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**Copenhagen Univ., Denmark**

## THE MONOPOLY OF VIOLENCE IN FRAGILE STATES - THE PROBLEM OR SOLUTION?

*Abstract:*

This article critically examines the concept of the monopoly on the legitimate use of force in fragile states, investigating whether it constitutes a source of instability or a potential solution. Drawing on postcolonial and liberal theoretical frameworks, the study explores the historical roots of state fragility, the role of extractive institutions, and the legacies of colonialism. It analyses how military power, both direct and indirect, functions as a tool of state-building through peacekeeping, capacity building, and external intervention. Case studies and empirical findings highlight the complex interplay between external security assistance and domestic governance, emphasizing that while military engagement is not a panacea, it is often a prerequisite for effective development and peacebuilding. The paper argues that establishing a legitimate and accountable monopoly of violence is essential for overcoming fragility and enabling broader institutional reform. The article concludes with policy recommendations aimed at balancing coercive stability with long-term state legitimacy and resilience.

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*Key words:*

liberal interventionism, political instability, monopoly of violence

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### **INTRODUCTION**

“A state is a human community that (successfully) claims the monopoly of the legitimate use of physical force within a given territory.” (Max Weber, 1918). Most theories of international relations and statecraft agree with Weber’s proclamation that the existential reason of a state is the fostering of stability and security. However, while for many

societies violence, poverty and instability are vestiges of the past, fragile states cluster the world map and fail the core functions they are designed to provide. While definitions differ, the fragile states index characterizes fragile states with: “the loss of physical control of its territory or a monopoly on the legitimate use of force; the erosion of legitimate authority to make collective decisions; an inability to provide reasonable public services; the inability to interact with other states as a full member of the international community.” (Fragile State Index, 2024). As fragility is a consequence and cause of armed conflict (and vice versa), their correlation is daunting as constant fragility risks restarting a cycle of violence in perpetuity (Dupuy et al., 2016). While not all fragile states are threatened by armed conflict, those states and populations face the greatest risks and are hence exclusive subject to this study. Despite the recent interstate Russo-Ukrainian War or the looming Chinese invasion of Taiwan, the vast majority of today's conflicts are characterized by their intrastate, extrasystemic (conflict between a state and non-state armed group outside the state's territory) or non-state nature (Uppsala University, 2024). While developmental programs identify and combat a vast array of needs such as economic development, societal equality or legal righteousness a key prerequisite is operational safety. However, as many fragile states are embroiled in violent conflicts, they are unable to guarantee the safety of humanitarian assistance and developmental aid, thereby limiting their effectiveness or even existence. Enforcing the monopoly on the legitimate use of force is hence the first step in state building and a key priority for aiding states. Recognizing this necessity, former US Defense Secretary Robert Gates (2010) proclaimed that building partner militaries in fragile states “is in many ways the ideological and security challenge of our time”.

In this study military power refers to the means by which an external state takes influence in a host state through military intervention. It will subsequently encompass direct intervention (peacekeeping, deployments, kinetic warfare) as well as indirect intervention (intelligence sharing, capacity building). Plenty of academics and practitioners have laid the groundwork by researching and discussing the merits and

limitations of military power as a tool to state building. With the research question: “What role should military power play in developing fragile states?”, this study will attempt to further illuminate the use of military power in assisting fragile states.

This article will be divided into two main parts. Firstly, an analysis of postcolonial and liberal theory will explore where state fragility originates from and why it has historically been addressed by specific global actors. The second part will further the argument that military means should be heavily leaned on in securing fragile states despite significant shortcomings that have to be recognized and countered.

## **THEORETICAL ANALYSIS OF FRAGILE STATES**

While not perfect and critiqued for biased, incomplete and untransparent measurements and analysis, the fragile state index provides a metanalysis of state failure. While this study recognizes the methodological inconsistencies of this index, it is simultaneously acknowledged that the project provides an accurate enough depiction of real-world issues and is hence used without further disclaimer. In analyzing the geographical distribution of fragile states in 2024 a clear picture emerges (Fragile States Index, 2024). While Western states are classified as stable, many ex-colonies, chiefly in Africa and the Middle East, are embroiled in turmoil. By relying on postcolonial theory this clear division will be investigated in the first part of this section. The second part will use liberal philosophy to explain why many Western liberal actors intervene in fragile states.

At its core postcolonial theory argues that the legacies of colonialism and imperialism reverberate in our society to this day never having fully ceased to exist. Contrary to the mainstream theories of realism and liberalism, post colonialist views the international system not as anarchic but hierarchic. This hierarchy originated in the Western domination during the imperial era and created distance between the ruling Western states and the “other”, often classified in the “North-South” divide (Nair, 2017). Many events and practices that originated during that time permeated throughout history and

contributed to the current fragility of non-western states. The mere act of colonialism led to the arbitrary delineation of borders, most of which constitutes today's state boundaries. Devoid from any practicality and logic, colonial borders were often drawn without regard for geography, ethnicity or cultural divisions. This at-will division of territory between occupying powers, has led to fragmented societies with deep internal divisions. In one of the most diabolical examples to date, the Kyrgyz, Tajik and Uzbek borders were deliberately drawn vague and cross-ethnic and geographic. With the aim to ensure instability, ethnic tensions and thereby dependencies on the UDSSR, the border region has been the source of continued conflict for more than 30 years after their independence (Rahimov & Urazaeva, 2005). Historic borders, and the resulting demographic and resource availability, suggest a certain path dependency for ex-colonial states. This claim is further accentuated by Robinson & Acemoğlu (2012) who found institutions to be the ultimate indicator of state failure. Institutions are classified as either inclusive, which creates opportunities for participation, protects private property, upholds the rule of law, and encourages innovation and investment or extractive which exploit resources for the benefit of the ruling class, discourage innovation, and fail to provide incentives for broader societal participation. Colonization has locked states onto a path of extractive institutional development as the ex-colonies were used as a labor and resource pool for consumers and markets in the West. While the types of institution and social hierarchy that were enacted differed between the colonial overlords, they all contributed to the creation of systems that prioritized the extraction of wealth over the development of inclusive governance and economic systems Tusalem (2016). These institutions often entrenched inequality, with power concentrated in the hands of local elites thereby contributing to an urban-rural developmental divide. This legacy left many postcolonial states with weak institutional frameworks, lacking mechanisms for accountability, representation, or equitable resource distribution. Upon independence, these extractive institutions, reliant on violent coercion and designed to control the masses, were easily usurped thereby perpetuating cycles of poverty,

corruption, and inequality (Schneider & Wiesehomeier, 2008; Robinson & Acemoğlu, 2012).

While global actors ostensibly recognize the plight of fragile states, they continue their practices of domination and exploitation through unfavorable trade systems, dubious military interventions and selective developmental aid (refusals). Specifically, military power is used to project continued dependencies on more powerful nations as seen in French, Russian or American deployments across Africa and the Middle East. Nominally under the prerogative of fighting terrorism and building native security capacities, these deployments can also be seen as projecting power in international rivalries while simultaneously safeguarding domestic capitalist business ventures in the host state. However, it would not be prudent to classify the deployment and intervention of external military forces in fragile states solely as self-interested. Many capacity building programs, donations and deployments are requested by the host nation and put immense financial and material burden onto benefactors. To delve deeper into the motivation of states that lend and transfer military power, liberalism offers an interesting perspective.

Unlike realists' philosophy, liberals argue that material power is not the sole determinant of international relations. While the notion of an anarchic international system is accepted by both sides, liberals maintain that international institutions and cooperation can promote and enforce peace, thereby mitigating the system's worst effects (Terriff et al., 1999). Even in matters of national security, states have recognized that it is possible to increase security through other means than military and economic hard power. Through coordination and cooperation, mutual interests can be meaningfully pursued as seen in the success of international organizations like NATO or OPEC. While liberal state building emphasizes democratization, rule of law, human rights, and market economies, it should not be perceived as pacifistic, indeed it is often realists that try to prevent a liberal military intervention (Wallis, 2017).

There are three liberal arguments and reasons why foreign states exercise military power in fragile states: they try

to 1) protect human rights, 2) promote democracy, and 3) increase global and regional security.

Firstly, the United Nations is the pinnacle of liberal institutionalism and was chiefly designed to prevent armed conflict while fostering cooperation and globalization. In the wake of two genocides in Rwanda and Srebrenica, the United Nations members unanimously agreed that states have a responsibility to protect (R2P) populations from genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity (R2P, 2024). Primarily, the R2P doctrine reiterates sovereign states individual responsibility to protect human rights. However, it also maintains that the international community has the responsibility to assist UN member states in this mission and is mandated to intervene if a state is incapable to do so. While direct military intervention is always meant to be the last resort, the International Community has accepted its potential necessity in order to prevent future genocides. Critics have voiced concern over the effectiveness of the R2P doctrine as its most prominent invocation, 2011 in Libya, was a disaster that is directly responsible for the current fragility of the Libyan state as well as violent regional spillover effects in the Sahel (Peta, 2017). Critics lament the Western intervention as an exclusive mission of regime change, which can be argued to be the second reason for liberal interventions.

Democratic Peace Theory maintains that democratic states don't go to war against each other, which means world peace is possible in a purely democratic state system. The argument rests on structural and normative notions. Firstly, unlike autocracies, democracies possess strong domestic political institutions with checks and balances. Since citizens are directly impacted by the costs of war, democratically elected leaders should be less inclined to violent intervention (Placek, 2012). Although this does not guarantee that citizens in democracies will never support war, they tend to be more cautious about electing leaders with aggressive tendencies, understanding the potential risks to themselves. The normative argument maintains that due to the shared values of democracies, peaceful means of domestic conflict resolution extend in the international realm. The realization that differences can be addressed through non-violent means, leads

democratic states to refuse to act violently against another democracy (Placek, 2012). However, on the flipside this also means that democratic states are thus more likely to go to war with non-democratic states as mutual values and trust is non-existent. As Doyle (1983) found, democracies often escalate conflicts of interests into interventions as their revulsion at autocracies' human rights records can lead to moral crusades against them. In the context of failed states, the Democratic Peace Theory provides Western states with a moral argument to intervene in favor of democratic movements or provide a lifeline to failing democracies to prevent them from democratic backsliding. A weak allied democratic state is viewed as a better guarantor of international security than a strong hostile autocratic state.

This objective of increasing global and regional security is the last liberal argument for military interventions in fragile states. Fragile states, characterized by weak institutional frameworks and a lack of professionalized militaries, are fertile grounds for transnational threats that undermine international stability (Craft, 2021). The international community attempts to address this issue through peacekeeping operations and military capacity building. Military capacity-building initiatives aim to develop foreign militaries' ability to produce or effectively deploy military hardware and tactics to strengthen domestic defense capabilities. They empower legitimate state actors to establish a monopoly of violence within their territories and address the root causes of insecurity while diminishing the risk posed by non-state actors to the international system (Karlin, 2018). From a realist perspective, these actions would primarily be interpreted as mechanisms for shifting balances of power and advancing national interests. However, liberal theorists view these measures as contributions to the broader goal of fostering global stability as these efforts align with the liberal emphasis on cooperation and the interdependence of states in achieving collective security. Similarly, peacekeeping operations are designed to stabilize post-conflict regions, support political transitions, and prevent the recurrence of violence, thereby reinforcing the international community's commitment to peace and stability (Dunton et al., 2023). In this sense, both capacity building and peacekeeping reflect the

liberal aspiration to construct a cooperative and secure international order through institutional frameworks and shared norms.

## **THE NECESSITY OF MILITARY POWER**

Military intervention is by no means the panacea that magically pulls fragile states out of their debilitating state. It is however the single most important factor in creating the stability necessary for subsequent humanitarian assistance, development and peace processes (Forsberg, 2020). Military interventions should not outrightly be dismissed as imperialistic or inherently selfish. While many past interventions had illicit objectives and dubious justifications, military interventions can help enforce peace, prevent conflict and as a result lead to prosperity.

Direct intervention can bring existing conflicts to an end and prevent conflict (re-) emergence. Much of liberal state building theory emphasizes the importance of good governance and the hearts-and-mind strategy to win over civilians in conflict-ridden areas. In her study of counter-insurgency campaigns, Hazelton (2021) critiques this approach as idealistic and inefficient, as recently visualized by the US evacuation of Afghanistan. Hazelton finds that hostile interstate actors are more often brought down through brute force and coercion of elites rather than popular reforms. Her compellence theory explains that successful offensive military interventions against hostile actors succeed through violence, while liberal reforms such as democratization or market liberalization only occur after the successful defeat of insurgencies. Her findings reveal the centrality of hard power to secure territorial integrity and a monopoly on violence, which is central in the longevity of peace. While this is by no means an invitation or excuse for unlawful or violent military campaigns, academics and policymakers should realize that the defeat of adversaries might not always be possible through more legal, passive and liberal COIN strategies. Miklaucic (2022) recognizes this and maintains that democracy is not a means to an end and should only be pursued after establishing stable

and native- driven governance. Simultaneously in cases where conflicts are ongoing or risk reigniting and offensive military interventions are unfeasible, the deployment of UN peacekeepers is found to reduce the likelihood of violence by 75% (Guterres, 2018). This is due to traditional peacekeeping operations, like DDR programs, creating the basic conditions needed for addressing the underlying causes of conflicts through monitoring borders, implementing ceasefires and assisting with peace agreements. The countering of insurgencies and establishment of government control contribute positively to stability and proves essential for long lasting peace processes (Forsberg, 2020).

Indirect military interventions legitimize the government by enforcing the prerogative of native security actors in their fight against illegitimate actors and in the creation of stability. Such interventions often take the form of intelligence sharing and capacity building measures. Capacity building refers to training and equipment programs that transfer military hardware and tactics to host countries and make local security actors familiar in their use. Actors like the US and EU use capacity building as a cost-effective way of increasing partner states internal and external deterrence capability to defend themselves without direct intervention (Karlin, 2018). The underlying issue of fragile states lack of military professionalism is directly addressed however significant shortcomings need to be mentioned. As found by Travis (2023) military capacity building measures in Afghanistan were inconsistent and created dependencies onto US logistical and material support. A fallacy of many capacity building measures is the focus on conventional western military doctrines and the focus on material support. Furthermore, Sullivan et al. (2018) shows that a focus on material donations strengthens the security sector relative to other state institutions and therefore encourages the government to become more restrictive. Weapon shipments increase the state's capacity for repression while lowering the cost of it. Hence it is of existential importance to not limit capacity building measures to material aid but actively monitor and influence organizational structures and personnel appointments. Fragile states often

affected by interethnic rivalry show deficiencies and therefore require fundamental structural reforms (Karlin, 2018).

Especially in fragile states affected by terrorism or criminal enterprises, intelligence sharing is used to bolster legitimate forces' ability to counter those threats. This can involve sharing satellite imagery, drone surveillance data, or human intelligence to improve operational planning. While intelligence sharing is limited to actors capable of acting on it, it is nonetheless an important and indirect practice that more capable external forces can provide to prevent threats from materializing (OECD, 2009).

As a result of the greater stability after successful direct or indirect military interventions sustainable humanitarian assistance, developmental aid and peace processes can begin. It is paramount that security measures have to be integrated with civilian interventions to assist fragile states. Without adequate humanitarian and developmental aid, security operations risk being isolated and can thereby prolong or even worsen a state of fragility (Forsberg, 2020).

Military and civilian operations have to work in unison in order to create meaningful change, however the establishment of a secure operational environment is the first step in this process. Military combat operations and deployments that create stability can improve access for developmental workers to insecure areas, facilitate the movement of humanitarian personnel and materials and induce private sector investment (Forsberg, 2020). As evidenced by the case of the MONUSCO mission in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, UN deployments prevented the expansion of the illicit economy, allowed local manufactures and services to expand and attracted valuable foreign capital investment (Scott, 2020). While economic growth based on consumption by foreign peacekeepers was witnessed, it has to be acknowledged that this can create a localized and unsustainable economic boom that creates dependencies on foreign powers. Hence to discourage nascent dependencies on foreign actors, wherever possible direct intervention should be limited to the establishment of stability to start locally led peace processes.

## CONCLUSION

Fragile states are states in crises due to unique, case-specific circumstances that often face a loss of control and ability to guarantee security to their population. A postcolonial theoretical analysis of the origin of fragile states and subsequent liberal interventions, ostensibly for their betterment, reveals the centrality of Western actors as both perpetrators and guardians. The fragility of many struggling states today can be traced back to oppressive colonial and imperial practices. Yet those same actors are often involved in attempts to reform extractive institutions and halt violent conflicts that continue to erode fragile states' social and economic foundations. Western liberal states intervene under the banner of human rights, democracy promotion, and global security—often with noble intentions. However, the results of such interventions have been deeply mixed. Civilian casualties, institutional degradation, and prolonged instability remain common outcomes, particularly when interventions lack long-term commitment, local legitimacy, or coordination with civilian efforts. Cases like Afghanistan, Libya, or Somalia reveal that even interventions pursued in the name of stability can unintentionally entrench fragility. It is therefore essential to recognize that military intervention alone cannot build states, it can only open the political and security space necessary for meaningful, locally-driven reform. When misused, the monopoly of violence risks reproducing cycles of repression, but when carefully structured and aligned with inclusive governance, it can create the conditions for peace and sovereignty.

The future of fragile states lies not in the hands of external actors alone but in the ability of these societies to reclaim and redefine legitimate authority. International support must be strategic, restrained, and rooted in partnership, not paternalism. Only by marrying short-term security with long-term institutional development can the international community help fragile states transform from subjects of intervention to authors of their own stability.

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## **THE JAMMU AND KASHMIR CONFLICT: ITS CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS**

*Abstract:*

The Kashmir dispute is among the longest disputes of the modern era, which has defined regional politics in South Asia and world geopolitical dynamics. This essay examines its historical origins, strategic lessons, and what it portends for the new world order and the Russian-Ukrainian war. Here are also underscored how border conflicts, economic projects such as the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, and military alliances impact global stability. Additionally, the key lessons drawn from the Kashmir dispute—such as the limits of military solutions, the importance of bilateral dialogue, and the role of international mediation—are examined in the context of the Russian-Ukrainian war. There are also explored how shifting zones of influence may affect Russia’s geopolitical standing, considering China’s cautious support, India’s strategic autonomy, and Pakistan’s balancing act. Finally, the Kashmir dispute is not just a national concern but also a potential trigger for global geopolitical change, addressed in the essay to a significant extent.

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*Key words:*

Jammu and Kashmir, India-Pakistan conflict, China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, Post-Potsdam-Yalta World Order, Russian-Ukrainian war

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Jammu and Kashmir conflict (see Picture 1) stands as one of the most enduring territorial disputes in modern history, involving three nuclear-armed nations—India, Pakistan, and China. Since its origins in the partition of British India in 1947, the dispute has led to multiple wars, insurgencies, and diplomatic tensions, reflecting both regional

and global strategic interests. Also, this conflict is not only about national sovereignty but particularly about ethnic identity, religious divisions, and competing geopolitical aspirations.

At its core, the conflict stems from the partition of British India, which left Jammu and Kashmir—a Muslim-majority region ruled by a Hindu Maharaja—caught between India and Pakistan. The first Indo-Pakistani war (1947–1948) led to the establishment of the Line of Control, which divided Kashmir into territories controlled by both nations. Over the decades, the region has witnessed further wars (1965, 1971, and 1999), political turmoil, and rising militancy.

Moreover, beyond South Asia, the Kashmir dispute has significant implications for the evolving global order. China's increasing economic and military involvement, particularly through CPEC, has tied the conflict to its broader strategic rivalry with India. The growing India-U.S. partnership, Pakistan's deepening alliance with China, and Russia's shifting geopolitical alignments all add complexity. It is within this context that China, India, and Pakistan, as significant world powers deeply intertwined with the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, possess the potential to influence the structure of the emerging New World Order and the trajectory of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

I believe that this influence stems from several key factors. Firstly, the actions of China, India, and Pakistan in relation to Jammu and Kashmir directly impact regional stability and power dynamics. Also, because these three countries are main players in Jammu and Kashmir, it gives them tools to influence international relations. Consequently, developments in the region, particularly the shifts in alliances and influence, inevitably play a role in the ongoing redistribution of "influence zones" within the emerging post-Potsdam-Yalta world order.

Hence, it is my deep conviction that the Kashmir conflict's evolution could play a crucial role in reshaping global spheres of influence. And, by analyzing historical lessons from the conflict—such as the limits of military solutions, the role of diplomatic negotiations, and the involvement of external actors—parallels can be drawn with the Russian-Ukrainian

war. Additionally, I will explore whether lessons from Kashmir's prolonged stalemate could inform strategies for resolving the Ukraine conflict and how the redistribution of geopolitical power in South Asia may indirectly impact Russia's strategic position.

**Pic. 1: India-Pakistan Conflict, 2019**



Source: The Skimm, retrieved February 9, 2025, from [https://www.theskimm.com/next/image?url=https%3A%2F%2Fimages.ctfassets.net%2F6g4gfm8wk7b6%2F6J1P7imFlb7PQSWOziQLwD%2F2447aee08a6a931daaa2a95ee047c0ed%2FIndia-Pakistan\\_map.png&w=1080&q=100](https://www.theskimm.com/next/image?url=https%3A%2F%2Fimages.ctfassets.net%2F6g4gfm8wk7b6%2F6J1P7imFlb7PQSWOziQLwD%2F2447aee08a6a931daaa2a95ee047c0ed%2FIndia-Pakistan_map.png&w=1080&q=100)

## **HISTORY AND COURSE OF THE CONFLICT**

It is my deep conviction that to understand something, you need to firstly understand its history, since only in the historical light the thing or event can be viewed overarchingly, and, therefore, the appropriate lessons and prospects can be made and established. Hence, I want to start this essay with the general overview of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, which roots trace back to the mid-19th century.

Namely, in this century, under the Treaty of Amritsar in 1846, the region was incorporated into the princely state of Jammu and Kashmir. This treaty transferred the region from Sikh control to the Dogra rulers with the financial exchange and laid the groundwork for future disputes, since it established a separate political entity in a region with diverse

ethnic, religious, and cultural groups (Lamb, 2008). Kashmir's political status further became contentious after the partition of British India in 1947. That year, the princely state, ruled by a Hindu Maharaja, Hari Singh, was given the choice to accede either to India or Pakistan. I assume this decision to be a crucial moment in the history of the conflict because the Maharaja chose to accede to India after facing a Pakistani tribal invasion. As a consequence, the first India-Pakistan war (1947-1948) started and the Line of Control which divided Kashmir between the two countries was established (Lamb, 2008).

