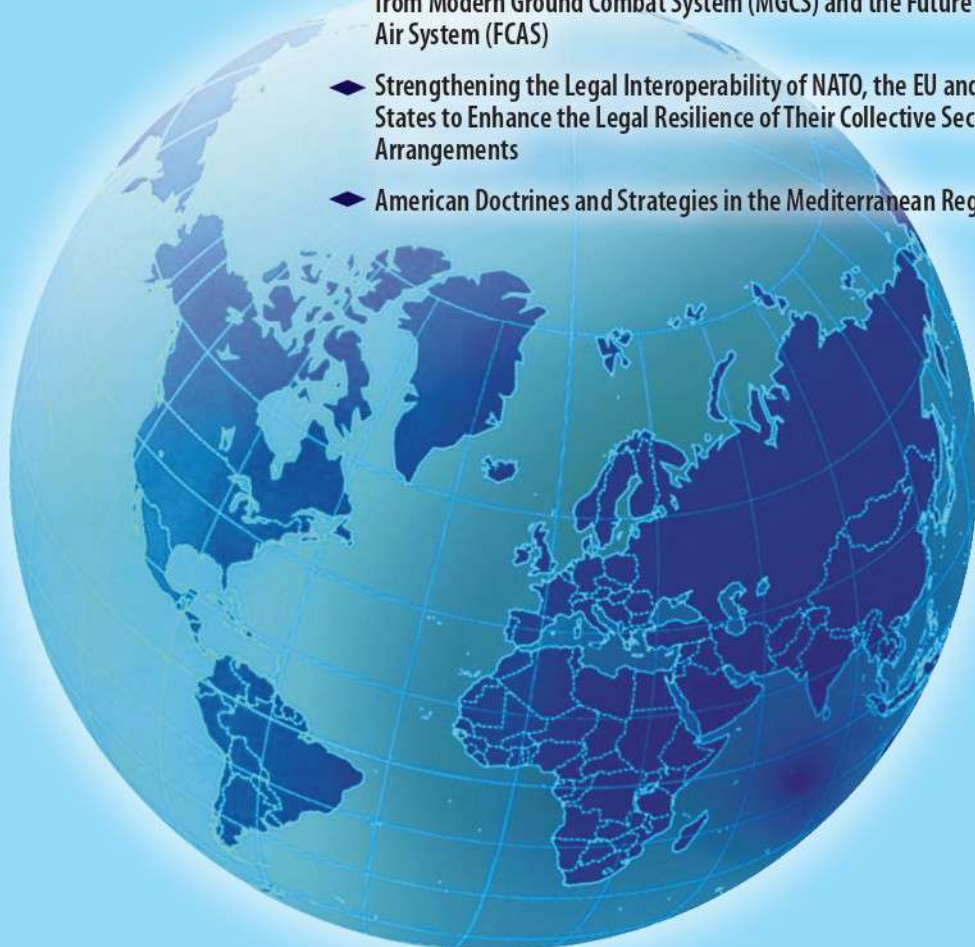


MONITOR STRATEGIC

REVISTĂ DE STUDII DE SECURITATE ȘI APĂRARE

ANUL XXVI • Nr. 3-4/2025

- ◆ Expert Views on Strategic Culture in Europe: Findings from a Survey across the Network of European Strategic Studies Institutions (NESSI)
- ◆ Strategic Perspectives of the European Defence Industry – Lessons from Modern Ground Combat System (MGCS) and the Future Combat Air System (FCAS)
- ◆ Strengthening the Legal Interoperability of NATO, the EU and Member States to Enhance the Legal Resilience of Their Collective Security Arrangements
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EVOLUȚII ÎN CADRUL UE ȘI NATO

Expert Views on Strategic Culture in Europe: Findings from a Survey across the Network of European Strategic Studies Institutions (NESSI)

Alexandru LUCINESCU, PhD

ABSTRACT

The Network of European Strategic Studies Institutions (NESSI) took shape in 2021 at the initiative of the Institut de Recherche Stratégique de l'École Militaire (IRSEM), the strategic research institute of the French Ministry of Armed Forces, and currently brings together 20 research institutes affiliated with national defence establishments from 19 European countries (Austria, Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Hungary, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom). NESSI is designed to operate as a platform for expertise on strategic issues and facilitates, among its members, both the exchange of knowledge and the sharing of perspectives on a regular basis. The presidency of NESSI is annually assumed by one of its members on a rotating basis, and in 2025 this position was held by the Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History (IPSDMH) within the Romanian Ministry of National Defence. As an original contribution to the attainment of one key objective pursued by NESSI, the development of a common strategic culture, IPSDMH conducted a network-wide survey, the findings of which were presented on the sidelines of the annual conference "Preparing for Turbulent Times – Reshaping Europe's Defence: Challenges, Lessons Learned and Possible Scenarios," held in Bucharest from 16 to 19 September 2025. IPSDMH's research staff contributed as follows: Dr Daniela Şişcanu and Dr Şerban-Filip Cioculescu drafted and circulated the survey, and Dr Alexandru Lucinescu analysed the results.

Keywords: NESSI, European strategic culture, European defence, threat perception, NATO, European Union, United States of America

Alexandru Lucinescu (PhD in Intelligence and National Security) is a senior researcher at the Institute for Political Studies of Defence and Military History.

A. Methodological approach

The survey was launched in April 2025 and circulated for five months among experts from NESSI and resulted in 13 responses. The questionnaire was distributed and the responses collected electronically (by email), with all responses subsequently anonymised before being processed and analysed, in order to encourage more forthcoming answers. The survey comprised 15 items pertaining to current

and relevant issues of European defence, in terms of threats and possible ways of addressing them through NATO and EU, as well as by individual European states. Each item was formulated as a declarative statement, and respondents were invited to express their views using a five-point Likert scale: strongly agree, somewhat agree, not sure, somewhat disagree, strongly disagree. In addition, several items allowed respondents to provide open-ended comments, thereby complementing the

closed-ended responses obtained through the Likert scale. All items were subjected to quantitative analysis, with the number of respondents and the corresponding percentage reported for each of the five Likert-scale response options. In addition, for the items that included open-ended responses, a qualitative content analysis was carried out, whereby comments were systematically grouped into categories corresponding to the main issues identified. Furthermore, a comparative analysis was undertaken for selected items, encompassing both the distributions across the Likert-scale answer choices and the open-ended comments. Beyond the numerical and categorical comparison, the results were also interpreted, with attention to the substantive insights that emerged from the observed differences and similarities. For the purpose of the analysis, the survey items were grouped into two main categories. The first category addressed respondents' perceptions of threats to European security (Q2, Q12), while the second focused on the approaches to addressing security threats, whether by Eu-

ropean states (Q1, Q3, Q4, Q5, Q6, Q7, Q11) or through the European Union and NATO (Q8, Q9, Q10, Q13, Q14, Q15).

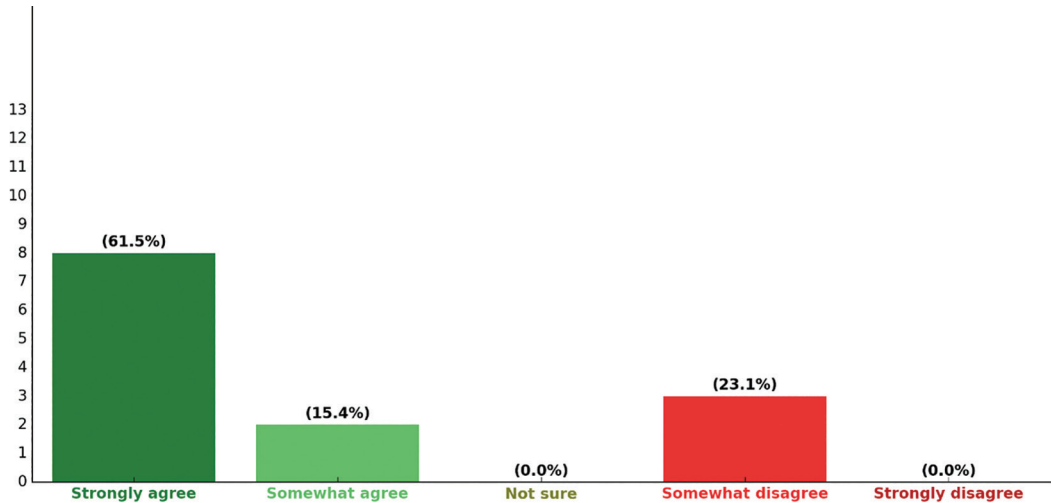
Despite the relatively small number of participants, the validity of the survey results for grasping the contours of strategic culture among NESSI members retains its significance, as the expertise of the contributors lends considerable weight to the data, thereby compensating, to a relevant extent, for the limited size of the sample. The survey reflected the security situation at the time of its drafting, and even though events have since evolved, its items may still be considered to have preserved their relevance.

B. Examination of the findings

1. Perceptions of security threats to Europe

A broad majority endorsed this assessment (76.9%), and the strength of this prevailing positive orientation is underscored by the clear majority of respondents (61.5%) who

Q2. *The military threats from the Russian Federation represent the most significant security threat to my country in the current geopolitical climate.*



offered unqualified agreement, a share representing nearly 80% of those in agreement. Yet the presence of a sizeable minority, comprising nearly one quarter of the respondents (23.1%), who expressed partial disagreement

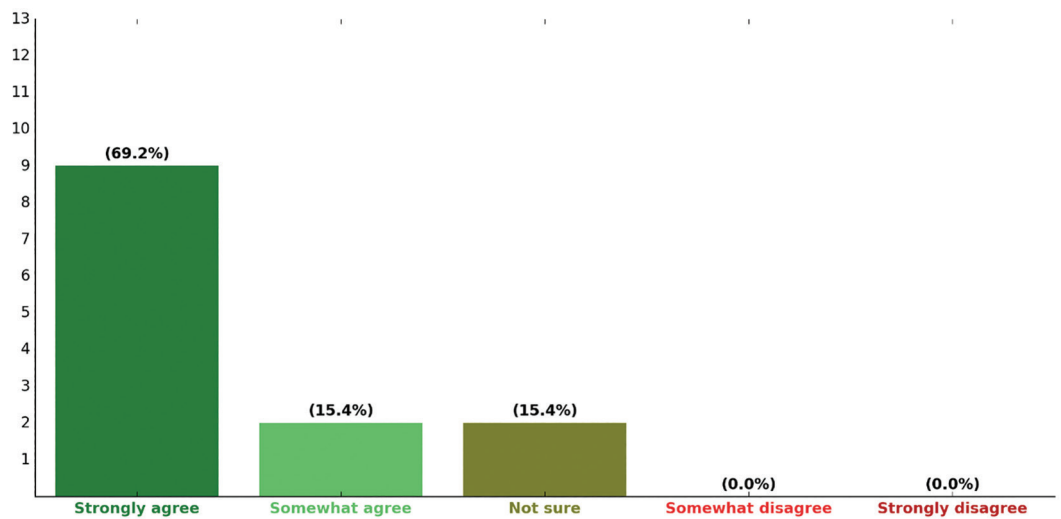
introduces a level of reservation that qualifies the predominant opinion. At the same time, the absence of any strong disagreement indicates that such reservations fall short of constituting a fundamental challenge to the

assessment. Finally, the lack of undecided responses suggests that the issue prompted all respondents to adopt a position, even if in some cases that position was articulated only in qualified terms. The sizeable gap between those who agree and those who disagree indicates an absence of polarisation and a broad tilt toward agreement.

The principal argument for viewing the Russian Federation as the foremost security threat was that it constitutes the only direct, existential threat to Europe. By contrast, responses expressing reservations argued that the Russian Federation was either comparable in importance to other threats – namely,

a potential invasion of Taiwan by China and the combined effects of climate change and instability arising from volatile regions of the world – or of lesser relevance when compared to threats emanating from Europe’s southern neighbourhood (e.g., North Africa, the Sahel, the Red Sea). The responses highlighted variations in how threats are perceived, both in their geographical distribution – distinguishing between those emanating from NATO’s eastern flank, Europe’s southern neighbourhood, and the Indo-Pacific region – and in their nature, differentiating between military threats posed by Russia and China and non-military threats such as climate change.

Q12. *Cyber threats, terrorism, and hybrid warfare will become more frequent in the EU space in the near future.*



A large majority, amounting to 84.6%, endorses this assessment, and the strength of this broad consensus is underscored by the marked predominance of unqualified agreement, which represents a clear majority both among all respondents (69.2%) and, even more strongly, among those expressing agreement (81.8%). It is nonetheless noteworthy that partial agreement and indecision together account for over a quarter of the total respondents (30.8%), indicating that those without full certainty regarding the precise short-term

evolution of these threats represent a non-negligible share. Importantly, no respondent expressed disagreement, and as a result the opinions are non-polarised, clearly indicating that the discussion concerns primarily the extent to which these threats are expected to increase in the near term.

Responses to Q2 and Q12, considered together, point to Europe facing a high level of security threats, consisting of a mixture of conventional and unconventional threats that are generated by both state and non-state actors.

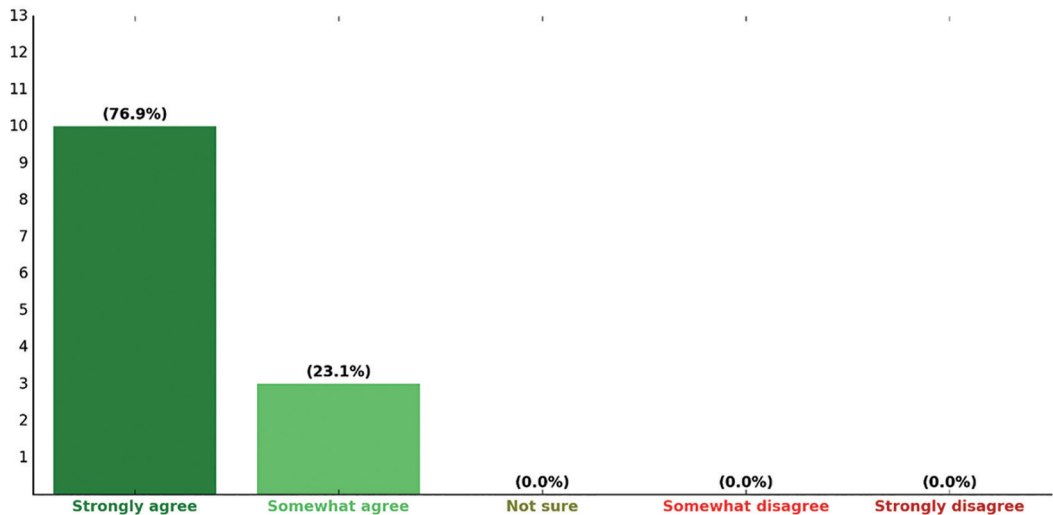
2. Approaches to addressing security threats affecting Europe

2.1. At the level of European states

The 100% agreement stands out and indicates that achieving European defence autonomy is unanimously regarded as the overarch-

ing goal to which all available resources should be committed. The breadth of this consensus is well grounded in a consistent majority (76.9%) expressing unqualified agreement. Nevertheless, the fact that nearly a quarter of respondents express certain reservations suggests that, despite the unanimity on the principle, the issue of costs remains a matter of concern.

Q1. *We need a greater defence autonomy in Europe despite the significant financial and other related costs.*



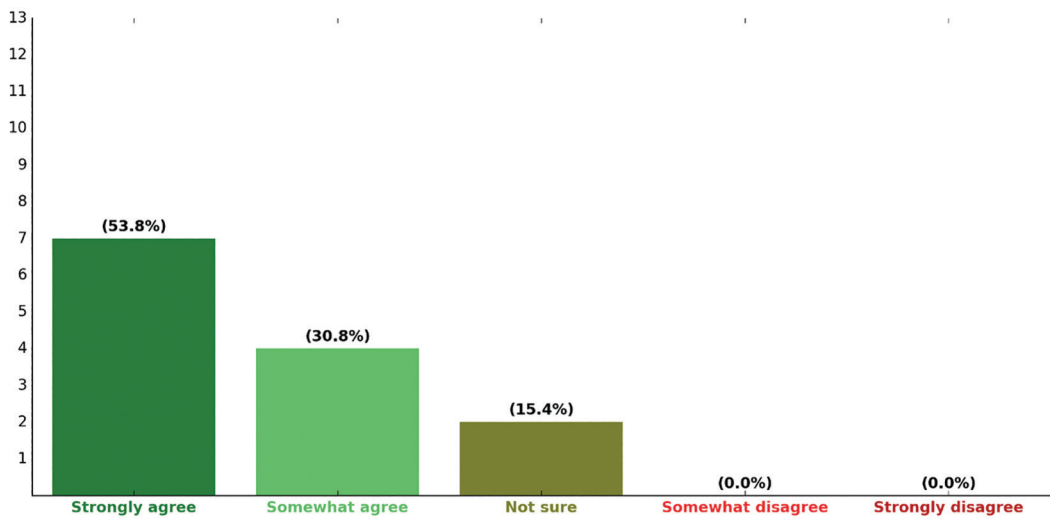
These opinions convey both a sense of urgency in reaching this objective and the perception that defence autonomy constitutes an appropriate response to military and non-military threats, regardless of their geographic origin or the type of international actors behind them. The importance attributed to strategic autonomy rests on two main arguments: the belligerent policy of the Russian Federation and the uncertainty surrounding the US commitment to Europe's conventional and nuclear defence. With regard to the latter, it has been suggested that the prospect of US disengagement from Europe may, in fact, constitute a form of strategic ambiguity deliberately cultivated by the Trump Administration towards NATO's European members as a means of exerting leverage to increase their defence expenditures. It was noted that European defence autonomy could be pursued independently by the EU, by NATO through its European

Pillar, or jointly by the two organisations, in which case greater reliance should be placed on the Berlin Plus arrangements. Regarding the financial burden of building defence autonomy, it was emphasised that the wealthier European states are expected to shoulder a larger share. As for the feasibility of increasing defence autonomy, it was indicated that it is unlikely for it to be achieved in the short to medium term, because it largely depends on the prevailing strategic culture among European states which is currently unsupportive of it and whose change requires a long-term process. As for the feasibility of increasing defence autonomy, it was noted that its achievement in the short to medium term is unlikely, as it largely depends on the currently prevailing strategic culture among European states – a culture which tends to be unsupportive of such an effort and whose transformation requires a long-term process. An important

conceptual distinction was drawn between strategic autonomy – understood as reduced reliance on the US – and the enhancement of military capabilities, with the latter rather than the former identified as the paramount goal for European states. From this perspective, sustaining US engagement in Europe and strengthening the military capabilities of Eu-

ropean states are mutually reinforcing rather than mutually exclusive; possessing both robust national military capabilities and a firm US presence in Europe would allow European states to achieve greater security. The process of advancing European defence autonomy thus emerges as practically challenging and conceptually open to discussion.

Q6. My country should play a more active role in strengthening European defence cooperation.

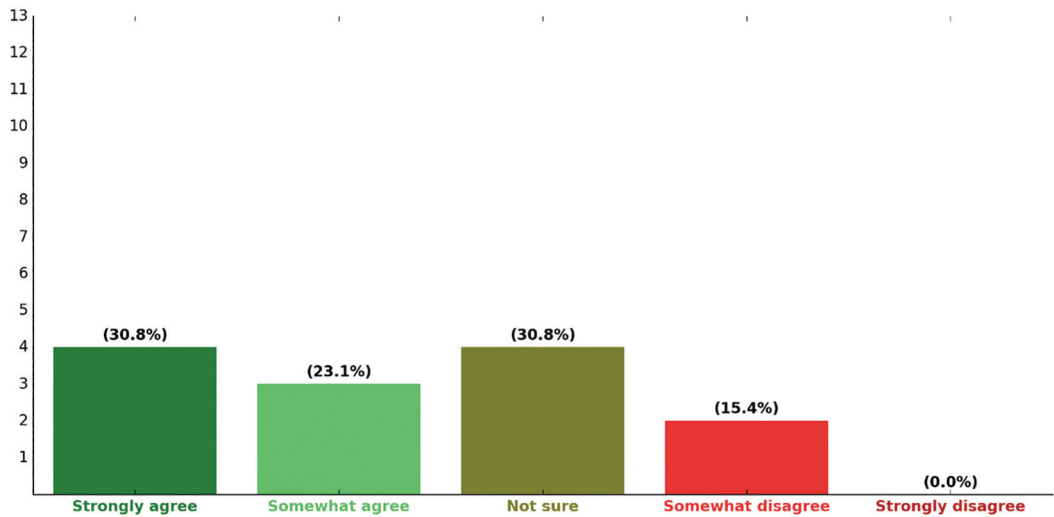


The data reveal a strong majority of 84.6% expressing agreement, within which 63.5% offered an unambiguous endorsement in the form of strong agreement. However, the strength of the broad consensus is tempered by the fact that only a narrow majority (53.8%) of the total respondents expressed unqualified agreement, while nearly half of them (46.2%) inclined towards a more qualified position on this issue, either by adopting partial agreement (30.8%) or by remaining undecided (15.4%). It is also relevant in this respect that, among respondents expressing agreement, more than a quarter (25.7%) offered only partial endorsement. The absence of disagreement shows that, despite these nuances, the overall orientation remains firmly positive, with the opinion displaying a non-polarised character.

The main conditions for enhancing involvement in European defence cooperation are considered to be broad political and public

support for strengthening European autonomous defence as a means of reducing exclusive reliance on NATO, together with the availability of the necessary material and human resources. It is mentioned that an appropriate balance must be found between political commitment to defence cooperation and the development of adequate capabilities, with the latter taking precedence; the underlying rationale is that capability development provides the substance without which political dimension of defence cooperation would remain merely aspirational. Among the priority areas identified for defence cooperation are multinational research, collaborative capability development programmes, and the establishment of multinational military structures. A general conclusion that can be drawn is that a more visible national role in European defence cooperation rests on public and political endorsement, supported by adequate resources.

Q5. *The willingness of your country to join various European defence initiatives is more dependent on political will than resources.*



There is only a fragile majority built around agreement, with 53.9% of respondents endorsing this view. Yet the position of those offering unreserved support does not cross the threshold of a majority of respondents standing well below it at 30.8%. The fragility of this majority is further accentuated, on the one hand, by the fact that the share of partial supporters (23.1%) is relatively close to that of the unequivocal supporters, representing 42.8% of all those in agreement, and, on the other hand, by the existence of a group of undecided respondents whose proportion is identical to that of the strong supporters (30.8%). To this must be added the presence of a non-negligible segment expressing partial disagreement (15.4%). The absence of respondents expressing strong disagreement nonetheless provides an element of reinforcement for the prevailing position. The distribution does not reflect polarisation but rather a fragmented pattern of opinions, with a relative majority in agreement, a smaller share in disagreement, and a substantial proportion undecided.

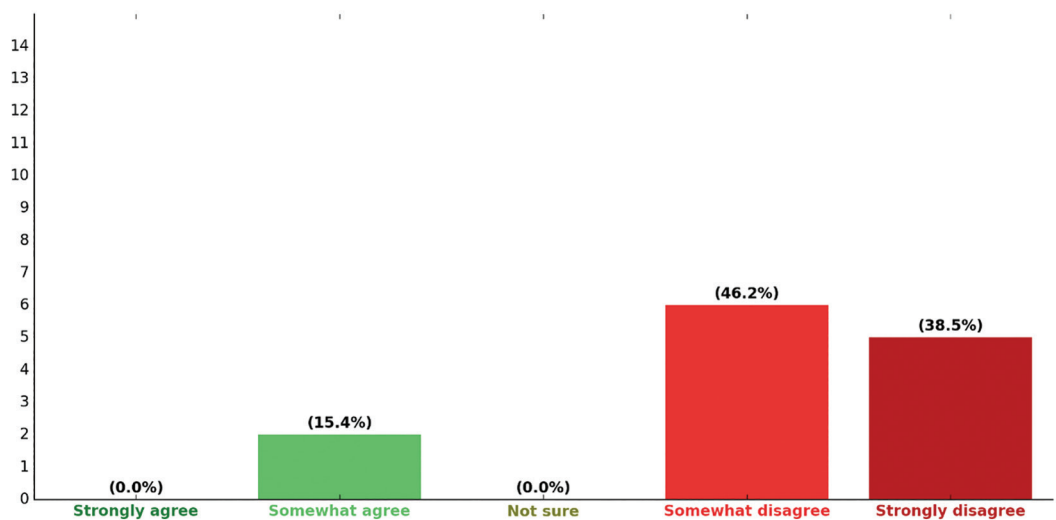
In support of the claim that political will plays only a secondary role, it is argued that resources, particularly financial and logistical, are indispensable for translating political intentions into practice. At the same time, it

is noted that neither political will nor resources constitute the ultimate foundation for participation in European defence initiatives, as this role belongs to national strategic culture, which must be aligned with such an orientation in defence policy.

Taken in conjunction, the responses to Q1, Q6 and Q5 suggest that the enhancement of European defence autonomy rests primarily on greater engagement by European states which, in turn, presupposes the alignment of resources with political commitment, supported by a strategic culture consistent with this objective.

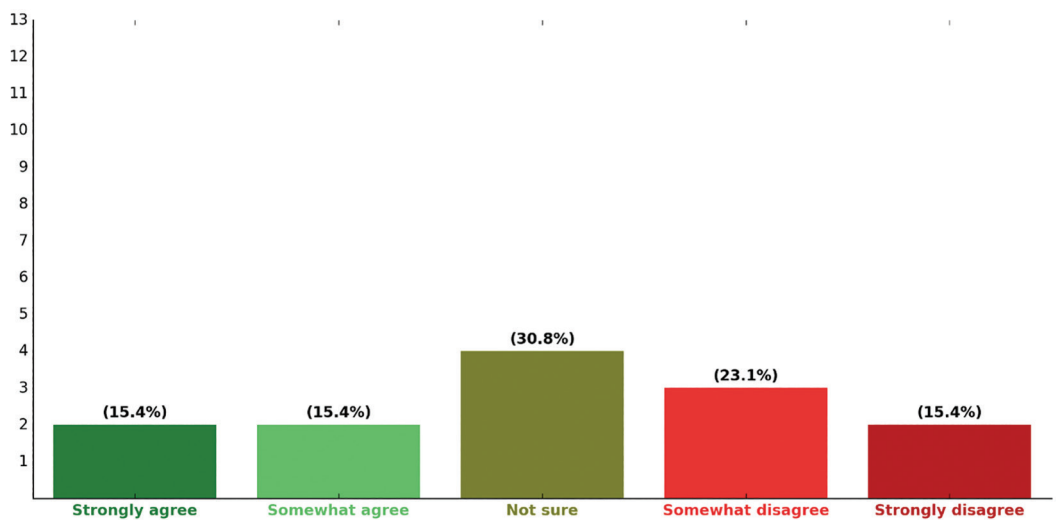
Disagreement with this assessment constitutes a broad majority amounting to 84.7%, within which the dominant view is partial disagreement, representing 61.8% of all those opposing the statement. This indicates that the prevailing disagreement is overall less categorical. The strength of the broad consensus against the assessment is further tempered by the presence of 15.4% of respondents who expressed only partial agreement with the assessment. Finally, the absence of undecided respondents demonstrates that their opinions on this issue are firmly crystallised. A further conclusion, grounded in the distribution of all responses, is that opinions are neither fragmented nor polarised, but instead reflect a clear and consistent orientation.

Q4. *Strengthening national defence capabilities alone is sufficient to address current security challenges.*



It is argued that strong national defence capabilities must be complemented by the consolidation of a European strategic culture, a robust willingness to defend the nation, heightened trust and equitable burden-sharing, deeper cooperation in defence – particularly in relation to high-cost military capabilities – enhanced societal resilience and preparedness, effective mechanisms for countering disinformation, the establishment of an EU nuclear umbrella independent of the United States, a legal framework supportive of technological innovation, and command structures at EU level developed to a degree comparable to those of NATO. The reference to burden-sharing suggests that the issue should be considered not solely within the transatlantic framework of NATO, but equally within the dynamics of intra-European relations.

Q3. *There is a strong will to fight in my country in the case of a Russian military aggression.*

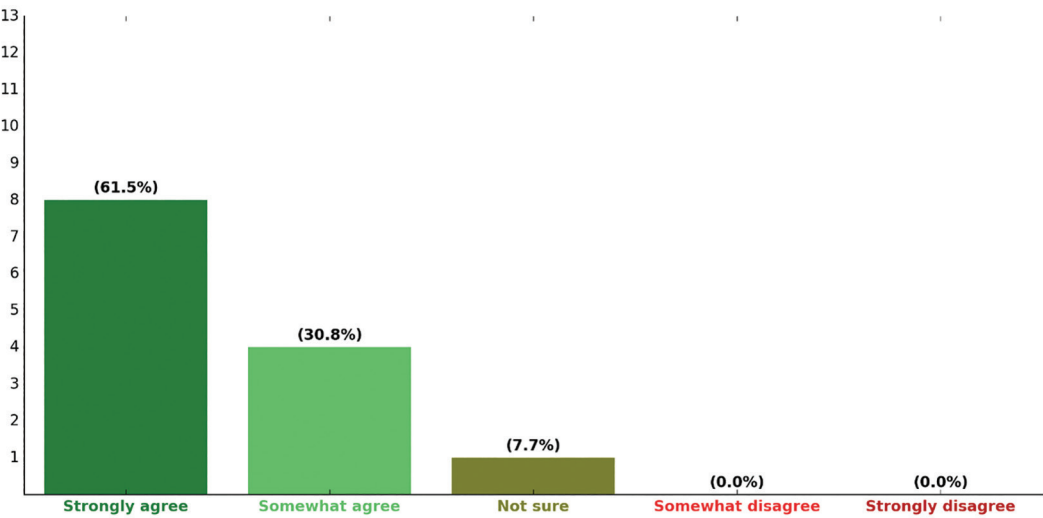


No majority position emerges on this issue, with disagreement at 38.5%, thus exceeding both agreement (30.8%) and indecision (30.8%), and giving relative preponderance to disagreement. Since 60% of those disagreeing fall into the category of partial disagreement, the prevailing form of disagreement is more qualified than categorical in nature. Among those expressing agreement, no dominant option is discernible, as both unconditional and partial agreement are equally represented (15.4% each). It is equally relevant that respondents in agreement and those undecided each account for the same share of the total, namely 30.8%. Overall, the results indicate that opinions are fragmented rather than polarised, with a relative leaning towards disagreement.

Effective means of strengthening the will to fight are identified as the incorporation of patriotic education into the formal curriculum

with support from the Ministry of Defence, the cultivation of patriotic values within the family, framing national defence as the protection of home, family, and lifestyle, reinforcing trust in state institutions, including the armed forces, articulating clearly the value of national sovereignty, fostering a sense of national unity, and, finally, broadening the scope of conscription. It is suggested that a conceptual distinction should be drawn between the *will to fight* and the broader *will to stand for one's country*, on the grounds that the former is only one component of the latter. The *will to fight* is understood as specific to wartime and to combatants, whereas *the will to stand for one's country* applies in both war and peace, engaging the entire population and the full range of activities essential to national survival; given its broader scope, the will to stand for one's country is regarded as deserving priority.

Q11. *A rapidly militarising Europe will better deter Russia from committing another aggression*

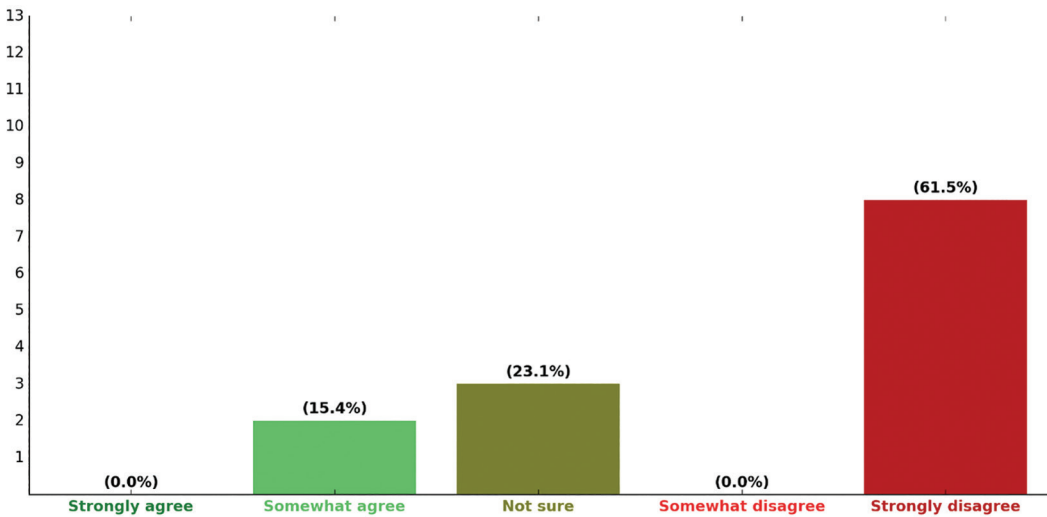


The level of agreement is very high (92.3%), and the strength of this broad consensus is reinforced by the fact that, among those supporting this position, 66.6% express unconditional endorsement, while only 33.3% offer qualified support. The low proportion of undecided respondents (7.7%) suggests that most participants have already formed firm opinions on

the issue, while the complete absence of disagreement indicates that the views expressed are non-polarised.

The predominant view, amounting to 61.5% of respondents, is built around disagreement with this assessment, and the strength of this prevailing orientation results from the fact that it consists exclusively of respondents

Q7. *The rearming of Europe could contribute to escalating tensions and could ultimately precipitate a military conflict with Russia.*



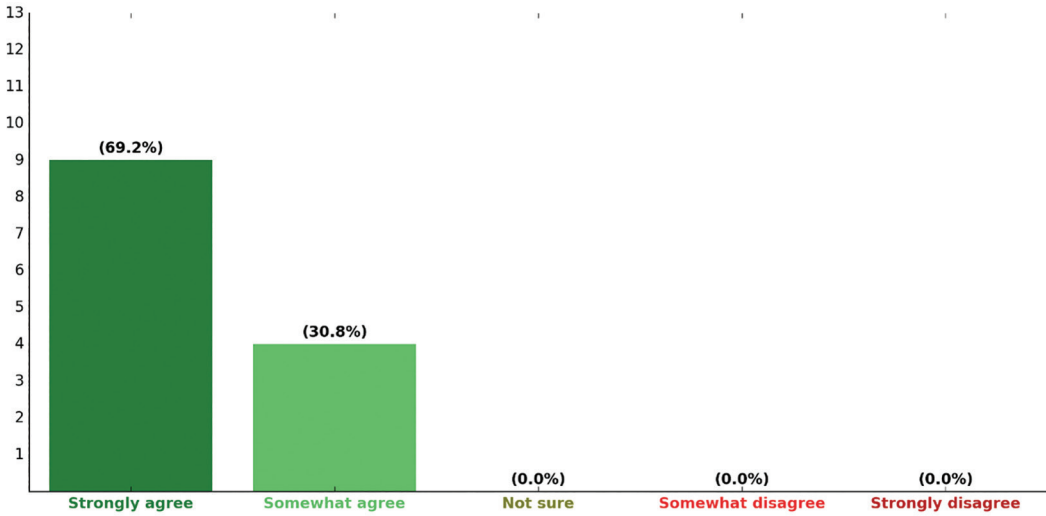
who strongly disagree. However, this position is moderated by almost a quarter of respondents (23.1%) remaining undecided and a smaller share (15.4%) expressing only partial agreement. The significant difference between agreement and disagreement, in favour of the latter, indicates that the predominant opinion is clearly negative, but not polarised. Moreover, the sizeable proportion of undecided respondents suggests that overall opinions are not yet fully crystallised. Overall, there is no fragmentation of opinions but rather a well-discernible disagreement.

The balancing of the defence build-up of European states with the avoidance of war with Russia is considered possible through effective strategic communication and diplomacy. Such measures could prevent a security dilemma by making clear to the Russian Federation that the driving factor behind these efforts is the pursuit of defence autonomy and not aggression against it. On the other hand, it is argued that the defence build-up is unlikely to trigger an armed conflict with the Russian Federation while it is still underway, since Russia is not currently in a position to wage war against EU and NATO states, and that once completed it will not have such an effect because it will

operate as a powerful deterrent against Russia. Unlike the arguments favouring a military build-up, it is also maintained that the most credible way of convincing the Russian Federation of the absence of aggressive intentions, and thus of eliminating any prospect of being drawn into a war with it, is for European states not to engage in a military build-up, since the absence of significant military capabilities simply renders any aggression against the Russian Federation unfeasible. Low European defence spending signals to Moscow the absence of aggressive intentions.

Reading Q11 and Q7 in conjunction, it could be maintained that confidence in the European military build-up as an effective deterrent against the Russian Federation is less robust than would appear from Q11 alone, since the responses to Q7 express concern that manifests either as uncertainty about the implications of such a build-up in relation to the Russian Federation or as partial conviction that its outcome could ultimately be a military confrontation with the Russian Federation. Consequently, these questions suggest that the military build-up should be pursued with great caution regarding its implications for the relationship with the Russian Federation.

Q8. *The EU member states need to develop a grand strategy to project and build a credible European defence posture.*



2.2. Within the frameworks of EU and NATO

For the second time, the 100% agreement threshold is reached, this time indicating that the adoption of a grand strategy at the level of EU is imperative. Within this total consensus, however, there is a consistent minority of 30.8% that expresses qualified agreement, to the effect that the need for such a strategy is not to be endorsed without further scrutiny.

Among the objectives identified for inclusion in an EU grand strategy are the development of a common threat and risk assessment, the financing of defence procurement from the EU general budget, joint military capability development, defence production and defence-related research and development, intelligence sharing, the harmonisation of defence-related national legal frameworks, the safeguarding of liberal democracy as the EU's defining way of life, greater European defence autonomy, fair burden-sharing, the regular issuance of EU strategic documents, and stronger EU–NATO cooperation. It is thus emphasised that an EU grand strategy should be grounded in a common security culture, should provide effective financial, scientific,

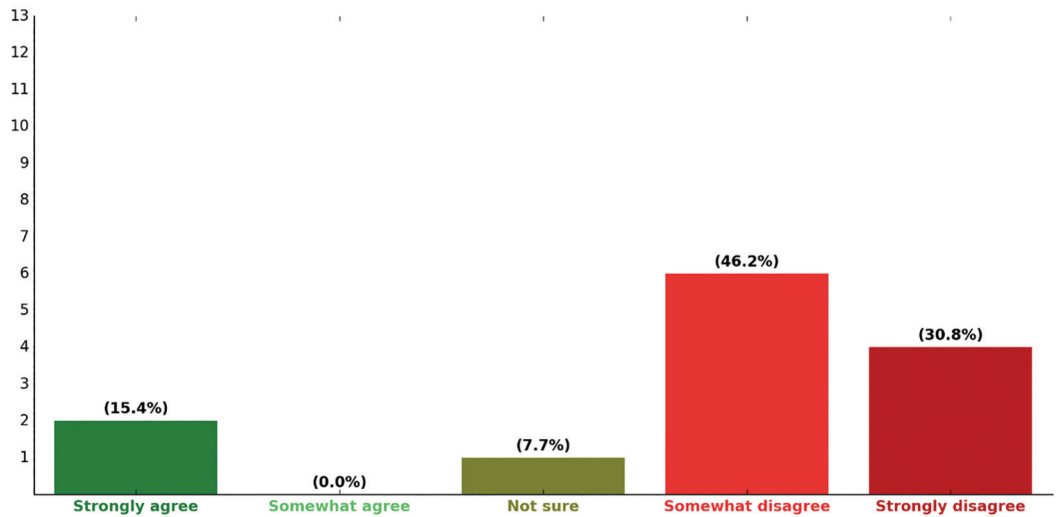
economic, and normative instruments, and should foster a well-balanced contribution among EU member states.

Linking Q8 to Q1, the other item that generated 100% agreement, it can be observed that the enhancement of defence autonomy in Europe and the development of an EU grand strategy emerge not only as absolute priorities but also as convergent objectives.

A large majority of respondents (77.0%) disagree with this assessment, but most of them – that is, 60% of all those in disagreement – express only partial disagreement. The strength of this disagreement is moderated, albeit only to a limited extent, by the 15.4% of respondents who expressed categorical agreement, while the difference between disagreement and agreement remains too large in favour of the former to produce a polarisation of opinion. The fact that the level of uncertainty is low (7.7%) indicates that opinions are, for the most part, well crystallised. In sum, disagreement is the predominant view, and the distribution of responses shows no fragmentation of opinions.

Arguments in support of abandoning the unanimous consent system include avoiding the paralysis of CSDP decisions due to single-state blockages, limiting external

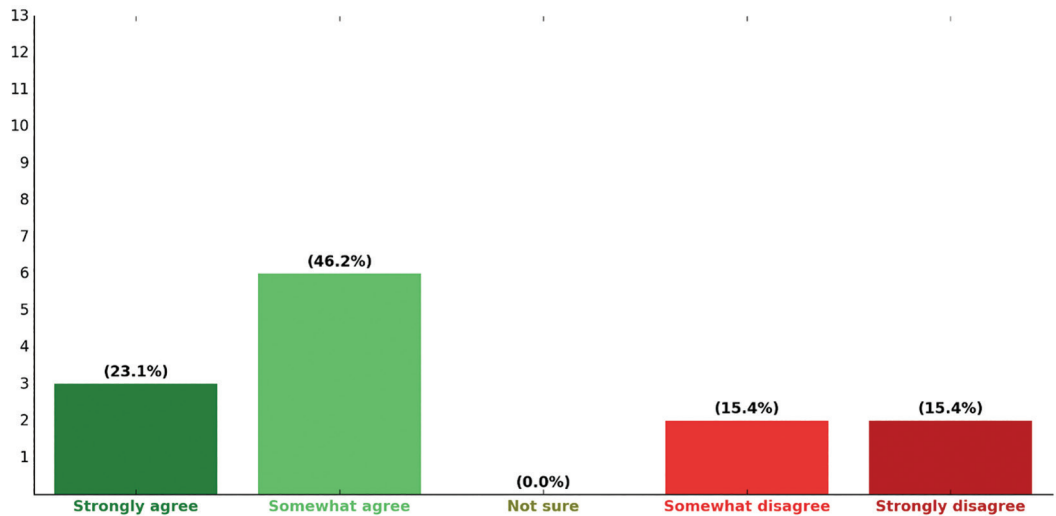
Q9. *Preserving the current system of unanimous consent within the EU on defence issues is essential to reinforcing the stability and legitimacy of the EU's decisions and policies.*



interference in the EU defence decision-making process when third countries are in a position to exert significant influence on an EU member state, facilitating the formation of coalitions of the willing and unilateral initiatives among EU members, and enabling timely decision-making in crises. As a means of facilitating the abandonment of unanimity,

it has been proposed that qualified majority voting should require a supermajority threshold – set not merely above 50% but potentially as high as 90%. At the same time, a note of caution is expressed, emphasising that the principal risk of moving away from consensus lies in the possible fuelling of nationalism across the EU.

