

# JEMEAA

The Air Force Journal of  
European, Middle Eastern,  
& African Affairs

VOL. 2 NO. 2

SUMMER 2020



The Air Force

# Journal of European, Middle Eastern, & African Affairs

---

**Chief of Staff, US Air Force**

Gen David L. Goldfein

**Commander, Air Education and Training Command**

Lt Gen Marshall B. "Brad" Webb

**Commander and President, Air University**

Lt Gen James B. Hecker

**Director, Air University Academic Services**

Dr. Mehmed Ali

**Director, Air University Press**

Lt Col Darin Gregg

**Chief of Professional Journals**

Maj Richard T. Harrison

---

**Editor**

Dr. Ernest Gunasekara-Rockwell

**Production Staff**

Megan N. Hoehn  
*Print Specialist*

Daniel M. Armstrong  
*Illustrator*

ISSN 2639-6351 (print) ISSN 2639-636X (online)

---



<https://www.af.mil/>



<https://www.aetc.af.mil/>



<https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/>

## FEATURES

4 **Putin and Missile Defense Malaise  
Broadening US Options**

Dr. Stephen J. Cimbala  
Dr. Adam Lowther

21 **Gray-zone Conflict Management  
Theory, Evidence, and Challenges**

Dr. David Carment  
Dani Belo

42 **Musical Criminology**

**A Comparative Analysis of Jihadist *Nasheeds* and *Narco Corridos***

Dr. Hayat Alvi

## VIEWS

61 **Trump Is Right about Europe  
What Next?**

Dr. Amit Gupta

76 **The Middle East and Syria as a Case of Foreign Intervention  
Implications for the United States, the Syrian Kurds, and the  
Middle East after the Defeat of Daesh**

Dr. Andrés de Castro García

87 **The Reconstruction of the Silk Road  
Contesting Norms and Challenging the Cohesion of  
European Union Foreign Policy**

Simon F. Taeuber

## COMMENTARIES

- 111 **The Battle Is Almost Lost**  
**China's Industrial Challenge to European Shipbuilding**  
Dr. Liselotte Odgaard
- 114 **Radicalization in Prisons and Mosques in France**  
Vinayak Dalmia

## BOOK REVIEWS

- 121 *Two Centuries of US Military Operations in Liberia: Challenges of Resistance and Compliance*  
by Niels Hahn  
Reviewed by Jeffrey Biller
- 122 *The Royal Air Force: The First One Hundred Years*  
by John Buckley  
Reviewed by LT Kristyna N. Smith, USA
- 124 *Tiger Tracks—The Classic Panzer Memoir*  
by Wolfgang Faust  
Reviewed by Andrei V. Grinëv

## Editorial Advisors

Gen Jeffrey L. Harrigian, Commander, USAFE, AFAFRICA, and Allied Air Command;  
director, Joint Air Power Competence Center  
Lt Col Darin Gregg, Director, *Air University Press*  
Lt Col Jorge Serafin, USAF, retired, *Air University Press*

## Reviewers

### **Dr. Sean Braniff**

Assistant Professor  
US Air War College

### **Dr. David Brewster**

Senior Research Fellow, National Security College  
Australian National University

### **Col Darrell Driver, PhD**

Director, European Studies Program  
Department of National Security and Strategy  
US Army War College

### **Dr. Scott Edmondson**

Assistant Professor, Regional and Cultural Studies  
US Air Force Culture and Language Center

### **Lt Col Alexander Fafinski, USAF**

Military Professor, National Security Affairs  
US Naval War College

### **Dr. Patricia Fogarty**

Assistant Professor, Cross-Cultural Relations  
US Air Force Culture and Language Center

### **John Hursh, JD, LL.M.**

Director of Research  
Stockton Center for International Law  
US Naval War College

### **Dr. Christopher Jaspardo**

Director, Africa Regional Studies Group  
Associate Professor, National Security Affairs  
Senior Associate, Center for Irregular Warfare  
US Naval War College

### **Dr. Thomas Johnson**

Research Professor & Director, Program for Culture  
and Conflict Studies and Department of National  
Security Affairs  
US Naval Postgraduate School

### **Dr. Suzanne Levi-Sanchez**

Assistant Professor, National Security Affairs  
US Naval War College

### **Dr. Montgomery McFate**

Professor, Strategic and Operational Research  
US Naval War College

### **CMDR Dayne E. Nix, PhD (US Navy, retired)**

Professor, College of Distance Education  
US Naval War College

### **Mr. Adam C. Seitz**

Research Assistant Professor, Middle East Studies,  
Brute Krulak Center  
US Marine Corps University

### **Col Chris Wyatt (US Army, retired)**

CEO  
Indaba Africa Group

# Putin and Missile Defense Malaise

## Broadening US Options

DR. STEPHEN J. CIMBALA

DR. ADAM LOWTHER

### Introduction

On 1 March 2018, President Vladimir Putin promised a new generation of Russian nuclear weapons specifically intended to circumvent US strategic missile defenses.<sup>1</sup> The weapons mentioned in Putin's presentation to the Federal Assembly included an intercontinental cruise missile, a hypersonic glide weapon, and a long-range nuclear torpedo, in addition to other nuclear-capable delivery systems in development and/or deployment. One of the reasons for Russo–American and NATO–Russian divergence on missile defenses is the Russian concern that NATO regional and US global missile defenses could overturn the stability of nuclear deterrence based on assured retaliation.<sup>2</sup> Although Moscow's concerns are understandable, given Russia's dependence on nuclear weapons to deter or stop a feared invasion from the West, US planning assumes that advanced ballistic missile defenses in Europe exist to protect NATO allies from small-scale attacks from Iran—not Russia.<sup>3</sup>

On the other hand, missile defenses can be tasked to protect retaliatory forces as their priority, or singular, mission. For example, terminal antimissile defenses for intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBM), deployed in missile silos, could be designed to protect those retaliatory forces from first strikes instead of populations from retaliatory attacks. The possibility of defending silo-based ICBMs with terminal ballistic missile defenses (BMD) to reduce their first-strike vulnerability was studied during the Cold War and subsequently by the US government and various defense contractors.<sup>4</sup> The Nixon administration approved deployment of the Sentinel-Safeguard system, with a primary mission of defending retaliatory forces, in 1969, but the United States subsequently mothballed the system after agreeing to the Anti-Ballistic Missile (ABM) Treaty in 1972.<sup>5</sup>

In the sections that follow, we first consider some of the military-strategic and arms control issues that have complicated US– and NATO–Russian dialogue on missile defenses. In the second section, we analyze the hypothetical impacts that ICBM silo defenses deployed by the United States and Russia might have on deterrence and arms control stability, including consideration of possible alternatives.<sup>6</sup> The development and eventual deployment by Russia and the United States

of advanced hypersonic weapons make this topic especially timely. Hypersonics could pose time-urgent threats to both fixed and mobile strategic launchers, but especially to silo-based ICBMs.<sup>7</sup>

### **Post–Cold War and Missile Defenses**

The United States and Russia now field 80 percent fewer operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons than during the Cold War. As table 1 illustrates, the United States and Russia each field a force with a slightly different mix of warheads and delivery vehicles—all of which meet the requirements of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (START).

**Table 1. New START Treaty aggregate numbers of strategic offensive arms**

Category of Data	United States	Russia
Deployed ICBMs, deployed SLBMs, and deployed heavy bombers	656	524
Warheads on deployed ICBMs, on deployed SLBMs, and nuclear warheads counted for deployed heavy bombers*	1,365	1,461
Deployed and non-deployed Launchers of ICBMs, deployed and non-deployed launchers of SLBMs, and deployed and non-deployed heavy bombers	800	760

\*Under New START counting rules, each bomber counts as one warhead.

Source: US Department of State, *New START Treaty Aggregate Numbers of Strategic Offensive Arms* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 2019).

At the same time the number of operationally deployed strategic nuclear weapons was in dramatic decline, the United States refused efforts on the development of antiballistic missile defenses.<sup>8</sup> Antiballistic missile defense technologies are of interest not only to the United States and Russia but also to other states who feel threatened by the spread of ballistic missiles outside of Europe. The spread of ballistic missiles and the decline of nuclear arsenals occurred independently but ultimately converged in their significant impact on strategic stability. One example is prescient. Japan, a nonnuclear state, would prefer neither to join the ranks of nuclear weapons states nor to enter into a regional nuclear arms race. It is, however, very interested in antimissile defenses as a defense against a limited nuclear strike—possibly from North Korea. Japan is already cooperating with the United States in developing and deploying theater missile defenses for its state territory and contiguous waters.<sup>9</sup> This stance is not unreasonable from Japan’s perspective, considering its proximity to North Korea, China, and other Asian nuclear powers. Missile defenses might provide for a country like Japan or South Korea an alternative “deterrent by denial” instead of a nuclear deterrent by threat of unacceptable second-strike retaliation.<sup>10</sup> Antiballistic missile defenses could also serve as an insurance policy against accidental launches or unauthorized rogue attacks.

Table 2 summarizes active and planned phases of the US–NATO European Phased Adaptive Approach (EPAA) missile defense plan, which could be replicated in Japan, Korea, or elsewhere.

**Table 2. European Phased Adaptive Approach to missile defense\***

	Phase I	Phase II	Phase III	Phase IV (canceled March 2013)
Timeframe	2011	2015	2018	2020
Capability	Deploying today's capability	Enhancing medium-range missile defense	Enhancing intermediate-range missile defense	Early intercept of MRBMs, IRBMs and ICBMs
Threat/Mission	Address regional ballistic missile threats to Europe and deployed U.S. personnel	Expand defended area against short- and medium-range missile threats to Southern Europe	Counter short-, medium- and intermediate-range missile threats to include all of Europe	Cope with MRBMs, IRBMs, and potential future ICBM threats to the United States
Components	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kurecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IA off the coast of Spain	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kurecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IB off the coast of Spain; Aegis Ashore with SM-3 1B in Romania	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kurecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IIA off the coast of Spain; Aegis Ashore With SM-3 IIA in Romania and Poland	AN/TPY-2 (FBM) in Kurecik, Turkey; C2BMC in Ramstein, Germany; Aegis BMD ships with SM-3 IIA off the coast of Spain; Aegis Ashore With SM-3 IIB in Romania and Poland
Technology	Exists	In testing	Under development	In conceptual stage when canceled
Locations	Turkey, Germany, ships off the coast of Spain	Turkey, Germany, ships off the coast of Spain, ashore in Romania	Turkey, Germany, ships off the coast of Spain, ashore in Romania and Poland	Turkey, Germany, ships off the coast of Spain, ashore in Romania and Poland

\*Separate national contributions to the mission of European BMD have been announced by Netherlands and France.

Source: Karen Kaya, "NATO Missile Defense and the View from the Front Line," *Joint Force Quarterly*, 71, no. 4 (2013), 84-89.

Key:

Aegis Ashore = land-based component of the Aegis BMD system;

AN/TPY-2 (FBM) = Army Navy/Transportable Radar Surveillance, Model 2 (Forward-based Mode)

BMD = ballistic missile defense

C2BMC = command, control, battle management, and communications

ICBM = intercontinental ballistic missile

IRBM = intermediate-range ballistic missile

MRBM = medium-range ballistic missile

The Obama administration's attempt to "reset" relations with Russia led to the conclusion of the New START agreement and to a temporary thaw in US–Russia

and Russia–NATO relations on the issue of missile defenses.<sup>11</sup> However, the thaw was temporary, as animosity over missile defenses returned in 2011–2012 when the Obama administration missile defense plan for Europe became clearer and its implications for Russia became a presidential election issue.<sup>12</sup>

To appease the Russians, then–US Secretary of Defense Chuck Hagel announced in 2013 that the Pentagon would cancel plans for the fourth phase of EPAA, regarded as the phase most objectionable to Russia, which viewed the system as a way to undermine Russian nuclear deterrence. Neither President Putin nor his military leadership was mollified by this US decision.<sup>13</sup> Moscow continued to demand either a change in the US plan or a Russian level of involvement and participation in designing the European BMD system that would satisfy Russia’s nervous military leaders and politicians as to American and NATO intentions and capabilities.<sup>14</sup>



*(Image courtesy of news2.ru)*

**Figure 1. Russia resurgent.** As President Putin strives to rebuild Russia’s international standing, Moscow has become increasingly adversarial toward the West.

Russian leaders persist in indicating that, if dissatisfied with respect to European missile defenses, they will decline further cooperation in offensive nuclear arms reductions and possibly deploy missiles capable of launching nonstrategic nuclear weapons closer to Russia’s borders with NATO.<sup>15</sup> In addition, the United States and Russia suspended their commitments to maintaining the Intermediate Nuclear Forces (INF) Treaty in 2019, and one of Russia’s arguments for doing so was its insistence that US antimissile system (Aegis ashore) deployments in Romania and prospectively Poland could also be used for launching offensive missiles of medium or intermediate ranges.<sup>16</sup>

Russia is especially sensitive to NATO's reach into former Soviet and "near-abroad" states and security space, within which Russia claims privileged interests.<sup>17</sup> These sensitivities to NATO visibility in post-Soviet space bordering Russia extend to any plans for NATO land-based interceptors, radars, or other components of a European missile defense plan. Proximity assists with the accuracy of antiballistic missile defenses, so it should come as no surprise that, despite American assurances, Russia is deeply concerned about the placement of such systems in former Warsaw Pact nations.

### **Methodology**

The probable performance of antiballistic missile defenses against offensive second-strike retaliation is unknown due to the uncertainties of current and future ballistic missile defense technologies.<sup>18</sup> Nevertheless, it seems reasonable to assume that the larger the offensive retaliatory force the more challenging the problem is for the defense. In addition, missile defenses to protect populations, as opposed to retaliatory forces or other "hard" targets, are incredibly demanding because the arithmetic greatly favors the attacker.<sup>19</sup> Even a small number of warheads penetrating a defense and aimed at population centers could create historically unprecedented destruction.

Thus, defenses of population centers have to be perfect or nearly perfect to be appealing to scientists or to deterrence theorists—but not necessarily to governments. Governments might reason that even imperfect defenses complicate the prospective first striker's attack plans, at least at the margin, and that in a crisis any hesitancy works in favor of the defender. This reasoning might be more compelling if defenses were deployed to protect retaliatory forces instead of populations. The formidable challenge facing population defenses against large-scale missile attacks has been shown in a number of analyses. For example, one study estimated the numbers of US direct, short-term casualties and collateral damage to medical facilities from various Russian nuclear attacks in 2002.<sup>20</sup> In one scenario, a Russian attack against US population targets using 500 weapons of 550kt each is opposed by US antimissile defenses of variable capability. The Russian targeting plan is deliberately structured to maximize US population losses, and 25 percent of the Russian warheads are assumed to malfunction. US missile defense intercept capabilities range from 0 percent to 30 percent of the attacking warheads. Summary results include those shown in table 3, as below.

**Table 3. Estimated Casualties: 500 Warhead Attack on Population Centers, US Missile Defenses**

Percent of incoming warheads intercepted	Total number of exploding warheads	Mean number of deaths in mass fire zones (thousands)
0%	375	97,104 plus or minus 2,714
10%	338	87,394 plus or minus 2,568
20%	300	77,683 plus or minus 3,061
30%	262	67,973 plus or minus 3,180

Source: Ira Helfand, MD; Lachlan Forrow, MD; Michael McCally, MD, PhD; and Robert K. Musil, MPH, PhD, "Projected US Casualties and Destruction of US Medical Services from Attacks by Russian Nuclear Forces," *Medicine and Global Survival* 7, no. 2 (February 2002): 68–76, excerpted from table 3, p. 73.

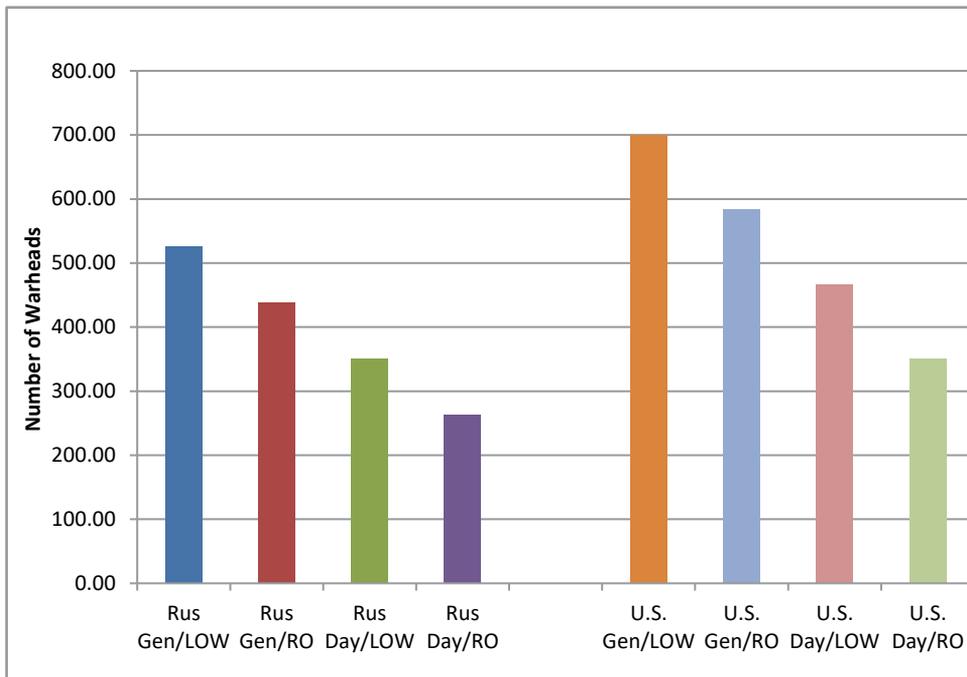
If the task of defending populations against large-scale attacks seems hopeless, a cost-effective alternative would be the fielding of antiballistic missile defenses for the United States' retaliatory forces. Given the current level of technology, such a system would have a sufficient kill probability that an attacker—Russia—would be required to dramatically increase the number of ICBMs used in a first strike, potentially making such a strike untenable. With missile defenses for US retaliatory forces intended to dilute an attacker's first strike, not its retaliatory second strike, such systems could not face the same criticism as EPAA currently faces. Therefore, Russia's complaint, that US or NATO missile defenses are really intended to deter Russia and not Iran would be less credible on that point. Of course, the United States and NATO might still want to deploy some version of EPAA against Iran or other states to the south of Europe, but they could do so more unambiguously without provoking Russian concerns about nullification of Russia's deterrent.

As mentioned above, the primary advantage of using missile defenses for retaliatory forces instead of cities is that the arithmetic is much more favorable to the defender, compared to the case of population defenses. The defense of missile silos against first strikes, for example, need not perform perfectly to exert meaningful attrition against an attack. Even so-called simple-novel ground-based antiballistic missile defenses or other available technologies could conceivably raise the "attack price" for destroying a silo from two to four warheads (or more), depending on accuracy and yield of an attacker's weapons.<sup>21</sup> If, for example, the United States deploys 400 Minuteman III ICBMs, a Russian first strike, for example, will likely include a salvo of between 800 and 900 warheads devoted to ICBM launch facilities and launch control centers.<sup>22</sup> While this was not an impossible challenge for the Soviet Union during the Cold War, it certainly presents a significant challenge for Russia under New START. This problem is potentially insurmountable if antiballistic missile defenses are fielded to protect American ICBM fields.

## Data Analysis

Would American or Russian ICBM defenses that incrementally raised the attack price against ICBM silos provide additional security worthy of the investment? In charts 1–3, we summarize the results of nuclear force exchanges between Russian and American strategic nuclear forces at prewar maximum deployment levels of 1,550, 1,000, and 500 warheads for each state. In charts 4–6, we simulate the outcomes of nuclear exchanges at maximum warhead deployment levels of 1,550, 1,000, and 500 for the United States and for Russia, each having deployed ICBM defenses that increase the survivability of silo-based missiles compared to the “no defenses” condition.<sup>23</sup>

**Chart 1. US–Russia: Surviving and Retaliating Warheads, 1,550 Deployment Limit**



Key:

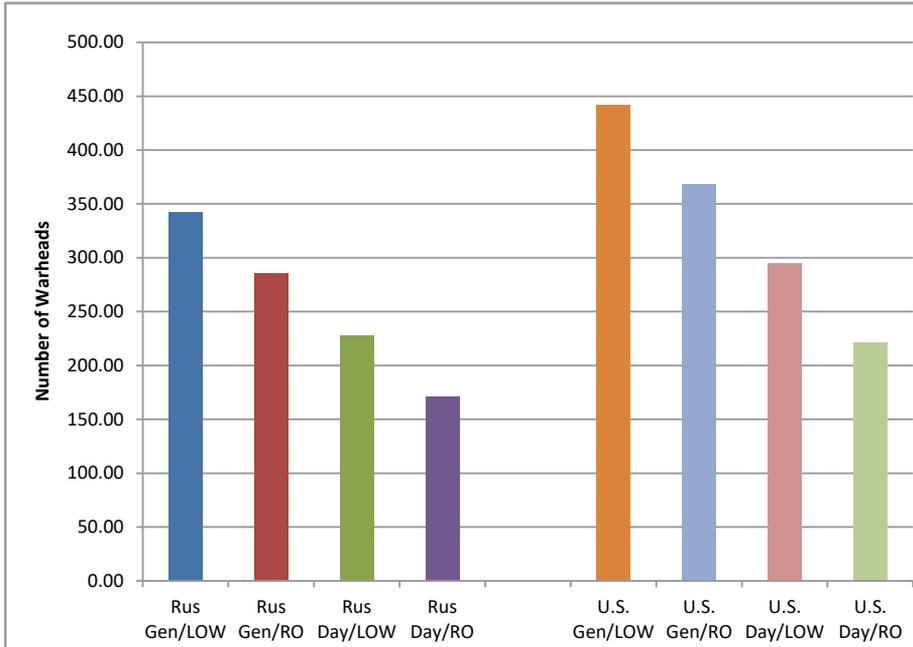
Gen/LOW = Generated Alert/Launch on Warning

Gen/RO = Generated Alert/Riding Out the Attack

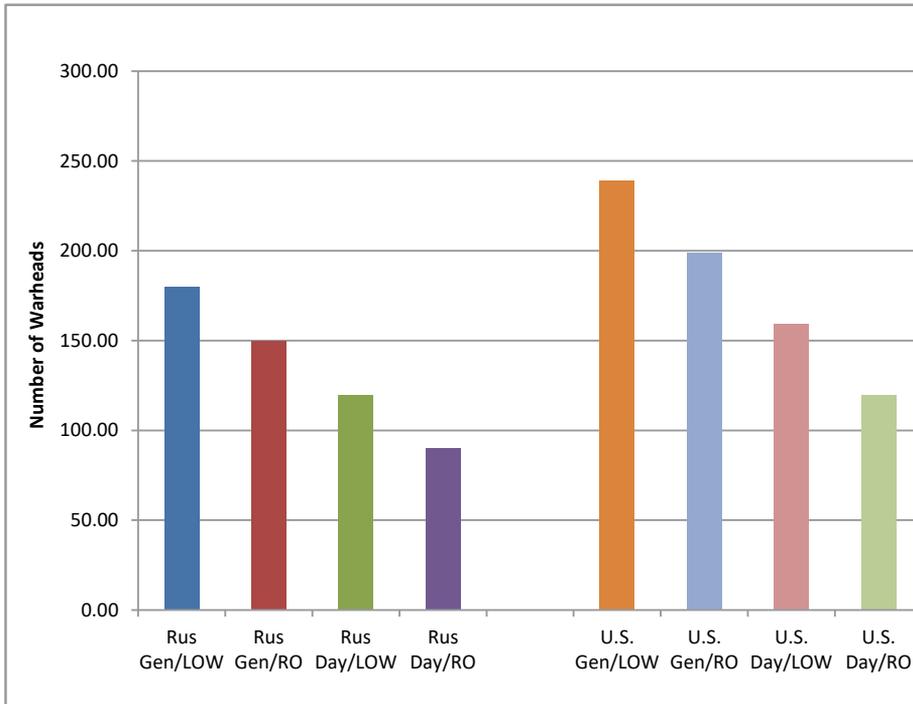
Day/LOW = Day-to-Day Alert/Launch on Warning

Day/RO = Day-to-Day Alert/Riding Out the Attack

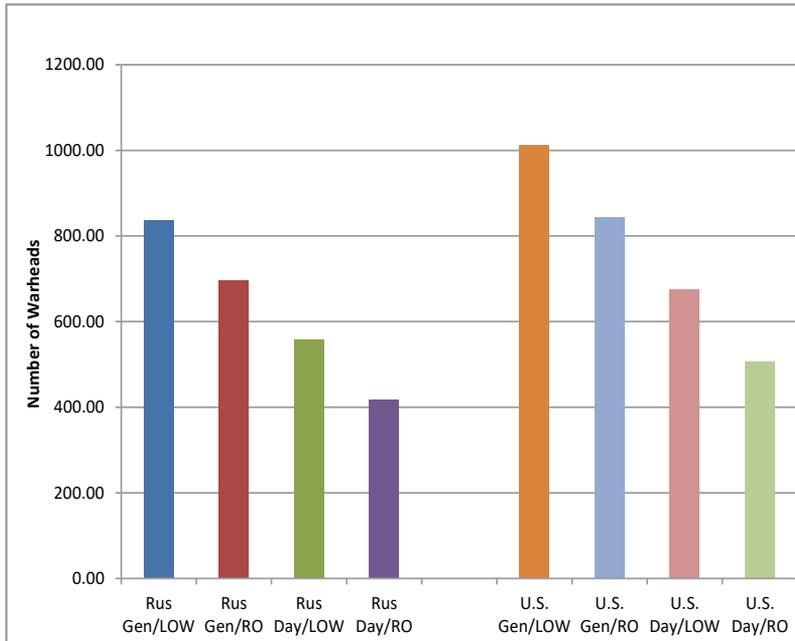
**Chart 2. US–Russia: Surviving and Retaliating Warheads, 1,000 Deployment Limit**



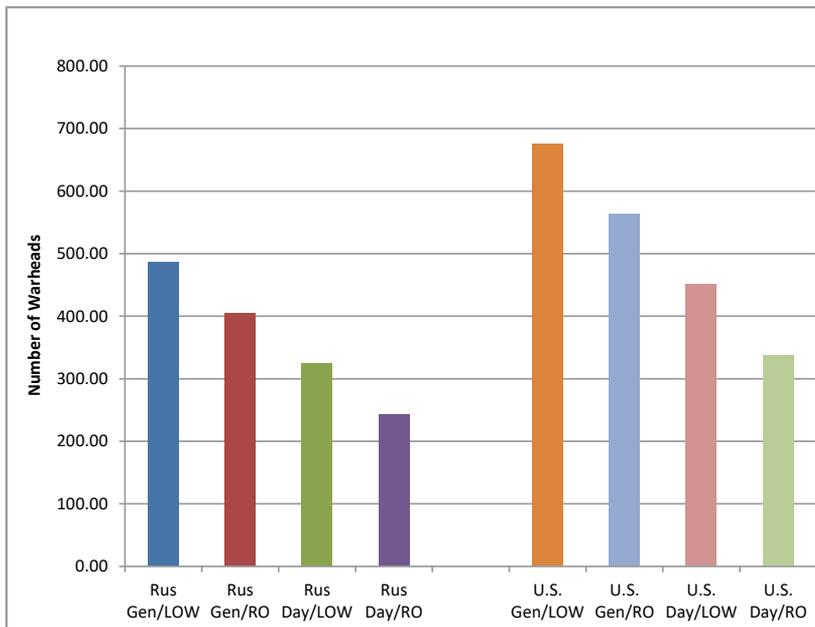
**Chart 3. US–Russia: Surviving and Retaliating Warheads, 500 Deployment Limit**



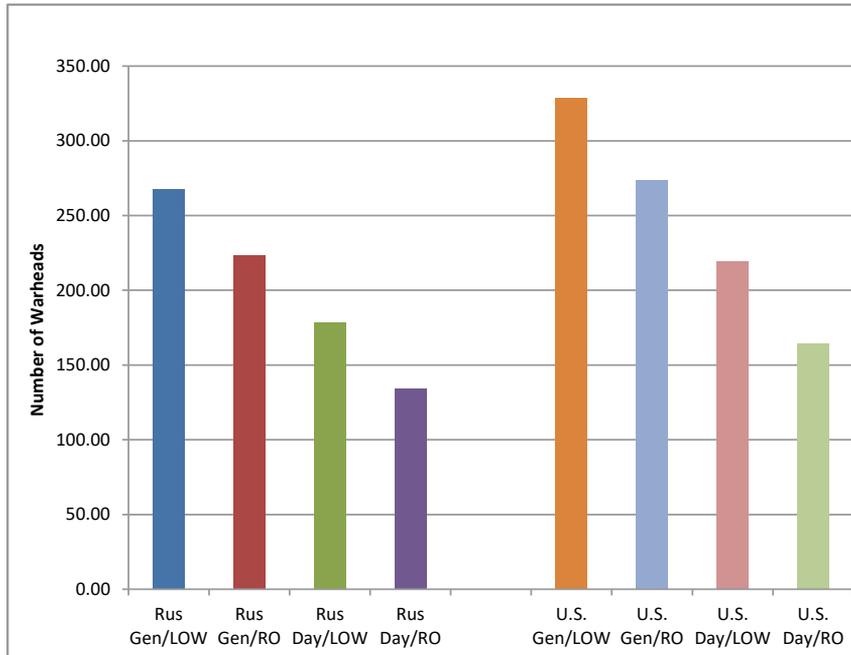
**Chart 4. US–Russia: Surviving and Retaliating Warheads, 1,550 Deployment Limit, ICBM Defenses**



**Chart 5. US–Russia: Surviving and Retaliating Warheads, 1,000 Deployment Limit, ICBM Defenses**



**Chart 6. US–Russia: Surviving and Retaliating Warheads, 500 Deployment Limit, ICBM Defenses**



The results summarized in charts 1–6 show that silo defenses could increase the percentage of surviving and retaliating ICBM warheads, relative to the undefended condition. The question is whether the improvement in outcomes for ICBM survivors is meaningful in terms of strategy. The picture is mixed. On one hand, the overall numbers of US and Russian ICBMs that survive a first strike and are available for retaliation increase, compared to the undefended condition; however, this does not change the basic structure of assured retaliation. With or without ICBM antiballistic missile defenses, the United States and Russia can guarantee adequate numbers of surviving and retaliating weapons (bomber or ballistic missile submarine delivered) to destroy any attacker as a modern society. Of course, this becomes more challenging as operationally deployed strategic weapons decline from 1,550 to 1,000, or even 500 weapons.

It might be supposed that Russia, because of its greater relative dependency on ICBMs as opposed to submarine-launched ballistic missiles (SLBM), gains relatively more than the United States does under the assumption of technologically symmetrical silo-defense deployments. However, Russian and US ICBM basing are not symmetrical. All American ICBMs are silo-based and in launch facilities that have not been hardened to account for the increasing accuracy of Russian ICBMs, while Russia’s silo-based ICBMs are in launch facilities that were hard-

ened.<sup>24</sup> A number of Russian ICBMs are also mobile land-based missiles. In our analysis for this study, no defenses were added for Russian mobile ICBMs, only for Russian ICBMs that are silo-based.

### **Upsides and Downsides: Risks and Benefits**

Regardless of these considerations, from a military and deterrence standpoint, there are two potential benefits the deployment of antiballistic missile defenses provide the ICBM force and deterrence—compared to the undefended condition. First, an attacker cannot know the exact performance of antiballistic missile defenses under crisis or wartime conditions; even the defender will be estimating success based on tests and simulations. These unknown parameters of missile defense performance “under fire” will complicate an attacker’s first-strike confidence. Second, the availability of silo defenses can allow leaders to feel less pressure to “use them or lose them” and increase confidence against a decision to strike preemptively. Opponents of antiballistic missile defense systems argue that current ABM technology does not perform particularly well, is too costly, and will always be overwhelmed by greater offensive weapons.<sup>25</sup> In many respects, these critiques are true but irrelevant. Antiballistic missile defenses, even mediocre ones, change the calculus for attacking ICBM fields and ensure that a portion of ICBMs are available for countervalue strikes. ABM systems need not be perfect. Mediocre is good enough.

Apart from these pros and cons for deterrence and nuclear crisis stability, there is also the issue of arms race stability. US antiballistic missile defenses for ICBMs might provoke Russian or Chinese countermeasures in the form of their own missile defenses or offsetting modernization of offenses. Russian or Chinese ICBM defenses might have a similar effect on the United States. But in all cases, ICBM silo defenses would not be a threat to the second-strike capability of another state. Thus, the potential for creating stability is a net positive.

Regardless of US strategic nuclear force size, the strategic logic for deploying available missile defense technologies to defend the ICBM force, and encourage Russia to do the same, is overwhelming. Since Russia is even more dependent on ICBMs as a makeweight of its strategic nuclear forces, the fielding of antiballistic missile systems is a logical proposition. As mentioned, there are drawbacks to these systems that leave decision makers in a number of advanced nations uninterested in their development.

First, for a cash-strapped country like Russia, antiballistic missile systems are expensive. Developing the scientific and industrial infrastructure to build and field such systems is a challenge for any nation.<sup>26</sup> While a nation like Iran can build a ballistic missile, building a missile that can hit another missile in flight is

a completely different proposition. Another issue for antiballistic missile defenses is that two of the three components of the US nuclear triad, submarines and bombers, are presumptively survivable without missile defenses, provided (especially in the case of bombers) sufficient warning is available.

A final reason for lack of interest in missile defenses for ICBMs is more controversial from an arms control perspective. ICBMs are the quick reaction component of the US and Russian nuclear triads. Although SLBMs can also be tasked for prompt launch missions, their uniqueness lies in their unmatched survivability. ICBMs also do not have to move to another location before firing after receiving duly authorized launch commands, as ballistic missile submarines do. It is also worth noting that although the command, control, and communications (C3) systems for ballistic missile submarines are reportedly as reliable as those for strategic land-based missiles, the latter are not quite as complicated.<sup>27</sup>

On the other hand, some arms control experts maintain that the United States and Russia maintain too many ICBM warheads on ready alert for prompt launch, creating a “hair trigger” problem during a prospective nuclear crisis.<sup>28</sup> And other arms control experts argue that the Cold War history of strategic missile defenses, whether deployed by the United States or by the Soviet Union, was that they generated offsetting changes in the other side’s force modernization and nuclear targeting plans, including specific plans for the suppression of missile defenses.<sup>29</sup>

## **Conclusion**

It is beyond the scope of this study to survey all candidate missile defense technologies or missions. Its focus is on the question of whether Russo–American disagreements about missile defenses could be partially mitigated by the substitution of unambiguously “defensive” BMD deployments for those capable of second-strike nullification.<sup>30</sup> Missile defenses remain debatable as technological game changers for the stability of strategic nuclear deterrence as between the United States and Russia. One complication is that, as Keith B. Payne has warned, the very concept of nuclear-strategic “stability” is more ambiguous and contestable than it was during the Cold War years:

In the contemporary era, there can be no generally-applicable “rule of thumb” derived from the US–Soviet experience for predicting that a particular set of US capabilities will be “stabilizing” or “destabilizing” across a spectrum of potential adversaries and contexts. In some cases, for example, rather than being a cause of deterrence “instability” as envisaged in the Cold War construct, US BMD capabilities able to defeat an adversary’s prospective missile attack may well be key to denying the political or military value that would underlie an adversary’s decision to attack, i.e., missile defense in such a case would rightly be deemed “stabilizing.”<sup>31</sup>

On the other hand, US current and proposed missile defenses in Europe have already contributed to friction with Russia over security issues, including the stability of mutual deterrence based on assured second-strike retaliation. The preceding analysis suggests that, all things being equal, deploying missile defenses tasked uniquely for the protection of retaliatory forces instead of populations could reduce first-strike vulnerability for US and Russian silo-based ICBMs, increasing their confidence in assured retaliation. On the other hand, the two states could reduce ICBM vulnerability by other means, including the replacement of silo-based ICBMs by mobile missiles.<sup>32</sup> Decision makers would obviously have to take into account the cost factors in protecting ICBM silos with BMD, compared to other options, including a shift from silo to mobile ICBM basing.<sup>33</sup>

Some in the arms control community would solve the issue of ICBM basing by moving to a dyad of US strategic nuclear retaliatory forces, eliminating ICBMs. Others have proposed that the United States rely on a strategic nuclear “monad” of SLBMs. In either case, eliminating one or two legs of the US triad, advocates of such a move suggest conventionally armed missiles and/or bombers could be substituted for nuclear-armed delivery systems of the same type. From the standpoint of stable deterrence and nuclear arms control, however, elimination of one or more arms of the nuclear triad is not necessarily a “plus.” In fact, the opposite may be the case. As Russian and American strategic nuclear arsenals are reduced in size, the diversity of the triad becomes more, not less, important for survivability and, therefore, for stability.<sup>34</sup>

From a more inclusive perspective, symmetrical nuclear arms reductions, as between the United States and Russia, may no longer have symmetrical effects, as assumed to be the case during the Cold War. According to Keith Darden and Timofei Bordachev, the United States and Russia should seek not only strategic stability based on mutual deterrence but also strategic compatibility, allowing for differing but compatible security portfolios.<sup>35</sup> The objective would be to disconnect arms control from an exclusive reliance on parity and symmetry as indicators of security and stability.<sup>36</sup> Stability through compatibility, instead of symmetry and parity in forces and deployments, is certainly one option that policy makers will need to consider in a complicated twenty-first century.

Although we did not discuss the issue here, technological developments are also set to dramatically change the dynamic of nuclear deterrence. New low-observable cruise missiles and hypersonic glide vehicles that can strike with little or no warning, for example, may upend our strategic planning calculus, as the United States seeks to find new ways to either address or circumvent these and other capabilities.<sup>37</sup> Whatever the future may hold for nuclear forces, the

need to ensure their survivability is becoming increasingly complex and deserving of considerable discussion.