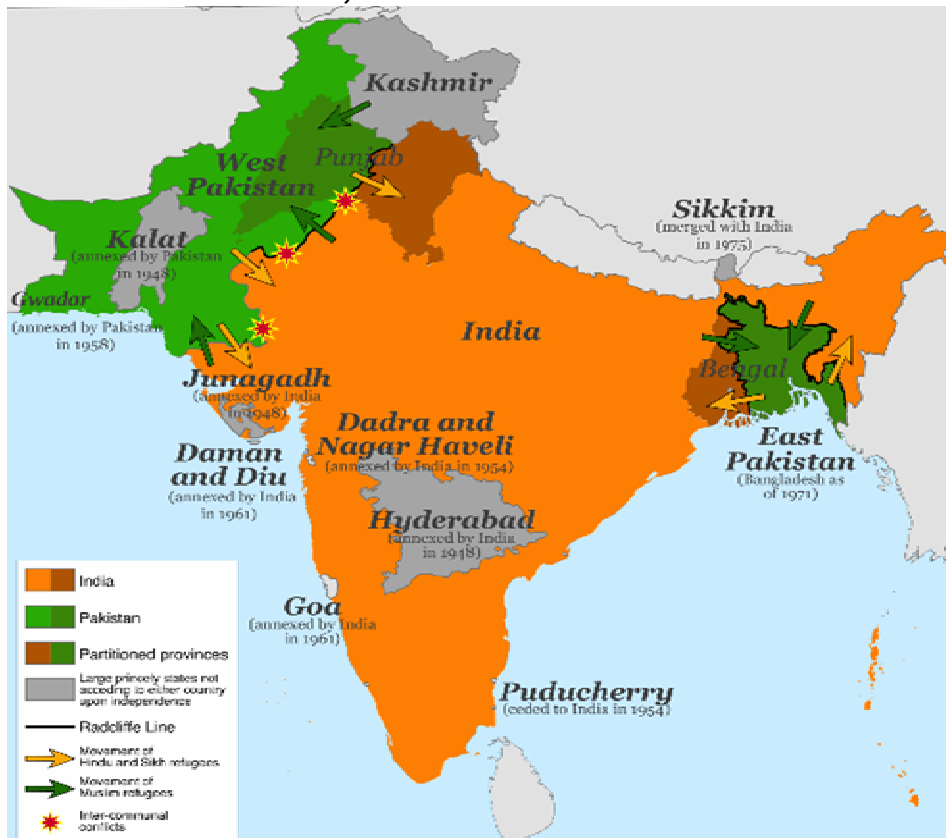
If talking about the one of the preconditions of the conflict – culture forced by religion – Kashmir's cultural history is marked by a blend of Hinduism and Islam which created a complex and often tense interaction between different religious communities (Lamb, 2008). I believe that the division between Kashmiri Muslims and Hindus became way more traceable during the 20th century, as communal tensions escalated in the wake of the partition.

Following from the cultural preconditions, I believe that it is also essential to emphasize the national ones. National identity in Kashmir has always been contested, and the national question—whether Kashmir should be part of India, Pakistan, or an independent entity—has remained central to the conflict. Here, the role of the Kashmiri leadership, particularly Sheikh Abdullah and his National Conference, is also momentous, since Sheikh Abdullah being initially a proponent of autonomy within India eventually moved towards advocating for a plebiscite to allow Kashmiris to determine their own future (Lamb, 2008). I conjecture that this shift in leadership and its subsequent fallout with India played a critical role in fueling the ongoing dispute.

From the preconditions of the conflict, I want to return to the historical period after the first Indo-Pakistani war. After this war and the establishment of the Line of Control, the political situation in Kashmir remained unstable. In the early years after the partition (see Picture 2), India's integration of Jammu and Kashmir remained very minor, and the region's special status under Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which granted it autonomy, was central to this process.

However, by the 1950s, the political landscape began shifting, particularly after the death of Sheikh Abdullah in 1967. His leadership, which had initially advocated for greater autonomy within India, was replaced by leaders less inclined to compromise with India which set the stage for greater regional disorder (Rizvi, 1992).

**Pic. 2: Partition of India, 1948-1975**



Source: Wikipedia, Wikimedia Commons, *Map of the Partition of India in 1947*, retrieved February 11, 2025, from: [https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3b/Partition\\_of\\_India\\_1947\\_en.svg/300px-Partition\\_of\\_India\\_1947\\_en.svg.png](https://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/thumb/3/3b/Partition_of_India_1947_en.svg/300px-Partition_of_India_1947_en.svg.png)

The 1980s were a turning point in the Kashmir conflict, as growing disillusionment among Kashmiri Muslims led to insurgency, especially after the 1987 rigged elections. Protests escalated into demands for independence or union with Pakistan. In response, India deployed military forces, which led to violent clashes with militants. Pakistan's support for

insurgents became evident through cross-border infiltration and material aid, which intensified the conflict into the early 1990s (Rizvi, 1992). By the 1990s, the conflict took on an international dimension, with Pakistan pushing the self-determination narrative. The 1999 Kargil conflict, marked by Pakistani military infiltration, led to intense Indo-Pakistani clashes. Moreover, the 2008 Mumbai attacks further derailed peace talks (Rizvi, 1992).

In the meantime, China's increasing presence in the region introduced yet another dimension of complexity to the Kashmir conflict. The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (see Picture 3), a component of China's Belt and Road Initiative, passes through Gilgit-Baltistan, India's contested territory (Tahir & Huda, 2022). Infrastructure development has served both to solidify Pakistan's hold on the territory and to advance China's strategic interests in the dispute. Nonetheless, Pakistan's increasing reliance on China for military and economic backing has made its position on Kashmir more rigid and made a diplomatic solution less likely.

**Pic. 3: China-Pakistan Economic Corridor**



Source: Drishti IAS

If talking about the situation for now, one of the most significant developments in recent years was the aforementioned revocation of Article 370 in August 2019, which removed Kashmir's special status within India. This move by the Indian government was condemned all over India as well as worldwide since it was perceived as a unilateral move aimed at altering Kashmir's demographic and political landscape. This revocation led to an increased security

presence in the region and a clampdown on political and communication freedoms (Rizvi, 1992).

In this context, I assume that the prospects for intervention and resolution of the conflict are way more uncertain, especially through the exclusion of the primary stakeholders - the people of Kashmir. Border tensions in Ladakh, coupled with deepening China-Pakistan military ties and growing Chinese economic influence in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, bring a global significance to the conflict, making it more than just an Indo-Pakistani issue (The Carter Center, 2003). Also, while international mediation is contested, with India opposing and Pakistan seeking it (The Carter Center, 2003), I believe that the conflict remains deeply rooted in historical and cultural factors, shaped by evolving geopolitical dynamics since the mid-19th century. Considering all these points, it is my deep conviction that without a comprehensive and sustained commitment to addressing both the political and economic dimensions of the conflict, the Kashmir dispute will likely persist as a flashpoint in South Asian and global geopolitics.

In her book “Statecraft: Strategies for a Changing World”, Mrs. M. Thatcher wrote: “History becomes even more important as a basis for our judgments.” Hence, I believe that the sides of the conflict and international observers learned some lessons from it that can be used as a basis for reflection to unleash other conflicts.

## **THE LESSONS THAT THE WORLD COMMUNITY LEARNED IN THE FACT OF REGULATING THE CONFLICT AND THEIR POTENTIAL TO BE APPLIED TO RUSSIAN- UKRAINIAN WAR**

At Charles University in my bachelor program, I particularly study philosophy, and I believe that from each situation you can understand the eternal number of lessons. However, in order to make this essay not only about them, I want to highlight the most significant, namely lessons connected to the limits of the military solution of the conflict, the importance of bilateral dialogue, the role of local political

aspirations, the complexity of international mediation, and the need for multidimensional measures.

I want to start with one of the most significant lessons from the Kashmir conflict - military force alone cannot resolve deep-rooted political disputes. Both India and Pakistan have engaged in multiple wars over Kashmir (1947-1948, 1965, and 1999), yet none resulted in a permanent resolution. Instead, military actions have often exacerbated tensions and led to increased insurgency and political instability (Bose, 2003). It is my deep conviction that the failure of outright military victories underscores the necessity of diplomatic and political solutions.

Secondly, it is important to highlight the meaningful progress toward peace that has occurred primarily through bilateral negotiations rather than third-party interventions. The 1972 Simla Agreement, for instance, marked a shift from international mediation to direct India-Pakistan negotiations, which reaffirmed the principle that disputes should be resolved bilaterally (Bose, 2003). However, such dialogues have often been fragile due to political instability, mistrust, or acts of violence.

Thirdly, I think that a crucial, but often neglected aspect of conflict resolution is the inclusion of Kashmiri voices. Namely, the peace efforts that ignore Kashmiri political aspirations tend to fail because they do not address the root causes of discontent (Bose, 2003). As far as I can see, the Indian government's unilateral measures, such as the 2019 revocation of Article 370, illustrate how imposed solutions can intensify resistance rather than bring stability. The lesson is clear: sustainable peace requires acknowledging and accommodating the diverse political aspirations of the Kashmiri people.

Fourthly, the international community has played a limited but inconsistent role in the Kashmir dispute. While the United Nations brokered a ceasefire in 1949, subsequent attempts at mediation, including those by the United States and the Soviet Union, have had mixed results. International involvement is often constrained by the geopolitical interests of major powers, particularly regarding their relations with India and Pakistan (Bose, 2003). I conjecture that this means that

the external mediation alone cannot impose a solution without the commitment of the primary stakeholders.

Fifthly, I want to highlight the fact that no single-track approach—whether military, diplomatic, or economic—can resolve the issue. Indian political scientist S. Bose thinks that a multidimensional approach that combines political dialogue, economic cooperation, and security guarantees is the right one. Additionally, confidence-building measures, such as cross-border trade and people-to-people contacts, have shown promise in reducing hostility, though their impact has been limited by recurring political crises (Bose, 2003).

I believe that the Kashmir experience can be applied to the Russian-Ukrainian war as well, though the conditions are different. As aforementioned, the experience of resolving the Kashmir crisis shows that military force alone cannot resolve fundamental political contradictions. Despite decades of armed confrontation, neither India nor Pakistan have been able to impose a final solution to the conflict. In the Russian-Ukrainian war, this is evident in the fact that prolonged hostilities have not achieved any of the stated goals of the parties. The depletion of resources, the destruction of infrastructure, and humanitarian disasters only exacerbate the conflict and don't contribute to the establishment of a lasting peace. I would also like to highlight the fact that significant progress in resolving the Kashmir issue has occurred primarily through bilateral negotiations and not through third-party intervention. I believe that in the case of Ukraine, this means that while international mediation can play a supporting role, sustainable peace can only be achieved if Moscow and Kyiv are willing to negotiate directly.

In addition, I believe that the Kashmir experience also shows that external mediation alone cannot impose a solution without a real commitment from the main stakeholder. The mediation efforts of the UN, the US and other players did not lead to a final settlement of the dispute between India and Pakistan by virtue of the fact that both sides continued to pursue their national interests. I assume that in the Russian-Ukrainian war perspective, it can be interpreted the following way: even strong diplomatic pressure from the West or other

international actors will not produce results unless Moscow and Kyiv are prepared to make concessions and negotiate.

However, I think that the lessons from Kashmir conflict can be applied not only for other international conflicts, but mainly to Kashmir itself. Therefore, in the next chapter of the essay I want to indicate the possible prospects of this Eastern conflict, considering its history and highlighted lessons.

## **PROSPECTS OF THIS CONFLICT**

In this chapter, I will analyze how different scholars assess the potential trajectories of the conflict and will give my own view on this issue. From the one point of view, the persistent danger of military escalation, particularly given the presence of nuclear weapons and the lack of effective de-escalation mechanisms, is essential. From the other one, the conflict cannot be viewed solely through the lens of state rivalries. Also, I will examine the strategic role of China and the significance of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) in shaping the conflict. In exploring these perspectives, I want to understand the key forces that shape Kashmir's future.

Ganguly (1992) points out the ever-present danger of the Kashmir war getting out of hand as a full-scale war, thanks to the participation of nuclear-armed India and Pakistan. Since both countries have now built large nuclear stockpiles, it is apparent that the danger of the conflict getting out of hand continues to be a matter of enormous concern. Moreover, the protracted military confrontations in the Kashmir area, coupled with increased political tensions, have the potential to generate massive misperceptions, particularly without robust communication and de-escalation mechanisms between the two states (Ganguly, 1992).

In this context, I believe that the role of the international community becomes crucial in preventing further escalation. Most likely, the global community, including major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China, has a vested interest in the stability of South Asia in light of its strategic importance and the nuclear dimension of the conflict. According to Ganguly (1992), the international community

must play an active role in preventing escalation, particularly by facilitating dialogue and fostering confidence-building measures between India and Pakistan. I also want to note that this would require not only diplomatic pressure but also strategic engagement with China, as its support for Pakistan complicates any potential resolution.

If proceeding talking about the international mediators, I think it is crucial to indicate one more aspect. Although the U.N. Security Council was historically involved in Kashmir, it has been limited in its capacity to intervene due to the veto powers of permanent members, including Russia and China. Thus, diplomatic initiatives must focus on encouraging bilateral talks, potentially with the support of regional powers like the United States and Russia, who can provide neutral ground for negotiations (Duschinski et al., 2023). Surely, the involvement of China in particular is crucial, because China has significant interests in the region and I believe that without its participation in any potential peace process, the prospects for lasting peace remain uncertain.

From this perspective, I envision China's involvement to be both stabilizing and complicating. On one hand, Beijing has an interest in not allowing things to escalate between India and Pakistan since war could jeopardize the future of large infrastructure projects like the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (Fingar, 2016). Conversely, the increasing economic and military relationship between China and Pakistan may embolden Islamabad's stance on Kashmir, thereby heightening tensions with India. The growth of Chinese influence in Pakistan-held Kashmir, especially with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), has already created diplomatic tensions with India, which, as noted above, perceives such developments as an encroachment on its territorial integrity (Fingar, 2016).

I want to expand on this analysis by exploring the broader geopolitical ramifications of CPEC. The economic corridor is not just a trade route, but a strategic tool that redefines power dynamics in South Asia. As Hussain & Jamali (2019) see, CPEC serves as a counterbalance to India's growing economic and military influence, reinforcing the China-Pakistan alliance as a challenge to New Delhi's regional

dominance. In this view, the corridor boosts Pakistan's strategic presence through the establishment of crucial economic lifelines and infrastructure development, making Islamabad less reliant on Western capital aid (Hussain & Jamali, 2019).

In this point, I also want to highlight the broader geopolitical context of South Asia, and refer to it as a complex theater where the different interests of China, India, and the United States intersect. India perceives China's growing presence in the region as an attempt to encircle it strategically, reinforcing New Delhi's determination to assert its claims over Kashmir. Moreover, Fingar argues that China's investments in South Asia serve not only economic but also strategic purposes, allowing Beijing to extend its influence while securing energy and trade routes (Fingar, 2016). In my view, this strategy means China will probably continue to support Pakistan diplomatically but not involve itself militarily directly. However, Duschinski et al. (2023) argue that explaining the Kashmir conflict requires moving beyond state-centric frames for making sense of Kashmiri experiences of occupation, violence, and political desires. They frame the conflict as an issue of decolonization. If this point of view is adopted seriously, recognition of Kashmiri self-determination is needed for conflict resolution over international treaties. There has to be Kashmiri voices involved in decision-making for peaceful coexistence. With the globalization of human rights, Kashmiris can question India's account all over the world (Duschinski et al., 2023).

To sum up, there are a variety of possibilities that define the future of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict. First, the current state can persist, with ongoing skirmishes and diplomatic standstills. Second, initiatives like CPEC may enhance regional cooperation, but this will occur only if trust issues and sovereignty concerns are addressed. Third, great powers like China and the U.S. may heighten tensions by engaging in strategic competition. Fourth, due to China's economic interests, it may promote diplomacy to preclude war, consistent with Fingar's observation that China emphasizes stability (Fingar, 2016). Fifth, more Chinese infrastructure projects might heighten tensions with India. Lastly, if India

perceives China's presence as threatening, it could proceed and militarize the region itself. I believe that all these scenarios could occur individually or at the same time.

According to the GFP 2025 Military Strength Ranking (see Picture 4), India and China are the top five strongest militaries in the world, and Pakistan ranks among the top 15, which certainly makes them one of the strongest players in the world. In my understanding, since the security system of Potsdam-Yalta fell apart after the Cold War, the world is seeking a new order. And Trump's response to Russia and China is symptomatic of this. Despite diplomatic attempts, he maintained sanctions and troops in Eastern Europe. With China, his actions were more direct—trade wars, tariffs, and efforts at containing its expansion worldwide (The Guardian, 2025). It is my firm conviction that these actions signal a change in which not only the US and Russia, but new nations such as China, reshape global norms.

**Pic. 4: 2025 Military Strength Ranking**



Source: Global Firepower (GFP). Retrieved February 11, 2025, from <https://www.globalfirepower.com/countries-listing.php>

Hence, the world is looking for a new order, trying to take into account not just the interests of the old players but also new players like China, India and other emerging nations. From this perspective, I believe that it is worthwhile to investigate how the Jammu and Kashmir conflict current situation and future prospects can influence the new World Order, considering China and India as key actors on the international scene.

## IMPACT ON THE POST-POTSDAM-YALTA WORLD ORDER

I believe that in order to understand how the Jammu and Kashmir conflict realities and prospects can influence the new Post-Potsdam-Yalta World Order, it is initially necessary to understand the portrait of the Potsdam-Yalta World Order before it ceased to exist.

The Potsdam-Yalta world order was established after World War II, based on agreements made by the Allied powers—primarily the United States, the Soviet Union, and the United Kingdom—at Yalta (February 1945) and Potsdam (July–August 1945). It was intended to prevent another global conflict, contain German militarism, and manage spheres of influence. Also, it is important to note that the Cold War maintained the Potsdam-Yalta structure through bipolar rivalry, and both superpowers avoided direct confrontation but engaged in proxy conflicts, ideological competition, and arms races. However, by the end of the 20th century, internal contradictions began to undermine the order. Namely, the Soviet Union proved unable to maintain its economic and military commitments, collapsed, and ended the Cold War. American historian and political scientist J. L. Gaddis notes that what ended the Cold War was not the victory of one ideology over the other, but the exhaustion of one side's ability to compete (Gaddis, 2005). And, as I reflect on the current state of international relations, it is clear that this order has disintegrated, giving way to a new, undefined geopolitical structure.

Despite this, the post-Cold War era still retained some aspects of the previous order – NATO continued to exist, Russia took over the Soviet nuclear arsenal, and international institutions operated under Western influence. However, the period of US dominance proved to be short-lived. We have seen China emerge as a strong global economic force and Russia adopt a more aggressive foreign policy, highlighted by its invasion of Ukraine. American journalist David E. Sanger suggests that these changes indicate a shift back to a multipolar world, where the United States must manage complex relationships with various rival powers (Sanger, 2024). This transition, in my view, poses a challenge to the remnants of the Yalta-Potsdam framework, as the rising powers aim to reshape their areas of influence.

However, the United States faces a great challenge in responding to these shifts. The strategies that defined the original Cold War may no longer be effective in this more complex and interconnected global landscape. David E. Sanger highlights the importance of strengthening alliances, particularly through NATO, to present a unified front against adversarial actions. He also points out that the U.S. should reassess its foreign policy priorities, learning from past engagements such as the withdrawal from Afghanistan, to better address the challenges posed by China's economic expansion and Russia's military assertiveness (Sanger, 2024). If talking about the American zones of influence in the New World Order, I think that in North America, the U.S. shares close ties with Canada through military cooperation in NORAD and strong economic interdependence. Also, Greenland holds strategic importance due to the U.S. base at Thule (The Atlantic, 2025) and to the Northern Sea Route. Furthermore, Latin America has traditionally been a U.S. sphere of influence, with the Monroe Doctrine deterring external powers. Particularly in light of recent events, the Panama Canal remains a critical chokepoint, with the U.S. ensuring its security, despite Panama's sovereignty (CFR, 2025). The U.S. also counters China in the Indo-Pacific through the Quad (CFR, 2025), maintains Middle Eastern stability via military bases, and limits Chinese and Russian influence in Africa through AFRICOM (CFR, 2025). The Arctic's strategic

importance grows as the U.S., Canada, and NATO counter Russian and Chinese expansion (The Atlantic, 2025).

However, I believe that in order to balance this influence, we and the US in particular need to consider the possible place and prospects of other global and regional leaders and influential countries, namely India, China and Pakistan.

If talking about China, I think that its revival as a global power is marked by its Belt and Road Initiative, which seeks to create an extensive network of trade routes and infrastructure projects across Asia, Africa, and Europe. A cornerstone of this initiative is the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, which not only provides China with access to the Arabian Sea through the Gwadar Port but also strengthens its strategic foothold in South Asia (CFR, 2025). In East Asia and the Pacific, China's economic and military dominance, territorial claims in the South China Sea, and strategic rivalry with the U.S. shape regional security. In Central Asia, it challenges Russia's historical influence through economic leverage (Chatham House, 2021). Also, China's African investments and Gulf energy ties strengthen its global standing, while the "Polar Silk Road" expands its Arctic reach.

Unlike China's state-driven approach, India leverages its democratic system, technological progress, and strategic partnerships to enhance its global presence. The Atmanirbhar Bharat initiative cultivates self-reliance, balancing ties between the West and BRICS to secure technological and defense investments (KPMG, 2024). In the Indo-Pacific, India counters China via the Quad, promoting a free regional order through collaboration with the U.S., Japan, and Australia (Carnegie Endowment, 2020). In South Asia, it maintains traditional influence, particularly through SAARC, countering China's regional expansion (Carnegie Endowment, 2023).