Q10. *Introducing the qualified majority voting system in respect to EU defence matters could affect the right to exert national sovereignty.*



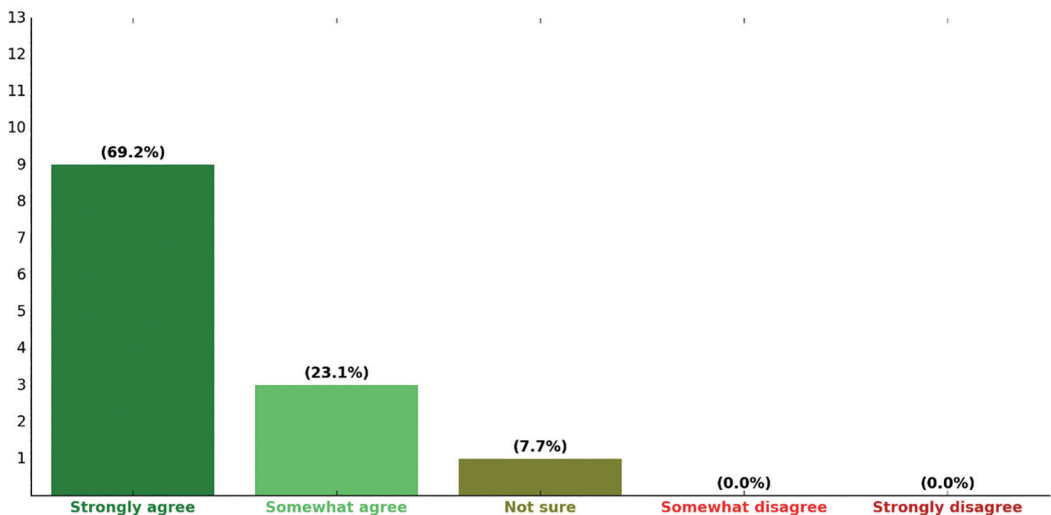
A comfortable majority of 69.3% of respondents support this assessment. However, most within this category – 66.7% – express only partial support, which somewhat reduces the strength of the majority. An even stronger effect in this direction comes from the significant share of disagreement, amounting to 30.8%, that is, well above one quarter of the respondents; the implications are particularly important given that categorical disagreement accounts for 50% of all dissenting opinions. Consequently, agreement emerges as the predominant orientation, without reaching the level of consensus. The absence of uncertainty indicates that views on this matter are well crystallised, and the uneven distribution of responses precludes fragmentation.

Arguments in favour of adopting a qualified majority voting system emphasise that all

unions imply a certain degree of sovereignty loss, with the EU being no exception. From this perspective, the defence of national sovereignty cannot be used to justify blocking initiatives supported by a clear majority of EU members. In turn, those cautious about this voting system stress that it disproportionately affects smaller member states.

A joint consideration of Q9 and Q10 can be interpreted as indicating a high level of agreement that the stability and legitimacy of the EU's decisions within the CSDP are not undermined by the limits to sovereignty inherent in membership of an effectively functioning EU in the field of defence. It may further be observed that this understanding appears to resonate more strongly with large EU member states than with smaller ones.

Q14. *Defence cooperation between the European Union and NATO will remain a key factor for transatlantic security.*

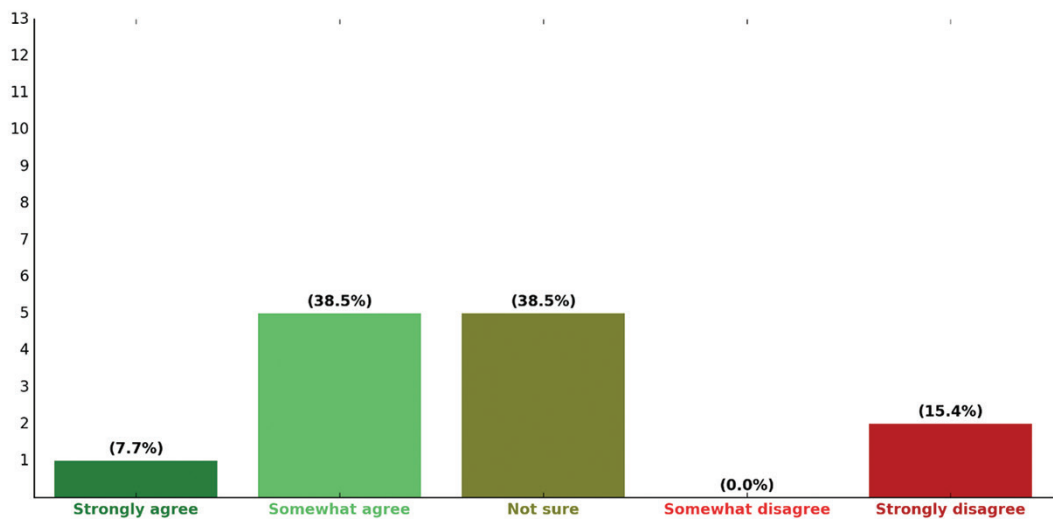


A very consistent majority of 92.3% supports this assessment, with the consensus further strengthened by the fact that 74.9% of those in agreement express categorical support. The level of uncertainty is limited to only 7.7%, while no respondent expressed disagreement. Taken together, these results indicate that agreement takes the form of a broad consensus that is non-polarised, non-fragmented,

and marked by a high degree of crystallisation, owing to the predominance of categorical endorsement within the overall support.

No clear majority emerges with respect to this assessment, although agreement holds relative preponderance, approaching the threshold of a majority with 46.2% of respondents. It is noteworthy, however, that this agreement is not particularly strong, since only 16.7% of

Q15. *The USA will continue to keep its commitment to guaranteeing the security of Europe.*

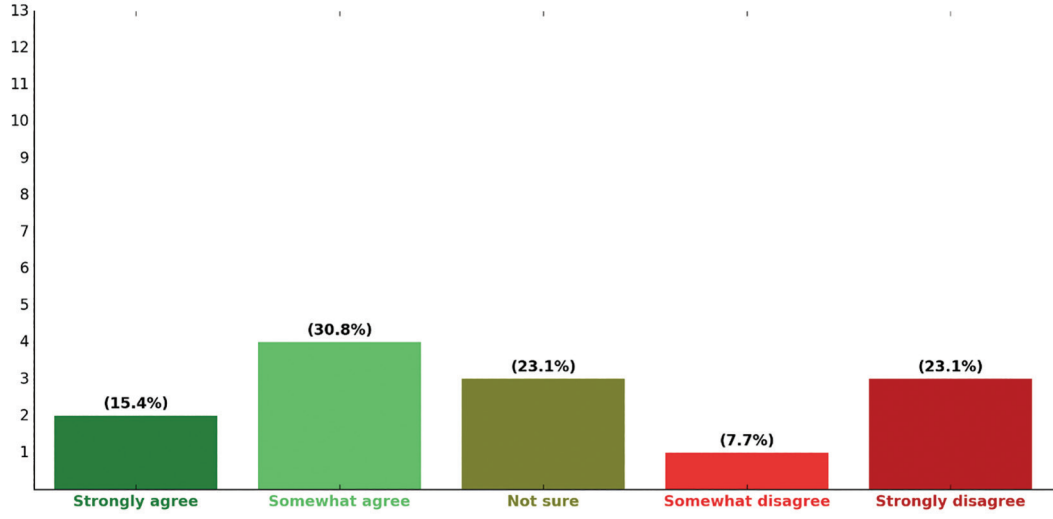


those in agreement express a categorical position. The share of undecided respondents is significant, both in absolute terms (38.5%) and in relative terms, the latter being evident from the fact that it equals the proportion of respondents who express partial agreement (38.5%). The strength of agreement is further weakened by the presence of a non-negligible share of categorical disagreement (15.4%). Consequently, there is neither consensus nor even a predominant orientation, but rather a lack of crystallisation of views, with opinions

distributed mainly between partial agreement and indecision.

Confidence in the US commitment rests mainly on the assumption that the United States guarantees Europe’s security primarily in pursuit of its own interests, while caution is reflected in the view that, at best, the US will provide only nuclear deterrence, leaving conventional deterrence to Europeans, and, at worst, may withdraw nuclear deterrence altogether, thereby compelling Europeans to develop their own nuclear capabilities.

Q13. *The EU could effectively provide a common defence for Europe with less US involvement in NATO.*



This assessment does not obtain a majority, yet agreement is expressed by 46.2% of respondents, a proportion approaching that of a simple majority. However, within this relatively preponderant position, the strength of agreement is diluted by the fact that only 33.3% of those in agreement express a categorical view. At the opposite end, a significant share of respondents (30.8%) express disagreement, with the strength of this position reinforced by the fact that 75% of them adopt a categorical stance. Indecision also remains considerable, at 23.1%, indicating that views on this issue are insufficiently crystallised. Taken together, the configuration suggests that, despite the relative preponderance of agreement, its weight is undermined by both the high share of undecided respondents and the consistent strength of disagreement. Overall, no consensus or predominant orientation emerges, and the distribution of responses points rather to a lack of crystallisation

than to actual polarisation of opinions.

An aggregated reading of Q2, Q3, Q7, Q12, Q13, and Q15 indicates the difficult security situation currently faced by European states. They are confronted with a high level of both military and non-military threats that are highly likely to intensify, while the willingness

of their populations to fight for the defence of the homeland remains limited. At the same time, there is significant concern regarding the ability of the military build-up to deter Russian aggression, coupled with insufficient confidence both in the firmness of the US commitment to guarantee European security and in the capacity of EU member states to ensure their own defence in the context of a reduced US engagement within NATO.

3. Final considerations

An intuitive and easy-to-follow overview of the survey results can be provided on the basis of a set of criteria specifically developed for this purpose. Thus, the items are organised according to the presence or absence of a majority opinion. Items for which a majority was recorded are further subdivided according to whether the majority expressed agreement or disagreement. Items without a majority opinion are, in turn, classified according to the relative preponderance of agreement (strongly agree and somewhat agree) or disagreement (strongly disagree and somewhat disagree), given that no item showed indecision ("not sure") as the relatively dominant position. Within each of these categories, items

SYNOPSIS

MAJORITY AGREEMENT

strongly agree + somewhat agree

- **100%** We need a greater defence autonomy in Europe despite the significant financial and other related costs
- **100%** The EU member states need to develop a grand strategy to project and build a credible European defence posture
- **92.3%** Defence cooperation between the European Union and NATO will remain a key factor for Transatlantic security
- **92.3%** A rapidly militarizing Europe will better deter Russia from committing another aggression
- **84.6%** Cyber threats, terrorism, and hybrid warfare will become more frequent in the EU space in the near future
- **84.6%** My country should play a more active role in strengthening European defence cooperation
- **76.9%** The military threats from the Russian Federation represent the most significant security threat to my country in the current geopolitical climate (**23.1% somewhat disagree**)
- **69.3%** Introducing the qualified majority voting system in respect to EU defence matters could affect the right to exert national sovereignty (**30.8% strongly disagree + somewhat disagree**)
- **53.9%** The willingness of your country to join various European defence initiatives is more dependent on political will than resources (**30.8% not sure; 15.4% somewhat disagree**)

MAJORITY DISAGREEMENT

strongly disagree + somewhat disagree

- **84.7%** Strengthening national defence capabilities alone is sufficient to address current security challenges
- **77%** Preserving the current system of unanimous consent within the EU on defence issues is essential to reinforcing the stability and legitimacy of the EU's decisions and policies (**15.4% strongly agree**)
- **61.5%** The rearming of Europe could contribute to escalating tensions and could ultimately precipitate a military conflict with Russia (**23.1% not sure; 15.4% somewhat agree**)

UNDECIDED

strongly agree + somewhat agree

- **46.2%** The EU could effectively provide a common defence for Europe with less US involvement in NATO (**23.1% not sure 30.8% strongly disagree + somewhat disagree**)
 - **46.2%** The USA will continue to keep its commitment to guaranteeing the security of Europe (**38.5% not sure; 15.4 strongly disagree**)
- strongly disagree + somewhat disagree
- **38.5%** There is a strong will to fight in my country in the case of a Russian military aggression (**30.8% strongly agree + somewhat agree; 30.8% not sure**)

are ranked in descending order according to the percentage corresponding to the specific response option that defines the respective category. All these aspects are reflected in the synopsis below.

This synopsis points to the existence of nine issues with respect to which either no majority opinion is present, or such an opinion does exist but is accompanied by a minority of agreement or disagreement – in the form of either strong or somewhat agreement/disagreement – that reaches at least 15%. The threshold for identifying such minority positions was set at a lower, yet still significant, level in order to capture a wide array of incongruence points. The hierarchy of the items identified reflects, in sequence, the absence of a majority opinion and the presence of such an opinion, in both cases ranking being carried out in ascending order of the percentage corresponding to the relatively predominant opinion or to the majority opinion, respectively. Listed in the order indicated above, the nine issues are as follows:

1. National will to fight in the event of a Russian military aggression
2. Effectiveness of defence provided within the EU framework under reduced US involvement in NATO

3. The credibility of US commitments to NATO's collective defence in Europe

4. The role of political will and resource availability in shaping national decisions to join European defence initiatives

5. The contribution of a rearmed Europe to escalating tensions with Russia and precipitating a military conflict with it

6. Implications of adopting qualified-majority voting in the EU's CSDP for national sovereignty of EU member states

7. The perceived level of threat posed by the Russian Federation

8. Implications of adopting qualified-majority voting in the EU's CSDP for the stability and legitimacy of the EU's decisions and policies

9. The extent to which enhanced national defence capabilities are sufficient to successfully cope with current security threats

Focusing discussion on these nine issues – which account for a significant 60% of the total number of survey items – could be said to contribute to the consolidation of a common strategic culture among NESSI members.

Readiness 2030 – o nouă provocare pentru conceptul de apărare europeană

Prof. univ. dr. Radu CARP

ABSTRACT

In March 2025, the European Commission announced the adoption of measures to relaunch the defence industry at the European level, amid the disengagement of the US armed forces from the European continent announced by the Trump Administration - as reflected in the Readiness 2030 document. The central objective of this plan is to mobilise up to 800 billion euros in defence investment for the member states, including up to 150 billion euros in EU-backed loans through the SAFE instrument, with the remainder to be provided by the member states themselves, supported by the activation of the national escape clause of the Stability and Growth Pact, which permits temporary deviations from the 3% of GDP deficit ceiling to accommodate increased defence expenditure. Although Readiness 2030 aims to strengthen European defence, it does not envisage measures that would fundamentally transform the existing strategic landscape. This is largely because the plan relies predominantly on an increase in national defence spending, with very limited emphasis on common expenditure at the European level. Such an approach reflects the reality that defence remains a sovereign prerogative of the EU member states. Current discussions include the possible establishment of a European Defence Mechanism (EDM), which would enable joint procurement and, in particular, coordinated strategic planning of capability requirements.

Keywords: budget deficit, defence industry, fragmentation, planning, Readiness 2030, safeguard clause

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Contextul european al apărării

Europa se confruntă, în prezent, cu o gravă criză de securitate. Compararea capacităților militare ale Federației Ruse cu cele ale statelor europene nu este favorabilă acestora din urmă. Piața europeană în domeniul producției de apărare este extrem de fragmentată, producția este redusă și costisitoare, iar dependența de sprijinul SUA devine tot mai problematică, mai ales în contextul noilor orientări ale admi-

nistrației Trump. În ansamblul noilor realități ale anului 2025, UE a înțeles că obiectivul reînarmării poate fi atins doar prin ajustarea cadrului fiscal, creșterea capacității de producție proprie și menținerea sprijinului militar pentru Ucraina.

Fragmentarea industriilor de apărare europene a condus la o realitate complicată: în timp ce SUA au furnizat Ucrainei un singur tip de tanc și două tipuri de obuze, statele europene au livrat șapte tipuri de tancuri și nouă

tipuri de abuze. Fragmentarea pieței europene creează cvasimonopoluri interne care permit producătorilor naționali să impună prețuri ridicate. Cazul Rheinmetall este relevant: producția sa ar putea fi realizată în Coreea de Sud la costuri de șapte ori mai mici. Competiția este redusă, iar inovația tehnologică, modestă, aproape inexistentă. Fiecare stat membru UE produce un anumit tip de echipament militar: companiile franceze vând 69% din producție în Franța, cele germane vând 70% din producție în Germania.

Un studiu publicat recent (*The Governance and Funding of European Rearmament*)¹ identifică cinci obstacole majore în calea unei cooperări eficiente între industriile de apărare europene:

- natura de „bun public” a apărării europene. Atunci când sunt concepute politici destinate îmbunătățirii capacităților de producție de armament, statele membre iau în calcul doar considerente naționale, fără a integra în mod substanțial nevoile de înzestrare ale statelor vecine sau ale celorlalte țări, în general;

- comportamentul de *free-riding* al statelor periferice, manifestat prin tendința acestora de a alocă resurse reduse pentru apărare. Cu cât un stat este mai îndepărtat geografic de Federația Rusă, cu atât este mai pronunțată percepția că un conflict armat nu îl afectează în mod direct, ceea ce conduce la niveluri mai scăzute ale cheltuielilor pentru apărare;

- tradițiile și standardele naționale care limitează interoperabilitatea echipamentelor militare produse la nivel național;

- naționalismul în industria de apărare și acapararea acestei industrii de lobby-uri locale;

- fragmentarea fiscală.

Readiness 2030: implicații și limite

Pornind de la aceste realități, președinta Comisiei Europene, Ursula von der Leyen, a anunțat, în martie 2025, adoptarea unor măsuri pentru relansarea industriei europene de apărare, pe fondul dezangajării forțelor armate ale SUA de pe continentul european, anunțată de administrația Trump. Inițial intitulat *Re-arm Europe*, planul a fost redenumit *Readiness*

2030 ca urmare a presiunilor Spaniei și Italiei (state membre care alocă în prezent sub 2% din PIB pentru apărare)². Ulterior, Comisia Europeană a publicat Cartea Albă *European Defence – Readiness 2030*³.

Planul urmărește mobilizarea a 800 de miliarde de euro pentru industria de apărare a statelor membre. Până la 150 de miliarde de euro pot proveni prin împrumuturi susținute de UE, iar restul din împrumuturi ale statelor membre facilitate de activarea clauzei de salvagardare din Pactul de Stabilitate și Creștere (pot depăși limita de 3% din PIB). Totuși, suma de 800 de miliarde de euro pare mai degrabă o estimare optimistă decât o evaluare realistă, Comisia neprecizând în detaliu cum poate fi atins acest nivel în perioada de patru ani a programului.

O dificultate majoră în ceea ce privește planul menționat este faptul că producătorii europeni din industria de apărare nu au capacități de producție pentru a răspunde unor cerințe mai ridicate și au nevoie de contracte ferme pentru a se putea extinde.

Comisia Europeană intenționează să atragă resursele financiare necesare programului *Readiness 2030* de pe piețele internaționale de capital, astfel încât să poată susține împrumuturile solicitate de statele membre. Rămâne însă neclar ce tip de proiecte vor trebui elaborate și depuse de statele membre pentru ca aceste împrumuturi să fie aprobate și în ce mod ar trebui configurată concret preferința acordată producătorilor europeni în procesul de achiziție⁴. Deși Comisia a oferit asigurări că, odată aprobat un împrumut, fondurile vor fi puse imediat la dispoziția solicitantului, cea mai dificilă etapă rămâne elaborarea de către statele membre a unui plan de achiziții, care trebuie ulterior transmis Comisiei spre aprobare. De asemenea, este interesant de semnalat că, în cadrul *Readiness 2030*, Comisia nu a fost de acord să realoce cele 93 de miliarde de euro care mai sunt disponibile ca împrumuturi pentru statele membre conform instrumentelor instituite ca răspuns la pandemia de COVID-19.

O altă neclaritate în ceea ce privește programul este aplicabilitatea acestuia pentru statele care alocă în prezent mai puțin de 2% din PIB pentru apărare. Italia și Spania, care se

încadrează în această categorie, au făcut deja presiuni la Bruxelles pentru extinderea categoriei „cheltuielilor pentru apărare”, astfel încât aceasta să includă și alte tipuri de cheltuieli, considerate parte integrantă din pregătirea în eventualitatea unui conflict armat – de exemplu, investiții în spitale civile care ar putea fi transformate în spitale militare în caz de necesitate.

Programul se bazează, de asemenea, pe activarea unei „clauze de salvagardare” care permite unui stat membru să depășească pragul de deficit de 3% din PIB atunci când dorește să crească cheltuielile pentru apărare. Menținerea deficitului la un nivel ridicat generează însă probleme structurale pe termen lung, ce pot fi abordate doar prin creșterea taxelor sau prin reducerea cheltuielilor publice. *Readiness 2030* nu contribuie doar la soluționarea unor dificultăți legate de industria de apărare, ci riscă și să amplifice un tip de deficit structural ce ar putea impune, în timp, adoptarea unor măsuri de austeritate. În aceste condiții, statele membre care se concentrează pe reducerea deficitului bugetar – precum România – vor avea o capacitate limitată de a beneficia pe deplin de oportunitățile oferite de *Readiness 2030*.

Pentru ca acest plan să funcționeze, implicarea băncilor comerciale din statele membre este esențială, întrucât acestea acordă, de regulă, cu dificultate împrumuturi pentru industria de apărare. Creșterea capacității de producție nu poate fi susținută exclusiv din fonduri guvernamentale; vor fi necesare, de asemenea, și astfel de împrumuturi contractate la nivel național. Deși Banca Europeană de Investiții nu este menționată ca un actor central în *Readiness 2030*, această instituție ar putea juca un rol-cheie, oferind băncilor comerciale din statele membre condiții de finanțare mai avantajoase, cu scopul de a flexibiliza creditarea destinată industriilor naționale de apărare. Acest aspect rămâne, deocamdată, insuficient clarificat.

Documentul stabilește, totodată, șapte priorități de investiții în domeniul apărării care ar trebui asigurate prin fonduri comune:

- apărarea aeriană și antirachetă;
- sistemele de artilerie;
- muniția și rachetele;
- sistemele de drone și contra-drone;

- mobilitatea militară;
- războiul electronic, AI și cibernetic;
- protecția infrastructurilor critice.

Aceste priorități derivă din concluziile prezentate în rapoartele Draghi și Niinistö, care au evidențiat nivelul redus de cooperare dintre industriile europene de apărare și consecințele sale: eficiență scăzută în dezvoltarea capacităților militare și costuri suplimentare pentru toate statele membre.

Cartea Albă *European Defence – Readiness 2030* analizează pe rând toate aceste priorități. Legat de mobilitatea militară, documentul menționează că Uniunea Europeană a identificat patru coridoare multimodale de transport (feroviar, terestru, naval și aerian) pentru deplasarea trupelor și echipamentelor militare. În acest cadru pot fi demarate peste 500 de proiecte – tuneluri de autostradă, poduri, terminale portuare și aeroportuare, cu condiția garantării securității acestora. Cartea Albă subliniază, de asemenea, necesitatea inițierii unui dialog cu industria de apărare, în vederea recunoașterii reciproce a certificărilor, accelerării obținerii autorizațiilor de mediu, eliminării obstacolelor privind accesul la finanțare și pentru a reduce timpul de livrare a echipamentelor militare.

În ceea ce privește sprijinul pentru Ucraina, Cartea Albă propune o nouă denumire, folosită deja în literatura de specialitate pentru a descrie situația Taiwanului: „strategia ariciului țepos” (*porcupine strategy*). Pentru a susține efortul de război din Ucraina, este nevoie de:

- o producție de muniție de artilerie de minimum două milioane de unități pe an;
- o producție de sisteme de apărare aeriană, rachete și drone, Cartea Albă făcând referire la momentul noiembrie 2024, când 18 state membre s-au angajat să ajute Ucraina în acest sens;
- crearea de întreprinderi comune între industriile europene și cea ucraineană pentru fabricarea de drone;
- antrenarea și echiparea brigăzilor ucrainene, prin continuarea operațiunii EUMAM (*EU Military Assistance Mission in support of Ukraine*), de care au beneficiat până în prezent peste 75.000 de militari;
- acordarea de sprijin direct industriei militare ucrainene;

– aprobarea cererii Ucrainei de a participa la Programul spațial al UE.

Diagnosticul formulat în Cartea Albă cu privire la industria europeană de apărare este foarte dur, dar realist: aceasta nu este în prezent capabilă să producă sisteme și echipamente în cantitățile și cu viteza necesare statelor membre.

Un alt aspect evidențiat în Cartea Albă este nevoia de a efectua comenzi de echipamente militare pe termen lung, prin programe de achiziții comune (EDIRPA). Pentru atingerea acestui obiectiv este esențial ca piața europeană să reducă dependența de un număr redus de furnizori de bunuri și servicii în domeniul militar, eliminând fenomenul descris în document drept „weaponisation of dependencies” (transformarea în arme a dependențelor). În acest sens, Cartea Albă recomandă identificarea, de către Comisia Europeană, a metalelor rare și a cipurilor de care depinde industria europeană de apărare, pentru a diversifica lanțul de achiziții.

Un obiectiv prioritar al consolidării industriei europene de apărare este creșterea capacității de producție și reducerea timpului de livrare a bunurilor și tehnologiilor militare. Pentru a îndeplini acest obiectiv este nevoie de investiții în cercetare și, mai ales, în inovație. Cartea Albă identifică două programe ce ar putea beneficia de o finanțare extinsă în acest sens: EUDIS (*EU Defence Innovation Scheme*) și HEDI (*Hub for European Defence Innovation*). Documentul accentuează, de asemenea, importanța investițiilor în cercetare pentru dezvoltarea tehnologiilor cu utilizare duală – civilă și militară. IMM-urile joacă un rol vital în realizarea acestui obiectiv, motiv pentru care Cartea Albă recomandă crearea unor competiții de finanțare la nivel european dedicate exclusiv IMM-urilor din industria de apărare. Totodată, documentul propune un nou instrument financiar FAST (*Fund to Accelerate Defence Supply Chain Transformation*).

Cea mai importantă parte a acestui document se referă la creșterea cheltuielilor de apărare la nivelul statelor membre UE. În primul rând, Cartea Albă constată că media cheltuielilor pentru apărare a atins nivelul de 1,9% din PIB abia în 2024, după o creștere cumulată de 31% în ultimii patru ani. Una dintre măsurile

propușe în Cartea Albă este de a permite statelor membre să se împrumute cu până la 150 de miliarde de euro din bugetul UE, potrivit art. 122 TFUE (*Tratatul privind funcționarea Uniunii Europene*), cu ajutorul instrumentului SAFE (*Security and Action for Europe*). Prin SAFE se vor putea face achiziții care implică cel puțin două state: fie două state membre, fie un stat membru și stat EFTA (Islanda, Liechtenstein, Norvegia, Elveția), EEA (primele trei, fără Elveția) sau Ucraina. A doua măsură avută în vedere de Cartea Albă este ca statele membre să poată alocă mai mult pentru cheltuielile de apărare, până la limita creșterii deficitului bugetar (peste cel existent) cu până la 1,5% din PIB. O a treia măsură este posibilitatea de a majora bugetul UE destinat apărării, dar ideea nu este dezvoltată în document.

Ulterior apariției acestui document, Comisia Europeană a adoptat o *Comunicare privind creșterea cheltuielilor pentru apărare în cadrul Pactului de Stabilitate și Creștere*⁵. Aceasta stabilește procedura aplicabilă în cazul în care statele membre nu reușesc să se încadreze în ținta de deficit de 3% ca urmare a unor investiții în industria de apărare. Procedura aleasă de Comisie a fost una clasică, testată în timp, și anume activarea unei clauze naționale de salvagardare, în temeiul art. 26 al Regulamentului (UE) 2024/1263. Este impusă o condiție suplimentară formulată însă în termeni foarte vagi: „Flexibilitatea cheltuielilor pentru apărare trebuie să fie în mod adecvat limitată de păstrarea credibilității cadrului fiscal al UE, în așa fel încât să nu fie pusă în pericol sustenabilitatea fiscală pe termen mediu”. Achizițiile finanțate din împrumuturi prin noul instrument SAFE ar trebui, potrivit documentului, să beneficieze automat de această flexibilitate. Clauza națională de salvagardare ar trebui să fie aplicabilă pentru o perioadă de patru ani, începând cu 2025.

Readiness 2030 reprezintă un plan foarte important pentru consolidarea apărării europene, dar nu are în vedere măsuri care să schimbe fundamental peisajul actual în domeniu. Aceasta se explică prin faptul că programul este bazat exclusiv pe creșterea apetitului național pentru cheltuieli în domeniul apărării și foarte puțin, aproape deloc, pe cheltuieli comune la nivel european. O altfel

de abordare nici nu ar fi fost posibilă, întrucât apărarea rămâne un domeniu suveran al statelor membre UE.

Pentru a înțelege mai bine mecanismele descrise de *Readiness 2030* trebuie să examinăm motivele invocării art. 26 al Regulamentului (UE) 2024/1263. Potrivit prevederilor acestuia, statele membre pot solicita autorizarea de a nu aplica anumite constrângeri fiscale dacă există „circumstanțe excepționale, pe care nu le controlează și care au un impact major asupra finanțelor lor publice”. *Readiness 2030* este un răspuns ad-hoc, rapid, la modificările anunțate de noua administrație Trump în privința apărării continentului european. Ar fi existat și varianta modificării Regulamentului (UE) 2024/1263 pentru a excepta cheltuielile militare de la calculul deficitului bugetar agreeat, însă un astfel de proces ar fi necesitat mai mult timp; este posibil ca această variantă să fie avută în vedere pe termen lung. Marea problemă este însă că statele membre UE se află într-o perioadă îndelungată de crize succesive care nu s-au încheiat și care au determinat creșterea masivă și necontrolată a deficitelor.

În prezent, puține state europene sunt dispuse în mod real să majoreze deficitele deja existente pentru a finanța cheltuielile destinate apărării. Germania este un exemplu relevant în acest sens. Regula limitării deficitului (*Schuldenbremse*) este de natură constituțională, iar singura modalitate de a permite deficite mai mari este revizuirea Legii fundamentale. Acesta este și motivul pentru care guvernul cancelarului Olaf Scholz s-a destrămat și au fost organizate alegeri anticipate – unul dintre partenerii de coaliție nu a fost de acord cu renunțarea la o politică fiscală prudentă. După alegeri, noul cancelar, Friedrich Merz, și-a exprimat disponibilitatea de a schimba regulile actuale, dar rămâne de văzut cum va acționa. În orice caz, în prezent, Germania nu poate aplica politicile publice fiscale recomandate de *Readiness 2030*. Mai mult, așa cum am arătat, multe state europene nu manifestă o dorință pronunțată de a investi mai mult în apărare, chiar și după apariția instrumentelor descrise de *Readiness 2030*. Recent, primul-ministru danez, Mette Frederiksen, declara, cu prile-

jul Summitului B9 de la Vilnius, că țara sa va investi mai mult în dezvoltarea sectorului de apărare⁶, cu depășirea deficitului de 3%, dar deocamdată rămâne o voce izolată.

În ceea ce privește referința din *Readiness 2030* la art. 122 TFUE, trebuie menționat că această prevedere a stat la baza adoptării unui pachet financiar similar în timpul pandemiei, în aprilie 2020. Ulterior, aceeași clauză de salvagardare descrisă de art. 122 TFUE a permis intervenția pe piața energiei, puternic afectată în UE după impunerea sancțiunilor împotriva Federației Ruse. Problema care se pune în prezent este dacă art. 122 poate avea în vedere și cheltuielile pentru apărare, în condițiile în care art. 41 alin. (2) TUE (*Tratatul privind Uniunea Europeană*) interzice utilizarea bugetului UE pentru finanțarea acestor cheltuieli⁷. Avantajul activării clauzei naționale de salvagardare constă însă în procedura de vot: este necesară doar o majoritate calificată, ceea ce înseamnă că, în situația în care un stat membru va dori să se împrumute mai mult pentru a finanța cheltuieli de apărare, țări ostile în general programului de reînarmare, precum Ungaria sau Slovacia, nu vor putea să blocheze aprobarea unor astfel de inițiative la nivel european.

Concluzii

Soluția pe termen lung la problema impunerii UE ca actor global capabil să descurajeze atacurile armate pe continentul european prin existența unor capacități militare solide este desigur crearea unui instrument propriu prin care UE să se poată împrumuta pe piețele financiare globale, după agregarea nevoilor de înzestrare militară ale tuturor statelor membre. Acest instrument a fost descris în studiul amintit mai sus și denumit de autorii acestuia *Mecanismul de Apărare European (EDM)* (*European Defence Mechanism*), similar cu Mecanismul de Stabilitate European (ESM). Un asemenea instrument ar permite realizarea de achiziții comune și, mai ales, o planificare strategică a nevoilor în materie de înzestrare militară. Statele care ar adera la EDM ar accepta automat și interzicerea oricărei preferințe în

materie de ajutoare de stat și de achiziții care ar avantaja producători naționali în detrimentul altor producători din Uniunea Europeană.

Prin urmare, *Readiness 2030* reprezintă un pas înainte în ceea ce privește consolidarea Uniunii Europene ca actor global în domeniul industriei de apărare, cu scopul de a crea o capacitate de descurajare credibilă în fața Federației Ruse, în condițiile dezangajării progresive a SUA din Europa. În pofida tuturor cerențelor semnalate, acest program va contribui cu siguranță, pe termen, lung la revitalizarea unei industrii aflate în declin și va reduce dependența statelor membre UE de producători situați în state terțe. Desigur, alte instrumente financiare vor trebui concepute și puse în aplicare pentru a crea o piață unică a industriei de armament. Important este că, la nivel politic, s-a format deja un minim consens în favoarea punerii în aplicare a primilor pași descriși de Cartea Albă *Readiness 2030*.

Note

¹ Guntram B. Wolff, Armin Steinbach, Jeromin Zettelmeyer, *The Governance and Funding of*

European Rearmament, Policy Brief nr. 15/2025, Bruegel, aprilie 2025.

² Jorge Liboreiro, *Brussels Rebrands 'Rearm Europe' Plan after Backlash from Leaders of Italy and Spain*, Euronews, martie 2025, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2025/03/21/brussels-confirms-rearm-europe-rebrand-after-backlash-from-italy-and-spain>

³ Comisia Europeană, White Paper *European Defence – Readiness 2030* (Cartea albă privind pregătirea pentru apărare a Europei 2030).

⁴ Aurélie Pugnet, *Von der Leyen's 'Rearm Europe' Plan and the Holes in It*, Euractiv, martie 2025, <https://www.euractiv.com/section/defence/news/von-der-leyens-rearm-europe-plan-and-the-holes-in-it/>

⁵ Comisia Europeană, *Communication from the Commission Accommodating Increased Defence Expenditure within the Stability and Growth Pact*, Bruxelles, 19 martie 2025.

⁶ *Danish PM Frederiksen says NATO defence spending target 'too late'*, The Local Denmark, iunie 2025, <https://www.thelocal.dk/20250602/danish-pm-frederiksen-says-nato-defence-spending-target-too-late>

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From Wales to The Hague: The Evolution of NATO Commitments

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ABSTRACT

The article compares the negotiating positions of NATO Allies on spending targets at two milestones: Wales 2014 (2% of GDP) and The Hague 2025 (5% of GDP). Building on the methodology of Becker et al. (2024), we replicate their “Wales negotiation score” and construct a “Hague negotiation score” by analogy. Using a sample of 27 countries, we combine attitude scores with NATO data on actual spending (2014, 2024) and the year in which 2% was achieved. We find consolidation above 2% and a new stratification at the 5% target: the strongest support comes from the Baltic states, Poland, and the UK; there has been a significant shift towards support in Denmark and Germany, while Spain and Slovenia are weakening. The proximity of the threat, legal anchors, and fiscal capacity explain the differences. We draw attention to the need to standardise “related spend”, introduce milestones, and link the 5% target to specific capabilities.

Keywords: commitment, military capabilities, military spending, NATO, negotiation, political approach

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Introduction

The annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation in 2014 fundamentally redirected the strategic priorities of the North Atlantic Alliance towards the long-term sustainability of defence capabilities and a fair distribution of the budgetary burden among members. The Wales Summit (2014) codified a norm of spending at least 2% of GDP on defence and at least 20% on modernising major military equipment. In response to continuing Russian aggression and a broader spectrum of security threats, the Alliance adopted a more ambitious framework at the Hague Summit (2025), with the goal of reaching 5% of GDP (3.5% “core defence” + 1.5% “related spend”) by 2035. This es-

calation of demands raises the analytical question of how the declared positions of member states are reflected in the negotiating dynamics and actual spending trajectories.

This study, based on official NATO statistics¹ and the methodological procedures of Becker et al. (2024)², maps and compares the negotiating positions of Allies at two key moments: Wales 2014 and The Hague 2025. We replicate the “Wales negotiation score” and in a methodologically comparable format, construct the “Hague negotiation score,” which captures (i) the degree of public acceptance of the 5% target and the realism of the planned trajectory, (ii) demands for flexibility or deferrals, and (iii) budgetary and legislative measures already implemented. Both scales use

the same categorising vocabulary from “Instigator” to “Strongest dragger,” which allows for time-consistent comparisons.

The analysis further links attitude scores with actual performance indicators (2014–2024; year of achieving 2%), thereby testing the gap between declaration and implementation. We identify distinct regional patterns: a consolidated high willingness in the Baltic states and Poland (along with the UK), versus caution and an emphasis on flexibility in parts of Southern Europe and among the “small rich” economies. The findings suggest that proximity to the threat and institutional anchoring of spending rules increase the likelihood of higher support categories, while fiscal constraints and political fragmentation push countries into “fence sitter” to “dragger” positions. At the same time, we draw attention to the key role of defining and classifying the “related spend” component (1.5%), which may have a significant impact on international comparability in the coming years.

Methodology and data

In this paper, we continue and expand on part of the research conducted by Becker et al. (2024), who analysed why NATO Allies, with different geographical locations and perceptions of the international security environment, agreed on a “goal to move toward” increasing defence spending at the 2014 summit in Wales. The analysis of the assessment of individual NATO members’ approaches to setting commitments, the scale, and the vocabulary of categories are based on the aforementioned work and are defined as follows: Instigator (1.00), Strongest/Strong/Medium/Weak supporter (0.90/0.80/0.70/0.60), Fence sitter (0.50), Bystander (0.40), Dragger (0.20), Strong dragger (0.10), Strongest dragger (0.00).

Data on military spending is drawn from official NATO statistics, where data is collected and published regularly. Each ally’s Ministry of Defence reports current and estimated future defence expenditures according to an agreed definition. The amounts represent payments made, or to be made, by national governments during the fiscal year to meet the

needs of their armed forces, the armed forces of Allies, or the Alliance.³

Quantitative Content Analysis was used to create the Hague negotiation score, utilising information available in online media from the time the commitment was announced until the end of September. The analysis focused on information about how each country: (i) publicly accepted the 5% target and the pace/realism of the trajectory, (ii) sought flexibility/deferrals, and (iii) had already taken budgetary/legislative steps. The scale and vocabulary of categories are based on the negotiation categories used for Wales 2014.

All data are used for the 27 NATO members, even though the alliance currently has 32 members. Iceland is a member but has no army, and Montenegro and North Macedonia did not have a Wales negotiation score available. Finland and Sweden have recently joined, and together with the previous three members, their approach to the new 5% GDP commitment to military spending is at least mentioned.

Wales commitment: 2% of GDP

The NATO Summit in Wales, held on September 4–5, 2014, marked a fundamental shift in the Alliance’s approach to defence funding. In response to Russia’s annexation of Crimea and growing security uncertainty, the Allies adopted the Welsh Pledge on Defence Investment, which set the goal of halting the decline in defence spending and gradually increasing it to 2% of gross domestic product (GDP) over the next decade. The Allies also agreed to allocate at least 20% of their defence budgets to modernisation and the acquisition of new equipment, which was intended to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Alliance’s military capabilities (Article 14).⁴

The Welsh commitment had a significant political dimension – it represented a public confirmation of the Allies’ willingness to bear their fair share of responsibility for collective defence. The declaration emphasised that “common security requires a fair sharing of the burden” and that maintaining NATO’s credibility depended on individual states being

willing to contribute appropriately (Articles 5–6). At the same time, it called for greater spending efficiency, transparency, and a focus on investing in capabilities that contribute to the fulfilment of the Alliance’s tasks – in the areas of readiness, interoperability, and technological innovation.

The declaration also enshrined the Readiness Action Plan (RAP), the implementation of which was to be financially supported by an increase in defence spending (Articles 3–5). This plan strengthened NATO’s ability to respond quickly to crises and increased the importance of the military presence on the Alliance’s Eastern Flank. The financing of these measures was seen as a test of the political will of member states to fulfil their commitments not only verbally, but also through real budgetary measures.

The Wales Declaration thus became a key milestone in NATO’s modern history. After more than two decades of gradual reductions in defence spending, it defined a new norma-

tive framework that influenced the Alliance’s future strategic planning and political culture. In the years that followed, the Wales commitment became the benchmark for assessing the reliability of Allies and the starting point for further negotiations on the fair distribution of the financial burden between Europe and North America (Articles 14–15).

The Wales commitment thus became not only NATO’s response to the changed security environment after 2014, but also a test of the Alliance’s cohesion. It showed that NATO unity is often the result of negotiation, diplomacy, and pressure from circumstances, regardless of the circumstances.⁵ The table below includes data from Becker et al. (2024), who evaluated the approach to the Wales commitment in their work. These data are supplemented by military expenditure in 2014 and 2024 (% of GDP), when the target was already met. There is also a column indicating which member states will achieve, or have achieved, the 2% target.