#### **Dr. Stephen J. Cimbala**

Stephen J. Cimbala is a distinguished professor of political science, Penn State Brandywine, an American studies faculty member, and the author of numerous books and articles in the fields of international security studies, defense policy, nuclear weapons and arms control, intelligence, and other fields. He is a graduate of Penn State, having received his BA in journalism in 1965. He received an MA in 1967, and his PhD in 1969, both in political science, from the University of Wisconsin, Madison. He serves on the editorial boards of various professional journals, has consulted for a number of US government agencies and defense contractors, and is frequently quoted in the media on national security topics.

#### **Dr. Adam Lowther**

Dr. Adam Lowther is a professor of political science at the US Army School of Advanced Military Studies, the former director of the US Air Force's School for Advanced Nuclear Deterrence Studies, and the former director of the Air Force Research Institute's Center for Academic and Professional Journals. He holds a PhD in international relations from the University of Alabama. Dr. Lowther is the author of numerous journal articles and books focused on international relations and military affairs.

#### **Notes**

1. Vladimir Putin, *Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly* (speech, 1 March 2018). *See also* Neil MacFarquhar and David E. Sanger, "Putin's 'Invincible' Missile Is Aimed at U.S. Vulnerabilities," *New York Times*, 1 March 2018; Dave Majumdar, "Russia's Nuclear Weapons Buildup is Aimed at Beating U.S. Missile Defenses," *National Interest*, 1 March 2018; Paul Sonne, "Pentagon Looks to Adjust Missile Defense Policy to Include Threats from Russia, China," *Washington Post*, 2 March 2018; and Eric Gomez, "Why Putin Is Obsessed with America's Missile Defenses," *National Interest*, 3 March 3, 2018.

2. For background on this issue, *see* Andrew Futter, *Ballistic Missile Defence and US National Security Policy: Normalisation and Acceptance after the Cold War* (London: Routledge, 2013); and Keir Giles and Andrew Monaghan, *European Missile Defence and Russia* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College Press, 2014), 28.

3. Russia's 2014 Military Doctrine, signed into law by President Vladimir Putin on 26 December 2014, reportedly identifies NATO's increasing military potential as among the most important external threats to Russia and notes Russia's specific concern about NATO plans for a global antiballistic missile system. *See* Yuri Smityuk, "Putin Endorses Updated Version of Russia's Military Doctrine," *ITAR-TASS*, 26 December 2014. *See also* Roger McDermott, "Putin Signs New Military Doctrine: Core Elements Examined," *Jamestown Foundation Eurasia Daily Monitor*, 6 January 6, 2015.

4. Lauren Caston, Robert S. Leonard, Christopher A. Mouton, Chad J.R. Ohlandt, S. Craig Moore, Raymond E. Conley, and Glenn Buchan, *The Future of the U.S. Intercontinental Ballistic Missile Force* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2014), 21–47.

5. The Sentinel-Safeguard system included two kinds of missile interceptors: Spartan missiles for interception outside of the atmosphere, and shorter-range Sprint missiles for endo-atmospheric intercept. Both missiles carried nuclear warheads. Originally proposed as a limited defense of cities against a Chinese or other light attack, its mission profile was reprioritized for the protection

of ICBM fields in North Dakota and Montana. See *Department of the Army Historical Summary, FY 1969* (Washington, DC: US Army Center for Military History, 1973), 31–33, 89–90.

6. In this study, we assume that ICBM silo defenses would be terminal defenses tasked for endo-atmospheric intercept instead of mid-course defenses of the kind now deployed in the US ground-based mid-course defense (GMD) program and designed for exo-atmospheric intercept. In addition, new technologies for boost phase intercept of ballistic missiles in their earliest stages of powered flight would, if successful, also protect retaliatory forces in addition to populations and other targets. On the other hand, projected US strategic nuclear modernization programs might replace silo-based ICBMs with mobile versions in the Ground Based Strategic Deterrent, making silo defenses unnecessary.

7. See Dawn Stover, “What Would Russia Nuke?,” *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (March 2019); and John A. Tirpak, “Roper: Hypersonics Capability Less Than Two Years Away” *Air Force Magazine* (February 2019).

8. Kingston Reif, *Current U.S. Missile Defense Programs at a Glance* (Washington, DC: Arms Control Association, 2019).

9. Thomas Karako, *Shield of the Pacific: Japan as a Giant Aegis Destroyer*” Center for Strategic and International Studies (Washington, DC: 2018).

10. Choe Sang-Hun, “South Korea Tells China Not to Meddle in Its Missile-Defense Talks With U.S.,” *New York Times*, 25 February 2016, A6. See also Kim Hwan Yong, “S. Korea Eyes US Missile Defense System as North Continues Tests,” *Voice of America*, 29 January 2016.

11. *Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms* (Washington, DC: US Department of State, 8 April 2010).

12. See Karen Kaya, “NATO Missile Defense and the View from the Front Line,” *Joint Force Quarterly* 71, no. 4 (2013): 84–89. See also Association of the US Army, *U.S. Army Integrated Air and Missile Defense Capabilities: Enabling Joint Force 2020 and Beyond* (Washington, DC: Institute of Land Warfare, 2014); Steven J. Whitmore and John R. Deni, *NATO Missile Defense and the European Phased Adaptive Approach: The Implications of Burden Sharing and the Underappreciated Role of the U.S. Army* (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2013); Patrick J. O’Reilly, *Ballistic Missile Defense Overview*, (Washington, DC: US Department of Defense, 2012); and North Atlantic Treaty Organization, *NATO Ballistic Missile Defense (BMD) Fact Sheet* (Brussels: North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2012).

13. Gordon Lubold and Julian E. Barnes, “U.S. Dismisses Putin’s Objection to European Missile Systems,” *Wall Street Journal*, 14 May 2016. See also “U.S. Activates Romanian Missile Defense Site, Angering Russia,” *Reuters*, 12 May 2016.

14. “Target for U.S. Missile Shield in Europe Still Important Issue, Russia Sees It as Threat—Kremlin Spokesman,” *Interfax*, 12 May 2016. Some experts contend that, even as Russia denounces US and NATO missile defenses, Russia is developing its own unified “aerospace defense” system, including capabilities for intercepting US ballistic missiles. See Mark B. Schneider and Peter Huessy, “Russian Deployment of Missile Defenses: Hidden in Plain Sight,” *Gatestone Institute*, 18 February 2013.

15. Examples include “Putin: Russia Will Consider Tackling NATO Missile Defense Threat,” *RT*, 13 May 2016; “Federation Council Not Ruling Out Deployment of US Missile Defense Shield in Romania May Influence New START Treaty’s Fate,” *Interfax*, 13 May 2016; and “Russia Could Drop START Treaty Due to New Air Defense Systems in Europe,” *Sputnik*, 12 May 2016.

16. This Russian assessment was based on the assumption that the Aegis Mk-41 Vertical Launching System (VLS) is also capable of launching offensive Tomahawk sea-launched cruise missiles over ranges that would violate INF limits of 500 to 5,500 kilometers. The US government says the Mk-41 launchers deployed in Europe lack software, fire control hardware, support equipment, and other infrastructure necessary to launch Tomahawks. See Matt Korda and Hans M. Kristensen, "US Ballistic Missile Defenses, 2019," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 24 October 2019, 295–306.

17. For historical perspective on this and other issues related to contemporary Russian security policy, see Olga Olikier, Christopher S. Chivis, Keith Crane, Olesya Tkacheva, and Scott Boston, *Russian Foreign Policy in Historical and Current Context: A Reassessment* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2015) and Walter Laqueur, *Putinism: Russia and Its Future with the West* (New York: St Martin's Press, 2015). See also Jacob W. Kipp, "Russian Military Doctrine: Past, Present, and Future," in *Russia's Military Politics and Russia's 2010 Defense Doctrine*, ed. Stephen J. Blank (Carlisle, PA: Strategic Studies Institute, US Army War College, 2011), 63–151.

18. For an example, see Committee on an Assessment of Concepts and Systems for US Boost-Phase Missile Defense in Comparison to Other Alternatives, *Making Sense of Ballistic Missile Defense: An Assessment of Concepts and Systems for U.S. Boost-Phase Missile Defense in Comparison to Other Alternatives* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2012). See also George N. Lewis and Theodore A. Postol, "A Flawed and Dangerous U.S. Missile Defense Plan," *Arms Control Today* (May 2010).

19. One reason is that attackers can use stratagems, such as decoys or antisimulation, to complicate the job of defenses that depend upon intercept in the vacuum of space, including so-called midcourse intercept systems. See Richard L. Garwin, "A Defense that Will Not Defend," *Washington Quarterly* 23, no. 3 (Summer, 2000): 109–23.

20. Ira Helfand, Lachian Forrow, Michael McCally, and Robert K. Musil, "Projected US Casualties and Destruction of Medical Services from Attacks by Russian Nuclear Forces," *Medicine and Global Survival* 7, no. 2 (February, 2002), 68–76.

21. Ashton B. Carter, "BMD Applications: Performances and Limitations," in *Ballistic Missile Defense*, ed. Ashton B. Carter and David N. Schwartz (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1984), 98–181.

22. Attacks would include launch control centers in addition to silos.

23. We employ James Scouras' Arriving Weapons Sensitivity Model (AWSM) in making calculations and drawing graphs. Additional information about the model is available in Stephen J. Cimbala and James Scouras, *A New Nuclear Century* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 2002).

24. Pavel Podvig, "The Window of Vulnerability That Wasn't: Soviet Military Buildup in the 1970s--A Research Note" *International Security* 33, no. 1 (Summer 2008): 118–38.

25. Joan Johnson-Freese and David T. Burbach, "The Best Defense Ever? Busting Myths about the Trump Administration's Missile Defense Review," *War on the Rocks*, 6 February 2019.

26. US Congressional Budget Office, *Approaches for Managing the Costs of U.S. Nuclear Forces, 2017 to 2046* (Washington, DC: Congressional Budget Office, 2017).

27. Bruce G. Blair, *Strategic Command and Control: Redefining the Nuclear Threat* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 1985), Ch. 7–8.

28. James Cartwright, *Modernizing U.S. Nuclear Strategy, Force Structure and Posture*. (Washington, DC: Global Zero, May 2012).

29. Hans M. Kristensen, Matthew G. McKinzie, and Robert S. Norris, "The Protection Paradox," *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists* (March/April 2004): 68–77.

30. For broader comparative perspective and appraisal, see Committee on an Assessment of Concepts and Systems for U.S. Boost-Phase Missile Defense in Comparison to Other Alternatives, *Making Sense of Ballistic Missile Defense: An Assessment of Concepts and Systems for U.S. Boost-Phase Missile Defense in Comparison to Other Alternatives* (Washington, DC: National Academies Press, 2012).

31. Keith B. Payne, "Nuclear Deterrence in a New Era: Applying 'Tailored Deterrence,'" *National Institute for Public Policy Information Series*, No. 431 (21 May 2018).

32. Mobile ICBMs were extensively studied by the United States but never deployed. For pertinent history, see Steven E. Pomeroy, *An Untaken Road: Strategy, Technology, and the Hidden History of America's Mobile ICBMs* (Annapolis, MD: Naval Institute Press, 2016).

33. In addition to silo and mobile basing for ICBMs, alternatives for improving ICBM survivability include deep underground basing, mobility combined with deceptive basing (e.g., the Carter administration "racetrack" basing scheme), and launch on warning as a declaratory policy. These options are not analyzed here.

34. See Andrew Futter and Heather Williams, "Questioning the Holy Trinity: Why the US Nuclear Triad Still Makes Sense," *Comparative Strategy* 35, no. 4 (2016): 248–56.

35. Keith Darden and Timofei Bordachev, *The Sword and the Shield: Toward U.S.-Russian Strategic Compatibility* (Cambridge, MA: Davis Center for Russian and Eurasian Studies, Harvard University, 2014).

36. *Ibid.*, 18.

37. See Adam Lowther and Curtis McGiffin, "American Needs a 'Dead Hand,'" *War on the Rocks*, 19 August 2019 and Adam Lowther and Stephen Cimbala, "Future Technology and Nuclear Deterrence," *Wild Blue Yonder*, 3 February 2020, <https://www.airuniversity.af.edu/Wild-Blue-Yonder/>.

# Gray-zone Conflict Management

## Theory, Evidence, and Challenges

DR. DAVID CARMENT

DANI BELO

In this article, we examine the involvement of state and nonstate actors in gray-zone conflict and their relationship to hybrid warfare and the implications for conflict management. The article unfolds in four parts. In the first part, we examine the concept of gray-zone conflict and how it relates to hybrid warfare and conventional interpretations and theories of conflict and war. In the second section, we outline evidence from the ongoing conflict in Eastern Ukraine with respect to how gray-zone conflict impacts both state behavior and conflict management strategies. In the concluding part, we consider implications for conflict management and directions for future research. Building on these insights, we identify several key steps for conflict resolution in Eastern Ukraine. We argue that it is important to disentangle and individually address the challenges posed by gray-zone conflict in all three security, economic, and sociopolitical domains. It is also essential to update international laws of war to account for low-intensity armed and unarmed hybrid tactics. Finally, it will be necessary to reform and upgrade contemporary international institutions to address gray-zone conflict.

### The Theoretical Underpinnings of Gray-zone Conflict

The shift to kinetic diplomacy occurred during the presidency of George W. Bush after 11 September 2001, when the president declared a “war on terror.” US strategy moved from containing threats to US security to engaging them abroad preemptively.<sup>1</sup> This meant more special forces on the ground and fewer diplomats. Thus, the concept of hybrid warfare largely emerged from American military-strategic studies, influenced by the realization that since 9/11 and following the 2006 Israel–Hezbollah War conflicts in which the United States and its allies are involved have become increasingly complex with regard to the number and kind of belligerents and the tools available to them.<sup>2</sup> The overt use of recent violence by state-backed proxies in Syria and Ukraine is driven by such “hybrid threats.” For America’s adversaries, Cold War-era concepts became embedded in Russia’s contemporary Gerasimov Doctrine and China’s concept of unrestricted warfare.<sup>3</sup> All three approaches assume adversaries will rely on unconventional tools and

tactics—such as propaganda campaigns, economic pressure, and use of nonstate entities—that do not cross the threshold of formalized state-level aggression.

However, contemporary multimodal hybrid threats have little in common with past examples of interstate aggression, which relied on conventional hard- and soft-power tactics to undermine opponents.<sup>4</sup> Hybrid warfare is distinct from regular warfare to the extent that nonmilitary actors and stakeholders are explicitly involved in the political, informational, and economic components of war. Hybrid warfare today is societal in scope in terms of intended targets and those states that engage in it. This increased complexity is exacerbated by the fact that the ultimate goals of belligerents are frequently, and often deliberately, unknown to prevent the deployment of deterrence measures by opponents.

One of the most important debates regarding gray-zone conflict has focused on how nondemocratic states conduct hybrid operations using nonstate actors against their democratic adversaries and what democracies can do to respond to these tactics.<sup>5</sup> It has been argued that nondemocracies are more readily disposed to gray-zone conflict because they are less constrained and have more centralized, procedurally flexible decision-making structures than their more democratic, consensus-building counterparts. Internationally, states such as Russia and China can use propaganda, domestic legal structures, economic pressure, and covert support for nonstate entities more readily compared to their democratic counterparts. Furthermore, the relatively unregulated international environment enables authoritarian states to “normalize” and “internalize” new practices for engagement against opponents.

In contrast, the problem for democracies is the shift to kinetic diplomacy. Consider the US deployment of special forces in more than 100 countries around the world. The United States acknowledges that its forces are involved in these missions, sometimes with foreign partner special operations forces, in an undeclared conflict zone. This is highly controversial, and many of these partnerships remain classified. In essence, special operations forces function in a dimension that shadows traditional diplomacy. There are some 70,000 US special operators worldwide, compared to fewer than 10,000 Foreign Service Officers.<sup>6</sup>

Complete reliance on unconventional tools, like special operations forces, is likely to be less effective at fully and rapidly compelling relatively strong opponents into specific avenues of desired action. Thus, states engaged in gray-zone conflicts are likely to utilize hybrid techniques, and more of their conventional resources, when there is a perception that the utilization of unconventional techniques will not fully achieve a desired outcome. The incorporation of conventional force against an opponent would be more likely in cases of asymmetric conflict in which the cost of applying conventional techniques against a weaker opponent is

much lower. However, in cases where opponents are in a symmetric conflict, states are likely to rely heavily on unconventional tools and covert operations.

Early military strategists note that the “fog of war,” or uncertainty at all levels of war from the tactical to the strategic are associated with incomplete information, which has been a major barrier in military campaigns throughout human history.<sup>7</sup> However, with increased emphasis on this information domain, the effect of uncertainty has been declining steadily, as more sophisticated intelligence-gathering and processing and reconnaissance technology is integrated into the armed forces. Thus, with more information regarding the intentions of opponents and their nonstate proxies, parties in conflict generally have a clearer outline of their possible contract space and may negotiate a settlement while foregoing the costs of fighting.

Prior to the emergence of gray-zone conflicts, points of victory by nonstate actors could generally be identified: either capturing centers of government, localized resources, territory, and/or the people who live there—frequently under the banner of ideological superiority. In gray-zone conflicts, it is unclear whether state and nonstate actors clearly understand their own long-term goal for engagement with opponents. In gray-zone conflicts, unconventional operations, and the increasing inseparability of civilian and military spheres, facilitate “situational ambiguity,” which states utilize to their advantage. This largely reverses the trend that started in the early post–World War II period. During the Cold War, even though many conflicts incorporated substate proxies, their relatively higher intensity prevented them from migrating into a frozen state. In gray-zone conflict, low intensity is one of its key characteristics, and hostilities frequently emerge between parties that are politically and economically interdependent. Thus, gray-zone conflicts also challenge the conventional wisdom that links strong economic relations and peace.<sup>8</sup>

Gray-zone conflicts are significant for the debate between institutionalists and realists regarding the anarchic world order and the role of various entities in contemporary conflict management. Institutionalists contend that structures such as international organizations and norms indeed influence the behavior of conflict participants toward peace in all stages of conflict management from prevention to resolution.<sup>9</sup> However, empirical evidence from gray-zone conflicts casts a more pessimistic shadow on this claim. For example, cyber and information technology offers new tools for nonstate actors to create disruption and inflict infrastructure damage. Within cyberspace, principles of conduct have started to emerge over the past decade,<sup>10</sup> but in regard to political, economic, and many other elements of soft power, such guidelines are weak or absent. This creates a permissive environ-

ment for, and normalizes, the use of unconventional military and low-intensity nonkinetic tactics for state and nonstate actors.

The resistance of gray-zone conflicts to resolution and the consistent inability of international institutions to influence state participants' behavior, and their aid to substate actors, supports the long-standing realist claim that security can ultimately be promoted by, and for, individual states. Furthermore, gray-zone conflicts support the claim that currently the international community is ill-prepared to manage civil conflict and malicious or incompetent domestic governments, because our international and national institutional structures are set up to deal with disputes across interstate borders—not those situated *within* them.<sup>11</sup>

In other words, institutions have generally been structures to mitigate Cold War-era confrontations and are not equipped to prevent and manage highly complex, low-intensity, and perpetual gray-zone conflict. This means if international institutions are to be responsive to the modern security environment, they will need new mandates, structures, tools, and procedures to effectively deal with this new format of conflict.

A key question that arises is the scope and purpose of conflict management strategies to prevent and mitigate the increasing use of hybrid warfare involving nonstate actors. For example, international law, whether through signed treaties—such as the Geneva Conventions of 1949—or customs, have generally provided sufficient guidelines to define and manage interstate conduct in conventional wars. However, within gray-zone conflicts, due to its low intensity and high degree of operational covertness, the laws of war and the means by which to manage if not resolve the conflict are few and vague. However, a key barrier for the creation of rules of engagement in gray-zone conflicts has been associated with challenges of attribution of actions.

Attribution of specific outcomes to actions of conflict participants has created a challenge for the legitimation and implementation of standardized punitive measures in gray-zone conflicts.<sup>12</sup> Cyberwarfare became especially elaborate, as software and hardware become increasingly sophisticated. Cyberattacks remain below the threshold of overt warfare, because they can rarely inflict immediate damage or cause casualties. Moreover, most cyberoperations can only be probabilistically attributed to specific state actors, and sponsors do not acknowledge their involvement.

For example, in December 2015, Russia was accused of attacking Ukraine's power grid through cyberspace. This event, even though attributed to Russia by the Kyiv government and some NATO officials, can only be probabilistically attributed to Russia. Cyberspace, however, is not only the sole purview of Russia. Moreover, states may provide direct material support to organized crime, militant

elements, separatist factions, and local elites within the territories of the opponent to fight on behalf of one or more of the conflicting parties. This is important, as states backing these actors desire to insulate themselves from responsibility and potential political backlash domestically and internationally. This method not only increases the overall number of actors and stakeholders in the conflict but also creates problems with attribution of actions to specific entities when attempting to reach conflict resolution.

In the next section we review the conflict management strategies in the most significant case to date. We identify entry points for action that have been used thus far to mitigate overt conflict and look to ways in which de-escalation might be achieved. There are three dimensions of the conflict that need to be considered: sociopolitical, economic, and security. As we note, disentangling the overt security dimensions from the conflict has been more readily obtained than addressing the economic and sociopolitical dimensions.

### **Gray-zone Conflict Management in Crimea and Eastern Ukraine**

Conflict management in Ukraine has primarily been undertaken through three formats of negotiation: (1) the Trilateral Contact Group, incorporating Ukraine, Russia, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), and on occasion, the leaders of the separatist territories; (2) the Normandy Format, involving representatives from Ukraine, Russia, Germany, and France; and (3) bilateral dialogue between representative of conflict participants and stakeholders.

A key characteristic of gray-zone conflicts is their complexity with regard to the number of actors and stakeholders, as is evident in Ukraine. Though unelected, oligarchs exercise a great deal of influence and power in Ukrainian politics. For example, the successful “marriage” between Rinat Akhmetov’s business group and Viktor Yanukovich’s Party of Regions provided for mutual control over the Donbas for at least a decade prior to the outbreak of the current conflict. However, pro-separatist rallies threatened Akhmetov’s business interests. As a result, Akhmetov adopted a relatively neutral position, calling for peaceful resolution through negotiation. As the wealthiest and most influential oligarch in Ukraine, his relative inaction was a key factor in separatist forces eventually taking over Donetsk and Luhansk. Complicating matters, Ukraine has had a number of private militias that have played a pivotal role in the conflict, each of them answerable not to Kyiv (or Russia) but to regional oligarchs. Given a Ukrainian army in decay after years of neglect, corruption, and stagnation, Kyiv’s military was given a significant boost through private volunteer Ukrainian battalions funded by public and diaspora donations together with oligarchs. Now that these private militias have become formally part of Ukraine’s military with public funding, questions remain as to

whose interests they serve. For example, Ihor Kolomoyskyi, a prominent Ukrainian oligarch, invested substantial funds in volunteer battalions that the Ukrainian authorities in Donetsk and Luhansk later used. However, these influential oligarchs were never formally incorporated into the peacemaking processes.



*(Photo by US Army National Guard Sgt Fiona Berndt)*

**Figure 1. Enhancing the Ukrainian armed forces.** Members of the Ukrainian Army pose for a photo during Combined Resolve XIII at the Joint Multinational Readiness Center, Hohenfels, Germany, 31 January 2020. Seventeen countries worked together during the exercise to increase readiness and improve interoperability between allied and partner nations.

The Trilateral Contact Group framework was developed by the OSCE to facilitate a dialogue between Russia and Ukraine through the mediation of an impartial actor. The negotiations through this format culminated in the Minsk I (September 2014) and then Minsk II (February 2015) agreements. The Minsk II agreements comprised a 13-point peace plan chief among which is an arrangement specifying support for the restoration of the Ukrainian–Russian border. While the implementation of the military portions of the Minsk II agreements were finalized within three months of signing, the sociopolitical and other security components remained unresolved. Though Russian president Vladimir Putin has declared his intent of protecting the Russian-speaking peoples of the region, he has also stated no interest in reclaiming Eastern Ukraine. Not surprisingly, since Russia’s ultimate goal is undeclared, the conflict has proved very difficult to resolve.

The Normandy Format began in 2014, when the leaders of Germany, France, Russia, and Ukraine met for memorial D-Day service in France. There they discussed the possibilities of addressing the political and security portions of the settlement. The active role of German and French parties initially produced a few rounds of negotiation that became formally recognized as part of the Minsk

agreements. This process, called the Normandy Format, did not directly involve the EU and consisted for the most part of phone conversations among the four counterparts, who at that time were Petro Poroshenko, François Hollande, Vladimir Putin, and Angela Merkel.

The early stages of the conflict in Crimea saw limited mediation in advance of formal Russian annexation. This is in part because of the limited resistance given by Kyiv, Russian forces were already present in Crimea through a basing agreement, and Crimea had experience in negotiating autonomy through previous referendums. On 14 March, just a few days before the referendum, US Secretary of State John Kerry and Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov spent six hours discussing the situation around Crimea with no results. Kerry argued that the whole of Ukraine should have been given the opportunity to vote on the issues involved. However, Lavrov countered that Moscow would respect the Crimean independence referendum. Neither Kerry nor Lavrov's positions were adequate at the time, given the lack of mechanisms for enforcing corresponding solutions on all the parties concerned.

On the ground, there were a few informal efforts. For example, Poroshenko, a Ukrainian member of parliament at that time, visited Crimea on 28 February 2014 but was escorted out of Crimea the same day. A delegation from the OSCE, including envoy Tim Guldemann and OSCE High Commissioner on National Minorities Astrid Thors, visited Crimea the following day. By the time of their arrival, pro-Russian activists and unidentified military personnel already controlled Simferopol airport, and no mediation took place.

German Chancellor Angela Merkel was actively involved in negotiations with Russia at the end of February and the beginning of March, but all her efforts had very little effect on President Putin. Kyiv declared the 2014 referendum illegal on the grounds that the Ukrainian constitution made no provision for it. The Russian framing of the conflict consisted of questioning the legitimacy of the Kyiv government's claim to Crimea, based on precedent, experience, and Crimean sentiment. The results of surveys, after annexation, showing strong Crimean support for remaining within Russia, suggest this was a strategy that found favor with the majority on the peninsula.<sup>13</sup>

A key reason for the lack of mediation was an unwillingness to address Russia's geopolitical security concerns. A compromise might have been possible, for example, whereby Sevastopol was annexed but Crimea resumed its 1992 constitution and remained an autonomous part of Ukraine. Even when part of Ukraine, Sevastopol was a "city with special status," and the area in which it was included was a distinct municipality, separate from Crimea. The majority (over 70 percent) of the city's residents are ethnic Russians. In addition, it is home to Russia's Black

Sea Fleet (and formerly also to the Ukrainian Naval Forces); Ukraine had previously leased the naval facilities to Russia. An independent Sevastopol might have been enough to satisfy Russia's strategic needs—and the Sevastopol city council, in fact, held a referendum of its own on accession to Russia.

Turning to the conflict in Eastern Ukraine, we have shown how it captures key elements of gray-zone conflict, given the fact that Russia and the United States are involved in supporting opposing sides. This raises the stakes obviously, but it also influences mediator techniques, the likelihood of success, and the level of commitment necessary to ensure a lasting peace from the opposing parties. The earliest and most concerted mediation attempt to facilitate a peaceful resolution to the war in Donbas was the meeting of the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine. The OSCE developed this framework as an attempt to facilitate a dialogue between Russia and Ukraine through the mediation of an impartial actor and eventually resulted in the Minsk I (September 2014) and then Minsk II (February 2015) agreements.<sup>14</sup>

In addition to the aforementioned Normandy Format negotiations, there have been several efforts at negotiation by the US Special Representatives for Ukraine, first Victoria Nuland and more recently Kurt Volker, and their counterpart, Russian presidential advisor Vladislav Surkov. In February 2020 Dmitry Kozak replaced Surkov. These conversations, based on private talks, has the American side ostensibly negotiating on behalf of Ukraine. In 2017 alone, there were five meetings between Volker and Surkov, showing an increasing pace compared to previous rounds.<sup>15</sup> These diplomatic efforts facilitated the large-scale prisoner exchange that took place in December 2019. The political goodwill created by this event resulted in a second round of prisoner exchanges in April 2020.

In addition to these bilateral talks, there were several higher-level meetings, including Putin's summit with Trump in July 2018, with Macron in August 2019, and phone conversations with Ukraine's president, Volodymyr Zelensky, in 2019. However, multilateral talks have dominated. The most notable of these being the aforementioned Normandy Format and the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine.

The subsequent Normandy Four Summit in Paris on 9 December 2019 brought Merkel, Putin, Zelensky, and French president Emmanuel Macron together. Its purpose was to not only reinvigorate talks but also to address key differences on political and security issues. The talks built on a recent de-escalation in tensions following the implementation in fall 2019 of the "Steinmeier formula," which saw the withdrawal of belligerent forces from three key sectors in the Donbas. Ukraine's leader expressed an openness to supporting a law that would grant special status for the people of Eastern Ukraine. Given that former Ukraine leader Poroshenko

proved unwilling to grant provisions for autonomy, President Zelensky's suggestion, made before the talks began, indicated he was open to compromise.

The outcome of the one-day Normandy talks was open-ended, leaving room for further negotiation. Summit host Macron called the session "a credible re-launch—which wasn't a given."<sup>16</sup> There never was any expectation that a one-day meeting would achieve a major breakthrough or that Russia would be relieved of sanctions simply by coming to the table. The goal was to "lock in" all parties to a process that would have economic and political momentum.

In their final communique, all parties agreed to reestablish direct ongoing communication between Ukraine and Russia through the Trilateral Contact Group. As noted, this smaller format of dialogue between Kyiv and Moscow has proven effective at de-escalating fighting by leveraging the implementation of three additional zones of demilitarization between Ukraine and the separatist territories following the Normandy Format meeting.

Zelensky's approach—if not strategy—is much different than that of his predecessor, Poroshenko. Indeed, Poroshenko and his government, more often than not, used such meetings as an opportunity to draw attention to Russian intransigence, a strategy intended to convince Washington to not lift sanctions on Russia and to justify a punishing embargo on Eastern Ukraine. However, in retrospect, neither of these objectives put Ukraine in a better negotiating position. They merely diverted attention away from Poroshenko's government's poor performance amid a number of corruption scandals and his party's failure to address the ongoing humanitarian crisis in the Donbas.

Over 13,000 people died in the first four years of the conflict, and landmines have been scattered throughout the region, remaining an unmet challenge. More importantly, Ukraine was stagnating under Poroshenko. Despite an auspicious beginning on reforms in 2014, Kyiv's post-Maidan Revolution elites proved unable to circumvent deeply entrenched oligarchic resistance to change, making it difficult to pursue real reform. Though unelected, oligarchs exercise a great deal of influence and power in Ukrainian politics.<sup>17</sup> Zelensky is, in many ways, cut from a different cloth—an outsider who speaks fluent Russian and is open to the possibility of reform if it means bringing prosperity to all the people of Ukraine, including the Donbas.

This is a far cry from the previous Ukrainian government, which terminated social transaction to the Donbas region and, in 2017, imposed a full embargo, provoking a significant decline in the wellbeing of Eastern Ukrainians. That in turn, led to Eastern Ukraine's considerable economic dependence on Russia—a situation that Moscow is keen to reverse, while at the same time ensuring that Russia has pre-eminent influence over the region. Moscow has thus far pursued both objectives by

supporting elections for self-government in 2018 (which were not internationally recognized), increasing trade, and issuing Russian passports.

The idea is to prepare for the possibility that the people of Donbas may one day achieve Minsk II's stated goal of autonomy or, failing that, integration into Russia.<sup>18</sup> With a view to choosing between compromise or continued low-intensity conflict, in which both sides continue to suffer, Putin and Zelensky have taken measurable steps toward de-escalation. Specifically, these include an immediate agreement to an expanded ceasefire zone and a commitment by Russia to disarm its proxy forces in the Donbas. Having a ceasefire in place means related efforts to reduce deeper tensions will follow, including a withdrawal of forces, an increase in the number of crossing points at the line of contact, and more concerted demining.

Simply put, the primary goal of normalizing relations between the breakaway region and Ukraine was being normalized, which up until the outbreak of COVID-19 allowed for increased freedom of movement of people and goods. This opening up is a fundamental prerequisite before a political plan or even boundaries can be agreed to and finalized. Without the participation of the local population in the reintegration process, the humanitarian crisis will continue to erode any confidence they might have in a negotiated settlement.

At the same time, two significant hurdles remain. These pertain to political and economic aspects of the management process. One is agreement on the fixed border between Ukraine and Russia, and the other revolves around provisions for granting autonomy to Eastern Ukraine. Zelensky's negative reaction to Putin's suggestion that autonomy should be pursued through Ukrainian constitutional reform shows there are still major gaps to be bridged. For many Ukrainians, the idea of autonomy is tantamount to surrender, even a loss of sovereignty, if not control over territory. Yet, decentralization is no stranger to Ukraine. Crimea enjoyed special autonomy status through constitutional reform while under Kyiv's control. Over time, Kyiv might be enticed to engage Eastern Ukraine in a dialogue on greater autonomy, including federalism, which would give greater authority over to its local leaders. What is not clear is if Putin will respond by making real and equally tangible concessions of his own to match those from Kyiv.

Putin's response is in part driven by US foreign policy toward Ukraine specifically and the region generally. Not only has a distracted Pres. Donald Trump not replaced his departing special representative for Ukraine, Kurt Volker, his escalating political disagreements with NATO members at the summit in London left the US-led alliance divided.

To some extent, the rift between the United States and NATO members had grown to the point that the hands of France and Germany were untied to go confidently into future negotiations without looking back at Washington. US

support for Ukraine is, thus, frozen as Trump remains preoccupied with domestic political struggles, COVID-19, a looming election, and an impeachment legacy—all of which have limited communications and coordination with President Zelensky. Russia is keen to not see the United States join the talks.

With respect to the economic dimensions, the building of Nord Stream II and TurkStream pipelines complicate further negotiations—but in a positive way. Indeed, EU relations with Russia have improved on the basis of common economic and security interests, with Germany and France abandoning much of their previous strong rhetoric against Russia in defense of Ukraine. Russia has in turn built durable relationships with influential EU members, such as Italy and Hungary. With the increasing alienation of Kyiv from its previous powerful allies and shrinking gas transit leverage, President Zelensky has a limited window of opportunity to reach a satisfactory deal on both gas transit and the conflict in Donbas. Thus, Kyiv is likely to expedite negotiations and push for a deal at later meetings.

Further still, while not a party to the negotiations, Turkey's uncertain position within NATO makes Ankara a wild card for both Russia and European powers. Turkey's strategic interests in Syria and the Black Sea region and Erdogan's deteriorating trust among EU leaders like Macron is an asset for Moscow in negotiations with European leaders. For example, as a member of NATO, Turkey can veto decisions within the alliance and undermine coordinated NATO operations in the Baltics and elsewhere. Such disruption by Turkey could cause further polarization in the alliance, a decrease in pressure and leverage over Russia, and change in the balance of power in future bargaining with Moscow.

However, France and Germany have their own strong card to play: the withholding of building permits for the TurkStream pipeline. The pipeline's launch has been delayed to mid-2020, as Bulgaria obtains compliance with EU regulations. With a stagnating economy, and continuing economic sanctions, Moscow is anxious for both Turkstream and NordStream II completion and will likely adopt a more collaborative posture in subsequent negotiations as it seeks regulatory and political cooperation from the EU. Ultimately, a cohesive Europe that is on good terms with Russia would be a significant challenge to American influence there and elsewhere.

Washington's recent imposition of sanctions on the Nord Stream II pipeline through the 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA) will further alienate Washington from global allies. The bill is intended to sanction all entities involved in the financing and construction related to the nearly completed pipeline. The measures were met with condemnation from Germany and a number of senior US officials have conceded that the act is unlikely to affect the project's completion. Such unilateral actions by Washington against European companies

signal the American readiness to employ hard power and coercion against geopolitical opponents like Russia—even if such measures come at the expense of relations with Washington’s closest European allies. Even though the act is futile in stopping the pipeline’s completion, Washington’s diplomatic relations with major European powers will bear the costs, further undermining the long-term political and economic cohesion within the US–Europe alliance. The act also incorporates sanctions against companies involved in the TurkStream pipeline project, along with a clause to block the delivery of F-35 fighters to Turkey. These NDAA provisions strain the already fragile relationship between the United States and Turkey and may further persuade Ankara to undermine NATO operations in the Baltic and elsewhere.

For Angela Merkel, the most productive and consistent Western mediator throughout the conflict, the ultimate goal, before she leaves office, must be to persuade Putin to play a constructive role in bringing stability to Ukraine through Western support and guidance. From a German perspective, if not a European one, continued confrontation with Russia remains counterproductive. Merkel famously faced down US Senator John McCain, who proposed fully arming Ukraine. She noted that no amount of arms would resolve the conflict. This is a message both Canadian and American leaders must comprehend. If Washington and Ottawa are sincere about bringing peace and stability to Ukraine, they will need to support the European initiative rather than undermine it by escalating the conflict.

Claims by Rudy Giuliani regarding Ukraine’s misuse of aid during the Obama administration have further complicated Washington’s relations with Kyiv.<sup>19</sup> Giuliani alleged misconduct by former US Ambassador to Ukraine Marie Yovanovitch and that the US embassy instructed Ukraine’s law enforcement not to investigate corruption associated with this aid. Even though Zelensky can distance himself from the process, the political infighting in Washington will continue the paralysis of US relations with Kyiv, as Trump is preoccupied with COVID-19 amid his own political future. This creates a window of opportunity for European leaders to spearhead negotiations with Russia and uphold their commitment to the Minsk Accords and the Steinmeier Formula.