Proceeding with the Pakistan situation, I think that its geopolitical position is largely shaped by its close ties with China, particularly through the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor. This partnership not only improves Pakistan's infrastructure but also strengthens its economic ties with China, even as concerns about rising debt and economic dependency persist (Lou, 2022). On the military front, Pakistan's nuclear capabilities and defense collaboration with

China, including joint military exercises and arms sales, play a key function in sustaining a balance of power in South Asia (Lou, 2022). Additionally, we see that Pakistan's relationship with the United States is complicated, especially as Washington increasingly converges with India; nevertheless, Pakistan continues to utilize its strategic position to foster bilateral relations. I believe that in the evolving global landscape, Pakistan's influence could grow through its partnerships with China and Russia, as well as its connections with important Middle Eastern nations like Saudi Arabia and Iran. I also assume that Pakistan's role as a significant player in South Asia is vital, especially concerning the Kashmir conflict and its rivalry with India. Moreover, Pakistan's backing of proxy groups in Kashmir and Afghanistan illustrates its strategy to exert regional influence without direct military involvement (Lou, 2022). For Pakistan, the Kashmir issue is intricately linked to its national identity and foreign policy. Namely, it perceives the conflict as a matter of self-determination, utilizing diplomatic avenues such as the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to seek international support. In this context, Pakistan's military strategy encompasses direct engagement, proxy warfare, and leveraging China's increasing influence to counter India's dominance (Lou, 2022). Also, as far as I can see, by seeking to capitalize on its alliance with China to gain economic and military leverage, Pakistan is positioning itself as a key player in the South Asian and Central Asian power dynamics, with hopes of increasing its role in regional governance as the New World Order takes shape.

Returning to Kashmir, India, on the other hand, views Kashmir as critical to its sovereignty and regional security. The revocation of Article 370 in 2019 solidified this view by fully integrating Kashmir into India, a move that faced pushback from both Pakistan and China, as discussed in earlier chapters. India's growing military presence in Kashmir, along with its strategic partnerships with the U.S., especially through the Quad, strengthens its stance against both Pakistan and China (Ganguly et al., 2023). I believe India's aim is not just to maintain control over Kashmir but also to establish itself as a leading regional power that can influence the broader Indo-Pacific strategy. I conjecture that by asserting its authority over

Kashmir, India appears to be trying to counterbalance China's increasing regional influence and enhance its strategic independence on the global stage.

Regarding China, its support for Pakistan helps it solidify its regional presence while countering India's ascent. The Belt and Road Initiative and the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor are key tools for China to extend its economic and strategic reach in South Asia. For China, having a stake in the Kashmir conflict enables it to challenge India's influence, especially as India converges more closely with the U.S. and the Quad (Lou, 2022). Furthermore, I think that China's investments in the region could be leveraged to strengthen its position in the ongoing Sino-Indian rivalry, since it may have an aim for a larger role in the economic and security dynamics of the New World Order.

Thus, I believe that the Kashmir conflict remains a high-stakes geopolitical issue where India, Pakistan, and China each seek to secure territorial, economic, and strategic advantages. I presume that the outcome of this dispute will have far-reaching consequences for the future balance of power in South Asia and beyond, since these three powers jockey for position in the evolving global order. And if considering the future balance of power beyond the South Asia, I believe that due to the fact that war in Ukraine has become a field of confrontation and influence between the world's major powers, including China and India (Ukrinform, 2024) by different instruments, which I will explain further, and both of them are involved in the Jammu and Kashmir conflict, I dare to suggest that due to the possible changes in the course of the conflict in Jammu and Kashmir, and, therefore, the impact on the distribution of the zones of influence of the countries in the frame of the New World Order, it could lead to changes in the course of the Russian-Ukrainian war.

## **HOW JAMMU AND KASHMIR CAN AFFECT THE COURSE OF THE RUSSIAN-UKRAINIAN WAR?**

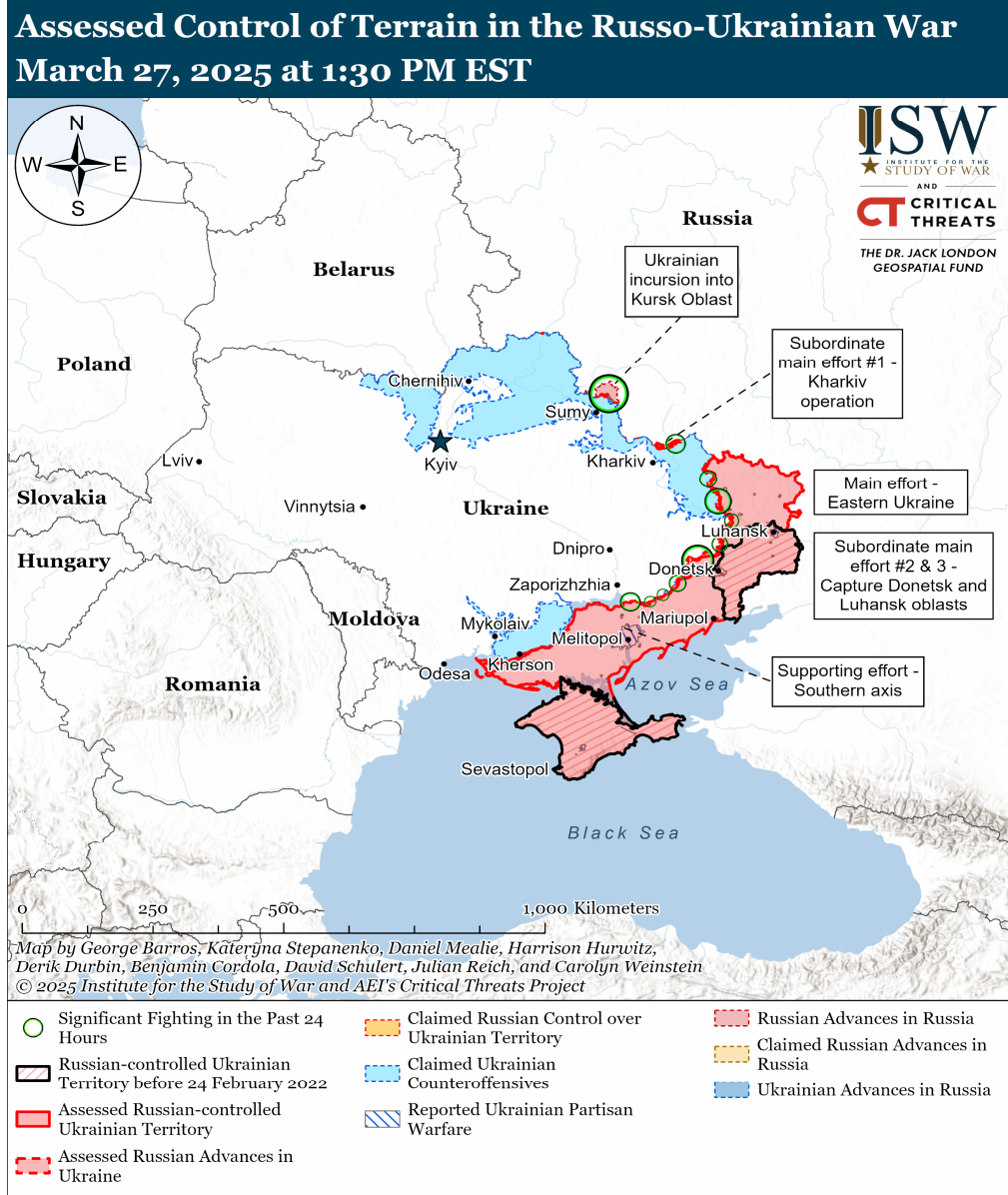
In this chapter, I want to analyze how the development of Jammu and Kashmir conflict can influence the course of the

Russian-Ukrainian war. However, I will do it not merely through using the mediator in the face of the change of the zones of influence, but also directly. Nevertheless, firstly, I want to indicate how the mentioned in the previous chapter possible changes in the zones of influence in the New World Order in light of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict can influence the Russian-Ukrainian war.

I believe that the shifting of global zones of influence directly affects the war in Ukraine, as it alters the strategic interests of the major powers involved. Russia's military actions in Ukraine (see Picture 5) are part of a broader effort to block Western influence in its historical sphere. As Mankoff (2024) argues, Russia views NATO's expansion and Ukraine's integration into Western structures as existential threats. This war is not just about territorial control, but about preventing a broader geopolitical realignment that could diminish Russia's role in global politics. If Ukraine were to fully align with the West, it would weaken Russia's ability to challenge the established world order (Mankoff, 2024). Ultimately, the redistribution of influence in South Asia could profoundly affect the Russia-Ukraine war. I conjecture that as global powers shift their priorities, the balance of military, economic, and diplomatic support for Russia and Ukraine may evolve, influencing the war's outcome.

Namely, as was already mentioned, China's expanding influence through its Belt and Road Initiative and economic partnerships is redefining its global role. While Beijing has maintained a neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine war, its growing dominance in Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America affects global alignments. China's deepening economic ties with Russia, particularly in energy and trade, provide Moscow with an economic lifeline amid Western sanctions (Ganguly et al., 2023). However, I assume that as China strengthens its influence in key regions, it may become more cautious about being closely associated with Russia's war. And if Beijing prioritizes stabilizing its global economic relationships, it could limit its indirect support for Moscow to avoid Western economic retaliation (Carnegie Endowment, 2024).

**Pic. 5: Assessed Control of Terrain in the Russo-Ukrainian War**



Source: Institute for the Study of War (ISW), <https://www.understandingwar.org/sites/default/files/Russo-Ukrainian%20War%20March%2027%2C%202025.png> (March 27, 2025).

India's evolving role in the world order also has major parts for the war. Historically, India has balanced relations between Russia and the West by purchasing Russian oil and defense

equipment while strengthening ties with the U.S. and Europe. However, as India seeks to expand its influence in the Indo-Pacific and counter China, its alignment with the West is likely to deepen (Carnegie Endowment, 2024). I assume that if India shifts further toward the U.S. and its allies, its reliance on Russian arms may decline, which will weaken a key economic and strategic relationship for Moscow. Additionally, India's growing importance in global supply chains means that Western powers may prioritize strengthening ties with New Delhi, further isolating Russia.

Pakistan, traditionally aligned with China, is also adjusting its foreign policy. As its economic dependence on Beijing grows, Pakistan may become more integrated into China's strategic vision, which can limit its engagement with Russia (Lou, 2022). I believe that while Pakistan has not been a major player in the Russia-Ukraine war, its shifting alliances contribute to the broader geopolitical realignment that affects Moscow's standing in the international system.

Ultimately, as China, India, and Pakistan redefine their zones of influence, Russia's position weakens. It is my deep conviction that with India gradually leaning toward the West, China prioritizing economic stability over strategic risk, and Pakistan remaining under Beijing's influence, Moscow faces increasing diplomatic and economic constraints. I presume that these shifts may not determine the immediate outcome of the war but will shape Russia's long-term capacity to sustain its geopolitical ambitions. However, here, I want to also investigate how China, India and Pakistan can straightly affect the course of the Russia-Ukrainian war.

As far as I can observe, China has consistently positioned itself as a supportive partner of Russia in the Russia-Ukrainian war, emphasizing its strategic alliance and mutual interests. As noted by OSW Commentary (2025), China seeks to pursue its overriding objectives that include curtailing the influence of the West and promoting relations with Russia. The two powers have common objectives, which include defiance of Western international institutions, NATO, and the European Union. I think this war gives an opportunity for China to deepen its ties with Russia while avoiding direct

involvement in the war, balancing its global position and economic interests, particularly concerning Taiwan.

Discussing India, its approach towards the Russia-Ukraine conflict is driven by considering its historical relationships with Russia and the emerging strategic relations with the West. It is clear that India's relationships with Russia have greatly impacted its decision to not denounce the invasion fully (Srinivasan, 2022). While it refrains from condemning the invasion, it strengthens defense ties with Russia while maintaining global credibility (Srinivasan, 2022). India also seeks to prevent Russia from becoming overly dependent on China, protecting its regional interests.

While Indian and Pakistani stances can be characterized as neutral to the war in Ukraine, they have party different characterization. Ali and Verma (2024) point out that Pakistan's neutrality is motivated by its geopolitical balancing act, which involves having strategic relations with the United States, while also developing relations with Russia, particularly with regards to regional security issues. Secondly, Pakistan's neutrality is a reflection of its desire not to be aligned in a war that would destabilize its relations with either of the two great powers (Ali & Verma, 2024). I presume that a protracted war in Ukraine can shift world military and economic resources away from South Asia, affecting the security environment of Pakistan. Additionally, I believe that Islamabad also understands that the development of a deeper relationship with Russia could jeopardize its essential relationship with Western financial institutions such as the International Monetary Fund, where Pakistan needs stabilization of the economy. Making a comparison between China, India, and Pakistan's stance on the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, I believe that it is apparent that each nation has its own specific set of strategic interests.

China aids Russia to keep the West from dominating without getting explicitly involved (OSW Commentary, 2025). India is neutral, engaging with Russia and the West on equal terms for security and economic reasons (Srinivasan, 2022). Pakistan is also neutral with a focus on regional stability (Ali & Verma, 2024). Although they refrain from intervention, they are able to exert indirect influence according to their relative stakes in the conflict. Nevertheless, I believe it is obvious that these

nations might not be involved directly in the war, but they can use other indirect tools of influence, depending on their own interests in the Russian-Ukrainian war.

While I have listed most of the key levers with which China, India and Pakistan can affect each other, I have not listed one that can shape the direction of the Russia-Ukrainian war – that is the war in Kashmir. Specifically, in the rest of these paragraphs, I will discuss primarily the employment of leveraging the escalation of the war in Kashmir for the aforementioned purpose.

I think that India's role in the Kashmir dispute gives it the flexibility to play strategically on the international scene particularly with China and the West. Especially, the sympathy of the majority of Western nations towards India's dispute with Pakistan over Kashmir was cultivated significantly by India's use of historical discourse concerning Kashmir. It is a reality that India can use this sympathy to put pressure on China, especially following Chinese relations with Pakistan. I believe that if India can use Beijing's alignment with Pakistan over the Kashmir question as part of a Chinese permissive to disorder approach, then China can be put in the position of having to defend the status quo. Such a diplomatic action could, by its mere occurrence, transform the dynamics of regional relations on the presupposition that it will curb Chinese belligerence on a variety of issues, including those concerning its interactions with Europe and America. As I see it, this would enable India to, on one hand, consolidate her global position and on the other, strengthen her relationship with western nations, which would have an impact on India's position regarding the Russia-Ukraine war. Apart from that, by being in alignment with Western powers, India might be pushed to adopt a more critical perspective of Russia's actions in Ukraine. Then, regarding China, in my opinion, China employs its relationship with Pakistan to advance its geopolitical interests in Kashmir against the regional power of India, potentially constraining India's regional power. In addition, strengthening Pakistan both militarily and diplomatically, China could divert India's focus away from global issues, like the Russia-Ukraine conflict.

I believe that by shoring up Pakistan's Kashmir ambitions, China is weakening India's strategic stance, and it

can compel India to rethink its relationship with the West. Overall, the tilt could restrict India's interaction with America and Europe to the indirect advantage of Russia. At the same time, China's partnership with Russia can also additionally stabilize Moscow in the current war. It is my strong opinion that for Pakistan, its China relationship and its persistent claims on Kashmir offer a unique opportunity to influence not only South Asian geopolitics but also global diplomatic alignments. I believe that Pakistan's China relationship makes it stronger vis-a-vis India, forcing India to split attention between regional security and Western relationships, limiting its response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Pakistan's alignment with China in Kashmir can push the West to India's corner, risking India-Russia ties but also possibly pushing India into Moscow's arms. In addition, proxy wars in Kashmir can further distract India, limiting its global role. Therefore, by involving India, I believe Pakistan can shape the lines of global diplomacy, determining the balance of the Russia-Ukraine war in a manner that could be beneficial to Pakistan and China. Generally, the emergence of the conflict of Jammu and Kashmir may impact the fate of the Russian-Ukrainian war indirectly—through the changing spheres of influence of the emerging world order—and directly—by affecting the strategic choices of China, India, and Pakistan. With emerging global realignments reordering the international order, Russia is under pressure because increasing restrictions are being imposed upon its diplomatic and economic reach.

Besides, China's increasing economic relations with Russia give Moscow an economic cushion, but Beijing's own geopolitical agendas can keep it from extending total support. Then, India, while traditionally a friend of Russia, is tilting increasingly to the West, potentially leaving Moscow more isolated. Furthermore, Pakistan, in a delicate balance in its relations with China and the West, is staying neutral for now but could play regional equations that have impacts on global alliances.

However, for me as for Ukrainian, this information costs less if we don't consider what should Ukraine do about it. As far as I can see, for Ukraine, understanding these dynamics offers an opportunity to strategically engage with China, India,

and Pakistan in ways that could limit Russian influence. Given China's cautious support for Russia, I think that Ukraine should continue engaging with Beijing diplomatically, considering the risks of economic entanglement with a declining Moscow while offering China economic incentives for maintaining neutrality or even distancing itself from Russia. We could also leverage its Western partners to pressure China into prioritizing economic stability over strategic alignment with Moscow. Regarding India, I conjecture that Ukraine should capitalize on New Delhi's growing ties with the West. Namely, by fostering deeper relations with India, particularly in economic and technological sectors, Ukraine can encourage India to gradually reduce its dependence on Russian defense imports. As for Pakistan, I assume that Ukraine should acknowledge its strategic constraints but seek engagement through diplomatic channels, emphasizing economic opportunities and stability in South Asia. Given Pakistan's reliance on Western financial institutions, we could advocate for policies that encourage Islamabad to maintain its neutrality or even cautiously support Ukraine in diplomatic forums or even by selling weapons, like ammunition supply in 2023 (Deutsche Welle, 2023).

Finally, considering the potential leverage of the Jammu and Kashmir conflict in the global power structure, it is my deep conviction that Ukraine could tactically highlight India's concerns over China's support for Pakistan to create a wedge between Moscow and New Delhi. If India perceives that Russia's alignment with China indirectly benefits Pakistan, it may further distance itself from Moscow, weakening one of Russia's critical geopolitical ties. Simultaneously, I believe that Ukraine should work with its Western allies and partners to deter China from using the Kashmir conflict as a means of pressuring India, thereby preventing further destabilization that could indirectly strengthen Russia.

## CONCLUSIONS

The Kashmir conflict continues to be one of the most prominent geopolitical issues in South Asia, affecting not only

regional stability but also larger global power structures. As a key historical conflict between India and Pakistan, the dispute has endured because of deeply rooted political rivalries, religious fault lines, and strategic interests. The emerging global powers—especially China's and India's emergence—have further transformed the character of this conflict so that it emerges as an influential force in shaping the post-Potsdam-Yalta world system.

Secondly, as highlighted in the essay, China and Pakistan's deepening economic and military ties, and particularly via the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor, undermine India's regional hegemony and empower Beijing further. At the same time, India's strategic alliances with the West, specifically via the Quad grouping, suggest its larger ambitions that go beyond South Asia. Hence, this clash of interests implies that Kashmir is a complicated bilateral affair to a serious forum in international power realignment.

In this essay, I also emphasized the direct and indirect influence of this conflict on the war between Russia and Ukraine. The changed dynamics of China, India, and Pakistan—dependent on their geopolitical strategies in Kashmir—have wider implications for Russia's strategic placement. I believe that as India reorients its alliances and China reexamines its global economic strategies, Russia's dependence on its allies comes under scrutiny.

Ultimately, I believe that the resolution of the Kashmir conflict is unlikely in the near future due to the vested interests of all major players. Notwithstanding, it is my deep conviction that its developments will continue to shape international relations, influencing security frameworks, economic alignments, and diplomatic strategies. For Ukraine, understanding these dynamics presents an opportunity to engage diplomatically with key regional powers, ensuring that Russia's influence is further weakened in the evolving global order.

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## **STRATEGIC BUNDLE ANALYSIS: THE QUESTION OF TAIWAN**

*Abstract:*

We are shifting into a multipolar world order in which states are competing for regional and global influence, seen in the growing number of conflicts around the world. This study applies the Scenario Bundle Analysis to examine the Taiwan conflict, assessing the strategic interactions between Taiwan, China, and the United States. The analysis focuses on deterrence, economic interdependence especially Taiwan's semiconductor "Silicon Shield" and political legitimacy effects on choice-making.

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*Key words:*

Taiwan conflict, One-China policy, geostrategy, semiconductor industry

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### **INTRODUCTION**

In an era marked by unpredictable shifts in global leadership and strategy, Trump's new term heralds a fresh wave of uncertainty across international borders. Nowhere is this uncertainty more palpable than in the Taiwan conflict - a situation that encapsulates the volatile interplay of military might, diplomatic leverage, and economic interdependence in the Asia-Pacific region. An escalation of this confrontation would most certainly have an immense impact globally, with a large part of the global economy depending on supplies from China's manufacturing capabilities and virtually all the world's advanced computer-technology contingent on Taiwan's greatest asset: The Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC).

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Recently, tension in the Taiwan Strait has risen since the visit of the US House of Representatives Speaker Nancy Pelosi, which has provoked a harsh response from the mainland, including unprecedented intrusions into Taiwanese Airspace by Chinese fighter jets and diplomatic outrage. To grasp the geostrategic importance of this conflict, we must briefly look back on how it came into existence in the first place.

## METHOD

This paper aims to analyze the Taiwan conflict based on “The Scenario Bundle Method,” created by Rheinhard Selten, a German economist and 1994 Nobel Memorial Prize winner in Economic Sciences (shared with John Harsanyi and John Nash) for pioneering the analysis of equilibria in the theory of non-cooperative games. The Scenario Bundle Analysis is an interactive technique to analyze conflicts based on game theoretic methods related to the theory of extensive n-person games.

To conduct such an analysis, we must first create a fundament for the analysis; in this case, the entities of conflict are specified in a list of relevant actors related to the conflict, where each actor must be understood as a homogenously acting entity. Following the introduction of the Actors, we must then create a list of attributes and rank them for the analysis. Since the Taiwan conflict is a military conflict, I chose to classify the actors' attributes by military and economic power, both being forms of hard power trying to force another government to comply with its policies. In addition to these attributes, we must create a list of relevant aims and fears for each of these actors. Once again, the ranking of their aims and fears should be qualitative and from the actors' perspective. They should also be classified as short-, medium-, or long-term.

After classifying each actor with their respective attributes, aims, and fears, each actor has a list of options for action that are relevant from the actor's perspective. Only now can the game tree be generated. For each node of the tree, one needs to check if other actors or coalitions are affected. If yes,

the next player (either actor or coalition) is written in the game tree. To analyze the respective outcomes, I will conduct a backward induction to eliminate the non-rational alternatives. In the end we will have a list of the most realistic outcomes for the Taiwan conflict.