Country	Wales negotiation score	Wales negotiation category	MilExp 2014	MilExp 2024	MilExp of 2% GDP
Albania	0.4	Bystander	1.330682	1.7	2025
Belgium	0.1	Strong dragger	0.966327	1.286806	2025
Bulgaria	0.4	Bystander	1.309083	1.953847	2025
Canada	0	Strongest dragger	1.006365	1.471471	2025
Croatia	0.4	Bystander	1.808199	1.867474	2025
Czechia	0.6	Weak supporter	0.93677	2.07568	2024
Denmark	0	Strongest dragger	1.149803	2.268266	2023
Estonia	0.9	Strongest supporter	1.898494	3.365538	2019
France	0.8	Strong supporter	1.815176	2.032427	2024
Germany*	0.1	Strong dragger	1.162232	2.003724	2024
Greece	0.7	Medium supporter	2.236944	2.740118	b 2014
Hungary	0.5	Fence sitter	0.857233	2.129139	2023
Italy	0.2	Dragger	1.132311	1.49751	2025
Latvia	0.7	Medium supporter	0.969921	3.360018	2018
Lithuania	0.7	Medium supporter	0.883811	3.0878	2020

Luxembourg	0.1	Strong dragger	0.367663	1.18956	2025
Netherlands	0.2	Dragger	1.123601	2.003354	2024
Norway	0.5	Fence sitter	1.539005	2.274757	2024
Poland	0.8	Strong supporter	1.864472	3.788951	2020
Portugal	0.4	Bystander	1.306764	1.581433	2025
Romania	0.7	Medium supporter	1.347606	2.171074	2024
Slovakia	0.4	Bystander	0.981634	1.960172	2025
Slovenia	0.4	Bystander	0.983232	1.371049	2025
Spain	0.4	Bystander	0.915132	1.429382	2025
Türkiye	0.6	Weak supporter	1.446641	2.131924	2024
United Kingdom	0.8	Strong supporter	2.142376	2.332988	b 2014
United States	1	Instigator	3.713862	3.205384	b 2014

Data and opinions of NATO members. Source: own processing, data from NATO (2025)⁶ and Becke et al. (2024)⁷

The positions of individual member states varied significantly. The group of initiators and supporters included the US, the UK, France, Poland, Romania, Lithuania, Latvia, Greece, Türkiye, and the Czech Republic. These countries either already met the 2% GDP target for defence or had concrete plans to achieve it. Another group – including Germany, Norway, Portugal, Spain, Hungary, and Luxembourg – expressed support for the idea, but with reservations. Germany was concerned about the binding nature of the commitment for future governments and demanded a more flexible formulation, while Portugal and Spain only joined the commitment at the end. The strongest opposition came from Belgium, Canada, Denmark, Italy, and the Netherlands. Denmark justified its position by arguing that its “real” contributions exceed the financial frameworks; the country does not have an arms industry that would generate multiplier effects, and its legal obligation to devote 0.7% of GDP to development aid limits its room for manoeuvre in the defence budget.

Wales commitment: 5% of GDP

On 25 June 2025, NATO members met in The Hague to reaffirm their unwavering com-

mitment to the Alliance, transatlantic ties, and collective defence under Article 5 of the Washington Treaty. In light of serious threats – in particular the long-term threat posed by Russia to Euro-Atlantic security and the continuing threat of terrorism – the spending target was revised, and NATO members committed to investing 5% of GDP annually by 2035 in basic defence needs and defence and security-related expenditures under Article 3. This will ensure the forces, capabilities, resources, infrastructure, readiness, and resilience necessary for deterrence and defence within NATO’s three core tasks: deterrence and defence, crisis prevention and management, and cooperative security.

This 5% commitment includes two categories: at least 3.5% of GDP per year, according to the agreed NATO definition of defence spending, to cover key capability requirements and objectives, and up to 1.5% of GDP for critical infrastructure protection, cyber defence, civil preparedness and resilience, innovation, and strengthening the defence industrial base. Member states should submit annual plans with a credible trajectory towards the goal; in 2029, the balance and pace should be reviewed in light of the strategic environment and updated capability goals. Sovereign support for Ukraine is reaffirmed, and direct contributions

to its defence and defence industry will be included in defence expenditure calculations.⁸ The text below describes the opinions and positions of individual NATO member countries on the new commitment.

Albania

Shortly after the NATO Summit in 2025, Albanian Foreign Minister, Igli Hasani, announced that Albania plans to allocate 5% of its GDP annually to defence and security by 2035, thereby aligning itself with NATO's new framework of commitments. According to local media (RTSH, 2025), this goal is to be achieved gradually. Analysts point out that even reaching the interim target of 3.5% will be difficult for the country, and that the pressure to meet the 3.5% target may be more of a means of getting member states to meet the original 2% commitment.⁹

Belgium

At the beginning of this year, the new Belgian Government agreed to increase defence spending to 2% of GDP. In 2024, the country allocated an estimated 1.29% of GDP to defence, with only Spain performing worse. Prior to the NATO Summit, the Belgian Government was aiming to maintain military spending at 2% of GDP until 2033 and then gradually increase it to 2.5%. After the NATO Summit in June 2025, Belgium accepted that it did not formally object to the 5% target, although it requested maximum flexibility in structuring the target. Belgium therefore does not directly reject the 5% target, but emphasises flexibility, gradualism, and the need for negotiated paths.¹⁰

Bulgaria

In April this year, Bulgaria requested that defence spending be excluded from its budget deficit in an effort to meet the key requirements for joining the eurozone next year.¹¹ Bulgaria basically supports and has publicly confirmed that it is joining NATO's goal of reaching 5% by 2035 and is preparing a national plan to achieve this goal. However, it

is taking a cautious approach, setting interim targets (e.g., 3.5% by 2032) instead of an immediate jump to 5%.¹²

Canada

Prime Minister, Mark Carney, has publicly committed Canada to reaching the target of 5% of GDP for military spending by 2035. He also stated that "other defence spending," i.e., 1.5% of the 5% target, should include items that Canada already plans to implement (ports, telecommunications, infrastructure).¹³ Canada is currently well below the new target, with defence spending at approximately 1.4% of GDP in 2024. Analysts warn that Canada has failed to meet even the 2% commitment in the past and that reaching 5% will pose major fiscal, industrial, and political challenges.¹⁴

Croatia

Croatia publicly supported NATO's target of 5% of GDP at the 2025 Summit. As the commitment is set for 2035, Croatia states that it is prepared to implement a gradual increase in its defence budget rather than a sudden jump.¹⁵ More specifically, in the spring of 2025, the outlook for military spending for 2027 was 2.5% of GDP and 3% by 2030.¹⁶

Czechia

The Czech Government and Ministry of Defence recognise the 5% plan (3.5% + 1.5%) as the new Alliance benchmark, but current legislation sets a minimum limit of 2%. According to current plans, the government is pursuing a gradual approach of increasing defence spending by 0.2% of GDP each year, with the aim of reaching 3% by 2030.¹⁷ After the October 2025 elections, there is a risk that the approach to the commitment will be re-evaluated, as indicated by Andrej Babiš (ANO party).¹⁸

Denmark

The Danish Government supports the 5% commitment and, at the beginning of the year, had already planned to spend more than 3% of

GDP on defence over the next two years. The plan includes the creation of an Acceleration Fund to speed up defence investments. The Danish Government realises that achieving this goal will require compromises, budgetary pressures, and timing issues, but military spending already exceeded 2% in 2023 and is accelerating above 3%.¹⁹

Estonia

In April 2025, the Estonian Government approved a supplementary funding package of €2.8 billion over four years, with the aim of increasing defence spending to an average of around 5.4% of GDP between 2026 and 2029. The government's plan is to maintain defence investment at 5.4% of GDP not just temporarily, but for several years. Estonia is one of NATO's most committed members when it comes to the 5% target. Not only has it given its political support, but it is already taking steps to implement it through legislative and budgetary measures.²⁰

France

France appears to broadly support the NATO 5% framework, with government documents emphasising that reaching these levels will require difficult budgetary decisions and a possible redistribution or re-evaluation of public spending priorities. According to current plans, simply increasing military spending to the target of 3.5% of GDP would require almost doubling defence spending compared with 2024.²¹

Germany

The German Foreign Minister has publicly stated that Germany will “follow” the US demand that Allies reach 5% and will adopt the NATO formula of 3.5% basic expenditure plus 1.5% related expenditure. At the same time, German Finance Minister, Lars Klingbeil, has committed to increasing defence spending to 3.5% of GDP by 2029. Discussions will focus on the allocation of the 1.5% that Chancellor Merz would like to use for investment in “du-al-use” infrastructure.²²

Greece

At the NATO Summit in 2025, the Greek Prime Minister confirmed that Greece would commit to the 5% target by 2035, adding that the agreed increase was “significant” but emphasising that Greece had consistently exceeded NATO's 2% baseline in previous years. Last but not least, he called for the 5% target to be binding on all NATO members to prevent “free riding”. The Greek Ministry of Defence has a 12-year defence modernisation plan (2025–2036) with investments of approximately €25 billion.²³

Hungary

The Hungarian Government welcomes the 5% commitment and sees it as an opportunity for the domestic defence industry and the modernisation of the country, but acknowledges that even meeting the 2% target has been challenging. Prime Minister, Viktor Orbán, said that achieving 5% will be difficult under current EU budget rules and called for a reform of these rules to make it feasible.^{24, 25}

Italy

Italy has publicly accepted, in principle, NATO's 5% spending framework, but with significant conditions (time horizon, flexibility, fiscal constraints). Estimates suggest that for Italy, reaching the 5% target within 10 years would require an additional €40-70 billion per year on top of current projections.²⁶

Latvia

In May, ahead of the NATO Summit, the Latvian Government adopted a decision to spend 5% of GDP on defence and national security from 2026. This year, the figure should already be at least 4%. Latvia stands out among countries pushing for higher defence spending, with its commitment to achieve this within two years, which is very ambitious.²⁷

Lithuania

At the beginning of this year, Lithuania announced that it would increase its military

spending to 5-6% of GDP from 2026, due to the threat of Russian aggression in the region.²⁸ This level of spending is to be maintained from 2026 to 2030. In 2024, Lithuania spent over 3% of its GDP on defence, and in 2025 it plans to spend more than 4%. Many NATO countries consider the 5% commitment by 2035 to be a long-term goal, but Lithuania aims to achieve the commitment as soon as possible and maintain it at 5-6% until the end of the decade.²⁹

Luxembourg

Luxembourg supports increasing military spending in principle but rejects a uniform and rigid target of 5%.³⁰ Luxembourg originally set a target of 2% of GDP for military spending by 2033, but in view of the security situation, it should reach 2% this year. Given its size, defence structure, and high GDP per capita, the 5% target can be considered difficult to achieve.³¹

Netherlands

The Dutch Government supports NATO's proposal to spend 5% of GDP on military expenditure. According to the Minister of Finance, achieving this target could cost more than €25 billion per year, which is a challenge even for a country with relatively strong public finances. The Netherlands will prioritise a gradual increase in the military budget in line with its commitment and will use a breakdown of 3.5% for military spending and 1.5% for defence spending.³²

Norway

The Norwegian Government has announced that it will allocate 5% of GDP to defence-related spending, in line with NATO: 3.5% for basic defence and 1.5% for defence-related investments. Although these are ambitious plans and will require a significant increase in the defence budget over several budget cycles, Norway has approached its previous target responsibly and planned military spending at 3.35% of GDP in 2025.³³

Poland

In April 2025, the Polish Minister of Defence declared that Poland intends to spend 5% of its GDP on defence in 2026, with military spending in 2025 planned at 4.7%. Poland is already leading NATO in terms of defence spending (as a percentage of GDP) and is positioning itself as a model of high engagement among European Allies. It has already enshrined in law (2022 - Ustawa o obronie Ojczyzny) that military spending should increase to at least 3% of GDP by 2023.³⁴

Portugal

Portugal aims to gradually increase defence spending to 5% by 2035 through an upward trajectory of annual increases, while protecting public finances. Portugal is one of the countries with the lowest defence spending in relation to economic performance. It is planned to reach the target of 2% of GDP for military spending by 2029, but this year there has been a rapid increase in the budget, so it should meet the target already this year.³⁵

Romania

In June 2025, the Romanian Government presented a comprehensive national defence programme that set out a vision for the country's armed forces, with a financial commitment to increase defence spending to 5% of GDP, including 3.5% for direct military spending and an additional 1.5% earmarked for related investments. The increase in military spending is to be gradual, reaching 3.5% of GDP by 2030, with the previous target of 2% of GDP to be met in 2024.³⁶

Slovakia

Prime Minister, Robert Fico, publicly rejected the sudden jump to 5% of GDP in defence spending, calling it an unachievable goal under current fiscal conditions. On the other hand, Slovak President, Peter Pellegrini, stated that Slovakia would not block the NATO Summit consensus and expressed support for extending the deadline and allowing flexibility

in implementation. With the current composition of the government, Slovakia will seek to take advantage of increases in other defence spending, which it will prioritise over large investments in weapons systems.³⁷

Slovenia

Slovenia's military and defence spending has hovered around 1.2%–1.3% of GDP in recent years, well below NATO's previous benchmark of 2%. In July, Slovenian Prime Minister, Robert Golob, distanced himself from the goal signed at the NATO Summit of investing 5% of GDP in defence. Slovenia considers it mandatory only to comply with the commitments approved by its own parliament, which set the spending limit for 2030 at 3%. Slovenia thus continues on its own path to determining the level of military spending, with the 2% target likely to be reached this year.³⁸

Spain

From the outset of discussions on the new 5% target, Spain took the position that it could not commit to a specific target for expenditure as a percentage of GDP, describing the target as “unreasonable” and “counterproductive.” An exemption was negotiated within NATO, and Spain reached an agreement with NATO that it would be exempt from the 5% target but would retain its importance within the Alliance. Spain will continue to aim for 2.1% of GDP in defence spending as a more realistic target.³⁹

Türkiye

Türkiye publicly supports NATO's decision to increase its defence spending commitment and already exceeds the previous standard of 2%. The country plans to use the increased defence spending to develop its capabilities within NATO and, above all, to support its domestic defence industry by investing in new generations of air defence systems, unmanned ground, sea and air systems, as well as aircraft carriers, frigates and tanks.⁴⁰

United Kingdom

The United Kingdom has stated that it will accept a 5% commitment within the NATO

structure: 3.5% for basic defence and 1.5% for other defence-related expenditures. The UK expects to reach military spending of 4.1% of GDP by 2027 under this plan. The key challenge will be how the UK and, above all, NATO define the 1.5% “related spend” component and how much of the existing expenditure can be reclassified or newly added.⁴¹

USA

The White House, led by President Donald Trump, initiated negotiations within NATO to increase defence spending from 2% of GDP to 5%. The US has long been hovering around the 3.5% GDP mark, spending more than most NATO members, and it is therefore impossible to meet the 5% target in the future without other NATO members also increasing their spending.⁴²

Finland, Sweden, Montenegro and North Macedonia

Finnish Prime Minister, Petteri Orpo, stated that Finland aims to increase its defence spending to 5% of GDP by 2032. Earlier this year, Finland committed to increasing military spending to 3% of GDP by 2029. Finnish military spending has exceeded 2% of GDP since 2023, and this year's target is 2.7% of GDP.⁴³ The Swedish Government accepted the 5% target for increasing military spending, having already significantly increased the budget by 2024, which was set to reach 2.6% of GDP from 2028 onwards.⁴⁴

Montenegro is a relatively small country with limited financial resources. Montenegro is starting from a low baseline in 2024 (1.6% of GDP), and reaching the full 5% in basic military spending will be extremely challenging.⁴⁵ North Macedonia's Defence Minister, Vlado Misajlovski, said that the country's defence budget this year is 2% of GDP and that 32% of this amount is earmarked for the purchase of new equipment. This indicates an emphasis on modernisation and capacity building. The Macedonian Government will want to align itself with NATO's commitment to spend 5% of GDP on defence in the future.⁴⁶

Country	Hague negotiation score	Hague negotiation category 2025	Change 2014 vs 2025
Albania	0.7	Medium supporter	0.3
Belgium	0.2	Dragger	0.1
Bulgaria	0.6	Weak supporter	0.2
Canada	0.2	Dragger	0.2
Croatia	0.6	Weak supporter	0.2
Czechia	0.5	Fence sitter	-0.1
Denmark	0.8	Strong supporter	0.8
Estonia	0.9	Strongest supporter	0
France	0.7	Medium supporter	-0.1
Germany	0.6	Weak supporter	0.5
Greece	0.8	Strong supporter	0.1
Hungary	0.5	Fence sitter	0
Italy	0.2	Dragger	0
Latvia	0.9	Strongest supporter	0.2
Lithuania	0.9	Strongest supporter	0.2
Luxembourg	0.1	Strong dragger	0
Netherlands	0.6	Weak supporter	0.4
Norway	0.8	Strong supporter	0.3
Poland	0.9	Strongest supporter	0.1
Portugal	0.6	Weak supporter	0.2
Romania	0.7	Medium supporter	0
Slovakia	0.2	Dragger	-0.2
Slovenia	0.1	Strong dragger	-0.3
Spain	0	Strongest dragger	-0.4
Türkiye	0.7	Medium supporter	0.1
United Kingdom	0.9	Strongest supporter	0.1
United States	1	Instigator	0

Hague negotiation score. Source: own processing

The table shows a significant stratification of approaches. The US stands as the “instigator”. The strongest support among European Allies comes from the Baltic states and Poland, together with the UK – Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, Poland and the United Kingdom, which are the “strongest supporters” (0.9). Denmark, Norway, and Greece also rank highly as “strong

supporters” (0.8). “Medium supporters” (0.7) are countries that declare growth but emphasise budgetary caution and phasing – Albania, France, Romania, Türkiye and Sweden. The “weak supporter” group (0.6) consists of Bulgaria, Croatia, Germany, The Netherlands, and Portugal; they rely on gradual increases and/or a broader interpretation of the +1.5% component.

In the middle is the “fence sitter” (0.5) – Czechia and Hungary, where the trajectory depends on domestic politics. Slovakia is a “bystander” (0.4): it does not block consensus but rejects a sudden increase. In opposition are the “dragger” (0.2) – Belgium, Canada, and Italy – and the even tougher “strong dragger” (0.1) – Luxembourg and Slovenia. At the bottom is Spain as the “strongest dragger” (0.0). Overall, a regional pattern applies: the closer to the threat and the stronger the tradition of high spending, the higher the likelihood of being in the “strong/strongest supporter” category, while southern and wealthy small states more often prefer flexibility, a longer run-up and an emphasis on the definition of “related spend” within +1.5%.

Conclusions

An analysis of the attitudes and behaviour of NATO member states between Wales (2014) and The Hague (2025) shows that the normative framework of spending targets has gradually become more realistic: most Allies have accepted 2% of GDP as a practical standard, and some of them are already operating above this level. However, with the transition to a more ambitious target of 5% of GDP (3.5% + 1.5%), the spectrum of attitudes has once again become stratified. The Baltic states and Poland – together with the UK and the US – confirm their role as “drivers”; Denmark and Norway have moved towards strong support. At the opposite end of the spectrum remains a group of countries favouring flexibility, a longer run-up or exemptions – notably Spain, Slovenia, Luxembourg and some of the “small rich” economies.

A comparison of scores suggests that the shifts are not random: countries where three factors converge – immediate security threat

perception, institutional anchoring (legal spending norms), and the ability to quickly re-direct budgets – have shifted significantly towards the target. The visible improvement in Germany (+0.5) and Denmark (+0.8) confirms that the political window of opportunity can overcome previous hesitation. In contrast, the decline in Spain (–0.4) and Slovenia (–0.3) illustrates how strongly the final score is shaped by domestic fiscal constraints, political fragmentation and the interpretation of “related spend”.

The link between declarations and behaviour in the area of military spending shows partial convergence: several countries that reported low spending shares in 2014 are now meeting the 2% target or have a clear year of achievement. However, this trend cannot be mechanically extrapolated to 5%, especially where current trajectories or medium-term budget plans are not compatible with achieving the target by 2035. In a number of cases, the declared 5% support is conditional on a reinterpretation and broader classification of the 1.5% component, which may compromise comparability across Member States.

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Strategic Perspectives of the European Defence Industry – Lessons from Modern Ground Combat System (MGCS) and the Future Combat Air System (FCAS)

Darko GJORGJIOSKI

ABSTRACT

The development of the next-generation fighter jet and main battle tank between France and Germany has faced numerous challenges in recent years, resulting in bottlenecks and significant delays. Although the EU has acted as a driving force for European rearmament since the beginning of the war in Ukraine, many opportunities have been missed, and there remains considerable potential for the EU to strengthen its influence over both projects by elevating them to the EU level. EU member states seem hesitant to procure military goods from the EU market, defending their own national interests and protecting their own defence companies. Because of that, the European defence market remains largely fragmented and insufficiently integrated, leading to annual financial losses amounting to billions of euros. This lack of cohesion negatively affects the uniformity and interoperability of the European armed forces, both within the European Union Rapid Deployment Capacity and NATO frameworks. To address these shortcomings, supranational mechanisms enabling deeper integration are required. Both the EU and its Member States must adopt a more proactive approach to enhance defence capabilities in today's fragile geopolitical environment.

Keywords: Defence industry, Interoperability, Multinational cooperation, EDF, New Generation Combat Systems, European Armed Forces

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1. Introduction

The development of modern weapon systems in the aftermath of the Second World War became a priority for global powers seeking to gain an upper hand over other systemic rivals. For this purpose, increasing financial resources and budgetary expediencies was a necessary “evil”, even after the ending of the Cold War. European countries, lacking a common defence industrial base (DIB), have been struggling ever since to find “European” solutions to overcome national interests, which would lead to a more unified defence industri-

al market. From this perspective, many scholars and experts have argued over the last two decades that the fragmentation of the European defence market has been the main problem for European armed forces on the way towards increasing their interoperability and uniformity, both within the EU (EU battlegroups) and within the NATO alliance (c.f. Faure: 5). The procurement of weapon systems “off-the-shelf” from European defence companies has become too expensive, mainly because of the lack of demand by European governments, which has led many European countries to procure from the best reliable partner, the

USA. After the full-scale invasion of Ukraine by Russia, the defence budgets of European countries have significantly increased (Liang et al.: 8). The aim is to replenish arsenals, to replace the old Cold War platforms, to increase defence capabilities etc. However, successful reforms, especially in the defence sector, take a very long time, as reaching consensus within a single country is not sufficient; rather, synchronised political efforts between all EU and NATO Member States are required. At the same time, given the dynamics on the battlefield in Ukraine and the inability of European companies to meet the minimal needs of European armed forces, the procurement of weapon systems and ammunition from the USA has increased by 64% (George; Djokic et al.: 11). In addition, countries like Poland, which is building one of the largest armed forces in Europe, are looking to Asia to meet their land forces' needs, particularly to South Korea. This increases the number of third-country suppliers within an already fragmented defence procurement landscape (Reuters: 2025).

MGCS and FCAS – political or institutional challenge?

Regional initiatives and projects that had stalled in recent years have gained renewed momentum through a more engaged approach among the partners. Examples include the MGCS and the FCAS, joint efforts between France, Germany, and Spain aimed at developing next-generation combat aircraft as well as a next-generation European main battle tank (MBT). For both projects, a certain percentage of participation is required. In the case of MGCS, it is 50% Germany and 50% France, both through the KNDS German and KNDS France consortium. For FCAS, the initial participation was split 50/50 between France and Germany until Spain joined the project, bringing the shares to 33% each, held by Dassault, Airbus, and Indra.

Both projects are characterised, however, by political controversies. Although “traditional” institutional disagreements between Germany and France persist in some areas, particularly regarding labour sharing and intellectual property, since 2022 the MGCS project

has shown positive developments on a bilateral basis (Möhring: 16; Militär Aktuell: 2025). In 2023, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron signed the agreement for the second phase of MGCS (La Maison Élysée: 2023), which resolved many technical and institutional issues between the two partners. A milestone was reached in 2025, when KNDS, Rheinmetall AG, and Thales founded the consortium MGCS Company GmbH with the aim of “consolidating the concept and the main technological pillars of the system” (Rheinmetall AG: 2025).

The FCAS project, however, has been accompanied by a complicated relationship, between French and German companies, and progress has been slower than originally planned. For the complex development of a sixth-generation fighter jet as part of a network-based warfare system, a “System of Systems” (SoS) is needed, where unmanned and manned systems work together in a complex battlefield environment. However, instead of following the MGCS approach of establishing a consortium, the countries left the decision on work-sharing to their respective defence industries. Dassault demands greater influence over the design of core technologies and insists on efficiency over inclusivity, whereas Airbus seeks equal access for other small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs). Due to these disagreements, including internal conflicts over programme leadership, critical technologies, and labour distribution, the project remained stalled in Phase 1A for a long time. This phase concluded in 2022, and Phase 1B was only approved in November 2024 (Speer, 2025). The ownership structure of national defence companies proves highly problematic in this context. As a state-owned company, Dassault can exert greater influence on policy decisions within the French Government compared to Airbus, which is entirely privately owned. In 2025, Dassault's director, Eric Trappier, even went so far as to claim more than 80% participation in the project for his company, otherwise Dassault would leave the project. This statement provoked strong reactions from Germany's political elite (Pugner & Alipour, 2025). Nevertheless, with a stronger military-industrial complex (MIC), France

continues to hold the upper hand in the design of the new generation fighter (NGF), while Germany contributes primarily through its civilian technological industry.

2. European Defence Industrial Base

European DIB and R&D programmes in both military and dual-use technologies lag far behind those of global players such as the USA and China, mainly because of differing political and security perspectives among member states. In the context of regional cooperation, European countries are able to be more competitive on the global defence market, primarily in Tier 2 technologies such as MBTs, artillery systems, helicopters, fourth-generation fighter jets etc. There is a complex set of reasons why European countries do not invest sufficiently in DIB: 1) an uncompetitive and weak European defence market, primarily due to a lack of demand from governments, which leads to higher prices and makes the sector unattractive for investment; 2) political unwillingness and the absence of a common strategy, resulting in a more fragmented defence market shaped by protectionist policies and exclusive participation of national companies; and 3) restrictive EU regulations. Defence companies across Europe duplicate production, which not only reduces the efficiency of the defence industry but also undermines the uniformity of European armed forces. At the same time, due to their geographical positions and geopolitical preferences, each country seeks to implement a military doctrine tailored to specific types of warfare in particular regions and perceives the threat from potential adversaries differently from allies in other regions. France, for example, produces ground weapon systems adapted also to desert environments or fighter jets capable of operating from aircraft carriers. Germany, on the other hand, requires different characteristics for its armed forces, shaped by the European continental environment and the need for an aircraft capable of carrying the US B-61 tactical nuclear bomb within the framework of NATO's nuclear sharing arrangement. Military doctrines are of crucial importance

for collaborative and cooperative projects, and in most cases, they are either a prerequisite for success or a factor that can lead such projects to fail.

With the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, many SMEs specialising in dual-use technologies actively engaged with major defence contractors, providing crucial components and research in areas, such as AI, optics, electronics etc. At the same time, numerous SMEs around the world became suppliers to both sides of the conflict, as inexpensive drone technologies found their way onto the battlefield, revealing the fragility of the current international order. As a result, countries across Europe have allowed dual-purpose research and development (R&D) to be led by private specialised companies in their respective fields, which has at the same time reduced public financial expenditure in the military sector. However, the defence market is inflexible and difficult to enter, especially for SMEs, and, at the same time, is dominated by large, well-established domestic champions.

In the EU, the paradigm for defence integration shifted after the outbreak of the war in 2014, but progress remained slow in the following years. Although the launch of PESCO (Permanent Structured Cooperation) and the EDF (European Defence Fund) in 2017 marked important steps toward a more common defence industry, an overarching and coherent strategy was still lacking. Nevertheless, given the high costs and complexities of developing and procuring advanced weapon systems, European leaders decided to deepen collaboration at the European level, primarily through the European Defence Agency (EDA). This intergovernmental framework provides a forum in which member states play a central role in decision-making, while simultaneously acknowledging the EU's role in addressing shared challenges (cf. Sabatino, p. 135).

This paper will analyse the challenges of development dynamics in the cases of MGCS and FCAS, and the role, or better said possibility through institutional mechanisms by the EU to support these two "flag projects" and possibly "Europeanise" them. The starting point is the need to shift cooperation from an

intergovernmental framework to the EU level and to ensure that critical projects are directly supported through EU mechanisms. With the EU's involvement in these projects, there is an opportunity to create a long-term political framework for the integration of the defence sector at the supranational level, which would lead to greater uniformity and interoperability among European armies. Therefore, this raises the following questions: *Which methods can the EU use to "Europeanise" the development of MGCS and FCAS? How does the transfer of defence cooperation to the European level contribute to deeper European integration?*

In the following section, the institutional approaches taken by European states will be analysed, with a focus on the conditions and strategies under which weapons platform procurement and R&D are conducted. This will be followed by an examination of the legal framework within the EU in the context of the defence industry. Finally, the paper will provide an outlook on the future of both FCAS and MGCS projects, discuss their potential to become "European flagship projects," and offer a brief perspective on the prospects for further supranational defence integration.

3. Methodology

This paper is based on qualitative content research, drawing on policy documents and a wide selection of academic literature. The development processes of the FCAS and the MGCS have been accompanied by significant controversy, not only in the media but also within academia, which has extensively analysed these programmes. This analysis also takes into account the cultural and strategic traditions of Germany and France, as their differing perspectives have contributed to bottlenecks during certain phases of FCAS and MGCS development. Finally, the paper examines the role of the European Union as an actor capable of mobilising financial resources and establishing a legal framework to foster collaboration among member states.

EU documents and official policy papers are analysed with the aim of explaining and

understanding the institutional framework designed to foster a more collaborative and cooperative approach among member states, with the ultimate goal of achieving greater defence market efficiency. Particular attention is given to the available institutional bodies, such as PESCO and the EDF, and all initiatives launched after 2022, such as EDIS (European Defence Industrial Policy), EDIP (European Defence Industry Programme), and Readiness 2030. Secondary peer-reviewed literature also plays a crucial role by highlighting the relevance of the EU in security and defence policy, as well as specialised online journals covering military technology and developments, such as *Militär Aktuell*, *Europäische Sicherheit & Technik* (ESUT), *Defence-Network* etc.

Data analysis

For the purpose of this analysis, four main categories are identified: 1. Long-term aims through cooperation; 2. Funding support from the European Union; and 3. Impact on FCAS and MGCS.

To ensure comparability and measurability, specific indicators complement each category. The first category, long-term aims, is assessed through three dimensions: (1) methodological approaches, (2) cost considerations, and (3) defence industry strategy, including cooperation with third countries. The second category examines (1) the level of financial support provided and (2) the EU initiatives and mechanisms facilitating such funding. Finally, the third category focuses on FCAS and MGCS, investigating changes in (1) national interests, and (2) DIB.

4. State interests vs. common objectives

Weapon procurement was for a long time considered the responsibility of individual nations, and the EU did not interfere in this regard. In the aftermath of the Cold War, conventional land warfare became a thing of the past, and the focus shifted to anti-insurgency operations, relying on expensive high-tech

weapon systems and limited deployment of ground forces. Therefore, defence industrial capabilities were largely dependent on national security considerations (including technology transfer) within NATO framework. The inter-governmental environment became an arena to secure the needs of countries, both for their armed forces and for their national defence industries. According to Fiott (2024: 1016), although mechanisms for cooperation in EU framework has existed within EDA since 2004, countries prefer to “retain political control via the treaty provisions on the CSDP”. That said, many defence projects of strategic importance and long-term relevance are focused more on sustainable cooperation and collaboration, mostly with third reliable countries such as the USA, Israel, Türkiye or South Korea, or are based on bi- or multilateral cooperation, rather than relying solely on common European collaboration. In the European context, militarily and economically powerful countries such as France, Germany, the UK, Italy, and Spain launched the Organisation for Joint Armament Cooperation (OCCAR), which over the past three decades has become a successful platform for multilateral off-the-shelf weapon procurement. Regional initiatives, such as the European Sky Shield Initiative (ESSI) led by Germany, bring together numerous Eastern and Central European countries to jointly procure medium-range air defence systems. Such cooperation is common among NATO and EU member states, particularly when it comes to more complex and expensive systems of strategic importance (cf. Marrone, Maulny, Fattibene, and Stabile: 11). By protecting their own national autonomy, the member states view European institutions, particularly the European Commission (the Commission) and the European Council, as political bodies which uphold intergovernmental bargains between member states and initiatives occurring outside the EU (cf. Fiott: 1018).

The interdependence between the civilian and military industries has deepened in many ways, making the DIB overall more interconnected and companies specialising in defence goods increasingly dependent on civilian enterprises. For example, countries invest more in the development of military systems pro-

duced by the nation's biggest defence companies, while civilian companies provide the software, critical minerals or other components for weapon platforms. Calcara and Simon (2024: 1397) analyse these trends, particularly in Germany and France, focusing on the tension between France's more developed defence industry and Germany's civilian-technological market. Their analysis shows that countries with greater resources and industrial potential tend to protect their own industries when building a harmonised European defence market, fearing that the other side might attempt to establish a monopoly in certain areas. As a result, smaller EU member states often resist the supranationalisation of the European defence market, concerned about potential monopolisation by a single country (cf. Calcara and Simon: 1403).

However, even during the Cold War and in the 1990s, there were some positive intergovernmental initiatives, resulting in more or less successful collaborative projects, such as the Eurofighter jet, the A400M transport aircraft, or the Tiger attack helicopter. As Calcara (2020: 18) describes, based on the needs for collaboration, there are two models: 1) ad hoc – when a government's need for a particular weapon system is urgent; and 2) intergovernmental – creating a framework for further developments. An example of the latter is OCCAR, subsequently followed by the establishment of the European Defence Agency (EDA) in 2004, which brought such initiatives to the EU level.

Structure of EU defence cooperation

To understand how European collaboration actually works, it is first necessary to explain the mechanisms and institutional basis of political decision-making. Unlike European economic integration, which is based on neo-functionalism, European countries in the military and industrial defence sectors strive to preserve their own sovereignty. Based on the principles of intergovernmentalism, the creation of the EDA in 2004 marked the first significant attempt to institutionalise European collaboration and cooperation in the defence industry, which was later expanded in 2007 with the establishment of the European

Defence Technological and Industrial Base (EDTIB). Despite its establishment, the cooperation in the framework of the EDA remained relatively inactive and dependent on a member state's financial contribution. The European security continued to rely on the US presence in Europe, leaving European countries dependent on cheaper and more capable American equipment. Weapon procurement often takes place by invoking Article 346 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) in order to purchase arms individually, under the pretext of defending national security. However, common weapon procurement remained very limited, even though a mechanism for joint procurement had already been established (cf. Blauberger and Weiss: 1125).

The launch of Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) in 2017 was not only a step forward to increase collaborative projects among member states, but also an effort to strengthen the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) within the framework of the EU Global Strategy (EUGS). The main goal of PESCO was to establish a political framework enabling all member states to improve their defence capabilities through coordinated initiatives, based on binding commitments (Council of the EU: 331/70). Common goals and plans for PESCO projects as well as the priorities were established in the Capability Development Plan (CDP) and the Coordinated Annual Review of Defence (CARD). During the same year, the EDF was established, which support bi- or multinational R&D projects, also related to PESCO (cf. Fiott: 2). With Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine, defence collaboration between member states has gained importance. In the same year, the EU launched the "Strategic Compass," which expanded the scope of responsibilities for protecting European security, while at the same time phasing out the EUGS. In 2023, PESCO member states agreed within the CARD framework to deepen their cooperation. Although national defence expenditures have increased since 2022, no single member state is still able to develop the necessary defence capabilities alone to fulfil strategic gaps. Efforts therefore were focused on addressing both short-term needs and long-term priorities, while investing across

all five domains, with a particular emphasis on strengthening strategic capabilities within the framework of the EDTIB. Furthermore, according to the agreement between defence ministers, expenditure was set to rise to €326 billion by 2024, which requires coordinated procurement of weapon systems, particularly for critical strategic assets (EDA, 2024). At the political level, a new Commissioner for Defence was appointed in 2024 to coordinate the European rearmament effort and to identify both financing requirements and capability needs in the field of defence (Mejino-Lopez & Guntram, p. 4). In the same year, Ursula von der Leyen announced the launch of the EDIS, aimed at strengthening the EDTIB through more coordinated and collaborative procurement efforts. The financial resources for this strategy are provided by the European Investment Bank (EIB) for "Readiness 2030" initiative, launched in March 2025, under which more than €800 billion will be mobilised and allocated in different phases, thereby activating EDTIB and enhancing national defence funding (Council of the European Union, 2025).

5. FCAS and MGCS – same goal, different approaches

As mentioned before, defence industrial policies and military doctrines are crucial for the success or failure of collaborative projects, both within the EU framework and beyond. National defence industry champions are present in almost every European country, which leads to fragmentation and duplication. According to a report by the European Parliament, between €18 and €57 billion are lost annually due to uncoordinated efforts in R&D and weapon procurement (European Parliament: 2025). Company ownership represents another area of conflict within the framework of collaborative projects, especially when national champions are involved. In the European context, after the end of the Cold War, the defence industry either became privatised, as in the cases of Germany, Italy, and the UK, or remained under state ownership, as in France, Poland, and Sweden; in Sweden the defence

industry is partly state-owned. Why is this differentiation important in the context of FCAS and MGCS, given the labour sharing between national champions in both projects? Calcara and Simon (2025: 1395; 1400) view the European defence industry as characterised by tension between efficiency and autonomy, shaped, on the one hand, by each country's capacities in the commercial (or civilian) and defence sectors, and, on the other hand, by the requirements of EU defence-industrial governance and ad-hoc programmes. The authors argue that although both Germany and France are pushing for greater strategic EU autonomy and a more integrated defence market, this may lead to disproportionate benefits for external competitors and other European countries. Both countries have different concepts of integration, mainly due to their defence industrial policies. Germany tends to view efficiency as the integration of all specialised companies, whereas France imposes protectionist measures. France's proposal for a new Advisory Defence Board in 2017 was aimed precisely at increasing the role of member states in the policy-making process by contributing to and influencing the work of the Commission (Haroche: 12). However, most European member states, including Germany, resisted this idea. With its developed military defence potential France seeks to get an upper hand in the EU, which means expanding its influence over smaller European member states. Given the pace of technological innovation and the increasing cooperation between civilian and defence companies, however, the EC, within the framework of EDIS and the EDTIB, is striving to improve SMEs' access to the defence sector. Countries with state-owned DIB are however often reluctant to support this step, as their national champions depend on specific smaller SMEs in highly specialised areas, and the defence market tends to be more protectionist. In this context, the EU could employ all available mechanisms to take a more proactive role by:

1. Promoting projects with a strong benefit–cost ratio supported by a legislative framework that guarantees secure supply chains and access to critical materials for the defence sector (e.g., the Critical Minerals Act) is essential.

Such a framework would encourage investment in the defence sector, provide SMEs and start-ups with easier access to opportunities, and ultimately reduce the costs associated with R&D, testing, and other related activities. This is particularly relevant for companies such as Dassault, Airbus, and Safran, given the complexity of the “System of Systems” architecture and the dependence on critical minerals. It will not endanger “flagship projects”, where labour-sharing and intellectual property rights will not be questioned. According to 2017 estimates, the development of the first FCAS prototype was expected to cost between €40 and €60 billion. However, due to the slow pace of progress and with the first flight not anticipated before 2027, these costs are projected to rise annually (Mueller, p. 9). National economies and defence contractors in the EU, however, cannot independently develop sustainable methods for creating complex and very expensive systems, secure supply chains, or implement technological know-how. Multinational cooperation is therefore essential to increase the efficiency, including all relevant political actors at the EU level.

2. The EU can use this window of opportunity to allocate significant financial resources to support the development of FCAS and MGCS by activating various mechanisms and leveraging its political influence. This is particularly important for the FCAS project, where the EU can act as a mediator between France's Dassault and Germany's Airbus to resolve disputes over workshare and technology transfer. By placing both projects within the PESCO framework, it becomes possible to link them to the EDF, which can provide support for the research phase. However, with only €2.7 billion for collaborative defence research of its total €7.3 billion budget allocated, the EDF cannot be a game changer, particularly if it is limited to covering mainly technical and organisational costs. Given the current political situation in the USA and the stance of President Donald Trump, the Commission is hesitant to increase the EDF budget for fear of reactions from across the Atlantic. For successful next-generation weapon systems, however, a broad mobilisation of resources is required (financial and human capital), as underlined in the Dra-

ghi Report (cf. Draghi Report, p. 166). To this end, the EU can use the Readiness 2030 initiative to accelerate the development of both projects, adding a strong R&D component rather than focusing solely on weapons procurement. From this perspective, the initiative would not be an ad hoc measure to boost short-term defence needs, but a strategic effort to build long-term industrial capabilities and to simplify EU funding for collaborative projects.

3. Enabling a Direct Financing Instrument for “critical projects of strategic importance” through European financial institutions. This would channel funds directly to companies in the defence sector and strengthen their competitiveness.

a. Several ideas have been proposed at both European and NATO levels, and the European Parliament currently discusses different approaches. Among these, the creation of a new “Rearmament Bank” or a similar institution is gaining prominence (cf. European Parliament: 9; cf. Taylor: 2025). Given the strict rules of the EIB, as well as Article 42.2, which “forbids the use of the EU budget ‘for such expenditure [...] having military or defence implications’” (Harroche: 10), the Commission recognises both the dysfunctionality and the limitations of intergovernmental cooperation. However, through the active participation of the EIB in the Readiness 2030 initiative and the SAFE instrument, the Commission is able to steer the supranationalisation of the European defence industry and provide direct, albeit temporary, support to defence contractors. From a political perspective, the Commission would also be able to invite other defence contractors, such as Saab or BAE Systems, thereby increasing pressure on Dassault, Airbus, KNDS, Rheinmetall AG, and Thales. This approach would not only ensure the continuation of flagship projects such as MGCS and FCAS, but also strengthen common strategic capabilities as defined in the Coordinated Annual Review on Defence (CARD) over the long term.

b. Easier access to the financial resources for defence contractors could significantly increase the number of new projects in Europe. However, the creation of new financial instruments alone is insufficient, given the restrictive legislative framework of the EU’s

ESG regulations and the Sustainable Finance Framework, which classify the defence industry as “non-sustainable”. Consequently, the European states must grant the defence industry greater flexibility by eliminating unnecessary regulatory barriers, while at the same time ensuring that the EU’s sustainability objectives are not undermined. CEOs of the largest European defence companies have repeatedly voiced concern about this contradiction, stressing that the current financial and legislative environment at the EU level, alongside national regulations limits investment, slows innovation and weakens Europe’s strategic autonomy (Hefter: 2025).