Looking ahead, the full implementation of the Minsk Accords would be a challenge for Zelensky, as he must decide between potentially painful alternatives, especially given that the border with Eastern Ukraine has been closed for now. On the one hand, recent polls indicate that Ukrainians are split on whether Kyiv should grant the separatist territories a special status within the country. However, those same polls show a majority of Ukrainians support compromise of some kind. At the Normandy Summit, Putin insisted that the Kyiv government must negotiate with the leaders of the separatist territories regarding their future rela-

tions. However few Ukrainians would see such engagement with the territories in a positive light, even though past Trilateral Contact Group meetings have involved separatist leaders. One option is the reintegration of the Donbas through the reopening of trade with the rest of Ukraine, akin to the Moldova model in relation to Transnistria. However, that idea seems unlikely, as only a minority of Ukrainians want trade fully restored with the Donbas region at this time.

This means any major steps such as constitutional reform to enable autonomy for the Donbas or the incorporation of the separatist leaders into the Trilateral Contact Group negotiations may come with high political costs for Zelensky. On the other hand, Russia has indicated its willingness to continue negotiations with Kyiv toward conflict resolution is based on Ukraine's commitment to the provisions of the Minsk Accords. However, even with growing domestic pressures, recent polls indicate a shift in Ukrainian attitudes toward Russia, with a decline in negative sentiment toward their eastern neighbor. Similar changes occurred in Russia, with more favorable media representation of Zelensky relative to Poroshenko and public opinion now favoring closer relations with Ukraine. Such a turn in public opinion may enable a more pragmatic approach by Zelensky relative to his predecessor, providing the opportunity for reciprocal concessions with Russia and the momentum necessary for more meaningful rounds of negotiations within the Trilateral Contact Group.

### **Key Challenges in the Three Domains of Gray-zone Conflicts**

The foregoing discussion highlights several challenges for scholars and policy makers. These relate specifically to the security, sociopolitical, and economic dimensions of gray-zone conflict. A key practical problem for conflict resolution in Eastern Ukraine is that the challenges associated with these individual domains are highly intertwined. However, we believe a key step toward conflict resolution in Eastern Ukraine is to identify, disentangle, and address the challenges in the individual domains. Moreover, we observe that the likelihood of successful conflict management in Ukraine is contingent upon the development of robust, broadly accepted, legal attribution mechanisms that create clarity regarding states' actions in support of nonstate entities.

### ***Challenges and Solution in the Security Domain of Gray-zone Conflicts***

First, with respect to the security dimensions, we find that current institutional mechanisms are ill-suited to manage gray-zone conflict. Over the latter part of the twentieth century, international organizations played an important role in fragile states, including capacity building, conflict management, and postconflict

reconstruction. The United Nations (UN) has been the largest international player to facilitate conflict management by states through activities such as multilateral peacemaking and peacebuilding operations. This includes monitoring a ceasefire or addressing questions of retribution for both sides in case of noncompliance. However, the UN would be a relatively ineffective organ for conflict de-escalation in gray-zone conflicts, considering the large number of nonstate entities, often making up the majority of participants. The decision-making process regarding conflict and crisis management strategies at the UN is largely state-centric—even if the targets are ultimately nonstate militant groups, rebels, or noncombatants. This means that the ultimate victims of interethnic hostilities have a limited ability to partake in de-escalating their own conflict. This mismatch increases the risk that de-escalation efforts fail altogether.

In that regard, it is critical to adapt long-standing international legal provisions such as Articles 51 and 2(4) of the UN Charter to the context of gray-zone conflicts era. Considering that states that engage in such conflict often rely entirely on substate actors for kinetic and nonkinetic operations, these provisions raise the important question of how to regulate the behavior of nonstate groups, sponsored by third-party state interveners, across international borders. For example, the issue of offensive cyberoperations by states and nonstate entities has created a conundrum regarding their legality in relation to UN self-defense provisions, the Law of Armed Conflict, and norms regarding preemptive operations. In relation to this, attributability of actions by nonstate actors to their state sponsors has been an opaque area. Legal scholars and policy makers alike have yet to provide a consensus regarding standardized guidelines or procedures to prove attribution that would decisively warrant specific retaliatory measures.<sup>20</sup>

Article 5 of the NATO Charter remains ambiguous regarding the format and intensity of an attack that would trigger a collective deterrence response. Some of the ambiguous aspects of this provision are the intensity threshold or the nature of the attack required to trigger the collective response. For example, state and nonstate actors alike engage in low-intensity cyberoperations against their opponents to an equally effective degree. A complicated issue associated with this is the virtual intrusion by nonstate groups, the composition of which may be defined, and therefore protected, as civilians under the Geneva Conventions of 1949 Article 51 (3) additional Protocol I.

## ***Challenges and Solutions in the Sociopolitical Domain of Gray-zone Conflicts***

With respect to the sociopolitical dimensions there are few international institutions that can effectively identify, and comprehensively respond to, elements of gray-zone conflict and low-intensity hybrid warfare. For example, the preoccupation of NATO with military affairs and strategies of militarization of the Baltic region has escalated tensions with Russia, while doing little to tackle the political dimensions of the conflict such as minority rights protection. This raises the question of how such structures can be adapted to the era of gray-zone conflicts.

More robust international human rights enforcement mechanisms must be created within existing alliances such as NATO. NATO and the protection of minority rights go hand in hand. After all, coming to the defense of minorities was the key reason why NATO, and the United States in particular, got involved in the conflict in Bosnia, took action in Kosovo, and gave long-term support to Europe's Stability Pact throughout Southeast Europe.<sup>21</sup>

Kyiv's efforts to counter Russia's gray-zone operations in Donbas overlap with the curtailment of minority language rights and increased social exclusion within Ukraine proper. The Maidan Revolution was supposed to be about uniting all Ukrainians—regardless of ethnic identity, religion, or language—within a single nation. Controversial language and memory laws have undermined that objective. These controversies have become fodder for Russia's soft-power incursion into Ukraine's media space under the guise of an anti-Nazi sentiment among Russia's diaspora. To complicate matters, Ukraine's government has risked alienating several of its minorities with the introduction of controversial laws under the guise of "Ukrainianization." For example, as part of its nation-building efforts post-Maidan, Kyiv sought to reorient its controversial wartime nationalist movements.

Ukraine's significantly low levels of institutionalization since Maidan highlights the problem. Under the circumstances, Ukraine's subordinated minority groups require protection either from state institutions or from external guarantors. When state institutions are weak or incapable of providing that support, then external security guarantees are essential for minority protection.

Furthermore, NATO could be used as a platform for multilateral coordination of human rights policy on Ukraine. To achieve that goal, NATO would need to work more closely with and provide support to the OSCE High Commission on National Minorities (HCNM) and the EU. Both the EU and the HCNM have a mandate to evaluate and advise on minority rights situations and were instrumental in removing minority rights roadblocks among current NATO members such as Romania, Hungary, the Baltics, Czechia, and Slovakia.

NATO's Comprehensive Approach to deterrence that emerged from the 2011 Lisbon Summit Declaration is a step toward countering unconventional threats, but empirical evidence from the Baltics shows that it has yet to be sufficiently effective in remedying the key areas that enable the use of diaspora-related gray-zone tactics.<sup>22</sup>

Together with specific NATO member states, such as Poland and Hungary, oversight measures mandated by the OSCE and the UN would help guarantee Ukraine's commitment to minority rights across the country. As a regional confidence-building measure, including those neighboring states who consider their minorities to be at risk will go a long way toward ensuring that if and when Ukraine pursues accession to the EU and NATO, the process is a positive and constructive one. Only then can Ukraine become the security maker its leaders want it to be and not the security taker it currently is.



*(USOSCE photo / Gower)*

**Figure 2. Trilateral Contact Group.** Ambassador Heidi Grau (Switzerland) and Ambassador Yaşar Halit Çevik (Turkey), chief monitor of the OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine at the Permanent Council, on 6 February 2020.

In our related research, we have argued the domain where regional international organizations such as the OSCE can be the most effective is diagnosis of causes and conflict de-escalation.<sup>23</sup> Regional organizations have in-depth specialized knowledge of the geographic area and actors, comparatively lower costs of operation, and are highly effective at producing outcomes in low-intensity disputes. Second, due to the perceived impartiality of such organizations, they have unmatched access to the conflict region and may monitor and disclose issues associated with spoilers, human rights, and cease-fire agreement violations. Finally, unlike large international organizations such as the UN, regional security-oriented organizations can incorporate nonstate actors into the multilateral dialogue for conflict management.<sup>24</sup> However, the resolution of gray-zone conflicts will, in our

opinion, still depend on some aspects of bilateral and small-format multilateral negotiations between great powers as the funders of the nonstate groups responsible for much of the tactical-level activities.

### ***Threats and Opportunities in the Economic Domain of Gray-zone Conflicts***

With respect to the economic dimensions, sending gray-zone conflict-related economic disputes through commerce arbitration will not provide long-lasting resolutions to conflicts; as such, institutions will be unable to formally account for the broader context of the problem—the strategic dimension. Russia's energy sector has been a key tool to leverage pro-Russian national attitudes in the post-Soviet space—frequently through special economic agreements or sanctions. Even though its effectiveness remains uncertain, economic pressure is frequently utilized by states against their opponents in gray-zone conflicts.<sup>25</sup> The inducement of economic pressure, through methods such as sanctions, is intended to erode the opponents' economy, especially in situations of asymmetric economic interdependence, and encourage a change in policy direction. It is a method of leverage that cannot be categorized as an overt declaration of war but also escapes the absolute state of peace.

In the modern interconnected world, there is an incentive to employ willful blindness in relation to potential threats emanating from geostrategic opponents such as Russia. These authoritarian states provide Western liberal democracies access to both inexpensive labor and vast energy resources required to fuel economic growth. Greed for short-term economic growth, for example through reliance on comparative advantage principles, however, may have long-term security consequences. However, economic interconnectedness may also create opportunities for conflict resolution. This means, even though foreign policy of state actors in gray-zone conflicts seems to be guided by realist thinking and pursuit of maximum relative gains, liberal institutionalism should not be outright dismissed.

As we highlight in this article, the common wisdom in recent literature on gray-zone conflicts has been to treat the economic domain as an area of threat. However, for the purpose of conflict management in Ukraine, Moscow's increasingly interconnected energy relations with the EU may also be an opportunity for peaceful conflict resolution.

Re-engagement between the EU and Russia demonstrates that complex interdependence can provide an opportunity for conflict resolution in Ukraine.<sup>26</sup> In the contemporary interconnected world, there is no clear hierarchy between economic and military issues among states. Moreover, as the cost of engagement in

conventional military operations has increased, the economic domain becomes increasingly important for exercise of power and overall interaction between states. The relationship observed is that as economic interdependence increases between nations, the cost of upsetting the mutually beneficial environment through conflict increases. Thus, states often choose to forego conflict and resolve disputes cooperatively.

This pattern of behavior can be observed among the EU, Ukraine, and Russia in their efforts to de-escalate the conflict in the Donbas and thereby eliminate barriers for energy cooperation. For example, reengagement through the Normandy Format and bilateral dialogue between Russia and European powers has paralleled the construction and launch of the Nord Stream II and TurkStream pipelines. Moreover, in December 2019, Russia and Ukraine reached a five-year gas transit deal.<sup>27</sup>

The period of reengagement between Moscow and its gray-zone conflict adversaries over economic issues has correlated with a decline in fighting and exchange of prisoners—important steps in the implementation of the Minsk II agreement.<sup>28</sup> However, as we discussed in this article, the United States attempted to block the pipeline construction and the renewal of Moscow's relationship with European leaders. The argument from Washington has been that the economic reengagement with Moscow will lead Europe into a dependence trap on Moscow's energy. However, according to analysts, the energy relationship between Moscow and Europe is symbiotic—not asymmetric.<sup>29</sup> In fact, some claim Russia is more dependent on European consumption of its resources than the reverse. What remains clear, however, is if Washington succeeds in disrupting Europe's trust building with Moscow, the chances of peaceful conflict resolution among Russia, Ukraine, and European powers decreases.

### **Future Directions of Gray-zone Conflict Policy and Research**

Looking ahead, a key challenge for the international community is that Russia and NATO are not the only actors to engage in gray-zone conflicts. For example, Beijing has mastered the art of hybrid warfare over the past 20 years and has already emerged as the main geopolitical challenger to the United States and its allies in the long term. Washington and its allies have only recently reoriented their attention to address this challenge. China is changing the rules of foreign aid, with profound consequences for the role of international institutions and standards of lending conditionality. Substantial fear exists that China's format of aid is strengthening rogue states, facilitating corruption, and increasing the debt burdens of targeted countries for political gains.<sup>30</sup> Thus, alongside the overarching need to upgrade international legal frameworks, institutions, and mechanisms of conflict

management, there will also be a demand for tailored approaches to address the individual tools and tactics employed by participants in gray-zone conflicts.

#### Dr. David Carment

Dr. Carment (PhD, political science, McGill University; MA, international affairs, Carleton University; MA, religious studies, McMaster University; and BA, religious studies and political science, McMaster University) is a professor of international affairs at The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada). He is series editor for Palgrave's *Canada and International Affairs*, editor of *Canadian Foreign Policy Journal*, and Fellow of the Canadian Global Affairs Institute. His research focuses on Canadian foreign policy, mediation, and negotiation; fragile states; and diaspora politics. Dr. Carment is the author, editor, or coeditor of 21 books and has authored or coauthored over 90 peer-reviewed journal articles and book chapters. His most recent books focus on diaspora cooperation, corruption in Canada, branding Canadian foreign policy, and state fragility. In 2017, Carment was a visiting scholar at the World Institute for Development Economics Research (Finland) and in 2015 a Fellow at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research (Germany). His most recent books include *Canada-US Relations* (2019) and *Exiting the Fragility Trap* (2019).

#### Dani Belo

Mr. Belo is a PhD candidate and SSHRC Doctoral Fellow in international conflict management and resolution at The Norman Paterson School of International Affairs, Carleton University (Ottawa, Canada). His research focuses on gray-zone conflicts, hybrid warfare, the evolution NATO–Russia relations, foreign and domestic policy of Russia, conflict mediation, security policy, ethnic conflict, and nationalism in the post-Soviet space. His other research interests include civil-military relations, international relations in the Arctic region, informal institutions and networks, and natural resources-based disputes. Mr. Belo's publications, among others, include: "War's Future: The Risks and Rewards of Gray-zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare," "Mediating an Impasse: The Way Forward in Ukraine," and "Ukraine's New Law: What Lies Ahead?" for the Canadian Global Affairs Institute (CGAI); "Canada and Russia: No Room to Manoeuvre" in *Canadian Defence at 150 and Beyond* for the NATO Association of Canada; and "Oswiecim and its Geographic Location" in *Cross-Border Urban Narratives*, focusing on ethnic grievances, nationalism, and conflict dynamics in Poland. He was the editor in chief of the *Paterson Review of International Affairs Journal* and is currently a regular contributor to *iAffairs Canada*.

#### Notes

1. Karl P. Mueller et al., *Striking First: Preemptive and Preventive Attack in U.S. National Security Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Project Air Force, 2007)
2. Frank G. Hoffman, *Conflict in the 21st Century: The Rise of Hybrid Wars* (Arlington, VA: Potomac Institute for Policy Studies, 2007); David E. Johnson, *Military Capabilities for Hybrid War: Insights from the Israel Defense Forces in Lebanon and Gaza* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND, 2010); and Hemda Ben-Yehuda and Shmuel Sandler, *The Arab–Israeli Conflict Transformed: Fifty Years of Interstate and Ethnic Crises*, SUNY Series in Global Politics (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002).
3. Valery Gerasimov, "The Value of Science Is in the Foresight: New Challenges Demand Rethinking the Forms and Methods of Carrying Out Combat Operations," *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (2016), 23; Charles Bartles, "Getting Gerasimov Right," *Military Review* 96, no. 1 (2016), 30; and Qiao Liang and Wang Xiangsui, *Unrestricted Warfare* (Beijing: PLA Literature and Arts Publishing House Arts, 1999).
4. Sascha Bachmann and Hakan Gunneriusson, "Russia's Hybrid Warfare in the East: The Integral Nature of the Information Sphere," *Georgetown Journal of International Affairs*, 1 October 2015, 199.

5. David Carment and Dani Belo, "War's Future: The Risks and Rewards of Grey-Zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare," *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*, October 2018, <https://www.cgai.ca/>.

6. Monica Duffy-Toft, "The Dangerous Rise of Kinetic Diplomacy," *War on the Rocks*, 14 May 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/>; and Monica Duffy-Toft, "Fewer Diplomats, More Armed Force Defines US Leadership Today," *The Conversation*, 20 September 2019, <https://theconversation.com/>.

7. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War* (London: K. Paul, Trench, Trubner, 1918).

8. John R. Oneal and Bruce Russett, "The Kantian Peace: The Pacific Benefits of Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations, 1885–1992," *World Politics* 52, no. 1 (1999), 23; and John R. Oneal, Bruce Russett, and Michael L. Berbaum, "Causes of Peace: Democracy, Interdependence, and International Organizations, 1885–1992," *International Studies Quarterly* 47, no. 3 (2003), 371–72.

9. Giulio M. Gallarotti, "The Limits of International Organization: Systematic Failure in the Management of International Relations," *International Organization* 45, no. 2 (1991), 183; and Michael Lipson, "Peacekeeping: Organized Hypocrisy?," *European Journal of International Relations* 13, no. 1 (2007), 12.

10. Michael N. Schmitt, *Tallinn Manual 2.0 on the International Law Applicable to Cyber Operations* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2017)

11. Edward Newman and Karl R. DeRouen, *Routledge Handbook of Civil Wars* (London, UK: Routledge, 2016).

12. Nicholas Tsagourias, "Cyber Attacks, Self-Defence and the Problem of Attribution," *Journal of Conflict and Security Law* 17, no. 2 (January 2012), 229.

13. Had there been meaningful mediation efforts, attention might instead have focused on the long-term political and economic viability of Crimea remaining within Ukraine. Conversely, Western mediators could have spelled out the costs of Crimea's absorption into Russia. There were bailouts and aid packages for Kyiv, but the economic and political benefits that would accrue to the Crimeans by staying in a unified Ukraine were never properly explained to them. *Also see* Gwendolyn Sasse, "What Is the Public Mood Like in Crimea?," *Carnegie Europe*, 6 November 2017, <https://carnegieeurope.eu/>.

14. "OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine (SMM) was deployed on 21 March 2014. The SMM is an unarmed, civilian mission, present on the ground 24/7 in all regions of Ukraine. Its main tasks are to observe and report in an impartial and objective way on the situation in Ukraine; and to facilitate dialogue among all parties to the crisis." OSCE Special Monitoring Mission to Ukraine, n.d., <https://www.osce.org/>.

15. David Carment, Milana Nikolko, and Dani Belo, "Gray-zone Mediation in the Ukraine Crisis: Comparing Crimea and Donbas," in *Research Handbook on Mediating International Crises*, ed. Jonathan Wilkenfeld, Kyle Beardsley, and David Quinn (New York: Elgar, 2019).

16. David M. Herszenhorn and Rym Momtaz, "Normandy Talks Land in Paris but Fail to Deliver Peace in Ukraine," *Politico*, 12 December 2019, <https://www.politico.eu/>.

17. David Carment, Milana Nikolko, and Dani Belo, "Ukraine's Grey-Zone Conflict: What Lies Ahead?," *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*, February 2018, <https://www.cgai.ca/>.

18. Carment, Nikolko, and Belo, "Ukraine's Grey-Zone Conflict."

19. "Giuliani Alleges \$5.3 Billion in U.S. Aid Misused in Ukraine, U.S. Embassy Told Police 'Not to Investigate'," *Epoch Times*, 6 December 2019, <https://www.theepochtimes.com/>.

20. Jenny Döge, "Cyber Warfare Challenges for the Applicability of the Traditional Laws of War Regime," *Archiv Des Völkerrechts* 48, no. 4 (2010), 486, <https://doi.org/>.

21. David Carment and Frank P. Harvey, *Using Force to Prevent Ethnic Violence: An Evaluation of Theory and Evidence* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 2001)
22. Dani Belo and David Carment, "Protecting Minority Rights to Undermine Russia's Compatriots Strategy," *Canadian Global Affairs Institute*, April 2019, <https://www.cgai.ca/>.
23. David Carment and Dani Belo, "Non-State Actors and Conflict Management in an Era of Gray-zone Conflict," in *The Routledge Handbook on Peace, Security, and Development*, ed. Fen Hampson, Jonathan Kent, and Alp Ozerdem (Abingdon-on-Thames: Routledge, 2020).
24. Jacob Bercovitch and Scott Gartner, "Is There Method in the Madness of Mediation," in *International Conflict Mediation* (London: Routledge, 2009).
25. David Carment and Dani Belo, "War's Future: The Risks and Rewards of Grey-Zone Conflict and Hybrid Warfare."
26. Robert O. Keohane and Joseph S. Nye, "Power and Interdependence," *Survival* 15, no. 4 (1973), 158; and Joseph S. Nye and John D. Donahue, *Governance in a Globalizing World* (Washington, DC: Brookings Institution, 2000).
27. "Russia, Ukraine Sign Gas Transit Deal Ahead of Deadline," *Deutsche Welle*, 31 December 2019, <https://www.dw.com/>.
28. "Prisoner Exchange Lifts the Veil on Russia's Hybrid War against Ukraine," *Ukraine Alert* (blog), Atlantic Council, 9 January 2020, <https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/>.
29. Andrej Krickovic, "When Interdependence Produces Conflict: EU–Russia Energy Relations as a Security Dilemma," *Contemporary Security Policy* 36, no. 1 (February 2015), 8–9.
30. Ngaire Woods, "Whose Aid? Whose Influence? China, Emerging Donors and the Silent Revolution in Development Assistance," *International Affairs* 84, no. 6 (2008), 1205.

# Musical Criminology

## A Comparative Analysis of Jihadist *Nasheeds* and *Narco Corridos*

DR. HAYAT ALVI

Jihadists have their *nasheeds*, and the Islamic State (IS) became popular for its nasheed compositions used in propaganda videos. Nasheed is an a cappella song praising the Prophet Muhammad and reciting Quranic verses glorifying jihad. Similarly, drug cartels have bands that compose and sing *narco corridos*, or “drug ballads,” based on Mexican folk music, which glorify cartel leaders as modern-day “Robin Hood” figures and announce executions of enemies. Both nasheeds and narco corridos have much in common: glorifying historical victories over enemies in wars and revolutions; using lyrics to warn their enemies about their invincibility and strength and bravery; calling out specific enemies as targets; and using their respective ideologies to justify their acts, behaviors, and beliefs.

This study examines and comparatively analyzes the two musical genres in the context of terrorism and narco-terrorism, and how these musical traditions affect their respective followers, admirers, and devotees. The analysis also highlights how these musical genres popularize crime and violence, and desensitize audiences to the extreme brutality praised and glorified in their songs.

There are some contextual distinctions that separate the two genres as well, and these entail part of the comparative analysis. The use of social media in both contexts is an essential tool to popularize nasheeds and narco corridos; they use YouTube videos, Twitter and Facebook, and other Internet resources to spread their music and messages. In particular, Western democracies provide freedom of expression, which further facilitates the proliferation of nasheeds and narco corridos. Specifically, the nasheeds are sung with religious references, verses, and lyrics, which endow them with greater allure and legitimacy in the eyes of the religious public. However, even some drug cartels and their leaders and followers embrace religious cult-like ideologies related to their narco-paradigms. They come complete with cults of personality attributed to specific drug lords and folkloric heroes from Mexican and Latin American history. An entire industry in entertainment, jewelry, amulets, shrines, icons, and spiritual “saints” and shaman-like figures flourishes in advancing what is called the “narco-culture.”

Moreover, law enforcement faces substantial hindrances to monitor and control online materials. How have governments responded to these social and religious

musical media that glorify violent crimes? What are the implications of these for counterterrorism and counternarcotics strategies, bearing in mind that drug cartels often resort to narco-terrorism in much of the same ways as religious terrorist organizations operate, and, in fact, in many cases, the narco-terrorists are *even more* brutal and heinous in their tactics, shock value, and impacts. Yet, each type of terrorist—religious and narco-terrorists—still secures a loyal following. Their audiovisual tools for glorifying their respective causes, leaders, ideologies, and roles in society have made them extremely popular, especially among the youth. Each type of terrorist claims to fight against corrupt political elites and to stand for and support the masses, especially the poor, disenfranchised, and oppressed in society. In their propaganda, they use words like “oppression,” “persecution,” the “corrupt officials,” and the like, and they present themselves as the heroic warriors rising from among the masses to fight against oppression and injustice, but never mind the drug production, drug and human trafficking, and senseless violence that they perpetrate. And, in the case of ISIS and al-Qaeda, their violent repression and brutality against anyone who fails to accept their creed, leadership, and way of life are clearly paradoxical to their claims of serving as fighters against oppression and injustice. Thus, we see that both narco corridos and nasheeds have much in common, while at the same time they are contextually different.

The fact that narco-terrorists and religious terrorist groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda use songs at all is rather surprising. For the world of narcos, traditional Mexican and other Latino folk music and songs in Spanish provide an historical backdrop for their narco corridos. However, in more contemporary times, narco-corrido singers and composers have been increasingly inspired by American hip-hop and rap music and what has evolved into the “gangster-rap,” or “gangsta rap” genre. This is easily correlated to drug cartels and dealers, because many gangs engage in the buying, processing, and selling of illegal drugs, mostly in urban streets, but now the target market is also expanding into the more suburban and rural areas of the United States.

Groups like ISIS and al-Qaeda present nasheeds without music, hence a nasheed is a religious hymn sung a cappella, mainly in Arabic. According to their extremist interpretations of Islam, instrumental music and female voices are not allowed. Therefore, only male voices are heard in nasheeds, which are sung and chanted without any instrumental accompaniment, especially when it comes to *jihadist nasheeds*. This is conducive to the traditional oral traditions of poetry and storytelling in Arab culture and history.

In order to understand the modern usage of nasheeds and narco-corridos, one must first understand each genre’s history, concepts, and cultural contexts. Then, it is imperative to analyze each genre’s messaging, propensity for glorifying gro-

tesque violence, and tools of dissemination. Finally, it is essential to assess the effectiveness of each genre's lyrics, strategic use of propaganda, profiteering, and growth of the cult-like cultures and industries associated with them, which could not happen without their music increasing in popularity among the masses, despite their criminality.



(Source: Mike Keefe, "ISIS vs. Western Modernity," 4 September 2014, <https://www.intoon.com/toons/2014/KeefeM20140904.jpg>)

**Figure 1. ISIS vs. Western Modernity**

### Nasheeds: The Hymns of Jihad

In the Muslim world, the nasheed (plural, *anasheed*) is a song without musical instruments with lyrics that resemble hymns that praise God (*Allah*). The person who sings a nasheed is called a *munshid*. According to the Islamic Board website, in Islam "what is meant by Nasheed is a song that carries with it an Islamic belief, practice, etiquette, lesson, etc. They do take many forms. Some are just pure simple praises of Allah, some have very specific lessons related to Qur'anic passages, some are lessons of life stated in an Islamic manner; . . . a Nasheed should be voice only with no use of musical instruments."<sup>1</sup> Sometimes a simple percussion is used in the background to accompany the a cappella singing. Most nasheeds are sung in Arabic, but they are contextually known in comparable terminology in other languages, for example, as *Islami nazam* in Urdu.<sup>2</sup>

According to some music scholars, nasheeds evolved from seventh century Arabia, similar to Christian hymns or psalms, which were sung as "tributes to the spiritual life."<sup>3</sup> With the worldwide spread of Islam, "worshippers began using elements from their own musical traditions, including instruments, to sing their own songs of praise. This led to the growth of several new subgenres of Islamic

music stretching across continents. Today's youth have also incorporated the latest styles, such as hip-hop and pop music, to craft their own modern odes to Islam."<sup>4</sup> In his article, "Music of the Arab World," Saeed Saeed explains the nasheed's traditional contents, rules, evolution, and iterations:

Islamic music was originally defined by what it didn't contain: no strings, brass, or wind instruments and no female vocals. The only instrument initially allowed was minimal percussion by an Arabic drum called the *daf*. This minimal form remains widely practiced in the Gulf and some other parts of the Arab world.

However, in places such as Turkey and Southeast Asia, several new styles of spiritual songs have developed. In Turkey, Sufi adherents incorporate music into worship. The most popular are services undertaken by Mevlevi Sufis, which include chanting and the famous whirling dervishes.

In Pakistan and Southeast Asia, the most recognized form of devotional music is *qawwali*. Performed by up to nine men, a qawwali group would often use instruments such as the harmonium (a type of keyboard) and percussion instruments including a tabla and dholak. The songs often run from 15 to 30 minutes and include instrumental preludes, repeated refrains and vocal improvisation. In recent times, nasheed artists from the Gulf have found innovative ways to overcome the no-instrument rule.

Albums by Sharjah's Ahmed Bukhatir and Kuwait's Mishary Rashid Al Afasy use studio trickery and manipulate backing vocals to sound like a synth piano or string section. In the West, groups such as America's Native Deen and Australia's The Brothahood use hip-hop music to get their spiritual message across to a new generation of young Muslims. The nasheeds in English by South Africa's Zain Bhikha secured him a large following in Europe and the Middle East.<sup>5</sup>

Global jihadists have composed their own brand of hymns derived from this tradition of nasheeds, and they have been using the nasheed genre in their propaganda videos, audio recordings, and recruitment tactics. These chants "are now the soundtrack of jihad."<sup>6</sup> In his *Euronews* article, Thomas Seymat says that, "Nasheeds were not always so significant in the jihadi culture, their rise has been only recent. 'There was an increase of songs after the outbreak of the Arab Spring and the diversification of the jihadi scene which was no longer represented by al-Qaeda alone'," quoting Behnam T. Said, a doctoral candidate at the University of Jena; "But an even stronger increase of new nasheeds could be observed during the last years within the context of the war in Syria and Iraq."<sup>7</sup>

Two scholars have focused on jihadi nasheeds: Behnam Said, whose 2012 journal article in *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* explains how nasheeds constitute a significant "Contribution to the Study of Jihadist Culture." Also, Aymenn Jawad

Al-Tamimi has been translating jihadi nasheeds from Arabic to English for many years and has posted his work on his website.<sup>8</sup> Behnam Said makes a startling discovery in his article, stating that the songs represent an inspiration for many modern jihadists, for instance Anwar al-Awlaqi, whom the United States killed in an airstrike in Yemen in September 2011, made an “interesting statement [in] his pamphlet ‘44 Ways to Support Jihad’,” saying:

In the time of Rasulullah (i.e., The Prophet Muhammad) he had poets who would use their poetry to inspire the Muslims and demoralize the disbelievers. Today Nasheed can play that role. A good Nasheed can spread so widely it can reach to an audience that you could not reach through a lecture or a book. Nasheeds are especially inspiring to the youth, who are the foundation of Jihad in every age and time. Nasheeds are an important element in creating a ‘Jihad culture.’ Nasheeds are abundant in Arabic but scarce in English. Hence it is important for talented poets and talented singers to take up this responsibility. The nasheeds can cover topics such as: Martyrdom, Jihad is our only solution, support of the present-day leaders of Jihad (to connect the youth to them), the situation of the *Ummah* (global Muslim community) the responsibility of the youth, the victory of Islam and defending the religion. The nasheeds should focus on Justice rather than peace and strength rather than weakness. The nasheeds should be strong and uplifting and not apologetic and feminine.<sup>9</sup>

Hence, we see that jihadists have used nasheeds strategically in a concerted effort to spread their propaganda, legitimize their ideologies in the façade of religion, and popularize their genre to gain recruits and loyal followers. Nasheeds are “used by different Islamic groups who are engaged in battle, Sunni or Shia. But many new songs are produced by one of the most powerful actors on the battlefield: the Islamic State”<sup>10</sup> (IS, also known as the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria, or ISIS; and the Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant, or ISIL). During the peak of the IS’s power and ubiquitous presence on the Internet, especially Twitter, newly composed nasheeds would be announced with great fanfare. The IS has produced Hollywood-quality propaganda videos that play nasheeds in the background, sometimes providing the lyrics in subtexts on the screen. In addition, al-Qaeda has used nasheeds for its own propaganda purposes as well.

According to Behnam Said, “There are more nasheeds, which are not subsumed under one special category due to the reasons that they are less common in jihadi publications than other ones. These nasheeds are related to Palestine, prisoners, or current political situations.”<sup>11</sup> He goes on, providing an example for a Palestine nasheed:

‘*Sahm al-Ams*’ (The arrow of yesterday) . . . by Abu Ali. This song has been used by Al Qaeda in its video ‘*al-Quds lan tubawwada*’ (Jerusalem will not be juda-

ized) from 19 July 2010 as well as in the 'Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghrib' (AQIM) film '*Adkbulu al-bab aleihim*' (Enter through the door against them), which was released in July 2011. The song's text is about the loss of Jerusalem and Palestine and the loss of dignity, which can be restored only by means of fighting for the land. The text itself is not militant but is apparently attractive for the militant scene as we can conclude from the fact that core Al Qaeda and its branches used this song for their videos.<sup>12</sup>

In addition to finding Jihadi nasheeds in propaganda videos, you can also hear them on the Internet, and prior to the technology of today, there was "already a distribution [before the Internet] via song books, cassettes and videos but the Internet worked as a catalyst."<sup>13</sup> The Internet also provides forums containing audios (*sautiyat*) and sections for discussions "about the permissibility of nasheeds, [and] they are asking for specific songs they come across in videos, etc."<sup>14</sup> Seymat reports in *Euronews*:

In a few clicks, *euronews* found similar forums, web portals and even a subreddit, that host hundreds of MP3s of nasheeds, available to stream or download.

On YouTube, a search for "nasheed" returns 1.3 million results (and more than 80,400 for 'jihad nasheed'), large parts of which use military imagery and claim geographical origins from Chechnya to Bosnia.

Militant Islamist groups have no qualms using Western inventions like the Internet to circulate their hymns: 'Jihadists are very pragmatic,' [Behnam Said] tells *euronews*. 'You will find that skepticism more amongst purist Salafis, like Nasir al-Din al-Albani and many Wahhabi scholars from Saudi Arabia.'

Peter Neumann, a professor of Security Studies at the Department of War Studies at King's College, London, sees irony in the situation. 'There has never been an objection to using Western technology, for example, as long as its use is for a religiously permitted purpose,' Neumann explained during an interview on NPR.

'That's always been the sort of irony and contradiction of this movement – that they are essentially trying to establish states that are following medieval rules, but they are taking advantage of the Internet' and other cutting-edge technologies, according to Neumann, who is the director of The International Center for the Study of Radicalization (ICSR).<sup>15</sup>

Nasheeds have been attached to jihadi videos, which often contain graphic, grotesque, and morbid imagery from battlefields, terrorist attacks, and executions that include beheadings. Sometimes nasheed music attributed to particular Jjihadi videos are banned "from video-hosting platforms, but in most cases not because of the nasheeds but because of the footage."<sup>16</sup> "But you can still access nasheed videos on internet platforms quite easily. The songs have spread so far and there

are so many that it is not possible to control their spread via internet. Also, in many cases you need experts telling you whether the song is a radical one or not and why it should be banned or not. So this is a quite complex task.”<sup>17</sup> Jihadi nasheeds convey a range of messaging, some specific, and some more ambiguous. Often, the “pictures or footage which illustrate the videos leave no doubt of its support for violent jihadist groups, at times the symbols used, such as lions, or scimitars, are ambiguous. Other propaganda videos do not contain violence but are posted by accounts claiming to be linked to ISIL.”<sup>18</sup>

The IS “has used nasheeds to spread its message since its founding, disseminating battle hymns online through its own media unit and other affiliated propaganda outlets.”<sup>19</sup> Most IS nasheeds “are in Arabic, but the language of delivery can be as diverse as the foreign fighters who have joined its ranks.”<sup>20</sup> In 2017, the IS released a new nasheed, entitled, “*Dawlati Baqia*,” or “My State Is Remaining,” which was “professionally recorded and has an Auto Tune quality to it.”<sup>21</sup> The song begins:

*My state is remaining, firing at the enemy.  
Its soldiers shout that it is remaining.  
Its path will not be eliminated; its light seeks to expand.*

Like other ISIS nasheeds, this one was disseminated across the Internet, on encrypted messaging applications, and likely on the organization’s radio station—still broadcasting in areas under its control. The verses are a defiant reply to those who believe IS’s battlefield setbacks signal the group’s demise.<sup>22</sup>

Law enforcement finds it difficult to monitor and police Internet content. However, YouTube, which is owned by Google, “has ‘clear policies prohibiting content intended to incite violence, and [we] remove videos violating these policies when flagged by our users. We also terminate any account registered by a member of a designated Foreign Terrorist Organization and used in an official capacity to further its interests,’ a YouTube spokesperson told *Euronews*. ‘We allow videos posted with a clear news or documentary purpose to remain on YouTube, applying warnings and age-restrictions as appropriate.’”<sup>23</sup> Furthermore, YouTube has “given a number of government agencies ‘trusted’ flagger status to prioritize their reporting of dangerous or illegal material.”<sup>24</sup> However, that might not suffice, since the Internet is global and the sheer capacity and capability to police it around the clock for each platform is impossible. Moreover, as Seymat indicates, “For video-hosting platform YouTube, it is a case of finding the right balance between freedom of expression and removing violent videos.”<sup>25</sup>

From the 1970s until the present, nasheeds have evolved in three contexts and purposes: (1) the “Islamic Resurgence” period as a means to counter cultural changes in Muslim societies and against various governments; (2) the anti-

occupation context and causes, such as Hamas's nasheeds against Israeli occupation, and militant groups fighting against Western forces in Iraq and Afghanistan—the precursor to this has been the much glorified jihad against the Soviets in Afghanistan; and (3) the “singing” or chanting of nasheeds as battle hymns, which include mourning for special martyrs and praising hymns that invoke jihadist and ideological leaders like Osama bin Laden, Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, Sayyid Qutb, and Samir Salih Abdallah al-Suwailam (aka “Saif al-Islam Khat-tab”), a highly-respected foreign commander in the Chechnya War (1994–1996).<sup>26</sup>

According to Behnam Said, the prominence of nasheeds grew in modern history based on the preaching of Sayyid Qutb, an Egyptian author, educator, Islamic theorist, poet, and a leading member of the Muslim Brotherhood (MB) in the 1950s and 1960s, which means that the MB embraced nasheeds, within certain parameters, to invoke Qutb and praise him and his “martyrdom.”<sup>27</sup> This phenomenon has mainly targeted internal changes within Muslim societies to repel secular Western cultures and ideas because they threaten Islamic principles and ways of life, as the MB interprets them. In general, most Salafists and Wahhabis do not find nasheeds incompatible with Islam, as long as musical instruments are not used. Salafism and Wahhabism are ultra-orthodox ideologies that usually inspire global jihadists and jihadist movements. Therefore, they use nasheeds to promote Islamism and Islamic principles and teachings and as morale boosters on the battlefield. The IS, which claims to follow Wahhabism, in particular, has popularized nasheeds in their videos and audios, and their videos frequently have extremely violent and graphic images.