## **BACKGROUND**

The Taiwan conflict has its roots in the aftermath of the Chinese civil war, when the Nationalist government retreated to Taiwan in 1949, leaving behind a Communist controlled Mainland (called the *Peoples Republic of China, PRC*) and the Nationalist-controlled Island of Taiwan (*Republic of China, ROC*). Both parties have since then kept up the claim to be the rightful representative of the entirety of China. Key to understanding the nature of this conflict is Beijing's "**One-China Principle**" (not to confuse with the US- "One-China Policy"), which maintains that Taiwan is an inalienable part of the PRC's territory and any nation wishing to maintain diplomatic relations with Beijing must acknowledge this framework. In contrast, the **1992 Consensus** is an informal understanding reached between representatives from both sides of the Taiwan Strait. It holds that there is only "one China" but permits each side to interpret the exact meaning differently. This consensus has enabled some level of dialogue and reduced tensions despite its inherent ambiguities. Many in Taiwan, but especially the "Democratic Progressive Party" (DPP) view these frameworks as constraints on their distinct democratic identity and self-determination, which is why the DPP, which has ruled the country since 2016, never acknowledged the very idea or outcome of the 1992 Consensus in contrast to the Nationalist Kuomintang (KMT), whose officials were involved in 1992 discussions. Nevertheless, Taiwan has refrained from declaring formal independence. Such a declaration is seen as too provocative by both parties and likely to trigger severe military, economic, and diplomatic repercussions from Beijing.

Taiwan's strategic location along key maritime corridors enhances its importance, not only for regional trade but also

for global supply chains. Besides its location, Taiwan has one big weapon in its hands: the Silicon Shield. This concept describes the immense economic power Taiwan holds over the rest of the world by producing 65% of the world's computer chip supply and even more of the latest 5<sup>th</sup>/6<sup>th</sup> generation chips, necessary for advanced computing applications like developing AI models. The United States, while adhering to the One China policy, has long supported Taiwan through arms sales and security commitments a balance that is now being reexamined in light of renewed U.S. assertiveness under Trump's influence, who, in his first term, already challenged the preexisting consensus. This evolving dynamic, coupled with China's growing military capabilities, sets the stage for a high-stakes contest in the Asia-Pacific region, forming the basis for our strategic bundle analysis.

## ACTORS

### Taiwan - Republic of China (ROC)

The ROC is at the heart of the conflict. It has developed a distinct democratic identity, robust economy, and unique cultural heritage over decades of de facto independence. Taiwan's primary interest lies in preserving its self-governance, security, and economic prosperity (=de facto independence). Maintaining a status quo that avoids provocative moves (such as a formal declaration of independence) is crucial to sidestepping potential military or economic retaliation from the PRC. Besides diplomatic delicacy, deterrence represents the second pillar of Taiwan's wider strategy. Maintaining tight (but unofficial) economic, diplomatic and military relations to regional partners (South Korea, Japan, Australia and new partners via Taiwan's "New Southbound policy" like the Philippines) as well as to global partners (mainly US) is essential to make the PRC believe that an attack on Taiwan would bring them more harm than good. To that end, the ROC's government actively works to reinforce global dependence on Taiwanese Chip manufacturing, a goal that is currently challenged by US who already passed the "Chips Act" in 2022 (so still under democratic leadership) to decrease

dependence and will likely continue to do so with President Trump's announcement to place tariffs of "25% or higher" on all Chip Imports. The announcement created quite some uncertainty in Taiwanese political circles, whose greatest fear (besides a full-out invasion) is and always has been, being abandoned by the US and its allies. Combined with Trump's general unpredictability, demonstrated well by his 180-degree turn-around of the US-Ukraine policy, this fear is greater today than ever before in the past 50 years. For that reason, the ROC does not solely rely on other powers but takes matters of deterrence and defense into its own hands. Over the past decade, Taiwan has continuously expanded its defense budget, bought advanced weapon systems from the US, pushed domestic weapon development, and newly introduced an asymmetric warfare strategy by introducing drones to the battlefield as well as introducing partisan/Guerilla tactics that would not prevent but hamper Chinese occupation attempts.

## People's Republic of China

For the PRC, Taiwan is viewed as an integral part of China, and so the PRC's assertive "**One China**" stance is deeply entwined with domestic legitimacy and strategic planning. The communist party (CCP) makes great use of the Taiwan topic for propaganda. The reinforcement of *the capitalist-imperialist attempts to keep our country divided* – narrative is a gladly used tool to promote unity and obedience of the population. It is especially useful to deter and discredit other national independence movements, for example, in Tibet or Xinjiang. Reunifying Taiwan would also solidify President Xi Jinping's legacy as the leader who restored China's full sovereignty. This is why the PRC is committed to eventual reunification, which is seen as essential to its national identity and geopolitical objectives. Strengthening its military capabilities, asserting economic influence, and managing international pressures are all part of its broader strategy to deter any moves toward Taiwanese independence and undermine US influence in the wider Indo-Pacific region. For that, Taiwan is of immense strategic value. Its location at the center of the first island chain is vital for China's naval expansion, and controlling the island would give China greater access to the Pacific, allowing

it to challenge U.S. dominance in the region, which asserts this dominance through controlling the Philippines-Taiwan-Japan island chain, effectively limiting China's power projection capabilities.

However, despite its military build-up and warmongering rhetoric, China worries that a military confrontation over Taiwan could spiral into a prolonged war, potentially involving U.S. forces and regional allies like Japan or Australia, leading to devastating losses. Such a move of aggression would most certainly entail grave international repercussions like a US-led sanctions regime or even a complete economic blockade. This could easily cripple China's export-oriented and momentarily struggling economy. One should also keep in mind that China's High-Tech sector is as dependent on Taiwanese Chip manufacturing as the rest of world.

## United States of America

The U.S. has historically played a balancing role in the Taiwan conflict, navigating a complex relationship by officially acknowledging but not recognizing the PRC's *One-China Principle* while providing robust support to Taiwan through arms sales and diplomatic engagement. Since Nixon decided to recognize the PRC as the *sole legal government of China* in 1979, the United States maintains a non-recognition stance on Taiwan as an independent state but supports its self-defense and participation in international forums. Since then, the US-Taiwan relations are governed by the One-China policy, taking form through the Three U.S.-China joint communiqués, The Taiwan Relations Act (TRA) of 1979 The Six Assurances made to Taiwan in 1982 (Prasad, 2023). Generally, the U.S. opposes unilateral changes to the status quo by either Beijing or Taipei and insists on peaceful dispute resolution, which is a reason for their Strategic Ambiguity which maintains the US will neither officially confirm nor deny military assistance to Taiwan in case of an attack by the mainland.

Under the new American administration which has signaled a more assertive and unilateral approach and views the current order as a multipolar one. The United States want to preserve its global leadership and influence in the Indo-Pacific region. If the US could not defend Taiwan, it would

likely trigger a domino effect of other US Allies hesitating to rely on American assurances and doubting their commitment. This would usher in an era of fear and uncertainty globally, as many countries, from Europe to the Middle East and East Asia rely on American security guarantees (Chiao, 2022). It is a vital interest of the US to prevent a China/Russia-dominated international order, which would spark possible conflicts over Trade and Economic and Financial Policy.

Washington is also deeply concerned about the consequences of semiconductor supply chain disruptions and a general global economic crisis that could follow upon an escalation of the conflict. Suppose the world loses Taiwan's production capacity, no other company will be able to fill the gap in the short term. Therefore, the economic relationship has supported U.S. dominance over the production of multiple critical technologies in the automobile, technology, and military sectors.

The evolving stance of the U.S., especially given the new administration's posture identifying China as "enemy no. 1" (Maier, 2024), adds an element of unpredictability to the conflict.

## ATTRIBUTES

**Fig. 1: Military Strength**

Country	Naval Strength	Aerial Capabilities	Nuclear Strength	Overall Investment
PRC	9	8	8	8
ROC	5	6	0	6
USA	10	10	10	10

Note. Table "Military Strength" is own work (Measured on a scale from zero to ten, zero meaning none and ten being the highest possible attribute)

The United States possesses an unmatched naval force with 11 aircraft carriers, advanced technology, and global reach. In comparison, China is the second-strongest navy in the world, continuously expanding its fleet and modernizing its capabilities, though it remains less projectable than the US (SIPRI, updated 2023). Taiwan focuses primarily on coastal defense and cannot compete on the high seas against China or

the US. If it comes to a Chinese naval blockade of Taiwan, global trade would be severely disrupted, mainly affecting semiconductor supply chains. The U.S. Navy, with its superior aircraft carriers and global reach, might attempt to break the blockade, increasing the risk of direct military confrontation.

In terms of aerial capabilities, the US Air Force is the world's largest and most advanced, equipped with modern technology such as the F-35 fighter jets and B2 stealth bombers (SIPRI, updated 2023). China has a significant and rapidly modernizing air force but still lags the US in cutting-edge technology. Taiwan maintains a highly modern but smaller air force, heavily dependent on US technology. In case of war, China's Air Force would likely conduct large-scale strikes against Taiwan's military bases and infrastructure to establish air superiority. However, U.S. intervention with advanced aircraft like F-35 and B-2 bombers could significantly counter China's aerial dominance.

Regarding nuclear strength, the US, along with Russia, has the most extensive and technologically advanced nuclear arsenal. China is steadily expanding its nuclear capabilities with a focus on strategic deterrence. Taiwan, however, does not possess any nuclear weapons and relies on conventional defense strategies. While China maintains a no-first-use nuclear policy, tensions with the U.S over Taiwan could lead to strategic miscalculations. A prolonged conflict might push China to consider nuclear signaling or limited nuclear use to deter U.S involvement.

In terms of overall military investment, the US leads global military spending with a budget exceeding \$800 billion per year. China is the second-largest military spender, focusing primarily on regional dominance. Taiwan has a significantly smaller budget, with its spending concentrated on defensive measures against China. A full-scale invasion would significantly drain China's military budget, forcing it to sustain high spending for occupation and counterinsurgency efforts.

In terms of strategic production capabilities, the US is the global leader in technology, finance, and innovation, playing a key role in advanced manufacturing and services. China dominates in manufacturing and has a rapidly growing

**Fig. 2: Economic Strength**

Country	GDP (per capita)	Growth	Strategic Production Capabilities	Overall Economic Importance
PRC	5	8	9	9
ROC	8	7	8	8
USA	9	6	10	10

Note. Table “Economic Strength” is own work. (Measured on a scale from zero to ten, zero meaning none and ten being the highest possible attribute)

tech sector, maintaining strong influence over global supply chains. Taiwan is a critical player in global semiconductor production, particularly through companies such as TSMC, making it pivotal in global technology industries. If China decided to attack Taiwan, this would have a massive impact on manufacturing supply links, on finance, and the access to markets across the region and the world and immediately impact the supply of high-tech semiconductors. Regarding overall economic importance, the US dominates global financial markets, with the US dollar serving as the world’s reserve currency and a leader in technological innovation. China continues to expand its global influence through initiatives like the Belt and Road Initiative but remains dependent on exports and imports of advanced technology, such as semiconductors from Taiwan. Taiwan, despite its smaller size, holds a disproportionately significant role in the global economy due to its leadership in semiconductor and electronics manufacturing. An attack on the island would have knock-on effects on the manufacturing of a range of goods, from smartphones to medical equipment and other technological devices, globally. A war between China and Taiwan will not be like the Russian war on Ukraine because China is a far larger economy than Russia and far more integrated into the global system. A prolonged military conflict could deter foreign investment, slowing China’s economic growth.

## ACTORS' AIMS & FEARS

### **United States – Aims**

Preserve security in the Indo-Pacific region: In a multipolar World, the United States (US) wants to preserve its leadership and influence in the Indo-Pacific region. Aiding Taiwan in conflict is vital for the security of the Region as it's located at a critical node within the first island chain, connecting a network of U.S. allies and partners.

Uphold the manufacture and shipping of semiconductors: Suppose the world loses Taiwan's production capacity; no other company will be able to fill the gap in the short term. Therefore, the economic relationship has supported U.S. dominance over the production of multiple critical technologies in the automobile, technology, and military sectors.

Prevent a China-dominated international order: Chinese leaders are convinced that America and the West will never voluntarily grant China greater influence at the international level, meaning that this would spark possible conflicts over Trade and Economic and Financial Policy. Meaning that it's of greater importance to maintain Global influence

### **United States - Fears**

Global economic crisis: Washington is also deeply concerned about the consequences of semiconductor supply chain disruptions—Taiwan produces over 60% of the world's semiconductors. A crisis in Taiwan could cripple industries globally, from automobiles to defense systems, amplifying the economic and strategic stakes.

A Domino effect weakening other alliances: If the US could not defend Taiwan, its allies might doubt their commitments. Suppose Taiwan was forcibly unified with China, other countries might hesitate to rely on American assurances, which could unravel key alliances like NATO in the long term.

Military conflict escalating into a broader war: The U.S. fears that escalation in the Taiwan Strait could trigger a broader conflict, particularly if China misinterprets defensive maneuvers as aggressive actions.

**Fig. 3: U.S.A., Aims & Fears**

U.S.A.	Aims	Likelihood	Preference
Short-term	Preserve security in the Indo-Pacific	2	4
Medium-term	Uphold the semiconductor industry	3	4
Long-term	Prevent Chinese international order	4	5
U.S.A.	Fears	Likelihood	Degree of Fear
Short-term	Weakening alliances	4	3
Medium-term	Military conflict	2	3
Long-term	Global economic crisis	2	4

Note. Table “U.S.A., Aims & Fears” is own work. (Measured on a scale from 1-5, one being very low and five meaning very high)

### China – Aims

Reunification: China’s primary goal is the reunification of Taiwan with the mainland, which the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) frames as essential to completing China’s “national rejuvenation.” Beijing views Taiwan as an inseparable part of its territory, and reclaiming it is both a political and emotional imperative deeply tied to its identity and legitimacy.

Deter independence movements: Reunifying Taiwan would also solidify President Xi Jinping’s legacy as the leader who restored China’s full sovereignty.

Undermine US influence in East Asia: Taiwan is of immense strategic value. Its location at the center of the first island chain is vital for China’s naval expansion, and controlling the island would give China greater access to the Pacific, allowing it to challenge U.S. dominance in the region.

### China – Fears

Domestic instability: China’s greatest fear is domestic instability that could arise if it fails to achieve reunification with Taiwan. The Chinese Communist Party (CCP) has consistently framed Taiwan’s return as a cornerstone of China’s national rejuvenation, tying it directly to the legitimacy of the Party itself.

Economic damage due to U.S.-led sanctions or blockades: Another significant fear is the possibility of international isolation or economic damage. If China were to invade Taiwan,

it could face crippling sanctions akin to those imposed on Russia after it invaded Ukraine.

Unsuccessful military conflict: Moreover, China worries that a military confrontation over Taiwan could spiral into a prolonged war, potentially involving U.S. forces and regional allies Japan or Australia, leading to devastating losses.

**Fig. 4: China, Aims & Fears**

China	Goals	Likelihood	Preference
Short-term	Undermine US influence	4	5
Medium-term	Deter independence movements	5	3
Long-term	Reunification	2	4
China	Fears	Likelihood	Degree of Fear
Short-term	U.S.-led sanctions	5	3
Medium-term	Unsuccessful military conflict	2	5
Long-term	Domestic instability	4	4

Note. Table “China, Aims & Fears” is own work (Measured on a scale from 1-5, one being very low and five meaning very high).

### Taiwan – Aims

Preserve its de facto independence: Taiwan’s foremost goal is to maintain its independence and preserve democracy while formal independence remains a sensitive and divisive issue due to the risk of provoking a Chinese invasion, Taiwan’s leadership seeks to solidify its international standing.

Deter Chinese aggression: Taiwan invests heavily in modernizing military forces to create a defence against a Chinese invasion. The Goal is to make any attack costly and prolonged, increasing the risk for China.

Strengthen economic interdependence: Another critical goal is to safeguard its semiconductor industry, particularly the Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC), which has become not only an economic asset but also a bargaining chip in its relations with other major powers.

### Taiwan - Fears

Chinese reunification: Taiwan’s people fear the loss of their democratic freedoms and distinct cultural identity if they were brought under Beijing’s authoritarian rule. The experience of Hong Kong is a stark reminder for many Taiwanese.

Military conflict: If China were to invade, the island could face widespread destruction of its infrastructure, including its

globally vital semiconductor industry, which could make Taiwan less valuable as an ally in the aftermath of a war.

Abandoned by the U.S. and other allies: Taiwan’s primary fear is abandonment by the United States and other allies in the event of a crisis. Despite strong rhetorical support, there is always a lingering uncertainty about whether the U.S. and its partners would commit to a full-scale military defence if China were to launch an invasion.

**Fig. 5: Taiwan, Aims & Fears**

Taiwan	Goals	Likelihood	Preference
Short-term	Deter Chinese aggression	4	5
Medium-term	Strengthen economic ties	2	3
Long-term	Preserve independence	3	5
Taiwan	Fears	Likelihood	Degree of Fear
Short-term	Abandonment by Allies	1	2
Medium-term	Military conflict	3	5
Long-term	Chinese reunification	2	4

Note. Table “Taiwan, Aims & Fears” is own work (Measured on a scale from 1-5, one being very low and five meaning very high).

**Fig. 6: Options of Actors**

Country	Option	Aims/Fears	Likelihood
PRC (China)	China takes a path involving negative peace (absence of violence). This strategy involves increasing the influence Taiwan in the political, cultural, and economic spheres. Through a long-term strategy of creating more dependence on the Chinese economy as well as influencing Western, and Taiwanese elections which would be done through misinformation campaigns to split the societies China would create an environment for eventual reunification.	Aims: 2) 4)  Fears: 1) 3)	3
	Decides for a quick “military operation”: It would need to be executed the same way Russia tried to invade Ukraine in form of a “Blitzkrieg”. As China did previously, it would announce a military drill which would then turn into a full-scale invasion of Taiwan. The decisive aspect here is to capture Taipei within a few days to prevent military aid by Taiwan’s allies (US).	Aims: 3) 4)  Fears: 2)	1
U.S.	Reinforcing deterrence through a more robust military presence and closer coordination with regional allies and Taiwan. Through naval presence in the Taiwan strait which China claims for itself, the US would demonstrate more commitment but also create the possibility of sparking new tensions with China.	Aims: 1)  Fears: 2) 3)	4

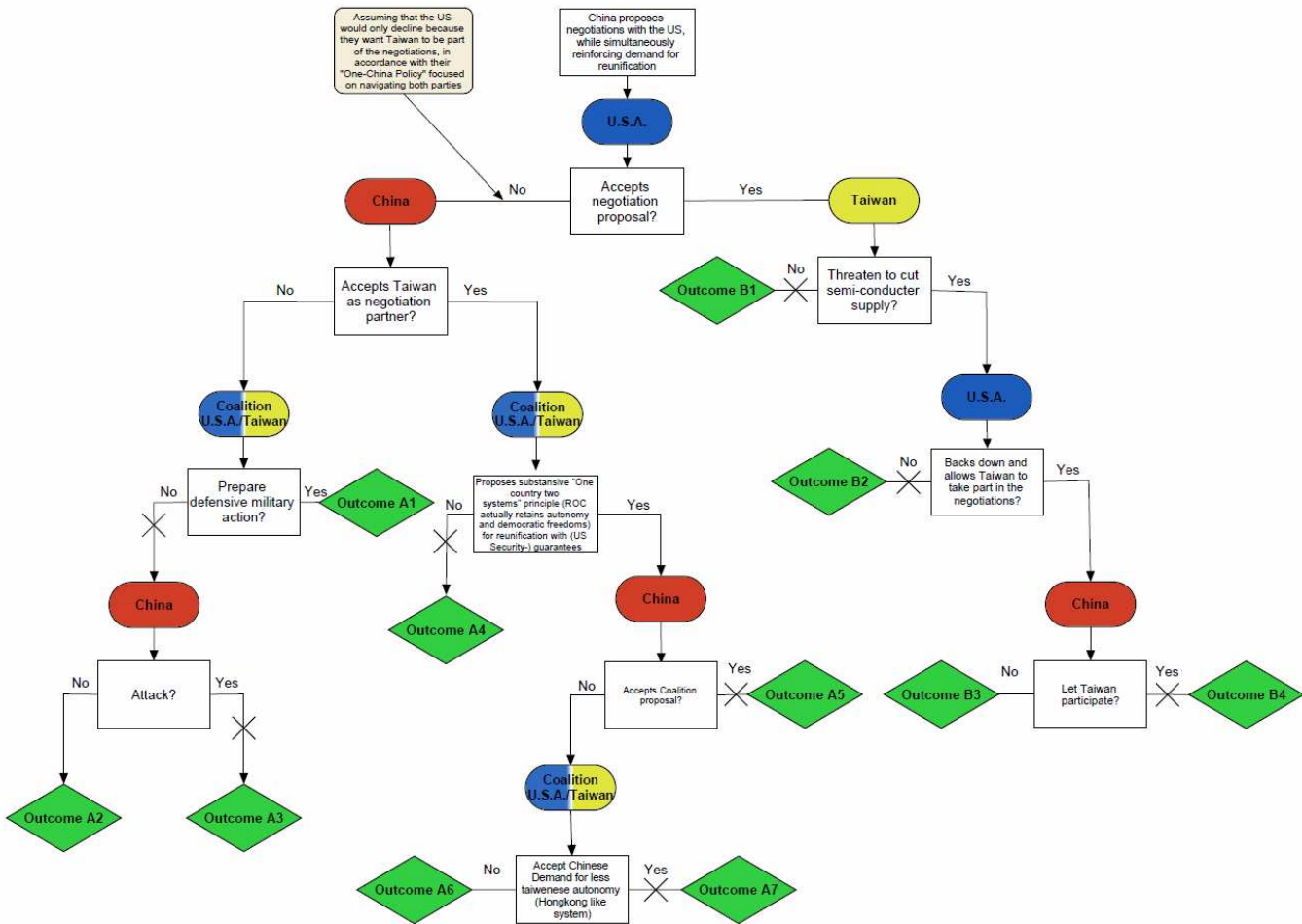
	A more peaceful approach using diplomatic methods like recently used in Saudi-Arabia regarding the Ukraine war. Economic cooperation between all actors allows for mutual economic benefits (e.g. in tech-sector) and helps to reshape the U.S. image in China, creating a more peaceful atmosphere while still maintaining its influence in the region as a security provider.	Aims: 2) 3)  Fears: 1)	4
ROC (Taiwan)	Taiwan is the weakest negotiation partner in the entire conflict. Nevertheless, they have one big asset: The “Silicon Shield” Strategy: If Taiwan faces serious threats from Mainland-China or feels like invasion is imminent, they could leverage the international dependence on semi-conductors by explaining to the whole world, that a PRC attack would lead to the complete (self-)destruction of the Taiwan’s manufacturing capacity (which would trigger a stock market crash and a global economic crisis). In addition, they could immediately block all semi-conductor exports to the mainland and threaten any country who helps China circumvent these measures with the same destiny.	Aims: 3)  Fears: 1)	2
	Foster diplomatic ties with other states to create new alliances. For example, they could apply for formal or informal membership in QUAD+ or sign a defense agreement with Japan. This can however also be risky as diplomatic dialogue undermines Chinas claims of Taiwan and has sparked increasing tensions in the past with military drills and threats by China.	Aims: 1)  Fears: 2)	3

Note. Table “Options of Actors” is own work

## GAME TREE

Since my prior analysis was focused on recent political developments and the question of how the change in the American Presidency could affect the Taiwan conflict, I decided on a special initial scenario where the PRC government sees an opportunity for successful negotiation with the US. This might not be the most likely starting point, but I feel that this reflects an interesting, unconventional possibility few people might have explored before. Backward induction was used because I started by eliminating highly unlikely outcomes, which allowed us to analyze only the most rational and probable choices. This method ensures that I derive the most stable and realistic equilibrium from the available options. My argumentation for why each outcome is realistic or not is mainly based on prior decisions in the path, to show which path/decision is the more rational one.