6. Conclusions

Given the new geopolitical dynamics, the EU must be able to react quickly and decisively in order to secure capable and well-prepared European armed forces. Although the development of MGCS and FCAS is advancing at a slow pace, the EU can still provide opportunities to all participating parties, thereby strengthening its influence over the European defence industry and taking a step towards a more supranational defence policy. Although member states may be hesitant to adopt this approach, European strategic autonomy should not lead to the creation of a “Fortress Europe.” Instead, it should keep the market open and attractive for companies from third countries with which European member states have traditionally maintained a good cooperation. The choice between European strategic autonomy and full independence, however, will always be closely tied to the effectiveness of the defence industry. Member states should address this issue as soon as possible in order to overcome national interests and duplications, which currently result in financial losses amounting to tens of billions of euros every year. However, defence market ownership remains a weak point, as countries continue to promote either more liberal or more state-controlled models, an issue that, as seen in the context of FCAS and MGCS, represents a major obstacle. For its critical projects, the EU could adopt a “best athletes” approach, ensuring that the most ca-

pable companies are selected while at the same time providing easier access for SMEs to secure a resilient supply chain. This should help reduce costs, particularly in light of the slow development and the postponement of the first prototype's maiden flight. Such measures would significantly lower the overall costs of major projects such as FCAS and MGCS, making them more attractive not only to other EU and to NATO member states but also for export to trusted third countries.

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Strengthening the Legal Interoperability of NATO, the EU and Member States to Enhance the Legal Resilience of Their Collective Security Arrangements

Andreea-Loredana TUDOR, PhD

ABSTRACT

In the current Euro-Atlantic security landscape, law shapes security choices in ways that are often underestimated. Governments discover this when they need to react quickly and realise that the legal route to a collective decision is less clear than expected. The political shift in Washington and the renewed attention given to the Indo-Pacific only accentuate these constraints: Europe has to rely more on its own instruments, yet those instruments do not always operate together as smoothly as their formal design suggests. Analyses tend to concentrate on planning, capability development or readiness, but the legal layer often decides whether coordination happens in time or becomes entangled in procedural doubts. When states are unsure which commitment applies, hesitation expands, and the entire process slows down.

The differences between NATO norms, EU treaty obligations and constitutional rules, combined with the increasingly visible use of law as a tool of strategic competition, show that lawfare is no longer a form of normative contestation but a method of influence and pressure. In this context, legal interoperability becomes essential for maintaining stability and ensuring that collective action is coherent rather than fragmented across overlapping legal orders. The argument advanced here is that, in the present environment, law should not be regarded as a purely technical instrument; it can also strengthen strategic deterrence by reducing uncertainty surrounding the activation and implementation of collective security commitments.

Given the evolution of threats and how they are perceived, as well as the broader geopolitical context, it is clear that the way legal obligations relating to collective defence are interpreted and managed needs to be reconsidered. The aim of this paper is not to offer a strictly legal assessment of these obligations. Instead, it proposes an integrated approach that brings together legal and political dimensions in order to show how greater normative coherence can reinforce the legal resilience of the Euro-Atlantic system and enhance the credibility of an allied response in times of crisis.

Keywords: legal interoperability, strategic deterrence, legal resilience, collective security, lawfare

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1. Introduction

Euro-Atlantic security is undergoing significant changes that are reshaping traditional assumptions about collective guarantees.

The United States is increasingly focusing on

the Indo-Pacific, which raises questions about Washington's role as Europe's main security provider¹. At the same time, Russia's invasion of Ukraine has highlighted the continuing relevance of conventional military power in Europe and has exposed the limitations of relying

heavily on external capabilities for deterrence, equipment, and strategic support.²

The threats facing Europe no longer resemble the conventional scenarios found in NATO handbooks. They now include hybrid pressure, challenges to established norms, cyberattacks on critical infrastructure, and various forms of lawfare³. This type of competition unfolds below the threshold of armed conflict, taking advantage of the gaps between different legal layers – international, Euro-Atlantic, EU, and national – which creates grey areas that can slow down or fragment a state's response. In such an environment, the effectiveness of collective action depends not only on military capabilities, but also on the clarity of the legal framework, the alignment of procedures, and the speed at which political decisions can be taken.⁴

Faced with this reality, the European Union can no longer act as a provider of complementary tools to the security ensured by NATO. In this context, European states have been compelled to increase defence investment and strengthen their industrial base, both to support their strategic responsibilities and to reduce vulnerabilities stemming from structural dependence on external capabilities⁵. Initiatives such as Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO), the Strategic Compass, and the newer industrial instruments, Security Action for Europe (SAFE), the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), and the European Defence Fund (EDF), point to a shift in approach, yet they have not removed decision-making fragmentation, nor have they produced a shared strategic culture among Member States⁶. The debate on strategic autonomy reflects not only this tension, but also the differences among Member States regarding its direction. For some, autonomy is a way to strengthen Europe's capacity to act; for others, it is a field where models of governance and influence compete in shaping EU policy. The key issue is not whether Europe should become more autonomous, but under what conditions a greater share of responsibility in security matters remains compatible with the existing framework of collective defence⁷.

Interoperability between NATO and the EU is not a new challenge, and the efforts made by

both organisations are widely acknowledged. However, the legal dimension is, in our view, the central element linking the two structures and their Member States. Without a sound and applied understanding of the fundamental legal concepts in this field, the management of security threats can become ineffective and may undermine public trust in the functioning of collective security⁸. In many discussions on collective defence, interoperability is treated almost entirely as a technical or operational matter. Yet, when a crisis unfolds, the legal dimension becomes unavoidable. Before governments can commit forces or decide what kind of support they can offer, they must determine the legal basis that enables action. This raises a series of practical questions: which clause applies in that scenario, who is entitled to trigger the mechanism, in what institutional format decisions are taken, and what constraints exist. These clarifications shape the pace of political decision-making and, ultimately, the ability to respond in time. When the underlying rules are well understood, the margin for hesitation narrows and the deterrent effect increases because Allies know what they can rely on. When the rules are unclear, however, uncertainty tends to slow everything down. Delays, doubts about procedures, or reluctance to move first can easily appear, and such gaps are precisely the ones that hostile actors try to exploit⁹.

Despite the visible improvement in EU–NATO cooperation over the past decade, the legal foundations that support their collective security commitments are still far from aligned. The three mechanisms relevant for this paper – Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Article 42(7) of the Treaty on European Union (TEU), and Article 222 of the Treaty on the Functioning of the European Union (TFEU) – differ in nature, activation conditions, obligations, and limitations. Although these frameworks are meant to reinforce one another, in reality their uneven substance and the way they intersect with national constitutional rules can easily create confusion or friction when a crisis unfolds¹⁰. The absence of practical legal coordination between NATO, the EU, and the Member States can be interpreted by experts as juridical fragmentation, even when the shared objective, security, is

undisputed. National legal cultures and constitutional framework, together with institutional procedures, produce divergent obligations that, in certain circumstances, may create legal tensions. These elements open gaps that feed uncertainty, weaken confidence in collective security commitments, and give opponents room to take advantage of legal or procedural hesitation. Seen from this angle, improving legal interoperability is not optional but essential for a response that is coherent, legitimate, and delivered without delay¹¹.

This study looks at the three collective-security clauses in parallel with several concepts that have become central in today's strategic environment: legal interoperability, lawfare, and legal resilience. The core argument is that bringing the legal bases, procedures, and constraints of Article 5 NATO, Article 42(7) TEU and Article 222 TFEU into closer alignment would make the Euro-Atlantic framework more robust and, as a result, strengthen the credibility of deterrence.

2. Conceptual and theoretical framework

To make sense of collective-security obligations in a setting where rules overlap and sometimes pull in different directions, it is essential to clarify what is meant by legal interoperability, legal resilience and lawfare.

Legal interoperability refers to the capacity of distinct legal systems to work in concert when states need to act together, ensuring that variations in rules, competences or procedures do not slow down, complicate or restrict a collective response. The notion gained shape in the context of multinational deployments, where governments discovered that acting together often requires adjusting their own legal arrangements to fit a shared operational setting¹². In the field of collective defence, legal interoperability concerns the alignment of obligations and procedures arising from Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty, Article 42(7) TEU, and Article 222 TFEU on the one hand, and from the domestic legal systems of Member States on the other¹³.

Since Euro-Atlantic security functions within overlapping legal orders – international, Euro-Atlantic, European, and constitutional – disagreements over the grounds and limits of support offered to an Ally may stem from legal pluralism and can slow reaction times, even when political consensus exists¹⁴. Legal interoperability thus forms the link between formal commitments and the actual ability of states to activate and implement them during a crisis¹⁵.

Its theoretical relevance rests on the assumption that cooperation depends on reducing normative uncertainty and ensuring procedural coherence among actors operating in a system without a central authority capable of imposing uniform rules¹⁶. For commitments of this kind to work in practice, the states involved need to rely on a shared sense of what the legal basis is, how the relevant procedures unfold, and where the limits of their support lie. Without that common ground, solidarity stays largely declarative. In this context, legal interoperability becomes a practical requirement rather than an abstract ideal: it is what allows the different legal regimes to operate side by side without generating delays or contradictions. When the rules are understood in the same way by all parties, the system reacts faster and with fewer uncertainties, which also strengthens the credibility of collective defence and the deterrent effect that comes with it.

Legal resilience is a less commonly used concept, often derived from the broader notion of resilience. The definition most relevant to our purpose is “the capacity of a system to experience shocks while retaining essentially the same function, structure, feedbacks, and therefore identity”¹⁷. In both the EU and NATO, resilience has become a defining feature, reflected for instance in NATO's Strategic Concept¹⁸ and the EU's Strategic Compass¹⁹. Transposed into the legal domain, legal resilience can be understood as the capacity of a legal system to maintain its legitimacy under conditions of crisis, external pressure, or normative challenge. It also encompasses the ability of norms and institutional mechanisms to adapt to unforeseen situations without compromising essential principles²⁰. In the context of collective defence, legal resilience concerns

the extent to which states and the organisations to which they belong can take legitimate decisions and act accordingly, even when adversaries attempt to exploit normative vulnerabilities²¹.

Today's security landscape combines familiar military risks with a wide range of hybrid pressures. Beyond cyber incidents or interference with critical infrastructure, hostile actors increasingly try to weaken the legal frameworks that guide how states and international organisations respond. This can take the form of twisting existing rules, pushing selective readings of procedures, or using gaps in legislation to delay political decisions²². A legal system that holds under pressure can limit these attempts by keeping procedures workable, protecting the decision-making space from manipulation, and ensuring institutional continuity even in moments of uncertainty. Seen this way, legal resilience is not a peripheral notion but part of broader security resilience, with direct implications for how the Euro-Atlantic community manages crises²³.

The value of legal resilience comes from its ability to keep a system usable and trustworthy even when the environment becomes uncertain. In the field of collective defence, this does not mean rigid rules, but a set of norms that are precise enough to guide action and, at the same time, flexible enough to function under pressure. When states know what they can rely on, they are more willing to act together and less exposed to hesitation or procedural dead ends. A system built in this way helps preserve confidence between Allies and limits the opportunities an opponent might have to exploit gaps or delays in order to break a joint response²⁴.

Lawfare is more frequently used in the literature and has accumulated several definitions. A useful starting point remains Carlson and Yeomans' formulation that "lawfare substitutes war, and harm is made with words, not swords"²⁵. Over time, the concept has expanded. Some military experts, notably within the People's Liberation Army of China²⁶, treat it as a secondary component of broader warfare strategies, alongside "psychological, informational, technological, and economic warfare"²⁷, an approach with which we do not agree.

Equally influential is the work of US Air Force Colonel Charles J. Dunlap Jr.²⁸, who describes lawfare as "the use of law as a weapon of war", one that can be employed by adversaries but can also serve national security interests. The definition most relevant for our study understands lawfare as "the use of force to conquer and control indigenous populations through coercive use of legal means"²⁹.

The concept has evolved, gaining further visibility in the context of post-Cold War conflicts, and is now widely understood as "the strategy of using or misusing law as a substitute for traditional military means to achieve an operational objective [...] encompassing both affirmative and malicious uses aimed at manipulating legal paradigms"³⁰. Law therefore becomes both a space of competition and an operational instrument in its own right.

The literature distinguishes between two forms of lawfare: offensive and defensive. This distinction clarifies the role lawfare plays in strategic competition. Offensive lawfare aims to create constraints, produce decision-making blockages, or delegitimise an adversary's actions³¹. Defensive lawfare refers to strengthening the legal framework, protecting decision-making processes, and maintaining legal resilience in the face of hybrid pressure or attempts at normative manipulation³².

A recent illustration of lawfare in practice is Russia's use of coercive legal narratives against Ukraine. Moscow sought to justify its actions through unilateral interpretations of treaties and international conventions, aiming to undermine Ukraine's sovereignty³³. In response, Ukraine employed defensive lawfare by turning to international institutions, challenging Russia's actions before international courts, and activating available legal mechanisms, while simultaneously reinforcing its domestic legal framework to support the military and diplomatic effort³⁴.

These three concepts work together rather than in isolation. When the legal frameworks used by NATO, the EU and national systems fit reasonably well, procedures become easier to navigate and the uncertainty surrounding the activation of collective defence obligations diminishes. This gives the entire system a higher degree of stability. A system that holds

together under pressure allows governments to respond faster, which in turn strengthens the credibility of deterrence. If these elements are missing, the legal environment becomes exposed to interference: gaps, overlaps or unclear procedures can be used to delay decisions, sow doubt or weaken the legitimacy of a joint response.

To understand why states behave this way when no central authority guarantees their security, and how legal clarity reduces hesitation while resilience helps institutions continue to function under stress, it is useful to look at these dynamics through several theoretical lenses. Each offers a different explanation for how uncertainty is handled and why coherent legal arrangements can influence strategic behaviour.

Waltz's neorealist logic captures the constraints of an international system without a central authority capable of enforcing uniform rules. To compensate for uncertainty about others' intentions, states reinforce their own instruments to reduce ambiguity, creating what he defines as a *self-help system*³⁵. Cooperation remains possible in such a system but depends on strong commitments that diminish fears about partners' behaviour. Legal interoperability thus becomes essential because it can provide the stable framework that substitutes for a central guarantor, allowing states to coordinate without assuming additional strategic risks. The pressure on European states to strengthen their legal mechanisms is therefore not only the result of geopolitical change but also a structural necessity inherent to a system without hierarchical authority.

Liberal institutionalism offers a complementary explanation, emphasising the relevance of shared norms and procedures for reducing uncertainty and enabling cooperation within the EU and NATO. As Keohane argues³⁶, coherent legal frameworks make Allies' behaviour more predictable and create a foundation for coordinated decision-making in situations of crisis. In this regard, both legal interoperability and legal resilience are essential for operationalising cooperation by limiting the potential for ambiguity to be exploited or for the activation of collective defence commitments to be blocked.

Finally, resilience studies highlight that effective systems are those capable of maintaining essential functions during crises without losing their institutional identity³⁷. Applied to the Euro-Atlantic framework, this suggests the need for coherent legal mechanisms that can preserve stable decision-making under hybrid pressure or attempts at normative manipulation. Legal clarity also contributes to deterrence by making potential costs and responses more predictable for adversaries.

3. Divergences in legal architecture and options for strengthening the collective response

With these theoretical points in mind, the next step is to look directly at how the three collective-response mechanisms actually operate. Once placed side by side, their legal differences become clearer, and it is precisely these gaps that influence how far states can coordinate their actions and how consistent a joint reaction can be.

Although Article 5 NATO, Article 42(7) TEU, and Article 222 TFEU are often presented as complementary instruments of collective reaction, their underlying legal architecture differs significantly. The nature of the obligations, activation conditions, competent actors, and the possible forms of "aid and assistance" diverge in fundamental ways, which may generate unnecessary tensions in times of crisis. The three clauses operate within distinct legal and institutional logics. First, the nature of the obligation differs. Article 5 is rooted in the classical tradition of defence alliances, is triggered only in the event of an "armed attack" within the meaning of Article 51 of the UN Charter, and creates an obligation of means rather than an obligation of result³⁸. By contrast, Article 42(7) TEU is drafted in stronger terms, requiring Member States to provide "aid and assistance by all the means in their power", and the trigger is "armed aggression", a broader term than that used in the NATO context, which expands the range of potential application scenarios³⁹. Finally, Article 222 TFEU belongs to a different register: it is not a military defence

clause but a solidarity mechanism for internal crisis situations within the Union⁴⁰. These differences have systemic consequences: NATO is geared towards a centrally decided collective response, Article 42(7) relies almost entirely on the will of individual states, and Article 222 operates within an administrative rather than a defence logic.

Secondly, the geographical scope of application differs considerably. Article 5 applies strictly to the North Atlantic area situated north of the Tropic of Cancer, excluding a significant part of the overseas territories of some European states. On the other side, Article 42(7) covers the entire territory of all Member States, including outermost regions, while Article 222 is confined to the territory of the Union and is interpreted mainly as an instrument for internal protection⁴¹.

Thirdly, institutional responsibilities vary, which reinforces fragmentation. Article 5 is activated by a collective decision within NATO, but each ally retains discretion over the form of support provided. Article 42(7) creates obligations directly among states, with no operational role for EU institutions, which means that the reaction depends almost entirely on each state's willingness to provide concrete support to the one invoking the clause. Article 222 requires a coordinated EU–Member State response, in which the Commission and the Council have specific competences⁴².

Taken together, these three clauses do not form a single coherent system, but rather a set of parallel mechanisms that can lead to divergent responses. The problem is therefore not only the absence of legal harmonisation, but the fact that these three frameworks create multiple decision-making centres. In the context of hybrid threats, differing legal characterisations can easily produce misaligned reactions: some states may consider that a situation warrants invoking Article 5 NATO, others may see it as falling under Article 42(7) TEU, while others might argue that it should be addressed solely through internal EU instruments. This legal misalignment translates directly into strategic misalignment.

All these seemingly technical differences become critical in an actual crisis, as they may lead to divergent views on the legal basis for

activation, the decision-making procedure, and the nature of the support to be provided. From this perspective, legal interoperability is the minimum requirement for a coherent collective response, particularly in hybrid scenarios that unfold below the threshold of armed aggression. The absence of a shared interpretative framework for these obligations can generate delays, political deadlock, and a legal space that is open to instrumentalisation.

A telling example of how the lack of legal interoperability can affect the coherence of a collective response is France's invocation of Article 42(7) TEU in 2015 following the terrorist attacks in Paris. Even though the article includes a strong obligation for Member States to provide "aid and assistance by all the means in their power," the response was fragmented in the absence of common procedures. Since the legal basis does not grant EU institutions an operational role, the Union was not able to coordinate the support, and Member States interpreted the nature of the obligation individually⁴³. In practice, this episode exposed a vulnerability in legal resilience when an assistance mechanism is not underpinned by clear procedures and an institutional architecture capable of handling crises. Without a coherent framework, support risks becoming dependent on individual political will, which undermines predictability in a context of strategic pressure. A high level of legal resilience can thus only be sustained by a collective coordination mechanism, rather than by relying on ad hoc bilateral arrangements around a legal instrument⁴⁴. The French case suggests that unclear procedures dilute deterrence. When legal mechanisms do not align, collective defence commitments appear less solid, and the broader Euro-Atlantic framework becomes more vulnerable to political obstacles and to the tactical use of legal rules⁴⁵.

It follows that the need to strengthen legal interoperability is driven not only by the logic of cooperation but also by the logic of deterrence. In a system where the legitimacy of action is as important as military capabilities, normative coherence becomes a strategic asset. Without a common interpretative framework, collective obligations are vulnerable to manipulation and solidarity risks remaining

fragmented. For this reason, the options for consolidation discussed in the following section should be seen not as technical fine-tuning, but as measures aimed at enhancing legal resilience and, by extension, the credibility of collective defence.

In the absence of treaty revision, the most effective instruments are procedural and institutional. A first step would be the development of a common interpretative framework that narrows the gap between “armed attack” and “armed aggression”, which remains one of the major sources of ambiguity. A set of joint guidelines, drafted in the spirit of NATO’s existing standardisation agreements (STANAGs), could define compatible operational understandings and reduce the risk of divergent interpretations⁴⁶. A useful practical model in this respect is the EU Civil Protection Mechanism⁴⁷, which operates on the basis of common notification and response procedures accepted by all Member States, enabling a standardised reaction regardless of the nature of the incident.

A second instrument concerns minimal legal alignment between NATO, the EU, and Member States. Here, the key step relates to harmonising domestic rules that directly affect the ability of states to provide military support. Germany illustrates the problem well. Any deployment of its armed forces requires prior parliamentary approval, a step that can slow the process sharply. In a hybrid crisis, where decisions must be taken quickly, this constraint can disrupt the coherence of a joint response⁴⁸. Examples of workable solutions already exist in both organisations. The NATO SOFA (Status of Forces Agreement) illustrates that, even with very different national rules, countries can still agree on shared practical arrangements that keep operations moving without touching the treaties or their constitutions. A comparable logic appears in the EU Civil Protection Mechanism, where states rely on common procedures for notifying, offering, and receiving assistance. These routines were designed precisely to avoid the delays that tend to arise when every national system follows its own legal path. Such models could be adapted to the security field through minimum legal alignment agreements clarifying the scope of

action, responsibilities, and procedures for activating support between NATO, the EU, and Member States⁴⁹.

A further avenue would be a shared legal support structure, essentially a Joint Legal Task Force, which could offer a practical way to bring interpretations closer together. It would help governments identify the right legal basis in real time, align their reactions to hybrid incidents in fields such as cyber, energy or space, and provide consistent readings when the situation is unclear. This would not imply transferring competences. It could work on the model of existing forms of NATO–EU cooperation that are already familiar to both sides. It could mirror the procedural logic of Berlin Plus, where coordination is not based on institutional integration, but on clear rules for information sharing, consultation, and allocation of responsibilities. A technical model also exists in current practice: the EU Hybrid Fusion Cell and NATO’s Hybrid Analysis Branch already work on parallel but compatible assessments to avoid divergent interpretations of the same incident⁵⁰. Transposed into the legal domain, a similar structure would allow states to receive a joint legal analysis before political decisions are taken, reducing the risk that the obligations under Article 5, Article 42(7), or Article 222 are triggered on different grounds. A Joint Legal Task Force would thus act as a mechanism for preventing blockages and enabling a rapid, coherent response in situations where interpretative differences are typically exploited by adversaries.

Taken together, the divergences between the three clauses and the procedural limits revealed by the French case show that the robustness of collective defence depends less on treaty wording and more on the ability of actors to operate with a shared set of legal reference points in times of crisis. A fragmented legal architecture may function in periods of stability, but it generates uncertainty in crises, precisely when adversaries seek to induce normative confusion or to block political decisions through legal instrumentalisation. From this angle, strengthening legal interoperability is not a marginal technical issue, but a structural component of Euro-Atlantic strategic credibility. The proposals outlined in this

section are relevant because they address vulnerabilities that have already become visible in practice over the past decade. Without such mechanisms, the three clauses remain parallel commitments, and the collective response risks being shaped more by domestic legal constraints than by the nature of the threat.

4. Conclusions

This analysis set out from the idea that the legal dimension of Euro-Atlantic security is not a technical appendix, but part of how deterrence actually works. When rivals look for loopholes or play with grey areas in the law, the strength of collective defence depends on whether the rules are understood in the same way by all those expected to act. If governments have a clear sense of which clause is relevant, how it can be triggered and what it asks of them, hesitation shrinks and the cost calculus for any adversary changes accordingly.

Reading legal interoperability, legal resilience, and lawfare through the main traditions of international relations helps show why these issues matter strategically. Neorealism reminds us that, in a system without a central authority, states try to limit uncertainty about one another's reactions; a shared legal frame becomes one of the few tools available to do that. Institutionalists emphasise how common procedures cut the coordination costs that usually appear in crises and allow Allies to move faster. Work on resilience adds another layer: systems hold together when they continue to function under strain, which in this context means keeping decision-making aligned even when hybrid pressure or legal manipulation aim to create confusion.

At the same time, the analysis showed that the link between legal interoperability and deterrence is no longer purely theoretical; it is increasingly acknowledged politically. The recent statement by NATO Secretary General Mark Rutte, calling for closer NATO–EU cooperation to strengthen deterrence and defence in the face of Russia, China's military build-up, and terrorism, indicates that the relationship between the two frameworks can no longer be conceived solely in operational or in-

dustrial terms⁵¹. The argument advanced here is that if this cooperation remains confined to capabilities and defence production without incorporating legal interoperability, it leaves unresolved the very space in which adversaries have demonstrated the greatest effectiveness: normative grey zones, divergent interpretations of clauses, and procedural hesitation in times of crisis.

The main contribution of the study lies in positioning the legal dimension as a structural element of strategic deterrence rather than as a technical annex to NATO–EU cooperation. On one hand, the paper brings together, within a coherent analytical frame, three concepts usually treated separately – legal interoperability, legal resilience, and lawfare – and links them to major theories of international relations to demonstrate why legal uncertainty is not incidental but a systemic vulnerability. On the other hand, the comparative analysis of the three clauses (Article 5 NATO, Article 42(7) TEU, and Article 222 TFEU) goes beyond the conventional catalogue of differences and shows how, in practice, these clauses generate multiple decision-making centres and distinct activation sequences, which can disconnect the nature of the threat from the form of the response. The 2015 French case is not used merely as an example of the “first invocation” of Article 42(7), but as evidence that, in the absence of common procedures and a coordination architecture, even a strongly worded obligation may result in a fragmented and unpredictable response.

The study's originality also stems from linking this diagnostic to a set of concrete policy instruments formulated not only through the logic of EU law or “NATO law,” but through the lens of security governance. The proposals regarding common interpretative guidelines for “armed attack” and “armed aggression,” minimum legal alignment agreements between NATO, the EU, and Member States, and the institutionalisation of a Joint Legal Task Force positioned at the interface of the two organisations are not presented as procedural optimisations, but as mechanisms for reducing ambiguity in advance, thereby strengthening deterrence. If such instruments were developed, legal interoperability would

begin to function in a manner similar to technical–military standards: as a credibility multiplier, making it clearer to adversaries that an attack, whether conventional, hybrid, or legal, will trigger a coordinated response rather than a dispute among competing legal regimes.

Ultimately, the study argues that legal resilience can no longer be treated as a marginal adjustment to the institutional architecture but as an integral part of Euro-Atlantic hard power. A Europe that seeks to strengthen its strategic autonomy and assume a greater role in its own defence requires not only capabilities and industry, but also a legal architecture sufficiently interoperable to avoid obstructing, at the decisive moment, the very solidarity it proclaims. From this perspective, reinforcing legal interoperability does not imply distancing from NATO but strengthening the European pillar of the Alliance and reducing the room for manoeuvre available to forms of lawfare that rely on normative fragmentation. The study thus opens a field of inquiry in which law is no longer viewed only as an object of *ex post* interpretation, but as an *ex ante* instrument designed to support strategic deterrence and make the Euro-Atlantic security architecture less vulnerable to the crises of the coming decade.

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Transitioning from a Security Consumer to a Security Provider? Kosovo's Quest for NATO Membership

Teodora Crina POPESCU, PhD

ABSTRACT

This article investigates how the approach of Kosovo's authorities to their security posture has evolved over the last two decades, since the unilateral declaration of independence in 2008, highlighting the main milestones pursued in order to achieve their enduring aim of becoming part of the Euro-Atlantic structures. The work focuses on the steps undertaken by the Kosovar authorities, supported by several Allies, which allowed for the establishment of a functional defence force, capable of being deployed abroad. Despite heavy investments in modern capabilities and important defence budget allocations, the research concludes that there are both external and internal hurdles that hamper Kosovo's efforts to upgrade its relationship with the Alliance and emphasise that in the absence of normalisation of relations with Serbia, NATO membership might not be a realistic objective.

Keywords: Kosovo Armed Forces, NATO, military capabilities, defence budget

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Foreword

The research is focusing on the efforts undertaken by Kosovo's authorities to transition from a security consumer to a security provider and to fulfil their strategic objective to join the Euro-Atlantic structures, regarded as a solid guarantee for preserving their sovereignty and independence. The study uses historical and qualitative data analysis, drawing from the content of various public documents, governmental reports, press releases from international organizations, and other relevant academic studies. The research highlights not only the technical, practical requirements envisioned by Kosovo's authorities to build up an effective defence force, as a prerequisite to join the Alliance and the progress achieved so

far, but also suggests that other aspects and regional challenges might factor in and hamper the accomplishment of this strategic objective.

I. Introduction: laying the foundation

In 2018, a decade after the unilateral declaration of independence, the Kosovar authorities began the process of transitioning the Kosovo Security Force (KSF) into the Kosovo Armed Forces (KAF), a move widely perceived as a key milestone in Kosovo's statehood architecture and an essential step in achieving its projected ambitions of joining NATO¹.

Initially, the establishment of KSF, a lightly armed formation of up to 2,500 members designed to assist central authorities in disaster relief and demining, was envisaged in the Comprehensive Proposal for the Kosovo Status Settlement² issued by the UN's Envoy, Martti Ahtisaari.

The KSF, a hybrid structure with overlapping responsibilities from an army and a police force, was foreseen to become fully operational within five years (2008-2013). Moreover, a review to potentially change its mandate, was not excluded. Standing up of the KSF started in early 2009, with NATO having clear responsibilities on helping with its formation, recruitment, and training.

In July 2013, the North Atlantic Council (NAC) declared that the KSF had reached full operational capacity³, thus paving the way for Kosovo Government to launch a review which later proposed the *KSF's transformation into a traditional defence force*.

Accordingly, in 2014 the Kosovo Government completed the "*Strategic Security Sector Review*" that basically proposed the transformation of the KSF into a defence force.

In December 2018, after more than four years since the completion of the review, Kosovo's Assembly approved a package of three laws expanding KSF's competences and creating a legal base for its transformation into a regular army, while establishing the creation of a Ministry of Defence and an oversight body, as well. As expected, this bold move was not fully embraced throughout, as it was boycotted by the Kosovo Serb members of the Assembly. Moreover, NATO Secretary General, Jens Stoltenberg, expressed regret over the law, adopted despite NATO's concerns, while acknowledging that the transition was within Kosovo's prerogative but calling the timing as inappropriate.⁴

The KSF's new mandate has been developed in close consultation with the US and has been designed to respond to "Kosovo's needs in protecting its sovereignty and territorial integrity". The KSF's strength would comprise 5,000 active members and a 3,000-reserve component, and it is envisaged to become fully operational by 2028. It is planned that the force would rely on defensive infantry capabilities, support ter-

ritorial self-defence and participate, on a case-by-case basis in peacekeeping operations and missions abroad.

II. Embarking on transition

Since 2018, the Kosovar authorities doubled down their efforts to speed up the transitioning process towards a regular defence force, which was regarded as an imperative, due to the fast-changing international environment. Against this background, and following the Russian full-scale invasion of Ukraine, the Assembly of Kosovo passed a resolution, urging the Government to begin a NATO membership bid⁵.

In July 2022, Kosovo approved the *Security Strategy 2022-2027*⁶, which outlines, among other fundamental interests, the protection of its sovereignty and territorial integrity, as well as *integration into Euro-Atlantic structures* and other international mechanisms. The Security Strategy indicates that "Kosovo will intensify its diplomatic efforts to achieve this strategic goal in full cooperation and coordination with Kosovo allies and partner countries. In this regard, foreign policy will strengthen international subjectivity, in particular, through recognition from the five European Union countries that have not yet recognised Kosovo". Although the statehood of Kosovo has been recognised by over 100 countries, Kosovo's further progress towards the European and Euro-Atlantic integration is hampered, among other issues, by the lack of recognition from five European states: Spain, Slovakia, Greece, Romania and Cyprus (the latest being the only EU member)⁷. Another roadblock is the lack of a comprehensive, legally binding agreement with Serbia – a stepping stone facilitated by the EU – which could foster reconciliation and recognition from Serbia.

NATO membership is perceived by the Kosovar authorities as an "irreplaceable aim" and while preparing for accession, Kosovo seeks to join the *Partnership for Peace Programme* and become a member of the *Adriatic Charter*.

Moreover, the *Kosovo Security Strategy 2022-2027* indicates that the KSF will "develop

the doctrine, standards and capabilities in line with those of NATO and will increase training activities and joint exercises with NATO countries, in order to train in interaction with their armed forces". Furthermore, the KSF will "contribute to security through participation in military missions abroad". Previously, in January 2021, the Kosovo Assembly unanimously approved a government proposal to deploy KSF personnel in international peacekeeping missions under the US Central Command, in response to the US invitation to consider deploying a unit abroad. In March 2021, Kosovo sent a military platoon to Kuwait for *its first international peacekeeping mission*, alongside troops serving under the command of the Iowa National Guard⁸. This international participation was regarded as a symbolic statement but significant milestone for Kosovo in raising its profile in the international arena and gaining more credibility and legitimacy.

III. Developing defence capabilities

The **process of transforming the KSF into a force with military capabilities** is envisaged by the Kosovar authorities to **follow a three-phase approach**, as reflected into the *Comprehensive Transition Plan*, the details of which are not public.

While the **first phase** was already completed (with recruitment of new members), the **second phase** is expected to be achieved by the end of 2025 and it will mainly be focused on enhancing combat capabilities and investing in modern weapons systems. In this context, it is worth mentioning Kosovo's request in 2024 to procure Javelin anti-tank missiles (around 250 pieces), at a value of 75 million USD, and the delivery in June 2023 of an undisclosed batch of Turkish-made TB-2 Bayraktar drones.⁹ Despite the acquisition of drones, NATO's KFOR mission publicly re-emphasised its primary authority over Kosovo's airspace, implying that the drones cannot be used without its consent¹⁰.

Previously, in 2018, the Kosovar authorities signed a contract with an American company (AM General) for the supply of 51 High Mobility Multipurpose Wheeled Vehicles

(HMMWVs) for the KSF, which were delivered meanwhile. Two years later, Kosovo also bought other military vehicles from the US, while in 2021, the American Government donated 55 Armoured Security Vehicles (ASV) to Kosovo. The KSF used its annual military allowance of €9,7 million from the Turkish Government to purchase 14 armoured vehicles from Türkiye, including 4 Vuran-type and 10 KIRPI-type vehicles equipped with weapons¹¹.

During the **third phase** of the KSF transformation, which will end up in 2028, plans are to increase air capacities, with a special focus on the acquisition of Black Hawk helicopters.

Kosovo has spent over €270 million on military acquisitions over the last four years (2020-2024), in a remarkable contrast to only €4 million between 2017 and 2020. According to Kosovo's officials, the budget for the KSF has doubled over the last three years and armament investments have increased by 191 percent. This steep increase might also be the direct result of the establishment in 2022 of a *Security Fund*, where interested citizens and different donors can contribute to the budget of this Ministry of Defence through a bank account, although the value of the contributions has never been made public. The budget for the Ministry of Defence for 2025 is €207.8 million, a noticeable 25 percent increase (€54 million) compared to 2024¹², and more than 2% of Kosovo's GDP¹³. Furthermore, Kosovo plans to boost its defence spending by 60% over the next four years¹⁴.

Moreover, Kosovo is signalling its interest to prop up its local defence industry by establishing an ammunition factory in partnership with Türkiye's state-owned defence manufacturer, Makine ve Kimya Endüstrisi (MKE), and a drone design laboratory. The factory plans to produce ammunition to NATO standards and is expected to serve Kosovo's military while facilitating exports to NATO countries¹⁵.

IV. Aiming high: the road to NATO membership

NATO has been the leading security mechanism in Kosovo since 1999 through KFOR,

which continues to contribute to maintaining a safe and secure environment in Kosovo and freedom of movement for all.

Following Kosovo's unilateral declaration of independence in February 2008, NATO began to review and adjust its mission and, in June 2008, agreed to start implementing *additional tasks in Kosovo* in coordination with local and international authorities. It assisted in the establishment of the KSF and supervised the formation, education and training of a multi-ethnic, professional and civilian-controlled KSF. Moreover, *NATO also started facilitating and conducting capacity-building initiatives* with various security organisations in Kosovo. The activities are run by the NATO Advisory and Liaison Team (NALT), which was established in 2016 following the decision to streamline the responsibilities of two entities: the NATO Advisory Team (NAT), created in 2008 to oversee the establishment of a civilian-led organisation designed to exercise civilian control over the KSF, and the NATO Liaison and Advisory Team (NLAT), which continued to support the KSF beyond the North Atlantic Council's declaration of the KSF's full operational capability in July 2013¹⁶. NALT provides advice and practical assistance in areas such as logistics, procurement and finance, force development and planning, leadership development, building integrity, cyber defence, public diplomacy and science.

In their pursuit of strengthening the relationship with NATO, the Kosovar authorities submitted an official request in 2016 to bolster ties with the Alliance. But instead of an enhanced interaction, that was hoped for by Kosovo, through NATO HQ, the Allies decided to manage this relationship through KFOR and NALT.

To date, Kosovo does not have a clear form of contractual relationship with the Alliance. Attempted rapprochement, such as the application for the Partnership for Peace Programme (PfP) in 2012, have not received any positive answer, *mainly due to the lack of recognition from four allied nations*. For the Kosovar authorities, a potential access to PfP and in the long run an invitation to start a Member-

ship Action Plan are regarded as prerequisites for compromising with Serbia on Serb-majority municipalities in Kosovo.

The increased tensions and violence in Northern Kosovo throughout 2023 were of great concern to NATO and prompted the North Atlantic Council to approve a request by NATO's Supreme Allied Commander Europe to temporarily deploy reinforcements in Kosovo. As a consequence, the number of troops contributed by NATO Allies and partners increased to over 4,500 personnel.

The shift in KFOR (NATO's Kosovo Force) readiness – which is, actually, the third responder after the Kosovo Police and EULEX – and the fragile security situation in Northern Kosovo may continue to impact NATO's perception of Kosovo as a potential candidate for membership. This new reality could compel NATO to view Kosovo more as a source of crises rather than a rational actor capable of contributing to regional stability.

V. Conclusions

Kosovo's evolving security posture builds upon a wide array of internal and external factors, catalysed by its aspirations to join the Euro-Atlantic structures. The gradual transformation of the KSF into a traditional defence force, complemented with an increased defence budget, consistent military equipment acquisitions and overt international support and assistance, mainly from the US and Türkiye, underscores Kosovo's commitment to bolstering its security and also lays a solid foundation for an improved relationship with NATO. Despite the incremental efforts made by the local authorities to change perceptions that associates Kosovo to a security consumer, the absence of normalised relations with Serbia continues to fuel the security dilemma and foster instability, particularly in the north of Kosovo. Moreover, a lack of consensus among NATO Allies on stepping up the Alliance's relationship with Kosovo might affect Kosovo's medium-term ambitions and security objectives.

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SECURITATE GLOBALĂ

American Doctrines and Strategies in the Mediterranean Region

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ABSTRACT

The Mediterranean region has never been a peripheral area of interest in the strategic calculus of US foreign policy. Its multiple geostrategic, economic, and political stakes with global impact are amplified by the ongoing competition with Russia and China. For the United States, a flexible, strategic, and tactical approach has long served as the central vector of its foreign policy in a region characterised by shifting alliances and the redefinition of strategic coordinates.

This article examines the continuities and nuances in US foreign policy towards the Mediterranean region, from the Cold War to the present. It highlights how American exceptionalism, liberal internationalism, and pragmatic realism have shaped US engagement in this area, transforming the Mediterranean into both a geopolitical arena and a testing ground for global order-making. The analysis identifies the strategic decisions and doctrinal transformations emanating from the White House that define the core of US foreign policy. By tracing the evolution from Bush's interventionism to Obama's multilateralism, Trump's unilateralism, and Biden's renewed alliance diplomacy, the study reveals how US policy continues to balance ideals and interests, mirroring the changing nature of American leadership in a multipolar and conflict-prone international system.

The Mediterranean arena remains a "black box" where competitive advantage depends on anticipating and understanding strategic, tactical, political, and economic choices. The US position in the region is deeply anchored in the subtle yet sensitive mechanisms through which power, influence, and interests are exercised.

Keywords: *US foreign policy, Mediterranean Region, American exceptionalism, doctrines, leadership*

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Introduction

The Mediterranean region is a point of convergence between North and South, and between East and West. As reflected in the dedicated literature, "the Mediterranean means (...) a thousand things at once"¹: the Mediterranean area lies at the crossroads of European, African, and Oriental civilisations². With a multiple and interconnected geopolitical identity, the Mediterranean constitutes a key geostrategic space – highly contested and densely populated by global powers. This "microcosm of contending visions of regional order"³ has become, without any doubt, a geo-

political and geoeconomic gateway to Europe and a central hub for transregional connectivity (through the Maritime Silk Road and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC)). The Mediterranean has become a true arena of competition and rivalry among major powers and regional actors within an extremely volatile geostrategic environment⁴, regaining in the last decade its role as the epicentre of international conflict and a generator of global tensions⁵.

Cooperation for common security is of major importance for the Mediterranean basin and relies on the convergence of interests among the states of the region. "Mediterranean

diplomacy”⁶ entails the coordination of international actors to ensure security and stability throughout the basin.

The Mediterranean is characterised by a multilateral approach. Today, the region is troubled by conflicts – ethnic, political, and otherwise. The Israel–Palestine conflict, uncontrolled migration from North Africa to the EU, illegal drug and arms trafficking, and terrorism in general are a few examples that cause, on the one hand, instability and insecurity across the Mediterranean region, and, on the other hand, “mitigate economic problems in states that play by the rules of law”⁷.

In addition to these aspects, regional instability is further influenced by large disparities between the levels of development in the Northern and Southern Mediterranean, as well as the surprising population growth in the south and east. Considering all these elements, the region raises pressing security concerns not only for its northern neighbours (the EU), but also for those in the south and east (Iran, Iraq, the Gulf).

We are witnessing a post–Cold War shift in the “major power consensus model”⁸ paradigm articulated by E. Haas in 1964, particularly regarding US behaviour towards Europe and collective security.

Significant changes are currently amplifying tensions related to migration, security, and international law in the Mediterranean – a region where the momentum of the Arab Spring was not capitalised upon, and where a subsequent reversal of individual and collective freedoms occurred⁹. The very edifice of international law established after the Second World War is now being questioned¹⁰.

The positioning of state actors towards a rules-based international order in the Mediterranean remains ambiguous, contributing to the deepening mistrust of Middle Eastern and North African countries and peoples towards the hegemonic (dis-)order imposed through economic, political, and bureaucratic constraints by the United States and the European Union¹¹.