The global jihadist movements use nasheeds strategically to connect “between the global jihadist scene to which [nasheeds] are helpful in creating a common narrative and building up a collective historical mind.”<sup>28</sup> Jihadist nasheeds pose significant problems for counterterrorism—specifically countering terrorist ideologies—because they are “very widespread throughout the Internet, so that not only adherents of the jihadist movements but also their sympathizers can get in touch with this material easily, because you will find many hard-core nasheeds not exclusively on jihadist websites but also on sites that claim to provide ‘Islamic nasheeds’.”<sup>29</sup> Scholar Behnam Said warns that, “by those websites people can come in touch with this material, which can, in combination with other factors, radicalize individuals on a rational and emotional level.”<sup>30</sup> Hence, the lines are increasingly blurred between the legal dissemination of nasheeds that are used in peaceful worship and those promoting violent extremism and jihadism.

Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi translates IS documents and nasheeds for counterterrorism purposes. He provided the English translation from Arabic for an IS

nasheed in November 2017 intended to boost morale following the loss of territories of the Caliphate, as mentioned above. According to Al-Tamimi,

The Islamic State's Ajnad Media, which produces nasheeds in Arabic, has released a new production entitled *Dawlati la tuqharu* ("My state will not be vanquished"). As with the other nasheeds produced in recent months by Ajnad Media, this nasheed follows the same theme of the endurance of the Islamic State despite the loss of its core territories in Iraq and Syria. Below is my translation of it:

*Cry the takbir [Allahu Akbar] and rejoice: my state will not be vanquished.  
My state, for we have continued supporting it.  
My state's edifice is built from our blood.  
My state's banners proudly fly in Excellence.  
On the day of the tumult, our soldiers' horse does not slacken.  
Their determination does not bend, their spear is not broken.  
What noble men they are! For loftiness they have embarked.  
In their efforts, our soldiers have bewildered mere men.  
Oh our enemies, come forth, mobilize and issue the summoning call.  
Gather your soldiers, in hellfire they will be burnt.  
You will either be killed or taken prisoner.  
Our swords have not ceased to drip with your blood.<sup>31</sup>*

Thus, we see that nasheeds remain as paramount strategic tools for the global jihadist movement that includes al-Qaeda, the IS, and a host of other militant groups and cells. The nasheeds have penetrated the spirit and psyche of thousands, if not millions, of admirers and sympathizers who have taken the nasheed as bait. Counterterrorism efforts must consider tackling nasheeds without violating freedoms and rights and without offending religious sensitivities. These are not only challenging goals and aspirations, but given the nasheeds' religious legacy, legitimacy, and history, they might be nearly impossible to achieve, especially since the Internet provides the ultimate platform for global reach and individual exposure to the "Islamic hymns."

Similarly, drug cartels have been using narco ballads called narco corridos to promote narco culture, beliefs, messages, and paradigms. The next section examines narco corridos and their impact on what can be described as "adoring fans," despite the narco stigma of criminality and reputation for excessive violence.

### **Narco Corridos: The Drug Ballads of Narco-Culture and Narco-Terrorism**

In 2013, Netflix aired a shocking documentary entitled *Narco Cultura*, or "Narco Culture." The film depicts the contrasting circumstances of drug cartels, or *narcos*,

and a law enforcement forensics team (SEMEOF, a crime scene investigation service) in Ciudad Juárez, Mexico, which is located at a mere stone's throw to the border town of El Paso, Texas. The film provides homicide statistics, stating that in 2007 Juárez suffered 320 murders; in 2008, 1,623 murders; in 2009, 2,754 murders, and in 2010, 3,622 murders; whereas, El Paso, Texas had less than eight murders per year.

The film opens with scenes and narrations about pistols, AK-47 and R15 machine guns, 9 mm handguns, beheaded and dismembered bodies, and, the narrator points out that, "sometimes the heads have messages" attached to them. These are the crimes of the narco cells in Juárez, and obviously, by looking at the statistics for homicides, these terrorists have increased their presence and bloody operations in the city. The local civilians suffer terribly from the narco gangs' extortion, bullying, kidnappings, and grotesque violence. The locals yearn for peace, security, and stability, and some desire to cross the border to safer ground in El Paso. The film also profiles Edgar Quintero, a popular narco corrido singer who is married and has two small children.<sup>32</sup> Quintero breaks into song on camera:

*I was walking in peace around Guadalajara  
The damn government started a battle  
With an AK-47 but no bulletproof vest,  
I cruised in my white truck  
I hit one, my rifle never fails  
With a good eye and a good pulse, my school fights back<sup>33</sup>*

Edgar Quintero then talks on the phone with "El Ghost," his narco benefactor. Quintero asks his employer what he wants in the next song. He gets paid a bundle of US dollars. He informs the viewers that he was approached in prison to be in a band called Buknas de Culiacan. In another scene, Quintero's wife says on camera, "I like narco-corridos. People like hip-hop . . . There's nothing better than narco-corridos, you know."<sup>34</sup>

If you go to "Narco-Corridos" in Amazon.com, you will see the following:

**Audio CD (2001)**  
**Editorial Review**

The corrido, or ballad, is one of Mexico's oldest and most respected song styles, and also one of its most contemporary and controversial. The classic corridos are Mexico's equivalent of the Spanish romances, the British broadside ballads, and the cowboy songs of the old West. Today, the form has been reborn as one of the most popular musics in Mexico and the U.S., but most of the corrido protagonists now are drug traffickers, and in Los Angeles or the border towns these narcocorridos are regarded by many people as a sort of Mexican equivalent of

gangsta rap. While narco songs dominate the field, groups like Los Tigres del Norte also use corridos to tell eloquent stories of immigrant life, and to deal with the twists and turns of contemporary politics.

This album, designed to accompany the book 'Narcocorrido: A Journey into the Music of Drugs, Guns, and Guerrillas' (Rayo/HarperCollins) is the first to survey the modern corrido boom. It focuses on the work of the genre's defining band, *Los Tigres del Norte*, with examples of other styles and artists showing the breadth and variety of the current scene. Like the book, it gives particular attention to the great *corridistas*, the writers who have made this medievaly-rooted form into one of the most exciting and relevant musics of our time. It has full notes on all the songs and artists by author Elijah Wald, in both English and Spanish.

This music is far more popular than most English-speakers can imagine. In the year 2000, Mexican regional music accounted for over half of all Latin and Spanish-language record sales in the United States—selling almost four times as many records as all the 'tropical' styles (salsa, merengue, cumbia) put together. It is hard to say what proportion of those records are corridos, but one of the five top stations in Los Angeles is playing corridos and narcocorridos virtually *all day long*, and corrido stars appear regularly on the Billboard Latin charts.<sup>35</sup> [emphasis added]

In the aforementioned documentary, viewers see extremely disturbing scenes, including Quintero riding a bicycle with his child in tow, singing, "We're blood-thirsty, crazy, and we like to kill," and then he turns to his child and says, "Sing it!" The scene brings home the fact that narcos often use children to kill; some are as young as 14 and 15 years old.<sup>36</sup> This is similar to the IS and various other militias and terrorist organizations, who increasingly see value in indoctrinating children and getting them to carry out their operations.

In his book *Narco-Cults*, Tony Kail describes the Mexican drug cartels as "a sophisticated breed of criminal enterprise," adding that, "The growth of the cartel networks and their expansion throughout the world also produced extreme acts of violence in a campaign to spread drug distribution routes."<sup>37</sup> He cites the statistics that since 2006, "more than 60,000 people have been killed in cartel-related violence and more than 26,000 have gone missing"<sup>38</sup> in Mexico. He adds,

Acts of violence, including public hangings, beheadings, and torture, have become trademarks of the cartel culture. Cartels publicly claim ownership of communities by flying 'narco banners' (*narcomantas*) or signs that display the cartel's name and challenges to rivals in the area. Internet postings, including videos of beheadings and shootings, are used to intimidate communities and rivals. Bodies of victims are displayed as warnings to rivals and threats to local communities. There are increasing acts of violence toward innocent civilians as well as journal-

ists covering the drug war. . . . Once small-time drug trafficking rings, many of these groups have evolved into international terrorist groups.<sup>39</sup>

Along with beheadings, hangings, and shootings, cartels are known for training recruits in disemboweling, filleting, boiling victims in vats (referred to as a “stew”), torturing, and flaying. Drug cartels have left rows of decapitated heads on public streets long before the IS began indulging in this grossly violent crime. Yet, despite these atrocities, narco corridos are extremely popular throughout Latin America and even in the United States.

Narco corridos—singing bands engage in concert tours in major US cities. Their concerts are packed with screaming audiences, who know all the lyrics by heart and sing along with the chorus. Often, the band members carry machine gun and bazooka props on stage while they sing and interact with the audience. The documentary shows a number of such scenes, one in which Buknas performs in El Paso, Texas, and gets the audience to sing along to these lyrics:

*With an AK-47 and a bazooka on my shoulder  
Cross my path and I'll chop your head off  
We're bloodthirsty, crazy, and we like to kill*

*[The audience repeats]*

*We are the best at kidnapping; our gang always travels in a caravan,  
with bulletproof vests, ready to execute!  
I'm number one, code name 'M1' . . . I'm backed up by El Chapo  
My name is Manuel Torres Felix, sending greetings from Culiacan  
(Sinaloa)<sup>40</sup>*

Performing in Los Angeles, lyrics by Los Twiins, Culiacan, who founded the Movimiento Alterado bands, include the following:

*Sending reinforcements to decapitate  
El Macho leads wearing a bulletproof vest  
Bazooka in hand with experience  
Wearing grenades, death is within  
The girls take off their clothes  
A private party like you can't imagine!<sup>41</sup>*

On camera, one of the founders of Los Twiins says, “Hundreds of clubs play this kind of music in the United States;” people go to the clubs and “feel narco for that night. It’s an anti-system rebellion that makes a hero out of somebody that operates outside of the law.”<sup>42</sup> Many people respect Joaquín “El Chapo” Guzmán—who is currently in a federal prison in the United States—because of his “Robin Hood”-like reputation for helping the poor in Sinaloa.<sup>43</sup> People get drunk and take drugs

at these concerts, and they get into fights. Young kids really like the corridos, and the bands that perform them, and they are practically giddy for singers starring in Mexican narco films.<sup>44</sup> In one scene of *Narco Cultura*, a young schoolgirl interviewed on camera says in Spanish, “I would like to be the girlfriend of a Narco, because it’s a way of life, not anything bad. . . . Well, okay, it’s something bad, but it’s a way of life. It’s something that’s a culture for us.”<sup>45</sup> Walmart, Target, and all the major chain stores sell music CDs of narco corridos. The music “is becoming more professional,” says Adolfo Valenzuela of Twiins Enterprises.<sup>46</sup>

The top-selling narco corrido singer is El Komander, whose logo is an AK-47. He aspires to enter Hollywood. In addition, Mexico has an entire film industry that caters to narco soap operas and action films, but many narco singers and actors want to make it big in the United States, particularly in Hollywood films. Narco corridos are enormously popular throughout the Western hemisphere, particularly in the United States, and the drug cartels even use them to taunt law enforcement personnel. For example, in Juárez you always hear narco corridos playing on police radio frequencies, signifying that there has been an execution.<sup>47</sup> The documentary *Narco Cultura* points out that the, now defunct, website [www.narco.com](http://www.narco.com) provided songwriters with ideas; it was loaded with extremely violent images, including real dead bodies.<sup>48</sup> The website contained videos and audios, including videos of cartels interrogating rival cartel members, as well as executions, all taking place to narco corridos playing in the background. They also make direct threats to the Juárez forensics personnel, SEMEFO, a number of whom have already been killed.<sup>49</sup>

Narco culture encompasses more than just drug production and smuggling and excessive violence; it also incorporates religious and cult-like beliefs, including the deification of some saints and drug lords, diverse iconography, spiritual roles of shaman figures, tattoo symbols, secret hand codes, and some even practice animal sacrifices and voodoo-like rituals. At least two Mexican cartels, La Familia Michoacana and Caballeros Templarios (Knights Templars), base their ideologies on Christian beliefs, symbols, and rituals. According to Tony Kail, “approximately 83 percent of Mexico identifies itself as Catholic (U.S. Department of State). Various forms and denominations of Christianity are widely accepted and embraced among the Mexican population. Drug traffickers who appropriate Christian elements into their practices may find that potential recruits feel as if they can identify with the religious aspects of the group if they are predisposed to this culture.”<sup>50</sup> Consequently, the convictions of the recruits are deeply entrenched, which are reinforced by fear tactics through excessive violence that the narcos utilize to deter operatives from disobeying orders, snitching on the drug lords, betraying the narcos, and/or withdrawing from cartel membership.

Mexico is locked in a drug war that appears unwinnable. The security forces and police have to hide their faces in public, or else they risk getting threats, or worse, from the narcos. Also, corruption and co-optation of government officials, the police, and a host of other figures and business people throughout the social spectrum pose significant challenges and obstacles to effective law enforcement efforts to rein in the narcos. Moreover, the drug gangs, leaders, and operatives who are in prison are capable of continuing their narco-related operations even behind bars. Therefore, if physical containment of the narcos is so difficult in the real world, one can only imagine how incredibly challenging control of their messaging in the virtual world/cyberspace becomes for law enforcement.

Furthermore, the drug cartels are meeting the high demands for consuming narcotics north of the border in the United States. The top drugs of choice over the last several years in the United States have been marijuana, methamphetamine (Meth), heroin, cocaine, and most recently fentanyl, which has emerged with the opioid abuse epidemic. The drug cartels in Mexico and Central and South America are very savvy in adjusting the drug supplies to meet the contemporary demand trends. Thus, it is important to note that if the demand for illicit drugs is so high and the volume of consumption and addictive traits only reinforce the needs for the supplies, then there remains very few ways and means—*if any*—to tackle the popularity of narco corridos and narco culture. In other words, the drug consumption culture, statistics, and demographics have skyrocketed in the United States. These trends provide immensely lucrative profits to the narcos, who then use the revenue to push and market the narco culture in the form of narco corridos and narco films. The narco world and its culture, messages, violence, and criminal behavior are proliferating not only in the real world but also in cyberspace, and until now, there is practically nothing that law enforcement can do about it—especially for long-term impacts against these variables and forces. In turn, the public seems to love narco corridos, the bands that sing them, and the drugs that the cartels produce and traffic particularly to consumers in the United States.

In many ways, the narco culture, organizational structures, methods of operations, ideologies and beliefs, use of narco corridos to popularize the culture, use of excessive violence, and taking advantage of cybertools bear striking similarities to the IS. In the same vein, both the narco corridos and culture and the IS also have distinct differences. The next section comparatively analyzes the similarities and differences between the narco culture/narcoterrorism and the IS. In particular, the comparative analysis focuses on the similarities and differences between narco corridos and jihadist nasheeds.

## **Two-Sided Mirror: Narco-terrorism and Jihadist Terrorism**

Jihadist nasheeds and narco-corridos have some striking similarities and contextual differences (*see* table 1). First, examining the similarities between them, we see that both have cult-like characteristics as symbolized in words, imagery, glorified heroes and leaders, icons, and totalitarian lifestyles, for example, one's membership in the narco world or IS requires complete and total acceptance of the ideologies and assimilation into the ways of life inside these cultures, and the organizations are able to monitor and enforce the rules and practices—violently if necessary. Jihadist nasheeds and narco corridos also glorify violent combat and operations. Both genres also call out their respective enemies and condemn, curse, and ridicule them in lyrics. Both genres also make reference to historical victories over enemies in wars, battles, and revolutions. Both genres use lyrics to warn enemies about the organizations' invincibility and strength and bravery. Both parties claim divine guidance and support on each of their sides in their respective goals and causes. Both genres and their respective organizations engage in brainwashing their followers and sympathizers.

Both genres glorify violence, and the bloodier and more grotesque and excessive in the shock value, the better; and, both use their ideologies to justify their acts, behavior, operations, beliefs, and lifestyles. Both genres pay homage to their fallen heroes, or "martyrs." Both genres are used to disseminate their respective organizations' propaganda, messaging, and ideological worldviews. Both genres are used to project their respective cultures. Both genres have agendas to weaken and/or discourage law enforcement entities and personnel, and they taunt and attempt to intimidate the authorities at large. Both genres have enemies within their own cultures—the Islamic State and al-Qaeda are enemies, and drug cartels are always violently competing with each other for drug smuggling territories and routes. Both genres extensively use social media tools, audiovisual tools, and Internet resources to expand their influence globally. Both genres and their respective organizations systematically and strategically use children in their agendas, operations, and propaganda tools, mainly to ensure the longevity of their ideologies and establishments. Finally, both genres use their songs and lyrics to recruit members and increase popular support worldwide.

Second, examining the contextual differences between Jihadist nasheeds and narco corridos, we see that the nasheeds are based on the jihadist organizations' interpretations of Islam and the scripture, the Quran. The narco corridos are based on the ideologies, tenets, and rules of drug cartels and drug lords, with religion used more as a legitimizing prop in narco culture rather than the core ideology. The jihadist nasheeds of the IS are composed and performed specifically for the greater

objective of creating the Caliphate and continuing its agendas. The narco corridos are composed and performed for the drug cartel leaders who pay the artists. The jihadist nasheeds are not intended for lucrative profits in the same way that narco corridos seek to gain immense fame and fortune for a given band or singer.

**Table 1: A comparative analysis of nasheeds and narco corridos: similarities and differences**

Jihadist Nasheeds	Both	Narco-Corridos
<p>Jihadist nasheeds are based on the jihadist organizations' interpretations of Islam and the scripture, the Quran.</p> <p>The Islamic State's nasheeds have the greater objective of creating the "Caliphate."</p> <p>Jihadist nasheeds do not seek fame and fortune in the same way as narco corridos.</p> <p>The Islamic State's nasheeds glorify jihad, and the fallen fighters as "martyrs."</p> <p>Jihadist nasheeds have very specific military themes and concepts.</p> <p>Jihadist nasheeds have derived from legitimate religious (Islamic) hymns.</p>	<p>Both have cult-like characteristics as symbolized in words, imagery, glorified heroes and leaders, icons, and totalitarian lifestyles.</p> <p>Both glorify violent combat and operations.</p> <p>Both condemn, curse, and ridicule their enemies.</p> <p>Both refer to historical victories over enemies in wars, battles, and revolutions.</p> <p>Both warn their enemies about their invincibility and strength and bravery.</p> <p>Both claim divine guidance and support on each of their sides in their respective goals and causes.</p> <p>Both engage in brainwashing their followers and sympathizers.</p> <p>Both glorify violence, and the bloodier and more grotesque and excessive in the shock value, the better.</p> <p>Both use their ideologies to justify their acts, behavior, operations, beliefs, and lifestyles.</p> <p>Both genres pay homage to their fallen heroes, or "martyrs."</p> <p>Both genres are used to disseminate their respective organizations' propaganda, messaging, and ideological worldviews.</p> <p>Both genres are used to project their respective cultures.</p> <p>Both taunt and attempt to intimidate law enforcement.</p> <p>Both have enemies within their own cultures.</p> <p>Both genres extensively use social media tools, audio-visual tools, and Internet resources to expand their influence globally.</p> <p>Both systematically and strategically use children.</p> <p>Both use their songs and lyrics to recruit members and increase popular support.</p> <p>Both present themselves as the "Good" forces fighting against the "Evil" ones.</p>	<p>Narco corridos are based on the ideologies, tenets, and rules of drug cartels and drug lords.</p> <p>Narco corridos are composed and performed for the drug cartel leaders who pay them.</p> <p>Narco corridos seek to gain immense fame and fortune for a given band and singer.</p> <p>Narco corridos glorify drug cartel leaders as "heroes."</p> <p>Narco corridos have more to do with asymmetric warfare and violence.</p> <p>Narco corridos are a unique genre in its own right, relative to the narco culture.</p>

The jihadist nasheeds glorify jihad, the supposedly divinely sanctioned “just battle” of good against evil, as the IS interprets these attributes. The narco corridos also symbolize the battle between good versus evil, but it is in the context of the oppressed poor for whom “Robin Hood”-like figures and revolutionaries, like Pancho Villa, come to the rescue. The only twist is that in narco corridos the drug cartel leaders are presented as the symbolic Robin Hood heroes fighting oppression on behalf of the poor masses.

Jihadist nasheeds have very specific military themes and concepts; whereas, the narco corridos lyrics have more to do with asymmetric warfare and violence against other rival cartels and law enforcement authorities. Finally, jihadist nasheeds are derived from legitimate religious (Islamic) hymns, and hence this makes them more difficult to distinguish between the peaceful and “radical” or extremist nasheeds. On the other hand, narco corridos are a unique genre in its own right, relative to the narco culture, although narco corridos draw influences from German polkas for the use of the accordion, as well as many influences from American rap, hip-hop, and Gangsta music. Nonetheless, narco corridos stand out as their own genre with no direct religious background, unlike the nasheed.

## **Conclusion**

The modern world of popular culture is complex enough, and when jihadist nasheeds and narco corridos are added into the mix, an extremely challenging problem emerges for law enforcement, social order, and basic human decency. The jihadist nasheeds are deliberately couched in the legitimate religious genre of the Islamic nasheed, which has been popular for decades, if not centuries. Violent jihadist organizations, like the IS and al-Qaeda, have strategically used nasheeds in their propaganda, indoctrination tactics, and global appeal, especially by means of social media and other Internet tools. Drug cartels have succeeded in popularizing the narco culture, and narco corridos have been the primary tool for drug lords and their organizations to glorify themselves, venerate excessive violence, threaten their enemies, and taunt law enforcement authorities.

Counterterrorism strategists face formidable obstacles and challenges on a regular day, but when including the power, influence, and reach of jihadist nasheeds and narco corridos, the terrorist organizations seem to enjoy many advantages. Social media and various Internet tools afford terrorist organizations, which include narco-terrorists, an edge that they effectively exploit, and global public demand for both nasheeds and narco corridos allows these organizations to proliferate and sustain their longevity. Counterterrorism experts, intelligence officials, and law enforcement authorities must consider innovative ways to disrupt the momentum and popular appeal of jihadist nasheeds and narco corridos without

offending cultural and religious sensitivities. Moreover, countering narco-terrorism also requires addressing the demand and consumption side of the illicit drugs equation. Anything less will eventually threaten global peace and security.

**Dr. Hayat Alvi**

Dr. Alvi (BA in journalism and international studies, University of South Florida; MA in Near Eastern studies, University of Michigan; and PhD in political science, Howard University) joined the US Naval War College in 2007. Previously, she served as an assistant professor in the Department of Political Science at American University in Cairo from 2001–05 and as the director of the International Studies Program at Arcadia University from 2005–07. She specializes in international relations, political economy, and comparative politics, with regional expertise in the Middle East, North Africa, and South Asia. She also specializes in Islamic studies and genocide studies. She is proficient in Arabic and Urdu and is a Fulbright Fellow (Syria, 1993–94). Alvi has published numerous articles, books, and book chapters.

**Notes**

1. “Nasheeds, What are They?” *Islamic Board*, 2018, <https://www.islamicboard.com/>.
2. Nasheeds are distinguished from South Asian Urdu *na’at*, which is poetry recitation praising the Prophet Muhammad; predominantly recited in Urdu, the *na’at* is also performed in other South Asian languages.
3. Although scholars have no consensus about this; some reject the notion that nasheeds date back to the seventh century and contend that they are a twentieth-century creation, while others contend that they are derived from Sufism, or Islamic mysticism, from early Islamic history.
4. Saeed Saeed, “Music of the Arab World: The Sound of Islam,” *National*, 21 July 2012, <https://www.thenational.ae/>.
5. Saeed, “Music of the Arab World.” See also Zain Bhikha’s “Allah Knows,” *YouTube*, 7 May 2010, <https://www.youtube.com/>.
6. Thomas Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad,” *Euronews*, 10 August 2014, <https://www.euronews.com/>.
7. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
8. See Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi’s blog at <https://www.aymennjawad.org/>.
9. Behnam Said, “Hymns (Nasheeds): A Contribution to the Study of Jihadist Culture,” *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism*, 35 no. 12 (2012), 863–64, <https://www.tandfonline.com/>.
10. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
11. Said, “Hymns (Nasheeds),” 864–65.
12. Said, “Hymns (Nasheeds),” 865.
13. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
14. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
15. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
16. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
17. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
18. Seymat, “How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad.”
19. Alison Meuse, “As ISIS Gets Squeezed in Syria and Iraq, It’s Using Music as a Weapon,” *National Public Radio*, 29 June 2017, <https://www.npr.org/>.
20. Meuse, “As ISIS Gets Squeezed in Syria and Iraq.”

21. Meuse, "As ISIS Gets Squeezed in Syria and Iraq."
22. Meuse, "As ISIS Gets Squeezed in Syria and Iraq."
23. Seymat, "How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad," *Euronews*.
24. Seymat, "How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad."
25. Seymat, "How Nasheeds Became the Soundtrack of Jihad."
26. See Said, "Hymns (Nasheeds)," 863–79.
27. Said, "Hymns (Nasheeds)," 863–79.
28. Said, "Hymns (Nasheeds)," 863–79.
29. Said, "Hymns (Nasheeds)," 876.
30. Said, "Hymns (Nasheeds)," 876.
31. Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi, "My State Will Not Be Vanquished' – New Nasheed from Ajnad Media," translation from Arabic to English, Aymenn Jawad Al-Tamimi (blog), 21 November 2017, <http://www.aymennjawad.org/>.
32. See *Narco Cultura*, documentary film, directed by Shaul Schwarz, 2013, originally broadcast on Netflix: <https://www.imdb.com/>. Warning: The film contains extremely graphic content.
33. *Narco Cultura*.
34. *Narco Cultura*.
35. See Various Artists, "Corridos y Narcocorridos," Amazon (website), <https://www.amazon.com/>.
36. *Narco Cultura*.
37. Tony M. Kail, *Narco-Cults: Understanding the Use of Afro-Caribbean and Mexican Religious Cultures in the Drug Wars* (Boca Raton, FL: CRC Press, Taylor and Francis, 2015), 1. Warning: The book contains extremely graphic photos.
38. Kail, *Narco-Cults*, 2.
39. Kail, *Narco-Cults*, 2.
40. *Narco Cultura*.
41. *Narco Cultura*.
42. *Narco Cultura*.
43. *Narco Cultura*.
44. *Narco Cultura*.
45. *Narco Cultura*.
46. *Narco Cultura*.
47. *Narco Cultura*.
48. An archived version of the site can be found at
49. *Narco Cultura*.
50. Kail, *Narco-Cults*, 233.

# Trump Is Right about Europe

## What Next?

DR. AMIT GUPTA

President Donald Trump has been criticized for his comments on NATO, along with his demand that member states pay more for the upkeep of the organization, and it is the usual list of suspects who have raised the alarm. Thus, European leaders, the pro-Europe elites in most American think tanks, academics in Ivy League and East Coast universities, and the New York- and Washington-based media have chastised Trump for undermining the transatlantic alliance. In response to Trump's concerns, French president Emmanuel Macron has warned that Europe has focused too much on growing as a market and that the United States now pays more attention to the Pacific rather than to Europe.<sup>1</sup> Further, he adds, China's rise marginalizes Europe. Of course, all this is because Trump supposedly does not understand the foundations of a classical liberal-democratic international order. The fact is, however, that Trump does understand the shift in global politics, while the Europeans and the Europhiles are pursuing an obsolete foreign policy. What this article argues is that Europe can still be relevant, if the United States views the continent not as a military partner to engage in long-range military power projection but, instead, as an economic, diplomatic, and soft-power proponent that helps bolster world order.

## Europe Is Aging

For several reasons the classic liberal-democratic order, with Europe playing a central role in it, has changed, and the primary reason for this is demographic. Any look at European demographics shows that the continent is aging and, in many cases—particularly Eastern Europe—is losing population. Table 1 shows the extent to which this decline is taking place in the Western world and Japan; table 2 shows the countries experiencing major population decreases; and table 3 shows the oldest populations in the world:

In many of these countries, the government has tried to exhort the population to produce more children with little effect: Denmark had a national “sex week” that did little to raise the number of births;<sup>2</sup> Vladimir Putin has repeatedly told Russians it is their patriotic duty to breed;<sup>3</sup> and other European nations have sought to give mothers incentives to stay at home and have children. None of these tactics have worked and, instead, we have what in some countries are irre-

versible population declines. Such aging populations also have a major impact on how a government's financial resources are utilized.

**Table 1. Demographic transition in Western nations**

Country	2015 Population (Millions)	2030 Population (Millions)	2050 Population (Millions)	2015 Median Age	2050 Median Age
Australia	23.9	28.4	33.4	37.5	41.4
France	64.3	68	71.1	41.2	43.9
Germany	80.6	79.2	74.5	46.2	51.4
Italy	59.7	59.1	56.3	45.9	51.7
Japan	126.5	120.1	107.4	46.5	53.3
Russia	143.4	138.6	128.5	38.7	40.8
Sweden	9.7	10.7	11.8	41	42
United Kingdom	64.7	70.1	75.3	40	43.3
United States	321.7	355.7	388.8	38	41.7

Source: United Nations Population Division, *World Population Prospects: The 2015 Revision*

**Table 2. Major population decreases**

Country	2015 Population in Millions	2050 Population in Millions
Bulgaria	7,150	5,154
Romania	19,511	15,207
Ukraine	44,824	35,117
Moldova	4,069	3,243
Bosnia and Herzegovina	3,810	3,069
Latvia	1,971	1,593
Lithuania	2,878	2,375
Serbia	8,851	7,331
Croatia	4,240	3,554
Hungary	9,885	8,318

Source: UN Population Prospects, 2015

**Table 3. World's oldest population, 2015–2030**

Country	Median Age 2015	Country	Median Age 2030
Japan	46.5	Japan	51.5
Germany	46.2	Italy	50.8
Martinique	46.1	Portugal	50.2
Italy	45.9	Spain	50.1
Portugal	44.0	Greece	48.9
Greece	43.6	China [Hong Kong]	48.6
Bulgaria	43.5	Germany	48.6
Austria	43.2	Nonspecified Area	48.1
China [Hong Kong]	43.2	Slovenia	48.1
Spain	43.2	South Korea	47.5

Source: UN Population Prospects, 2015

In most European nations, the emphasis is on free healthcare and a heavily subsidized education program. Moreover, European electorates are tired of the austerity measures that center-right governments pushed through in Europe after the 2008 financial crisis, because such measures led to cutbacks in the social programs that Europeans now take for granted. The reaction in fiscally conservative and abstemious nations like the Netherlands and Finland has been to elect governments that will increase public spending. Even in Britain, whose national leadership still fancies itself as a global power, one of the main claims made by the Brexiters was that leaving Europe would free up hundreds of millions of pounds for the National Health Service—which turned out to be a false claim. Thus, even Prime Minister Boris Johnson has pledged that a Conservative government would spend up to 100 billion pounds on infrastructure and social welfare projects, and after gaining reelection, he has stated that his government will spend on building infrastructure—railways and highways—as well as invest in an improved health-care system. Consequently, the main cutbacks in European expenditures have come in the field of defense.

### **Reduced Defense Expenditures and Force Levels**

Across Europe, countries have cut back their defense expenditure and significantly reduced force levels as well as force structures. Neutral Sweden, at the height of the Cold War, was able to put 800,000 active soldiers and reserves in the field, but today, its forces have been reduced to 14,000 regular troops.<sup>4</sup> Short of the outbreak of a major European war, it is unlikely that Sweden could even bring its force levels back to a more modest level of 100,000. At the height of the Cold War, Germany used to have thousands of operational Leopard tanks, but today it

only has 311 tanks in its inventory—only 95 of which are operational. The Netherlands got rid of its armored regiment in 2011 but subsequently revived it by integrating it into the German command structure and leasing German Leopard tanks to carry out the regiment's functions.<sup>5</sup> The table below shows how severe the cutbacks have been in NATO forces:

**Table 4. Manpower & aircraft cuts in the major NATO nations, 1977–2018**

Country	Army 1977	Army 2018	Aircraft 1977	Aircraft 2018
Britain	177,600	82,050	450	258
France	338,500	112,500	470	294
Germany	345,000	60,900	462	211
Italy	240,000	102,200	296	260

Source: International Institute for Strategic Studies, *The Military Balance* (London: IISS, 1977 and 2018).

These figures would paint an even starker military picture if we take into account how many weapons systems are actually operational on any given day in the armed forces of these countries. A 2018 report stated that only four of the 128 of the Luftwaffe's fleet of Eurofighter combat aircraft were combat ready, and other NATO air forces have similar problems with maintaining an operational fleet.<sup>6</sup> Worse, the Luftwaffe, in 2019, stated that it only had two-thirds of the combat pilots it needed to maintain a fighting force, since pilots were resigning to join the lucrative civil sector.

One can argue that current aircraft are far more capable than the ones in NATO inventories in 1977, but in the 1970s, European air forces had far more aircraft that were operational and could be put into the fight. If you can only put up 2–3 squadrons at any given time, then what you bring to the fight is actually quite limited—however you may finesse it at a NATO meeting. There is, after all, considerable heft to the Russian argument that quantity has its own quality.

When one looks at the actual defense expenditures, President Trump's case about the nonperformance of NATO becomes even stronger. The magic number in NATO is supposed to be that member countries spend 2 percent of GDP on defense, but a recent NATO report paints a dim picture of the extent to which countries are meeting this target. The countries that exceed the target of 2 percent, in order of actual percentage of GDP spent, are the United States, Bulgaria, Greece, United Kingdom, Estonia, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, and Poland. But if one looks at the some of the bigger countries of NATO, the numbers are dismal to down-right embarrassing.



*(NATO photo by Spanish Sgt. First Class David Vivar, LANDCOM Public Affairs Office)*

**Figure 1. NATO Commanders Conference.** US Air Force Gen Tod D. Wolters, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, meets face to face with Allied Command Operations commanders and representatives from Allied Command Transformation at NATO Allied Land Command Headquarters in Izmir, Turkey, 29 January 2020, to discuss a number of issues, including NATO priorities and how the alliance is evolving to meet contemporary challenges in the defense of the alliance.

For 2019, it is estimated that France is spending 1.84 percent of GDP, Germany 1.38 percent of GDP (and has made a commitment to increase defense expenditure to 2 percent of GDP by 2031), Canada spends 1.38 percent of GDP, Italy spends 1.22 percent of GDP, while Spain spends a low 0.92 percent of GDP.<sup>7</sup> A country like Spain, therefore, would have to double the percent of GDP it spends on defense to meet the target, and that is highly unlikely to happen.<sup>8</sup> And to put this in perspective, as a report by Tony Cordesman at Center for Strategic and International Studies in Washington points out, the cuts in NATO countries led to the US share of NATO expenditure rising from 71.1 percent in 2010 to 73.9 percent in 2017.<sup>9</sup>

Further, one needs to ask the important question, in an age where the world's greatest security challenges are posed by the non-Western world and potentially China, can 2 percent of GDP allow Europe to participate effectively in "out-of-area" operations around the world? Macron's dire warning about NATO is, therefore, right. He has warned that Europe is at "the edge of a precipice. If we don't wake up . . . there's a considerable risk that in the long run we will disappear geopolitically, or at least that we will no longer be in control of our destiny. I believe that very deeply."<sup>10</sup>

Yet the European Union (EU) itself is no longer an Atlantic-oriented organization, as it continues to have a burgeoning relationship with China. According to statistics for 2019, released by the EU Directorate of Trade, the EU–China bilateral trade (and the new numbers are for 27 nations; thus, not including the United Kingdom) has crossed 547 billion Euros and accounts for 13.5 percent of global trade.<sup>11</sup> If one were to add significant non-EU NATO countries like Britain and Norway, these numbers would be even higher. Additionally, Chinese firms have made huge investments on the continent, and the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) continues to gather momentum in Europe and around the globe.

### **The Consequences of COVID-19**

Compounding the problem is the emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic, which has global repercussions but is especially virulent in what it has done to European countries like Italy and Spain and could potentially do to France and the United Kingdom. At the time of writing, it is not known how long the pandemic will impact global society, but one thing is clear: citizens around the world, especially in the West, where the consequences have been well-publicized through traditional and social medias, will call for increased investments in healthcare, civil defense, and social welfare programs to avoid repeating in the future the chaotic and tragic events of early 2020. One must expect to see Western nations invest in building a robust reserve capability in the healthcare systems to be able to successfully tackle the outbreak of a future pandemic, and, once again, it will most likely lead to demands for curtailing defense expenditure.

### **And Then There Is Brexit**

The United Kingdom is the third-largest contributor to the EU with 11.88 percent of the total budget, and once London leaves the union, the shortfall will have to be made up by the other 27 member states. Some states, like Italy and Spain, which have their own financial problems, will balk at paying more, while others, like Greece and Portugal, are not in the position to ever pay more. However, the EU is the primary institution that these countries want to support, and whatever noisy promises they may make about backing NATO will be little more than a symbolic effort.