Fig. 7: Game Tree - SBA



Source: own elaboration.

**A1:** China would be outraged by the American announcement to increase military presence in the light of Chinas refusal to grant Taiwan a seat at the table. Beijing would probably hold symbolic military drills but ultimately back down due to fear of full-scale war and American military power. This would serve as a show of force without the risk of a direct conflict. Since it is not irrational of China to expect the US to insist on Taiwanese participation, this is an adequate response of using military posturing to signal strength (as done in the past) but avoiding direct conflict (effectively maintaining status quo, but with heightened tensions).

**A2:** The status quo is maintained. None of the actors escalate, and the current situation persists. Taiwan remains de facto independent without official recognition. Odds are that the negotiations end after the PRC declines the US demand to integrate ROC leadership into the talks and not responding to that (i.e. not prepare defensive action) would be irrational by the coalition.

**A3:** Full-scale war between China and Taiwan (including U.S. involvement). China opts for a military solution, triggering open war with Taiwan and potentially the United States. This would be an extremely destructive scenario with severe global economic and political consequences. As explained in outcome A2, the path leading to this outcome is inherently irrational. Additionally, the high costs and risks of war make this scenario unlikely to happen.

**A4:** The Coalition effectively ends the negotiations because it does not see room for a compromise. Very unrealistic because China would perceive such an action very negatively, especially after they granted the ROC a seat at the negotiating table.

**A5:** Taiwan renounces formal independence permanently and reduces its armed forces but retains a self-defense force and significant autonomy (human rights, democracy). It joins a Greater China Economic Zone without political integration into the PRC. No Chinese military presence is allowed, and Taiwan's leadership remains in control. The U.S. scales back military cooperation but remains a security guarantor. However, strong anti-CCP sentiment in Taiwan and Beijing's likely rejection of such autonomy—especially with continued U.S. influence—make this deal highly improbable.

**A6:** Negotiations fail due to Coalition rejection of Chinese proposal (after China rejected the Coalitions proposal), leading China to escalate militarily in a limited manner, to follow through on their initial threat of consequences and put the blame for the failure on the Coalition (especially on Taiwan, who was not part of the original negotiations). It would be achieved through symbolic military drills, partial blockades, or seizure of small Taiwanese-controlled islands—but stopping short of full-scale war. This outcome is rational because it is to be expected that the US ask for Taiwanese participation, so

China granting it is not unlikely. Since both sides have very different interpretations of “One Country, Two Systems” it is likely that the negotiations would not reach a compromise acceptable to everyone and status quo would be more less maintained.

**A7:** China successfully reunifies Taiwan under its rule, like Hong Kong, eliminating Taiwan’s military and political autonomy. This would likely trigger massive resistance from the Taiwanese population and could only be achieved through extreme force. This is very unlikely because neither the ROC government nor the American would grant China a deal that effectively strips Taiwan of its autonomy and military (without American security guarantees). The ROC government would never agree to a Hong Kong-like deal because they frequently used it as an example of how reunification would NOT work.

**B1:** If the US accepts Chinese proposal and Taiwan does not make use of its “Silicon shield strategy” (effectively blackmailing the US and allies by threatening destruction of Chip supply) the outcome would be similar to Trumps current proposal for solving the Ukraine conflict. The US would grant a great deal of influence over Taiwan to China, but make sure that some autonomy remains. At the same time the US and Cina would sign an economic cooperation agreement and tensions in the wider region would reduce. Unlikely because this outcome is not at all welcome in Taiwanese civil society. There would be great resistance and anger towards the government for standing by and accepting the fate the bigger powers decided for them.

**B2:** Due to American refusal to take Taiwanese interests into account, ROC imposes semiconductor embargo, thereby causing skyrocketing prices that trigger a crisis in the global technology sector, ultimately culminating in an international economic crisis. Going through with such a bold move is risky for ROC, because the US and other allies might feel betrayed and they give up their greatest asset, probably leading to Chinese annexation without much American resistance. This scenario is unlikely because it is irrational of Taiwan to implement the silicon shield strategy due to the consequences described above.

**B3:** Negotiations fail over Taiwanese participation. China escalates militarily in the following months to follow through on their initial threat and not lose its reputation. Without a diplomatic resolution, China increases military activity, destabilizing the region further, but not provoking the coalition too much to keep escalation under full-scale war threshold. Likely to happen because it is rational of the US to take Taiwanese interests into account to not risk an economic crisis and grant China too much geopolitical power. China's original goal of negotiating without Taiwan (thereby discrediting them) was not successful, thereby status quo is maintained (heightened tensions)

**B4:** In this situation it would be irrational of China to agree to Taiwanese participation, because the goal of their initial proposal was to negotiate a better deal by circumventing Taiwanese interest. With the US being blackmailed by ROC, China cannot hope to realistically achieve what they originally wanted and agreeing on Taiwanese participation would make them look weak (loss of domestic reputation).

## CONCLUSION

The Taiwan conflict, as analyzed through the game tree and strategic bundle analysis (SBA), presents a complex interplay between diplomacy, economic interests, and military deterrence. The unconventional approach of China directly negotiating with the U.S. instead of Taiwan introduces a new dimension to strategic calculations. After systematically eliminating unlikely outcomes, the most rational remaining scenario was A6, because it aligns with China's strategic objectives (reinforcing claim to Taiwan). China needs to follow through on its threats to maintain credibility but wants to avoid a full-scale war that would severely damage its economy and provoke stronger U.S. intervention. A limited escalation (such as military drills or economic pressure) allows China to save face while preventing major backlash. It matches China's historical behaviour and basically preserves the status quo while raising tensions. A1 is less likely because it suggests China would back down without any significant reaction,

which would hurt its credibility both domestically and internationally (Invasion is at least as unlikely). B3 is an escalation beyond A6, making full-scale military conflict more likely in the long term.

China prefers to avoid a direct military confrontation unless absolutely necessary, making A6 a more calculated and rational choice. Outcome A6 does also represent the Nash equilibrium (occurs when no player can improve their situation by unilaterally changing their strategy) in this case: China does not fully escalate (avoiding war but maintaining military pressure), while the U.S. does not escalate militarily (detering China while keeping diplomatic leverage). Taiwan remains independent but under greater coercion (accepting risks but avoiding catastrophic war). A change of strategy by any of the actors would result in a worse outcome (e.g. China deciding for Outcome A5: accepting a “reunification proposal” that would make them look weak and would come short of their actual goals). So, in conclusion we can say that the idea, that China proposes Ukraine-like negotiations with the US will probably not lead to a more beneficial outcome for them. Instead, the analysis indicates that the current status quo would be maintained, but with higher tensions, increasing probability for military conflict.

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## STRATEGIC RESOURCE COMPETITION IN THE U.S.- CHINA RIVALRY: SECURING MINERALS IN AFRICA

*Abstract:*

The United States and China increasingly compete on the global stage for technological supremacy in a struggle over access to major minerals. China expanded its acquisition of resources with the recent discovery of niobobaotite, a mineral rich in niobium and in demand in high-tech production and defense systems. In response, the United States intensified efforts to establish mineral partnerships in Africa in the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC) and Zambia in order to acquire supplies of cobalt, lithium, and other strategic minerals. This competition is further intensified by the growing trend of resource weaponization, as exemplified by China's recent export controls on critical minerals such as gallium and germanium. This paper examines how such a strategy of resources impacts the larger geopolitical dynamics and influences policy in international trade, security in the supply chain, and regional diplomatic alignments. Through an examination of recent trends between 2023 and 2025, the essay shows how mineral dominance affects U.S.-China relations and foresees potential geopolitical shifts in global power dynamics. The findings show China maintains a commanding lead in rare earth supply chains but the United States is leveraging economic and security agreements to counter Chinese influence. Ultimately, this struggle over resources illustrates the increasing convergence of economic security, technological advancement, and international relations in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

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*Key words:*

USA, China, geoeconomics, mineral resource, supply chain, Africa

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## INTRODUCTION

Competition for strategic resources in the US-China rivalry is emerging as a critical component of international geopolitics. As two of the most powerful nations on earth, the United States and China are both vying for control of strategic resources essential for economic growth and national security. The transition to clean energy globally and the diffusion of new technologies have driven demand for strategic resources to historic highs. This surge, combined with existing geopolitical tensions, has sparked a heated rivalry between China and the United States as both nations compete to secure access to critical resources that power their economies and sustain their strategic advantage. The competition is being observed in various domains, including energy resources, rare earth elements, and technological advancements.

One of the most important domains of strategic rivalry over resources between the U.S. and China is in the field of energy resources. Both countries are heavily reliant on energy resources such as oil, natural gas, and coal to power their economies, but with increasing energy demand worldwide, competition for these resources is increasing. China, along with other nations, has been fervently looking for sources of energy within the Middle East, Latin America, and Africa to ensure its energy prospects for the future.

One other competitive area that is strategic among the U.S. and China includes rare earth minerals. Rare earth minerals are essential components of numerous high-technology technologies like smartphones, electric vehicles, and advanced weapons. China currently controls a significant market share in producing the world's rare earth minerals, thus holding a strategic upper hand in the sensitive sector.

REEs refer to a set of 15 lanthanides and one yttrium that have become vital for modern technology due to their uncommon physical and chemical properties. Both neodymium and dysprosium are fundamental for high-performance magnets, and yttrium is vital for superconductors and laser technology. They are vital for wind turbines, electric vehicles, and military uses, and currently, there is not a ready

replacement without compromise in performance (Du & Graedel, 2013).

China has dominated REE production and mining for over two decades, and countries like the U.S. and Japan have been highly dependent on Chinese exports. Additionally, China's growing domestic demand for REEs will dampen exports, putting further strains on supply chains worldwide. With limited facilities for mining and production outside China, countries like the U.S. and Europe lost processing capacity for REEs domestically and hence create supply chain weaknesses. The convergence of Chinese domination, increasing demand, and supply chain vulnerabilities worldwide increase concerns over the future availability and sustainability of REE. Limited quantitative data on REE end-use also makes it more difficult to plan strategically to access these important materials.

Technological innovation is another key battlefield of the U.S.-China competition. Both countries are investing considerably in research and development to create technologies such as artificial intelligence, quantum computing, and 5G telecommunications. The U.S. has long been the leader in technological innovation, but China is rapidly closing the gap and aggressively investing in strategic areas to challenge American primacy.

As U.S.-China competition continues to heighten, strategic rivalry for dominant resources is most likely to further intensify. Both nations are competing to ensure their access to critical resources and technology in order to secure their economic and military dominance. Such rivalry is most likely to have long-lasting implications for the geopolitics of the entire world and could even result in more tensions and clashes between the two superpowers. Competition for strategic resources in U.S.-China rivalry is a complex and intricate phenomenon encompassing many dimensions such as energy sources, rare earths, technological advancement, cybersecurity, and information technology. Both countries are engaged in an ongoing fight to ensure access to important resources and technologies in order to maintain their competitive edge. As competition between the U.S. and China deepens, strategic competition for vital resources will most likely determine future global geopolitics trends and have far-reaching implications for

the world at large. As the strategic importance of rare earth elements, the competition between China and the U.S. is not just about technological superiority, it is a struggle for resource security. China tried to maintain its dominance in resource acquisition, while the U.S. turned to Africa in a bid to diversify supply chains. This essay will examine the multifaceted nature of the U.S.-China rivalry for strategic resources, focusing on the competition for rare earth elements and the strategies employed by both nations to secure resource supplies and examining how this competition influences global power dynamics.

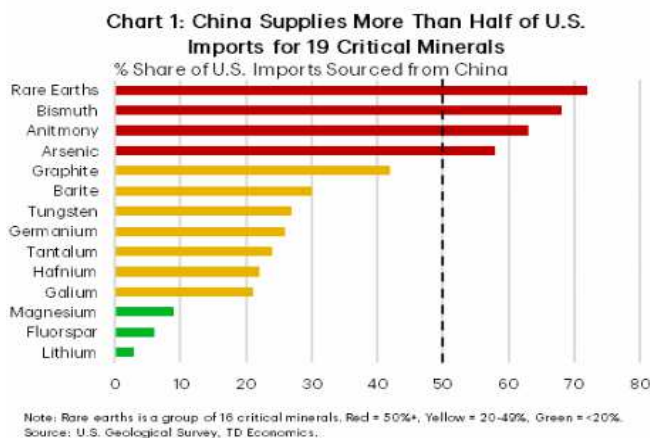
## **THE STRATEGIC IMPORTANCE AND SUPPLY CHAIN CHALLENGES OF RARE EARTH ELEMENTS**

Rare earth elements (REEs) are integral to modern technology, forming the backbone of industries such as renewable energy, advanced electronics, and defense. These 17 chemical elements, known for their unique electrochemical, luminescent, and magnetic properties, are irreplaceable in applications ranging from high-performance magnets and superconductors to laser technologies. The growing global demand for REEs is driven by advancements in artificial intelligence, clean energy initiatives, and expanding military capabilities. However, their supply chains remain highly vulnerable and concentrated only in a few key regions.

China has maintained a commanding dominance over the global REE market for decades, supplying more than 60% of world production and controlling approximately 85% of processing capacity (Trends Research, 2025). This near-monopoly creates strategic vulnerabilities for import-reliant nations such as the United States, Japan, and the European Union. Unlike geological abundance, which is more evenly distributed, China's dominance stems from its state-controlled economic system, relaxed environmental regulations, and aggressive industrial policies. These factors have allowed Beijing to establish itself as the dominant global producer, reinforcing its strategic advantage in the sector.

The global REE supply chain faces severe challenges. The "balancing problem", that is the difficulty in producing specific rare earths independently of others, results in fluctuating availability, supply chain disruptions, and market volatility. Certain REEs become oversupplied, while others face shortages, creating imbalances that complicate long-term resource planning. The problem has worsened over time, with growing discrepancies between demand and supply leading to recurring shortages, particularly after 2010. Moreover, REE extraction and processing have significant environmental consequences, including pollution and hazardous waste, further complicating diversification efforts outside of China.

**Fig. 1: U.S. dependence on China for mineral imports**



Source: Foran, A. (2024). 'U.S. trade vulnerabilities in critical minerals: Pressure points amid rising tensions'.

The strategic importance of securing REE access cannot be overstated. Demand has surged since the mid-20th century and is expected to grow exponentially as countries transition toward green energy systems. Electric vehicles, wind turbines, solar panels, and rechargeable batteries all rely heavily on REEs, making their supply chains a geopolitical priority. However, limited availability, rising extraction costs, and supply monopolization by China continues to pose risks. The business policies of dominant producers influence global pricing, exacerbating economic vulnerabilities for dependent nations.

Amid this intensifying competition, China announced on February 4th 2025, that it would restrict exports of five critical minerals, namely tungsten, tellurium, bismuth, indium, and molybdenum, citing national security concerns (Exiger, 2025). These materials are essential for industries including defense, renewable energy, electronics, and manufacturing. Given China's dominant role in their production, the restrictions are expected to create global supply chain disruptions, leading to price surges and supply bottlenecks. This announcement follows a pattern of Chinese export controls on critical minerals. In July 2023, China restricted exports of gallium and germanium, metals that are essential for semiconductor manufacturing, leading to price spikes of nearly 20% in the United States and Europe. In August 2024, China imposed restrictions on antimony, a metal used in defense technology, which resulted in a 97% drop in shipments to the U.S. and a 200% increase in prices (Exiger, 2025). By December 2024, China completely banned exports of gallium, germanium, and antimony to the United States.






The United States, heavily reliant on tungsten, faces particular challenges as it stopped domestic mining of the mineral in 2015. In December 2024, the U.S. imposed a 25% tariff on certain tungsten imports from China, encouraging importers to seek alternative suppliers such as Vietnam, Russia, Bolivia, and Rwanda. However, while alternative sources exist, China's restrictions could still drive global price surges and impact U.S. industries.

In response to China's market control, the United States and its allies are actively seeking to diversify supply chains, particularly by securing REE sources in Africa. Yet, reducing dependency on China has proven to be a daunting challenge. Despite efforts to invest in alternative sources, including recycling and technological innovations, China's processing and refining infrastructure remains unmatched. The development of a stable, non-Chinese supply chain is critical, yet remains a long-term goal rather than an immediate solution.

As strategic resources, rare earth elements significantly impact business investment, economic development, and global geopolitics. Competition for these materials reflects broader

struggles over technological dominance and national security. Addressing REE vulnerabilities requires a combination of international cooperation, investment in alternative mining and refining projects, and enhanced recycling technologies. While some progress has been made in these areas, significant risks remain, making REEs one of the most contested resources in the U.S.-China strategic rivalry.

**Fig. 2. Minerals under export restrictions by China and their uses**

Mineral	Uses
 Tungsten	Artillery shells, armor plating, cutting tools, engine parts, airplane balancing weights.
 Tellurium	Solar panels, thermoelectric devices, infrared optics, steel alloys, and rechargeable batteries.
 Bismuth	Medical treatments, lead-free solder, cosmetics, flame retardants, and ammunition.
 Indium	Phone screens, TV displays, fiber-optic technology, semiconductors, and solar panels.
 Molybdenum	Missile components, nuclear reactors, steel alloys, lubricants, and high-temperature electronics.

Source: Exiger. 'China Announces Export Controls on Five Critical Minerals'.

## **AFRICA: A STRATEGIC BATTLEGROUND FOR MINERALS**

As China tightens its grip on mineral exports, the United States is looking to Africa to secure alternative sources. With nearly a third of the world's strategic mineral reserves, Africa has become a key battleground in the race for resource security. Countries like the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Zambia, and Namibia are rich in cobalt, lithium, and manganese, critical materials used in electric vehicles, batteries, and defense technology.

The DRC alone supplies nearly 70% of the world's cobalt, but much of its mining sector is already under Chinese control through direct ownership and long-term contracts. This dominance gives Beijing a stronghold over global supply chains and pricing, making it harder for Western nations to secure these essential minerals. In response, the Biden administration has pushed to develop non-Chinese-controlled supply chains

through initiatives like the Mineral Security Partnership (MSP). The U.S. has also backed the \$4 billion Lobito Corridor Project, which aims to improve transportation and export infrastructure for minerals from the DRC and Zambia, reducing dependence on Chinese-built logistics.

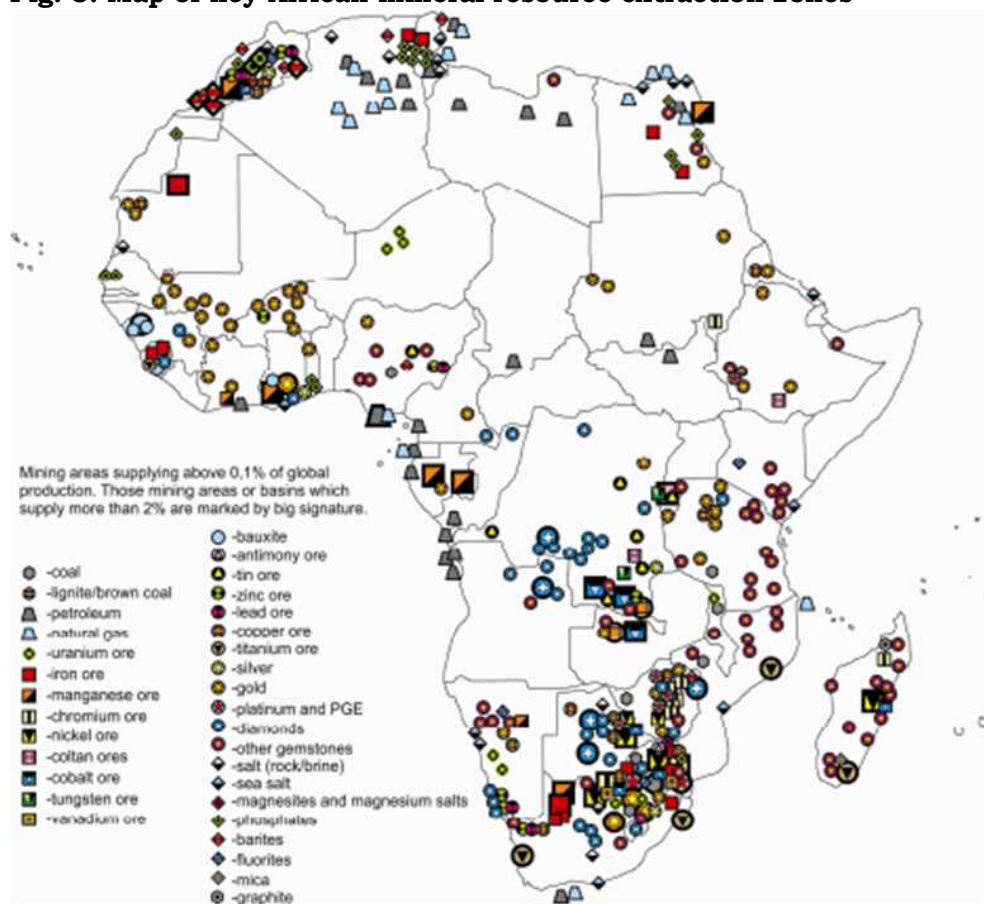
However, the U.S. faces serious challenges in expanding its influence in Africa. Over decades, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) has made it a trusted partner for many African nations, giving Beijing an edge in infrastructure financing and development. By contrast, the U.S. has historically been less involved in direct resource extraction, which has limited its immediate impact. Additionally, African governments are asserting greater control over their mineral wealth, demanding better contract terms and more local processing instead of simply exporting raw materials. This shift presents further challenges for Western companies, which must comply with stricter environmental and labor standards than their Chinese competitors.