Instability generated by shifting, short-lived transactional alliances, together with the politicisation and loss of control over phenomena such as migration and the legiti-

misation of populism, pose serious threats to the credibility of diplomacy and multilateralism. The parameters of regional security are being reshaped today by the war in Gaza and by the nature and future of post-Assad Russian–Syrian relations¹².

The Arab world of North Africa is currently positioned between two poles: revolution and evolution. Specialists and theorists have noted that, over the past decade, Arab political regimes have shown intransigence towards reform, with the main obstacles being: (1) political diversity; (2) the emancipation of women; and (3) the differing levels of development that exist between the Arab world and others. A major role and a prominent impact in slowing down the reform process in Arab states are played by the evolution of the Israeli–Palestinian conflict. Without resolving this conflict, political reform in other states cannot achieve optimistic outcomes. One thing, however, is certain: the Arab world will not wait for the Israeli–Palestinian conflict to be settled before embarking on the reform process¹³.

There exists a variable geometry within the North African region from the perspective of security and stability. Factors related, on the one hand, to territorial and cultural fragmentation, and, on the other hand, to the political and economic context, highlight the complexity of regional conflicts.

Professor Nicola Pratt, an expert in international politics and the Middle East at the University of Warwick, observes that “the outcome of democratisation efforts is, in reality, dependent on the extent to which the strategies chosen by actors contribute either to the reproduction or to the challenging of power relations between civil society and the state”¹⁴.

The main hypothesis of the study is that US foreign policy in the Mediterranean reflects a constant balance between the pursuit of strategic interests and the promotion of democratic values.

The analysis highlights how American exceptionalism, liberal internationalism, and pragmatic realism have shaped the US approach towards the Mediterranean as both a geopolitical arena and a testing ground for global order-making. Beginning with the economic and security-oriented engagement

of the 1970s and 1980s, US policy gradually evolved towards the promotion of democracy and market liberalisation throughout the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region, culminating in the ambitious yet contested democratisation agenda of the George W. Bush Administration.

Furthermore, the paper explores the emergence of the Obaman School of Thought, defined by the recognition of multipolarity, globalisation, and soft power, and embodied in the “leading from behind” doctrine. It contrasts this cooperative and multilateral vision with Donald Trump’s Preservationism Doctrine, rooted in unilateralism, transactional diplomacy, and the “America First” principle. The analysis concludes with an assessment of the Biden Administration’s Mediterranean policy, centred on renewed multilateralism, alliance restoration, “breakthrough diplomacy,” and strategic recalibration in response to regional conflicts such as the Gaza War.

By integrating geopolitical, economic, and normative dimensions, the article demonstrates that the evolution of US engagement in the Mediterranean embodies the enduring tension between values and interests, revealing how successive doctrines have sought to reconcile America’s liberal aspirations with the pragmatic realities of global power politics.

US Foreign Policy in the Mediterranean

Individualism, mobility, and exceptionalism constitute the main elements around which US foreign policy is projected and conceived¹⁵. American exceptionalism has become a unique reference point for analysing US foreign policy¹⁶. The rhetoric encompasses the idea that the United States, as a global actor, has the duty to shape the future of humanity – an idea that explains its diplomatic presence and action in regional conflicts.

There is already a long-standing tradition of interpreting American foreign policy through the lens of exceptionalism. US political rhetoric is centred on the belief that the United States possesses distinctive qualities – a unique historical trajectory, and political and economic values – that set it apart from

other states and are destined to shape humanity’s future.

The exceptionalist perspective of American foreign policy is perceived by Leggold and McKeown as one in which “Americans criticise power politics and old-fashioned diplo-economics, distrust strong standing armies and complex peacetime commitments, issue moralistic judgements about other peoples’ internal systems, and believe that liberal values are quickly transferable to foreign affairs”¹⁷. Barry Buzan identifies four essential elements characterising the United States’ exceptional external behaviour: liberalism, moralism, isolationism/unilateralism, anti-statism, and the separation of powers¹⁸.

Four defining positions for the grand strategy of the United States are identified by Posen and Rose, emphasising even more the idea of exceptionalism, as follows:

(1) Neo-isolationism – based on the premise that geography has protected the United States, while the four major powers are geographically confined within a relatively independent Eurasian balance-of-power game (a premise concerning rivals and potential enemies);

(2) Selective engagement – which the United States assumes and promotes to maintain Eurasia’s political division and avoid involvement in major world conflicts, as in 1917, 1941, and 1947 (a premise concerning rivals);

(3) Cooperative security – whereby, through the system of relations among states, national interests are pursued without eliminating those of others, with the United States assuming leadership in maintaining a liberal order (a premise concerning both rivals and allies);

(4) Primacy – through which the United States prioritises its own objectives to maintain its status as the world’s sole superpower, prevent the rise of rivals, and extend the legitimacy and strength of its leadership across all levels (a premise concerning enemies and rivals).¹⁹

These four positions – to which war on terrorism could be added as well – clearly define the main policy options of the United States. According to Barry Buzan, in the past decade, although all four remain valid, the last two –

cooperative security and primacy – have dominated the rational core of US external action²⁰. Many analysts and scholars have highlighted and debated in specialised studies the neo-imperialist features of US policy and their global consequences. The geopolitical status that the United States holds in the world shapes the security directions and strategies of successive White House administrations.

For over 200 years, the United States have been a Mediterranean power, yet its strategy has remained fragmented and diffuse, anchored in rigid geographical fault lines (Europe – including Türkiye – versus the Middle East and North Africa)²¹. For the United States, the Mediterranean region has been part of the Euro-Atlantic security equation, a gateway towards strategically connected routes to the Gulf, and a center of regional crises with global implications – hence the strong engagement of US diplomacy and policy²². The Mediterranean has served as a stage for projecting American power²³.

Over time, US interests in the Mediterranean have fluctuated according to regional and global crises that have reset Washington's geopolitical compass towards: maintaining energy supplies; countering the spread of weapons of mass destruction; counterterrorism and intelligence cooperation; supporting key allies, such as Israel – including compliance with the Camp David Accords – and competing with other great powers²⁴.

US bilateral assistance has been concentrated primarily on two states: Israel, which received approximately \$300 billion in economic and military aid between 1946 and 2023, and Egypt, which received over \$150 billion²⁵.

A Mediterranean actor without a Mediterranean strategy, the United States relies on efficient bilateralism and a selective approach to regional issues. It recognises the European sphere of influence and focuses on the periphery and subregions to gain influence from within through bilateral channels and a multi-layered strategy (e.g., the antiterrorist struggle in Algeria and Morocco; normalisation of Arab–Israeli relations in Egypt, Jordan, and Türkiye; energy cooperation with Gulf States, Algeria, and Libya)²⁶.

US conduct in the Mediterranean highlights its interest in the following lines of action: the security of Israel; the security of energy supplies; hard security (proliferation of WMDs and terrorism); economic markets; and democratisation²⁷.

The image of the United States in the world today requires revitalisation, and within American political circles this idea is gaining traction through a rediscovery of multilateralism. In a region facing wars, humanitarian and economic crises, and technological and environmental disruptions, multilateralism should not be understood merely as an end in itself, but rather as a means to fulfil the mission of building a shared space of peace, stability, prosperity, and security.

For the integration of economic, institutional, and democratic models to have a significant impact in the Mediterranean, the political vision must be supported by a *modus operandi* appropriate to its purpose²⁸.

US Presidential Doctrines for the Mediterranean

US foreign policy became significantly focused on promoting democracy in the MENA region during the first decade of the 21st century. While in the 1970s the United States was primarily interested in oil – which implied the need for political and security stability, as well as peace between Arab states and Israel – in the 1980s military and strategic cooperation became increasingly important for securing access to natural resources and supporting American military operations in Asia and Africa. The United States also focused on economic growth, viewed as a key factor for maintaining stability in Arab states.

For these reasons, which encouraged economic reform, the US constructed a foreign policy based on the principle that the American Administration could and should engage with Arab governments to help address their internal challenges. In this context, the United States held discussions with the governments of Egypt, Jordan, Israel, and the North African countries to facilitate trade and foreign investment.

In the 1990s, several economic initiatives took shape – among the most notable: the US–Egypt Partnership for Economic Growth (known as the Gore–Mubarak Commission) established in 1994; the US–North Africa Economic Partnership (USNAEP) launched in 1998; and the 1996 amendment to the US–Israel Free Trade Agreement (originally signed in 1985) to include the West Bank, Gaza, and the Qualified Industrial Zones in Jordan²⁹.

Democracy assistance and support programmes in the Arab world were also introduced by the George H.W. Bush Administration to encourage economic liberalisation through political liberalisation. During this time, the Middle East Democracy Fund was established, and projects were implemented to improve management and efficiency within authoritarian governmental structures characterised by laws and practices contrary to democracy³⁰.

Both the Clinton and Bush Administrations focused their political agenda on international trade, concluding free trade agreements with Jordan (2000), Morocco, and Bahrain (2004), and expressing the long-term goal of creating a US–Middle East Free Trade Area (MEFTA).

Between 2000 and 2004, the United States approached political and economic reform and democratisation with a renewed attitude, placing them high on the political agenda in the Middle East. At the heart of US diplomacy, peacemaking efforts in the Israeli–Palestinian conflict represented the driving force behind the US democratisation strategy in the Arab world.

The 11 September 2001 attacks prompted Washington officials to broadly reconsider democracy promotion in the MENA region, viewing democracy as an instrument for preventing terrorism and maintaining stability³¹. These arguments provided the basis for the neoconservatives and the George W. Bush Administration in launching the Iraq War. The establishment of the Middle East Partnership Initiative (MEPI) in 2002 and the Broader Middle East and North Africa Initiative (BMENA) in 2004 are two clear examples of the new “bottom-up” directions in US foreign policy.

However, the Bush Administration’s attempts to accelerate political reform in the

region – including the Greater Middle East Initiative – ultimately failed, as they were perceived as externally imposed and lacking the consent of the states concerned. Through this initiative, Bush sought a chain democratisation process across the Arab world. By definition, any lasting process of political reform must be initiated and led by internal will.

Major criticisms were directed at the Bush Administration’s democratisation agenda. Firstly, diplomatic and strategic imperatives – cooperation on counterterrorism and assistance for stabilising Iraq – resulted in slowing down the political reform process³². Secondly, the effectiveness of the US military engagement as a tool for promoting democracy was called into question, as “reformers in the Arab world do not want their hopes and dreams subordinated to the US political agenda”³³. The most intense criticisms of US foreign policy pointed to the use of democracy as a justification for military intervention³⁴.

In contrast to his predecessor, Barack Obama developed a different strategy for addressing the interests and challenges of the Middle East and North Africa, invoking soft power instruments and a policy of selective engagement. The Obama Administration articulated a distinct approach to democracy promotion, declaring that “no system of government can or should be imposed upon one nation by another,” while maintaining faith in “governments that reflect the will of the people”³⁵.

Obama’s Administration completely abandoned the Greater Middle East concept proposed by his predecessor and instead launched a re-evaluation of US foreign policy strategy, given that Arab regimes had shown high resistance to political reform in recent years³⁶. The President argued that change is inevitable but requires time, assuring Arab peoples that the United States would remain diplomatically, economically, and strategically engaged in supporting their movements. His appeal to protesters to voice their demands without resorting to violence or terrorism aligned with the rhetoric of advocating a peaceful and democratic process.

The protests, uprisings, and revolutions in the MENA region, which began on 18 December

2010 and continue today, sparked the struggle for democracy and freedom in countries such as Tunisia, Egypt, Libya, Bahrain, Yemen, and Syria. The US response to the Arab revolutions was delayed, as American foreign action was calibrated around competing priorities: managing the armed conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan, confronting the challenges posed by the Iranian regime, international terrorism, climate change, and the economic recession.

Compared with previous administrations, the Obama Administration proposed a reassessment of US foreign policy in recent years and a reprioritisation of its engagement in regional conflicts. Beginning with the Obama era, the centrality of the Mediterranean world was recognised according to the dynamics of conflicts and competition over strategic resources, with implications for the global order³⁷. Under the Obama label, Litsas identifies a new school of thought in foreign policy – one that diverges from the paradigms promoted by Hamilton, Wilson, and Jefferson³⁸.

The central element of the Obamian School of Thought is the recognition of multipolarity, globalisation, cosmopolitanism, and self-constrained interventionism – embodied in the “leading from behind” military doctrine³⁹. Unlike the Jacksonian approach, Obama’s vision rests on the idea that international affairs are not zero-sum games but multi-dimensional processes of asymmetric interdependence, shaped primarily by soft power. He favoured short-term but firm interventions that preserved national interests intact⁴⁰.

Seeking to distance himself from George W. Bush’s costly democratic peace doctrine, Obama promoted the notion of a new beginning in US–Mediterranean relations – a pragmatically interest-driven framework founded on mutual respect, progress, and human rights sensitivity⁴¹. Obama was a strong supporter of the liberal international order, safeguarded by a military architecture (NATO, ANZUS), an economic one (WTO, World Bank, IMF, GATT), and a political one (the United Nations)⁴².

The Arab Spring represented one of the most serious foreign policy tests for the Obama Administration and the US establishment in the MENA region. Critics of Obama’s “distant

observer” stance in the Eastern Mediterranean point to the modest outcomes in achieving US national interests and maintaining the regional *status quo*⁴³.

Under the Biden Administration, the outbreak of the Gaza War on 7 October 2023, marked a strategic reorientation towards security in the Eastern Mediterranean, with emphasis on supporting the coalition government led by Prime Minister Netanyahu. The United States backed Israel in its military campaigns in Gaza and Lebanon. For geostrategic, economic, trade, and environmental reasons, Washington withdrew its initial support for the EastMed pipeline project, which was designed to transport gas from Egypt and Israel to Cyprus, Greece, and the rest of Europe⁴⁴.

Multilateralism has been an important pillar of Biden’s foreign policy, aimed at increasing US influence through extended networks of alliances and partnerships worldwide – thus reaffirming a traditional vision of a rules-based international order. The Biden Administration’s “Mediterranean policy” was integrated into Washington’s response to economic, political, and climate challenges that generated crises both domestically and globally⁴⁵.

During Biden’s term, regarding Mediterranean security and stability, the US aligned itself closely with the European Union and sought to rebuild strong relations with European allies. American interests have primarily focused on countering rival great powers, Russia and China. The key directions pursued by the US in the region included: (1) combating terrorism in the Eastern Mediterranean, North Africa, and the Sahel; (2) containing the nuclear and conventional threat from Iran; (3) maintaining the free flow of maritime trade; and (4) supporting Israel’s security and prosperity. Moreover, the narrative of supporting democratisation in the region was revived to distinguish the US from the authoritarian models promoted by Russia and China⁴⁶.

To harness the region’s resources and development potential, the Biden Administration advocated a “Breakthrough Diplomacy”, designed to identify appropriate legal instruments for cooperation, stability, security, and prosperity. Together with France, the US diplomatically mediated the Israel–Lebanon

maritime border dispute, an approach aimed at reducing the risk of new conflicts and de-escalating existing tensions⁴⁷.

The Trump Administration rewrote US foreign policy through unconventional and unpredictable decisions, reintroducing unilateralism and the reduction of US involvement costs in Mediterranean conflicts⁴⁸. Trump presented himself as a key broker of peace and conflict resolution in the region, pursuing a pragmatic approach rooted in neoclassical realism and neoliberalism⁴⁹.

Until the Trump era, the United States had supported the two-state solution for Israel and Palestine for decades⁵⁰. The Trump Administration's vision of peace and prosperity emphasised Israel's security and capabilities, justifying limits on Palestinian sovereign power⁵¹. Like Truman, Trump built a special relationship with Israel, recognising Jerusalem as Israel's capital and Israeli sovereignty over the Golan Heights, while contributing to the Abraham Accords, which normalised relations between Israel and several Arab countries⁵².

US Mediterranean policy under Trump must be understood within the broader framework of the Preservationism Doctrine, promoted by the MAGA movement's leader, which diverges from the Progressivism Doctrine of the Biden–Harris Administration. Trump revised the traditional narratives shared by the American foreign policy establishment, offering an updated version of “Conservative American Nationalism”⁵³.

His transactional and transformative leadership, centred on the “America First” doctrine, sought to emphasise power, patriotism, and sovereignty – a cornerstone of America's essential relationship with itself and the world⁵⁴. Rejecting globalised multilateralism for its limited contribution to national security, Trump promoted a cost–benefit bilateralism rooted in US economic and political interests⁵⁵, which simultaneously underscored the willingness to use national power (military, economic, political, and cultural) and the reaffirmation of the principle of reciprocity⁵⁶.

Even though, since the Obama Administration, US foreign policy attention has been increasingly oriented towards the strategic and economic importance of the Western Pacific

Ocean through the Pivot to the Asia-Pacific – adapted under Trump to the self-absorbed goal of “Make America Great Again”, a return to strict protectionism – the United States continues to show interest in the Eastern Mediterranean.

For instance, enacted in December 2019 with strong bipartisan support, the Eastern Mediterranean Security and Energy Partnership Act (Senate Bill 1102, introduced by Senators Robert Menendez and Marco Rubio) authorised the establishment of a United States–Eastern Mediterranean Energy Center, tasked with facilitating energy cooperation among the US, Israel, Greece, and Cyprus⁵⁷.

The US is exploring new bilateral and multilateral cooperation routes to achieve its strategic interests in energy and access to natural resources while avoiding excessive and costly involvement “into the black hole of the Eastern Mediterranean, a place which the Hobbesian spirits never seem willing to abdicate”⁵⁸. The United States seeks to maintain supreme position in the regional balance of power, safeguard its forward presence in competition with China and Russia, and pursue a new *modus operandi* with Türkiye⁵⁹.

Conclusions

The Mediterranean region has remained a strategic constant in US foreign policy, serving as a vital arena for projecting power and balancing interests across Europe, the Middle East, and North Africa. Although the focus of American engagement has evolved – from securing energy routes and countering terrorism to promoting democracy and regional stability – the region continues to test the consistency, adaptability, and credibility of US global leadership.

Over time, successive administrations have reflected distinct doctrinal orientations: Bush's interventionist democratic peace, Obama's multilateral leading from behind, Trump's unilateral America First, and Biden's alliance-based multilateralism. These successive approaches demonstrate the gradual transformation of US strategy from hegemonic dominance towards pragmatic cooperation and

selective engagement in an increasingly multipolar international order.

Ultimately, the persistent tension between values and interests remains the defining feature of America's Mediterranean policy. Efforts to advance democracy, ensure security, and safeguard economic interests have often conflicted, revealing both the limits of US transformative ambitions and the resilience of its influence in shaping regional stability and the evolving liberal international order.

The exercise of US power and influence in the Mediterranean is part of a complex equation in which costs and benefits are constantly redefined through the lens of bilateral relations and competition with other major powers. The optimisation of the cost-benefit balance has been the central objective of every US Administration. Assessing the success of American engagement in the Mediterranean continues to generate intense debate, as no consensus has yet been reached regarding the nature and distribution of these costs and benefits.

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From Global Multipolarity to Regional Unipolarity: Theoretical Aspects of a New Approach to Security?

Robert-Ionuț STANCIU, PhD

ABSTRACT

The war in Ukraine and shifting global dynamics have prompted the European Union to reconsider its role in international security. This paper argues that the great powers – USA, China, and Russia – are moving toward regional unipolarity, where each state focuses on securing its own region, reducing the costs of defence. For the EU to remain competitive, it must combine liberal and realist approaches, enhancing military capabilities, and creating stronger diplomatic alliances. The EU must also adapt its institutional structure to handle defence decisions and possibly establish a regional power centre. The key to EU security lies in harmonising member states' divergent interests while pursuing a strategic balance between hard and soft power.

Keywords: regional unipolarity, security complex, European Union, realist theory, military capabilities, supranational defence.

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Introduction

The war in Ukraine and the aggressive stance of the Russian Federation, complemented by the new positioning of the US Administration, have sent shockwaves throughout the international landscape, generating deep questions and concerns within the European Union. The objective of this paper is to initiate and theoretically argue the idea that we are currently witnessing a new positioning of the great powers within international relations, characterised by regional unipolarity. It will be structured in three main sections that will briefly address security theories, the concept of Regional Security Complex, as well as some relevant aspects for the European Union to be

able to keep pace with the new trend – issues that will be presented in the conclusion section.

Conceptual and definitional framework

In the field of international relations, security is a complex and multidimensional notion that refers to the protection and maintenance of the well-being and interests of a state or community against various threats, both internal and external.

In short, perspectives on security include the realist view, in which tradition security is primarily seen in terms of military power and

the protection of a state's sovereignty. States seek to maximize their security through military force and deterrence strategies to defend themselves against potential threats from other states (Jervis 1999). In essence, realism presents the international system as an environment governed by the principle of "self-protection," with states being forced to protect themselves, because they cannot rely on any other agency or actor to ensure their security; therefore, the rationale of realism is in terms of power (Ardam, et al. 2021). Hans J. Morgenthau, often referred to as the "father of realism" (Kunz 2010) emphasised the role of power and national interest in international relations. His theories on security, as presented in his work *Politics Among Nations*, focus on aspects such as the balance of power, national interest, realpolitik, introducing the security dilemma as a foundation of realist theories. Morgenthau advocated for a realpolitik approach to international relations, in which states act based on the pragmatic calculation of power and interests, rather than moral or ideological considerations. From this perspective, security is achieved through a realistic assessment of power dynamics and the pursuit of national interests, regardless of ethical concerns (Williams 2004). Unlike classical realism, which emphasises the role of human nature and the decisions of individual leaders, neorealism (Kenneth Waltz) focuses on the distribution of power (Lobell 2010) within the international system as the main driver of state actions. Complementing this, John Mearsheimer argues that the international system inherently pushes states to pursue power and security at the expense of others (Mearsheimer 2001).

The liberal perspective emphasises the importance of international cooperation, institutions, and economic interdependence in enhancing security. According to liberal theory, the promotion of democracy, human rights, and free trade can contribute to a safer international environment, especially through the institutions that have been created (Ardam, et al. 2021). The works of Doyle, especially his essay *Kant, Liberal Legacies, and Foreign Affairs*, emphasise the role of liberal-democratic norms and institutions in promoting peace

and cooperation among states. His security theories often revolve around the concept of democratic peace and the role of liberal democratic norms in promoting international security (Doyle 1983). He claims that the norms contribute to a stable international order by promoting cooperation and reducing the likelihood of violent conflicts (Friedman 2008). Keohane is a key supporter of neoliberal institutionalism (Keohane and Martin 1995), a theoretical framework that argues states are rational actors seeking to maximise their interests, but that international institutions play a vital role in promoting cooperation and reducing uncertainty between states. Keohane introduced the concept of complex interdependence (Keohane and Nye 1987) arguing that economic, social, and political interactions have become highly interconnected, leading to an interdependence that goes beyond military concerns. This interdependence reduces the likelihood of conflicts, as disruptions in one area can have negative consequences in other domains.

From a constructivist perspective, security is not determined only by material factors, but also by socially constructed norms and identities. Ideas, values, and shared beliefs play a crucial role in shaping perceptions of security and influencing the behaviour of states (Farrell 2002). Some researchers advocate for a comprehensive approach to security, which integrates various dimensions of security, including military, political, economic, environmental, and social aspects (Prezelj 2015).

Regional security complexes (RSC) are "sets of units whose major processes of securitization, desecuritisation, or both are so interconnected that their security issues cannot be analysed or resolved reasonably one from another". RSCs are defined as durable patterns of regional friendships or enmities based on long-lasting subregional (geographical) ties, or a group of states (or units) whose security concerns cannot be viewed independently of each other (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 44).

RSC provides a more comprehensive framework for analysis in security studies by considering the geographical, historical, or economic ties between nation states belonging to the same geographical region (Buzan

and Wæver 2003, 40), rather than simply categorising into unipolarity or multipolarity, RSC represents an implicit format that mediates the antinomies between the realist and liberal theories of security, as a result of the anarchic characteristic of state behaviour (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 40), nuancing them through the lens of constructivist theories. Geographically, the concept emerged equally to mediate two dimensions: the national and the global. This aspect is relevant because a state's national security cannot be analysed independently, as it is interconnected and dependent on regional dynamics. Similarly, global security is a utopian concept (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 43), never achieving the conditions for a lasting universal peace. Therefore, security can be analysed exclusively within the regional spectrum, through the analysis of cultural, economic, or historical ties within a defined geographical area. The central idea of RSC is that the fundamental elements of (de)securitization processes in international relations manifest in regional patterns.

Regional unipolarity: a new paradigm for future security?

Waltz argued that states try to maintain a balance of power to ensure their security. When a state becomes too powerful, others will align and attempt to maintain a balance against it to prevent domination. In interdependence with this, the distribution of power in the international system, particularly polarity (unipolar, bipolar, or multipolar), influences the behaviour of states. Different power distributions have implications for the stability and dynamics of the system in general. Neorealism argues that the international system is anarchic (Waltz 2000), which means that there is no central authority to govern the interactions of states.

In light of RSC, only superpowers are capable of projecting their power beyond the geographical space of an RSC. Superpowers, by nature, transcend the logic of geography and proximity in their security relations (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 46) by penetrating

other RSCs (India-Pakistan, the two Koreas, etc.) in a manifestation of power distribution. However, the associated costs for supporting powers are high, making it difficult to maintain an omnidirectional orientation, which, in practice, leads to, for example, the strategic repositioning of the US towards the Asia-Pacific (Ganchev 2025).

Relevant in this argument is the classification of countries based on the budget allocated to military spending, from which we observe that the top positions are held by the main powers within each RSC defined by the current article: the USA, China, and Russia (Neufeld 2025). Furthermore, the budget of the first country (the USA) is more than four times larger than that of the second-largest spender (China), spending as much as the next 12 countries combined (Neufeld 2025). This positioning is costly and, at least superficially, creates the impression that hegemonic powers are providing security to other states outside their immediate spheres of interest for free.

On these coordinates, an agreement among the great powers (the USA, China, Russia) regarding a withdrawal to their respective RSC areas would create regional unipolarity and implicitly reduce the costs allocated to defence. In this sense, it can be argued that RSCs can emerge from the interest of a great power to reduce security threats in a geographically close framework, with the hegemonic power playing the role of a local stabiliser (Amable 2022). Ultimately, this aspect would overlap with the RSC theory, according to which the possessiveness of great powers tends to overlap with regional imperatives (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 46). The USA, Russia, and China would become regional hegemonic powers in a centre-periphery construct, where the security dynamics within each RSC would be dominated by these powers. Furthermore, the new approach would not only be less costly, but it is also necessary for the mentioned powers to maintain their regional influence status and represents the simplest level of hierarchy in security theories (state, regional, and global), excluding the existence of a super- or inter-regional level.

Thus, the withdrawal of the three major actors into their own RSCs could be theoretically

sustainable through the overlapping of multiple roles within the same geographical area, from that of a stabiliser to that of the main threat (USA vs. Canada/Greenland, China vs. Taiwan, Russia vs. Eastern Europe) to other states in the region (Amable 2022), this being a catalyst or even an imperative for deepening cooperation. The theory aligns with Mearsheimer's observations, who noted that even states with the ability to project their power over long distances primarily focus on ensuring regional dominance, both through rational calculations and coercion, assuming one of the roles of domination, primacy, or hegemony (Amable 2022).

On traditional coordinates, in the world of zero-sum alliances, there is little room for cooperation between the USA, China, and Russia. Thus, any policy aimed at strengthening these alliances by one of the major actors is likely to directly conflict with the interests of the other actors, leaving limited scope for genuine cooperation (Cohen and al. 2023). To this end, the only remaining option is an alignment of regional interests and a non-interference pact between the three major state actors, especially considering that at least two of them (Vinocur and Gijss 2025) have a common interest in dismantling the European Union.

The European Union as a potential centred RSC

Understanding the different dimensions of power is crucial for analysing security dynamics and developing effective foreign policies. In this regard, starting from Nye's theory of power, we find that it encompasses three dimensions: military power (coercion), economic power (the ability to influence through economic means), and soft power (attractiveness and persuasion) (J.S. Nye 2013) in a complex interdependence. Furthermore, the formation of an RSC is determined by enduring historical ties, whether partnership or conflictual (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 45) conjugated with an anarchic structure of the balance of power and the limitations of geographical proximity.

Analysing these dimensions from the perspective of the European Union, its reputation

as the strongest supporter and defender of the liberal global order is well-known (Youngs and Smith 2018). This seemingly involves strong support for multilateral institutions and norms, open markets, free trade, respect for human rights, and democratic values, as well as cooperative approaches regarding security (Youngs and Smith 2018) thus, through the lens of an RSC, a series of ties to a common European culture, to which all member states (and sometimes candidate states) have adhered, evolve into a pronounced soft power dimension. Similarly, the geographical membership of states in the same geographical area represents a new characteristic that can overlap the extended EU region with an RSC.

On the other hand, from the realist security theories, we learn that Mearsheimer's offensive realism revolves around principles such as maximising security, balance and alliances, relative gains, the security dilemma, etc. (Mearsheimer 2001). The idea that states primarily seek security through defensive means is contested, with states pursuing power and domination as a central factor of their behaviour. This leads to a more pessimistic view of international relations, marked by competition, conflict, and a constant struggle for power, especially among hegemonic powers (*Ibidem*), an aspect that can be observed in the current trend in international relations. This dimension is currently missing in the European Union and the extended European space. We note that this tool is what the European Union lacks in order to transform into a competitive RSC with those defined by the USA, Russia, or China. The main theoretical difference is that, while the USA, Russia, and China can form unipolar RSCs, in line with the variables introduced by Buzan and Wæver (Regions and Powers 2003, 53), the European space can form a multipolar RSC.

Thus, considering the EU's constructive architecture, it is in total contradiction with the theory of regional unipolarity, as described in the previous paragraph, because the application of great power possessiveness over regional imperatives within the EU would represent the very destruction of the unity and trust necessary to form an RSC. Therefore, to address this gap, it would be necessary for

the European RSC to either have a power pole based on an agreement between two or three European states (such as France, Germany, the United Kingdom, or Türkiye) for the smaller states to follow, or the creation of a supranational defence structure that would take over some of the prerogatives of the member states. This would, of course, imply changes both institutional and treaty-based, such as the introduction of qualified majority voting in defence-related decisions. This hypothesis was also proposed by Buzan & Wæver, who argued that such behaviour could transform the European RSC into a single actor, representing security at a level higher than an RSC (Buzan and Wæver 2003, 58). A relevant historical example is the unification of the USA in North America. In these conditions, the Union would need to function as a supranational entity, replicating states that operate as autonomous and independent entities within international law (Skordas 2018).

The next step would be the development of common military capabilities and structures. Through this move, the European space would transcend Nye's concept of complex interdependence, moving towards the concept of smart power, which advocates for the strategic use of both hard power (coercion) and soft power (attractiveness) to achieve desired outcomes in international relations (Măgureanu 2009). The combination of military force with diplomacy, economic incentives, and cultural attractiveness can maximise the European Union's influence and more effectively achieve security objectives.

An additional argument is that, although liberal-democratic norms and institutions play a key role in promoting peace and cooperation among the states within the European Union (EU), they effectively establish a security community (Jones 2003). The current reality shows that these rules apply within the European Union, while international competitors (the USA, China, Russia) do not follow the same ones. Therefore, to become competitive, or rather, to avoid becoming an easy target for these major actors, the solution is, if not changing, at least adapting the rules. Thus, following the scenarios of realist coordinates, where the European Union borrows state-like

behavior on the international stage, according to some authors, it could evolve to take the form of a democratic confederation (Beetz 2018). The described scenario presents a new normative model for the EU, combining the realist considerations of national interests and meaningful self-governance with aspirations for cooperation, democracy, and the pursuit of the common good at the EU level (*Ibidem*), transforming the European Union into a European superstate (Morgan 2005) *apud* (Beetz 2018) and a smart power within its own RSC.

Conclusions – policy implications and strategic recommendations

The current dynamics on the international stage seem to indicate that interactions in international relations tend to evolve towards the realist definitions of security assurance, through the maximisation of military force and deterrence strategies. In this new context, states cannot rely on any other supranational agency or actor to ensure their security. The current reality has demonstrated that the three major powers under analysis (the USA, China, Russia) act based on a pragmatic calculation of interests, through a realistic assessment of the power dynamics and the pursuit of national interests, regardless of ethical consequences.

Maintaining a regional balance of power and a regional distribution of power within the anarchic international system is shaping up as a new understanding among the world's major powers. This unidirectional approach, in which each of the three powers becomes a local hegemon, is far less costly and allows for the long-term allocation of resources to other areas (the USA towards Asia-Pacific, Russia towards Europe, China towards Taiwan). Thus, the USA, Russia, and China could become regional hegemonic powers in a centre-periphery construction where the security dynamics within each RSC would be dominated by them.

Belonging to the same geographical space tends to generate more interaction regarding security than between actors located in distant geographic regions. The historical ties between the states in the European space have

led to the political development of the European Union based on liberal values such as democracy, human rights, and economic cooperation, aspects that have created systemic interdependencies. Therefore, the conflict in Ukraine, the new positioning of the US administration, and Russia's aggressive stance, however, call into question the effectiveness of the EU's purely liberal approach, bringing to the forefront realistic concerns related to security, such as territorial integrity, the use of force, and the accumulation of military power.

In this sense, to demonstrate strategic adaptability and become a competitive RSC, the EU will need to reassess its defence role and capabilities, combining both liberal and realist instruments. Among the range of measures that are absolutely necessary, we highlight the need to strengthen military capacities, enhanced efforts in multilateral diplomacy, conflict prevention, or the creation of partnerships and alliances. For the EU to navigate effectively in this liberal-realist equation, success will depend on its ability to harmonise the occasionally divergent positions of its member states. Therefore, to counteract this gap, it would be necessary for a power centre to emerge within the European RSC, based on the agreement of two or three European states (such as France, Germany in the EU, or even the UK or Türkiye in an extended spectrum), or to create a supranational defence structure within the EU that would take over certain prerogatives of the member states. This endeavour would, of course, involve institutional and treaty changes, such as the introduction of qualified majority voting in defence-related decision-making. In this context, the Union should function as a supranational entity, mirroring the model of states operating as autonomous and independent entities under international law.

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În căutarea „inamicului necesar”: O analiză a conflictului politico-militar dintre Israel și Iran prin prisma teoriei securității ontologice și a eșecului descurajării reciproce

Dr. Șerban-Filip CIOCULESCU

ABSTRACT

This study questions the reasons behind the great enmity existing between Iran and Israel, two countries which do not share a common border. Since 1979, Israel and Iran have been trapped in a spiral of mutual hostility, shaped by antagonistic identities and a zero-sum perception of security. Their leaderships perceive the other country as an existential enemy, and all means are seen as useful and acceptable to deal with the mortal threat. This explains the covert hybrid warfare that Iran launched and sustained, and Israel's harsh reaction, and even the short episodes of open war in 2024-2025. Theories of ontological security and national role conception highlight how each state's leadership constructs the other as an existential enemy to legitimise internal authority. This dynamic aligns with Alexander Wendt's concept of a Hobbesian anarchy culture, where fear is normalised and violence seen as legitimate. War has become routine, and changing this pattern would trigger deep anxiety due to the disruption of entrenched identities. Events like the Abraham Accords have challenged traditional roles, while shifting alliances (e.g., Iran with Russia/China) reshape regional power balances. A strategic identity shift – possibly triggered by a major trauma or regime change – could open paths to de-escalation, but only if both nations and their leaders embrace compromise and new roles, or in case of leadership change.

Keywords: Iran, Israel, mutual fear, hybrid war, deterrence, ontological security, national role conception, nuclear weapons, defence doctrines

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Introducere

a) Originile și natura conflictului

Puține state ale lumii au relații atât de complexe și de tensionate precum Israelul și Iranul, iar episoadele de violență militară acută din anii 2024-2025 confirmă gravitatea situației. Studiul de față pornește de la evaluarea contextului general de securitate regională și investigarea rolului geopolitic asumat de elitele politice ale Iranului și Israelului în

Orientul Mijlociu, față de propriile națiuni și în relația dintre acestea. Ne propunem să oferim o mai bună înțelegere asupra cauzelor profunde ce au stat la baza declanșării și extinderii acestui conflict, punând accentul pe modul în care elitele politice și religioase israeliene și iraniene au perceput contextul istoric al rivalității geopolitice și ideologice dintre aceste națiuni separate de peste 1.000 de kilometri, diferențiate clar prin religie, demografie, alianțe politico-militare și cultură de securitate.

Știm că Iranul vede Israelul ca fiind o entitate statală ilegală din punct de vedere religios și politic, un implant colonial, vinovat de încălcarea drepturilor palestinienilor și un adversar comun al musulmanilor din toată lumea (*Ummah*), iar elitele politice și populația israeliană privesc Iranul ca pe o teocrație agresivă și conservatoare, un stat care urăște poporul evreu, democrația și libertatea. De aceea, schimbarea de regim politic la Teheran este parte a strategiei israeliene pentru Orientul Mijlociu, instrumentele cele mai cunoscute fiind sancțiunile economice, sabotajele și lovirurile militare contra infrastructurilor critice.¹

Dar rivalitatea dintre Iran și Israel este și una geopolitică, manifestată prin căutarea de sfere de influență și teritorii, pe hartă: Iranul în mod tradițional dorește să controleze geopolitic Libanul, Siria, Gaza, Irakul și Yemenul – exact zonele unde Israelul încearcă să contracareze prezența iraniană (prin atacuri militare directe și sprijin pentru inamici asimetrici ai Teheranului).

Regimul teocratic islamist de la Teheran promovează mitul „eliberării Ierusalimului” ca parte a rolului asumat de stat, a misiunii sale naționale și religioase.² Când Iranul era condus de ultimul său monarh, Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, și se afla în sfera de influență a SUA, între Iran și Israel au existat strânse relații politico-economice și de securitate. Astfel, Iranul a fost una dintre primele țări care au recunoscut statul israelian abia format. Numeroși evrei trăiau în Iran, cei mai mulți emigrând după 1979, astfel că acum mai există doar circa 20.000. Israelul a ajutat la antrenarea armatei iraniene, a oferit tehnologii avansate și sprijin în agricultură.³ După revoluția islamică din 1979, care a adus la putere un regim teocratic revoluționar anti-occidental, Iranul nu s-a mai definit doar ca stat-națiune clasic, ci ca un stat revoluționar cu vocație transnațională. Ayatollahul Khomeini, liderul *de facto* al țării, a afirmat deschis că revoluția islamică nu este doar pentru Iran, ci trebuie exportată în toate zonele locuite de musulmani. Se referea la întreaga „Ummah”, comunitatea islamică globală, deși regimul politic era unul ce susținea dogmele ramurii șiiite a Islamului. Nevoia de a găsi un țap ispășitor, un simbol care să unifice lumea musulmană sub conducerea Iranului, a

dus la identificarea Israelului ca parte a unui așa-zis binom malefic SUA–Israel, acestea fiind denumite de propaganda iraniană „marele” și „micul” Satan. La rândul lor, elitele politice israeliene se folosesc de retorica agresivă a Iranului, de derapajele verbale ale ayatollahului și de acțiunile concrete (programul nuclear, terorismul prin grupări proxy și dezvoltarea rachetelor balistice, de exemplu) și, printr-un act de securitizare, descriu Iranul ca fiind un inamic existențial, contra căruia orice sancțiune politico-economică, operație militară sau acțiune subversivă este justificată.

b) Elitele politice și națiunile: convergență vs divergențe

Este oare acest conflict doar unul al regimurilor politice, al elitelor ce conduc aceste țări? Sau are la bază o ură profundă la nivelul națiunilor? Înainte de 1979, Israel și Iran aveau relații foarte apropiate, inclusiv cooperare militară și economică. După revoluție, regimul islamic a inversat complet această relație. Rezultă că explicația se află la nivel ideologic și psihologic, în sistemul psihocognitiv al elitelor islamiste iraniene. Relația dintre cele două popoare a fost într-o măsură însemnată influențată și de raportarea la SUA ca actor dominant. Când ambele state aveau relații pozitive și apropiate de SUA, relația lor bilaterală a fost constructivă și viceversa.

Se constată, în primul rând, lipsa tradiției conflictuale dintre cele două națiuni – Iranul, ca centru politic al Șiiismului mondial, nu a avut deloc conflicte cu Israel, statul evreilor, și nu a fost vizibil interesat de Ierusalim și palestinieni până în anul 1979. Un lung război hibrid (*shadow war*) a avut loc între 1980 și 2023, potențat de problema înarmării nucleare iraniene. Israelul posedă rachete cu încărcătură nucleară, deși nu recunoaște, în schimb Iranul este împiedicat să le aibă prin intervenția comunității internaționale (a se vedea pozițiile Agenției Internaționale a Energiei Atomice). Războiul prin forțe *proxy* dus de Iran contra Israelului a contribuit la radicalizarea politică a leadershipului de la Tel Aviv, care a afirmat că măsuri excepționale sunt necesare spre a garanta supraviețuirea națiunii și a statului.

Războiul „cald” (dar limitat în manifestările sale și perioada de desfășurare) s-a concretizat în intervalul 2024-2025, după ce o serie de acțiuni hibride anterioare a dus la creșterea ostilității reciproce și a activat succesiv ferestre de oportunitate pentru fiecare dintre cei doi adversari. Serviciile secrete israeliene au ucis ofițeri și oameni de știință iranieni, de asemenea au eliminat oficiali ai Hamas și Hezbollah, au atacat reprezentanți iranieni pe teritoriul altor state, scopul fiind de a pedepsi Iranul, dar și de a îi reduce capacitatea ofensivă.⁴ Așadar, de ce s-a recurs în final la lovituri directe cu riscul de escaladare necontrolată? Pentru că fiecare dintre cei doi actori statali a perceput acțiunile sale ca fiind legitime, dictate de comportamentul adversarului, nu a acceptat să se autolimezeze din teama că își va încălca rolul asumat la nivel național sau că va fi perceput ca slab la nivel internațional. În relațiile internaționale, slăbiciunea unui stat este asociată cu riscul de a fi atacat direct sau de a suferi agresiuni hibride repetate, deoarece adversarul sau adversarii nu se tem suficient de reacția sa, așadar logica descurajării nu funcționează eficient.