The problem for the Trump administration is that we have seen this movie before, because, since the administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, American presidents have demanded, unsuccessfully, that NATO members pay their fair share for the maintenance of the organization. President Trump, like all other American presidents, has walked away with promises that the Europeans are un-

likely to keep or, as the above analysis shows, cannot keep. Nor do the Europeans have an incentive to do so, because they recognize that the United States, despite making threats, will not pull out of NATO because Washington sees the defense of Europe as one of the pillars of its international security policy. Given these constraints, what can be done to secure the American perception of world order and international security?

### **From Western World Order to World Order**

To have a different security policy, one needs to have a different perception of world order, and that means moving away from the world order that the United States constructed at the end of World War II by forming the UN and the Bretton Woods economic system. After setting up these international institutions, the United States then led the Western European nations into NATO. All these institutions were established on the bases of Western liberal ideas, but with the rise of countries like India, Indonesia, Brazil, and, most importantly, China, we are slowly but surely moving away from a Western world order to a truly international world order, where nations from all continents will help shape the future of the international system. To put this in perspective, the failed League of Nations had only 58 members, the UN, initially, had 51 members, and now has 196 members. More importantly, this growth of the international system is marked by a shift in the global economy—Asia now accounts for 40 percent of global GDP but 70 percent of global growth.

In Washington, some officials have recognized the inevitable future, and steps are being taken to accommodate rising non-Western powers. The Trump administration, much like the preceding Obama administration, has been working to build an international order that is more Asia-centric and one that makes NATO be more accountable for being a permanent financial defaulter. In this Asia-centric foreign policy focus that President Macron worries about, it is countries like India that have become important, since it is clear that Europe could not do extended operations, or for that matter even get to, the Indo-Pacific conflict region. Just as the United States recognized at the end of World War II that colonialism was dying and, therefore, pressured both the British and the French to give independence to their colonies, Washington is now shaping a different world order recognizing that the old order does not have the ability to counter or manage current global challenges.

The Obama administration tried to do this with its “Pivot to Asia,” but like all pivots, the administration had to swivel back to the Middle East. The Trump administration also put Asia, and the containment of China, front and center in its *Nuclear Posture Review (NPR)* and its *National Security Strategy (NSS)*. Unlike

Obama, however, Trump has not made the mistake of being sucked back into the swamp called the Middle East. Trump has created a smaller military footprint in Syria and is working a peace deal with the Taliban to end America's longest war. This disengagement from the Middle East and Central Asia will allow the Trump administration to do what the George W. Bush and Obama administrations could not do—take on the challenge of a rising China.

In two ways, the Trump administration has put teeth into the containment of China. First, the *NPR* has explicitly stated how the United States will modernize its nuclear capabilities to strengthen the deterrent against China and Russia. The United States will build low-yield nuclear weapons, long-range cruise missiles, a long-range bomber, and dedicated combat aircraft. In choosing to develop a low-yield submarine-launched ballistic missile and a new long-range cruise missile, the *NPR* states this obviates the need for a host nation, thereby recognizing the fickleness of alliances in the modern era.

Secondly, President Trump has sought to reduce American military commitments abroad, especially in the Middle East, to focus on China—something both President Bush and Obama unsuccessfully sought to do, as they were dragged back into the Middle East conflicts. President Bush had labeled China the America's strategic competitor, while Pres. Barack Obama sought to pivot to Asia; yet, neither president was able to focus on the Chinese challenge. President Trump, in contrast, has sought, till now, to stay out of the Middle East quagmire to pursue the challenge posed by a China as it seeks to create a global economic order in which Beijing is the dominant actor. The American attempt to restrict the growth of Huawei's 5G network around the world is one example of the Trump administration's approach of tackling the Chinese challenge head on. Thus, the United States has not expanded the conflict in Syria and, for now, has ratcheted down the conflict with Iran.

## **The United States and the Future of Europe**

If one goes by the above analysis, certain trends become clear: militarily, Europe will focus on traditional and nontraditional threats in its different subregions of Northern and Southern Europe; European defense budgets will continue to contract as these countries face the challenges posed by aging populations that require healthcare and advanced social services; and, as a consequence, expecting NATO to do out-of-area operations like Iraq or Afghanistan is unrealistic.

Additionally, it is not clear whether the EU will survive as a coherent economic, political, and military entity. Brexit may be the first of several exits from the EU, as nation-states see themselves better off being out of the monetary union (Greece, for example, in its financial crisis did not have the luxury of devaluing the Drachma

and, instead, had its financial options constricted by being part of the Euro zone). Further, the fact remains that there is a cultural and economic divide between the older, western members of the EU and the newer, eastern members of the EU. What is called Western liberal values are not being displayed in countries like Hungary and Poland, where right-wing populist regimes are proclaiming anti-immigrant policies and violating the EU's Dublin agreement on refugees. Alongside the question of differing values lies the problem posed by migrant labor. Part of the support for Brexit came from people who were alarmed by the inflow of intra-EU workers (particularly Polish citizens) into the country. Even earlier, in France, Nicolas Sarkozy was able to run a successful presidential campaign by raising fears about a country overrun by Polish plumbers. Nationalist and subnationalist sentiments that continue to grow in Europe, coupled with the divergence in societal values, could potentially lead to fragmenting of the union.

Alongside the political fragmentation, there are concerns about the future viability of the Euro in its present form. Some analysts suggest that as financial worries increase in Europe the push may come for dividing the continent into several Euro zones that reflect the existing economic disparities in the broader region.<sup>12</sup> Countries like Greece, Spain, Italy, and several Eastern European nations could be moved into a separate financial category, thereby ensuring greater financial stability but lowering the economic power of the Euro and the EU. The possibility, therefore, exists of a far more fragmented EU, where the integration of the last three decades starts to unravel on the rocks of nationalism and economic disparities. At the same time, however, Western nations share values and world views with the United States, so the question arises as to how to leverage this shared outlook, and the continued economic strength of the EU, with the changes in the international system?

Additionally, the increasing challenge posed by nontraditional security issues that are now creating serious problems for the future is reshaping European security. Illegal and refugee immigration have now become central concerns for the NATO countries, as refugees from Syria and economic migrants from Africa continue to come across the Mediterranean and pose economic, social, and security challenges to the state structures of Europe and to the EU itself, with some member nations disregarding the Dublin accord on refugees. This raises the question can an EU survive where the Western wing attempts to retain its liberal-democratic values while the eastern wing moves more toward authoritarian and xenophobic structures? There is, instead, the real possibility that Europe takes a different form by jettisoning parts of the eastern wing that are less productive, less well-educated, and verging on authoritarianism—and the latter is the greatest concern, since it goes against the democratic tenets that are enshrined in the EU's constitution.

To sum up, we are seeing a Europe that is older, focused on internal issues, concerned with the economic and social welfare issues of its populations, and incapable of doing a sustained military operation in out-of-area scenarios. Moreover, there is a real question over the future of Europe as a united political and economic entity. Given these facts, what should the future of the US–Europe relationship look like in the future? The answer lies in leveraging those areas where Europe has great capacity and, more importantly, willingness to contribute to the maintenance of the global commons and for a world order.

### **Europe and the China Challenge**

The US *National Defense Strategy (NDS)* and the *NSS* both state that China is the most pressing challenge to the United States in the near to medium term. The *NDS* argues that, “China is leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce neighboring countries to reorder the Indo-Pacific region to their advantage. As China continues its economic and military ascendance, asserting power through an all-of-nation long-term strategy, it will continue to pursue a military modernization program that seeks Indo-Pacific regional hegemony in the near-term and displacement of the United States to achieve global preeminence in the future. The most far-reaching objective of this defense strategy is to set the military relationship between our two countries on a path of transparency and non-aggression.”<sup>13</sup> One of the tools to meet this challenge is to harness the economic and soft power that Europe has and can be successfully used to further American and Western interests in the international system. In the competition with China, the EU has a record that reflects both its strengths and weaknesses as an international actor.

Militarily, the EU is unlikely to send forces to the Indo-Pacific and is incapable of sustaining a significant force in the region. The force structures of the NATO member nations are not focused to project power over long distances for an extended period, and then there is the question of the sensitivity to casualties. This despite the fact that they have aerial refuellers, aircraft carriers, and, in the case of France and Britain, nuclear submarines. The problem will not be of equipment but instead of budgets and the public’s unwillingness to fight a battle thousands of miles away from their homeland for a cause that is grounded in power politics rather than an existential threat to the survival of the nation or the European continent—and the latter would motivate the national populations of Europe to militarize and wage war. In the light of this constraint, it is necessary to look at Europe through a different lens that emphasizes the EU rather than NATO.

## **European Soft and Economic Power**

While Europe's military power is declining and its ability to project and sustain military power abroad weakens, it has enormous levels of soft and economic power that it continues to use across the world. Europe's corporations, ranging from Scandinavia to the Mediterranean, still produce high-quality and technologically advanced products, from aircraft (Airbus) and telecommunications (Ericsson and Nokia) to the high-fashion products from Italy. These products make Europe a formidable competitor in the global markets, and countries around the world want technological inputs and investments from Europe. In fact, the Chinese have long told the Europeans that they would buy anything with the name Airbus on it if European nations were to lift the arms embargo put in place after Tiananmen Square and, instead, provide military technology to Beijing.<sup>14</sup> In contrast, the EU remains a major supplier to other Asian nations and helps to upgrade their military technologies against a China whose indigenous defense technologies are growing impressively.

Additionally, there is the soft power Europe derives from the fact that alongside the United States the European nations have some of the finest universities in the world, which attract students from around the world. The Chinese now do the most authoritative ranking of universities in the world, and it is interesting to see which nations have the most universities among the top 500 in the world.

**Table 5. Nations with the most universities in the top 500 (2019)**

Country	Universities in top 500
USA	137
China	66 [9 in 2003]
Germany	30
Australia	23
France	21
Italy	18
Canada	16
Netherlands	12

*Source: Shanghai Jiao Tong University, Academic World Rankings 2019.*

Further, Project Atlas provides the data on just how many international students there are and what are their countries of destination to embark on their studies.

**Table 6. Countries with most international students (2019)**

Country	Number of Students
USA	1,095,299
UK	496,570
China	492,185
Canada	435,415
Australia	420,501
France	343,400
Russia	334,497
Germany	282,002
Japan	208,901
Spain	120,991

Source: Project Atlas, 2019.

While it is difficult to assess what will happen to the international flow of students in the short term, due to the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic, in the long run it is difficult to stop the global flow of students from around the world to seek higher education. Europe, therefore, along with other Western nations like Canada, Australia, and New Zealand, will remain in the forefront as knowledge economies that provide a twenty-first-century education to students from around the world and, in doing so, will serve as a counter to the Chinese push to achieve supremacy in international affairs.

One of the most important trends of the twenty-first century is the international quest for global intellectual labor. Countries around the world now compete for the best academic and industrial minds, as nations seek to remain relevant in the race to be a knowledge economy. To achieve this goal, different countries now teach courses in English, attract international students with financial packages, and, in countries like Canada and Australia, make it easy for such students to obtain residency and jobs. The link between such students and their countries of origin gives the Western nations significant influence around the world, and the United States should be looking to see how it can use the EU's intellectual capital to its advantage.

So, what does all this mean for the United States as it seeks to secure the world order it created at Breton Woods and Dumbarton Oaks, with the formation of the International Monetary Fund and the UN, to last into the twenty-first century? The answer lies in accepting that the United States will need new partners as well as old ones in the coming world order and that the role played by traditional partners will change.

New partners like India will be central to a policy of containing China and ensuring that Beijing remains a stakeholder in the international system as opposed to being a revisionist power. New Delhi will certainly be able to provide military muscle in the Indo-Pacific region, though, admittedly, it will take time for India to reach the ability to provide a challenge to China in the Indian Ocean or even further out in the Strait of Malacca or the South China Sea. For that to happen, the Indian Navy will have to grow into a true blue-water fighting force, something it aspires to be with the buildup of a carrier force and a nuclear submarine fleet.<sup>15</sup> So, while regional powers provide the muscle, the EU can provide the intellectual, diplomatic, and economic capability to balance the rapid growth of Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific.

Writing in the *Atlantic Monthly*, Noah Barkin has suggested several ways to have a US–EU agreement to balance the economic and technological challenge posed by China. These include holding the Chinese to be accountable and transparent in their pursuit of the BRI, filing a joint complaint on Chinese misbehavior to the World Trade Organization, and the US and the EU working together to create a 5G network that rivals the one Huawei is putting in place.<sup>16</sup> While such steps are necessary, they are akin to trying to put a finger in the dyke and to stem the economic and technological juggernaut that is China. Further, for those seeking to contain China, much in the same way that the West contained the Soviet Union in the Cold War, there seems to be a lack of understanding that the containment of the Soviet Union was not only done by the buildup of military weapons but also by the dispensing of economic assistance and helping develop countries across the world—and all this began with the Marshall Plan to rebuild Europe. Where then does Europe fit in when searching for an economic policy to contain Chinese expansion?

Put simply, it is time for the US and the EU to work together to provide an alternative to the economic system that the Chinese are presenting as the rosy future for most of the world. With the BRI, the Regional Comprehensive Economic Program (RCEP)—for the Indo-Pacific—and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, the Chinese are seeking to create an alternative economic system in which they are the hegemonic power. The Chinese are able to do this because they have ambition, vision, and resources and, therefore, are willing to commit around a 1 trillion USD to the building of the BRI. They are also putting pressure on countries like India to adopt the Chinese version of 5G, since that would mean a huge market for China and a level of connectivity that would be difficult for the rest of the world to resist.

Given this fact, the US and the EU need to do three things immediately, and they have economic, scientific, and technological clout to bring this about: (1)

present the world with an alternative vision to the BRI and RCEP, (2) help build a Western 5G around Asia, and (3) take the lead in assisting with environmental cleanups in some of the most polluted countries in the world. None of these measures are military ones, but, in the long run, they will be the ones that transform the international system and help maintain Western influence and goodwill in the twenty-first century.

An alternative to RCEP would have the US and the EU join the Trans-Pacific Partnership and ask that India, as the second-most populous country in the world, be included as well. Rather than provide an alternative to the BRI the US-EU partnership could provide the technologies that add value to the infrastructure created by the Chinese. Thus, while China may be laying down fiber optics and 5G, American and European corporations can provide the software and services that would allow these nations to better integrate into the global economy. In doing so, it would give the countries that are concerned about growing Chinese influence through the BRI room to maneuver in the international economic system.

In the case of 5G, the key is to seek to put a Western network into countries like India, which are as suspicious of Chinese intentions as some of the countries in the West. If India, Japan, Korea, and Singapore were on a Western 5G network, it would counterbalance the power of the Chinese network and alleviate fears in Washington that the Chinese were technologically outstripping the West.

Finally, the pressing need for environmental cleanups in the non-Western world is something that a US-EU partnership would be well-suited to address. One of the silver linings of the COVID-19 lockdown of nations around the world is that pollution levels sank dramatically in many countries. This has led to the realization that living in a polluted society is not an inevitability but, instead, a bad choice that countries lived with because they felt they were helpless to change the state of affairs. A well thought out and funded environmental assistance program would have tremendous soft power, since it would show a West that is willing to counter the economically deterministic policies of China with a soft-power approach that cares for the global human condition. Such an approach would find a ready audience and willing participants among the environmentally conscious nations of Europe. All that is required is a vision for an alternative and more humanistic world order and the willingness to fund it.

To sum up, a militarized Europe is the thing of the past but a Europe that is willing to promote humanistic values and technological modernity could be a valuable ally in maintaining American influence in the international system.

**Dr. Amit Gupta**

Dr. Gupta (PhD, University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) is an associate professor of international security studies at the US Air War College, Air University. He works on the politics of globalization, Indian and Australian politics, popular culture, and politics.

**Notes**

1. “Macron Criticized by US and Germany over NATO ‘Brain Death’ Claims,” *The Guardian*, 7 November 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.
2. Terrence, McCoy, “Do It for Denmark!’ Campaign Wants Danes to Have More Sex. A Lot More Sex,” *Washington Post*, 27 March 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/>.
3. “Putin Dissatisfied with Russia’s Birth Rate,” *Tass*, January 15, 2020, Available at, <https://tass.com/>.
4. Jan Angstorm and Erik Noreen, “Swedish Strategy and the Afghan Experience: From Neutrality to Ambiguity,” in *The Swedish Presence in Afghanistan: Security and Defence Transformation*, ed. Arita Holmberg and Jan Hallenberg (London: Routledge, 2017), 35.
5. Katrin Bennhold, “A European Army? The Germans and Dutch Take a Small Step,” *New York Times*, 20 February 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.
6. “Only 4 of Germany’s 128 Eurofighter Jets Combat Ready — Report,” *Deutsche Welle*, <https://www.dw.com/>.
7. NATO, “Defense Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013–2019)” (press release, Brussels, 29 November 2019, <https://www.nato.int/>).
8. NATO, “Defense Expenditure of NATO Countries (2013–2019).”
9. Anthony H. Cordesman, *The U.S., NATO, and the Defense of Europe: Shaping the Right Ministerial Force Goal* (Washington, DC: Center for Strategic and International Studies, 27 June 2018), <https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/>.
10. “Macron Criticized by US and Germany.”
11. European Commission, “European Union, Trade in Goods with China,” *Directorate General for Trade*, 8 May 2020, 8, <https://webgate.ec.europa.eu/>.
12. Mark Blyth and Simon Tilford, “How the Eurozone Might Split,” *Foreign Affairs*, 11 January 2018, <https://www.foreignaffairs.com/>.
13. US Department of Defense, “Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America,” 2018, 2, <https://dod.defense.gov/>.
14. For a discussion see, Mathieu Duchâtel & Mark Bromley, “Influence by Default: Europe’s Impact on Military Security in East Asia,” *European Council on Foreign Relations Policy Brief*, May 2017, 9.
15. For a discussion see, Amit Gupta, “India’s Maritime Strategy: Aspirations and Reality,” in *Interests, Objectives, and Contemporary Policies in a Globalized Space: Naval Powers in the Indian Ocean and Western Pacific*, ed. Howard M. Hensel and Amit Gupta (New York: Routledge, 2018), 172–94.
16. Noah Barkin, “Why the US Is Losing Europe in Its Battle with China,” *The Atlantic*, 4 June 2019, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>.

# The Middle East and Syria as a Case of Foreign Intervention

## Implications for the United States, the Syrian Kurds, and the Middle East after the Defeat of Daesh

DR. ANDRÉS DE CASTRO GARCÍA\*

احسن طريقة للتعامل مع الاكراد هي ان لاتعير لهم اي اهتمام

(Arabic Proverb)\*\*

One of the key elements in the analysis of foreign realities is the acknowledgment of its foreign element. In a very recent publication,<sup>1</sup> Dr. Irena Chiru, of the National Intelligence Academy of Romania, describes the importance of the cultural element in security-related research and the importance of understanding a country's society and values. Western academics and practitioners must carefully study the Middle East, as a strategic area, to truly understand its history, its unique way of development, and forms of governance. This article intends to give a broad perspective of the Middle East—and Syria in particular—from a Western perspective but with an approach qualified by a proper experience on the field and using Realism and Structural Realism.

### Introduction

Since World War I, the West has focused on influencing and trying to change the main principles by which leadership is produced and maintained in the Middle East, disregarding the reality of the terrain and the past experiences of Western actors. But, more importantly, the West has forgotten, or has claimed to forget, the matters that peaked its interest in the region in the first place: availability and control of mainly natural resources and the establishment of regional peace and stability.

Much like the Soviet Union during the Cold War, Moscow and Beijing today are using the space left by Western neglect and lack of cultural awareness to enhance Russian and Chinese power in the region. That same power gap is also allowing other regional powers, such as Iran, to fill the void.

\* The views expressed herein are those of the author and do not necessarily reflect the official policy or position of the Catholic University of Erbil.

\*\* Translation: The best way to deal with the Kurds is to not give them any attention.

In decisions that result in Western intervention in the Middle East, sociocultural structures and complex political allegiances are disregarded, resulting to chaos in the region. Furthermore, once the intervention is over, a vacuum of power results, which is quickly filled up by the contenders in their constant bid to oppose Western supremacy.

If we analyze the case of Iraq after 25 years of Saddam Hussein's rule, the fact that the newly established system after 2003 was going to bring a predominance of the Shia factions with very strong ties to Iran was disregarded and seen as a minor issue. Seventeen years later, Iran's power in Iraq poses a threat to Western interests and has caused grief to a significant percentage of the local population. Iran is a regional power with a history of domination and an overt and publicly expressed long-term plan that excludes the presence of the West.<sup>2</sup>

### **Syria, Human Rights, and Several Proxy Groups**

Syrian society is extremely complex. There are people of numerous ethnicities and religious beliefs and a long list of politically complex features. As in many other cases in the Middle East, the Syrian government of Bashar al-Assad stands accused of violations of human rights. Western nations used these violations as a pretense for the ongoing proxy war. The wide diplomatic measures that were taken against al-Assad failed to dismantle his power, but they did weaken it. An unintended result was the strengthening of preexisting cells that eventually coalesced to create Daesh (more commonly known as the Islamic State, ISIS, or ISIL). In response, al-Assad deliberately released jihadis to delegitimize the protest movement, hoping to foster a setting in which he became the only viable, palatable option for a stable Syria. Additionally, the weakening of the Government of Syria opened the door for increased participation in the country by Russia and Iran, both siding with al-Assad and reducing the room for Western participation in matters of security, economy, and diplomacy. The West's competitors are always ready to act as vultures. Their techniques are well-known and consistent throughout a history that the West does not seem to master as well as it should.

The West must come to understand that the only possibility in which war is a viable option and winning proposition is if—after the real estimation of losses, including human, economic, and political, and understanding strategic scenarios—a country is ready to make all those sacrifices. If not, a war should never be initiated. Entering a war where total victory will not be pursued until the last circumstances is a big mistake—one that is acknowledged in most conflict-resolution manuals.

Setting up red lines is also very delicate. If a super power establishes red lines, its credibility is on the line. "If you make the tragic mistake of using these weap-

ons there will be consequences and you will be held accountable,”<sup>3</sup> as Obama said, without fulfilling his own red-line promises. In the Middle Eastern context, if a promise or a threat is not fulfilled, loss of respect is an immediate consequence.

Another element that is widely used against the West is public opinion, which plays a very important role in this regard. Russia and China have an increased interest in keeping Western populations busy with issues that are beyond the West’s immediate capacity to fix, as they require a global approach. Such issues serve as the perfect preoccupations to “entertain” Western constituencies while other countries play a hardcore Realist game. The importance of public opinion in the West is notorious, and competing powers have realized the possibility of using that aspect against Western governments, thus limiting the latter’s actions toward the pursuit of national interests in the international political sphere.

The use of proxies is also widespread and has been the case for decades, as leaders see the practice as a tool to save Western lives. When interests no longer align and Western nations withdraw their support to their proxies, those erstwhile friends become foes who possess Western training and Western equipment. The problem with engaging proxies with “bad faith” is that they are designing their “betrayal” from the beginning, as illustrated by the case of Osama bin Laden in Afghanistan. The problem with those of “good faith” is that either the proxies deeply believe—or they so claim—to be key allies of the West, and when that relationship is broken, the resulting information campaign becomes very damaging to the interests of the West. The latter is a more serious case of credibility loss.

## **The Kurds**

The Kurds are an Indo-European ethnic group of unknown origin who reside among different nations in the Middle East, mainly in mountainous environments that have allowed them to maintain a certain distinctive personality and have also led to their isolation from the other ethnic groups in the region: Arabs, Persians, Assyrians, Chaldeans, Turks, and others. For centuries, their “otherness” has set them apart from the majority ethnic groups and ruling factions in these Middle Eastern countries, due in part to their very unique line of thought and distinct culture that have made it difficult for states to integrate them.

A very strong publicity campaign from the 1980s onward, designed by Kurdish intellectual elites and funded by their corrupt political leadership, allowed the Kurdish cause to globalize and to enter the consciousness of all leftist liberal circles throughout the West. The picture of an oppressed Middle Eastern people in need of state building was much more appealing to these leftist liberals than the memories of the Kurds slaughtering Armenians (Christian Orthodox) in the early twentieth century in the context of the Armenian Genocide. The same narrative, as well

as the claim of escaping totalitarian regimes, was a key element in allowing certain members of the Kurdish population to be successfully granted asylum in the West.

### **The Kurds as a Proxy Force in Syria**

The use of foreign forces to achieve a political interest is an ancient practice. Julius Caesar famously described the pitting of the different Gallic tribes against each other in the eight books that compose the *Commentaries on the Gallic War*. A few millennia later, Carl von Clausewitz developed the practical and theoretical approach to the use of proxies,<sup>4</sup> while Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov established his in 1984, providing two useful definitions:

1. “a war between regional states behind each of which—or behind only one—stands a superpower who supplies the state by indirect military intervention, i.e. without the need to intervene by its own forces”; and
2. “a war between regional states in which external powers may intervene directly when a local state is defeated, despite the arms supplied to it”<sup>5</sup>

After the collapse of the Soviet Union, the definition of a proxy war was broadened to include a wider range of actors, as described by Andrew Mumford: “Proxy wars are the product of a relationship between a benefactor, who is a state or nonstate actor external to the dynamic of an existing conflict, and the chosen proxies who are the conduit for the benefactor’s weapons, training and funding.”<sup>6</sup>

In the case of the war against Daesh, some Syrian Kurdish groups forged a collaborative relationship with the United States in which the latter serves as a benefactor and provider of training, weapons, and aerial and intelligence support. In this specific situation, the tricky element in the use of Syrian Kurds such as the Popular Protection Unit (YPG) as proxies is that they were engaged because they had a common enemy with the United States: Daesh. On the other hand, American engagement with the YPG put Turkey—a US NATO ally—in a difficult position, since Turkey considers the YPG as a terrorist group affiliated with the outlawed Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK).

President Donald Trump gave several public speeches in which he made the most important points about the US position toward Syrian Kurds, which are analyzed in this article and are consistent with the use of Syrian Kurds as a proxy force:

1. “Kurds are fighting for their land.”<sup>7</sup> The United States did not initiate the cause for the Kurds’ fight but saw an opportunity for a strategic partnership that resulted in a collaboration.
2. “We secured the oil.” The United States was not hiding the importance of oil in the Middle East as a strategic interest. Even after Washington’s

partnership with the Kurds ended, the US military presence to protect the oil was maintained. That would explain why the military presence survived the end of the US partnership with the Kurds.

3. “We never agreed to protect the Kurds.” There was a common interest to fight common enemies, in this case, Daesh. Once the enemy was gone, that meant the end of the partnership and a return to the previous status quo in which Turkey, as a NATO member and strategic ally of the United States, was more relevant than several militias that are, by definition, non-state actors and, therefore, much more volatile.
4. “We fought with them for three and a half to four years.” The partnership had a beginning and an end. The end has arrived.
5. “We never agreed to protect the Kurds for the rest of their lives.”<sup>8</sup> As already developed in the third point.
6. “Without spending a drop of American blood.” This point represents one of the key elements of this paper’s claims in terms of the Syrian Kurds being a proxy force and fighting the war—against a common enemy—with boots on the ground.
7. “Sometimes you have to let them fight a little while, then people find out how tough the fight is.” A claim that illustrates the price that US leadership is willing to pay to prove the difficulty of its position and that sometimes it is necessary to make allies understand the weight of the hegemon’s position.

US Secretary of Defense Mark Esper also explained the US position in October 2019, elaborating that the Kurds had not been abandoned, as *Al-Monitor* journalist Adam Lucente was successfully able to explain.<sup>9</sup>

After the partnership was over, the Syrian Kurds launched a public relations campaign. The Kurds denounced the United States for “using” them and claimed that the US withdrawal left the Kurds at the mercy of Turkish forces and the Syrian government.

A good knowledge of the terrain would have informed decision makers that it was impossible to predict concrete Kurdish behavior but the general pattern is typically obvious: Kurdish nationalism only exists as a flag for victim status, which the foreign gaze pushes onto them, and the Kurds utilize whenever it benefits them. The actual daily relations are far more tribal and business-centered, and it is these more primitive relationships that hold sway in day-to-day decision-making processes. To the Western eye, the first perception would be that Kurds first betray each other, then continue being traitors to their allied forces, and in between they generate chaos. However, that lack of unity, the absence of a “they” as a category

cannot be forgotten. The end result of the Kurds' political behavioral patterns is very well-known in the region and throughout history.



*(US Army photo by SSgt Ray Boyington)*

**Figure 1. A symbol of Kurdish nationalism.** The Kurdistan flag waves atop a government building of the Iraqi autonomous region of Kurdistan during an engagement between Coalition Forces and members of the Peshmerga media cell in Erbil, Iraq, 2 May 2019. The engagement was to discuss media capabilities and offer assistance to strengthen them.

The Kurds follow the concept of *brakuji*, which is well-known among Middle Eastern peoples and Middle East experts. Composed of the Kurdish word *brak* (brother) and *kuji* (to kill), it literally means to kill one's brother and is used as an expression of a Kurd killing or betraying another Kurd.

It is not uncommon for Kurds to involve other forces in their fights, either as a result of them being used as proxies or them dragging other forces into a personal or tribal fight as in the case of the Iraqi Kurdish Civil War. One of the more important examples in recent history happened during the Iraqi Kurdish Civil War between 1994 and 1997 in which the two main tribes, the Barzanis and the Talabanis were in competition for power and money. To cement his power, Massoud Barzani, as the head of the Kurdistan Democratic Party (PDK), decided to seek help from Saddam Hussein, Turkey, and the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) (an anti-Iranian regime Kurdish party). Jalal Talabani, as a founder of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (PUK), managed to secure military help from Iran and the PKK, now designated a foreign terrorist organization by the United States and the European Union.<sup>10</sup>

Around 5,000 people lost their lives because Jalal Talabani could not accept Massoud Barzani's leadership. Such examples are rampant in Kurdish history—subordinates in political organizations sooner or later betray their leaders, establish a new political party or a guerrilla group, and even start a war to become the

leader. Today this remains the case, witnessed by the fact that in April 2020, the PDK, PUK, and PKK are engaged in skirmishes against one another to seize control of Zini Warte, a city to the west of Mount Qandil in Iraq.<sup>11</sup> These realities on the ground contradict the preferred narrative of the Kurdish diaspora and the liberal West of a united Kurdish nation seeking freedom from Middle Eastern regimes through state building.

Thus, a good Western public relations campaign to counteract such Kurdish narratives should have been put in place, especially taking into consideration wide-eyed leftist liberals who, as constituents of Western leaders, negatively influence national political decision making, and who, without proper knowledge of the region, buy into the fictitious narrative of an egalitarian Kurdish society where women are equal to men and renounce freedoms all for the elusive dream of building a country.

However, in this specific case, Washington's use of Syrian Kurdish militias as proxies in the Syrian Civil War was in itself a mistake. Wars are terrible, men and women in uniform die, as do civilians, but the West has to engage in brutal honesty with its publics and build a system that, instead of relying on naïvety at home and employing the "real game" abroad, explains to its citizens what the real game is about and the true price that has to be paid for Western cultural pervasiveness and military primacy in the world.

Jean Baudrillard famously declared that "the Gulf war did not take place," implying the history of the war is nothing more than the sum of the media images it generated, with no way to separate that largely fictitious version of events from the reality of what happened on the ground.<sup>12</sup> This perspective allows us to understand a change of attitude of the public to wars. The public does not want to see dead people, it wants to keep war out of its comfortable lives and receive as little information as possible to keep its conscience clean. Remaining true to the meaning of democratic societies means having Western citizens understand that freedom comes with a high price. Social naïvety and governmental hypocrisy will not allow the West to remain in a position of power. The West seems to want a low cost of comfortable living, to engage in discussions over global issues (peace, global warming, etc.) and is increasingly less willing to accept the costs of its privileged position.

### **Implications for the United States and the West**

The United States and the West have failed by engaging in a conflict that they were neither able to win nor to end and have been affected more greatly than "the enemy." The earliest and most crucial mistake was to label Bashar al-Assad as an enemy, following the trend of seeking to oust other unsavory leaders such as Saddam Hussein in Iraq and Mu'ammār Gadhafi in Libya. In a polarized world, the

West is struggling to dominate and, unfortunately, is leaving the door open for its competitors (Russia, China, Iran, and others) to offer their support. Doing so has enabled these adversaries to keep the conflict going for almost a decade. The West must come to understand that the Middle East has its own ways, respect it, and try to play the game without burning the cards.

The second big mistake was to continue engaging in a proxy war even after witnessing the obvious strength of Daesh in relation to those chosen to be Western proxies. In the end, failing to properly gauge this power disparity resulted in the West needing a strong boots-on-the-ground presence in the Middle East, costing a high price in lives and resources. It also brought the migration crisis to Europe, generated regional chaos, led to loss of lives, and created a difficult, complex, and unresolved situation, with negative effects that will last decades.

The third mistake was to engage with the Kurds without understanding their manifest political nature—an unreliability displayed throughout history that has become almost a pattern—and forgetting the financial and public relations support to Kurds in the Middle East given by the Kurdish diaspora. One of the major points of agreement among Kurds is the phrase that they repeat like a mantra, “No friends but the mountains,” which describes everyone aside from themselves individually as a foe. Human relations cannot flourish without trust.

A successful marketing campaign, however, has masked such ethnocentrism. Crafted by the Kurdish diaspora, one of the demonstrable successes of this marketing campaign is the Western nations’ granting of full citizenship to millions of Kurds, which started in the 1970s and has continued through today.

The asylum programs in these Western nations, praised by the Western liberal left in a rather triumphant way, allowed enemies of the West to exploit their hosts’ hospitality—providing citizenship to individuals who did not share the West’s values. Those passports—and the rights that came with them—were later used to move freely and conduct political campaigns centered on the the cause of the Kurdish “nation”—a cause that does not exactly align with the West’s regional or global interests.

Furthermore, information drawn from hundreds of formal and informal interviews performed in the field point to a significant number of Kurds faking their need for asylum or refuge. Among these Kurds are officers who served in the Syrian and Iraqi armies during the rules of Hafez Assad and Saddam Hussein, as well as political elites who lied in their interview processes by exaggerating threats to their own survival.

During the years in which Daesh still held territory (2014–2017), many of the current Kurdish political leaders took the opportunity to seek asylum or refuge, acquire a residency in the West and quickly returning to the region to continue

conducting their political activities, then returning to the West for the purpose of continuing the process of acquiring citizenship.

The fourth mistake—which is ongoing—is the retreat of Western military forces from the Middle East, largely due to the fear of losing Western lives in renewed and intensified fighting in the region in recent years. Such a withdrawal leaves open the door for other states, mainly Iran, to insert themselves and influence the new postwar situation. The most dangerous mistake that the West can make in the Middle East is to show weakness and fear. Once an open wound is bleeding, the piranhas will attack. Only firmness will keep the West safe and strong.

### **Implications for the Syrian Kurds**

At this point, the only viable option for the Syrian Kurds is to return to the fold and follow their nation's leaders. They will not be benefiting from any other partnership that offers them an alternative to negotiating with Damascus for a way forward. In the most likely scenario, the Kurds will be required to again acknowledge Syrian sovereignty in the northeast of the republic.

In accepting such a suboptimal outcome (from a Kurdish perspective) the Syrian Kurds do have an advantage over other Kurds in the region, as they possess one of the highest levels of education—together with their ethnic cohorts in Iran—and a mastery of the Arabic language that allows them to integrate easier into the national culture. In contrast, Iraqi Kurds, especially those among younger generations, are unable to understand Arabic, their national language, as a result of a disastrous policy to neglect it and to teach only their local dialect of Kurdish in primary, secondary schools, and universities.

A postwar agreement with Damascus might be the only way to protect Kurds against invading Turkish troops—sent by Ankara out of fear of the creation of a stronghold of Kurdish administration close to Turkish borders that could enhance the creation of similar structures in the southeast of Turkey in PKK-dominated rural areas.

History teaches us that Middle Eastern leaders, due to their feudal nature, do more to protect those who acknowledge themselves to be part of the nation. The Syrian Kurds do not have any other viable option now that their partnership with the West is over.

### **Implications for the Wider Middle East**

The Middle East is on the verge of falling under Iranian domination. Tehran has been a consistent actor in the region and knows where it wants to go and who

it wants to be, and the regime has the cultural awareness to bring its Middle Eastern plans to fruition.

In waging war against President Assad, the West lost a decade it did not have to spare in its efforts to reshape the region in a fashion more aligned with Western strategic interests. In the aftermath of this failed endeavor, the West must rethink those strategic interests in the region and devise a sounder plan, couched in a better understanding of the region, to achieve its goals.

## **Conclusions**

Labeling al-Assad as an enemy of the West was a big mistake. Liberal democracy should not be the only system that we feel comfortable in openly engaging. The Middle East has some particularities that we might learn from, if we want to continue interacting with such a rich and storied culture.

The West is no longer able to afford certain mistakes such as the hidden proxy wars against established leaders like al-Assad, Hussein, and Gadhafi and open proxy wars against terrorist organizations like Daesh. Partner states have to be strong, and partnerships have to be strengthened, ensuring the West offers a better deal than other contenders.

The Syrian Kurds were aware all along that they were a proxy force. The War against Daesh is over, and Turkey is a NATO member and a key ally for the United States. Throughout the history of the region, partnerships with Kurdish militias have always ended badly—and this one is likely no different.

If the West resorts to proxies in this day and age, leaders must expect a public relations campaign against itself from its proxy force that will continue to demand for more and continued support. We see this in April 2020 with Iraqi Kurds who are overplaying the importance of the Daesh in Iraq and selling themselves to Iran and the Shia after several decades of US influence and “partnership” that cost billions in American aid and military assistance.

There is a need to know and understand the terrain—geographic and human—and for more honesty toward a more educated and realistic Western citizen.

### **Dr. Andrés de Castro García**

Dr. de Castro García is the Head of the Department of International Relations at the Catholic University of Erbil, in Northern Iraq. He earned his PhD in international security at the Spanish Ministry of Defense's Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado (IUGM-UNED) in Madrid, and a Law Degree from the University of Salamanca, also in Spain. He has held numerous academic positions in many different countries including the United States, Canada, Spain, Ecuador, Chile, and Iraq.