China's commitment to securing Africa's resources is clear from its massive investments. In 2023 alone, Chinese companies poured \$21.7 billion into African mining and infrastructure projects, with \$8-10 billion specifically targeting minerals (Tucker, 2025). As part of its green energy transition, China has prioritized securing supplies of cobalt from the DRC (90% of its imports) and nickel from Côte d'Ivoire (Tucker, 2025). Meanwhile, the U.S. has stepped up its engagement—but at a much smaller scale. The 2022 U.S. Strategy Toward Sub-Saharan Africa emphasized support for African nations in managing their resources, and the U.S.-led MSP held talks with African leaders in 2023 to strengthen mineral partnerships. Still, the total U.S. investment in Africa that year was just \$7.4 billion, with only \$300 million allocated to minerals—a fraction of China's spending (Tucker, 2025).

As Africa takes more control over its own resources, managing U.S. and Chinese interests will become even more complex. African governments are demanding fairer deals, more local value addition, and greater transparency in mining operations, which will force both the U.S. and China to adapt their strategies. The competition is not just about owning mines but also about who builds the infrastructure, like

railways, roads, and ports, that dictate how these resources move across the globe. For decades, China has led the way in African infrastructure development, financing and constructing vital transportation links. One of the most significant examples is the Tanzania-Zambia Railway (TAZARA), built in the 1970s with Chinese funding to give Zambia an export route to the Indian Ocean (Marchetto, 2025). More recently, Beijing reaffirmed its presence by signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Zambia and Tanzania to modernize the railway, further cementing its role in Africa's mineral trade.

**Fig. 3. Map of key African mineral resource extraction zones**



Source: Wilczyński, P. L. (2021). 'Arms trade and resources exploitation: Survey of neo-colonialism and neo-imperialism in Africa'.

But China's ambitions are not limited to Eastern and Central Africa. In Guinea, Chinese companies are heavily

invested in the Simandou iron ore project, which is set to produce high-grade iron ore. Given China's push to reduce dependence on Australian iron, securing a direct supply chain from Guinea aligns with its long-term goals. Similarly, China has played a major role in revamping Angola's Benguela Railway, which connects the Copperbelt region of Zambia and the DRC to Angola's Atlantic coast, facilitating mineral exports.

For years, China faced little competition—but now, the West is pushing back. A turning point came in July 2023, when management of the Lobito Atlantic Railway (LAR) was transferred from the Angolan government to a Western-led consortium that includes Trafigura, Mota-Engil, and Vecturis. Shortly after, the U.S. and EU signed a MoU under the G7's Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment (PGI) to expand the Lobito Corridor, linking Angola and Zambia (Marchetto, 2025). This is not just an economic project, it is a strategic countermeasure to China's growing control over African infrastructure. The West sees the Lobito Corridor as a way to diversify global mineral supply chains, reducing dependence on China while offering African nations an alternative development partner. Still, long-term U.S. and EU engagement in Africa remains uncertain. The recent U.S. presidential election could bring major policy shifts, particularly if Donald Trump's return to office leads to an adoption of protectionist policies that reduce America's focus on African infrastructure. If that happens, China could strengthen its hold over Africa's mineral supply chains even further.

There are also challenges on the African side. Nations like DRC and Zambia continue to struggle with governance issues, corruption, and weak regulatory frameworks. While the EU and U.S. emphasize transparency and sustainability, their slow bureaucratic processes and strict investment conditions can make China's fast, no-strings-attached approach more appealing to African leaders. The battle for Africa's minerals is no longer just about who owns the mines, it's about who controls the infrastructure that transports those resources. China, with its decades-long investments, still holds the upper hand, but Western-backed initiatives like the Lobito Corridor present a real challenge. As Africa asserts greater control over

its mineral wealth, balancing U.S. and Chinese interests will become increasingly complex. African governments are pushing for more equitable deals, greater local value addition, and improved transparency in mining operations. This growing assertiveness will reshape the competitive landscape, forcing both superpowers to adapt their strategies in the evolving resource race.

## **CONSEQUENCES OF THE MINERAL RIVALRY**

The increasing competition for minerals is already reshaping international economic and political configurations. Both China and the United States are pursuing a policy of resource nationalism, implementing policies that privilege national and ally-saturated access to strategic resources and restrict exports to rivals. The policy follows greater geopolitical realignments, as critical minerals become a fulcrum of economic security and strategic influence. China itself has utilized control of vital mineral supply chains as a tool of geopolitics. Its 2023 export prohibitions on gallium and germanium, affecting major inputs into producing semiconductors, were broadly perceived as an exercise of geopolitical restraint in response to U.S. moves that shut off China's access to top-end chip technology. But such restrictions were not isolated; they formed part of an extended trend in China using its control of minerals to impose economic and political pressure. The 2010 rare earth export restrictions on Japan were an early example of the use of such weapons in geopolitics. The competition for resources in Africa has also put the place of the continent in international value chains into perspective again. Since the U.S. and its allies are attempting to form independent mineral blocs, African nations are seeking more aggressively to mine the fullest economic benefit of their resources. This has pushed resource nationalization policies forward, seeking increased local processing, employment guarantees, and revenue-sharing agreements. These trends are reshaping China-U.S.-African government talks as both the U.S. and China compete to create supply chains in the midst of African political and economic drama. China, in some cases,

has bid to tighten its grip by taking direct investments in African mining and infrastructure projects, doubling up on control of processing capacity.

The global rare earth market is undergoing a fast transformation with increasing demand in defense, industrial, and clean energy sectors. China, the United States, and Japan remain the biggest users of rare earth elements (REEs), but the dynamics of this competition are shifting. As much as China's demand is expected to increase further, demand in the United States and Japan can level off due to efforts to diversify sources of supply. Despite such alterations, these three nations are going to remain the largest global consumers of REEs, and competition for supply chains is going to be a defining feature of global geopolitics.

One of the largest issues faced by the rare earth market is monopoly in supply. These nations, China, Brazil, Russia, India, the United States, and Australia, produce the majority of the world's REE, with China maintaining its supremacy due to its sheer refining capability. This hegemony is further reinforced by China's hegemony in midstream and downstream processing, which renders other nations reliant on Chinese factories even when they are acquiring raw materials in Africa. This makes the effort to establish independent supply chains by the U.S. and its allies immensely ineffective. Further, the rising costs and hazards of REE mining exacerbate supply challenges.

As readily available deposits are exhausted, new mines become increasingly technologically advanced and capital-intensive. This creates a special problem for nations that wish to diversify away from Chinese REEs because alternative mines and refineries in countries other than China need high levels of investment and governmental sanction. China can also control worldwide supply chains by imposing export controls or price ceilings, further entrenching its strategic position. One of the proposed remedies for this problem is the creation of REE recycling programs, which could reduce reliance on newly mined material. Both the U.S. and EU have been looking into recycling technology, but changes are only now starting and will not likely be a large-scale alternative in the near term.

In the end, these forces demonstrate the vulnerabilities of international rare earth supply chains and the weakness of an industry where China virtually has a monopoly on processing capabilities. The U.S. and its allies are confronted with enormous difficulties in tapping alternative supply chains, so geopolitical competition for REEs will remain a characteristic hallmark of U.S.-China strategic competition.

This is added to China's long-term economic vision of innovation, digitalization, and green technology as its key pillars to its world strategy. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) stands at the center here, integrating Eurasia, Africa, and South America into a massive web of trade and infrastructure investments (Kalantzakos, 2019). BRI emphasis on "high connectivity" by land, sea, air, and digital channels puts China at the forefront of global trade and supply chains of strategic minerals. BRI has presented an unprecedented challenge to the U.S., EU, and Japan, which have historically dominated leading industries, business, and technology. The rise of China, in the guise of the BRI, is what some analysts view as a re-centering of global power. In response to China's rising influence, the U.S. has accelerated its strategic competition, and it is undertaking what can be termed as a "geopolitical showdown." The competition is defined by the pursuit of resource nationalism, where both China and the U.S. are interested in national control of major resources and restricting exports to respective competitors. As the competition advances, it will presumably decide the fate of international trade, security alliances, and the balance of economic power.

## **THE US-CHINA RIVALRY: STRATEGIES AND IMPLICATIONS**

The US-China rivalry for strategic minerals is characterized by distinctive strategies and deep implications for the global geopolitical landscape. China's strategy for obtaining strategic minerals is characterized by large-scale economic engagement in Africa, primarily through the Belt and Road Initiative, with a significant proportion of these investments going towards strategic mineral projects. China is interested in

clean tech investment and actively imports important minerals from Africa to supply core industries that are core to its clean tech development policies as well as overall economic initiatives. China's policies, such as the "New Energy Vehicle Industry Development Plan (2021-2035)" and the emphasis on the "new three" (electric vehicles, lithium batteries, and solar photovoltaic commodities), reflect China's strategic aim to ensure stable supply chains for strategic minerals, with Africa at the forefront of fulfilling this requirement and in sustaining the development of China's strategic industries (Tucker, 2025). China is especially reliant on Africa for specific minerals, such as DRC's cobalt (a key component in electric vehicle batteries) and Côte d'Ivoire's nickel ore, reflecting its reliance on the continent for vital resources. Moreover, China has a monopoly in processing and refining the world's strategic minerals, giving it a strategic asset that further secures its access to African resources and affirms its position in the world's value chain. This control over processing is crucial because even if raw materials are sourced elsewhere, the reliance on Chinese refining capacity creates a bottleneck, limiting other countries' ability to establish truly independent supply chains.

Conversely, the United States, with a mix of economic, national security, and clean energy objectives, also aims to gain access to key minerals but does so with a different strategy in a number of significant respects. The U.S. is most anxious about its reliance on China for minerals, which it regards as posing a "U.S. national security with a grim economic threat," a reflection of the growing unease throughout the U.S. government regarding supply risks and threats of disruption. The U.S. aims to decrease its dependence on China and broaden its mineral supply chain from a combination of policy initiatives, diplomatic engagement, and strategic alliances with countries located in Africa as well as in other regions around the globe. US government efforts to increase its strategic mineral relationship with Africa include the release of the US strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa in August 2022 and the establishment of the Mineral Security Partnership, showing an enhanced level of coordination in working with African nations and advancing collaboration within the industry. While China has established a broader portfolio of minerals in Africa with its

enormous investments, the U.S. is actually going after individual projects and initiatives to construct its own supply chain and reduce its reliance on China. This includes not only securing access to raw materials but also investing in developing processing capabilities, although these efforts lag behind China's existing capacity.

These rival strategies have deep significance for trade, investment, and diplomacy. China's economic engagement in Africa, particularly under the Belt and Road Initiative, involves major investments in priority mineral projects, most often with connected infrastructure development and other types of economic cooperation. China's economic relations with African nations are usually crafted to grant access to vital minerals, sometimes creating a condition of interdependence where both parties rely heavily on the other for economic benefit. This can lead to situations where African nations, while benefiting from Chinese investment, also become reliant on China for markets and financing, potentially limiting their economic options. The U.S., in contrast, is deepening its investments in Africa's strategic minerals sector but is also laying greater stress on diplomacy to form strategic alliances, advance transparency and sustainability, and challenge China's position in the continent. The U.S. has established the Mineral Security Partnership to encourage collaboration with mineral-rich African countries, and other like-minded nations with similar interest in supply chain security, to address the challenges and opportunities in the minerals space in a multilateral environment. This reflects a growing emphasis on "responsible sourcing" and supply chain diversification among Western nations.

The struggle for African minerals represents a potential new front of great power competition between China and the U.S. with both risk of conflict and cooperation. Increasing U.S.-China competition and weaponization of supply chain dependence, as evidenced in Chinese export controls on key minerals, increase significant risks of potential supply chain disruption and exposure of countries reliant on these materials. The 2010 rare earth crisis, where China restricted exports to Japan, serves as a stark reminder of how control over mineral supply can be used as a geopolitical tool.

However, the need to address climate change and transition to clean energy also creates potential avenues for cooperation. Both the U.S. and China have a vested interest in ensuring a stable supply of minerals for renewable energy technologies, which could incentivize collaboration on certain aspects of the supply chain or technology development. This complex interplay of competition and potential cooperation will likely define the future of resource geopolitics.

## **CONCLUSION**

The competition for minerals is not simply an economic competition but a real defining element of U.S.-China strategic competition that conditions global trade, supply chains, and geostrategic reach. As demand continues to rise for critical minerals and rare earth elements, access to such resources will become even more determinative of technological advancement and national security. The ability to secure such resources will likely determine who will dominate developing key 21st-century technologies like AI, renewable energy, and high-performance computing.

Though China has a current dominant position through deeply integrated mining, processing, and infrastructure networks, the United States is actively engaged in challenging Beijing's control by cultivating new partners in Africa and investing in alternative supply chains. But significant structural impediments remain. The lack of refining and processing capacity outside of China continues to hinder Western attempts at securing autonomous supply routes. In addition, political and economic realities of African states with resources complicate matters still further, as such states seek to exercise more control over their mineral wealth. Many African states are insisting on more favorable terms of extraction of their resources, including local beneficiation and more investment in domestic industries, a development that is a reflection of their increasing agency in this competition. These are conditions that Western companies, subject to environmental and labor regulations, will find hard to satisfy as effectively as their Chinese counterparts.

As the energy transition accelerates and the world shifts to electrification, the stakes of this competition will rise still further. The success or failure of the United States and its allies to establish a viable, China-free mineral supply line can well shape power balances decades hence and result in a realignment of global power and new geopolitics. It is not a contest over economic leverage but over technological supremacy and political authority in the 21st century. Whatever nation or group is able to have secure access to those critical resources will not just drive innovation but will shape the geopolitics of the future.

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## SECURITY DIPLOMACY AS A RESPONSE TO HORN OF AFRICA'S SECURITY COMPLEX

*Abstract:*

The Horn of Africa is confronted with a complex security environment marked by state weakness and the ever-present threat of Al-Shabaab. This essay examines the Ethio-US partnership in the broader framework of regional and international anti-terrorism collaboration. It looks at the religious, socio-political, and historical roots of Al-Shabaab, the extremist ideology of the group, and its evolving tactics, including the manipulation of Islamic narratives and exploitation of socio-economic grievances. The analysis explores the role of state weakness and governance deficit in driving the region's instability, the challenges confronting counter-terrorism initiatives, and the humanitarian and geopolitical stakes of Al-Shabaab's presence. The essay also analyzes the efficacy of the Ethio-US alliance and its reliance on military measures, and the necessity of addressing the source causes such as bad governance, socio-economic disparities, and the different versions of Islam in Somalia. It ends with emphasizing the necessity of an overall strategy involving military, political, economic, and social measures to provide lasting stability to the Horn of Africa.

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*Key words:*

Al-Shabaab, Horn of Africa, counter-terrorism, state fragility, Ethio-US partnership

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### **INTRODUCTION**

The Horn of Africa, a geostrategically sensitive zone, has to contend with a multi-layered security complex characterized

by state fragility, competition among states, and proliferation of non-state actors. One of the most pressing challenges is the persistent presence and evolving capabilities of Al-Shabaab, a militant Islamist movement that has destabilized the Horn of Africa region and Somalia. This essay aims to examine the security complex in the Horn of Africa, with specific application to the Ethio-US alliance against Al-Shabaab, and the broader regional and international responses. To achieve this, the assessment employs a qualitative research approach, drawing its conclusions from a wide review of scholarly literature, policy reports, and regional studies in order to analyze the historical, socio-political, and religious dimensions of the conflict. The scope of this research covers the analysis of Al-Shabaab's ideological roots, recruitment processes, and operating tactics, and the effectiveness and limitations of regional and international counter-terrorism efforts. Specifically, the article investigates the Ethio-US alliance dynamics, considering its logic of strategy, operational reach, and the regional socio-political dynamics. Further, the discussion in the analysis addresses the role of state weakness and differing perceptions of Islam in Somalia, assessing their contribution to regional instability. Through the convergence of various perspectives and empirical facts, this essay will seek to build a balanced image of the region's complex security concerns and shed light on the paths to lasting stability.

**Fig. 1: Horn of Africa**



Source:

<https://web.archive.org/web/20211210220434/https://www.eda.admin.ch/deza/en/home/countries/horn-africa.html>

## **THE ORIGINS OF AL-SHABAAB AND THE CONSTRUCTION OF ISLAM IN SOMALIA**

It is not possible to explain the rise and survival of Al-Shabaab without the understanding of Somalia's religious, historical, and socio-political background. Al-Shabaab had its roots in the broader Islamist movement that gained momentum in Somalia following the collapse of Siad Barre's regime in 1991. The power vacuum and prolonged civil war that followed created fertile ground for extremist ideology to gain roots.

The Islamic Courts Union (ICU), having briefly controlled most of southern Somalia in 2006, presented Al-Shabaab with an invaluable stepping-stone. Albeit the ICU initially introduced an element of stability and order, its radical flank, including among them Al-Shabaab, desired to institute a strict system of Sharia law. The United States-backed 2006 Ethiopian intervention deposed the ICU but, in so doing, stoked the Al-Shabaab insurgency, which had positioned itself as a foreign occupation resistance movement (Menkhaus, 2007).

Socio-economic grievances and clan disputes have also played a major role in Al-Shabaab's recruitment and expansion. The group has exploited the widespread poverty, unemployment, and insufficiency of basic services to recruit disenchanted youth. The allure of Al-Shabaab's ideology, which offers a sense of belonging and meaning, has attracted marginalized communities. In addition, the group's ability to provide security and resolve local grievances has lent potency to its legitimacy in specific locations.

The image of Islam in Somalia is also a very important consideration. As Abdurahman Abdullahi points out in his study, the past relationship between Islam and Somali society has been complex and varied. Islam has been deeply integrated into Somali culture and identity over centuries, but its interpretation and practice have varied from one region and social group to another (Abdullahi, 2009). Al-Shabaab's rise put the conflict between moderate and extreme versions of Islam into the national spotlight.

Al-Shabaab's radical brand of Islam, one that is opposed to secular rule of all kinds and intends to establish a caliphate for the global world, came into conflict with the more diverse and syncretic Somali variant of Islam. The imposition of its strict dress codes, bans on music and entertainment, and use of violence in enforcing its brand of Sharia law by the group has alienated the majority of Somalis. The use by the group of religious rhetoric in order to validate its violence and extremism has also distorted the perception of Islam among many both locally and internationally.

How the public views Islam and how Al-Shabaab exploits it is a big part of the issue today. The majority of Somalis, particularly rural residents, are poorly educated and are vulnerable to the ideology of Al-Shabaab. The group's ability to twist religious books and stories to advance its interests has been a big challenge for counter-extremism efforts. Initiatives to promote moderate interpretations of Islam and push back against Al-Shabaab propaganda are essential to Somalia's long-term stability.

Ethiopia's intellectual movement, typified by Terje Østebø and Walleign Shemsedin, provides comparative analysis into the dynamic interplay of political and religious identity in the region. The focus of the movement on outreach to the Muslim Brotherhood and efforts to promote moderation addresses the diversity of Islamic practice and idea in the Horn of Africa (Østebø & Shemsedin, 2015). It is imperative in developing an effective counter-terrorism strategy that counters the ideological roots of extremism.

## **AL-SHABAAB'S IDEOLOGY AND STRATEGIES**

Al-Shabaab's ideology is rooted in a hardline interpretation of Salafi-jihadism with the aim of establishing a global Islamic caliphate through force. The vision of the group is characterized by a rejection of secular authority, a zealous commitment to its interpretation of Sharia law, and a willingness to use terrorism to achieve its objectives. Its ideology is not static, however, and has evolved in accordance with changing realities and internal tensions.

**Fig. 2: Al-Shabab warriors**



Source: Barnes, A. Abdullahi, A. Yasuf, Z., *Al-Shabaab's Kenyan Ambitions*. Crisis group: Image source: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/horn-africa/kenya/al-shabaab-s-kenyan-ambitions>

Central to the ideology of Al-Shabaab is the practice of takfir, by which the group can declare other Muslims apostates and justify violence against them. This practice has been employed to target political opponents, clerics, and civilians who do not adhere to Al-Shabaab's radical interpretation of Islam. The group's use of takfir has produced bitter fractures in Somali society and increased sectarian tensions.

Al-Shabaab's recruitment strategy is multifaceted and targets a wide range of individuals. The group employs socio-economic grievances, clan tensions, and the lure of religious extremism to enlist new recruits. In rural areas, Al-Shabaab provides security and justice, which have not been delivered by the collapsed state. The group's propaganda, disseminated on the web and in local media, portrays Al-Shabaab as a defender of Islam against foreign occupation.

As Fathima Badurdeen's ethnographic research demonstrates, the recruitment models of Al-Shabaab are sophisticated and multi-faceted. That the organization has managed to adapt its strategies to suit local environments and utilize existing social networks has made it resilient (Badurdeen, 2021). The organization also uses coercion, intimidation and economic rewards to recruit as well as sustain members.

Al-Shabaab's modus operandi has evolved over time, depending on its shifting capabilities and strategic interests.

Al-Shabaab has demonstrated its ability to conduct sophisticated attacks like suicide bombs, complex attacks, and improvised explosive devices (IEDs). Al-Shabaab has also engaged in territorial control, where shadow administrations have been established in the group-controlled areas. This allows the group to raise funds through extortion and taxation, which strengthens its economic foundation.

Social media and online platforms have become a central element of Al-Shabaab's recruitment and propaganda campaign. The organization sends its messages via different online media, such as websites, social media sites, and encrypted messaging applications. This enables Al-Shabaab to reach the entire world and recruit foreign fighters.

The funding of the group is varied. Al-Shabaab makes its revenue through extortion of businesses, taxation of local communities, and control of smuggling networks. It also raises money from external sources, including donations from individual and groups that share its ideology. The ability of the group to mobilize and control its finances has been key to its survival.

The operational resilience of the group also resides in its ability to change and adapt. Al-Shabaab has been able to maintain a high level of operation despite widespread counter-terror actions, says the CTC Sentinel (2024). This kind of resilience is due to the decentralized nature of the group, its recruitment and training abilities for new fighters, and its propensity to adapt to change methods based on evolving conditions.

## **REGIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL COUNTER-TERRORISM EFFORTS**

The conflict against Al-Shabaab has involved a complex array of regional and international players with varying strategic objectives and methods. Regional interventions have been led by the African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), then the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), sending in troops from various African countries to support the government of Somalia. International donors, particularly the

United States and the European Union, have provided funds and technical assistance, along with military aid.

AMISOM/ATMIS has been instrumental in thwarting Al-Shabaab's bid for total control of Somalia. Military operations of the mission have pushed Al-Shabaab out of central cities and dislocated its territorial grip. The mission has nevertheless been plagued by major challenges, which have ranged from logistics, lack of adequate finances, as well as complexity in operating under an unstable environment.