Acest studiu folosește atât metoda istorică de analiză, cât și teorii ale științelor sociale (adaptate la relațiile internaționale), în încercarea de a explica comportamentul elitelor decidente din Israel și Iran în relația bilaterală, dar și în relațiile cu aliați sau adversari ai fiecăreia dintre aceste țări. Se recurge la surse bibliografice deschise, surse primare și secundare – articole, cărți, studii, declarații și documente oficiale –, scopul fiind de a încerca să explicăm de ce două state care nu au granițe directe și nici conflicte teritoriale au ajuns la episoade de conflict militar deschis, care riscă să escaladeze către un război devastator de lungă durată.

c) Fundamentul teoretic al cercetării

Teoria securității ontologice a fost selectată ca bază pentru explicarea persistenței politicilor externe conflictuale ale Iranului și Israelului. Elitele politice ale celor două state inamice și-au construit imagini ale sinelui (*self-images*) puternice, coerente, bazate organic pe doctrine politice și de securitate stabile,

pe teorii ale rolului (*role theories*), în care „ce-lălalt” este prezentat ca pericol existențial, iar compromisul are o valență negativă, similară cu trădarea și abandonul interesului național. Conform teoriei securității ontologice, indivizii (în acest caz decidenții de politică externă) își creează identități solide, bazate pe certitudini cognitive și comportamentale, și acționează în conformitate cu această identitate (imagine de sine), ceea ce face dificilă schimbarea.⁵ După cum afirmă politologul turc Ayşe Zarakol, „securitatea ontologică presupune, în primul rând, a avea un sentiment coerent al sinelui și ca acest sentiment să fie confirmat de către ceilalți.”⁶ Prin interacțiune cu alți actori, indivizii umani își consolidează și reconfirmă propria identitate, acționând spre a dovedi constanță, stabilitate. Astfel, aceștia devin prezizibili pentru aliați, dar și pentru adversari.⁷

Teoriile rolului se referă la imaginea pe care conducătorii unui stat vor să o impună lumii din exterior cu referire la țara lor, la națiunea respectivă. Această teorie – concepția națională de rol (*National Role Conceptions – NRCs*) – a fost adoptată de disciplina relațiilor internaționale din sociologie și psihologie pentru a explora modul în care identitățile și așteptările influențează comportamentele și modelează politica externă.⁸ Asumarea pe termen lung a unui rol de către un stat (ca produs al identității sale strategice) are ca rezultat formarea unor așteptări din partea altor actori internaționali, pe baza predictibilității și continuității.⁹ Cele două teorii combinate ne arată că decidenții, odată ce și-au forjat o identitate strategică, vor tinde să o conserve pe termen lung, aceasta fiind o necesitate fundamentală, la nivel psihocognitiv. De aceea, relațiile conflictuale vor tinde să se perpetueze, iar cele de cooperare, la fel. Conflictele de durată între state, starea de ostilitate pe termen lung se pot explica atât prin recurs la paradigma neorealismului a relațiilor internaționale (anarhie, luptă pentru putere, *self-help*, teamă), cât și prin teorii de tip constructivist, precum cele prezentate mai sus. În acest caz, metoda constructivistă pare mai adaptată, deoarece explică mai adecvat dificultatea de a ieși din starea conflictuală, la nivelul decidenților.

Prima ipoteză de lucru afirmă că natura conflictului dintre Iran și Israel se

caracterizează prin transformarea dintr-o rivalitate ideologico-religioasă, filtrată decisiv prin raportarea la poziționarea politică față de SUA, într-o confruntare complexă, multidimensională, un conflict identitar acut, de tip joc de sumă nulă, influențând profund securitatea regională. De mai multe decenii, oficialii iranieni amenință națiunea israeliană și statul cu dispariția fizică, sugerând că existența Israelului este incompatibilă cu armonia necesară lumii islamice în ansamblul ei. Dacă natura conflictului Iran–Israel ar fi rămas preponderent ideologică, cumva artificială (raportată la nevoile de securitate fizică ale Iranului), aceasta ar reflecta doar prevalența ideologico-religioasă a elitelor de la Teheran asupra calculelor clasice de securitate (legate de granițe și teritoriu), și eșecul mecanismelor internaționale de descurajare și diplomație. Transformarea multidimensională pare a fi permis convertirea unei rivalități regionale într-un factor destabilizator global, cu potențial de escaladare la nivel internațional. Atacurile cu rachete și drone din perioada 2024–2025 reflectă un eșec al descurajării din partea celor două state, dar și un eșec al diplomației.

Elitele politice iraniene au nevoie de un inamic simbolic, un țap ispășitor, prin care să își poată reafirma constant identitatea strategică de apărător al lumii islamice și al comunității šiite.¹⁰ Dar și elitele israeliene se legitimează la nivel național prin combaterea influenței malfice a Iranului, ceea ce le permite premierului B. Netanyahu și aliaților săi să își prelungească rămânerea la putere. Se constată o asimetrie în patternul amenințărilor: leadershipul israelian nu amenință cu distrugerea națiunii iraniene, ci afirmă doar că riposta defensivă va fi decisivă, teribilă, totală, așadar scopul este de descurajare prin amenințare cu represalii extreme (*deterrence by punishment*). Conducerea de la Teheran, prin ayatollahii și președinții succesivi, a recurs periodic la amenințări existențiale. Sistemele de apărare antiaeriană israeliene dispuse stratificat asigură și descurajarea prin antiacces și interdicție (*deterrence by denial*).

Israelul are o postură defensivă, ceea ce nu îl împiedică să își asume în caz de necesitate, adică de pericol iminent, recursul la atac preventiv, lucru dovedit de exemple istorice concludente, precum Războiul de Șase Zile din

1967. În schimb, decidenții politici și religioși iranieni amenință adesea Israelul cu anihilarea, utilizând un imaginar religios specific, cu toate că recunosc uneori că nu dispun de mijloacele militare necesare atingerii acestui scop.¹¹

Geografia joacă și ea un rol în gradul de intensitate al acestui conflict. Nu a existat și nu există un stat-tampon autentic (*buffer state*) între Iran și Israel, care să absoarbă șocurile și să reducă tensiunile. Siria este un stat slab, cvasi-eșuat. Măcinat de revolte interne, nefuncțional, a trecut printr-un lung război civil, așadar credem că nu poate juca rolul respectiv. Statul-tampon ar trebui să fie stabil, solid în plan politic, perceput ca independent în exterior, iar suveranitatea sa să fie în general respectată. Timp de peste două decenii, Iranul a penetrat aparatul politic și de securitate sirian, ajutat în faza finală de Rusia, astfel încât Siria nu putea fi privită ca un stat-tampon independent, care să limiteze tensiunile, ci mai curând ca un teritoriu de influență al Teheranului și al Moscovei.

A doua ipoteză afirmă că rivalitatea Israel–Iran este mai ales un produs secundar al ostilității dintre SUA și Iran, Israelul fiind văzut de majoritatea iraniienilor ca un pion al Americii pe scena regională. Ulterior, conflictul s-a intensificat în principal ca urmare a competiției pentru influență strategică în Orientul Mijlociu, depășind frontierele ideologice și implicând actori statali și non-statali într-o rețea regională de conflicte indirecte. Această ipoteză mută accentul pe dimensiunea geopolitică și *proxy wars* (ex. Hezbollah, Hamas, militanți susținuți de Iran în Siria, Irak, Yemen), sugerând că situația conflictuală este alimentată mai degrabă de ambiții de putere regională, decât de diferențe ideologice.

Criza de legitimitate politică din cele două state, cu lideri contestați, a crescut probabilitatea unor acțiuni militare spre a obține legitimitate. Politicile dure față de riscurile din exterior și acțiunile de slăbire a statului de drept, de către B. Netanyahu, l-au făcut destul de nepopular.¹² În Iran, politicile economice girate de regimul teocratic, reprezentat de ayatollahul Khamenei, au determinat erodarea legitimității regimului. Slăbiciunea internă a leadershipului poate conduce către tentația unei acțiuni externe agresive.

Necesitatea de a înțelege eforturile în direcția păcii (ca ideal) implică analiza leadership-ului celor două state. Este util să recurgem la teorii de natură psihologică spre a oferi o explicație asupra dificultății de a se negocia o pace de durată între cele două state. Elitele din Iran nu au interes să oprească conflictul cu Israel; acestea suferă de „anxietatea păcii”, pentru că, în lipsa asumării oficiale a narațiunii că Israelul este un inamic existențial, și-ar pierde o mare parte din legitimitate pe plan intern, iar populația și-ar manifesta mai clar nemulțumirea față de degradarea nivelului de trai și excesele/abuzurile comise de reprezentanții religioși ai puterii asupra cetățenilor. Este foarte probabil că decidenții de la Teheran cred că pacea reală cu Israelul ar destabiliza identitatea regimului politic, generând anxietăți care fac conflictul mai „confortabil” și profitabil decât pacea.¹³ Securitatea personală a elitelor politice tinde să devină mai importantă decât securitatea națională ca atare.

De la un îndelungat *shadow war* la conflict militar direct: logica escaladării

Care sunt, așadar, sursele rivalității profunde dintre Israel și Iran și cum se explică faptul că un conflict lung de zeci de ani, desfășurat prin metode indirecte¹⁴ – gherile, actori proxy transnaționali, subversiune, crime – a escaladat către lovituri militare directe între cei doi adversari? Considerăm că elementele centrale sunt: factorul religios transpus în politică, cu efect puternic asupra identităților colective în sensul radicalizării mutual ostile, ideologia (regimul islamic iranian vs statul israelian democratic, dar ancorat solid în religia mozaică), rivalitatea geopolitică pentru influență în Orientul Mijlociu (inclusiv *proxy wars* în Liban, Siria, Gaza), și relația Israel–SUA (factor amplificator, dar nu unic). În lipsa fundamentului religios-ideologic, situația de securitate dintre Teheran și Tel Aviv ar fi fost probabil o rivalitate pentru putere și influență asemănătoare celei dintre Turcia și Arabia Saudită sau Turcia și Egipt, lipsită de dorința de a-l distruge pe celălalt.

Analizii în studii regionale și de securitate au arătat faptul că ostilitatea față de Israel nu este doar un produs secundar al conflictului Iran–SUA, în condițiile în care Israelul este unul dintre aliații importanți ai Washingtonului, ci are rădăcini proprii, multiple și adânci. Elitele clericale iraniene și-au construit artificial un adversar, un stat care e îndepărtat geografic, cu care nu poate avea conflicte teritoriale, de resurse etc. Au prevalat motivele ideologice și religioase. Nu e vorba de a solicita simple modificări de granițe sau de acuzații privind participarea la alianțe ostile, ci de dorința unui actor statal de a-l distruge fizic pe celălalt, în flagrantă contradicție cu Carta ONU. Conducerea teocratică de la Teheran afirmă că dorește ca Israelul să dispară definitiv de pe harta regiunii. Situația amintește de războiul dintre Rusia și Ucraina, în care conducerea rusă nu recunoaște existența națiunii ucrainene, dar nu spre a o distruge, ci spre a o include forțat în propria națiune. Iranul are o minoritate etnică israeliană pe teritoriul său, din timpuri vechi, dar nu dorește sub nicio formă să includă toți evreii israelieni în granițele sale și să le extindă. Ayatollahul Khamenei nu are modul de gândire specific lui Putin.

Spre a înțelege politica de securitate a Israelului și imaginea Iranului ca adversar principal, după ce Egiptul și apoi Irakul au încetat să mai fie amenințările centrale de tip statal, este necesar să înțelegem modul în care două țări cu capacități militare importante, Israel și Iran, prima dintre ele posedând deja arme nucleare (în mod nedeclarat), au ajuns în intervalul 2024-2025 să intre direct în situații de conflict militar, ceea ce reprezintă un eșec al descurajării pentru ambele. Trebuie observat faptul că Iranul a folosit încă din anii '80 ai secolului trecut grupări non-statale din state vecine Israelului, spre a acționa ca adversari proxy, asimetrici, contra acestuia – e vorba mai ales de Hezbollah, de Hamas dar și de gruparea Houthi din Yemen, de milițiile šiite din Irak și Siria. Acești actori non-statali au primit inclusiv rachete cu rază scurtă și medie. Însă Iranul nu a trebuit să plătească pentru aceste acțiuni altfel decât sub formă de sancțiuni economice și de acțiuni de război hibrid (subversiune, atacuri cyber de tipul celui care a implicat folosirea virusului Stuxnet¹⁵, uciderea unor comandanți

militari iranieni etc.), derulate de serviciile secrete israeliene și americane pe teritoriul său.

Conflictul dintre cele două state a luat cel mai adesea forma unui război din umbră, nedecarat, hibrid, cu numeroase asasinat, distruger, atacuri cibernetice din partea israeliană, atacuri prin proxy regionali și sabotaje din partea Iranului. Înă s-a ajuns și la faza acțiunilor militare propriu-zise (conflicte de joasă intensitate), prin escaladare în urma unor decizii cu grad mare de risc adoptate de decidenții israelieni și iranieni. Era prima înclătare militară directă iraniano-israeliană de la proclamarea republicii islamice în 1979.

În primăvara anului 2024, tensiunile dintre Israel și Iran erau agravate de acțiunea armată israeliană din Gaza contra Hamas, soldată cu multe decese în rândul populației locale, de conflictul militar dintre Israel și Hezbollah, și de convingerea decidenților israelieni că Iranul a contribuit la planificarea atacului terorist palestinian din 7 octombrie 2023. Netanyahu și aliații săi politici au acceptat escaladarea crizei pe 1 aprilie 2024, permițând forțelor Tsahal (armata israeliană) să lovească cu rachete secția consulară a ambasadei iraniene din Damasc. Au fost uciși astfel comandanți importanți ai Gardienilor Revoluției – o acțiune percepută de Iran ca o încălcare majoră a regulilor diplomatice, și anume a protecției oferite prin cutumă și tratate de spațiul diplomatic. O adevărată declarație de război implicită. Planificatorii israelieni au anticipat o reacție furibundă din partea Teheranului, care nu putea să se abțină de la o acțiune punitivă de amploare fără a se decredibiliza pe plan intern.¹⁶ Dar și-au asumat riscul. Acest atac a subminat regulile nescrise ale războiului din umbră (*shadow war*), desfășurat prin proxy și a determinat o reacție directă a adversarului. Pe măsură ce Israelul a redus capacitatea de luptă a forțelor non-statale aflate în serviciul Iranului, acesta a trebuit să ia în calcul acceptarea riscurilor aferente unui conflict militar cu Tel Avivul, însă a urmărit ca acesta să rămână limitat, să nu escaladeze necontrolat, mai ales să nu se implice și SUA.

Astfel, pe 13 aprilie 2024, Iranul a lansat în scop punitiv peste 300 de drone și rachete către Israel, din Iran și din zonele controlate de actorii de tip proxy (Liban, Siria, Yemen); majoritatea au fost interceptate, dar acțiunea

a fost un pas direct spre un conflict escaladat. Iar pe 19 aprilie, Israelul a ripostat prin atacuri aeriene limitate asupra teritoriului iranian. Distanța terestră foarte mare dintre cei doi adversari a împiedicat recursul la atacuri de infanterie și tancuri.

Ulterior, în iulie 2024, a urmat asasinarea de către israelieni a liderului Hamas, Ismail Haniyeh, în Teheran, urmată de lovituri israeliene în Liban (în zona Haret Hreik). Liderul Hezbollah, Hassan Nasrallah, a fost și el asasinat în 27 septembrie 2024 la Beirut (Liban), tot prin lovituri aeriene. În replică, pe 1 octombrie 2024, Iranul a efectuat noi lovituri cu rachete asupra Israelului, care a replicat prin Operațiunea *Days of Repentance*, vizând facilități militare și nucleare iraniene. Starea conflictuală dintre cele două țări nu s-a disipat, dar abia în anul următor a avut loc o nouă ciocnire militară. Loviturile militare israeliene din octombrie 2024 au distrus cea mai mare parte a apărării antiaeriene a Iranului, care a rămas vulnerabil la pătrunderea aviației israeliene în spațiul său aerian, dar nu i-au putut anihila rampele de lansare și rachetele aflate la sol, decât parțial.

În 13 iunie 2025, deoarece estima că programul nuclear iranian avansa rapid, Israelul a atacat Iranul cu rachete și drone, prin operațiunea *Rising Lion*, care a distrus numeroase infrastructuri militar-industriale și a eliminat mai mulți oameni de știință și comandanți militari de top ai Corpului Gardienilor Revoluției. Forțele armate israeliene și Mossad au folosit și drone prepoziționate și camuflate pe teritoriul iranian, iar țintele au fost identificate cu ajutorul unor spioni din rândul CGR și al Armatei. S-a urmărit mai ales distrugerea unor capacități de cercetare nucleară. Iranul, care nu mai avea un sistem antiaerian eficient și nici avioane de vânătoare capabile să facă față inamicului, a răspuns imediat atacând cu rachete și drone teritoriul Israelului, ucigând un număr redus de civili și provocând daune materiale în orașe precum Tel Aviv, Ramat Gan, Beer Sheva. Dar Israelul a fost ajutat de SUA și alte state UE care au interceptat numeroase drone și rachete iraniene. În război au fost atrase și SUA, care au bombardat cu bombe antibuncăr marile instalații nucleare ale Iranului. Începând cu noaptea de 13-14 iunie, Iranul a ripostat, folosind în total circa 350-550 de rachete balistice și peste

1.000 de drone.¹⁷ Unele surse afirmă că circa 25-28 de israelieni ar fi fost uciși și aproximativ 3.000 de răniți.¹⁸

Apărarea antiaeriană a Israelului, bazată pe sisteme concentrice de rachete antirachetă, nu a putut bloca în totalitate rachetele balistice iraniene (deși circa 86% dintre acestea au fost interceptate), astfel că au fost lovite și distruse, parțial sau total, mai multe baze militare, laboratoare, centre de cercetare, universități etc. La rândul său, Israelul a atacat cu succes huburi logistice, fabrici militare, centre de comandă, laboratoare de cercetare și baze militare. Liderii politici și opinia publică din Israel au considerat că este vorba de o victorie clară a țării lor, ceea ce a sporit capitalul politic al lui Netanyahu și al Likud-ului. Au murit, conform unor estimări credibile, între 600 și 1.000 de iranieni, mult peste numărul victimelor israeliene, așadar putem vorbi despre o demonstrație a avansului tehnologic israelian și a pregătirii populației pentru apărare. Scurtul război de 12 zile din 2025 a permis celor doi adversari să își evalueze punctele forte și vulnerabilitățile defensive. Armistițiul agreeat după 12 zile de lupte a fost perceput la Teheran și Tel Aviv ca o simplă pauză necesară înaintea unei probabile reluări a ostilităților militare.¹⁹ Doar descurajarea reciprocă efectivă, presiunile din exterior și problemele interne ale celor două state pot menține starea fragilă de armistițiu.

Politica de securitate a Iranului și rolul atribuit Israelului de „Mic Satan”, alături de „Marele Satan” (SUA)

Decidenții politici ai Iranului (desigur, după revoluția islamică din 1979) văd SUA ca pe marele adversar ideologic, securitar și geopolitic, iar Israelul ca fiind un instrument central al influenței americane în Orientul Mijlociu. Propaganda oficială iraniană a descris adesea Israelul ca fiind un „cancer sionist” plantat de Occident în regiune. Imaginea „entității sioniste” are rolul de a evidenția un element alien, ostil, implantat în miezul lumii islamice²⁰, fiind comună Iranului și altor state arabe în trecut.²¹ În acest sens, ostilitatea Iranului față

de Israel, țară non-islamică și al cărei teritoriu național, odată cu emergența statului în 1948, a fost pierdut politic și identitar de Ummah, se suprapune cu resentimentul său față de hegemonia americană în zonă. SUA este principalul aliat strategic, militar și diplomatic al Israelului, garantul ultim al supraviețuirii acestuia, așadar, în percepția liderilor iranieni, un obstacol major în calea îndeplinirii interesului național și religios de eliminare a acestuia. Ajuutorul militar masiv și sprijinul politic necondiționat (ex.: vetouri la ONU) creează imaginea unei relații simbiotice între cele două state, alimentând percepția iraniană că atacarea Israelului înseamnă lovirea intereselor americane.

Iranul își definește interesul național într-un mod extins, nu doar în termeni de granițe și teritorii, ci afirmând constant o solidaritate religioasă absolută cu știții din întreaga lume. Acest lucru este unic comparativ cu alte state din regiune, singurele exemple comparabile fiind poate Turcia și Arabia Saudită, care se vor conducătoare ale lumii musulmane sunnite, dar nu într-un mod atât de radical precum Teheranul. În bătaia sa ideologică și religioasă contra Israelului, Iranul se proclamă liderul lumii musulmane în totalitatea ei, un lucru care, desigur, irită statele arabe sunnite, dar și Turcia. Aplicând teoria securității ontologice și pe cea a rolului, observăm că elitelor politico-religioase de la Teheran le convine să nu schimbe abordarea conflictuală a relațiilor cu Israelul.²² Astfel, rămân consecvente cu identitatea asumată începând din 1979.

Concepția privind rolul național se bazează pe faptul că elitele politice iraniene au ales, de-a lungul timpului, mai multe roluri care converg către identitatea strategică oficială:

- principalul apărător al lumii islamice (Ummah): mai ales după revoluția islamică din 1979, Iranul s-a văzut pe sine ca avangarda islamului revoluționar;

- actor antisionist și antiimperialist: o componentă centrală a politicii externe iraniene este opoziția totală față de Israel, ca o completare *sine qua non* a adversității extreme față de hegemonia sistemică americană;

- Iranul nu este de acord nici cu crearea unui stat palestinian independent, care să coexiste cu Israel, deoarece ar implica recunoașterea Israelului de către țările arabe care

sprijină un stat palestinian suveran.²³ Așadar, paradoxal, decizia lui Netanyahu de a se opune existenței unui stat palestinian convine Teheranului;

– putere regională: Iranul se autopercepe ca lider natural în Orientul Mijlociu și factor de contrabalansare a statelor aliniate cu SUA (inclusiv Israel și Arabia Saudită). Dorește o lume multipolară, nu una dominată de Occident.

Iranul a acționat militar în perioada 2024-2025 nu pentru a învinge Israelul, lucru imposibil din punct de vedere material, ci pentru a salva credibilitatea regimului său, atât în plan intern, cât și extern. Pe plan intern, regimul se afla sub presiunea nemulțumirilor populare cauzate de inflația ridicată, stagnarea economică și pierderea sau diminuarea influenței în Irak, Siria și Liban. Un act de forță contra Israelului, cu utilizarea masivă a forței militare, era menit să ralieze sprijinul la nivelul populației și să distragă atenția de la crizele interne, iar uciderea liderilor IRGC în atacul israelian din aprilie 2024 a creat necesitatea unui răspuns hotărât, altfel regimul ar fi părut slab în fața inamicilor săi, inclusiv în poziționarea față de rivalii strategici din regiune (Arabia Saudită, Emiratele Arabe Unite, Turcia). Așadar, Iranul și-a asumat un risc strategic controlat, mizând pe faptul că Israelul nu va lansa un atac nuclear decât dacă ar fi într-o situație de tip *existential threat*; de asemenea, a calculat că Washingtonul va interveni spre a împiedica o escaladare prea periculoasă. Decidenții iranieni mizează pe faptul că Israelul nu va folosi arme nucleare contra țării lor, dacă atacurile iraniene cu rachete și drone nu vor avea efecte prea grave. Mai mult, mizează pe eficiența scuturilor antirachetă israeliene de tip Iron Dome și David's Sling, precum și pe sprijinul antiaerian oferit de SUA și unele state vest-europene. Cu alte cuvinte, Teheranul a lansat numeroase rachete și drone, sperând ca o mare parte a lor să fie doborâte. A urmărit să copleșească apărarea antirachetă israeliană prin numărul mare de vectori, lucru parțial realizat în 2025. Așadar, considerăm că Teheranul a calibrat atacurile, astfel încât să nu existe această percepție de amenințare existențială exacerbată la Tel Aviv.

Strategia militară a Iranului se bazează pe conceptul de apărare înaintată (*forward defen-*

ce doctrine), adică propagarea revoluției islamice în alte state și continuarea luptei contra adversarilor săi, spre a-i împiedica să se apropie și să atace teritoriul național, iar folosirea unei rețele de actori proxy contra acestora face parte din strategia menționată, sub forma unei „axe a rezistenței”.²⁴ Războiul hibrid devine astfel metoda esențială de luptă. Se consideră că adversarii vor fi aliați sau parteneri *ad-hoc* ai SUA și vor căuta să încercuiască Iranul, care are dreptul moral să riposteze oricând și oricum.

Conducătorul religios (ayatollahul) și cel politic (președintele) ai Iranului știu că nu pot încerca să distrugă Israelul fără a risca propria distrugere de către SUA și Israel, posesoare de arme nucleare. Probabil că și dacă ar avea câteva capete nucleare nu ar îndrăzni să inițieze un atac cu acestea, adoptând o doctrină strict defensivă, de tip *no first use*. Așadar, opinăm că retorica antiisraeliană este preponderent de uz intern și, de asemenea, pentru lumea arabo-musulmană din regiunile aferente Orientului Mijlociu și Africii de Nord (MENA). Elitele politice de la Teheran știu că populațiile statelor arabe sunnite privesc cu suspiciune creșterea puterii iraniene, mai ales după ce Irakul a fost ocupat de SUA și aliați începând cu anul 2003, iar Teheranul a profitat de vidul de putere spre a crea o rețea de proxy šiiti în zona Golfului Persic și a estului Mării Mediterane. Este, așadar, discursul tipic de autolegitimare al leadershipului de la Teheran. De exemplu, fostul președinte iranian Ahmadinejad avertiza că orice tentativă de pace cu Israelul va fi văzută ca un act de trădare de către lumea musulmană: „*Anybody who takes a step toward Israel will burn in the fire of the Islamic nation's fury*”²⁵, iar ayatollahul Mohammad Reza Mahdavi-Kani afirma că: „*A peace agreement that calls for recognition of Israel is not acceptable*.”²⁶ Faptul că printre președinții Iranului au existat și figuri mai moderate (ex-președintele Khatami, de exemplu) nu a permis schimbarea abordării conflictuale a relațiilor cu Israelul, deoarece establishmentul de la Teheran nu a permis acest lucru.

Iranul nu are șanse să reziste unui atac comun SUA-Israel, decât dacă ar primi un sprijin militar masiv din exterior, de la China și Rusia, cu care are relații politice și economice apropiate, fiind membru în Organizația de

Cooperare de la Shanghai (SCO) și în BRICS. Teheranul face parte din „axa rezistenței” anti-SUA. Dar acestea probabil nu ar risca să fie implicate într-un război cu SUA spre a salva Teheranul. Spre a putea primi sprijin pe cale terestră, are nevoie ca Pakistanul să nu îi fie ostil, și nici Afghanistanul, spre a avea conexiune terestră cu China; de asemenea, are nevoie ca Armenia să îi rămână apropiată, asigurând prin Georgia legătura cu Rusia.

Asimetria de putere nucleară dintre Israel, stat care deține arme de acest fel, deși nu recunoaște, și Iran, care încă nu le posedă, constituie un motiv de anxietate securitară majoră pentru Teheran. Iranul a negat în mod constant că ar încerca să fabrice sau să achiziționeze arme nucleare, însă a îmbogățit uraniu la niveluri care nu sunt necesare pentru aplicații pașnice; a împiedicat inspectorii internaționali să verifice instalațiile sale nucleare și și-a sporit capacitățile de rachete balistice.

Se consideră că Iranul a investit puternic în actori substatali și transnaționali de tip proxy regionali și în războiul hibrid (cibernetice, drone, atacuri asimetrice), în timp ce Israelul a răspuns cu operațiuni preventive, război hibrid (asasinate, sabotaje²⁷, infiltrări de agenți Mossad în rândurile Gardienilor revoluției și prin capacități tehnologice avansate).

Un eveniment cu ample efecte geopolitice a afectat puternic capacitatea de proiectare a puterii Teheranului: Iranul a pierdut Siria după decembrie 2024, stat aflat de decenii în sfera sa de interese, deoarece noul regim post-Assad este pro-sunnit și pro-turc, acesta cautând un *modus vivendi* cu Israelul. În acest fel, Iranul momentan nu mai are acces la țărmul sud-estic al Mării Mediterane și nu mai poate lovi Israelul de aproape prin gherile siriene sau Hezbollah, delocalizate în Siria. Contactul terestru cu Israelul prin Irak și Siria este un element fundamental în gândirea strategică a elitelor politice și religioase de la Teheran. În lipsa acestuia, transferul de luptători, instructori, arme și muniții către Liban și Gaza devine mai dificil. Simultan, Hezbollah și Hamas au fost slăbite grav de atacurile israeliene din perioada 2023-2025, iar Iranul nu le-a putut ajuta eficient să reziste.

Faptul că SUA a intervenit militar de partea Israelului, contra Iranului, determină elitele politico-religioase de la Teheran să considere

că SUA lasă Israelul să contrabalanseze Iranul, să îi reducă nivelul de putere, o subcontractare a acestei sarcini pentru care Washingtonul nu are dorința de a aloca resurse și nici motivația să se ocupe personal în mod constant.²⁸ În plus, ne spune Alex Vatanka, cercetător în cadrul Middle East Institute, SUA și Israel nu par să aibă o strategie de schimbare de regim la Teheran, ceea ce îi lasă o anumită marjă de manevră lui Khamenei, acesta fiind convins, probabil în mod iluzoriu, că Rusia și China nu vor permite să se prăbușească regimul său și vor proteja statul de agresiuni din exterior.²⁹ Acesta nu simte nevoia să facă rapid un compromis cu SUA și Israel, lucru ce ar dăuna reputației sale de lider islamist antiamerican fervent și i-ar reduce șansele de a rămâne un membru important al „axei rezistenței”, conduse de China și Rusia.

Dar Teheranul nu se comportă strict defensiv și reactiv. Putem afirma că Iranul are și un comportament de politică externă de tip imperial, urmărind o extindere a influenței sale mult dincolo de granițele naționale, prin instrumentalizarea identității islamice șiite, nu doar a celei persane. Există motivații ideologice, interese strategice și o viziune religioasă și transnațională asupra puterii, securității, dar și asupra elementelor ce țin de morală și etică.

Situația de securitate unică a Israelului

Unicitatea situației Israelului în plan securitar este dată de combinația mai multor factori. Statul este contestat nu doar ideologic, ci în mod existențial, de către conducătorii și populațiile altor țări, care vorbesc adesea de necesitatea anihilării acestuia și a națiunii israeliene. Chiar dacă amenințarea poate fi citită ca fiind pentru uz intern, pentru legitimarea elitelor politice față de propriile popoare, națiunea israeliană nu poate ignora lecțiile istoriei, cel mai grav moment fiind Holocaustul și nici uita războaiele cu scop de anihilare pornite de statele arabe vecine (1948, 1967, 1973). Egiptul și Siria au atacat prin surprindere Israelul în 1973, deși știau că acesta posedă arme

nucleare, în mod nedeclarat (strategia ambiguității), așadar descurajarea bazată pe arme de distrugere în masă nu a funcționat. Lucrurile au stat asemănător și în perioada 2024-2025, în conflictul Israel-Iran. Într-o situație de acest tip, Tel Avivul ar putea fi tentat să utilizeze o armă nucleară tactică, spre a determina adversarul să își înceteze agresiunea. Strategia nucleară bazată pe ambiguitate deliberată (*Amimut*) permite descurajarea inamicilor fără a provoca curse ale înarmării sau presiuni internaționale directe.³⁰ Șansa istorică face ca Israelul să aibă de partea sa SUA, cel mai puternic actor statal la nivel mondial din punct de vedere militar, garant *sine qua non* al existenței națiunii și statului. Protecția oferită de SUA și de armele nucleare³¹ conferă un nivel de securitate extrem de ridicat pentru națiunea israeliană. Însă, adversarii statali nu sunt complet descurajați să comită atacuri convenționale, și nici să recurgă la atacuri asimetrice, prin forțe proxy.

Alte cazuri cunoscute la nivel global de națiuni a căror suveranitate teritorială este contestată total sau parțial – Taiwan, Ucraina, Coreea de Sud – au anumite similitudini, dar lipsește cel mai adesea retorica privind legitimitatea anihilării explicite, amenințarea cu genocidul și magnitudinea izolării. În schimb, elementul comun pentru cazurile Taiwan și Ucraina tinde să fie discrepanța balanței demografice și militare dintre națiunea amenințată și națiunile care emit amenințări cu distrugerea sau cucerirea [China, Rusia, ambele puteri nucleare, membre ale Consiliului de Securitate (CS) al ONU³²].

Și Israelul are propria concepția de rol național, iar elementele sale centrale sunt:

- apărător al statului și poporului evreu: se ia în calcul memoria istorică a Holocaustului și ostilitatea regională, iar Israelul se percepe ca un stat super-vigilent la nivel existențial, în timp ce Iranul a primit eticheta de inamic existențial major;

- democrație consolidată într-o regiune ostilă, cu regimuri autoritariste: se autopercepe ca o democrație liberală occidentală într-o zonă cu regimuri autoritare;

- factor stabilizator la nivel regional: Israelul și-a extins rolul ca putere în domeniul tehnologiei, militar și al informațiilor, precum și ca partener strategic pentru Occident.

Ținând cont de aceste trăsături, Iranul este perceput ca cel mai periculos adversar statal regional, datorită ambițiilor nucleare³³, sprijinului pentru Hezbollah, Houthi, Hamas și discursului vehement anti-Israel. Iranul nu se mulțumește să amenințe verbal Israelul cu distrugerea, până în anul 2040, instalând și un „ceas al distrugerii Israelului” într-o piață publică din Teheran (Piața Palestina), dar îi subminează securitatea, recurgând la mișcări transnaționale proxy, prin acțiuni de terorism.

Strategii israelieni au stabilit o geografie a amenințărilor bazată pe trei cercuri (sau inele): primul cerc – vecinii direcți (Siria, Liban), al doilea – state ostile care sunt separate de Israel prin altă țară (Irak) și al treilea – state care au mai mult de o altă țară între ele și Israel (Iran). Primele au fost de regulă cele mai periculoase, în decursul istoriei secolului XX, deoarece pot ataca rapid și prin surprindere. Un departament special al Statului Major al armatei se ocupă, din 2020, de amenințarea de al treilea tip, axată pe Iran – Agaf Estrategia Vma’agal Shlishi, în traducere Directoratul pentru strategie și pentru al treilea inel.³⁴

Strategia de supraviețuire a Israelului se bazează pe păstrarea avansului la nivel tehnologic și științific, a avantajului de a poseda arme nucleare, față de adversari, deoarece aceștia vor avea constant de partea lor demografia și resursele naturale. Conceptul de „zid de fier” (*iron wall*) datează din perioada interbelică; este asociat cu numele teoreticianului radical Vladimir (Ze’ev) Jabotinsky³⁵, și a fost adaptat epocii actuale prin ideea că Israelul trebuie să aibă la granițe un sistem defensiv inexpugnabil, de care niciun inamic să nu treacă.³⁶

De asemenea, „Doctrina Begin”³⁷ se axează pe împiedicarea dobândirii de arme nucleare de către adversari ai Israelului, inclusiv prin lovituri preventive împotriva oricărui stat ostil din Orientul Mijlociu care ar încerca să obțină arme nucleare.³⁸ Astfel, Israelul a atacat instalații nucleare din Irak, Siria și, recent, din Iran.

Iar „Doctrina Dahiya”³⁹ permite lovituri militare devastatoare, disproporționate ca forță, asupra infrastructurilor și centrelor civile ale adversarului, dacă acesta participă la acțiuni ostile prin intermediul unor actori non-statali, grupări teroriste care atacă civilii israelieni. Se

urmărește distrugerea completă a infrastructurii din zonele controlate de inamic, fără a menaja civilii și descurajarea adversarilor de a continua agresiunea asimetrică.⁴⁰

Pentru Israel, Iranul este inamicul central, deoarece are o vastă rețea de actori proxy agresivi, rachete balistice și dezvoltă în secret un program nuclear de tip militar. În trecut, Israelul a fost atacat militar de vecini ostili, Egiptul fiind cel mai periculos. Israelienii nu au folosit niciodată arme nucleare, nici măcar în 1973 (când Egiptul și Siria l-au atacat prin sur-

prindere, în Războiul de Yom Kippur), dar nici în fața valurilor de rachete venite din Liban, Yemen sau Gaza. Nu știm ce s-ar fi întâmplat în situația în care armatele inamice arabe ajungeau la periferiile Ierusalimului și Tel Avivului, dacă decidenții israelieni ar fi autorizat în final lovituri nucleare. Proximitatea geografică ar determina propagarea efectelor letale și către populația israeliană. Comunitatea internațională consideră non-recursul la lovituri nucleare o linie roșie clară, lucru dovedit și în războiul dintre Rusia și Ucraina.

Tabel referitor la teoria rolurilor ca element explicativ al comportamentului de politică externă

Țara	Iran	Israel
Autopercepție a rolului propriu	Revoluționar, islamic, antiamerican și antisionist, apărător al musulmanilor din Orientul Mijlociu	Apărător al poporului evreu, al democrației, stabilizator regional
Atribuirea de rol celuilalt	Israelul este un agresor de tip colonial, ocupant ilegal al teritoriului palestinian.	Iranul este un stat „paria”, sponsor al terorismului Islamic, un pericol grav pentru evrei.
Îndeplinirea rolului	Sprijină proxy-uri precum Hezbollah, Hamas, Houthi; retorică anti-Israel, ocazional lovituri militare	Lovituri aeriene asupra Iranului și asupra activelor iraniene în Siria; lobby împotriva programului nuclear iranian
Conflict de roluri	Rolul Iranului de potențial „eliberator al Palestinei” versus imaginea Israelului ca refugiu sigur pentru evrei (și pentru arabii israelieni)	Israelul se vede ca descurajând o amenințare existențială (Iranul), ceea ce întărește narativul de „rezistență” al Iranului.

Asumarea unor roluri mutual opuse creează un cerc vicios autoalimentat, unde fiecare parte își confirmă constant, prin acțiunile sale, cele mai rele presupuneri despre cealaltă – un fel de blocaj reciproc al rolurilor, cu imposibilitate de a accepta mental ideea de compromis pozitiv. Compromisul devine sinonim cu trădarea.

Guvernele conduse de Benjamin Netanyahu: interes personal, interese de grup, interes național

Liderul naționalist-conservator și religios, Benjamin Netanyahu, este o figură politică extrem de controversată în Israel și la nivel

mondial, contra sa fiind emis un mandat de urmărire de către Curtea Penală Internațională pentru crime de război contra civililor palestinieni. Este cel mai longeviv prim-ministru israelian, reușind să se mențină la putere și în prezent, după ce a câștigat alegerile din noiembrie 2022, iar Likud, partidul său de dreapta, guvernează în alianță cu partide ale dreptei ultrareligioase radicale, având o majoritate confortabilă în Knesset.⁴¹ Stânga moderată se află într-un declin evident, întregul spectru al forțelor politice de centru fiind în această situație.

Israelul are ca obiectiv major al securității naționale să își sanctuarizeze teritoriul și să își apere populația de atacuri din exterior și interior. Istoria i-a arătat că riscul cel mai mare este o invazie din partea unui stat sau a unei

coalitii de state ostile care i-ar anula complet dreptul la statalitate și ar deporta sau ucide populația. Însă, în ultimele decenii, teama de un atac nuclear a devenit la fel de importantă, adversarii fiind, pe rând, cei care puteau obține asemenea arme și aveau intenții ostile: Siria, Irak, apoi Iran.⁴² Supraviețuirea națiunii este în centrul strategiei de securitate a Israelului, așadar un mediu de securitate periculos, „hobbesian,” unde cel slab este învins și eliminat. Normele care recunosc și apără suveranitatea statelor, prin Carta ONU, nu au valoare cu adevărat pentru Israel, care vede cum alte națiuni au fost agresate și uneori învinse fără a primi sprijin din partea ONU. Iar posesia nedeclarată a armelor nucleare este garanția că nu va fi atacat din exterior.

Netanyahu urmărește slăbirea (și uneori chiar distrugerea) adversarilor țării sale, statali și non-statali. Încă din 1992 a avertizat în Knesset că Teheranul va avea capacitatea de a construi arme nucleare în trei-cinci ani. Sub conducerea sa, Israelul a distrus o mare parte din structurile grupărilor teroriste transnaționale Hezbollah și Hamas; de asemenea, a contribuit la schimbarea de regim din Siria. În primăvara și vara anului 2025, trupe de comando israeliene au pătruns în Siria, creând o zonă de *buffer* în jurul graniței comune, de asemenea generând un „cordon de protecție” pentru comunitatea druză din Siria, pe care o protejează din motive umanitare, dar mai ales spre a beneficia de un aliat substatal de tip proxy contra Iranului și a Turciei. Ca să creeze o etanșizare a zonei, o protecție atât contra unor posibile atacuri ale gherilelor sunnite pro-Damasc, cât și a unor miliții šiite-alawite favorabile Iranului, Netanyahu este tentat să demilitarizeze și să controleze trei regiuni din sudul Siriei, securizând astfel complet platoul Golan, teritoriu sirian ocupat încă din 1967: Quneitra, Daraa și Sweida.⁴³ Druzii vor fi folosiți spre a face ca adversarii Tel Avivului să nu fie capabili să folosească regiunile respective ca un avanpost de atac. Tendințele de separatism teritorial ale druzilor și kurzilor sunt instrumentalizate de decidenții israelieni, care și-au atras simpatia acestor grupuri etno-religioase ce se opun tendinței de centralizare a puterii și uniformizare practică de noua conducere pro-sunnită a Siriei.

Evident, nemaicontrolând Siria (împreună cu Rusia), Iranul pierde capacitatea de a transporta arme, logistică și instructori către granițele Israelului, via Irak și Siria, ceea ce, implicit, îl determină să nu mai aibă contact terestru nici cu Liban, spre a ajuta Hezbollah.

Există opinia că dorința lui Netanyahu ca Israel să ocupe în final toată Cisiordania și să o declare teritoriu israelian, contrar rezoluțiilor ONU, ar destabiliza Iordania vecină, care are circa 60% din populație de origine palestiniană.⁴⁴ Dar Iranul ar putea profita de situație, spre a se infiltra într-o Iordanie slăbită și divizată politic. Pe viitor, Iordania, eventual cu un nou regim politic de tip radical islamic, ar putea ajunge un aliat *de facto* al Teheranului. Desigur, Arabia Saudită, Egipt și Turcia se opun unei asemenea evoluții și probabil ar interveni spre a o împiedica.