## Notes

1. Irena Chiru, "National Intelligence Cultures," in *The Conduct of Intelligence in Democracies: Processes, Practices, Cultures*, ed. Florina Cristiana Matei and Carolyn Halladay (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2019), 213–26.
2. Isabel Coles and Catherine Lucey, "Trump Pushes Iraq, Threatens Sanctions after Vote to Expel U.S. Troops," *Wall Street Journal*, 6 January 2020, <https://www.wsj.com/>.
3. *The Telegraph*, "Barack Obama Lays Down Red Line to Syria over Chemical Weapons," *YouTube*, 4 December 2012, <https://www.youtube.com/>.
4. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, trans. Michael Eliot Howard and Peter Paret (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2008).
5. Yaacov Bar-Siman-Tov, "The Strategy of War by Proxy," *Cooperation and Conflict* 19, no. 4 (1984): 263–73.
6. Andrew Mumford, "Proxy Warfare and the Future of Conflict," *RUSI Journal* 158, no. 2 (2013): 40–46.
7. *MSNBC*, "Trump's Bizarre Reason for Abandoning the Kurds in Syria | Hardball | MS-NBC," *YouTube*, 9 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/>.
8. *ABC News*, "Trump: US Never Agreed to Protect Kurds in Syria | ABC News," *YouTube*, 21 October 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/>.
9. Adam Lucente, "We Are Not Abandoning Our Kurdish Partner': US Secretary of Defense," *Rudaw*, 10 December 2019, <https://www.rudaw.net/>.
10. Council of the European Union, "Council Decision (CFSP) 2019/25 of 8 January 2019," <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>.
11. Fehim Tastekin, "Turkey Seeks to Exploit Claims to Iraqi Kurdish Village," *Al-Monitor*, 23 April 2020, <https://www.al-monitor.com/>.
12. Jean Baudrillard, *The Gulf War Did Not Take Place* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

# The Reconstruction of the Silk Road

## Contesting Norms and Challenging the Cohesion of European Union Foreign Policy

SIMON F. TAEUBER

### Abstract\*

This article analyses the European Union's (EU) and its member-states' responses to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and addresses norm contestation in Sino-European discourse regarding the primary institutions (PI) of sovereignty, international law, and market economy. The article combines the toolset of the English School with norm contestation theory. The findings show evidence for norm contestation and increasing tension in Sino-European discourse and relations since the beginning of Xi Jinping's presidency. Moreover, the article illustrates that the BRI, while at first a projection screen for norm contestation, eventually became subject to contestation itself. The article argues that the identified norm contestation is rooted in a clash between liberal-solidarist interpretations of PIs and Chinese pluralist interpretations and that the variegated European responses to the BRI demonstrate the challenges the initiative presents to cohesion in EU foreign policy. Lastly, the article demonstrates that in contesting liberal-solidarist interpretations of PIs, China is resisting European solidarization and arguably proposing a pluralist alternative to a liberal-solidarist order.

### Introduction

Since its inception in 2013, the BRI has become a household name for interaction with China in many different spheres. In short, the initiative is China's contemporary foreign policy framework under President Xi, based on strengthening the transport and trade connections along the ancient Silk Road, and beyond, through bilateral agreements and investments in infrastructure. Scholarship dealing with the BRI has been focused on both realist and liberal approaches to analyze a variety of global and regional settings and investigate questions of geopolitical, economic, and financial impact.<sup>1</sup> Some scholars have criticized the

\*This article is based on or reproduces Simon F. Taeuber, "Reconstructing the Silk Road: Norm Contestation in Sino-European Relations in Times of the Belt and Road Initiative," *Journal of Rising Powers and Global Governance* 1, no. 1 (2020): 31–65. In September 2019, the author presented an earlier version of this article at EISAs Pan-European Conference in Sofia, Bulgaria.

emphasis on realism and liberal theory in BRI studies, arguing that “neither perspective can shed light on the conceptual challenges that Chinese proposals present for world politics, assuming instead that China either wants to cooperate (the liberal argument) or conquer (the realist argument).”<sup>2</sup> This critique of the state-of-the-art provides grounds for investigating, paraphrasing Karin Marie Fierke and Francisco Antonio-Alfonso, how China is possibly reconfiguring the normative fabric of global politics through the BRI. It is this puzzle that is at the center of the presented research.

Departing from studying the BRI in realist or liberal terms allows for adopting new analytical tools to understand the BRI's implications beyond a debate focused on China as a revisionist or status-quo power. To address the mentioned puzzle of possible reconfiguration of normative fabric, this article deploys English School theory (ES), with its main concepts of international society as “a group of states, conscious of certain common interests and common values”<sup>3</sup> and PIs as these “patterned practices, ideas and norms/rules.”<sup>4</sup> These PIs are polysemic in their meaning, i.e. their interpretation on part of statespersons depends on the respective (regional) context.<sup>5</sup> Or put differently, international societies on a regional level can have different interpretations and related practices of PIs, e.g., Western-liberal interpretations. This article utilizes the differentiation between solidarist and pluralist interpretations of PIs as a further analytical tool in the study of Sino–European discourse.<sup>6</sup> The salient difference is that “[a] pluralist international society builds on a rather thin and weak basis of shared norms and values”<sup>7</sup> and that “a thicker basis of shared norms and values underpins a solidarist international society, in which the universalization of ideas beyond national borders becomes possible and desirable.”<sup>8</sup> In a pluralist international society, the norms of nonintervention and respect for national sovereignty are paramount, bearers of rights and duties are states alone, and humanitarian intervention and universal human rights are consequently regarded as problematic.<sup>9</sup> In contradistinction to that, a solidarist conception of international society ascribes rights and duties related to international law also to individuals, and sovereignty is more relational to global governance in the sense of the UN.<sup>10</sup> These solidarist and pluralist frames impact not only perception and practice of PIs but also play into interstate relations when actors promote contesting interpretations of PIs. The notion of solidarization of international society “implies a reinterpretation of national sovereignty in terms of a distinct and more far-reaching definition of responsibilities and duties of states towards each other and vis-à-vis individuals inside and outside their own territories,”<sup>11</sup> and the EU shows solidarizing tendencies in its outward behavior.<sup>12</sup> Similarly, pluralization would imply a reinterpretation of PIs in line with a pluralist conception of international society. It is these analytical

tools that allow uncovering substantive disagreement regarding interpretations of PIs in Sino–European discourse, i.e., norm contestation in the context of the normative fabric of global politics. The understanding of norm contestation between actors from different regional international societies (RIS) is aligned with the *theory of contestation*, i.e., norm contestation is considered as a social practice with normative, or norm-generative, dimensions.<sup>13</sup> The analysis focuses on norm contestation in the sense of the actors promoting differing interpretations of PIs or opposing one another’s interpretations or related practices. These actors are the EU as a global actor, Germany and Italy as two of the 27 EU member states (EU27, since the exit of the United Kingdom), and China, as the initiator of the BRI. Germany and Italy carry special relevance for the BRI’s goal of connecting China with Europe. Germany marks the nodal point for the Silk Road Economic Belt, and Italy, as the occidental end of the historic Silk Road, marks the nodal point for the twenty-first-century Maritime Silk Road. Their selection as EU27 cases draws on this geo-economic relevance to the BRI. The chosen actors are members of different theorized RISs. The EU, Germany, and Italy represent geographical Western Europe and European RIS (ERIS),<sup>14</sup> while China is located in East Asia and an arguably prominent, possibly dominant, member of an East Asia RIS (EARIS).<sup>15</sup> The PIs under investigation are *sovereignty* and *international law* as the pillars of international society.<sup>16</sup> Further, the *market economy*, as an institution bearing great relevance to the BRI itself and being the one that China has arguably embraced above all, is examined as the third PI for this study. These three PIs are further explicated in section three. This article contributes to the diversification of theoretical approaches to the study of the BRI and its global impact. Within the ES, it adds to the further study of RISs and the respectively differing, polysemic interpretations of PIs. The findings show that the BRI developed from a theme for cooperation to a projection screen for substantial disagreements regarding values and principles, ending up as subject to contestation itself. Sino–European relations can be divided into three distinct phases between 2013 and 2019, with an emerging fourth one, each characterized by different defining themes and changing receptions of the BRI. This article argues that, firstly, the BRI increasingly presented a challenge to EU cohesion and unity, especially in member states’ foreign policies vis-à-vis China. Secondly, that substantive disagreements between China and the EU, Germany, and Italy were based in a clash of pluralist and solidarist interpretations of *sovereignty*, *international law*, and the *market economy* and differing related practices. Thirdly, that the relations between China and the EU and Germany became increasingly contested throughout the phases, while Sino–Italian relations developed amicably. Furthermore, that in contesting solidarist interpretations of PIs, China is resisting solidarizing tenden-

cies of members of ERIS and arguably proposing an alternative, pluralist order to a (European) liberal-solidarist one. These findings have clear policy relevance, and this article makes a case for experts and practitioners in the field of security and foreign affairs to adopt new analytical tools beyond realism and liberal theory to analyze and fully grasp the ramifications of contemporary Chinese foreign policy and the BRI for Western-liberal order.

This article is structured into four sections, with the following one discussing the reception of the BRI by the EU and its member states. The third section focuses on contestations of sovereignty, international law, and the market economy in Sino–European discourse between 2013 and 2019. The last section provides a conclusion and discusses implications for international relations, both as a discipline and in practice.

### European Responses to the BRI

In this section, the findings regarding the BRI in Sino–European discourse are briefly presented and put in context to recent bilateral developments between EU27 member states and China. The chronological analysis of empirical material yielded three distinct phases of Sino–European relations between 2013 and 2019, with a fourth one commencing in late-2019. The phases are termed: *Anno BRI: Xi Era Begins* (2013–2015), *Chinese and European Strategic Currents* (2015–2016), *Facing Variegated European Winds* (2016–2019), and *A Japanese–European BRI Alternative* (from late 2019). These phases are characterized by a differing role of the BRI in Sino–European discourse and increasingly diverging responses from EU27 member states. The findings point to the BRI increasingly presenting a challenge to cohesion in EU foreign policy and adherence to guiding principles set forth by the European Commission (EC) for EU27 member states to consider in their national foreign policy strategies.

During *Anno BRI: Xi Era Begins*, the BRI arguably arrived in Sino–European discourse at the occasion of Xi’s visit to Europe in 2014, when he met with European Council (EUCO), Pres. Herman Van Rompuy and EC Pres. José Manuel Barroso. In a joint statement issued after the meeting, the three statesmen declared, “In view of the great potential to improve their transport relations, both sides decided to develop synergies between China’s ‘Silk Road Economic Belt’ initiative and EU policies and jointly to explore common initiatives along these lines.”<sup>17</sup>

This first mention of the BRI in (Sino–)EU discourse came at a timely point, as the BRI physically reached the EU with the opening of the YuXinOu freight train connection from China to Germany at this time. In this first phase, the dominant theme in Sino–European discourse was economic cooperation, exemplified by the beginning of negotiations for an investment agreement between

China and the EU, and the BRI was not part of norm contestation regarding interpretations of PIs.

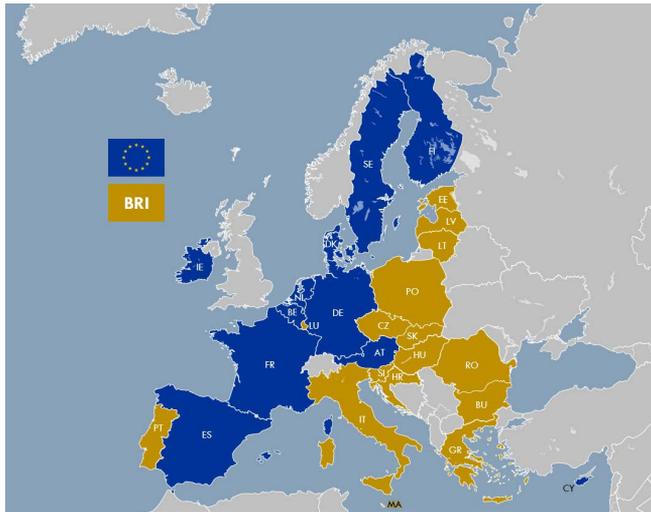
With the publication of a white paper in March 2015, China provided a clear outline of its conception and perception of the BRI and its role in contemporary Chinese foreign policy.<sup>18</sup> It arguably marked the beginning of a second phase, *Chinese and European Strategic Currents*, in Sino–European relations, stating, “The Initiative is harmonious and inclusive. It advocates tolerance among civilizations, respects the paths and modes of development chosen by different countries, and supports dialogues among different civilizations on the principles of seeking common ground while shelving differences and drawing on each other’s strengths, so that all countries can coexist in peace for common prosperity.”<sup>19</sup>

It is important to read this statement with the distinction between solidarist and pluralist frames in mind. That is to say, the relevant message here is arguably the emphasis on respect for sovereign choices of countries in their domestic matters. Moreover, the reference to the inclusiveness of the BRI is not unconditional, as China also put forward “terms of affiliation”: “They [countries along the Belt and Road] should promote policy coordination, facilities connectivity, unimpeded trade, financial integration and people-to-people bonds as their five major goals.”<sup>20</sup>

Despite the BRI being described as “open to all countries, and international and regional organizations”<sup>21</sup> with the overall aim of “[promoting] the connectivity of Asian, European and African continents and their adjacent seas,”<sup>22</sup> the five mentioned pillars have to be understood not through a Western-liberal or liberal-solidarist frame but from a Chinese pluralist one. The BRI arguably became a projection screen for the disagreements over issues such as reciprocity in foreign direct investment (FDI) regulations and foreign companies’ access to the Chinese market within the EC’s strategy paper on China toward the end of *European and Chinese Strategic Currents*, which stated, “Co-operation with China on its ‘One Belt, One Road’ initiative should be dependent on China fulfilling its declared aim of making it an open platform which adheres to market rules and international norms in order to deliver benefits for all.”<sup>23</sup>

An open letter in February 2017, signed by Germany, Italy, and France, calling for FDI screening mechanism for the EU is considered as the second turning point in Sino–European relations at the time and as the beginning of *Facing Variegated European Winds*.<sup>24</sup> The respective responses to the BRI changed yet again in this third phase, with the EC reiterating the conditions for cooperation and detailing the meaning of “adhering to international norms” as “EU and international requirements, and [complementing] EU policies and projects.”<sup>25</sup> President Xi hosted the first Belt and Road Forum in May 2017. At the occasion, no EU representative co-signed the Leaders’ Roundtable joint communique as the EU’s requirements

and concerns were addressed in the document.<sup>26</sup> German minister for economic affairs and energy Brigitte Zypries reportedly commented in a press briefing at the summit that “so far the demands of the EU countries in areas such as free trade, setting a level playing field and equal conditions have not been met”<sup>27</sup> and that “therefore we say at the moment, if that does not happen, then we cannot sign.”<sup>28</sup> The Italian prime minister Paolo Gentiloni, who in contrast to Zypries did sign the joint communication, boiled down the Italian response to the BRI to its essence: “I would say that the fact that the Chinese President has confirmed their intention to include Italian ports among the ports on which to invest in this gigantic investment program as Silk Road terminals is important. . . . In particular, we are talking about the expansion of the ports of Trieste and Genoa, connected as they are to the railway and highway system that reaches the rich heart of Europe.”<sup>29</sup>



**Figure 1. EU27 cooperation under BRI framework (2019)**

These developments arguably demonstrated two things. Firstly, the BRI had become subject to contestation itself—that is from the EU and Germany. Secondly, Sino–Italian relations were developing juxtaposed to relations between the EU and Germany and China. This argument is underlined by Italy’s responses to the BRI in discourse throughout the three phases and Rome’s formal affiliation with the BRI framework in March 2019.<sup>30</sup>

The implications of a European founding member going against the majority within the EUCO and the EC’s proposed foreign policy guidelines for EU member states are manifold. The German foreign minister (FM) Heiko Maas commented that “a single country must not have the opportunity to always block all others,”<sup>31</sup> which arguably gave expression to the challenge that the Italian position and presumably voting in the EUCO regarding a joint EU position and policy on

the BRI presented to the bloc. Maas found frank words concerning EU unity vis-à-vis China: “In a world with giants like China, Russia, or our partner the US, we can only persist when, as EU, we are unified. And if some countries believe one can do clever business with the Chinese people, they will be surprised and eventually wake up in dependencies. Short-term lucrative offers get a bitter aftertaste faster than expected. China is not a liberal democracy.”<sup>32</sup>

Looking beyond Brussels, Berlin, and Rome, it becomes apparent that the Italian response to the BRI is not a singular occurrence. By 2019, 16 of the 27 EU member states had signed agreements with Beijing for cooperation under the BRI framework.<sup>33</sup> The resulting division among EU member states regarding the BRI is striking and further underlines the challenge that China has, arguably successfully, laid out for the bloc’s cohesion in its external relations.

Bearing in mind the rules of unanimity within both the EU Council and the Foreign Affairs Council, it becomes clear that a unified response from the bloc to the BRI seems unlikely at this point. However, the EC as an organizational actor has far-reaching competencies within EU foreign policy and in negotiating foreign relations and agreements. Exemplary cases in response to the BRI are the 2018 Economic Partnership Agreement and the 2019 Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure.<sup>34</sup> The language used by then-EC president Jean-Claude Juncker and Japanese prime minister Shinzo Abe and within the agreement itself bears a striking resemblance to that of China and the BRI but with a Western-liberal or liberal-solidarist framing of PIs. The BRI framework speaks of respect for different chosen development paths, civilizational differences, and of “seeking common ground while shelving differences.”<sup>35</sup> The EU–Japan framework copies the BRI’s five pillars and adds that cooperation with other countries will “fully [take] into account partners’ needs and demands and paying utmost attention to their fiscal capacity and debt-sustainability.”<sup>36</sup> This is arguably a reiteration of the bloc’s critique of dependency and exploitation regarding the BRI. In the agreement, the EU and Japan also express their desire to “to promote openness, transparency, inclusiveness and a level playing field for those concerned, including investors and businesses in connectivity”<sup>37</sup> and in doing so reiterate the aforementioned points of critique regarding the BRI. Moreover, the reference to “free, open, rules-based, fair, non-discriminatory . . . trade and investment, transparent procurement practices, the ensuring of debt sustainability and the high standards of . . . environmental sustainability”<sup>38</sup> gives expression to liberal-solidarist interpretations of PIs. In a press conference, Prime Minister Abe refers to “common values and principles”<sup>39</sup> between the EU and Japan that underpin their relation and subsequently names “democracy,” “the rule of law,” “human rights,” and “freedoms” as these common values. While neither China nor the BRI was directly

invoked, President Juncker made clear that the EU and Japan were pitching to the world an alternative to the BRI framework and possible future dependency on China: “Connectivity must also be financially sustainable. It is about handing down to future generations a more interconnected world, a cleaner environment and not mountains of debt. It is also about creating more interconnections between all countries around the world, not more dependence on one country.”<sup>40</sup>

The changing role of the BRI in Sino–European discourse is considered emblematic of Sino–European relations becoming more confrontative between 2013 and 2019. The BRI had become subject to contestation itself due to fundamental disagreements regarding values and principles—PIs—among the EU, certain member states, and China. At the same time, the responses by EU member states toward the BRI increasingly diverged. By the end of 2019, as many as 16 of the EU27 had affiliated with China’s framework while others, including Germany and France, and the EC had openly opposed the initiative, proposing an alternative in line with their liberal-solidarist values and principles. Moreover, this article argues that the BRI illuminates the caveats of partial integration of the bloc and increasingly presented, and presents, a challenge to EU cohesion and unity especially regarding member states’ foreign policies vis-à-vis China.

**Table 1. Four phases of Sino–European relations (2013–2019)**

Phases and Turning Points	Defining Themes	Role of BRI
<b>Anno BRI: Xi Era begins (2013–2015)</b>	China’s extensive reform plans, civilization-difference argument and human rights, Sino–European cooperation	<b>BRI as opportunity</b> BRI plays a minor role in Sino–European discourse and contestation
* EU–China joint strategy & BRI whitepaper		
<b>Chinese and European Strategic Currents (2015–2016)</b>	Strategic partners for long run, steel overcapacity, state subsidies, reciprocity regarding FDI	<b>BRI as projection screen</b> China publishes BRI ‘terms of affiliation’, EU & Germany point to substantial disagreements, Italy open to cooperation
* KUKA takeover & EU triumvirate letter		
<b>Facing Variegated European Winds (2017–2019)</b>	FDI screening mechanism, protection of critical infrastructure, sharp language “systemic rivalry”	<b>BRI as subject of contestation</b> China reiterates pluralist nature of BRI framework. EU & Germany openly contest BRI, while Italy signs MoU
* EU–Japan Connectivity Agreement		
<b>A Japanese–European BRI Alternative (from late 2019)</b>	Counterinitiative complying with liberal-solidarist interpretations of sovereignty, international law, and market economy	<b>BRI as competitor</b> EU and Japan agree on alternative Eurasian connectivity initiative that emphasizes liberal values

Recalling the puzzle of how China might be reconfiguring the normative fabric of global politics, a look beyond the BRI as a framework for cooperation and infrastructure development is in order. Thus, if it is these values and principles that are at the core of fundamental disagreements among China and the EU, the latter's member states, and also Japan, then the differences of values and principles require special attention. The following section investigates the differing frames, ideas, and values that underpin the self-conceptions of statespersons on both the Chinese and European sides and analyses how these differences are woven into Sino–European discourse.

### **Norm Contestation in Sino–European Discourse**

An analysis of Sino–European discourse from 2013 to 2019 shows that there is substantial disagreement regarding the PIs of sovereignty, international law, and the market economy and that actors were contesting one another's interpretation in their discourse. The following three subsections provide relevant examples of this contestation and capture the defining themes that norm contestation manifested around. Moreover, the differences in (Western) liberal-solidarist and (Chinese) pluralist interpretations and frames of PIs are highlighted. These insights can help practitioners of international relations hone their analyses of state discourse regarding norms and values and provide the necessary mental flexibility to change perspective to grasp the respectively other's perspective.

#### ***Sovereignty***

*Sovereignty* as the “defining quality of states”<sup>41</sup> refers to the notion that states do not accept a higher authority in conducting their affairs; it also represents a fundamental attribute to determine membership in (regional) international society.<sup>42</sup> Moreover, human rights (HR) and individuals as holders of rights and duties are a focal point of liberal-solidarist conceptions of sovereignty, and the promotion of global, universal HR—solidarization—is a central practice related to liberal-solidarist interpretations of sovereignty.<sup>43</sup> However, a pluralist conception of sovereignty emphasizes the adherence to practices of nonintervention, territorial integrity, and self-determination.<sup>44</sup>

At the beginning of his presidency, Xi Jinping outlined China's interpretation of sovereignty as absolute both in internal and foreign affairs at the G20 summit: “We respect the development paths and domestic and foreign policies chosen independently by the people of every country. We will in no circumstances interfere in the internal affairs of Central Asian countries. We do not seek to dominate regional affairs or establish any sphere of influence.”<sup>45</sup>

The emphasis on self-determination in relation to the choice of development path and noninterference in other countries' internal affairs is an example of a pluralist interpretation of sovereignty. The contrast in interpretation and practice of sovereignty arguably becomes clear from EUCO President Van Rompuy's statement at the 2013 EU–China Summit: “The protection of human rights and fundamental freedom is at the core of the existence of the EU itself and constitutes an important part of our exchange with all our partners. There is no doubt that through lifting millions of people from poverty China has made key contributions in this field. . . . We discussed today questions related to the protection of minorities and freedom of expression especially on defenders of human rights and I expressed our concerns.”<sup>46</sup>

This expression of the EU's self-conception as a protector of universal HR and the voiced criticism toward China demonstrates the substantive disagreement with Chinese practice. In the context of styling the EU as a “protector of HR,” such open contestation of China's domestic HR situation can arguably be seen as an example of solidarizing tendencies in the EU's approach to China.<sup>47</sup> While China consistently reiterated that it “will never seek hegemony or expansion,”<sup>48</sup> Xi made it clear that “China will firmly uphold its sovereignty, security, and development interests. No country should expect China to swallow the bitter fruit that undermines its sovereignty, security and development interests.”<sup>49</sup> This positioning strengthens the argument that noninterference is of paramount importance within EARRIS,<sup>50</sup> and that “the practice [of sovereignty] in ASEAN [Association of Southeast Asian Nations] seems to go beyond international standards. . . . Within ASEAN, the practice seems . . . to question the right of a state to even comment on what another state does within what the latter considers to be domestic jurisdiction.”<sup>51</sup>

Speaking at the UNESCO headquarters in Paris, Xi provided insights to the reasoning behind China's perception of sovereignty—namely that “civilizations have come in different colors,”<sup>52</sup> that “all human civilizations are equal in terms of value,”<sup>53</sup> and, thus, “no one civilization can be judged superior to another.”<sup>54</sup> The final point he made is China's inclusiveness in the sense that “copying other civilizations mechanically or blindly is like cutting one's toes just to fit his shoes, which is not only impossible but also highly detrimental.”<sup>55</sup> This article terms this discursive practice as the *civilization-difference argument*, which is shown to be a recurring way in which China is contesting or resisting solidarizing tendencies. The understanding and practice of sovereignty within ERIS differs from the Chinese reading: internally member states are pooling their respective sovereignty.<sup>56</sup> The EU's policy on China, adopted in 2016, arguably demonstrated this (internal) reading of sovereignty. The policy made clear that “[the] EU must project a strong,

clear and unified voice in its approach to China”<sup>57</sup> and that “Member States should reinforce agreed EU positions in their bilateral relations with China, while the Commission and the EEAS [European External Action Service] should ensure that Member States are made aware when EU interests need to be safeguarded.”<sup>58</sup> The call for “EU coherence and cohesiveness is vital on the big policy choices and on the maintenance of the rules-based international order”<sup>59</sup> vis-à-vis China further illustrated the practice of pooled sovereignty also in a foreign policy context.

The discourse surrounding the condition of HR in Xinjiang province, specifically the internment of Uyghurs in reeducation camps, provides a further example for substantive disagreements related to the interpretation of sovereignty. Following a debate in the German Bundestag on the matter, the Chinese embassy issued a serious *démarche*, strongly protesting that the “Bundestag’s arbitrary allegations, . . . constitute a blatant intrusion into domestic affairs and a gross violation of China’s sovereignty.”<sup>60</sup> China’s invocation of the civilizational-difference argument—“Germany and China have a very different history and culture, and the understanding of Human Rights is not the same”<sup>61</sup>—in the context of defending “itself against the politicization and instrumentalization of Human Rights”<sup>62</sup> arguably provides an example for resistance to or contestation of solidarizing efforts on the part of Germany and the EU. Substantive disagreements regarding the interpretation and practice of sovereignty could not be identified in Sino-Italian discourse.

### ***International Law***

*International law* is “the bedrock institution on which the idea of international society stands or falls.”<sup>63</sup> It is the “Volume of Sacred Law” of the international society in the sense that within international law, the agreed-upon norms and rules are codified so that they can serve as the reference for determining legitimate state behavior and legitimacy in international relations for all members. The UN Charter and the UN Security Council (UNSC) are central to this codification of common institutions on a global level.<sup>64</sup> There exist further treaties and secondary organizations related to international law such as in the (solidarist) European legal system and the European Court of Justice on a subglobal level.<sup>65</sup>

The friction between Chinese and European conceptions of international law found expression in China’s position paper for the 69th Session of the UN General Assembly: “It is the goal of all countries to achieve the rule of law at the national and international levels. At the national level, countries are entitled to independently choose the models of rule of law that suit their national conditions. Countries with different models of rule of law should learn from each other and seek common development in a spirit of mutual respect and inclusiveness.”<sup>66</sup>

Recalling the third point of the civilization-difference argument—inclusiveness—reveals that the same was deployed here when China stated that there were different models of rule of law in different countries. This is in line with a pluralist interpretation of international law and strongly relates to the previously explicated Chinese practice of sovereignty on the national level. Looking at the international level, China stated, similar to the definition found in the joint declaration between President Xi and German chancellor Angela Merkel,<sup>67</sup> that “it is necessary to uphold the authority of the UN Charter, and strictly abide by universally recognized principles of international law such as sovereign equality and non-interference in others’ affairs.”<sup>68</sup>

It is necessary to look at the respectively differing interpretations of the same to understand the meaning of referencing the UN Charter—for the reference itself is subject to the same notion of polysemy as PIs in regional contexts. Statements made at the UNSC’s 7,389th session on the rule of law highlighted the core of norm contestation among China, the EU, and member states in relation to international law. Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi opened the debate by putting forward China’s reading of the content and role of the UN Charter and how it defined the UN: “The UN Charter affirms the strong determination of the international community *to prevent war and maintain lasting peace*. At the outset, the Charter defines the *purposes of the United Nations as maintaining international peace and security*, which embodies the world’s deep reflection over the two world wars and the great yearning of all countries to be free of war, fear and want” (emphasis added).<sup>69</sup>

The EU representative’s response made clear that the EU had a different reading of the preamble and the UN Charter: “But preventing future wars was not the only undertaking of the signatories of the Charter 70 years ago. The very same preambular passage of the Charter also stresses their determination *to reaffirm faith in fundamental human rights*, in the dignity and worth of the human person, in the equal rights of men and women and of nations large and small; . . . In its very first paragraphs, *the Charter thus defined the three pillars of this Organization: peace and security, human rights, and development*” (emphasis added).<sup>70</sup>

These remarks represented an open contestation vis-à-vis China’s reading of the UN Charter and the one-dimensional role of the UNSC, as “the European Union also believes that the Security Council has its own specific responsibilities with regard to the other two pillars,”<sup>71</sup> i.e., HR and development. The German envoy backed the EU position and made a case for universal HR when stating that there “is also a growing understanding that human rights should know no borders and that those responsible for the most egregious violations must be held accountable.”<sup>72</sup> In contrast, the Italian envoy, while stating that “Italy aligns itself

with the statement made by the European Union,<sup>73</sup> also made use of the civilization-difference argument highlighted earlier: “In the same spirit, Italy promotes respect for human rights—a key priority of our foreign policy—with an *inclusive and balanced approach, taking into account all of the different positions*” (emphasis added).<sup>74</sup>

The Italian response can arguably be viewed as a deviation from a cohesive line in European foreign policy vis-à-vis China. This line found expression in the EU’s strategy on China in 2016, with the purpose of the strategy expressed as, among other factors, to promote “respect for the rule of law and human rights within China and internationally.”<sup>75</sup> It also defined the EU’s understanding of a “rules-based international order [being] based on respect for international law, including international humanitarian and human rights law,”<sup>76</sup> and that “the EU should work with China to promote universal advancement of human rights, in particular compliance with international human rights standards at home and abroad.”<sup>77</sup> The reference to promoting universal HR is considered further evidence for solidarizing efforts on the EU and Germany’s part regarding interpretations of both sovereignty and international law. It is to these solidarizing efforts that FM Wang responded with outspoken rejection: “In international legislation, it is important to reflect countries’ concerns in a balanced manner and to resist the attempt to make the rules of certain countries as ‘international rules,’ and their standards ‘international standards.’”<sup>78</sup>

The differing Italian response highlights the absence of European unity or cohesion in discursive interaction with China and gives expression to the status quo of only limited European integration within the spheres of foreign policy and external relations. Moreover, statements provide insights on the contested and polysemic phrase of “rules-based international order.” Within the ERIS, such an order includes the establishment of global and universal HR, while the Chinese interpretation of international order is strictly pluralist and, thus, arguably contests the European, or Western, reading.

### ***Market Economy***

The *market economy* is the economic part of an operating system of contemporary international society that, with the help of international organizations like the World Trade Organization (WTO) and the International Monetary Fund, governs hegemonic stability and the liberalization of international trade and finance globally.<sup>79</sup> Historically, it is a primary institution of the Western core, but in times of modernity and globalization, it has also been adopted in regions formerly governed by mercantilist or state socialist approaches to economy and trade.<sup>80</sup> China’s domestic interpretation of the market can be perceived from Xi’s state-

ment outlining internal reforms at the G20 summit in 2013: “China will *strengthen the market system construction*, advance the structural reform on macroeconomic regulation and control, taxation, finance, investment, administrative system and other fields, and *give full play to the basic role of the market in resource allocation*” (emphasis added).<sup>81</sup>

At the 2013 World Economic Forum, Chinese premier Li Keqiang made further remarks regarding the reform of China’s economic system, stating that China had “endeavored to develop a mixed economy, relaxed market access, . . . encouraged more investment of the non-public sector, and provided greater space for business of various ownerships.”<sup>82</sup> The joint communique following the EU–China Summit explicated that the parties agreed to foster “their trade and investment relationship towards 2020 in a spirit of mutual benefit, by promoting open, transparent markets and a level-playing field.”<sup>83</sup>

The fact that it is a joint communique—bearing in mind the notion of polysemic institutions—does not mean that there was an agreement regarding the interpretation or practice of terms such as “open, transparent markets and a level-playing field.”<sup>84</sup> On the contrary, as the findings show, there is disagreement on such interpretations. China, on the one hand, pointed out it had chosen what it termed “socialism with Chinese characteristics”<sup>85</sup>—or “a mixed economy”<sup>86</sup>—as its (economic) development path. While this included giving “full play to the *basic* role of the market in resource allocation,” (emphasis added)<sup>87</sup> it also included “the visible hand,”<sup>88</sup>—governmental involvement in the economy. The EU, on the other hand, is a form of a liberal market economy with comparatively reduced involvement of the state in the economy and different market-related practices regarding private operators. As EC President Barroso put it, “[in] Europe we are reforming our social market economy.”<sup>89</sup> Thus, a level playing field needs to be seen before a backdrop of fundamentally differing economic systems and fundamentally different frames regarding both the market and the role of the government can be agreed upon.

The news of a bid by China’s Midea Group for the German KUKA corporation, a technology leader in robotics, made landfall in mid-2016. Midea eventually acquired a 94.5-percent stake in the company. The outspokenness of German minister of economic affairs and energy Sigmar Gabriel stood in stark contrast to the Italian response regarding ChemChina’s acquisition of Pirelli in spring 2015. At the time of bidding, the Italian minister of economic development Federica Guidi made a statement welcoming the investment: “The entry into the share capital of Pirelli by China Chemical is an operation that concerns a private company and, therefore, the Government is not entitled to intervene. That said, any

transaction that aims to consolidate and render even more national industrial competitive excellence is absolutely acceptable, just as is the case with Pirelli.”<sup>90</sup>

When questioned about KUKA at a press conference in May 2016, Gabriel responded by clarifying that it was essential to not make the debate about nationality, i.e., China, but about unequal practices regarding know-how transfer, and added, “And of course, I would find it appropriate if there was at least an alternative offer from Germany, or Europe. So that it can then be decided by the owners which of the offers is—for the companies that have the intent of disposition, but also for the future of the German industrial base—the ultimately better one.”<sup>91</sup> Acknowledging that there was some concern on the part of the German government regarding targeted bids for leading German companies and substantive disagreements with China over the manner of know-how transfers, he stated that one “cannot declare a state-led economy [Staatswirtschaft] to be a market economy. Those are the areas of conflict we have.”<sup>92</sup> In June 2016, Gabriel voiced the question of how Europe, as one of the most open market economies, was competing with state-subsidized companies from non-open market economies, stating, “the game is not protectionist versus market, but rather the game is open market versus state-capitalist intervention.”<sup>93</sup> Gabriel concluded that the debate was about “the contradiction between an open market economy [offene Volkswirtschaft] and a state-capitalist intervention economy [Interventionswirtschaft].”<sup>94</sup> During a meeting with Chancellor Merkel, Premier Li made China’s position regarding its status as (non-)market economy and obligations under WTO agreements clear when he stated that “China has fully implemented its commitment upon the entry of the WTO, and the EU and relevant parties should also fulfil their commitments.”<sup>95</sup> The differences in Italian and German discourse on Chinese investment and contestation of market-related practices were striking—the presented evidence speaks for itself.

A further example of contestation regarding the issue of reciprocity of foreign investment opportunities and the change in language—for example, the introduction of terms like “security,” “defending strategic interests,” “critical technologies and infrastructure”—can be perceived from Juncker’s State of the Union speech in September 2017: “Let me say once and for all: we are not naïve free traders. Europe must always defend its strategic interests. . . . This is why today we are proposing a new EU framework for investment screening. If a foreign, state-owned, company wants to purchase a European harbor, part of our energy infrastructure or a defense technology firm, this should only happen in transparency, with scrutiny and debate. It is a political responsibility to know what is going on in our own backyard so that we can protect our collective security if needed.”<sup>96</sup> A similar understanding can be derived from the EC’s report accompanying the policy proposal for an FDI screening mechanism:<sup>97</sup> “In this context, there is a risk

that in individual cases foreign investors may seek to acquire control of or influence in European undertakings whose activities have repercussions on critical technologies, infrastructure, inputs, or sensitive information. This risk arises especially but not only when foreign investors are state owned or controlled, including through financing or other means of direction. Such acquisitions may allow the States in question to use these assets to the detriment not only of the EU's technological edge but also its security and public order."<sup>98</sup>

In March 2019, the EC postulated that "China can no longer be regarded as a developing country,"<sup>99</sup> and, while systemic differences had been acknowledged by both the EU and China before, the classification of China as a "systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance"<sup>100</sup> marked a sharp turn in EU discourse and language.

### **Conclusion and Policy Implications**

With respect to the previously discussed findings regarding the changing role of the BRI in Sino–European relations and norm contestation regarding sovereignty, international law, and market economy, this article advances four arguments.

First, contemporary Chinese foreign policy, of which the BRI framework is the arguable cornerstone, perceivably presents a challenge to EU unity and cohesion, especially in member states' foreign policies vis-à-vis China and their respective positioning toward the BRI. Moreover, this highlighted the implications of only partial EU integration and required unanimity in EUCO decisions, despite the EC's efforts to create an alternative to the BRI in line with EU values.