The United States has also been a principal ally in the counter-terrorism, providing military training, intelligence support, and aerial drone strikes on Al-Shabaab targets. The US has also provided significant economic assistance to the Somali government and AMISOM/ATMIS. The US-Ethiopia alliance, in particular, has been an integral component of the regional counter-terrorism initiative.

Ethiopian military interventions in Somalia have been driven by its interests to achieve regional stability and to avert the establishment of Al-Shabaab's safe haven in its territory. The capability of Ethiopia in the employment of force and in its experience on counter-insurgency operations rendered it an ally to combat Al-Shabaab.

The European Union has also played a proactive role in supporting the efforts of counter-terrorism in the Horn of Africa, financing AMISOM/ATMIS, capacity building Somali security forces, and providing development assistance to address root causes of instability. The EU's holistic strategy of integrating security and development components addresses its comprehension of the complex nature of the regional issues.

Nonetheless, counter-terrorism initiatives have been beset by various challenges. Poor coordination among the various actors, the challenge of holding and controlling territory, and the continuity of socio-economic grievances have hindered progress. The limitations of the military-centric strategies have also come to the fore, as Al-Shabaab has proven that it can recover and regenerate.

As the report of the Chatham House meeting noted, there has been an acceptance that the way forward would be a broader strategy that focuses on the deeper drivers of Al-Shabaab's survival (Chatham House, 2012). These include the

building of effective governance, promotion of economic growth, and the address of grievances among marginalized communities.

The Ethio-US security diplomacy is a core element of the Al-Shabaab war. According to Ahmad Irwin Ibrahim, the question of who governs and how governance is exercised is a vital consideration in understanding the conflict and security dynamics within the region (Ibrahim, 2022). The Ethio-US partnership needs to be understood in the context of the broader political and security dynamics of the Horn of Africa.

The importance of engaging with local communities and resolving their complaints has been stressed too. As the Middle East Council policy note suggests, wherever possible, negotiating with members of Al-Shabaab can prove to be a useful strategy in order to create fissures within the group and facilitate local solutions. (ME Council, 2024).

## **THE STATE FRAGILITY AND GOVERNANCE ROLE**

The region's chronic instability, and the long-term survival of Al-Shabaab, are closely linked to the region's extensive state fragility and governance breakdowns. Weak governance, corruption, and inadequate state institutions have created fertile ground for the growth of extremist elements.

The fall of the Siad Barre government in Somalia in 1991 led to a vacuum of power yet to be wholly filled. This has led to the civil war and the clashes between and among clans politicizing the nation and undermining efforts toward establishing a viable and operational government. Various transitional federal governments, one following the other, have failed to bring their control out of the city of Mogadishu and have been marked by power struggle and corruption from within.

Poor leadership has also contributed to the perpetuation of socio-economic complaints, which Al-Shabaab has exploited for recruitment and expansion. The lack of basic services, such as education, healthcare, and infrastructure, has disenfranchised and marginalized communities. The excessive

unemployment, particularly among young people, has created a pool of possible recruits for Al-Shabaab.

Corruption has also helped to further undermine the legitimacy of the state and erode public trust. The misappropriation of state resources and lack of accountability have undermined efforts to deliver basic services and address the causes of instability at their source. Corruption has also undermined the counter-terrorism strategy, as it has allowed Al-Shabaab to infiltrate and corrupt state institutions.

State-building and governance problem is not Somalia's alone. There are similar problems in other countries in the Horn of Africa, including Ethiopia and Kenya, though to varying degrees. Political competition, ethnic tensions, and resource competition have contributed to instability and undermined good governance efforts.

As posited in the Durham University paper, state-building in a post-conflict environment is a protracted and complex process (Bryden & Williams, 2011). It requires an integrated strategy that addresses the underlying causes of state weakness, including political, economic, and social causes. This entails strengthening state institutions, fostering inclusive governance, and addressing socio-economic grievances.

The imperative of addressing the causes of instability has been highlighted by various scholars and policy-makers. Based on the University of Free State study, the failure to address the root causes has contributed to the repetition of conflict and extremism in the area (Neethling, 2015).

The need to adopt a more comprehensive approach to counter-terrorism, by fusing the military and non-military measures, has been long and widely realized. This is by promoting good governance, economic development, and addressing the grievances of marginalized groups. As stated in the Vrije Universiteit Amsterdam paper, religious freedom and political order are most closely related (Abbink, 2014). Tolerance and respect for religious diversity should be ensured by good governance.

## REGIONAL SECURITY AND DEVELOPMENT

The Al-Shabaab presence has also had a destructive impact on local security and development. Al-Shabaab's terrorist activities, recruitment, and territorial influence have destabilized Somalia and the wider Horn of Africa, undermining efforts at promoting peace and prosperity.

The humanitarian impact of Al-Shabaab's activities has been harsh. Al-Shabaab operations have displaced hundreds of thousands of people from their homes, leading to a humanitarian crisis in Somalia and the rest of the region. Interference with agriculture and trade has exacerbated food insecurity, leading to widespread malnourishment and famine. Humanitarian staff attacks by Al-Shabaab have further hampered efforts at reaching vulnerable groups.

Its economic influence has been significant as well. The taxing of businesses and control of territories by the group have discouraged business and investment. The instability induced by Al-Shabaab attacks has also prevented trade and tourism, further sabotaging economic development. The continual need to support military campaigns further diverts resources away from more productive areas in the economy.

Al-Shabaab operations have also had significant geopolitical impacts. The group's ability to recruit foreign fighters and conduct operations beyond Somalia has raised concern about the internationalization of terrorism within the region and globally. The group's relationships with other terrorist groups have also raised concerns regarding the threat of transnational terrorism.

The activities of the group have also been the cause of militarizing the area, with increased military spending and the deployment of foreign troops. This has continued to destabilize the area, creating a cycle of violence. The attacks of the group in other countries within the region, such as Kenya, have also been strained on regional relations and undermining the work towards building cooperation.

As observed in the IFRI report, terrorists' mobility in East Africa is one of the crucial elements of the security dynamics

within the region (Bardurdeen, 2024). Al-Shabaab fighters and resources' ability to move between borders has kept it intact, and it is able to further extend its sphere of influence. The control of key routes are essential to keep the group surviving.

The necessity to address the root causes of instability and promoting sustainable development has been universally understood. As has been argued in the *Saudi Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences*, promoting social justice and economic growth is key to addressing the underlying causes leading to extremism (Al-Shammari, 2021).

Importance has also been emphasized in promoting good governance and building state institutions. Since the subject has been discussed in the *Politeja* journal, how the state and religion relate to each other is one of the determinants that contribute significantly to the stability of the region (Zabek, 2012). State capacity to manage religious diversity and build tolerance would be vital in preventing the rise of extremism.

## **THE ETHIO-US PARTNERSHIP AGAINST AL-SHABAAB**

The United States-Ethiopia strategic alliance has become a cornerstone of counter-terrorism efforts in the Horn of Africa. This partnership, driven by shared security interests, leverages Ethiopia's regional weight and military might with the US's technical and financial capabilities.

Ethiopia's geographic proximity to Somalia and its history of military interventions in the region have positioned it as a critical actor in the fight against Al-Shabaab. The Ethiopian National Defense Force (ENDF) has demonstrated its capacity for counter-insurgency warfare, deploying troops to Somalia on multiple occasions. The ENDF's military presence has been instrumental in dislodging Al-Shabaab from key strongholds and disrupting its operational capabilities.

The US, recognizing Ethiopia's strategic importance, has provided substantial support to the ENDF through military training, intelligence sharing, and logistical assistance. The US has also provided financial aid to support Ethiopia's counter-terrorism operations and strengthen its border security. This

partnership has been formalized through various security agreements and cooperative initiatives.

The partnership's effectiveness has been evident in the joint operations conducted against Al-Shabaab. The coordination between the ENDF and US intelligence has facilitated targeted strikes against Al-Shabaab leaders and operational centers. The US's drone strikes, coupled with Ethiopian ground operations, have inflicted significant losses on Al-Shabaab's forces.

However, the partnership has also faced challenges and criticisms. Concerns have been raised about the human rights record of the ENDF and the potential for unintended consequences of US military interventions. The focus on military solutions has also been criticized for neglecting the underlying socio-economic and political factors that contribute to Al-Shabaab's resilience.

The future of the partnership will hinge on overcoming these challenges and adapting to shifting security realities. As put forth in the NDU Press paper, the merit of developing partner capacity and fostering regional cooperation has only strengthened (Patterson, 2017). The US and Ethiopia both need to come together in support of stabilizing Somali security forces and promoting regional stability.

**Fig. 3: American military in Ethiopia**



Source: Evers, C. (2019). *Coup-proofing Ethiopia: How the United States Can Promote Stability in an Important African Partner*. Modern war institute. <https://mwi.westpoint.edu/coup-proofing-ethiopia-united-states-can-promote-stability-important-african-partner/>

The two countries' security diplomacy must be approached with care. As described in the Tandfonline article, the necessity of learning the environment and relating to the people has been underscored (Verhoeven, 2021). The success of the partnership will depend on whether it will tackle the concerns of marginalized groups and provide inclusive governance.

The cooperation is also determined by other factors. As stated in the Procon BG report, Al-Shabaab possesses an advanced system of financing, and the US-Ethiopia alliance has to contend with all of them (Procon BG, 2022).

## **THE CONCEPTION OF ISLAM IN SOMALIA**

The role of religion in Somali society is profound, and understanding the diverse interpretations and practices of Islam is key to understanding conflict and stability dynamics in the region. Islam has been deeply interwoven with Somali culture and identity for centuries, shaping social norms, political discourse, and individual behavior.

Historically, Somali Islam has been characterized by a combination of Sunni orthodoxy and Sufi mysticism. Sufi orders such as the Qadiriyya and the Ahmadiyya were significant in maintaining religious scholarship, social welfare, and spiritual guidance. The orders have traditionally emphasized tolerance, moderation, and peaceful coexistence.

But the rise of Al-Shabaab has undermined these traditional explanations of Islam. The group's radical vision, rooted in Salafi-jihadism, rejects the syncretic traditions of Somali Islam and seeks to impose a strict and intolerant interpretation of Sharia law. Al-Shabaab's use of takfir to label other Muslims as apostates has created deep fissures within Somali society and inflamed sectarian tensions.

As Abdurahman Abdullahi points out, the perception of Islam in Somalia is not monolithic (Abdullahi, 2009). There are different interpretations and practices of Islam across different regions and social classes. The challenge is to promote moderate interpretations of Islam and counter Al-Shabaab's extremist narratives.

The group's manipulation of religious narratives and texts has posed a significant challenge to counter-extremism efforts. The majority of Somalis, particularly those from rural regions, do not have access to formal education and are vulnerable to Al-Shabaab propaganda. The ability of the group to access socio-economic grievances and competition among clans through religious rhetoric has also made it more appealing.

The necessity to encourage religious tolerance and interfaith dialogue has been generally acknowledged. According to the VU Amsterdam paper, the connection between the political order and religious freedom is essential (Abbink, 2014). Good governance should be respectful of religious diversities and encouraging of tolerance.

Another significant aspect is the position of religious leaders against challenging the ideology of Al-Shabaab. Religious scholars and Somali community leaders have a unique ability to challenge the group's radical ideologies and push forward moderate Islamic interpretations. They are also key to challenging the socio-economic complaints that drive Al-Shabaab recruitment.

The education system is also crucial. The lack of adequate secular education in Somalia allows such groups to take up the mantle, and provide their own type of education, which is predominantly based on their own ideology. A robust education system capable of withstanding the influence of such groups is needed.

## **CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OUTLOOK**

The fight against Al-Shabaab remains a complex and enduring challenge, with numerous obstacles hindering progress toward the achievement of long-term stability in the Horn of Africa. Despite concerted military and counter-terrorism efforts, Al-Shabaab has demonstrated its resilience and flexibility under pressure. One of the challenges that is essential to overcome is the persistence of state fragility and governance vacuums in Somalia. There is still a lack of strong state institutions, a culture of corruption, and an

empowerment of fragmented political power eroding the efforts towards establishing a stable and legitimate government. Unless the underlying causes are solved, it is questionable whether Al-Shabaab can be fully defeated.

That the group can capitalize on socio-economic grievances and clan conflicts also poses a significant challenge. The lack of economic opportunities, particularly for young people, and the persistence of marginalization and disenfranchisement continue to provide fertile ground for Al-Shabaab's recruitment and expansion.

The evolving nature of Al-Shabaab's strategy and tactics also poses a challenge. The ability of the group to adapt to changing circumstances, conduct advanced attacks, and leverage the internet for recruitment and propaganda highlights the need for a dynamic and adaptive counter-terrorism strategy. The regional and international character of the conflict further complicates the situation. Involvement of various actors with varying strategic interests and modus operandi may lead to a lack of coordination and consistency in counter-terrorism strategies. Regional coordination and cooperation demand are essential. There is also the increasing impact of climate change in the Horn of Africa. Climate change increases the frequency of extreme weather events as shown in numerous studies, thereby exacerbating food insecurity, displacement, and competition for resources. These elements lead to instability, and may be exploited by Al-Shabaab. Things can depend on the Horn of Africa future only if such problems are addressed and adapting is made to the fast-evolving security environment. It is possible with an all-inclusive approach using military, political, economic, and social means.

Good moral and sound leadership as well as inclusive political practices are important for the formation of a stable and legitimate Somali state. This includes addressing corruption, improving transparency and accountability, and strengthening state institutions. Economic growth and addressing socio-economic problems are also a priority. This includes creating economic opportunities for youths, expanding basic services, and addressing root causes of marginalization and exclusion. Addressing the ideology and propaganda of Al-Shabaab is also of critical importance. This includes promoting

moderate interpretations of Islam, challenging the extremist discourses of the group, and engaging with local communities and religious leaders.

There is a need for greater regional coordination and cooperation. This entails enhancing border security, sharing intelligence, and synchronizing counter-terrorism activities. The Ethio-US partnership has to be adapted to deal with the new realities. This entails reinforcing Somali security forces, promoting regional stability, and addressing the underlying factors that make Al-Shabaab linger on.

## CONCLUSION

The Horn of Africa security complex, spearheaded by Al-Shabaab, poses a huge regional and international threat to stability. In this essay, the author has examined the cause, ideology, strategy, and the spectrum of counter-terrorism measures employed to contain the group. The Ethio-US alliance, as much a critical component of these measures, highlights the complex nature of regional and international actors in countering the security threat.

State vulnerability persistence, socio-economic grievances, and Al-Shabaab's shift in tactics highlight the need for a multiple and dynamic approach. Military action is not enough; long-term stability must tackle the roots of extremism within the context of weak governance, corruption, and bad economic prospects.

The perception of Islam in Somalia is equally at stake. Promoting moderate Islam practices, countering extremist ideology, and engaging with religious leaders are central to undermining the ideological attraction of Al-Shabaab. The future of the Horn of Africa is in building stable states, inclusivity and participatory governance, and sustainable development.

Moreover, in order to effectively address the security concerns in the region, it is crucial to boost regional and international cooperation. This entails boosting intelligence sharing, military coordination, and combating terrorism financing. The international community also must address the

root causes of instability, such as poverty, unemployment, and inequality, that make individuals vulnerable to recruitment by terrorist groups.

Finally, there needs to be a move towards enabling dialogue and reconciliation between the different Somali communities and the region, as a means of promoting lasting peace and stability. This entails supporting efforts at conflict resolution, religious tolerance, and ensuring all the groups feel included in the political process. By addressing the security challenges of the Horn of Africa in a comprehensive and collaborative manner, one can set the stage for a peaceful and prosperous future for the region.

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## RUSSIAN GEOSTRATEGY IN THE ARCTIC AMID NATO ENLARGEMENT TO INCLUDE FINLAND AND SWEDEN

*Abstract:*

This article investigates the transformation of Russian geostrategy in the Arctic following the accession of Finland (2023) and Sweden (2024) to NATO, developments that have fundamentally altered the strategic balance in Northern Europe. The analysis contends that NATO enlargement has accelerated the militarisation of Russian Arctic policy, shifting the region from limited cooperation to intensified strategic competition. Drawing on Russia's post-2020 Arctic policy documents, the study identifies a clear reorientation from economic priorities, such as resource extraction and development of the Northern Sea Route, toward military security, consolidation of the Northern Fleet, and expansion of anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems across key Arctic territories. The article also examines how NATO's strengthened northern posture, including expanded Nordic defence cooperation, large-scale exercises, and the creation of new command structures, has heightened Moscow's perception of strategic encirclement. In addition to conventional military developments, the analysis highlights Russia's increasing reliance on grey-zone activities, such as GPS interference, cyber operations, and sabotage of seabed infrastructure, as integral tools for shaping the regional security environment. The study further assesses the evolving role of China in Russia's Arctic strategy, noting deepening economic and selective military cooperation, despite Moscow's reluctance to permit broad Chinese security involvement. The article concludes that the Arctic is experiencing a structural shift toward polycentric rivalry, characterized by increased risks of miscalculation and unintended escalation. The capacity of major actors to manage competition and establish de-escalation mechanisms will determine whether the region develops into a stable strategic theatre or becomes a potential flashpoint in future NATO–Russia.

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*Key words:*

Arctic, Russia, NATO, Sweden, Finland, geostrategy, international security

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## INTRODUCTION

The Arctic region has emerged as a central arena of geopolitical rivalry in the early 21st century, where the interests of major powers intersect. Finland's accession to NATO in 2023 and Sweden's in 2024 have established new strategic dynamics in Northern Europe. The integration of Swedish and Finnish armed forces into NATO has altered the military balance in the Baltic Sea and adjacent Arctic regions. The ongoing rivalry between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Alliance in the Arctic exemplifies broader trends of polycentrism within the international system. Russian intelligence assessments suggest that control over strategic locations in the polar region could prove decisive in potential armed conflicts. NATO strategic documents identify Russia as the principal security challenge to the Alliance, alongside terrorism. The conflict in Ukraine, which began in 2014 and escalated in February 2022, has extended to other domains of geopolitical competition, including the Arctic. The decisions by Finland and Sweden to pursue NATO membership in May 2022, followed by formal invitations in June 2022, directly reflect the intensification of tensions between Russia and the West, fundamentally altering the longstanding military neutrality of these states (Smirnov, 2023).

The geopolitical significance of the Arctic within the European security system has steadily increased since the annexation of Crimea in 2014. Nordic countries have conducted exercises such as the *Nordic Response* manoeuvres to prepare allied forces for operations in polar environments. Concurrently, Moscow has continued to strengthen its military presence in the region by modernising bases and enhancing naval and air defence capabilities. This article examines Russia's strategic response to NATO's expansion in the Arctic, with particular emphasis on changes in Russian military doctrine, the shift in priorities from economic to military concerns, and potential scenarios for conflict escalation. The central hypothesis is that the NATO membership of Finland

and Sweden has accelerated the militarisation of Russian Arctic policy, transforming the region from a space of international cooperation into a potential theatre of military confrontation. This militarisation is evident in both increased military activity and the revision of strategic assumptions to prioritise the defence of national interests amid intensifying geopolitical competition (Friis, 2025).

## **THE EVOLUTION OF RUSSIAN ARCTIC**

The Russian Federation's policy documents relating to the Arctic region illustrate a fundamental shift in Moscow's priorities towards the polar region. An analysis of successive versions of Arctic strategies reveals a gradual shift in emphasis from economic to military considerations, reflecting broader geopolitical processes in the international system. In October 2020, a document entitled "Strategy for the Development of the Arctic Zone of the Russian Federation and Ensuring National Security for the Period up to 2035" was adopted. This strategy developed the assumptions contained in the "Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the Arctic until 2035" from March 2020. The document defined the mechanisms for achieving strategic goals, considering economic and military dimensions. The 2020 strategy was a continuation of earlier Arctic concepts from 2008 and 2013, which formulated Russia's basic priorities in the region. Of particular importance is the February 2023 revision of the document, introduced by President Putin, which clearly indicates a change in strategic priorities. A key element of the modification was the removal of specific references to cooperation within the Arctic Council and a stronger emphasis on Russian national interests. The updated version highlights the importance of the shipbuilding complex's import independence and of developing infrastructure to support the Northern Sea Route. This strategic shift underscores Russia's intent to consolidate its economic and security posture in the Arctic, leveraging its resource wealth and the Northern Sea Route as critical geopolitical assets (Kluge & Paul, 2020; Staun, 2023).

The original concept of Russia's Arctic strategy focused on the region's raw materials and energy resources. The Russian Arctic was treated primarily as a „natural resource base” – the region supplies over 80% of Russia's natural gas and 17% of its oil. According to the 2020 strategy document, the continental shelf contains over 85.1 trillion cubic metres of gas and 17.3 billion tonnes of oil. The 2020 assumptions predicted a significant increase in the extraction and processing of raw materials, including liquefied natural gas production, from 8.6 million tonnes in 2018 to 91 million tonnes by 2035. There were also plans to increase the capacity of the Northern Sea Route from 31.5 million tonnes in 2019 to 130 million tonnes by 2035. The strategic documents from 2008 and 2013 were characterised by moderate rhetoric and did not focus on counterbalancing NATO's military potential. The 2020 strategy brought traditional military security back onto the Arctic agenda. The conflict in Ukraine after 2022 reinforced the military priority in Russian polar policy. This reorientation emphasises the Arctic's role as a vital geopolitical and geo-economic macro-region for Russia, particularly given its vast hydrocarbon reserves and the strategic importance of the Northern Sea Route for energy exports and national connectivity (Kirsanova et al., 2020; Sleptsov et al., 2021; Ulchenko et al., 2019).

The Arctic's position in the Russian Federation's national security priorities has been steadily rising. The 2023 Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation placed the Arctic second among Moscow's strategic priorities, after relations with the post-Soviet states. This represents a significant change compared to the 1990s and 2000s, when Arctic issues did not feature on Russia's foreign policy agenda. The establishment of the Northern Strategic Command (in Russian: *Obyedinonnoye strategicheskoye komandovaniye "Sever"*) on 1 December 2014 was a key element in the militarisation of the Arctic. The command does not function as a military district in peacetime, suggesting an operational rather than a district-level disposition. The basis of the armed forces in the Arctic is the Northern Fleet, which underpins Russia's nuclear deterrent capability. It is the most powerful of the four Russian fleets, with the largest number of icebreakers and submarines. It

comprises about 40 warships, including one aircraft carrier and over 40 submarines, some of which carry ballistic missiles with nuclear warheads. The year 2019 saw a further strengthening of the management of the Arctic region through the appointment of new members to the State Commission for the Development of the Arctic and the extension of its jurisdiction, as well as the creation of the Ministry of the Russian Federation for the Development of the Far East and the Arctic. The Kremlin sees control over the Arctic as a marker of superpower status. NATO's expansion into the Arctic is interpreted as a fundamental threat to Russian strategic interests, which strengthens Moscow's determination to militarise the region (Wódka, 2017).