Percepția poate fi uneori la fel de importantă ca și realitatea în relațiile internaționale și studiile de securitate. Un stat poate reacționa la o amenințare percepută, chiar dacă ea nu este confirmată. Acest lucru poate duce la escaladări, conflicte de durată, poate facilita formarea unor alianțe noi. Majoritatea decidenților israelieni a considerat că Iranul a știut de atacul terorist palestinian din 7 octombrie 2023, când peste o mie de militanți palestinieni au luat prin surprindere Israelul într-un atac neanticipat de Tel Aviv, ucigând peste 1.200 de persoane și răpind 250. Cercurile politice conservatoare din Israel și SUA au sugerat că Teheranul ar fi sprijinit indirect sau „încurajat” atacul prin sprijin logistic pe termen lung, deoarece el era sponsorul principal al Hamas. Chiar dacă este posibil ca în realitate liderii iranieni să nu fi știut de planificarea și desfășurarea acestui atac⁴⁵, ei au fost acuzați că l-au facilitat și că au căutat să beneficieze de pe urma lui. Cert este că imediat după 7 octombrie 2023, Teheranul a accelerat programul de construire a armelor nucleare, pe măsură ce Israelul reușea să anihileze o mare parte din capacitățile de luptă ale mișcărilor proxy aflate în serviciul Iranului.⁴⁶ Pentru că așa-zisa „Axă a rezistenței” s-a mobilizat imediat contra Israelului, mai ales forțele proxy din Liban, Yemen, Irak, Siria, iar Teheranul a încurajat grupările Hamas, Hezbollah, Houthi să lovească ținte din Israel. De aceea, liderii

israelieni au perceput Iranul ca fiind cel care a inițiat un război multi-front, în timp ce el a rămas în afară, neimplicat direct.⁴⁷ Iranul nu a putut transmite în mod credibil mesajul că nu a avut nicio implicare, el fiind un beneficiar al ridicării la luptă a unor grupări non-statale sau parastatale sunnite și šiite contra Israelului. Nici afirmația liderilor săi că nu ar urmări să producă vreodată arme nucleare, ci doar energie, nu este luată în serios de israelieni. Singurul motiv rațional pentru care Teheranul ar fi putut încerca să împiedice escaladarea acestui conflict ar fi fost teama pentru supraviețuirea propriului regim în cazul unui atac israelian masiv asupra teritoriului național. Dar nu a funcționat acest calcul, deoarece acțiunile Israelului contra aliaților proxy ai Teheranului au fost numeroase, cu rezultate spectaculoase, ceea ce a provocat panică în rândul establishmentului iranian.

Pe de altă parte, factorii de decizie din Israel nu pot accepta ca Iranul să aibă arme nucleare, de aceea își anunță intenția de a ataca preventiv spre a împiedica această evoluție considerată catastrofală. Există o tradiție a acestor lovituri israeliene contra unor reacitoare nucleare ale Siriei și Irakului. De aceea, decidenții de la Teheran s-au pregătit pentru această posibilitate, îngropând la mare adâncime instalațiile de cercetare și producție nucleară. Regimul teocratic de la Teheran nu poate renunța ușor la tentativele de înarmare nucleară, după ce Tratatul JCPOA (*Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action*) a fost abandonat de SUA în 2018. Solicitarea de garanții de securitate extrem de generoase ar fi fost condiția *sine qua non* pentru a abandona efortul de nuclearizare, dar niciun actor extern important nu i-a oferit aceste garanții după anul 2018.

Așadar, Iranul a ripostat militar în iunie 2025, dar a anunțat cu puțin timp înainte, pe diverse canale, că urma să facă acest lucru, spre a permite Israelului să minimizeze impactul loviturilor, și a afirmat că a distrus foarte multe ținte spre a da satisfacție pe plan intern populației și *hard liners*-ilor.

La rândul său, Israelul știe că se poate baza pe SUA în caz de necesitate, ca *last defender*, dacă adversarul i-ar copleși sistemul defensiv. De aceea, replica Israelului a fost una moderată, lovind doar anumite ținte industriale și

militare, nu zone civile. Nici persoana ayatollahului Khamenei nu a fost vizată prin lovituri precise de rachetă sau dronă. Israelul se bazează pe numeroase sisteme antirachetă și anti-dronă sofisticate. Dar în acest conflict militar Tel Avivul a epuizat o mare parte din stocurile de rachete antirachetă și rachete ofensive de care dispunea. De aceea, ajutorul SUA exprimat prin trimiterea de muniții de artilerie și rachete a fost decisiv.

În conformitate cu teoria securității ontologice, premierul Israelului a consolidat în cadrul identității și rolului asumat de stat noțiunea de lovire preemptivă a adversarului existențial, de aplicare a doctrinei zidului de fier chiar prin asumarea de riscuri foarte mari. Securitatea națională se bazează pe gesturi decisive, care reconfirmă identitatea și descurajează inamicul.⁴⁸ Trebuie spus că conducerea politică a Israelului, și în mod special Netanyahu, dorea atacarea Iranului încă din 2016, dar planul era ca SUA să efectueze atacul prima, ajutată eventual de armata israeliană, iar Israelul să beneficieze de eliminarea celui mai puternic adversar. O strategie de *buck-passing* în grila teoriei neorealiste a relațiilor internaționale.⁴⁹ În perioada în care cei cinci membri permanenți ai CS al ONU, alături de Germania, au semnat acordul JCPOA cu Iranul, prin care acesta accepta să renunțe la nuclearul în scop militar spre a dezvolta doar capacități civile, Tel Avivul și-a manifestat din plin neîncrederea și, alături de Arabia Saudită și EAU, a urmărit constant ca acest tratat să eșueze, iar Iranul să fie supus strategiei de *containment*, mai ales, din nou, sancțiunilor economice.⁵⁰ Netanyahu nu a avut încredere în tratatul JCPOA de renunțare, prin care Iranul se angaja că nu va procura arme nucleare și că se va mulțumi cu instalații nucleare civile controlate de AIEA⁵¹, și nici în onestitatea elitelor politice iraniene, de aceea el și cercul său politic au militat pentru denunțarea acestui acord și l-au influențat pe Donald Trump în acest sens.⁵² Și-a atins obiectivul când SUA a părăsit acest tratat.

Există două mari riscuri pentru Israel din partea Iranului: un atac nuclear masiv (doar dacă și după ce va obține câteva arme nucleare) și continuarea/intensificarea agresiunii indirecte prin actorii de tip proxy din statele vecine. A doua amenințare s-a concretizat

deja, în mod repetat, iar Israelul a putut să intervină substanțial contra forțelor *proxy* pro-iraniene, reducându-le drastic capabilitățile de luptă. Faptul că Iranul a acceptat, pe 9 septembrie 2025, să reia negocierile cu AIEA nu este suficient spre a sugera dorința unui compromis real, deoarece nu a declarat că va permite inspecții la siturile sale nucleare. Astfel că, pe 29 septembrie, au fost reintroduse de către ONU sancțiuni la adresa Teheranului, pentru activități nucleare ilicite, ceea ce va îngreuna suplimentar situația economică a populației și statului. Sancțiunile fuseseră eliminate odată cu semnarea tratatului JCPOA în 2015. Rămâne de văzut dacă conducerea statului va decide ieșirea din acordul de neproliferare nucleară (NPT), așa cum a amenințat, asumându-și un nivel de marginalizare și mai mare.⁵³

Pe de altă parte, Israelul, sub conducerea lui B. Netanyahu, a efectuat atacuri cu rachete asupra unor ținte din mai multe state arabe, în numele dreptului la autoapărare, de pildă Yemen, Siria, Qatar. Lovirea unei clădiri unde se aflau negociatori ai Hamas în capitala Qatarului, pe 10 septembrie 2025, soldată cu victime, a constituit o violare a dreptului internațional, fiind o formă de agresiune și o nerespectare a instituției diplomatice ca atare. Asemenea acțiuni fac ca lumea arabă, preponderent sunnită (strada arabă), să simpatizeze în prezent mai degrabă cu Iranul, în ciuda adversității identitare clasice dintre sunniți și šiiti, vechi de sute de ani. Iranul nu atacă militar ținte din state arabe, prin surprindere, ci recurge uneori la metode subversive, indirecte, spre a elimina sau slăbi anumiți adversari, ceea ce provoacă, în lumea arabă, mai puțină indignare, însă destulă suspiciune.

Concluzii

Cele două state, Israel și Iran, sunt prinse într-o spirală a ostilității reciproce, bazată pe identități și roluri mutual ostile, de tip joc de sumă nulă. Teoria securității ontologice și cea a rolului ne permit să punem accentul pe percepțiile și psihologia liderilor, pe formarea identității lor politico-strategice.⁵⁴ Khamenei și Netanyahu se detestă reciproc, se prezintă unul pe altul ca adversari existențiali și se jus-

tifică pe plan intern prin raportarea la celălalt ca alteritate malefică. Conducerile politice ale celor două state se legitimează prin afirmarea stării de pericol generată reciproc, prin ostilitate mutuală, așteptări de continuare a războiului din umbră (uneori devenit conflict militar deschis), ceea ce blochează tentativele de a începe un proces negociat de pace. Este un pattern ce poate fi caracterizat foarte bine prin sintagma de „cultură a anarhiei hobbesiene” (Wendt), în care teama e firească între națiuni și violența e legitimă.⁵⁵ Atât la nivelul străzii, cât și la cel al elitelor politico-militare și religioase, se perpetuează imaginea de adversitate extremă față de celălalt stat. Alteritatea malefică este folosită de leadershipuri ca metodă de justificare a propriilor acțiuni, fie ele și imorale sau ilegale, pe plan intern și extern. Iranul și Israelul sunt exemple tipice de state care adesea nu respectă rezoluțiile Adunării Generale a ONU. Teoria securității ontologice completată de cea a concepției rolului național sugerează că schimbarea de rol necesită modificări profunde fie în concepțiile interne (ex: discursul elitelor, identitatea națională), fie la nivelul așteptărilor externe (ex: realinieri regionale sau globale). Episoadele de război cald din perioada 2024-2025 au potențat autoasumarea activă a teoriei rolului național de către ambele elite politice, permițându-le să capete mai multă legitimitate în ochii propriilor națiuni, în momente în care anumite decizii de politică internă le făcuseră destul de nepopulare în ochii multor conaționali. Violența a devenit o rutină și un mod normal de a interacționa cu „celălalt”, iar renunțarea la aceasta și căutarea unui compromis cu adversarul ar genera o fază de anxietate profundă, de ieșire din rutină și zona de confort. De exemplu, Acordurile Abraham au reprezentat o schimbare în asumarea rolurilor de către unele state arabe (trecând de la solidaritate sporită cu Palestina la cooperare regională cu Israelul). Iranul a perceput acest lucru ca pe o trădare, ceea ce i-a întărit propriul rol autoasumat. Radicalismul conducerii politice israeliene face ca statele arabe să se teamă mai mult de Israel decât de Iran, inversând un pattern istoric, mai ales că SUA nu mai pare dornică să se implice activ pentru modelarea arhitecturii de securitate din Orientul Mijlociu, cu excepția unor lovituri militare

precise și masive. Iar Iranul este apropiat politic de Rusia și China, țări față de care statele arabe au interese economice puternice. Aceste state arabe nu privesc cu ochi buni o hegemonie regională a Iranului, dar nici una a Israelului, preferând o balanță de putere constantă, bazată pe negocieri și compromis.⁵⁶

Cum SUA rămâne principalul protector al Israelului, iar Trump și-a scos țara din acordurile JCPOA, apoi chiar a bombardat Iranul în iunie 2025 ajutând Tel Avivul, decidenții de la Teheran asociază strâns cele două state și foarte probabil consideră că Washingtonul dorește ca Israelul să devină hegemon regional și împreună să continue politica de *containment* față de Iran, scopul final fiind schimbarea de regim și scoaterea sa de pe axa revizionistilor (deci separarea de China, Rusia etc.).

O traumă, un șoc major ar putea produce modificarea identităților strategice ale liderilor sau înlocuirea acestora cu alții mai concilianți, cu condiția ca și națiunile să fie favorabile unor compromisuri și negocieri. Teoria securității ontologice postulează existența unor identități alternative (*second-best identities*) la care actorii statali pot recurge în cazul unui eșec major în asumarea primeia.⁵⁷ Așadar, dacă Iranul și-ar modera retorica revoluționară, sau dacă elitele israeliene și-ar schimba accentul de la confruntarea regională, ar fi teoretic posibilă o schimbare reciprocă de rol, trecerea la relații non-conflictuale, dar aceasta ar necesita transformări majore de identitate și așteptări, rezultat al schimbărilor majore în clasa politică și chiar în tipul de regim politic. Schimbarea de regim politic și noile elite politice ar putea fi un factor esențial de asumare a unor noi identități și roluri naționale, care să permită o reconciliere istorică, după modelul Egiptului care, în anii '70 ai secolului trecut, a recunoscut Israelul și a pus capăt conflictului de durată cu acesta.

Note

¹ Vezi Nicholas Carl, „The Reshaping of Iran's Axis of Resistance”, <https://www.aei.org/articles/the-reshaping-of-irans-axis-of-resistance/>, 10 decembrie 2024.

² Tradiția religioasă specifică šiismului duodeciman, religia oficială a Iranului, menționează un al doisprezecelea Imam, zis Cel ascuns (Muhammad al Mahdi/Mehdi), despre care se afirmă că, atunci când va reapărea, va conduce o luptă sacră pentru victoria globală a islamului, existând tradiții care afirmă că Ierusalimul va fi „eliberat”. Ayatollahul Khamenei este considerat de iranieni un fel de loțiitor al lui Mahdi („naqib al-a'imma”), iar în speech-urile sale apar uneori referințe la acest personaj și la misiunea sa sacră. Imamul ascuns mai este denumit Imam-e Asr (Imamul Vremurilor) și Sahib az Zaman (Domnul Timpului). Ayatollahul le cere credincioșilor iranieni să nu aștepte pasivi revenirea lui Mahdi, ci să acționeze constant spre a pregăti înfrângerea definitivă a dușmanilor islamului, printre care Israelul este considerat unul dintre cei mai importanți. Mistica šiită axată pe revenirea lui Mahdi este folosită așadar spre a legitima lupta actuală a Iranului contra Israelului și scopul distrugerii acestuia. Planurile de înarmare nucleară ale Teheranului sunt considerate și mai periculoase de către cei care cred că religia influențează semnificativ deciziile de politică de securitate. Cu toate acestea, decizii precum atacarea unor ținte din Israel în 2025, bombardarea unor ținte din Pakistan în ianuarie 2024 sau relațiile cu China și Rusia sunt bazate preponderent pe geopolitică, calcule de putere și pragmatism. Vezi Michael A. Youssef, „Why Iran's nuclear theology left Israel no choice”, <https://www.premierchristianity.com/opinion/why-irans-nuclear-theology-left-israel-no-choice/19616.article>, 20 august 2025 și M. Moezzi, „Khamenei's Obsession with the Mahdi”, https://www.huffpost.com/entry/khameneis-obsession-with_b_218333, 25 mai 2011.

³ S. Von Hein, „Why are Iran and Israel sworn enemies?”, <https://www.dw.com/en/iran-israel-attacks-hezbollah-ayatollah-ali-khamenei-islamic-revolution/a-68780605>, accesat pe 13 iunie 2025.

⁴ Louis Imbert, Ghazal Golshiri și Liselotte Mas, „How Israel tracked down and assassinated scientists involved in Iran's nuclear program”, www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/07/08/how-israel-tracked-down-and-assassinated-scientists-involved-in-iran-s-nuclear-program_6743166_4.html, 8 iulie 2025.

⁵ Jennifer Mitzen, „Ontological Security in World Politics: State Identity and the Security Dilemma”, în *European Journal of International Relations*, vol. 12(3), 2006, p. 341-370. Pionierul acestei teorii a securității ontologice, prin prisma psihologiei, este considerat David R. Laing (psiholog scoțian), în cartea sa din anul 1965, *The Divided Self: An*

Existential Study in Sanity and Madness, Londra: Penguin Books. El a inventat sintagma și a caracterizat starea respectivă ca fiind situația în care un individ uman își manifestă identitatea și autonomia față de ceilalți, fără a se simți în pericol, fără a trăi o stare de anxietate sporită. Ulterior, J. Huysmans a folosit conceptul în relațiile internaționale, urmat de alți politologi și teoreticieni. Vezi J. Huysmans, „Security! What Do You Mean? From Concept to Thick Signifier”, *European Journal of International Relations*, 1998, 4 (2): 226-255. De asemenea, Brent J. Steele, *Ontological Security in International Relations. Self-Identity and the IR State*, Routledge, 2008.

⁶ A. Zarakol, „Ontological (In)Security and State Denial of Historical Crimes: Turkey and Japan”, *International Relations*, 24 (1), 2010, p. 3-23. Vezi p. 6.

⁷ *Idem*, p. 342.

⁸ Marijke Breuning, „Role Theory Research in International Relations: State of the Art and Blind Spots,” în S. Harnisch, C. Frank, H.W. Maull (eds.), *Role Theory in International Relations: Approaches and Analyses*, Londra, Routledge, 16-35, 2011.

⁹ Vezi, de exemplu, Irma Dutra Gomes de Oliveira, Pedro Labriola, „Role Theory como terceira via nas Relações Internacionais”, Monções: Revista de Relações Internacionais da UFGD, vol. 8, nr. 15, 2019, p. 73-102.

¹⁰ Michael Rubin, *Dancing with the Devil: The Perils of Engaging Rogue Regimes*, Encounter Books, 2014, p. 8.

¹¹ Nicholas Carl, Brian Carter, „How Iran Plans to Destroy Israel”, <https://www.aei.org/articles/how-iran-plans-to-destroy-israel/>, 23 mai 2024. Aceștia afirmă că Teheranul se bazează pe mai multe elemente în strategia de anihilare a statului evreu: atacuri terestre în Israel comise de grupări proxy și blocarea comerțului israelian prin acțiuni agresive în Marea Mediterană efectuate de vase ale Gardienilor Revoluției. Iranul ar dori să elimine atât prezența SUA cât și pe cea a Israelului din ceea ce consideră a fi sfera sa de influență.

¹² Un sondaj efectuat de publicația *The Jerusalem Post* în august 2025 arată că doar 36% dintre israelieni erau mulțumiți de guvernarea lui Benjamin Netanyahu, iar 59% se declarau nemulțumiți. Vezi Moshe Cohen, „Netanyahu, Zamir's spar over Gaza operations leaves IDF chief as winner in the public eye – poll”, *The Jerusalem Post*, 17 august 2025, (<https://www.jpost.com/israel-news/politics-and-diplomacy/article-864395>) citat de Raluca Moldovan, Cum a fost Donald Trump scos din joc, în decizia de a lovi Qatar – interviu cu M. Grădinaru, [https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/politica/cum-a-fost-donald-](https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/politica/cum-a-fost-donald-trump-scos-din-joc-in-decizia-de-a-lovi-qatar-interviu-12-septembrie-2025)

[trump-scos-din-joc-in-decizia-de-a-lovi-qatar-interviu, 12 septembrie 2025.](https://spotmedia.ro/stiri/politica/cum-a-fost-donald-trump-scos-din-joc-in-decizia-de-a-lovi-qatar-interviu-12-septembrie-2025)

¹³ Vezi argumente de acest tip expuse de Ras Zimmt, „Reassessing Fundamental Concepts in Iranian Policy Against the Background of the War in Gaza” – INSS, <https://www.inss.org.il/strategic-assessment/iranian-policy/>, 24 iulie 2024. Acest autor este de părere că ayatollahul Khamenei în general a dat dovadă de o abordare rațională, precaută și pragmatică față de Israel, evitând să îl confrunte direct până în aprilie 2024. Destructurarea Hezbollah și a altor grupuri proxy va determina Iranul să acționeze mai des singur în viitor, asumându-și riscuri mai mari, dacă va percepe un sprijin mai consistent din partea Rusiei și Chinei, și un recul strategic al SUA în Orientul Mijlociu.

¹⁴ Michael Rubin, *op. cit.*, p. 3-10.

¹⁵ Este vorba de utilizarea unui *computer worm* (troian) care a fost infiltrat în sistemul electronic al centralei de la Natanz și a sabotat laboratorul unde se încerca separarea uraniului 235 prin atacarea sistemului de control și monitorizare. Documentele publicate ilegal de Edward Snowden arată că acest virus a fost conceput de Israel și SUA. Unitatea 8200 din Israel este cea care planifică și desfășoară asemenea atacuri cibernetice. De asemenea, troianul Flamer a fost probabil utilizat de aceeași unitate. În acest fel au fost sabotate terminale petroliere iranien în 2012. Acest troian a fost descoperit și în Siria, Liban, Arabia Saudită etc. Edward N. Luttwak, Eitan Shamir, *The Art of Military Innovation. Lessons from the Israel Defense Forces*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 2022, p. 216, 217.

¹⁶ Există dovezi că susținători ai regimului de la Teheran au îndemnat decidenții să nu mai ezite și să atace Israelul în forță, spre a evita decredibilizarea. Vezi S. Von Hein, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ Visualising 12 days of the Israel-Iran conflict, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/6/26/visualising-12-days-of-the-israel-iran-conflict>, accesat pe 3 martie 2025.

¹⁸ Daniel Myers, „Europe's Takeaway from the Israel-Iran War: Offense Is Still the Best Defense”, www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/europes-takeaway-from-the-israel-iran-war-offense-is-still-the-best-defense/, accesat pe 20 septembrie 2025.

¹⁹ „Israel is likely to launch another war with Iran before December – perhaps even as early as late August. Iran is expecting and preparing for the attack. It played the long game in the first war, pacing its missile attacks as it anticipated a protracted conflict. In the next round, however, Iran is likely to strike decisively from the outset,

aiming to dispel any notion that it can be subdued under Israeli military dominance". Trita Parsi, *The Next Israel-Iran War Is Coming*, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/08/11/israel-iran-war-trump-nuclear-august-december/>, 11 august 2025.

²⁰ Fariba Parsa, „Iran Cannot Support the Two State Solution”, https://www.realclearworld.com/articles/2025/09/27/iran_cannot_support_the_two_state_solution_1137558.htm, accesat pe 30 septembrie 2025.

²¹ *Idem*, Ultima zi a sărbătorii religioase Ramadan este celebrată în Iran prin marșuri populare dedicate Zilei Quds, unde manifestanții cer distrugerea Israelului.

²² Vezi Murat Cingöz, Fulya Özkan, Yavuz Selim Alkan & Ramazan İzol, „Iran's axis of resistance through the lens of ontological security”, *Third World Quarterly*, 17 septembrie 2024, DOI: 10.1080/01436597.2024.2398613

²³ *Ibidem*, „The Islamic Republic's opposition to a Palestinian state beside Israel is not a mystery; it is baked into its revolutionary DNA and regional strategy. A two-state solution would strip Tehran of its ideological mantle, weaken its proxy networks, and hand the narrative of Palestinian advocacy to its Arab rivals”.

²⁴ E. Van Veen, H. Azizi, „Playing with Fire: Patterns of Iranian-Israeli Military Confrontation”, 25 iunie 2024, <https://warontherocks.com/2024/06/playing-with-fire-patterns-of-iranian-israeli-military-confrontation/>.

²⁵ A. William Samii, „Iran's Guardians Council as an Obstacle to Democracy”, *Middle East Journal* (Autumn 2001): 644–646, în Ray Takeyh, *Guardians of the Revolution, Iran and the World in the Age of the Ayatollahs*, Oxford University Press, 2009, p. 208.

²⁶ Said Amir Arjomand, „The State and Khomeini's Islamic Order”, *Iranian Studies* 13 (1980), p. 155.

²⁷ De pildă atacul cibernetic cu virusul Stuxnet din 2010, care a afectat grav centrala nucleară iraniană de la Natanz, a fost atribuit de cei mai mulți experți SUA și Israelului, deși acestea nu au recunoscut. Este un exemplu de acțiune de război din umbră (*shadow war*), asimetric, dar extrem de distrugător.

²⁸ Alex Vatanka, „Khamenei thinks he can ride this out”, https://foreignpolicy.com/2025/09/11/iran-khamenei-snapback-israel-war/?utm_content=gifting&tpcc=gifting_article&gifting_article=aXJhbi1raGFT-ZW5laS1zbmFwYmFjay1pc3JhZWwtd2Fy&pid=PNIN DdWCfrkgws3, 11 septembrie 2025.

²⁹ *Idem*, „And instead of pushing harder for a diplomatic breakthrough while talks still sput-

ter along, many officials in Tehran are clinging to the illusion that China and Russia will rescue Iran from Western pressure. That is hope, not strategy. And it leaves Iran's fate in the hands of powers that have repeatedly shown they will never risk much on Tehran's behalf”.

³⁰ Experții în strategie militară din Israel se referă uneori la scenariul denumit „Samson Option” (וְשֵׁם שִׁמְשׁוֹן, *b'rerat shimshon*), anume dacă Israelul ar fi în pragul distrugerii sau cuceririi de către adversari, ar răspunde cu toată forța nucleară disponibilă, chiar dacă asta ar putea duce la distrugere reciprocă. E o strategie mai ales contra adversarilor non-nucleari, de aceea Israelul depune orice efort și își asumă riscuri mari pentru ca niciun stat potențial inamic din regiune să nu aibă arme atomo-nucleare. Adversarii trebuie să știe că Israelul este dispus să accepte propria distrugere odată cu a acestora, precum a făcut biblicul personaj Samson. Sintagma respectivă a fost popularizată de jurnalistul Seymour Hersh, în cartea sa din 1991, *The Samson Option: Israel's Nuclear Arsenal and American Foreign Policy*. Vezi A. Dilawar, „The Samson Option: Israel's Plan to Nuke Its Opponents”, <https://progressive.org/latest/the-samson-option-israelis-plan-to-nuke-its-opponents-dilawar-20240624/>, 24 iunie 2024. Se estimează că Israelul are circa 90-100 de capete nucleare și destul plutoniu pentru 200 de bombe.

³¹ *Idem*, „The Samson Option is not designed to deter a nuclear adversary from a first strike or counter strike – Israel is the only nuclear-armed state in the region. Rather, its purported purpose is to ensure Israel's survival. Under the Samson Option, nuclear weapons would be deliberately used against a non-nuclear adversary as a last resort to prevent an Israeli defeat”.

³² Acest lucru le permite să blocheze în CS al ONU încadrarea faptelor lor de agresiune ca fiind agresiune, așadar ONU nu poate interveni în sprijinul națiunilor atacate.

³³ Iranul a decis să îmbogățească uraniu în 1985, în timpul războiului contra Irakului, dar abia în 2006 a anunțat că a reușit să îmbogățească acest element radioactiv pentru prima dată. De semnalat că primul reactor de cercetare nucleară din Iran a fost instalat în 1967, cu ajutorul SUA, care a livrat tehnologie și a instruit experți iranieni.

³⁴ Edward N. Luttwak, Eitan Shamir, *The Art of Military Innovation. Lessons from the Israel Defense Forces*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge, Massachusetts, London, 2022, p. 34.

³⁵ E. Van Veen, H. Azizi, *art. cit.*

³⁶ Politician, scriitor și militant evreu născut în Imperiul Rus. Fondator al curentului sionist revizionist, opus celui politic moderat al lui Theodor Herzl. A trăit între 1880 și 1940. Vladimir Jabotinsky, deși respecta arabii palestinieni și nu dorea expulzarea acestora, ajunsese la concluzia că statul evreiesc nu se putea construi decât prin forța armelor, nu prin negocieri pașnice, așadar prin crearea unei armate israeliene mai puternică decât cele ale vecinilor arabi. În opinia sa, fără superioritate militară, proiectul sionist nu putea reuși. Acest „Zid de fier” (*The iron wall* – titlul unui articol al său din 1923) urma să descurajeze și chiar să anihileze atacurile arabilor asupra noului stat. Odată stabilită dominația evreiască asupra țării, se puteau negocia garanții de drepturi civile pentru arabii palestinieni. De semnat că tatăl premierului Netanyahu, Benzion, a fost secretar personal al lui Jabotinsky. Menahem Begin a fost și el inspirat de ideile acestuia. V. Jabotinsky a pus așadar bazele unei direcții de politică de extremă dreapta în Israel, opusă celei dominante în primele două decenii de existență a noului stat, de centru stânga, asociată cu personalitatea lui David Ben Gurion. În acest fel s-au dezvoltat cele două mari partide, Laburist și Likud. Laburiștii au dominat viața politică din Israel între 1948 și 1977. Vezi Daniel Gordis, *Israel. A concise history of a nation reborn*, Ecco, 2016, p. 230.

³⁷ De la numele lui Menachem Begin, fost prim-ministru al Israelului și fondator al Partidului Likud. Doctrina apărării preemptive contra celor ce vor să posede arme nucleare a fost concepută în 1981.

³⁸ David Bastardo Martínez, „Israel’s Iran Policy Endgame: How Begin Doctrine Shaped the Netanyahu Era”, <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/israels-iran-policy-endgame-how-begin-doctrine-shaped-the-netanyahu-era/>, 10 iulie 2025.

³⁹ De la numele unui cartier al Beirutului, bombardat de aviația israeliană în campania din 2006, în cel de-al doilea război al Libanului.

⁴⁰ Este vorba de descurajarea prin distrugere. Vezi Fouad Gehad Marei, „Dahiya Doctrine”, în J.K. Zartman (Ed.), *Conflict in the Modern Middle East: An Encyclopedia of Civil War, Revolutions, and Regime Change*, 2020, p. 75-76. ABC-CLIO. Doctrina a fost structurată în anul 2008 prin câteva articole publicate de strategii militari din cadrul IDF.

⁴¹ Benjamin Netanyahu a fost prim-ministru în mai multe rânduri: 1996-1999 (primul mandat), 2009-2021 (al doilea și cel mai lung mandat continuu), 2022-prezent (al treilea mandat). În total, el a acumulat deja 17 ani la conducerea guvernului

israelian, depășindu-l pe fondatorul statului, David Ben-Gurion, care a stat în funcție aproximativ 13 ani.

⁴² Unele cercuri de securitate din Israel consideră și Turcia și chiar Pakistan ca potențiali adversari, fiind țări unde Islamul joacă un rol important în politică.

⁴³ Kamran Bokhari, „Jordan and the Next Middle Eastern War”, *Geopolitical Futures*, <https://geopoliticalfutures.com/jordan-and-the-next-middle-eastern-war/>, 4 septembrie 2024.

⁴⁴ Annexation of the Jordan Valley: Implications for the Two-State Solution and Regional Stability, <https://poca.org/2025/09/annexation-of-the-jordan-valley-implications-for-the-two-state-solution-and-regional-stability/>, 29 septembrie 2025.

⁴⁵ Mukul Sharma, „US intelligence says Iran ‘did not orchestrate nor had foreknowledge’ of October 7 attacks”, www.wionews.com/world/us-intelligence-says-iran-did-not-orchestrate-nor-had-foreknowledge-of-oct-7-attacks-699432?utm_source=chatgpt.com, 12 martie 2024.

⁴⁶ D. Horovitz, „Israel was facing destruction at the hands of Iran”, www.timesofisrael.com/israel-was-facing-destruction-at-the-hands-of-iran-this-is-how-close-it-came-and-how-it-saved-itself, 30 iunie 2025.

⁴⁷ Erwin Van Veen, Hamidreza Azizi, *art. cit.*, p. 4.

⁴⁸ Vezi Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self-Identity: Self and Society in the Late Modern Age*, Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991.

⁴⁹ *Buck passing* (www.oxfordreference.com/display/10.1093/acref/9780199670840.001.0001/acref-9780199670840-e-1616), strategie prin care un stat evită să își asume direct povara contracaraării unui alt stat ostil sau a unei grupări non-statale, determinând o altă țară să facă acest lucru, prin metode de persuasiune, lobby, oferi de avantaje economice etc.

⁵⁰ Vali Nasr, „Iran’s Roads Not Taken”, *Foreign Affairs*, septembrie/octombrie 2025, volum 104, nr. 5, p. 132.

⁵¹ Agenția a declarat în mai multe rânduri că Iranul a încălcat Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (CSA) și a raportat către CS al ONU.

⁵² Vezi mai ales David Remnick, „Israel’s Zones of Denial”, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2025/08/04/israels-zones-of-denial>, 28 iulie 2025.

⁵³ Darya Dolzikova, Snapback: Iran’s Nuclear Programme and Crisis of Legitimacy, <https://www.rusi.org/explore-our-research/publications/commentary/snapback-irans-nuclear-programme-and-crisis-legitimacy>, 30 septembrie 2025. Este

probabil ca Rusia și China să nu respecte sancțiunile, ceea ce va permite Iranului să facă comerț și să importe tehnologii necesare economiei sale, precum și armament.

⁵⁴ J. Mitzen, *op. cit.*

⁵⁵ Alexander Wendt, *Social Theory of International Politics*, Cambridge University Press, 1999, p. 264-266. Denumirea provine de la numele filosofului britanic Thomas Hobbes (1588-1679), unul dintre fondatorii teoriei clasice a contractului social. Plecând de la descrierea Leviathanului (metaforă pentru stat) de către acesta, teoreticianul construc-

tivist A. Wendt a dedus trăsăturile principale ale culturii anarhiei de tip hobbesian: caracterul primordial al supraviețuirii, mai ales prin efort propriu (*self-help*), utilizarea forței ca act legitim, violența ca aspect normal al relațiilor interstatuale, nerezunoașterea reciprocă a suveranității de către state, lipsa de încredere și teama statelor față de celelalte state, ceea ce determină o stare permanentă de vigilență și pregătire pentru război. Nimeni nu se simte în siguranță.

⁵⁶ D. Remnick, *op. cit.*

⁵⁷ J. Mitzen, *op. cit.*, p. 347.

From Convention to Contestation: The Evolving Concept of Prisoner of War in the Aftermath of the 2022 Russian Invasion of Ukraine

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ABSTRACT

The article examines the evolving interpretation and practical implications of the concept of prisoner of war (POW) within the legal framework established by international humanitarian law, which is the Third Geneva Convention. Focusing on the illegal and unjustified war of the Russian Federation against Ukraine in 2022, the analysis concentrated on how the notion of POW has been subject to complex reinterpretations. The different facets of this concept will be analysed taking into account the hybrid and the high-intensity nature of the conflict, in order to identify and critically assess the main emerging challenges that could potentially threaten to undermine established international norms governing the protection of POWs.

Keywords: prisoner of war, Ukraine, Russian Federation, Third Geneva Convention, international humanitarian law, foreign fighters

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After the Russian invasion of Ukraine on 24 February 2022, a significant emotional, strategic, and geopolitical impact was felt worldwide by both belligerents and supporter camps¹, emerging from this unjust and unprovoked war. The different strategic and ideological views of the war among the combatants highlight the complex causes of the different disputes, in terms of security and defence.

In unjust war, intentional killing, torture and inhumane treatment, along with deliberately depriving a prisoner of war (POW) of the right to a fair trial, constitute reasons for the contrast between the regulation of the POW

status in international humanitarian law and its devaluation in practice without moral and mutual protection – an aspect that indicates the need to rethink the international instruments of deterrence, monitoring and sanction.

Within this framework, what is nowadays the meaning of a prisoner of war? Over the past years, this concept has embodied different interpretations, but after the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, we identify particular nuances that compel us to examine all facets of this concept.

This study aims to investigate the current status and meaning of this concept, from a

comparative and interdisciplinary perspective. Given the fact that this issue has received minimal attention in the literature, the philosophy and ethics of war in present times require a new interpretation of the status of prisoners, taking into consideration the exercise of power to conquer and to dominate.

The POW framework in the 21st century continues to remain limited to a definition that offers a considerable margin of interpretation². Protecting POWs remains essentially conditional on how it serves the interests of the detaining authority³, to the extent that their inhumane or degrading treatment constitutes an expression of unjust war, devoid of basic ethics. We identify the line between just and immoral war captivity in relation to the purpose for which it is used: a protective measure by which the POWs' further participation in the war is prevented and an instrument of punishment and revenge⁴.

The 2022 invasion of Ukraine marked a turning point in post-Cold War history that has shown the entire world that peace in Europe is no longer guaranteed and the global order is fragile, taking into account the aggressive war of conquest by the Russian Federation. Within this context, it is interesting to observe how the POW concept and status have evolved in an unjust war, in relation to the philosophical, ethical and social coordinates. For researchers and practitioners alike, this approach could be useful because it might offer a new perspective on the interpretation and understanding of international humanitarian law, as it is designed in relation to the central concept of POW. To capture the complexity and essence of the new POW concept and status in the 21st century, this research will simultaneously refer to the strategic, diplomatic and legal dimensions.

In order to define the concept and the status of prisoner of war nowadays, we need to first understand the evolution of the meaning in order to see what are the main challenges and new dimensions of the concept and practice of the POW status, after the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

The main hypothesis of this research captures a relation between the POW framework and the interests of the holding authority in exercising and exposing its power, by applying

selective ethics that exclusively serve the fulfilment of its own interests. Unconditional compliance by warring parties with the principles of reciprocity and protective parity relates to the treatment of POWs in terms of the strategic interests of war without limits.

The POW becomes a tool of negotiation, of deterrence of participation in the enemy camp, of intelligence gathering, of punishment and revenge. POW capture and detention with limited maintenance resources and high security standards reflects the primary dimension of philosophy, sociology and law of unjust war, and removes the guarantee of basic and effective protection for POW.

These aspects could also highlight the limited dimension of international humanitarian law, whose regulation regarding the provision of minimum protection to POWs remains restricted to just war, in which the belligerents respect basic and reciprocal standards of capture, detention and release of prisoners during the war. In case of an unjust war, we need to rethink the concept based on the realities on the ground and the particularities of the conflict.

The concept of POW in the 21st century needs to be focused on narrowing the interpretation of its status and on making international monitoring, control and sanctioning tools more effective. The new challenges of unjust war offer the possibility to debate and adopt a new architecture of international humanitarian law that will impose new standards for development – now and in the future.

The POW is defined in international law by the *Third Geneva Convention*⁵ in 1949 (one of the four treaties of the Geneva Conventions), with a particular reference to the basic rights of wartime prisoners. Initially adopted in 1929 and revised in 1949, this Convention provides a clear definition on the humanitarian protection for prisoners of war. It is important to note that both the Russian Federation and Ukraine are parties to this Convention and have thus legal obligations to grant POW status to captured enemy combatants and provide the protections outlined in the Convention.

The definition of the prisoner of war is provided by Article 4 that outlines all specific categories of POW who “have fallen into the power of the enemy”⁶:

“(1) Members of the armed forces of a Party to the conflict as well as members of militias or volunteer corps forming part of such armed forces.

(2) Members of other militias and members of other volunteer corps, including those of organized resistance movements, belonging to a Party to the conflict and operating in or outside their own territory [...]

(3) Members of regular armed forces who profess allegiance to a government or an authority not recognized by the Detaining Power.

(4) Persons who accompany the armed forces without actually being members thereof, such as civilian members of military aircraft crews, war correspondents, supply contractors, members of labour units or of services responsible for the welfare of the armed forces [...].

(5) Members of crews, including masters, pilots and apprentices, of the merchant marine and the crews of civil aircraft of the Parties to the conflict, who do not benefit by more favourable treatment under any other provisions of international law.

(6) Inhabitants of a non-occupied territory, who on the approach of the enemy spontaneously take up arms to resist the invading forces [...].”⁷

Therefore, these are all categories of POW that meet the criteria set in international humanitarian law. Either a member of armed forces, or a member of militias or volunteer corps have the legal rights of a POW.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) mission to monitor respect for the human rights of POWs in Ukraine after the outbreak of war reported violations of the international humanitarian law (IHL) and international human rights law (IHRL) at every stage of captivity (capture, internment and repatriation). It is relevant to analyse the periodic reports by OHCHR that outline the most important human rights developments in Ukraine⁸. We can see that the POWs did not benefit from increased protection and appropriate conditions of internment, and were exposed to initiating criminal prosecution procedures for participating in hostilities, without benefiting from a fair trial. OHCHR identified various patterns of belligerent reporting to IHL and IHRL fol-

lowing the documentation and cross-checking of individual POW cases, depending on the cooperation and openness of national authorities in allowing OHCHR access to official places of internment (full and confidential in interviews carried out with POWs from the Ukrainian side, confined and supervised only in the preventive detention facility from the Russian Federation).

Thus, the treatment of POWs by the Russian Federation has led to serious violations of IHL and IHRL that may constitute war crimes as a result of the summary executions of POWs at the time of capture, their use as human shields, the death of wounded prisoners as a result of torture, their ill-treatment during interrogations and lack of proper medical care, looting of the prisoners' possessions, as well as evacuation in inhumane conditions. Contrary to IHL obligations, POWs were interned in prisons administered or occupied by Russian power, where they were exposed to widespread and persistent violations (torture and inhumane treatment by electrocution, beatings, sexual abuse and forced nudity, inadequate detention conditions, inadequate diet and medical care, forced labour, gender discrimination and complete isolation from the support environment). The Ukrainian soldiers captured by the Russian army in Mariupol benefited from a different treatment, and their negotiated surrender took place in the presence of international observers. Meanwhile, in the case of Russian soldiers captured in Ukraine, OHCHR documented – following interviews with POWs – cases that may constitute war crimes (summary executions), violations of IHL and IHRL (torture, ill-treatment, stabbings, the so-called “welcome beatings” at the penal colony in Dnipro, inadequate conditions of admission and placement in detention facilities)⁹.

The latest periodic report (1 December 2024 - 31 May 2025) shows an increase in conflict-related violence compared to the previous year, following the military operations of the armed forces of the Russian Federation. With regard to the POW situation, it is outlined that violations continued and the “Russian Armed Forces executed at least 35 captured Ukrainian soldiers during the reported period”¹⁰. The report describes also the situation of the released

Ukrainian prisoners of war who “provided detailed accounts of recent use of torture and ill-treatment, including sexual violence, and dire detention conditions in facilities managed by the Russian Federation and confirmed previous findings of widespread and systemic use of torture and ill-treatment”¹¹. There were also brutal videos widely disseminated via social media with soldiers from the Ukrainian armed forces that were captured, mutilated, exposed to torture, sexual violence and even death.

Therefore, we can observe that there are already established patterns of such inhuman treatment of Ukrainian POWs by the Russian Federation, which are not in accordance with the POW international legal framework. Besides torture and ill-treatment, the Russian authorities increased pressure on Ukraine also by executing its captured military personnel, and even by prosecuting of Ukrainian POWs on terrorism-related charges¹².