Second, norm contestation of sovereignty, international law, and the market economy in Sino–European discourse stems primarily from differing interpretations and related practices of these PIs. That is to say, the EU, Germany, and Italy—as members of the ERIS—have a liberal-solidarist understanding and practice of these three institutions, while China, as a member of the narrow EARIS, interprets the institutions from a pluralist perspective. Thematically, the contestation could be summarized as universal HR versus noninterference, and "social market economy" versus "state-capitalist economy."

Third, the relations between China and the EU and Germany showed an increasing degree of substantive disagreements in the context of all three PIs, examples are the aforementioned Chinese démarche and the EU's labeling of China as "a systemic rival promoting alternative models of governance."<sup>101</sup> Sino–Italian relations and discourse were shown to be less confrontative, with Italy more open to the BRI and Chinese inbound investment.<sup>102</sup> In this context, the article makes the argument that throughout the investigated period, the BRI did indeed present a challenge to the cohesiveness of the EU's foreign policy vis-à-vis China. The

findings further demonstrate how a strategy or foreign policy such as China's BRI can become both the projection screen and direct subject to norm contestation and, as foreign policy, evidently enshrine the respective interpretations and practices of sovereignty, international law, and the market economy.

And fourth, this article argues that the findings do indeed point to China contesting solidarist interpretations of PIs, for example, resisting solidarization, in its exchanges with the EU, Germany, and Italy respectively. As to whether China is actually reconfiguring the normative fabric of global politics and, in doing so, challenging a Western-liberal order, the answer depends on the respective understanding of the concept of *hegemony*. This concept yet again appears to be polysemic, similar to PIs, which becomes apparent when looking at China's insistence on noninterference, HR as a domestic matter, and the different choice of an economic system. In that regard, one could argue that in contesting these practices, i.e., rejecting solidarization, and the underlying liberal-solidarist framing, which ultimately stand for a Western-liberal order, China is proposing an alternative, pluralist order. Whether this alternative order succeeds to reconfigure the normative fabric global politics—provided such is the purpose—remains to be seen.

**Table 2. Solidarist and pluralist frames of PIs**

Primary Institution	European liberal-solidarist frames	Chinese pluralist frames
<b>Sovereignty</b>	Relational sovereignty: universal HR and humanitarian rights, adherence to liberal order	Absolute sovereignty: noninterference, self-determination, civilizational-difference argument
<b>International Law</b>	Reference for national legislation—solidarization UN Charter with three pillars: "peace and security, human rights, and development"*	Not to become national legislation—contestation of solidarization. UN Charter emphasis on one pillar: "prevent war and maintain lasting peace"†
<b>Market Economy</b>	Open market economy, reciprocity in FDI regulation, comparatively reduced role of state and government	Visible and invisible hand, i.e., active role of state and government

\* Thomas Mayr-Harting, "Statement by Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nation, at the 7389th UNSC Meeting" (speech, UNSC 7389th Meeting, New York, UN, 23 February 2015).

† Wang Yi, "Wang Yi: China, a Staunch Defender and Builder of International Rule of Law" (Beijing, China, 24 October 2014), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

Several points can be made when reflecting on the theoretical and policy implications of both findings and arguments. First and foremost, the ES as an international society approach, with its concept of PIs, adds to the understanding of the normative impact and implications of contemporary Chinese foreign policy generally and the BRI in particular. Moreover, with China having expanded the geo-economic scope of the BRI over the past years, the emerging field of BRI studies proves promising for furthering the regional agenda of the ES, as it allows analyz-

ing the interactions and impact of one actor with many others from and in different regions and RIS around the globe. Secondly, both the concepts of polysemic PIs and solidarization are relevant and viable analytical tools in the study of international relations between actors from different RISs—especially when comparing Western regional orders with non-Western ones.

Further, this article shows how permeable and receptive the ES is of the scholarship on norm contestation—a connection that has been surprisingly neglected so far. Introducing the notion of polysemy proved to be geared for dissecting and identifying differing interpretations of PIs in discourse over chronological context. Evidence for solidarization could be identified primarily in EU and German discourse, while *pluralization*—the promotion and insistence on pluralist readings of sovereignty and international law above all—was the defining pattern for China’s discursive behavior. Moreover, the identified civilization-difference argument might open up to further research on how non-Western perspectives, such as China’s, inform state behavior and practice of PIs in relation to the debate on the standard of civilization and international society.<sup>103</sup> Concerning policy relevance, the findings and arguments of this article demonstrate the importance and benefit of going beyond realist or liberal theory when analyzing contemporary Chinese foreign policy and the implications of the BRI for global and regional orders. This article shows that the fundamental disagreements and friction among the EU, its member states, and China are rooted in fundamentally differing values and principles. Thus, to fully grasp the ramifications of the BRI, experts working in security and foreign affairs need to utilize analytical tools that allow for a focus on precisely these differences of values, norms, and principles. The international society approach—ES theory—with its concept of polysemic PIs and the distinction between solidarist and pluralist frames can demonstrably deliver such focus. It can educate experts and practitioners in the field of international relations in their understanding of fundamental, value-based disagreements among states, governments, and statespersons. Lastly, cognitive linguistics might provide a useful further analytical and explanatory tool, considering the discovery of different solidarist and pluralist frames in Sino–European discourse, for example, metaphor theory<sup>104</sup> and political framing.<sup>105</sup>

#### **Simon F. Taeuber**

Mr. Taeuber is a doctoral candidate in international relations at the University of St Andrews (Scotland) where he also teaches on several modules, e.g. *Concepts in Global Politics* and *Foreign Policy and Diplomacy in Global Politics*. He holds an MSc in global studies from Roskilde University (Denmark) and a BA in international business from Duale Hochschule Baden-Wuerttemberg Stuttgart (Germany). His main areas of interest and research include Sino–European and Sino–Latin American relations, respective foreign policies, the impact of the Belt and Road Initiative on regional and global orders, and disorder in social systems. He won the Critical Edge Alliance’s Best Student Paper award in 2018 and has presented his research at numerous international conferences. He is also the Founding Director of Stonepine Research and in that role advises practitioners of international relations on matters of foreign relations, policy, and strategy.

## Acknowledgments

The author would like to thank Laust Schouenborg for his constructive feedback and comments during the initial research process. Moreover, thank you to Filippo Costa Buranelli for his valuable comments and questions on this piece. A thank you to Mads H. Højgaard, Sophia Erhard, Federico Jensen, Lukas J. Friga, and Ahmed Abozaid for their helpful comments on earlier drafts. Lastly, many thanks to Bettina Ahrens, Peter Wilson, Yongjin Zhang, Nicolás Terradas, and Ali Murat Kurşun for their comments and questions at EISAPEC19 in Sofia.

## Notes

1. Maximilian Mayer, *Rethinking the Silk-Road: China's Belt and Road Initiative and Emerging Eurasian Relations* (New York, NY: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2017); Lars Erslev Andersen et al, "One Belt on Road" and China's Westward Pivot: Past, Present and Future (Copenhagen: DIIS, 2017); and Yu Cheng, Lilei Song, and Lihe Huang, eds., *The Belt & Road Initiative in the Global Arena* (Singapore: Palgrave Macmillan, 2018).

2. William A Callahan, "China's 'Asia Dream': The Belt Road Initiative and the New Regional Order," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 1, no. 3 (September 2016): 226–43, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891116647806>; and Karin Marie Fierke and Francisco Antonio-Alfonso, "Language, Entanglement and the New Silk Roads," *Asian Journal of Comparative Politics* 3, no. 3 (September 2018): 194–206, <https://doi.org/10.1177/2057891118762521>.

3. Hedley Bull, *The Anarchical Society: A Study of Order in World Politics* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 1977), 13.

4. Laust Schouenborg, *The Scandinavian International Society: Primary Institutions and Binding Forces, 1815–2010* (London: Routledge, 2012), 45.

5. Arie Marcelo Kacowicz, *The Impact of Norms in International Society: The Latin American Experience, 1881–2001* (Notre Dame, IN: University of Notre Dame Press, 2005); and Filippo Costa Buranelli, "Do You Know What I Mean?' 'Not Exactly': English School, Global International Society and the Polysemy of Institutions," *Global Discourse* 5, no. 3 (3 July 2015): 499–514, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2015.1053195>.

6. Bettina Ahrens, "The European Union Between Solidarist Change and Pluralist Re-Enactment," in *International Organization in the Anarchical Society: The Institutional Structure of World Order*, ed. Tonny Brems Knudsen and Cornelia Navari, Palgrave Studies in International Relations (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 265–92, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71622-0\\_11](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71622-0_11); and Tonny Brems Knudsen, "Fundamental Institutions and International Organizations: Solidarist Architecture," in *International Organization in the Anarchical Society: The Institutional Structure of World Order*, ed. Tonny Brems Knudsen and Cornelia Navari, Palgrave Studies in International Relations (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 175–202, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71622-0\\_8](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71622-0_8).

7. Ahrens, "European Union between Solidarist Change and Pluralist Re-Enactment," 266.

8. Ahrens, "European Union between Solidarist Change and Pluralist Re-Enactment," 266.

9. Knudsen, "Fundamental Institutions and International Organizations," 177.

10. Knudsen, "Fundamental Institutions and International Organizations," 177.

11. Ahrens, "European Union between Solidarist Change and Pluralist Re-Enactment," 266.

12. Bettina Ahrens and Thomas Diez, "Solidarisation and Its Limits: The EU and the Transformation of International Society," *Global Discourse* 5, no. 3 (3 July 2015): 341–55, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2015.1053189>.

13. Antje Wiener, *A Theory of Contestation*, SpringerBriefs in Political Science (Berlin: Springer Berlin Heidelberg, 2014), 1–7, <https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-642-55235-9>.

14. Thomas Diez, Ian Manners, and Richard G. Whitman, “The Changing Nature of International Institutions in Europe: The Challenge of the European Union,” *Journal of European Integration* 33, no. 2 (1 March 2011): 117–38, <https://doi.org/10.1080/07036337.2011.543522>; Ahrens and Diez, “Solidarisation and Its Limits”; and Ahrens, “European Union between Solidarist Change and Pluralist Re-Enactment.”

15. Barry Buzan and Yongjin Zhang, *Contesting International Society in East Asia* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Costa Buranelli, “Do You Know What I Mean?”; and Yongjin Zhang, “Regional International Society in East Asia? A Critical Investigation,” *Global Discourse* 5, no. 3 (3 July 2015): 360–73, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2015.1053190>.

16. Robert Jackson, *The Global Covenant: Human Conduct in a World of States* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2003), <http://www.oxfordscholarship.com/>; Kalevi J. Holsti, *Taming the Sovereigns: Institutional Change in International Politics*, vol. 94 (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004); and Buranelli, “Do You Know What I Mean?”

17. Xi Jinping, Herman Van Rompuy, and José Manuel Barroso, “Joint Statement Deepening the China-EU Comprehensive Strategic Partnership for Mutual Benefit” (Brussels, Belgium, 31 March 2014), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

18. NDRC, FMPRC, and MCPRC, *Vision and Actions on Jointly Building Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road* (National Development and Reform Commission, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and Ministry of Commerce of the People’s Republic of China, with State Council authorization, 2015), <http://en.ndrc.gov.cn/>.

19. NDRC, FMPRC, and MCPRC, *Vision and Actions*.

20. NDRC, FMPRC, and MCPRC, *Vision and Actions*.

21. NDRC, FMPRC, and MCPRC, *Vision and Actions*.

22. NDRC, FMPRC, and MCPRC, *Vision and Actions*.

23. EC and Federica Mogherini, “Elements for a New EU Strategy on China,” Joint Communication to the European Parliament and the Council (Brussels: European Commission and the High Representative and Vice-President Federica Mogherini, 22 June 2016), 10, <http://eeas.europa.eu/>.

24. Brigitte Zypries, Michel Sapin, and Carlo Calenda, “Letter to Commissioner Malmström by German, French and Italian Ministers for Economy,” Joint Letter (Berlin, Paris, Rome: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, Ministère de l’Économie et des Finances, Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico d’Italia, February 2017), <https://www.bmw.de/>.

25. EC and EEAS, “Belt and Road Forum - EU Common Messages,” Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation (Brussels, Belgium: European Commission and the European External Action Service, 14 May 2017), <https://eeas.europa.eu/>.

26. Xi Jinping and et al, “Joint Communique of the Leaders Roundtable of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation - Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation” (Beijing, China: Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation, 16 May 2017), <http://www.beltandroadforum.org/>.

27. As cited in Simina Mistreanu and Joern Petring, “EU States to Refuse to Sign Trade Statement at New ‘Silk Road’ Forum,” *Dpa International*, 14 May 2017, <http://www.dpa-international.com/>.

28. As cited in Mistreanu and Petring, “EU States to Refuse to Sign.”

29. Paolo Gentiloni, “Gentiloni a Pechino, Conferenza Stampa” (press conference, Beijing, China: Palazzo Chigi, 2017), *YouTube*, translation added, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

30. ITA and PRC, “Memorandum of Understanding between the Government of the Italian Republic and the Government of the People’s Republic of China on Cooperation within the Framework of the Silk Road Economic Belt and the 21st Century Maritime Silk Road Initiative,” Memorandum of Understanding (Rome, Italy: Governments of the Republic of Italy and the People’s Republic of China, 23 March 2019), <http://www.governo.it/>.

31. Welt am Sonntag, “Europa: Wir müssen weg von der Einstimmigkeit in der Außenpolitik,” (interview, Berlin, Germany: Auswärtiges Amt der BRD, 24 March 2019), <https://www.auswaertiges-amt.de/>.

32. Welt am Sonntag, “Europa.”

33. Steer Davies Gleave, “Research for TRAN Committee: The New Silk Route - Opportunities and Challenges for EU Transport” (Brussels, Belgium: European Parliament, Policy Department for Structural and Cohesion Policies, January 2018); Hui Lu et al., “China Belt and Road Initiative: Measuring the Impact of Improving Transportation Connectivity on Trade in the Region” (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2018), <https://doi.org/10.7249/RR2625>; PRC, “China, Malta Sign MoU for B&R Cooperation” (Malta: Embassy of the People’s Republic of China in the Republic of Malta, 8 November 2018), <http://mt.china-embassy.org/>; FMPRC, “Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Lu Kang’s Regular Press Conference on March 6, 2019” (press conference, Beijing, Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, 6 March 2019), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>; PT and PRC, “Declaração Conjunta Entre a República Portuguesa e a República Popular Da China Sobre o Reforço Da Parceria Estratégica Global” (Lisbon: Republic of Portugal and People’s Republic of China, 5 December 2018).

34. EUCO, “Council Decision (EU) 2018/1907 of 20 December 2018 on the Conclusion of the Agreement between the European Union and Japan for an Economic Partnership,” Pub. L. No. 32018D1907, 330 OJ L (2018), <http://data.europa.eu/>; and Jean-Claude Juncker, Shinzo Abe, and EC, “The Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure Between the European Union and Japan,” 2019, <https://eas.europa.eu/>.

35. NDRC, FMPRC, and MCPRC, *Vision and Actions*.

36. Juncker, Abe, and EC, “Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure.”

37. Juncker, Abe, and EC, “Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure.”

38. Juncker, Abe, and EC, “Partnership on Sustainable Connectivity and Quality Infrastructure.”

39. Shinzo Abe, “Japan and the EU: The Strong and Steady Pillars Supporting Many Bridges” (Brussels, Belgium: EU-Asia Connectivity: Building Bridges for a Sustainable Future, 27 September 2019).

40. Jean-Claude Juncker, « Discours d’ouverture Du Président Jean-Claude Juncker Au Europa Connectivity Forum » (Brussels, Belgium: European Commission, 27 September 2019).

41. Barry Buzan, *From International to World Society? English School Theory and the Social Structure of Globalisation* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 178.

42. Costa Buranelli, “Do You Know What I Mean?.”

43. Ahrens, “European Union between Solidarist Change and Pluralist Re-Enactment”; and Ahrens and Diez, “Solidarisation and Its Limits.”

44. Knudsen, “Fundamental Institutions and International Organizations.”

45. Xi Jinping, “Promote Friendship Between Our People and Work Together to Build a Bright Future” (speech, Nazarbayev University, Astana, Khazakstan, Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, 7 September 2013), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

46. Herman Van Rompuy, "Remarks by President of the European Council Herman Van Rompuy Following the 16th EU-China Summit" (speech, 16th EU-China Summit, Beijing, , European Council, 21 November 2013), <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/>.
47. Ahrens and Diez, "Solidarisation and Its Limits."
48. Xi Jinping, "Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at the Körber Foundation" (speech, Forum Für Impulse, Berlin, Germany, Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 28 March 2014), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.
49. Xi, "Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at the Körber Foundation."
50. Buzan and Zhang, *Contesting International Society in East Asia*; and Costa Buranelli, "Do You Know What I Mean?."
51. Tay (2008) as cited in Costa Buranelli, "Do You Know What I Mean?," 506.
52. Xi Jinping, "Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at UNESCO Headquarters" (speech, Paris, France, Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 28 March 2014), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.
53. Xi, "Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at UNESCO Headquarters."
54. Xi, "Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at UNESCO Headquarters."
55. Xi, "Speech by H.E. Xi Jinping President of the People's Republic of China at UNESCO Headquarters."
56. Diez, Manners, and Whitman, "Changing Nature of International Institutions in Europe"; Ahrens, "European Union Between Solidarist Change and Pluralist Re-Enactment."
57. EC and Mogherini, "Elements for a New EU Strategy on China," 4.
58. EC and Mogherini, "Elements for a New EU Strategy on China."
59. EC and Mogherini, "Elements for a New EU Strategy on China."
60. PRC, "Stellungnahme Des Sprechers Der Chinesischen Botschaft in Deutschland Zur Beratung Im Deutschen Bundestag Über so Genannte Menschenrechtslage in Der Chinesischen Provinz Xinjiang" (Germany: Embassy of the People's Republic of China in the Federal Republic of Germany, 9 November 2018), translation added, <http://www.china-botschaft.de/>.
61. PRC, "Stellungnahme Des Sprechers Der Chinesischen Botschaft."
62. PRC, "Stellungnahme Des Sprechers Der Chinesischen Botschaft."
63. James Mayall, *World Politics: Progress and Its Limits* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000), 94.
64. Dennis R. Schmidt, "Institutionalising Morality: The UN Security Council and the Fundamental Norms of the International Legal Order," in *International Organization in the Anarchical Society: The Institutional Structure of World Order*, Palgrave Studies in International Relations, ed. Tonny Brems Knudsen and Cornelia Navari (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2019), 99–125, [https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71622-0\\_5](https://doi.org/10.1007/978-3-319-71622-0_5).
65. Jorge M. Lasmar, Danny Zahreddine, and Delber Andrade Gribel Lage, "Understanding Regional and Global Diffusion in International Law: The Case for a Non-Monolithic Approach to Institutions," *Global Discourse* 5, no. 3 (3 July 2015): 470–96, <https://doi.org/10.1080/23269995.2015.1053197>.
66. FMPRC, "Position Paper of the People's Republic of China at the 69th Session of the United Nations General Assembly" (Beijing, China: United Nations General Assembly, 5 September 2014), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

67. GER and PRC, “Joint Declaration between Germany and China” (Berlin, Germany: Federal Republic of Germany and Peoples’ Republic of China, 28 March 2014), <https://archiv.bundesregierung.de/>.

68. FMPRC, “Position Paper of the People’s Republic of China

69. Wang Yi, “Carry Forward the Purposes and Principles of the UN Charter and Build a New Type of International Relations Featuring Win-Win Cooperation” (speech, UNSC 7389th Meeting, New York, UN, 23 February 2015), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

70. Thomas Mayr-Harting, “Statement by Thomas Mayr-Harting, Head of the Delegation of the European Union to the United Nation, at the 7389th UNSC Meeting” (speech, UNSC 7389th Meeting, New York, UN, 23 February 2015).

71. Mayr-Harting, “Statement by Thomas Mayr-Harting.”

72. Harald Braun, “Statement by Harald Braun, Permanent Representative of Germany to the United Nations, at the 7389th UNSC Meeting” (speech, UNSC 7389th Meeting, New York, UN, 23 February 2015), <https://undocs.org/>.

73. Inigo Lambertini, “Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy and Charge d’Affaires, A.I. to the United Nations, Ambassador Inigo Lambertini, at the Security Council Open Debate on Maintenance of International Peace and Security” (speech, UNSC 7389th Meeting, New York, UN, 23 February 2015), <https://italyun.esteri.it/>.

74. Lambertini, “Statement by the Deputy Permanent Representative of Italy.”

75. EC and Mogherini, “Elements for a New EU Strategy on China,” 3.

76. EC and Mogherini, “Elements for a New EU Strategy on China,” 15.

77. EC and Mogherini, “Elements for a New EU Strategy on China,” 15.

78. Wang Yi, “Wang Yi: China, a Staunch Defender and Builder of International Rule of Law” (Beijing, China, 24 October 2014), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

79. Buzan, *From International to World Society?*; and Barry Buzan, *An Introduction to the English School of International Relations: The Societal Approach* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2014).

80. Barry Buzan and George Lawson, “Capitalism and the Emergent World Order,” *International Affairs* 90, no. 1 (1 January 2014): 71–91, <https://doi.org/10.1111/1468-2346.12096>; and Buzan, *Introduction to the English School of International Relations*.

81. FMPRC, “Xi Jinping Attends Eighth G20 Leaders’ Summit and Delivers Important Speech” (press release, Foreign Ministry of the Peoples’ Republic of China, 6 September 2013), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

82. Li Keqiang, “The Chinese Economy: Reform and Innovation for Sustained and Healthy Development” (speech, World Economic Forum: Annual Meeting of New Champions, Davos, Switzerland: Foreign Ministry of the People’s Republic of China, 11 September 2013), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

83. EC and PRC, “EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation,” 2013, 5, <http://eeas.europa.eu/>.

84. EC and PRC, “EU-China 2020 Strategic Agenda for Cooperation,” 5.

85. Xi Jinping, *The Governance of China*, vol. 1, 1st ed. (Beijing: Foreign Language Press Co. Ltd., 2014).

86. Li, “Chinese Economy.”

87. FMPRC, “Xi Jinping Attends Eighth G20 Leaders’ Summit.”

88. Xi, *The Governance of China*, 1:128.

89. José Manuel Barroso, “Statement by President Barroso at the Press Conference of the EU-China Summit” (speech, 16th EU-China Summit, Beijing, China: European Commission, 21 November 2013), <http://europa.eu/>.

90. MISE, “Pirelli - Chemchina: Guidi, Governo Non Ha Titolo a Intervenire Ma Ogni Operazione Che Rafforzi Un'importante Realtà Industriale Italiana va Accolta Favorevolmente?” (press release, Ministero dello Sviluppo Economico d'Italia, 27 March 2015), <https://www.mise.gov.it/>.

91. BMWi, “Pressekonferenz Zur Mittelstandskonferenz” (press conference, Zukunft Mittelstand: Politik Und Wirtschaft Im Dialog, Berlin, Germany: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, 2016), *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

92. BMWi, “Pressekonferenz Zur Mittelstandskonferenz.”

93. BMWi, “Bundesminister Gabriel Zum EEG 2016 in Der Bundespressekonferenz” (press conference, Berlin, Germany: Bundesministerium für Wirtschaft und Energie, 2016), *YouTube*, <https://www.youtube.com/>.

94. BMWi, “Bundesminister Gabriel Zum EEG 2016.”

95. FMPRC, “Li Keqiang and Chancellor Angela Merkel of Germany Jointly Meet the Press” (press release, Foreign Ministry of the People's Republic of China, 13 June 2016), <https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/>.

96. Jean-Claude Juncker, “President Jean-Claude Juncker's State of the Union Address 2017” (speech, Brussels, Belgium: European Commission, 13 September 2017), <http://europa.eu/>.

97. The Regulation 2019/452 was ratified on 19 March 2019.

98. EC, “Welcoming Foreign Direct Investment While Protecting Essential Interests”, Communication from the Commission to the European Parliament, the European Council, the Council, the European Economic and Social Committee and the Committee of the Regions” (Brussels, Belgium: European Commission, 13 September 2017), <https://eur-lex.europa.eu/>.

99. EC, “EU-China – A Strategic Outlook,” European Commission contribution to the European Council (Brussels, Belgium: European Commission, 12 March 2019), <https://ec.europa.eu/>.

100. EC, “EU-China – A Strategic Outlook.”

101. EC, “EU-China – A Strategic Outlook.”

102. The difference in strength of economy against the backdrop of the Great Financial Crisis's long-term effects could be argued as one explanation for this difference. However, given recent domestic political developments in Italy, further investigation is required on the internal member state level.

103. Gerrit W. Gong, *The Standard of “Civilization” in International Society*, vol. 20 (Oxford: Clarendon Press Oxford, 1984).

104. George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Metaphors We Live By* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1980); George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, *Philosophy in the Flesh: The Embodied Mind and Its Challenge to Western Thought* (New York: Basic Books, 1999); and George Lakoff, *Moral Politics: What Conservatives Know That Liberals Don't* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996).

105. George Lakoff and Elisabeth Wehling, *Your Brain's Politics: How the Science of Mind Explains the Political Divide, Societas: Essays in Political & Cultural Criticism* (Exeter, UK: Imprint Academic, 2016); Elisabeth Wehling, *Politisches Framing: Wie Eine Nation Sich Ihr Denken Einredet – Und Daraus Politik Macht*, Edition Medienpraxis 14 (Köln: Herbert von Halem Verlag, 2016); Elisabeth Wehling, “Politics and Framing,” in *The Routledge Handbook of Language and Media*, 1st ed., ed. Colleen Cotter and Daniel Perrin (London: Routledge, 2017), 136–50, <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781315673134-11>.

# The Battle Is Almost Lost

## China's Industrial Challenge to European Shipbuilding

DR. LISELOTTE ODGAARD

**S**hips may be the new battleground for the European Union's (EU) willingness to loosen its antitrust rules. Cruise ship builders Fincantieri in Italy and Chantiers de l'Atlantique in France attempt to create an industrial heavyweight to counter China's rise as a cruise ship builder. These companies argue that if European shipbuilders continue to be constrained by rules protecting competition in Europe, Chinese companies with significant financial resources and with technological capacity comparable to that of Europe will take hold of the European shipbuilding market and outcompete European companies.



*(US Navy photo by Mass Communication Specialist 2nd Class Kevin S. O'Brien)*

**Figure 1. Fincantieri Shipyard.** US officials tour the Fincantieri Shipyard in Genoa, Italy, the largest shipyard in Europe.

However, the battle for European shipbuilding is already almost lost. Beijing's advantage is China's willingness to engage in intellectual property theft, which is illegal under World Trade Organization rules. Through intangible technology transfers by means of direct investments, mergers and acquisitions, research cooperation, and the transfer of data in nonphysical form, China has made major inroads into the European shipbuilding industry. In many cases, China has already taken over companies or redirected companies' production to areas that have not

yet been hit by competition from China. In other words, the European maritime industry is very close to losing the ongoing battle with China for shipbuilding. Here is how it happened.

Europe's maritime industry has a strong supply chain in northern Europe, which China has accessed, either through design collaboration agreements or through acquisitions. China copies advanced innovative ship designs, often resulting in domestic copies of these designs within as little as a year. Provided the copy is successful, China starts developing a domestic supply chain and acquires companies that have key technologies in the supply chain, such as engine producers.

The final step is to establish economies of scale by consolidating the Chinese design competencies in one large company, such as China State Shipbuilding Corporation (CSSC). This state-owned enterprise is the world's biggest shipbuilding corporation and has enormous financial backing from the Chinese state. In 2019, the Chinese government merged the country's top two shipbuilders, CSSC and China Shipbuilding Industry Corporation (CSIC), which has a global market share of 20 percent. The new super-conglomerate is expected to greatly boost China's shipbuilding industry and facilitate the building of a strong navy. Through illegitimate market economic practices, China is positioning itself as an industrial civilian and naval shipbuilding giant capable of significantly reducing the market share of Western companies.

In 2019, the European Commission blocked a merger of the largest regional suppliers in the European rail market, Alstom in France and Siemens in Germany, despite prior French and German governmental approval, because the Commission believed that the merger would harm competitiveness. The risk is high that the newly appointed Commission will repeat the mistake regarding Europe's maritime industry with reference to their understanding that China is not yet competitive in the market for cruise liners.

The Commission's lack of forward thinking on China's industrial policies and the consequences for European shipbuilding has received almost no attention in Western debates despite the serious economic and security challenges posed by China's emergence as a major force in the shipbuilding industry. European and US competitiveness is threatened across a wide range of maritime productions related to the building of ships such as cruise ships, cargo ships, and frigates. This could lead to a loss of jobs and profit. In the long term, it could also lead to a loss of standard setting influence, a development that is already starting to emerge in some high-tech sectors where China has taken the lead. At the moment, China is experimenting with the establishment of a standardization organization that would be available to partners of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's program for global economic development. Standard setting can be used by China

as a barrier for companies from non-BRI countries to enter markets, because such countries do not have access to the key technologies and designs required to meet the standards.

The security challenges arising from Chinese shipbuilding are equally worrying. China is on the threshold of establishing economies of scale in shipbuilding, producing commercial and military vessels in large quantities. China has already quickly expanded its naval forces and continues to develop the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) into a global force to protect China's global economic and security interests. The PLAN's latest Chinese-produced surface and subsurface platforms such as missile-guided destroyers, high-capability intelligence collection ships, and autonomous underwater vehicles are key to future naval warfare. China is producing naval platforms at the same production sites as its commercial fleet, again aiming at economies of scale to make China a major independent arms manufacturer. This development enables China to carry out naval operations beyond China's immediate neighborhood and poses a threat in regions such as the Americas and the Arctic—far from China's shores.

Instead of protecting internal European competitiveness, the European Commission needs to focus on saving European industries from state-supported Chinese competition across a wide range of industries. This can only be done by allowing Europe to build companies sufficiently large to compete globally. The threat to Europe's economic health does not come from within. It comes from China's global competition.

**Dr. Liselotte Odgaard, Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute**

Dr. Odgaard (bachelor's, master's, and PhD in political science from Aarhus University, and master's degree in international studies from the University of Warwick) is a visiting senior fellow at Hudson Institute. Her work focuses on policy analysis in the field of Chinese and Indo-Pacific security, US–China–Europe relations, and Arctic policy. Previously, Odgaard was a visiting scholar at institutions such as Harvard University, the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars, and the Norwegian Nobel Institute. She is the author of numerous monographs, books, peer-reviewed articles, and research papers on Chinese and Asia-Pacific security, and she is a frequent commentator on these issues in the media. Recent publications include “European Engagement in the Indo-Pacific: The Interplay between Institutional and State-Level Naval Diplomacy,” *Asia Policy* 14, no. 4 (October 2019): 129–59 and “Europe's Place in Sino-U.S. Competition,” in *Strategic Asia 2020: Sino-U.S. Competition for Global Influence*, ed. Ashley J. Tellis, Alison Szalwinski, and Michael Willis (Seattle: National Bureau of Asian Research, 2020), 277–304. She regularly participates in policy dialogues such as the Arctic Circle Assembly in Reykjavík, Iceland, and the Xiangshan Forum in Beijing, China.

# Radicalization in Prisons and Mosques in France

VINAYAK DALMIA

France has the largest Islamic population in Europe (~5.7 million) and one of the largest percentages of total population (~8.8 percent), along with Sweden, Bulgaria, and Cyprus.<sup>1</sup> While the Arab Spring and associated conflict in the Middle East have triggered a significant influx of migrants into the country, France has been a destination for immigrants from its former colonies like Morocco and Algeria since the second half of the twentieth century. While many issues regarding radicalization stem from migration stretching back decades, the rapid increase in immigrants from war-torn areas, combined with prevalent Islamist extremism, presents extremely serious issues for the French government. For perspective, the Islamic population in the country in 2011 was roughly 4.7 million, or 7.5 percent of the total population.<sup>2</sup> However, as France refrains from conducting censuses on the basis of religion, there are no official statistics about the subject—only estimates.

The phenomenon of Muslim immigration to France became significant in the 1960s, following the granting of asylum to hundreds of thousands of Algerians who fought on France's behalf in the Algerian War of Independence. After that, an economic boom led to the country welcoming millions of immigrants, many of whom were Muslim. While the French polity and society has continued from that time to be welcoming and accommodating of cultural and religious differences, many present-day points of contention regarding Islam were prevalent even before the significant Wahhabi and Salafist radicalization that is noted today.<sup>3</sup> These include conflicts over the *hijab*, extremists silencing of moderate Muslim voices, poor living conditions and ghettos, and so forth.<sup>4</sup> Islamic traditions have often clashed with French ideals, as exemplified by former French Interior Minister Charles Pasqua's statement that has been echoed by later presidents: "It is not enough simply to have Islam in France. There must now be a French Islam."<sup>5</sup>

Since 2011, the world has had to deal with a shift in tactics by terrorist groups because of factors such as the phenomenal progress seen in digital communications and technology, as well as increased radicalization aimed at migrants and "home-grown" terrorists. This is reflected in France as well, with major attacks like the January 2015 *Charlie Hebdo* shootings, November 2015 Paris shootings and bombings, and the July 2016 Nice vehicle attack (accompanied by myriad smaller attacks), all in the name of radical Islam. Similarly, as of 2018 an estimated 2000 French

nationals traveled to the Middle East to fight for the Islamic State of Syria and the Levant (ISIL).<sup>6</sup> While keeping in mind the significant roles technology plays in radicalization today, one must not forget the continuing influence other organizations and institutions like mosques and prisons have played in radicalization.

French Muslims have historically suffered poor socioeconomic conditions as compared to other groups, with higher rates of unemployment, gentrification and ghettoized living spaces, and increasing Islamophobia and discrimination.<sup>7</sup> This is a distinct phenomenon even culturally, where the French word for suburbs, *banlieue*, is understood to be used only with negative connotations because of their poor living conditions and large, visible Muslim populations.<sup>8</sup> Youth unemployment in Sevrans and Grigny, both suburbs of Paris with visible Muslim populations, is over 40 percent. In 2005, martial law was declared to quell riots across suburbs in response to the death of two teenagers who were evading the police.<sup>9</sup>

While many commentators and studies would like to make the easier rationalization for radicalization, that of poor socioeconomic conditions and poor integration with French society,<sup>10</sup> the issue is far more complex. For instance, a study by the *Centre de prévention contre les dérives sectaires liées à l'Islam* in 2014 stated that 67 percent of the radicalized youth the center studied belonged to a middle-class backgrounds and 17 percent came from an upper-class backgrounds.<sup>11</sup> Related studies have also reiterated that poor socioeconomic conditions alone cannot explain patterns of radicalization in countries like France.<sup>12</sup> While socioeconomic backgrounds definitely influence the radicalization of individuals, such as through institutions like the prison system, it is clearly only one aspect of a larger problem many countries in Europe must deal with immediately.



(Photo: Twitter, @ManikTyagi)

**Figure 1. Riots.** French Muslim youths rioting in Paris during a July 2014 anti-Israel demonstration.

As can be evinced from France's recent counter-radicalization and antiterrorism measures, mosques are often the first step in influencing individuals and making them sympathetic toward radical views and a precursor to some choosing to pick up arms against the state. France has approximately 2,500 mosques and prayer halls, and in just nine months after the November 2015 Paris attacks, 20 were shut down for preaching radical Salafist ideologies.<sup>13</sup> After the introduction of a controversial antiterrorism law in November 2017, a further seven mosques were shut down for similar reasons.<sup>14</sup> The French government has stated that an estimated 30,000–50,000 French Salafists have ties to approximately 140 Salafi mosques in the country.<sup>15</sup> Ironically, the French government's strict adherence to secularism, called *laïcité*, bolstered the role of mosques in radicalization. The strict separation of church and state leads to the government's inability to play a role in the funding or running of religious institutions. This has resulted in funds and training originating from countries such as Algeria, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, and Morocco, with a report claiming that 70 percent of the imams preaching in French mosques are not French nationals and are trained and paid only by their country of origin.<sup>16</sup>

Though the imams from these countries are often investigated before being allowed to preach in France, the significant number of informal congregations, with any individual volunteering to be the imam of the day, ensure that it remains extremely difficult to monitor and control such religious sermons.<sup>17</sup> Oversight of religious sermons has resulted in the expulsion of 40 clerics between 2012 and 2015, with 52 individuals, including clerics, expelled through 2017.<sup>18</sup> In April 2018, Algerian imam El Hadi Doudi was expelled from France for preaching that Jews are "unclean, the brothers of monkeys and pigs," women should not leave their homes without permission, and that apostates need to be eliminated by the death penalty.<sup>19</sup> Though the exact methods undertaken to monitor these sermons are opaque, they are unlikely to have changed from the pre-Arab Spring era, where sermons were collected, centrally analyzed on the basis of certain indicators, and then classified as requiring further surveillance or not.<sup>20</sup>

However, the danger today is the role technology plays in radicalization, as it lessens the dependence on large, physical congregations to spread extremist ideas widely. Radical preachers can now spread their sermons through videos and chatrooms accessible on individuals' phones, with places like mosques and ghettos often being the gateway or introduction to individuals who share such content. The internet resources accessed act as constant echo chambers and allow exposure to extremist content throughout the day, as opposed to a few minutes or hours an individual would be influenced in physical congregations, allowing then for self-radicalization.<sup>21</sup> The French government has an Internet Referral Unit to study and take down websites if necessary (as of 2016 almost 5,000 websites were

blocked for connections to radical Islam<sup>22</sup>) and until recently had also deemed making regular visits to jihadi websites illegal.