## **BALANCE OF POWER IN THE ARCTIC AFTER 2022**

The start of the second phase of the war in Ukraine and Finland's, followed by Sweden's, accession to the North Atlantic Alliance, have led to a strategic reconfiguration of the Northern European security system. The decision to admit two new countries created new parameters for geopolitical rivalry and transformed the defence architecture of the Arctic region. Finland's accession to NATO on 4 April 2023 doubled the length of the Alliance's direct border with the Russian Federation, adding 1,340 kilometres. Finland's geographical location, only 180 km from St Petersburg, created new strategic conditions for the Russian centre of power. Despite its relatively small demographic potential of just over 5 million inhabitants, Finland has significant military potential, including 900,000 trained reservists and the capacity to mobilise 280,000 soldiers. Its accession to NATO strategically complicates Russian defence operations in the Baltic Sea region, especially regarding the security of the Baltic Fleet base in Kronstadt and access to Kaliningrad (Friis, 2025).

Sweden, despite not being a direct neighbour of Russia, brought significant defensive capabilities to the Alliance when it joined on 7 March 2024, particularly through its control of the strategically located island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea. Control over this geographical point is important for securing

airspace and communication routes in the region. Both Nordic countries cooperate in the joint defence of the strategic Åland Islands. From the Russian Federation's geopolitical perspective, NATO's expansion means closing the Alliance's „defensive gap” along the northern transport route, limiting Russia's room for manoeuvre in the event of a direct confrontation. The expansion of NATO to include the two Nordic countries was the Alliance's strategic response not only to the intensification of the war in Ukraine, but also to the strengthening of Russian defence structures, the reconstruction of the Leningrad Military District and the reinforcement of Russia's presence in the Arctic (Ack et al., 2024; Mattelaer, 2018).

The Nordic Defence Cooperation, comprising Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden, gained new geopolitical significance following Finland and Sweden's accession to NATO. The fundamental objective of this cooperation remains to strengthen the national defence capabilities of the participating countries and to develop joint operational solutions. In 2024, the defence ministers of the Nordic countries adopted a new vision for NORDEFECO until 2030, given that all Nordic countries are full members of NATO. This document emphasises credible deterrence and defence capabilities through the development of interoperability in armed conflict situations. The priority of Nordic defence cooperation is to ensure that the armed forces of the five countries can conduct joint operations as an autonomous group and in coordination with other allies. At the same time, the establishment of the Multi Corps Land Component Command and the deployment of Forward Land Forces on Finnish territory were approved. This initiative aims to increase the cohesion and defence capabilities of the region, thereby strengthening NATO's strategic posture in the face of growing security challenges (Friis & Tamnes, 2024; Mattelaer, 2018).

The accession of Sweden and Finland to NATO has significantly increased the Alliance's presence in the Arctic region. Currently, seven of the eight traditional Arctic states (members of the Arctic Council) are part of NATO structures, which Moscow interprets as a “hostile encirclement”. NATO ships repeatedly patrol the waters of the Barents Sea near the bases of the Russian Northern Fleet and key nuclear-armed

submarine facilities. A NATO task force operates in Arctic and High North waters, demonstrating the Alliance's commitment to the collective security of this strategic region. These operations are coordinated by ships and aircraft assigned to NATO Standing Maritime Group 1 (SNMG1) as part of maritime presence operations (Mattelaer, 2018).

The Svalbard archipelago is of geostrategic importance as a potential flashpoint for geopolitical tensions. The Spitsbergen Treaty grants Norway "full and absolute" sovereignty over the archipelago but imposes significant restrictions on its exercise by prohibiting the construction of military fortifications or naval bases. Norway emphasises that Svalbard is covered by NATO protection under Article 5 but treats the practical defence of the archipelago as a national responsibility to avoid provoking Russia. The new policies of Stockholm and Helsinki have fundamentally transformed the security architecture in Northern Europe. NATO has gained a compact and unified space in the north, strengthening the Alliance's deterrence and defence posture in the Northern European region. At the same time, these changes have created new strategic challenges for the Russian Federation, which perceives NATO's expansion in the Arctic as a direct threat to its geopolitical interests. In response to these strategic changes, Russia has redefined its approach to the Arctic, focusing on economic, political and security dimensions (Thatcher, 2024).

The Kingdom of Norway is implementing significant modernisation projects as part of the strengthening of NATO's northern flank. The reactivation of the Bardufoss air base in June 2024, after four decades of inactivity, is an important element in expanding operational capabilities. The facility has been equipped with modernised mountain hangars and infrastructure to support F-35 fighter jets, enhancing the country's power-projection capabilities in the north. The base in Bodø is also gaining strategic importance, with the establishment of a third Combined Air Operations Centre (CAOC) to coordinate activities in the Nordic region. The Reitan mountain facility is to serve as a command centre for air operations in the Far North, working in cooperation with the Norwegian Joint Headquarters. The reactivation programme also included the Andøya air base, which was scheduled to

close in 2016. The decision to bring it back into service in 2023 was based on the need to strengthen surveillance and defence capabilities in the polar region. The Setermoen garrison, Norway's largest military base, is currently being expanded under the Supplementary Defence Cooperation Agreement with the United States (Åtland et al., 2024).

Iceland is implementing a project to expand the NATO fuel depot in Helguvík, including the construction of a 390-metre quay and storage facilities with a capacity of 25,000 cubic metres. The investment, estimated at ISK 10 billion, is scheduled for completion in 2029. The NATO Secretary General emphasised Iceland's strategic importance as an "unsinkable aircraft carrier", pointing to its location at the intersection of major routes connecting the Arctic, the Atlantic and Europe. Control of the GIUK (Greenland-Iceland-UK) gap remains crucial for securing communications between North America and Europe. The Nordic Response exercises are an evolution of the earlier Cold Response manoeuvres, adapted to the new geopolitical conditions following the accession of Finland and Sweden. The manoeuvres, conducted in March 2024, brought together more than 20,000 soldiers from 13 countries, operating in the northern areas of Norway, Finland and Sweden. The participants included approximately 8,000 Norwegian, 4,100 Finnish, and 4,500 Swedish soldiers. Other participating countries included the United States, Canada, the United Kingdom, Denmark, Germany, the Netherlands, Belgium, France, Spain and Italy. The exercise programme included, among other things, maritime operations involving more than 50 vessels of various types, including submarines, frigates, corvettes and landing craft; air operations involving over 100 aircraft platforms, including fighter jets, transport aircraft and helicopters; and land operations using artillery systems, armoured vehicles and tracked equipment. The Nordic Response manoeuvres were part of the broader Steadfast Defender 2024 exercises, which ran from January to June 2024 and involved 90,000 soldiers from 31 NATO member states and Sweden. The scenario involved invoking Article 5 in response to a simulated attack by an equivalent adversary (Morgan, 2018).

The Nordic countries have taken initiatives to strengthen operational cooperation in the Arctic region. In June 2024, Norway, Finland and Sweden announced the creation of a trilateral military transport corridor through the Far North. At the same time, the Multi Corps Land Component Command and Forward Land Forces were established in Finland. Cooperation on Arctic technology included an agreement among the United States, Finland, and Canada to construct icebreakers and develop other polar capabilities through knowledge and resource exchanges. Norway hosts the NATO Winter Operations Centre, providing training for Alliance troops, including US Marines, in Arctic operations. Finland has established NATO Forward Land Forces, a multinational unit stationed above the Arctic Circle, comprising soldiers from Finland, Sweden, the United Kingdom, France, Norway, Denmark, and Iceland. The NATO Multi Corps Land Component Command is a permanent command responsible for coordinating land-based deterrence activities in the Arctic part of Europe. The programme to strengthen reconnaissance capabilities includes Norway's fleet of P-8A maritime reconnaissance aircraft and the development of unmanned systems adapted to Arctic operations. Norway's 113 per cent increase in defence spending from 2022 reflects the region's priority in NATO's security strategy (Stensrud & Østhagen, 2024).

## **THE DEVELOPMENT OF RUSSIA'S MILITARY PRESENCE IN THE ARCTIC**

NATO's expansion into the Arctic region has intensified Russian defence activities in the Far North. The Kremlin interprets the strengthening of the Alliance's presence as a violation of the existing strategic balance, particularly in the context of Finland and Sweden's membership, which has brought NATO structures closer to key Russian military facilities in the region. A key element of Russia's Arctic defence concept is the deployment of anti-access and area denial (A2/AD) systems around strategic locations. In December 2015, the Novaya Zemlya archipelago received two long-range

S-400 anti-aircraft complexes, alongside the installation of a similar system in the port of Tiksi in Yakutia. Franz Josef Land, the New Siberian Islands and Severnaya Zemlya were equipped with S-300 systems. Facilities in the region are protected by mobile Pantsir-S1 air defence systems, armed with Igla-S missile launchers and Djigit automatic cannons. New Earth also has Bastion-P complexes with P-800 Yakhont anti-ship cruise missiles. The Rogachevo airbase, a key node in the Russian defence network in the archipelago, received S-300 systems in 2014-2015, along with the modernisation of its radar infrastructure. In 2023, these complexes were replaced with modern S-400 systems, which achieved full operational readiness in September. Moscow has announced the further deployment of S-300 and S-400 systems in the Russian Arctic, creating an integrated anti-aircraft dome over the region. The system is designed to protect against air attacks, including tactical aviation, manoeuvrable missiles and ballistic missiles. The main task of the Northern Fleet remains to maintain strategic nuclear forces in constant combat readiness and to protect infrastructure on the Kola Peninsula and strategic submarine bases (Baev, 2019).

Russia's missile potential in the Arctic has been strengthened by the introduction of new systems on the Kola Peninsula. In 2019, the Severomorsk base received its first vehicles with Pantsir-S missile complexes. The Northern Fleet assessed that this system provides the most effective air defence for military facilities in the complex terrain of the strategic peninsula, guaranteeing the destruction of air targets, including small ones. The Pechenga region, located several kilometres from the Norwegian border, received demonstration Tor-M2DT missile systems in 2023. The complex, based on DT-30PM tracked vehicles, operates at temperatures as low as 50 degrees Celsius. The system achieved operational readiness in Pechenga at the end of 2019. Tor-M2DT provides protection up to 16 km against flying objects, including drones and enemy missiles. The modernisation of military infrastructure over the last decade has covered about a dozen existing Arctic bases and airfields, including the Rogachevo facility on Novaya Zemlya. In addition, three new bases have been built in strategic locations or on the sites of destroyed Cold War

installations. Projects implemented according to the standard “Arctic Trefoil” consist of central residential and administrative buildings with a triangular architecture (Inzhutov et al., 2019).

The operations of the Russian Northern Fleet cover the Arctic Ocean, the North Atlantic and the strategic GIUK-N zone (Greenland-Iceland-United Kingdom-Norway), as well as monitoring activity on the Northern Sea Route. This potential comprises nuclear submarines armed with missiles and torpedoes, anti-ship and anti-submarine aircraft, and surface ships equipped with anti-aircraft and anti-submarine capabilities. Moscow is returning to its Cold War defence concept, particularly the bastion strategy of securing strategic territory to maintain freedom of action. The implementation of this concept includes extending control over the deep waters between Svalbard and Norway and securing the maritime space towards the GIUK-N gap. The highly capable Sierra II-class submarines, among the most advanced Russian strike vessels, play a key role (Wegge, 2020).

The nuclear potential deployed in the Arctic space is a key element of Russia’s strategic doctrine towards NATO’s expansion in the Far North. The nuclear component is particularly important as an instrument balancing the Alliance’s conventional superiority and the ultimate guarantor of the security of the Russian power centre. The Northern Strategic Command concentrates about two-thirds of Russia’s sea-based nuclear capabilities, with the remainder belonging to the Pacific Fleet. The primary task of the Northern Joint Strategic Command remains to secure the Kola Peninsula, where strategic submarines, the foundation of Russia’s deterrence capability, are stationed (Martz, 2020).

The nuclear arsenal modernisation programme includes the systematic expansion of the Arctic submarine fleet. Currently, there are seven ballistic missile submarines and five cruise missile submarines, with more under construction. Despite the reduction in the number of ballistic missile submarines from 48 in 1990 to 12 in 2024, sea-launched missiles still account for one-third of strategic nuclear delivery systems. The maritime plan presented by Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu in November 2023 identifies the modernisation of the SSBN fleet as a strategic priority for 2019-2025. At the

same time, conceptual work is already underway on the fifth generation of Russian ballistic missile submarines (Stefanick, 2025).

The traditional Russian concept of bastion defence involves protecting maritime nuclear resources by establishing a controlled zone in the Barents Sea and towards the Norwegian Sea and the GIUK gap. This strategy is based on anti-access capabilities at sea and in the air to protect ballistic missile submarines. Changing geographical and military conditions, combined with technological developments, are limiting the effectiveness of this strategy in northern Europe. Following the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002, Russia has been seeking to develop new strategic nuclear systems capable of overcoming missile defence systems. Among the new capabilities is Poseidon, an intercontinental nuclear-powered torpedo with a nuclear warhead, launched from specialised submarines. The development of such systems calls into question the feasibility of the classic bastion strategy (Klimov, 2022).

## **RUSSIAN NON-MILITARY ACTIVITIES AS AN INSTRUMENT OF ARCTIC POLICY**

Moscow is pursuing a multidimensional strategy of influence in the Arctic that goes beyond the conventional framework of military confrontation. These activities, referred to in the literature as „grey zone” operations, are an important element of Russia’s concept of power projection, allowing it to weaken its opponents while maintaining the possibility of credible denial. Since 2017, the Russian Federation has been conducting systematic operations against GPS satellite navigation systems in northern Scandinavia, which have intensified since 2022. These incidents correlate with periods of intensified military exercises, both Russian and allied. Cases of interference during the Zapad-2017 manoeuvres, NATO’s Trident Juncture operation and the British Clockwork exercises have been documented. In 2023, the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs officially accused the Russian centre of power of “almost continuous jamming or falsification of GPS

signals”, which directly affects the safety of civilian transport, including medical rescue helicopters. In July 2023, incidents were reported in the Spitsbergen archipelago in which manipulated navigation signals misled the crews of rescue aircraft. Norwegian technical services identified cases of spoofing – an advanced form of GPS signal manipulation which, unlike simple jamming, can confuse pilots as to the actual position of the aircraft. This phenomenon occurs at altitudes of up to 4,000 feet. Measurements carried out by the Norwegian authorities confirmed that the interfering signals originated from the territory of the Russian Federation (Lo et al., 2025).

Seabed communication infrastructure has been the target of numerous unexplained incidents. In January 2022, a few weeks before the start of the second phase of the war in Ukraine, a fibre-optic cable connecting the Svalbard archipelago with mainland Norway was damaged, with Russian trawlers observed in the incident. Damage to both cables connecting the archipelago to the mainland would result in the loss of communication with the strategic K-SAT satellite ground station. In April 2021, a 4.3-kilometre section of submarine cable off the coast of Norway disappeared, with no determination of the causes or identification of the perpetrators. In October 2023, the Baltic connector pipeline connecting Finland and Estonia was destroyed, which is interpreted as Russian sabotage in response to Finland’s accession to NATO (Schaller, 2024).

Since February 2022, there has been a significant increase in cyber activity targeting Arctic countries. In March 2022, a cyber-attack paralysed Greenland’s government network, while in May, a similar attack on the healthcare system limited access to medical services. Icelandic websites were the target of a series of DDoS attacks in April 2022, which were linked to the country’s planned increase in defence spending. By March 2023, the director of Iceland’s cybersecurity team, CERT-IS, had recorded a sixfold increase in suspicious scanning activity in the local cyberspace. In addition, the energy sector is particularly vulnerable. The 2022 attack on the Colonial Pipeline by the Russian group Darkside resulted in the first-ever complete shutdown of the

infrastructure, which supplies 45% of the petrol and jet fuel on the East Coast of the United States. In Europe, a cyberattack on the KSAT satellite network, which SvalSat is the central hub for, led to the shutdown of 5,800 wind turbines in Germany (Mittal, 2024).

## **THE CHINESE FACTOR IN RUSSIA'S ARCTIC STRATEGY**

Cooperation between China and the Russian Federation in the Arctic reflects broader processes of shaping a multipolar international system. Moscow's isolation after 2022, due to sanctions imposed by Western countries, has created new geopolitical conditions in which Beijing has become a key partner in pursuing Russian strategic interests in the polar region. The 2024 agreement between Rosatom and the Chinese Ministry of Transport on developing shipping along the Northern Sea Route is part of Beijing's broader economic strategy. The agreement establishes an institutional framework for cooperation on Arctic transport routes. For the Chinese centre of power, the NSR is a component of the "Polar Silk Road", enabling the distance between Asian and European markets to be shortened. The establishment of a joint coordinating body under the leadership of Rosatom Director Alexei Likhachev and Chinese Minister of Transport Liu Wei testifies to the institutionalisation of this cooperation. The increase in container traffic to 280,000 tonnes across 17 voyages in 2024 underscores the practical importance of this route to Chinese trade interests (Palu & Hilmola, 2023).

Chinese companies are participating in strategic extraction projects in the Russian Arctic. As part of the Yamal LNG project, China National Petroleum Corporation controls a 20% stake, while the Chinese Silk Road Fund holds another 9.9%. The Arctic LNG 2 project has a similar ownership structure, with CNPC and China National Offshore Oil Corporation holding a 20% stake together. However, Moscow remains cautious about Chinese capital involvement, seeking to avoid excessive dependence on a single partner. The search for alternative sources of financing, including in India, reflects Russia's strategy to diversify its partners and maintain

decision-making autonomy in the Arctic region (Kosowska & Kosowski, 2024).

Military cooperation between the two centres of power has expanded into areas previously under Russian monopoly, particularly in the sphere of military operations. The first joint patrols of strategic bombers near the coast of Alaska in July 2024 and coast guard exercises in September of the same year in the Russian Arctic signal a new stage of defence cooperation. However, Moscow remains reluctant to allow a broader presence of Chinese naval forces in the region. Russia sees itself as the guardian of access to Arctic waters, and an uncontrolled Chinese presence could antagonise the Kremlin's interests. The 2020 case of Professor Mitko, who was arrested for passing information about submarine hydroacoustic to China, illustrates the continuing tensions in this area of cooperation (Hauksdóttir & Þórhallsson, 2025).

## **POTENTIAL SCENARIOS FOR ESCALATION IN THE ARCTIC**

An analysis of military activities in the Arctic region identifies several potential tensions between the Russian power centre and NATO structures. The ongoing militarisation of the polar region increases the likelihood of unintended incidents that, in certain circumstances, could escalate regional conflicts. The Kingdom of Norway, which shares a 198-kilometre land border with the Russian Federation in the Arctic region, is particularly vulnerable to destabilisation. NATO naval units are intensifying their patrols in the deep waters of the Barents Sea, moving near Russian Northern Fleet bases and key strategic installations. The continuation of such operations without establishing de-escalation mechanisms may lead to maritime incidents with the potential to escalate into direct armed confrontation. An additional risk factor is the possibility of "horizontal escalation" – the transfer of tensions from other theatres of operation, such as the Baltic Sea, to the Arctic (Buitrago, 2019).

The Russian Federation conducts regular Grom exercises, during which all components of its strategic nuclear forces in the Arctic region are tested. The United States

conducts parallel Global Thunder manoeuvres, involving the American nuclear triad. NATO continues its Steadfast Noon exercise programme, simulating the use of nuclear weapons in the European theatre. The intensification of such activities, particularly in the context of testing new weapons systems such as the *Poseidon* torpedo and the *Burevestnik* cruise missile, increases the risk of misjudging the opponent's intentions (Favaro & Williams, 2023).

Russian anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) systems deployed along the Northern Sea Route provide Moscow with significant capabilities to control international transit. A complete closure of the NSR would cause losses to the Russian economy, but a more likely scenario is selective access restrictions for specific countries and companies. Such action, despite violating the principles of non-discrimination under UNCLOS, could be implemented under existing Russian regulations requiring special permits to enter the NSR (Liu & Solski, 2022).

## CONCLUSIONS

The membership of Finland and Sweden in the North Atlantic Alliance has created a new geopolitical configuration in the Arctic, confirming the hypothesis of an acceleration in the militarisation of Russian polar policy. Moscow's response to NATO's expansion illustrates the classic mechanisms of power balancing in the international system, in line with the principles of the realist paradigm in international relations. The Russian Federation's strategic documents for 2022-2023 reflect a fundamental reorientation of the Kremlin's priorities in the Arctic region. The shift away from economic cooperation goals towards national security imperatives signals a return to geopolitical thinking about space control and the balance of power. The Northern Fleet, as an instrument of power projection and a guarantor of strategic nuclear deterrence, has gained a central position in Russia's Arctic security concept. The systematic expansion of anti-access systems around the Novaya Zemlya archipelago and the intensification of activities in the grey zone represent a multidimensional strategy to

counterbalance NATO's expansion. Moscow is pursuing a bastion defence concept, seeking to establish a controlled security zone around key strategic installation. At the same time, asymmetric activities – from GPS signal manipulation to cyber operations – illustrate the desire to weaken the enemy's capabilities while maintaining plausible deniability (López-Rodríguez et al., 2023).

The alliance with the People's Republic of China is evolving into a strategic partnership amid Russia's international isolation. Joint patrols of strategic bombers, coordination of activities within the Northern Sea Route and investments in energy infrastructure point to the formation of an alternative balance of power in the polar region. This development confirms the thesis that the international system is moving towards a polycentric balance of power. The Arctic is evolving into a new theatre of geopolitical rivalry, where the risk of unintended escalation is steadily increasing. The intensification of NATO maritime patrols near Russian strategic bases, combined with the expansion of military infrastructure on both sides, creates conditions conducive to incidents that could lead to wider confrontations (Åtland et al., 2022).

An analysis of processes in the Arctic region confirms the thesis that this region is transforming from a space of cooperation into a theatre of strategic competition. NATO's expansion northwards, while strengthening the security of its member states, paradoxically contributes to the escalation of militarisation through the reactions of the Russian power centre. The future security arrangement in the polar region will be determined by the ability of the main actors to manage strategic competition within a framework of controlled rivalry, avoiding thresholds that lead to open military confrontation (Knutsen & Pettersen, 2024).

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