Another institution that acts as a breeding ground for radicalization is the prison system in France, as is the case in many other countries as well.<sup>23</sup> Depending on the location, some prisons in France are estimated to house approximately 50 percent Muslim inmates.<sup>24</sup> More worrisome is the fact that Muslims constitute 8.5 percent in the 18–24-year age demographic in France but account for 39.9 percent of all prisoners in that age cohort.<sup>25</sup> Scholars have theorized that the feeling of “frustration,” minimal contact with the outside world, limited effectiveness of Muslim chaplains, and a strict enforcement of French secularism have all contributed to prisons creating micronetworks of radicalized individuals who interact and communicate even after their prison terms.<sup>26</sup> Considering the continuing phenomena of a disproportionate number of Muslims in France being incarcerated, prisons and mosques often work hand-in-hand to introduce individuals to radical theologies and slowly increase their participation in the same, all assisted by increasingly sophisticated digital communications.

The focus of radicalization and its effects, violent or otherwise, has traditionally focused only on Muslim males, often ignoring the radicalization of Muslim women. Until 2016–17, returning women jihadists from Syria were treated as victims of ISIL rather than criminals themselves and were rarely prosecuted.<sup>27</sup> This has changed in recent years, as French authorities realized around 28 percent of returning ISIL fighters were women, with home-grown radicalization also resulting in instances of female-only groups attempting terrorist attacks, such as the 2016 Notre Dame terror plot.<sup>28</sup> Even nonviolent radicalization has many women-centric issues at its heart; for instance the French government’s pushback against the *hijab* has created resentment in many communities in the country and is often used as a tool to radicalize.

The French government is aware of the gravity of radical Islam and its growth, resulting in a series of new laws and reforms in recent years, often with bipartisan support. In February 2018, a 60-point plan was unveiled to seek to prevent radicalization and focus on tackling many of the foundational issues that allow/encourage radical Islam to flourish. Measures include the inception of 1,500 separate units for the incarceration, education, and evaluation of radicalized individuals in prisons; programs for the reintegration of radical fighters returning from the Middle East; and increasing oversight of French private schools (out of which less than 100 are for Muslim children).<sup>29</sup>

It remains unclear whether any of the proposed measures will be adequate to deal with this issue. President Emmanuel Macron has considered the possibility of an interlocutor for French Muslims, a framework to monitor and facilitate

funding for places of worship and seek ways to stop the foreign funding that keeps the mosques in France running.<sup>30</sup> Many of his proposed measures may have to amend the 1905 law of separation of church and state in France and are the subject of much debate. In 2016, the French Muslim Council proposed the creation of a foundation to finance mosques and wean them off their dependence of foreign funding, but the proposal has not seen any progress since. Similarly, a proposed deradicalization center was established in 2016 but shut down five months later and criticized for a heavy handed approach.<sup>31</sup> All this indicates a willingness by the Muslim community in France to work with the government on issues of extremism, but the criticism of some proposed moves is also indicative of how much the community is amenable to French secularism making demands of Islam. Moderate and progressive voices like that of Tareq Oubrou, Grand Imam of Bordeaux, have to contend with a community that is increasingly fearful of rising Islamophobia and susceptible to extremist views, while dealing with government measures some deem draconian along with death threats from extremists.<sup>32</sup> A comprehensive plan to tackle radicalization has to deal with French secularism, which is often at odds with the Muslim community, who view it as an attack on their religion. Additionally, would-be reformers must contend with rising Islamophobia and political parties like the National Rally; poor socioeconomic and living conditions for most Muslim immigrants; and juggling all these issues with the very real threat of increasing extremism in mosques, prisons, community centers, and even schools. One often associates discussions about radicalization with its violent strains, and yet its nonviolent forms are as worrisome for national and social cohesiveness, if not more so. An example of this would be the many Muslim school students refusing to observe a minute of silence following the Charlie Hebdo attacks.<sup>33</sup> In a country with an exceptionally high regard for free speech and secularism, what policies can work to bridge the gap between different communities?

As of today, possibly the most consistent efforts to combat radical Islam in France are being implemented by the country's security apparatus, such as Operation Sentinelle, in which 10,000 military troops are tasked with patrolling and safeguarding key areas, and the new antiterrorism law providing greater powers to the government. With regards to a comprehensive deradicalization program tackling the root of the problem, there appears to be no consensus or concerted policy shift that can actually solve many of the societal issues that turn individuals to extremist strains of Islam.

**Vinayak Dalmia**

Mr. Dalmia is an entrepreneur and national security and foreign affairs thinker. He has studied economics at Cambridge and the University of California, Berkeley.

## Notes

1. "Muslim Population in Europe," *Pew Research Center*, 29 November 2017, <https://www.pewresearch.org/>.
2. "The Future of the Global Muslim Population," *Pew Research Center's Religion & Public Life Project*, 29 January 2019, <https://www.pewforum.org/>.
3. Milton Viorst, "The Muslims of France," *Foreign Affairs* 75, no. 5 (September/October 1996), 78–96.
4. Viorst, "The Muslims of France," 89–92.
5. "Is 'French Islam' an attempt to control Muslims in France?," *TRT World*, 3 April 2019, <https://www.trtworld.com/>.
6. Lucy Williamson, "What Does the Future Hold for France's 'IS children?'," *BBC*, 5 August 2018, <https://www.bbc.com/>.
7. Jonathan Laurence and Justin Vaïsse, "The Steady Integration of France's Most Recent and Largest Minority," in *Integrating Islam: Political and Religious Challenges in Contemporary France* (Washington: Brookings Institution Press, 2006).
8. Samuel Driggers, "Les Banlieues de France: How a Failure of Integration Has Led to the Spread of Extremism," *Georgia Political Review*, 2018, <http://georgiapoliticalreview.com/>.
9. Ibid.
10. Jamie Schram and Bob Fredericks, "Muslim Ghettos in Europe are Breeding Grounds for Terror," *New York Post*, 22 March 2016, <https://nypost.com/>.
11. Romain Quivoij, *The French Counter-Radicalisation Strategy* (Singapore: S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 2016).
12. Dounia Bouzar, "Stages of the Radicalization and Deradicalization Process," *Practices Network*, 2018, <https://efus.eu/>.
13. Yasmeen Serhan, "France's Disappearing Mosques," *The Atlantic*, 1 August 2016, <https://www.theatlantic.com/>.
14. Etienne Jacob, "Seven Mosques Closed since the Anti-terrorism Law Came into Effect in 2017," *Le Figaro*, 12 February 2019, <http://www.lefigaro.fr/>.
15. Robin Simcox, "Assessing Europe's Efforts to Oppose Islamist Extremism," *Hudson Institute*, 2019, <https://www.hudson.org/>; and Jean-Michel Décugis, Jérémie Pham-Lê, and Éric Pelletier, "Why Salafists Worry the Authorities," *Le Parisien*, 26 May 2018, <http://www.leparisien.fr/>.
16. Boris Thioly, "Le Maroc, fabrique d'imams français," *L'Express*, 30 March 2017, <https://www.lexpress.fr/>.
17. Kamel Daoud, "France Has Millions of Muslims. Why Does It Import Imams?," *New York Times*, 28 January 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/>.
18. "France 'Expels' Controversial Salafist Preacher to Algeria," *France24*, 20 April 2018, <https://www.france24.com/>.
19. Ibid.
20. Pascale C. Siegel, "An Inside Look at France's Mosque Surveillance Program," *Jamestown Terrorism Monitor* 5, no. 16 (August 2007).
21. Inos V. Behr, Anaïs Reding, Charlie Edwards, and Luke Gribbon, *Radicalisation in the Digital Era* (Brussels: RAND Corporation, 2013), <https://www.rand.org/>.
22. "France Now Home to over 8,000 Islamic Radicals: Report," *The Local*, 3 February 2016, <https://www.thelocal.fr/>.

23. James Brandon, "The Danger of Prison Radicalization in the West," *CTC Sentinel* 2, no. 12 (December 2009).
24. Farhad Khosrokhavar, "Radicalization in Prison: The French Case," *Politics, Religion & Ideology* 14, no. 2 (June 2013): 284–306. doi:10.1080/21567689.2013.792654.
25. Laurence and Vaïsse, "Steady Integration of France's Most Recent and Largest Minority."
26. Khosrokhavar, "Radicalization in Prison"; and Farhad Khosrokhavar, "The Constrained Role of the Muslim Chaplain in French Prisons," *International Journal of Politics, Culture, and Society* 28, no. 1 (May 2014): 67–82. doi:10.1007/s10767-014-9183-x.
27. Elizabeth Pearson and Emily Winterbotham, "Women, Gender and Daesh Radicalisation," *RUSI Journal* 162, no. 3 (July 2017): 60–72.
28. Elizabeth Pearson, "How Europe Toughened Its Stance on Women Returning from Islamic State," *The Conversation*, 21 February 2019, <https://theconversation.com/>.
29. Colin Randall, "Can France's New Plan Counter Radicalisation?," *The National*, 31 May 2018, <https://www.thenational.ae/>.
30. Rim-Sarah Alouane, "Islam, Made in France? Debating the Reform of Muslim Organizations and Foreign Funding for Religion," *Order from Chaos* (blog), Brookings Institution, 1 May 2019, <https://www.brookings.edu/>.
31. Stephanie Fillon, "What We Can Learn from France's Failed Deradicalization Center," *La Stampa*, 2 September 2017, <https://www.lastampa.it/>.
32. James Glenday, "The Moderate Imam: On a Mission to Unite France while Dodging IS Assassins," *ABC News (Australia)*, 16 August 2016, <https://www.abc.net.au/>.
33. Jon Henley, "France Must Reach Out to Disillusioned Young Muslims, Says Director of The Class," *The Guardian*, 17 January 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/>.

*Two Centuries of US Military Operations in Liberia: Challenges of Resistance and Compliance* by Niels Hahn. Maxwell AFB, AL: Air University Press, 2020.

As a young intelligence officer in 2003, I deployed with the 398th Air Expeditionary Group to Freetown, Sierra Leone, in preparation for a possible noncombatant evacuation of US citizens from Liberia's capital, Monrovia. At the time, Liberia was in the midst of a lengthy civil war. Two separate rebel factions were bearing down on the capitol, and the country's president, Charles Taylor, had recently been indicted for war crimes in Sierra Leone. I had been warned that the situation in Liberia was complicated, understood only in the context of the myriad factors affecting West Africa in general and Liberia in particular. In *Two Centuries of US Military Operations in Liberia: Challenges of Resistance and Compliance*, Niels Hahn provides an in-depth analysis of the factors that shaped Liberia from its founding to the present day and the inextricable part US involvement has played in that history.

Utilizing a wealth of primary sources, particularly personal interviews, as well as established historical reviews, Hahn proceeds chronologically through Liberia's history from the early nineteenth century to the twenty-first century. As Hahn rightly points out in the first chapter, the motivations involved in Liberia's founding were more complex than popularly conceived. While establishing a homeland for freed slaves in the United States was a motivation, fear of slave revolts, concern for the growing dependency on slave labor, and colonial ambitions also were important factors. This exploration of Liberia's founding was also significant in that it marked the beginning of long-term US military involvement in West Africa. Military involvement was necessary not only to secure the land from the local population but also because of Liberia's strategic location and the access to a deepwater port in West Africa. Military involvement becomes a theme of the book, as Hahn sets out to establish that US military, as well as intelligence agency, involvement was, and continues to be, a primary influence shaping the Liberian state. Another key factor in US involvement in Liberia at the time was the great-power rivalry among Great Britain, France, and the United States. Regional involvement by these states, with the eventual inclusion of China and the Soviet Union, is another theme that runs through the narrative.

Chapters 2 and 3 see the introduction of additional major factors in Liberia's development: economic involvement by foreign companies and the related early growth of the Pan-African and socialist movements. Firestone was the first major Western company to enter into Liberia for the purpose of developing rubber plantations, although other companies would eventually enter as well. The massive scale of the rubber plantations required huge amounts of labor. The resulting system of forced labor was seen by many in Africa as something akin to slavery. The inequalities inherent in this system caused many Liberians to look for answers in the nascent Pan-African movement as well as early communist movements. However, Liberia's ruling class benefited greatly from the involvement of US companies, which led to a largely pro-US stance by government leaders. This tie was furthered during World War II and the Cold War, as the US government invested heavily in Liberia for strategic purposes, including the development of sea and air ports, a powerful *Voice of America* transmitter, the OMEGA navigation system, and a large CIA contingent. One of Hahn's strengths throughout the book is his ability to weave together these competing factors to explain political developments and US involvement in Liberia. Hahn also mixes in interesting anecdotes, such as the story behind the Liberian president's traditional "swearing-in" suit, the result of a rapid ceremony given fears of an imminent coup.

Chapters 4 and 5 chart the end of the first Liberian Republic and rise of the second following the 1980 assassination of Pres. William Tolbert. Ethnic rivalries and an unstable government led to the suspension of the 1846 Liberian Constitution, and in 1984 a new document was drafted and approved. An election followed the approval of the new constitution, placing Samuel Doe in the presidency. However, a failed coup against President Doe led to the exile of many popular leaders and germinated the seeds of rebel movements that would plague Liberia from that time

forward. Doe's would also chart the beginning of a deteriorating relationship between the United States and Liberia. Doe began to approach socialist countries for development aid and investment, causing a rift with the United States. This prompted Washington to explore options of placing other individuals in power, including the eventual Pres. Charles Taylor. The growing power and influence of rebel groups, 1990 assassination of President Doe, rise and fall of Taylor (indicted for war crimes in Sierra Leone), and widespread instability in West Africa would all lead to the continued military involvement of the United States and the United Nations in Liberia, covered in the final chapter.

Chapter 6, the book's final chapter, is Hahn's strongest, as he brings together all the book's themes to analyze the Liberian Civil War, the UN Mission in Liberia, and US involvement in resolving the conflict. He charts the dizzying array of internal factions, international organizations, foreign governments, nongovernmental organizations, and others who would play a role in shaping the conflict and its resolution. Hahn also neatly explains how all this led to the growing Chinese influence over Liberian affairs. Hahn notes how the long-term involvement by the United States in Liberia resulted in Washington being viewed as neocolonial, attempting to dictate outcomes as opposed to supporting a struggling country. Hahn notes that the United States was also suffering from "Somalia Syndrome" following Operation Restore Hope and the "Blackhawk Down" incident, leading to a reluctance to commit US forces in resolving internal African disputes. This chapter draws on detailed accounts of internal deliberations, international negotiations, and US military records of involvement at the time to provide a balanced narrative of the resolution of the conflict in Liberia.

Overall, Hahn provides a clear and concise narrative of Liberian history and US involvement. The book's strength is the identification and weaving together of the historical, economic, military, and social factors driving that history. Hahn provides a balanced account of US involvement, frequently criticizing shortsighted and selfish decisions taken by the US government and companies as well as their roles in resolving internal conflicts. If there is one criticism, it is that the account of US military activities in Liberia is underdeveloped. Although not vital to the overall analysis, Hahn proposes in his introduction that his book "demonstrates how US military power has been the primary influence shaping the Liberian state." Whether this is true or not, further description and analysis of those military operations would be necessary to support that thesis. Despite this possible shortcoming, Hahn's book is invaluable for anyone seeking to understand Liberian history and the role of the United States in that story.

**Jeffrey Biller**

Assistant Professor  
United States Air Force Academy

***The Royal Air Force: The First One Hundred Years*** by John Buckley and Paul Beaver. Oxford University Press, 2018, 251 pp. Hardcover \$24.95, ISBN 978-0198798033.

With the rapid advent of the United States Space Force, the rise of remotely piloted aircraft, and the development of a potentially crippling pilot shortage, the impact of airpower has become a critical topic as nations prepare to face advancing threats. As such, reflection is warranted; there is an opportunity to learn from airpower's history the ways in which nations overcame arguably worse setbacks and disadvantages than currently presented. Furthermore, broadening the understanding of how pilots have been trained throughout history could provide invaluable insight as companies and militaries continue to search for faster, more comprehensive methods of training. Perhaps more importantly, in returning to the inception of airpower there exists the potential for some much-needed inspiration for the next generation of aviators.

Such reflection is attempted by Buckley and Beaver as they research the place of airpower in the defense of the United Kingdom and its allies, specifically through a review of the Royal Air

Force (RAF) from inception to present. The authors identify the themes of the history as technology, finance, strategy, and personnel, which they assert to be the most important aspect of the RAF's success, and ultimately use these themes to establish the RAF as having a critical role in military aviation's past and future. To prove the RAF's vital contributions, its history is presented chronologically, identifying the major events and individuals impacting the employment and development of the branch, starting from its creation during World War I. The fiscal and political battles fought by the fledgling branch are supported by limited statistics on the manufacturing outputs and asset availabilities, as well as some comparative costs for policy deals made early in the development of the RAF. The formative policies and national strategies are compared to demonstrate the limitations that initially and ultimately continue to counteract the desired rapid technological advancement and tactical employment of the RAF. Despite these constraints, the history demonstrates repeatedly how the RAF was still able to create meaningful impact throughout the ensuing battles, from World War I through the present conflicts in the Middle East. Ultimately, Buckley and Beaver conclude that the RAF has been transformative for not only the United Kingdom's national defense strategy but for the rest of the world's strategy development as well.

While the chronology of events and major players provides a relatively comprehensive view of the RAF's history, it fails to engage with the key element that the authors identify as driving public interest in the topic: the romanticism, heroism, and individualism of military flying. The foreword provides a promising start, if the reader overlooks the initial statement that inherently disregards half of the potential readership: "All small boys have dreams." Despite the divisive start, the foreword highlights the passion and sense of adventure associated with flight, and the introduction provides some examples of the RAF's transformative effects on gender and racial equality throughout its development, but outside of the introduction, the evidence of societal impact is limited. The book presents a policy history that is supported by its listed sources: primarily strategic articles and other similarly impersonal histories. While well-researched on events and politics, there are very few personal accounts from members of the RAF, and rarer still are sources directly from RAF aviators. Throughout the entire book there is a resounding lack of any meaningful recount of aerial engagements. The only other references to the personnel that the authors state to be the key to understanding the RAF's history are those at the highest levels of strategy or the comments on the general public's possible psychological response to associated aerial events. If the authors had illuminated on some of the social history of the RAF, the book would have more clearly exemplified their assertion that it is the heroism of the personnel that has been the bedrock of the British aerial military branch. The top-down history presented in the book ultimately fails to capture the spirit and character of the RAF.

With regards to the psychological analysis, the book is plagued by assertions at times so vague or biased that it dangerously flirts with inaccuracy. From the first major revelation that the RAF was the world's first aerial military branch, the authors become unreliable as they simultaneously make a note clarifying that the RAF was in fact the second aerial military branch to be created. The authors further frustrate readers with the book's inconsistent assumptions on the knowledge base of the reader and the convoluted historical tangents. In the discussion of the RAF's role in World War II, the authors greatly misconstrue the weaknesses of the German Luftwaffe, especially in the comparison of what they refer to as the Luftwaffe's "more obsolete" aircraft, which does a great injustice to the comparison of the Spitfire and Focke-Wulf FW 190. In fact, this would have presented an opportunity to discuss comparative energy–maneuverability diagrams of the aircraft as a demonstration of technology's impact on the developing branch and provide data corresponding to the role of the aircrew versus the advancements of their equipment. Many of the conclusions discussed as to the RAF's role in battles lack concrete data regarding actual impact and instead seem more glossed opinion than factual recounting. This is furthered by the use of policy decisions to explain the RAF's constraints, as these policies often lack any discussion of the

underpinning concerns or misinformation such that the reader is left no option but to agree with the authors due to lack of broader context. The limited scope of data provided is a lost opportunity, whether in regards to the comparison of the decline of imperialism to the advancing technologies, or how the RAF's training matched against their enemies or allies. In the last chapter, the authors discuss the present state of the RAF and the expected development, but they leave out one of the most significant changes that has just now begun in full effect: not only is the RAF working more closely with its NATO allies, it is outsourcing its claimed superior training by sending pilot trainees and instructors to the European NATO Joint Jet Pilot Training Program in the United States.

Buckley and Beaver provide an overview of the major historical points of significance in the history of the Royal Air Force, and audiences looking for a broad (albeit biased) understanding of the RAF's last 100 years may be satisfied. However, even for the most passionate aviation aficionados, the dry, murky presentation is a struggle and does not engage with the most enamoring or significant aspects of the RAF's history or military aviation.

LT Kristyna N. Smith, USA

Candidate for Master of Liberal Arts in International Relations  
Harvard University, Extension School

*Tiger Tracks—The Classic Panzer Memoir* by Wolfgang Faust. This book was published in English in 2016 by Bayern Classic Publications. The present review is of a translation of the book into Russian by V. D. Kaidalov (Moscow: ZAO Tsentropoligraf, 2017).

This review is devoted to the critical analysis of the notes of the German tankman Wolfgang Faust, the driver of a Tiger tank in battles on the Eastern Front in the autumn of 1944. The author of this review clearly concludes that these pseudo-memoirs are a fictional literary work, which in principle cannot be used as a historical source.

Although the history of World War II is not one of my priority scientific topics, interest in it has remained since school, and in my bookcase, there are several dozen books on military subjects. Many of them belong to the series "Behind the Front Line. Memoirs," which has been published since 2003 in the publishing house Tsentropoligraf and currently has more than a hundred titles. The books in this series are mainly devoted to the memories of German soldiers on the Eastern Front. Among them are the memoirs of well-known historical figures such as Field Marshal Erich von Manstein, the famous ace Hans-Ulrich Rudel, general of the tank forces Heinz Guderian, and others. However, most of the publications in the series are notes and memoirs of ordinary participants in the battles, and among them are relatively recently published front-line notes of the driver of a Tiger tank, Wolfgang Faust. They were originally published in German in 1948 under the title *Panzerdämmerung (Tank Twilight)*. These notes were then published in English in 2015 (Faust, 2015) and are now widely sold on the Internet. In 2016, a Russian version appeared under the title *Sledy "Tigra." Frontovye zapiski nemetskogo tankista. 1944 ('Tiger' Tracks. The Frontline Notes of a German Tankman. 1944)*, and in 2017 the book was reissued. Let's get to know it.

Wolfgang Faust's notes begin with a brief preface, in which the author refers to the atrocities of the past war, which he witnessed. Already in the preface, Faust allows a rather free interpretation of the facts: according to him, of the 20 million German soldiers who served in the Wehrmacht between 1939 and 1945, 17 million fought on the Eastern Front. This is a clear exaggeration, as stated in the editor's note, since according to a fairly authoritative source, only 17,893,200 people were conscripted into Hitler's army (including the SS) during the war (p. 5).

Further, the editor again had to make a footnote in the author's text, since according to Faust, the events described by him relate to October 1943 in western Russia. The editor is forced to explain that in fact these events could only have occurred in the late autumn of 1944 in western Lithuania, where the Red Army was already able to use the latest T-34-85 and IS-2 tanks that are mentioned in Faust's notes (in 1943 these tanks had not yet entered service).

Faust's memoirs themselves begin with a detailed description of the attack of 20 Tigers on Soviet positions with the support of German aviation. The author points out that before the attack six dive bombers, accompanied by three Focke-Wulf Fw190 fighters, passed over them in the direction of the enemy (p. 9). But the fact is that the German fighters did not fly in threes, but rather in pairs: the leader and the wingman, when one attacked, the other covered him. At the beginning of the war, Soviet fighter pilots fought as part of triples, but abandoned this tactical form, borrowing from the Germans the more effective pair in air combat.

Faust writes that in a tank battle his company was led by the regiment commander himself, a major general who had commanded the regiment from the beginning of Operation Barbarossa, that is, from 1941 when Germany, together with its allies, attacked the Soviet Union (p.13). But Faust does not give his last name (nor the numbers of his regiment, battalion, and tank), and therefore it is impossible to identify the general who died in this battle. On the other hand, it is not clear why the major general led the attack of the company and not the entire regiment, and in fact, it would be much more logical if he controlled the battle from a rear position in accordance with his status as highest commander. No less mysterious is the person of Faust's immediate commander, Colonel Helman, who, according to Faust, had received the Knight's Cross (an award approximately equivalent to the Golden Star of the Hero of the Soviet Union). A total of more than 7,360 awards of the Knight's Cross were made during the war, and verification shows that among them there was no tankman Helman, but only his namesakes pilot Lieutenant Erich Hellmann and naval Captain Paul Hellmann, who received their awards in 1944.<sup>1</sup> However, in the book by Franz Kurowski, *Tank Aces II*, a tank commander Hellmann of the 29th Regiment of the Tank Corps is mentioned, who was rushed on 22 June 1941, to the East against the Soviet Union,<sup>2</sup> but, again, he does not appear among the recipients of the Knight's Cross. All these facts immediately make us doubt the reliability of the analyzed notes as a historical source.

But let's return to the story of Faust, who writes that a wave of new Soviet T-34-85s rushed toward their company, and Faust's tank received a shell directly in the 100-mm frontal armor, but the shell could not penetrate it (p. 19). One could believe this if the Tigers were attacked by the old T-34-76, but the shell of the 85-mm long-barreled gun of the newly modified thirty-four could confidently pierce the Tiger's armor from a distance of less than 1,000 m.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Faust points out that the shell of his Tiger in turn could not penetrate the armor plate of the T-34 (p. 21). However, the 45-mm armor of the T-34 did not present a serious obstacle for the powerful 88-mm projectile of the Tiger's gun, and in a real battle, the Soviet tank would have been destroyed by a direct hit. Then, after a Russian tank attack, according to Faust, a certain mythical Soviet antitank infantry appears on the scene (the editor had no choice but to simply mark in a footnote: "Thus, in the text"). Faust adds that during the battle two more 85-mm shells hit his tank from a nearby T-34 but never pierced his armor (some kind of enchanted tank, nothing else!).

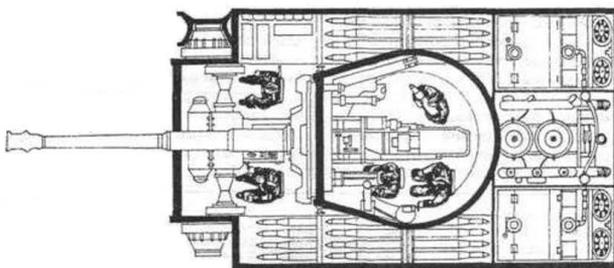
Faust's notes go on to set forth quite unimaginable facts that make it doubtful that he ever drove a Tiger at all or was familiar with its technical characteristics. Thus, Faust writes that his friend Kurt was the radio operator and the machine-gunner, and, therefore, he sat to his right in the tank (p. 10, 19, 58). During the battle, tank commander Helman shouted to Kurt during the attack of the Russian infantry: "Turret gunner! Where are your eyes, boy? The Reds are right in front of us!" (p. 22). However, the turret gunner (he is also a loader) is not a radio operator or a machine gunner (see the layout of the crew of the Tiger tank in fig. 1). Describing the further vicissitudes of the battle, Faust mentions that he turned his tank with the left and right levers. However, this was how the Soviet T-34 tanks were operated; the Tiger had a steering wheel, which was a wheel without a lower third part (see the layout of the Tiger tank in fig. 2). Finally, the tank commander, in order to force Faust to execute a risky command, resorted to an unconventional method: "I felt the kick of Helman's boot, which fell between my shoulder blades, because I had hesitated" (p. 30). It is not clear how the colonel could have reached the driver's back

with his foot from his position in the rear of the tower at a distance of at least 2.5 m, bypassing the tank gunner (see fig. 1). Nevertheless, in the course of the narrative, Helman, according to Faust, resorted to such nontraditional pedagogical influence a couple of times (see pp. 42, 57).

No less fantastic details are contained in Faust's description of the battle for Russian positions:

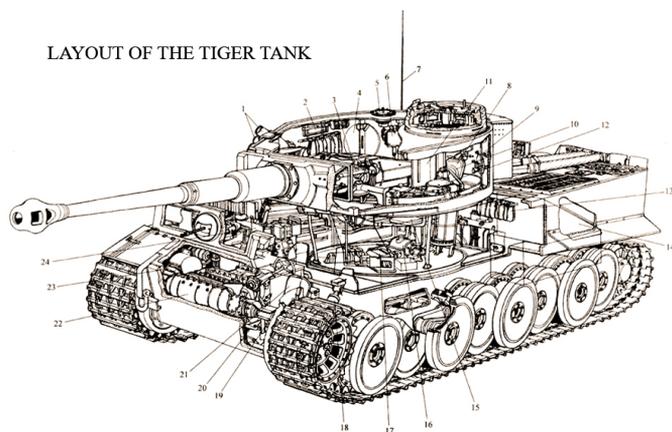
I saw the hatch on the front plate of the T-34's armor leaning back; a pale, bloodless face appeared in the hole. The Russian driver-mechanic was peering at me through his hatch and blinking his eyes, clearly trying to come to his senses, unable to believe what he had witnessed! I continued to push his tank with my machine, with the recovered mechanic in it, who looked directly into my eyes from a distance of four meters (p. 31).

In fact, Faust "forgot" that he wrote earlier that a Tiger shell had hit the observation slot of that tank (p. 21). After such a hit, there would have been little left of the driver's body.



Placement of internal units and crew in a PzKpfw VI "Tiger" tank.

**Figure 1. Tiger tank arrangement**



1 – mortars for firing smoke grenades; 2 – box with the butt and bipod of a twin machine gun; 3 – binocular sight; 4 – escape hatch; 5 – fan; 6 – fuse block; 7 – antenna; 8 – commander's seat; 9 – hatch for firing personal weapons; 10 – commander's flywheel for turning the tower; 11 – commander's shield; 12 – turret rotation mechanism; 13 – MG34 ammo pouches; 14 – fuel tank; 15 – gunner's seat; 16 – hydraulic traverse control; 17 – hydraulic traverse foot pedal; 18 – shock absorber; 19 – clutch pedal; 20 – brake pedal; 21 – driver's seat; 22 – steering unit; 23 – disc brake drum; 24 – radio.

**Figure 2. Tiger tank layout**

After capturing the Russian positions, the Germans had to leave them soon and start a retreat to avoid being surrounded. On the way, the 15 remaining Tigers of Faust's company and 10 Hanomag armored personnel carriers with motorized infantry had a battle with the latest Soviet IS-2 tanks (the abbreviation "IS" referring to Iosif (Joseph) Stalin). But based on Faust's descriptions, they were IS-3s (pp. 52, 55, 57), which were produced by the Soviet industry only in May 1945. There are details in Faust's notes about the course of the battle that in reality simply could not be. Thus, the crew of one of the Soviet tanks allegedly survived, although the tank itself received two direct hits at point-blank range from the Tiger's gun (for destruction of an enemy tank, one would have been sufficient). Three similar hits to the tower of another IS tank ended for some reason with a ricochet, the probability of which approaches zero. At the same time, a shell from a Russian tank, after hitting the 88-mm Tiger gun in the mask, tore it off, dropping it onto the front armor plate (it is impossible to imagine such a picture—see fig. 2). Moreover, during this fictional battle, the crews of Russian tanks, noticing the German armored personnel carriers, contrary to elementary logic, for some reason transferred their fire to them, although they did not pose any threat to the heavy Soviet tanks, unlike the Tigers, which continued to fire. Faust's tank fired three projectiles at one of the IS from a distance of only about 100 m, but two of them ricocheted off (this is from a hundred meters?!). In turn, the body of the Tiger, which was controlled by Faust, received at point-blank range a shell from a powerful 122-mm IS gun, which should have immediately done away with its crew (and above all with Faust himself), as well as cause irreparable damage to the German machine, but nothing like this happened: the author of "memoirs" escaped with only a slight concussion and cracked bulletproof glass covering his viewing slot. Another shell that hit the lower part of the Tiger's armor plate also failed to penetrate it; nor did the next shell and another that hit the turret (it only resulted in the death of the loader from a splinter of broken armor). Then tank commander Helman ordered Faust to ram an enemy machine: "We covered the hundred meters that separated our Tiger from the Russian 'Stalin' in a few seconds, moving so fast that the Russian gunner didn't have time to point his gun at us and two shells passed, missing us, flashing with their tracers and driving into the frozen ground" (p. 58). This last Faust could not observe, for the shells had fallen far astern of the Tiger, and from the driver's seat he could see only a relatively limited sector immediately in front of the leading edge of the tank. However, it is completely incomprehensible how a Russian gunner could twice miss a huge Tiger from a distance of less than 100 m, since he did not need to specifically aim his gun, because, contrary to Faust's assurances, he had already fired at Faust's tank. Finally, the Russian tankman was unlikely to be able to fire two shots at Faust's Tiger in a few seconds, since the IS-2 gun had a separate loading system, and therefore was not distinguished by a high rate of fire.

It is probably worth interrupting the analysis of Faust's notes now and making the unambiguous conclusion that this is not a memoir of a real tankman, a participant in the war, but rather a somewhat cobbled-together story in the style of a military adventure that does not have any factual basis. Therefore, consideration of Faust's pseudo-memoirs can be continued only from the position of criticism of its shortcomings as a purely literary work, but this is beyond the scope of my analysis. And yet I cannot but note that despite the fact that this military prose is written quite vividly and sometimes entertainingly, the thoughtful reader will be disturbed by periodic interspersions of the author's fantasies, which are at odds not only with historical realities but also sometimes even with common sense and the laws of mathematics. Thus, during a retreat to the river through the forest, a column of six Tigers (Faust was in one of them), four armored personnel carriers, and a self-propelled antiaircraft gun was suddenly attacked by a relatively small detachment of partisans. This is almost impossible to believe, since only those with a suicidal bent would decide to do this; the attackers did not even have a single small-caliber gun against heavy German tanks. But to dispel any doubts the reader might have about the mental capacity and sanity of the partisans, Faust (or whoever hides behind this name) arms them with a flamethrower (pp. 83–85). But where could the

flamethrower of the partisans have come from? I have never read about the use of such weapon by Soviet partisans. Nevertheless, as a result of the partisan raid, two Tigers and an armored personnel carrier were lost (p. 92). Then the retreating Germans were attacked by Soviet IL-2 attack aircraft, and, as a result, they lose three more tanks and two armored personnel carriers (p. 99). A simple calculation suggests that there should have been only one Faust tank left in the ranks. But no, the author has an interesting kind of arithmetic, since on the next page he writes: "In our column now remained a Hanomag, four Tigers, and the self-propelled anti-aircraft installation" (p. 100). When the convoy finally reaches the river and takes up a defense in front of the bridge, a battle begins with the heavy self-propelled Soviet guns and tanks approaching amid snowdrifts as tall as a man and more (and this is in October!). In the course of the battle, various other miracles occur, and in his description, Faust gives particulars and details that he simply would not have been able to observe through the very limited sector of the viewing slit of his Tiger. Therefore, it seems that instead of armor, his tank had transparent glass through which the author of the pseudo-memoirs could see everything for 360 degrees. This remark fully applies to all previous episodes.

The overall result is disappointing: the Tsentrpoligraf Publishing House did not show due diligence, and instead of genuine notes by a real German tankman, like the memoirs of the tank ace Otto Carius,<sup>4</sup> published outright literary rubbish, providing it with editorial notes. And naturally, these pseudo-memoirs cannot in principle be used as a serious historical source. Their direct harm lies in the formation in an inexperienced reader of a distorted picture of the fighting on the Soviet-German front in World War II.

**Andrei V. Grinëv**

Doctor of Historical Sciences  
Professor in the Department of History  
Peter the Great St. Petersburg Polytechnic University  
St. Petersburg, Russia

**Dr. Richard L. Bland, translator**

Museum of Natural & Cultural History  
University of Oregon

## Notes

1. Walther-Peer Fellgiebel, *Elite of the Third Reich. The Recipients of the Knight's Cross of the Iron Cross 1939–1945* (Solihull, England: Helion, 2003), 183.
2. Franz Kurowski, *Panzer Aces II: Battle Stories of German Tank Commanders of WWII* (Mechanicsburg, PA: Stackpole Books, 2004), 129–30.
3. Mikhail Baryatinskii, "Srednii Tank T-34-85" [Medium tank T-34-85], *Bronekolleksiya* 4, no. 25 (1999), 3.
4. Otto Carius, *Tigers in the Mud: The Combat Career of German Panzer Commander Otto Carius*, Stackpole Military History Series, trans. Robert J. Edwards (Auburn, WA: Thriftbooks. 2003).

# JEMEAA

600 Chennault Circle  
Maxwell AFB, AL 36112-6010  
USA  
Fax: 1 (334) 953-4298  
<http://www.airuniversity.af.edu/JEMEAA/>  
ISSN 2639-6351 (print)  
ISSN 2639-636X (online)

**Vision:** The US Air Force *Journal of European, Middle Eastern, & African Affairs*, published quarterly, is the premier multidisciplinary peer-reviewed academic journal cutting across both the social sciences and airpower operational art and strategy.

**Mission:** The US Air Force *Journal of European, Middle Eastern, & African Affairs (JEMEAA)* mission is to explore significant issues and serve as a vehicle for the intellectual enrichment of readers. It seeks to provide quality works that contribute to a regional and global understanding of human affairs and aid in the discovery and dissemination of materials that further scholarly investigation, advance interdisciplinary inquiry, stimulate public debate, and educate both within and outside the Department of Defense.

**Submission Guidelines:** We welcome submissions from researchers, scholars, policy makers, practitioners, and informed observers on such topics as strategic and security issues, international relations, civil-military relations, leadership, ethics/morality, women in society, economics, democracy, terrorism, human rights, and so forth. Articles should take existing theories and concepts in a new direction or bring a novel perspective to current literature. Manuscripts submitted to JEMEAA's editor should follow the guidelines provided in AU-1, *Air University Style and Author Guide*, or the most recent edition of the *Chicago Manual of Style*.

**Peer-Review Process:** Manuscripts will undergo anonymous peer review, which will evaluate them on the basis of creativity, quality of scholarship, and contribution to advancing the understanding of the subject addressed.

**Copyright:** Articles in this edition may be reproduced in whole or in part without permission. If they are reproduced, *The Air Force Journal of European, Middle Eastern, & African Affairs* requests a courtesy line.

**Disclaimer:** The views and opinions expressed or implied in *JEMEAA* are those of the authors and should not be construed as carrying the official sanction of the Department of Defense, Air Force, Air Education and Training Command, Air University, or other agencies or departments of the US government or their international equivalents.