As we observe that in the war in Ukraine there are involved different combatants, apart from the Ukrainian and Russian Armed Forces, such as international volunteers and foreign fighters, private military contractors and militias, there is a certain ambiguity referring to their status. Thus, the status itself of the POWs might become debatable in such cases. Both sides have captured such combatants and their status was disputed, taking into account that, when being captured, they were treated like mercenaries, not like POWs. The study case will expose a similar situation in order to better understand the complexities of this war.

Case study: foreign fighters sentenced to death (June 2022)

Russia’s offensive in Mariupol led to the capture of 1,026 Ukrainian and foreign servicemen from the 36th Detached Marine Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine who voluntarily laid down their arms on 13 April 2022, according to Russian authorities¹³.

In the Ukrainian army in the 36th Detached Marine Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine in Mariupol, the Donetsk Region, there were also some volunteers and foreign

fighters, among which it is relevant to note the presence of Brahim Saadoune (Moroccan citizen, born in 2000, settled in Kyiv in 2019 for studies), Shaun Pinner (British citizen, born in 1973) and Aiden Aslin (British citizen, born in 1994). They were subsequently charged with forcible seizure of power or retention of power (Article 323 of the “Criminal Code of the DPR”), participation in an armed conflict or hostilities as a mercenary (Article 430) and promotion of training in terrorist activities (Article 430). Found guilty of violent seizure of power and overthrow of the constitutional order, Saadoune, Pinner and Aslin were sentenced to death on 9 June 2022¹⁴ by the self-proclaimed “Donetsk People’s Republic” (“the DPR”).

Amnesty International condemned the separatist court’s decision on 9 June 2022, considering it a flagrant violation of international law¹⁵. On the one hand, Amnesty International highlighted the prisoner of war status applied in accordance with the Geneva Conventions, as the three were enlisted in the Ukrainian regular military forces. With the exception of charges of war crimes, they are protected from prosecution for participation in hostilities. The OHCHR highlighted that in the war in Ukraine, foreign fighters who were enlisted in the Ukrainian army defended the port city of Mariupol, which is why they should not be considered mercenaries and enjoy the same rights as other combatants, recognised in international humanitarian law.

On the other hand, Amnesty International criticised the arbitrary deprivation of life based on an unfair decision and procedure that was not based on sufficient admissible evidence and the provision of a fair trial. “The DPR” was not recognised as an independent and impartial court. As occupying power, the Russian Federation was accused of violating international humanitarian law by intentionally depriving prisoners of war of a fair and regular trial¹⁶.

On 16 June 2022, the European Court of Human Rights (ECHR) applied interim measures to the death sentences imposed by “the DPR”. In the case of *Saadoune v. Russia and Ukraine* (application no. 28944/22), under Article 39 of the Rules of Court, the ECHR

indicated that there was a real risk of irreversible harm as a result of the decision to sentence Saadoune to death¹⁷. The case was judged by the ECHR in relation with the prisoners of war rights, being established the responsibility of the Russian Federation not to implement the death penalty and the need to ensure the prisoner of war adequate conditions of detention, medical care and access to necessary medicines in order not to violate Articles 2 (right to life) and 3 (prohibition of inhumane or degrading treatment) of the Convention.

On 27 June 2022, in the cases of *Pinner v. Russia and Ukraine* (no. 31217/22)¹⁸ and *Aslin v. Russia and Ukraine* (no. 31233/22)¹⁹, the ECHR reiterated its established jurisprudence in the case of *Saadoune v. Russia and Ukraine* (application no. 28944/22)²⁰.

The actions of the Russian Federation against the captured and detained persons were condemned by Amnesty International, the ECHR and the OHCHR, as constituting war crimes.

On a large scale, after the outbreak of the war in Ukraine, over 16,000 foreign volunteers fought on the side of Ukraine (of which 60-70 French citizens, 70-80 Croats, 400 Swedes, 1,000 Germans, 5,000 Polish fighters based on estimates)²¹, the issue of legal protection of foreign fighters being brought into discussion, in the situation where the Russian Federation did not recognise their status of prisoner of war. The position of the Russian Federation was presented, in May 2022, by Russian Defence Ministry spokesman, Igor Konashenkov, who categorised foreign fighters as mercenaries²². In the absence of an internationally agreed legal definition of foreign fighters and the specific regime applied to them, legal gaps overlapped with the political options of the combatants. ONCHR (2023) reported that foreign fighters captured in the war in Ukraine were exposed to illegal detention, torture, ill-treatment and sexual violence, with their political and civil rights being affected²³.

On 22 September 2022, the international law issue was politically resolved following the prisoner exchange. Saudi Arabia mediated the transfer of 10 foreign fighters which were fighting on the side of Ukraine (five UK citizens, two US citizens and one each of Morocco, Cro-

atia and Sweden) in the United Arab Emirates. They were part of the POW exchange between Russia and Ukraine (215 Ukrainian army soldiers, 55 Russian soldiers and Viktor Medvedchuk – a pro-Russian politician with close personal ties to Vladimir Putin)²⁴. The POWs exchange was a political action, which was followed by the organization of the pseudo-referenda in the occupied territories (the so-called Donetsk and Luhansk People's Republics and the partially occupied Kherson and Zaporizhzhya oblasts). For Ukraine, the recovery of the soldiers from the 36th Detached Marine Brigade of the Armed Forces of Ukraine represented a reaffirmation of the firm position and a response to the opposition's criticism regarding the failure of the operation to surrender Mariupol. For the Russian Federation, the significance of this political move stemmed from the close relationship between Vladimir Putin and Viktor Medvedchuk, taking into account that the latter's knowledge of irregularities in the management of funds allocated to the operation to destabilise Ukraine by the Russian intelligence services²⁵.

The Geneva Conventions and the ECHR jurisprudence have not served as effective tools to ensure the right to a fair trial and adequate conditions of detention for POWs. Foreign fighters have been called "mercenaries" and thus, their POW status has not been recognised. The OHCHR report (2023) highlighted and condemned the use of torture and inhumane and degrading treatment during the deprivation of liberty and the transfer of prisoners of war²⁶. The postponement of the implementation of death sentences was driven by political implications, to the detriment of the legal ones. The release of foreign fighters in the exchange of soldiers was not followed by international efforts to condemn the Russian Federation for the establishment and activity of the DPR, as well as for the failure to respect the POW status of these combatants.

Conclusions

Given the conceptual framework outlined above, how can the current status of prisoners of war be characterised?

If we were to outline the lessons learned from the Russian war in Ukraine from the point of view of POWs, there are several issues that need to be taken into account.

First, we observe that the specific context of this conflict provides a clear delimitation between the legal definition of the status, protection and treatment of POWs and the realities on the ground that seem not to respect the international legal framework covered by the Third Geneva Convention.

Thus, the meaning of the concept has been challenged in terms of treatment of POWs. Article 13 of the Convention states clearly that “Prisoner of war must at all times be humanely treated. Any act or mission by the Detaining Power causing death or seriously endangering the health of a prisoner of war in its custody is prohibited, and will be regarded as a serious breach of the present Convention.”²⁷ As we have already exposed above, there are particularities that show the brutal treatment and torture of POWs by the Russian Federation, sometimes resulting in death. It is clear that there is a breach of the extensive protection measures stated in the Third Geneva Convention. Moreover, we notice that taking into account the release of different videos, Article 13 also refers to the protection of POWs “against acts of violence or intimidation and against insults and public curiosity”²⁸. Or, since the Russian invasion of Ukraine, there have been videos showing soldiers who were captured and tortured. Thus, both sides of the conflict have exposed POWs publicly, potentially for reasons of propaganda and political pressure.

These forms of treatment are prohibited by the international humanitarian law and constitute “war crimes” and, as it is also recently pointed out in the press statement by the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on Ukraine, in March 2025: “The Commission examined a growing number of incidents in which the Russian Armed Forces killed or wounded Ukrainian soldiers who were captured or attempted to surrender. This constitutes a war crime.”²⁹ Moreover, it is also stated that it is a “coordinated state policy”³⁰.

Second, the situation on the ground shows that prisoners of war are treated in this conflict as political tools by both sides. On one

side, the Russian Armed Forces have released videos showing the ill-treatment of Ukrainian soldiers, which is prohibited under the international legal framework and demonstrates the politicisation of prisoners of war, who are being used as tools to delegitimise the Ukrainian military forces. On the other side, the Ukrainian Armed Forces have publicly released interviews with captured Russian POWs³¹, in order to present evidence of Russia’s war crimes and influence the morale of soldiers involved in the war.

Third, the case study revealed that the status of POWs in the war in Ukraine is sometimes contested and challenged taking into account the presence of different categories of combatants and the grey zone in the international legal context in this regard. The case study presented a tragic situation in 2022, in which some captured foreign fighters enrolled in the Ukrainian Armed Forces were not treated as POWs by the pro-Russian forces from the self-declared Donetsk People’s Republic, but were rather labelled mercenaries. They were tried and sentenced to death, which serves as further evidence that the Geneva Conventions might not have been respected.

In a Machiavellian perspective of the Russian war in Ukraine, the situation on the ground could be understood in terms of the core principle “the end justifies the means”. We observe that the focus is on power, and all actions taken by both sides are justified by the ultimate goals of maintaining power, on one side and expanding power, on the other side. The question of morality is being challenged. Along with all efficient, practical and effective actions and measures, and even strategic deception, propaganda, disinformation and cruelty, if these serve the national interests, pragmatism prevailed against morality and ethical values. The war itself becomes a political tool, not necessarily an ultimate resort, but a very calculated instrument in order to achieve the ultimate goals.

In the context of the Russian war in Ukraine, the notion of prisoners of war has been instrumentalised as a political tool within broader power struggle. Their legal and normative status is increasingly contested, particularly in light of the hybrid nature of the conflict, which

also exposes the fragility of the international norms when confronted with a war marked by both hybridity and extreme brutality.

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POLITICA DE SECURITATE A ROMÂNIEI

România și motivațiile nerecunoașterii Kosovo

George-Alin OPREA

ABSTRACT

This article aims to assess the reasons why Romania does not recognise Kosovo's independence, alongside four other EU members. By analysing Romania's positions on Kosovo's independence over time, this study finds that there are three main reasons for such a stance: the violation of international law if Kosovo's independence were recognised, the fear that this move would be considered a precedent by the Hungarian minority in Romania, who aims to obtain the autonomy of the Székely Land, and the fear that Kosovo's recognition might be used by Russia to recognise Transnistria. While this study finds that Kosovo's recognition depends more on political and not legal reasons – thus not placing too much emphasis on the international law reason – the arguments regarding the emergence of a precedent for the Székely Land and Transnistria are not valid, since Kosovo and the Székely Land/Transnistria are each very different cases. In this light, Romania's stance is vulnerable in the context of the constant pressure exerted by other states to recognise Kosovo, especially since Kosovo's path to the EU is blocked by the non-recognition policy of the five EU states that do not recognise Kosovo as an independent state, with Romania being one of them.

Keywords: European Union, Kosovo, international law, non-recognition, precedent, Romania, Székely Land, Transnistria

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Pe 17 februarie 2008, fosta provincie a Serbiei, Kosovo, și-a declarat unilateral independența. Ulterior, aceasta a fost recunoscută de majoritatea statelor occidentale, grupate în NATO și Uniunea Europeană, iar astăzi Kosovo se bucură de recunoașterea a mai mult de jumătate din statele lumii¹. Așa cum am precizat însă, nu toate statele membre ale NATO și UE recunosc Kosovo drept stat suveran și independent. În Uniunea Europeană, cinci state continuă să se opună recunoașterii Kosovo și să aibă o poziție diferită față de cea a aliaților occidentali ai acestora: Grecia, Spania, Slovacia, Cipru și România, fiecare având propriile motivații și raportându-se la Kosovo în mod diferit.

Deși nu recunosc oficial Kosovo, Grecia și Slovacia au adoptat o poziție moderată și

întrețin un anumit tip de relație cu autoritățile de la Priștina. De partea cealaltă, Spania și Cipru au adoptat cea mai dură poziție vizavi de nerecunoașterea Kosovo, datorată problemelor separatiste cu care se confruntă cele două state din Catalonia și Ciprul de Nord. În acest peisaj, țara noastră se plasează undeva la mijloc între cele două grupări de state aflate la extreme, adoptând o atitudine oscilantă, dar uneori pragmatică și lucrând cu partenerii din UE pentru găsirea unor soluții practice. Astfel, deși România a participat la procesul emiterii opiniei Curții Internaționale de la Haga cu privire la declarația unilaterală de independență, unde a pledat împotriva, aceasta nu s-a opus aderării Kosovo la o serie de organizații internaționale² și nici dezvoltării unor legături mai strânse între Priștina și Bruxelles.³

Deși au trecut 17 ani de la declarația de independență a Kosovo și poziția României nu s-a schimbat, subiectul rămâne unul de interes în actualul context geopolitic. Kosovo, împreună cu alte cinci state din Balcanii de Vest – Serbia, Muntenegru, Bosnia și Herțegovina, Albania și Macedonia de Nord – are ca obiectiv integrarea în Uniunea Europeană. Spre deosebire însă de acestea, Kosovo are de parcurs cel mai dificil drum către acest obiectiv, în prezent având doar statutul de potențial candidat, în contrast cu vecinii săi care au obținut statutul de candidat sau au deschis negocierile de aderare. În cazul Kosovo există atât factori obiectivi, cât și subiectivi care explică această rămânere în urmă. Din punct de vedere tehnic, Kosovo este departe de a îndeplini criteriile de aderare (criteriile de la Copenhaga), fosta provincie sârbă confruntându-se în primul rând cu mari dificultăți economice, însă decisiv pare a fi factorul politic. Uniunea Europeană a avertizat Serbia și Kosovo că viitorul lor european depinde de normalizarea relațiilor dintre ele, iar un factor care contează la fel de mult este vetoul exprimat de cele cinci țări membre care nu recunosc Kosovo. Pentru ca statul Kosovo să parcurgă toate etapele acestui proces (oferirea statutului de candidat, deschiderea negocierilor de aderare etc.) este nevoie de unanimitate în rândul statelor membre. Astfel, fără recunoașterea independenței sale de către toate statele membre UE, viitorul european al Kosovo rămâne incert, iar procesul de integrare europeană a Balcanilor de Vest, incomplet.

În aceste condiții, pentru a elimina vetoul pe care aceste cinci state îl opun recunoașterii Kosovo, țările care au recunoscut Kosovo exercită presiuni atât asupra Serbiei, pentru a-și normaliza relațiile cu Kosovo, cât și asupra grupului de cinci state amintite mai sus. Marea Britanie, spre exemplu, primul stat care a recunoscut Kosovo și unul dintre cei mai vocali susținători ai Priștinei pe arena internațională, a lansat un apel⁴ prin care cere membrilor ONU care încă nu au recunoscut Kosovo „să se alătore majorității”, adăugând că „recunoașterea (Kosovo - n.a.) este esențială pentru stabilitatea pe termen lung și valorificarea întregului potențial al Kosovo”. Nu este prima dată când Marea Britanie a făcut un apel de acest fel. Cu

ocazia emiterii avizului consultativ al Curții Internaționale de Justiție, șeful diplomației britanice, William Hague, a salutat avizul care „confirmă faptul că declarația de independență a Kosovo nu încalcă dreptul internațional” și care „îi încurajează pe cei care nu au recunoscut până acum Kosovo, să o facă”, subliniind unicitatea cazului Kosovo și faptul că nu instituie un precedent⁵. De asemenea, Parlamentul European a adoptat de-a lungul timpului mai multe rezoluții, ultima, din 7 mai 2025, îndemnând „cele cinci țări care nu au recunoscut încă independența Kosovo, să facă acest lucru fără întârziere, permițându-i astfel să avanseze pe calea sa către UE pe picior de egalitate cu celelalte state candidate”, reamintindu-se de „avizul consultativ al Curții Internaționale de Justiție din 22 iulie 2010, în care se afirmă că declarația de independență a Kosovo nu încalcă dreptul internațional general”⁶.

Se poate observa, așadar, că Marea Britanie leagă recunoașterea Kosovo de stabilitatea acestui stat și a regiunii Balcanilor de Vest, în general, iar Parlamentul European atrage atenția celor cinci țări asupra nevoii ca statele din Balcanii de Vest să beneficieze de șanse egale în procesul de integrare europeană, proces care, începând din 2022, constituie din nou o prioritate pentru Uniunea Europeană (după agresiunea Rusiei împotriva Ucrainei) și, deci, o oportunitate unică pentru statele din Balcanii de Vest. Statele din vestul Uniunii Europene vor exercita în continuare presiuni asupra statelor care încă nu au recunoscut Kosovo, astfel încât motivațiile acestora și nerecunoașterea independenței Kosovo vor rămâne de interes. România, ca stat care a adoptat o atitudine echilibrată între grupul statelor de linie dură care nu recunosc Kosovo și a celor care au adoptat o atitudine moderată, constituie în acest sens un caz potrivit pentru a fi analizat.

Poziționarea României față de problema Kosovo de-a lungul timpului. Motivațiile României

Pentru a identifica și analiza motivațiile României, este necesară o trecere în revistă

a poziționării României față de problematica Kosovo de-a lungul timpului.

În contextul crizei din Kosovo din 1999, România, țară aspirantă la statutul de membră NATO, la cererea alianței, și-a deschis spațiul aerian pentru aeronavele NATO care bombardau RFI, declarând, totodată, că respectă suveranitatea și integritatea teritorială a vecinului său⁷. Conflictul s-a încheiat cu retragerea trupelor sârbe din Kosovo, provincie care a fost pusă sub administrarea ONU, conform Rezoluției 1244 a Consiliului de Securitate al ONU din 10 iunie 1999. Timp de șase ani, discuțiile cu privire la provincia Kosovo, cerute de Rezoluția 1244, au fost amânate. Abia în 2005, comunitatea internațională a demarat acest proces, iar toate semnalele sugerau că se va finaliza cu independența Kosovo, soluție care nu a fost primită cu entuziasm la București. Pe parcursul următorilor ani, România și-a exprimat în mod clar îngrijorarea în legătură cu acest subiect și consecințele pe care această soluție le-ar putea avea.

În noiembrie 2005, cu ocazia unei vizite la Paris, Traian Băsescu, președintele României, a prezentat președintelui Franței, Jacques Chirac, un proiect privind provincia Kosovo și viitorul său statut, bazat pe principiul nemodificării granițelor Kosovo, implicarea UE în soluția de stabilitate și „nevoia de a nu face pași greșiți în Balcani”⁸. Președintele român a adăugat că motivul pentru care România se implica în dezbateră era nevoia de a nu se „greși” în Balcanii de Vest, atenționând că „dacă în momentul de față se ia o decizie inacceptabilă pentru zonă, riscăm să revenim la conflicte armate”⁹. În cadrul aceleiași vizite, președintele român s-a plâns presei franceze de faptul că Franța nu ar fi interesată de zona Mării Negre, o zonă de interes pentru România datorită existenței pe teritoriul Republicii Moldova a conflictului înghețat în Transnistria. Acest subiect s-a regăsit, de asemenea, pe agenda discuțiilor bilaterale. La final, Traian Băsescu conchidea că „Franța rămâne o țară puternic implicată atât în problemele de securitate din Balcanii de Vest, dar și cu un interes crescând, un interes deosebit pentru zona Mării Negre”¹⁰. Se poate observa faptul că România încerca să includă problemele din Kosovo și cele din zona extinsă a Mării Negre referitoare la conflictele înghe-

țate, în special cel din Transnistria, sub aceeași umbrelă. Cu alte cuvinte, din perspectiva României, modul de rezolvare a problemei din Kosovo putea influența securitatea în zonele de conflict înghețat din spațiul ex-sovietic.

La finalul anului 2005, au apărut indicii că Rusia ar putea folosi independența Kosovo ca precedent în conflictele înghețate în care era implicată¹¹. Un document Wikileaks din 2006 dezvăluie faptul că România era îngrijorată în legătură cu aceste comparații făcute de Rusia în cazul transnistrean¹². Tot în aceeași perioadă, tema precedentului Kosovo a ajuns subiect de discuție între președintele României, Traian Băsescu, și președintele Republicii Moldova, Vladimir Voronin. Cu ocazia întrevederii din 10 decembrie 2005, dintre cei doi șefi de stat, președintele României a declarat:

„Vă pot spune că, în acest sens, am avut o discuție foarte lungă și cu secretarul de stat Condoleezza Rice, legat de soluția pentru Kosovo. Noi nu vedem o soluție care ar putea să fie de alt tip decât cea pentru Transnistria. Din acest motiv, România a considerat că trebuie să aibă o abordare în avangarda soluțiilor care se vehiculează, pentru că în Kosovo trebuie să se creeze un precedent favorabil rezolvării problemei transnistrene, din punct de vedere al comunității internaționale”¹³.

Această declarație dovedea încă o dată preocuparea României pentru rezolvarea problemei din Kosovo, dar făcea, în același timp, în mod explicit, legătura dintre cele două conflicte.

În cadrul unei conferințe de presă din 17 februarie 2006, Traian Băsescu s-a referit din nou la problema Kosovo, subliniind din nou că „nici o soluție, fie că discutăm despre Kosovo, unde Europa are o experiență, fie că discutăm despre alte zone, nu poate să fie în favoarea unei singure părți”¹⁴ și a insistat pe problema precedentului, explicând că „soluția Kosovo nu poate fi aplicată oricărei zone de conflict înghețat”¹⁵.

În anii care au urmat, poziția României a devenit din ce în ce mai critică la adresa soluției independenței. Dacă în perioada 2005-2006, președintele Băsescu cerea oficialilor SUA să întârzie acordarea independenței, la mijlocul lui 2006 România propunea o soluție negociată care să ofere Kosovo autonomie, nu independență, soluție care, în 2007, era deja respinsă

categoric¹⁶. În acel an, Traian Băsescu declara că „România va pleda, în continuare, pentru o soluție negociată, acceptabilă ambelor părți, din solidaritate cu toate statele pentru care precedentul Kosovo ar putea reprezenta un precedent nefast”¹⁷. Tot în acel an, președintele României se referea din nou, explicit, la Kosovo și Transnistria: „Eu nu vreau ca România să creeze precedentul, în Kosovo, pentru Transnistria”¹⁸.

Un alt aspect asupra căruia România s-a pronunțat este respectarea principiului fundamental al integrității teritoriale, care nu ar mai putea fi respectat dacă Belgradului i s-ar impune recunoașterea secesiunii Kosovo, iar ideea potrivit căreia o decizie unilaterală trebuie evitată și soluția la problema Kosovo trebuie să fie luată cu acordul ambelor părți a fost reiterată de oficialii români de-a lungul timpului. Totodată, România a respins preeminența drepturilor colective ale minorităților în fața drepturilor individuale¹⁹, iar președintele Traian Băsescu declara că independența Kosovo nu are temei legal și că se împotrivesc ideii potrivit căreia Serbia și-ar fi pierdut dreptul de a-și restabili suveranitatea în Kosovo²⁰.

Ca reacție la declarația unilaterală de independență a Kosovo din 17 februarie 2008, Parlamentul României a adoptat o declarație prin care respingea recunoașterea independenței provinciei și arăta că „eventuala recunoaștere de către alte state a independenței unilateral declarate nu poate fi interpretată ca un precedent pentru alte zone și nici drept recunoaștere sau garantare a drepturilor colective pentru minoritățile naționale”²¹. De asemenea, Parlamentul declara că „nu sunt întrunite condițiile pentru ca noua entitate să fie recunoscută”²².

În 2009, România și-a expus opinia cu privire la independența Kosovo în cadrul deliberărilor de la Curtea Internațională de Justiție care trebuia să emită un avis consultativ cu privire la această chestiune²³. Argumentele României s-au bazat pe prevederile dreptului internațional care interzic secesiunea, pe rezoluțiile Consiliului de Securitate care prevăd respectarea integrității teritoriale a Serbiei și pe faptul că orice soluție în acest caz trebuie agreată atât de Belgrad, cât și de Priștina²⁴. În ceea ce privește ideea potrivit căreia statutul de regiune autonomă pe care

Kosovo îl avea în cadrul Republicii Socialiste Federative Iugoslavia ar justifica secesiunea, România a contrazis-o, argumentând că data de referință care trebuie luată în considerație este 17 februarie 2008, când Kosovo era parte a Serbiei și nu a Republicii Socialiste Federative a Iugoslaviei care și-a încetat existența în 1992²⁵. Mai departe, România s-a referit la dreptul la autodeterminare, subliniind că, în afara contextului colonial, acesta se poate exercita doar prin componenta sa internă, adică în cadrul oferit de statul în care acea minoritate se află²⁶.

La 22 iulie 2010, Curtea Internațională de Justiție a emis avizul consultativ prin care constata că declarația unilaterală de independență a Kosovo nu încalcă nici dreptul internațional și nici prevederile rezoluției Consiliului de Securitate al ONU din 1999. Cu toate acestea, și în ciuda așteptărilor, România nu și-a schimbat poziția. Ministerul Afacerilor Externe a emis un comunicat prin care constata faptul că judecătorii Curții au analizat, „cu caracter limitativ, numai legalitatea actului propriu-zis de a face o declarație de independență, dar nu și consecințele juridice ale acesteia, adică problema legalității constituirii unui pretins nou stat”²⁷, acest lucru datorându-se „modalității formulării întrebării de către Adunarea Generală a ONU, ce nu a permis Curții să abordeze problema pe fond”.

Acestea au fost de-a lungul timpului cele mai importante luări de poziție ale statului român față de problema recunoașterii independenței Kosovo. Din analiza acestora, se pot distinge trei principale motivații care au stat la baza raționamentului României, și anume: problema respectării dreptului internațional, evitarea creării unui precedent și a unui imbold pentru cererile autonomiste ale comunității maghiare din România și evitarea unui precedent pentru Transnistria.

Respectarea dreptului internațional

Așa cum am observat în luările de poziție ale României cu privire la independența Kosovo, o parte dintre argumente vizează chestiuni legale, din sfera dreptului internațional. Este

vorba de respectarea principiului integrității teritoriale a Serbiei, de inoportunitatea aplicării în cazul Kosovo a principiului autodeterminării și de nelegalitatea actului de declarare a independenței Kosovo.

Susținerea puternică de către România a principiului integrității teritoriale a fost o constantă pentru București de-a lungul timpului. Fiind un stat care și-a desăvârșit unitatea statală prin unirea tuturor teritoriilor locuite de români și un stat de mărime medie, România a devenit un ferm susținător al supremației dreptului internațional și al principiilor sale²⁸. În contextul izbucnirii conflictelor separatiste din fosta Uniune Sovietică, România a sprijinit în mod constant integritatea teritorială a țărilor afectate, în special a Republicii Moldova, confruntată cu separatismul Transnistriei²⁹.

Pentru a vedea în ce măsură chestiunile invocate de România sunt valabile, este necesar să studiem avizul consultativ al Curții Internaționale de Justiție (CIJ) din 22 iulie 2010. Deși se spera ca acesta să clarifice definitiv controversata problemă a statalității Kosovo, judecătorii CIJ s-au mărginit să se canalizeze strict pe întrebarea adresată, fără a atinge alte chestiuni de importanță vitală. În secțiunea II a Avizului, dedicată scopului și înțelesului întrebării, judecătorii CIJ au fost de părere că: „în acest caz, întrebarea pusă de Adunarea Generală este clar formulată. Întrebarea este canalizată și specifică; Curtea este întrebată dacă declarația de independență este în concordanță cu dreptul internațional sau nu. Aceasta nu se referă la consecințele juridice ale declarației. În particular, nu întreabă dacă Kosovo a ajuns la statalitate sau nu”³⁰. O altă problemă ridicată de statele care au transmis prezentări scrise în fața Curții a fost dacă Kosovo are drept la secesiune ca remediu la gravele încălcări ale drepturilor omului. De asemenea, Curtea a refuzat să ia în discuție acest argument, motivând că nu are legătură cu întrebarea adresată, ci cu o altă temă, aceea a dreptului de separare față de un alt stat³¹.

În final, Curtea a decis că Declarația de Independență nu a încălcat nici dreptul internațional, nici prevederile Rezoluției Consiliului de Securitate 1244 (1999). Decizia

judecătorilor de a alege să analizeze dacă Rezoluția 1244 împiedică sau nu Kosovo să-și declare independența a fost luată având în vedere că la momentul declarării independenței, Kosovo încă se afla sub administrarea misiunii ONU, înființată în baza acestei rezoluții. Pentru a-și susține concluzia, judecătorii au argumentat că „dreptul internațional general nu interzice declarațiile de independență”³². În ceea ce privește Rezoluția 1244, Curtea a decis că aceasta „nu conținea prevederi cu privire la statutul final al Kosovo sau condițiile pentru atingerea acestuia”³³. Prin acestea, Curtea a concluzionat, de fapt, că simpla declarare a independenței, atât timp cât nu este în mod ilegal raportată la alte documente internaționale (lucru valabil în cazul Kosovo, având în vedere că Declarația Unilaterală de Independență nu a fost catalogată ca atare de vreo decizie ulterioară a Consiliului de Securitate), nu încalcă nicio prevedere internațională. Având în vedere că cea mai înaltă instanță juridică din lume a evitat să se pronunțe asupra statutului de independență al Kosovo, se poate spune că această problemă a fost mutată din sfera juridică în sfera politică. O asemenea interpretare a fost adusă în discuție de Hārūn al-Rashīd, fost ambasador la ONU, care a susținut că „în mod esențial, Curtea a spus că legitimitatea Kosovo va fi conferită mai degrabă de statele care vor recunoaște independența, decât de Curte”³⁴. În aceeași notă se înscrie și concluzia expertului James Ker-Lindsay, care a constatat că recunoașterea cazurilor de secesiune va fi decisă de comunitatea internațională.³⁵ Ceea ce contează cel mai mult în astfel de cazuri este *recunoașterea*³⁶.

În concluzie, chestiunea recunoașterii independenței Kosovo este una subiectivă, la fel ca utilizarea argumentelor din sfera juridică, care, luate izolat, nu pot determina dacă apariția statului Kosovo a fost legală sau nu. Dacă din perspectiva Curții Internaționale de Justiție, declarația de independență nu a încălcat principiul integrității teritoriale sau dreptul internațional în general, din perspectiva Serbiei, României și a altor state care nu recunosc Kosovo, apariția noului stat (chestiune diferită de emiterea declarației de independență) a încălcat integritatea teritorială a Serbiei.

Cereri de autonomie ale comunității maghiare

Al doilea motiv pentru care România refuză să recunoască independența Kosovo are legătură cu cererile comunității maghiare din România privind acordarea autonomiei pe criterii etnice. De altfel, singura forță politică din România care a salutat declarația unilaterală de independență a Kosovo a fost UDMR (Uniunea Democrată Maghiară din România)³⁷, formațiunea politică reprezentativă pentru comunitatea maghiară din România, al cărei program politic conține dezideratul obținerii autonomiei Ținutului Secuiesc.

Deși UDMR a încercat în acel moment să valorifice subiectul pentru a legitima pretențiile referitoare la autonomie, realitatea din Kosovo și cea din Transilvania nu permit realizarea unor paralele între cele două cazuri. În primul rând, istoricul conflictului din Kosovo relevă o situație cu totul specială. Aceasta a fost determinată de persecutarea etnicilor albanezi de către statul sârb, culminând cu violențele exercitate împotriva acestora în timpul Războiului din Kosovo (1998-1999) ce au generat o catastrofă umanitară cu sute de mii de refugiați. A urmat intervenția NATO și punerea sub administrarea ONU a provinciei Kosovo, iar în 2008 Kosovo și-a declarat independența. În contextul evenimentelor din Kosovo, o nouă normă de drept internațional s-a cristalizat, și anume secesiunea ca remediu (*remedial secession*)³⁸. Autorii acesteia argumentează că, în situația în care un stat nu asigură drepturile fundamentale tuturor cetățenilor săi, inclusiv membrilor minorităților etnice, sau exercită violențe împotriva acestora, comunitatea în cauză are dreptul la secesiune, ca formă de remediu față de persecuțiile la care a fost supusă. Observăm că nimic din toate acestea nu s-a întâmplat pe teritoriul României. Comunitatea maghiară din România, de la prăbușirea regimului comunist în 1989, își exercită deja dreptul la autodeterminare prin componenta sa internă. Acest lucru înseamnă că minoritatea maghiară din România participă la actul guvernării (prin delegarea reprezentanților săi în organele de conducere ale României) și se poate dezvolta din punct de vedere economic, social, politic și cultural.

Având în vedere toate acestea, o eventuală recunoaștere de către România a independenței Kosovo nu implică în niciun fel obligația României de a recunoaște autonomia Ținutului Secuiesc, cu atât mai puțin secesiunea acestui teritoriu față de România. Acest subiect este total diferit de cazul Kosovo și nu se încadrează în teza secesiunii ca remediu.

Conflictul transnistrean

Analizând luările de poziție ale oficialilor români în legătură cu independența Kosovo, se poate constata că preocuparea de a nu crea un precedent pentru Transnistria ocupă un loc central în argumentație. De altfel, acest lucru a fost observat și de către ambasadorul SUA la București într-o convorbire cu președintele Traian Băsescu, ambasadorul fiind surprins de cât de importantă este pentru președintele român chestiunea Transnistriei și subiectul mai larg al securității la Marea Neagră. Acesta și-a exprimat îngrijorarea legată de faptul că Rusia ar putea instrumenta o provocare în Moldova care ar necesita un răspuns militar din partea României, cu implicații majore pentru UE și NATO³⁹.

Și în acest caz, o simplă comparație a conflictului din Kosovo cu cel transnistrean relevă mai multe diferențe decât asemănări. În timp ce conflictul din Kosovo a fost declanșat de discriminarea la care erau supuși minoritarii albanezi de către Belgrad și de atacul la adresa identității albanezilor ce a culminat cu războiul din perioada 1998-1999, în timpul căruia s-au comis violențe pe scară largă împotriva civililor, ce a dus la o catastrofă umanitară, situația din Transnistria nu poate fi catalogată ca un exemplu de încălcare a drepturilor omului, iar conflictul nu a fost rezultatul urii interetnice dintre rusofoni și moldoveni.

În același timp, cele două cazuri sunt diferite și dintr-un alt motiv. În cazul Kosovo, a avut loc o implicare masivă a comunității internaționale, manifestată prin discutarea crizei la nivelul Consiliului de Securitate. Precipitarea evenimentelor în 1999 a dus la măsura fără precedent a suspendării exercitării de către Serbia a suveranității sale în Kosovo, ce a fost înlocuită cu administrarea militară și civilă a

ONU. Sub aceasta a avut loc dezvoltarea instituțiilor politice care au declarat independența în 2008, soluție recomandată și conținută chiar și în Planul Ahtisaari, rezultat al negocierilor conduse sub egida ONU. Spre deosebire de cazul Kosovo, în cazul conflictului transnistrean, implicarea comunității internaționale a fost mai redusă, procesul pentru reglementarea conflictului desfășurându-se sub auspiciile OSCE în baza principiului integrității teritoriale a Republicii Moldova, iar toate planurile de soluționare a conflictului, inclusiv Planul Kozak din 2003 ce prevedea federalizarea Republicii Moldova, aveau la bază acest principiu. Totodată, ca o consecință a slabei implicări la nivelul organizațiilor internaționale în soluționarea conflictului transnistrean, în acest caz misiunea de menținere a păcii nu are un mandat internațional, aceasta desfășurându-se doar în baza Acordului bilateral moldo-rus din 1992.

Nu în ultimul rând, un alt motiv pentru care „aplicarea” precedentului Kosovo în cazul Transnistriei nu este plauzibilă este însăși strategia Rusiei. Dacă în urma declarării independenței Kosovo, Rusia a recunoscut la rândul ei independența Abhaziei și Osetiei de Sud, utilizând teza precedentului Kosovo, Kremlinul nu are niciun motiv să facă același lucru în cazul Transnistriei, deoarece scopul este de a deține o părghie de control asupra Republicii Moldova, pe care Moscova ar pierde-o dacă ar recunoaște independența Transnistriei. În același timp, neavând graniță comună cu Transnistria (ca în cazul Abhaziei și Osetiei de Sud), Rusia nu ar putea susține eficient preținsul nou stat independent, mai ales în condițiile actuale determinate de războiul din Ucraina.

Concluzii

În urma acestui studiu, s-au putut desprinde motivele care au stat la baza deciziei României de a nu recunoaște Kosovo, precum și validitatea fiecăruia dintre acestea.

În ceea ce privește primul argument analizat, potrivit căruia o eventuală recunoaștere a independenței Kosovo ar constitui o încălcare a dreptului internațional, valoarea de adevăr a acestuia nu poate fi stabilită cu precizie. Acest lucru reiese din abordarea Curții Internaționale

de Justiție, în al cărei Aviz Consultativ din 2010 se constată că declarația de independență a Kosovo nu încalcă dreptul internațional fără a aborda aspecte conexe, și anume problematica statutului internațional al Kosovo, respectiv dobândirea calității de stat independent. Astfel, Curtea a lăsat în continuare la discreția statelor decizia de a recunoaște sau nu independența Kosovo, mutând problema din sfera dreptului internațional în cea a politicului.

În ceea ce privește celelalte două argumente invocate, referitoare la posibilitatea creării unui precedent pentru Ținutul Secuiesc și Transnistria, o simplă comparație între aceste două situații și cazul Kosovo relevă deosebiri fundamentale ce infirmă acest pericol. Cu alte cuvinte, o eventuală recunoaștere a independenței Kosovo nu poate fi folosită ca argument nici pentru justificarea pretențiilor de autonomie ale minorității maghiare din România, nici ca sursă de legitimare pentru independența Transnistriei.

În consecință, argumentația României împotriva recunoașterii Kosovo ca stat are anumite vulnerabilități, ceea ce o poate pune într-o situație și mai dificilă în contextul în care presiunile continuă să se intensifice asupra celor cinci state membre UE care nu recunosc Kosovo, însă este greu de crezut ca poziția României, constantă timp de două decenii, să se modifice în absența unui pretext. De aceea, pentru România, scenariul cel mai favorabil îl constituie o eventuală înțelegere între Serbia și Kosovo privind normalizarea efectivă a relațiilor dintre cele două părți, care să includă chiar o recunoaștere *de facto* a independenței Kosovo de către Serbia și ralierea României la această poziție comună.

Note

¹ Statul Kosovo susține că se bucură de recunoașterea a 119 state, în timp ce Serbia consideră că cifra reală este 84, susținând că unele state și-au retras între timp recunoașterea.

² I. Armakolas, J. Ker-Lindsay (eds.), *The Politics of Recognition and Engagement, EU Member State Relations with Kosovo*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham, Switzerland, 2020, p. 15, 16.

³ *Ibidem*, p. 174.

⁴ <https://www.gov.uk/government/speeches/the-uk-calls-on-member-states-who-have-not-yet-done-so-to-join-the-majority-and-recognise-kosovo-independence-uk-statement-at-the-un-security-council>, accesat în data de 23 octombrie 2025.

⁵ <http://www.fco.gov.uk/en/news/latest-news/?view=News&id=22581837>, accesat în data de 29 octombrie 2025.

⁶ Rezoluția Parlamentului European din 7 mai 2025 referitoare la rapoartele Comisiei privind Kosovo din 2023 și 2024 [A10-0075/2025], https://www.europarl.europa.eu/doceo/document/TA-10-2025-0094_RO.html, accesat în data de 29 octombrie 2025.

⁷ Declarația Parlamentului României adoptată în ședința plenară din data de 30 martie 1999, disponibilă la http://www.cdep.ro/pls/legis/legis_pck.hp_act_text?idt=33399, accesat în data de 31 octombrie 2025.

⁸ BBC Radio, *La Paris, convorbiri între președintele României, Traian Băsescu și președintele Franței, Jacques Chirac*, 21 noiembrie 2005.

⁹ *Ibidem*.

¹⁰ Radio France International, *Paris: convorbiri Traian Băsescu-Jacques Chirac*, 21 noiembrie 2005.

¹¹ Paul Ivan, *Romania: Kosovo's Cautious Non-recognition in The Politics of Recognition and Engagement. EU Member State Relations with Kosovo*, Ioannis Armakolas, James Ker-Lindsay (editori), Cham (Elveția), Palgrave Macmillan, 2020, p. 179.

¹² „Romania on CFE Entitlement Transfers”, U.S. Embassy in Romania, WikiLeaks Cable:

06BUCHAREST1576_a, *apud* Paul Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 179, disponibil la https://wikileaks.org/plusd/cables/06BUCHAREST1576_A.html, accesat în data de 25 ianuarie 2022.

¹³ *Comunicat de presă*, Administrația prezidențială, 10 decembrie 2005.

¹⁴ *Comunicat de presă*, Administrația prezidențială, 17 februarie 2006.

¹⁵ *Ibidem*.

¹⁶ Paul Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

¹⁷ Administrația prezidențială, *Alocuțiunea președintelui României, Traian Băsescu, în cadrul Reuniunii „Europa Centrală și de Sud-Est: probleme actuale și provocări pentru viitor”*, 25 mai 2007.

¹⁸ Radio România Actualități, 28 septembrie 2007.

¹⁹ Paul Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 180.

²⁰ Bogdan Boga, „Băsescu: un Kosovo independent nu are acoperire juridică”, www.ziare.com, 3 septembrie 2007.

²¹ *Declarația nr. 1 din 18 februarie 2008 a Parlamentului României privind proclamarea unilaterală a independenței Kosovo*, disponibilă la <http://www.monitoruljuridic.ro/act/declaratie-nr-1-din-18-februarie-2008-parlamentului-romaniei-privind-proclamarea-unilateral-a-independentei-provinciei-kosovo-emitent-parlamentul-publicat-n-89703.html>, accesat în data de 31 octombrie 2025.

²² *Ibidem*.

²³ Shpend Kursani, Violeta Haxholli, Gent Gjilkolli, *Kosovo in Regional Context. Bilateral Political Relations*, Kosovar Institute for Policy Research and Development, nr. 3/14 mai 2014, p. 49, disponibil la <https://kipred.org/wp-content/uploads/2014/05/Kosovo-in-Regional-Context-Bilateral-Political-Relations.pdf>, accesat în data de 4 noiembrie 2025.

²⁴ Paul Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

²⁵ *Ibidem*.

²⁶ *Ibidem*.

²⁷ Poziția MAE român față de Avizul consultativ privind „Conformitatea cu dreptul internațional a declarației unilaterale de independență a instituțiilor provizorii de autoguvernare din Kosovo” al Curții Internaționale de Justiție, Ministerul Afacerilor Externe, 23.07.2010

²⁸ Paul Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 174.

²⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 175.

³⁰ International Court of Justice, *Advisory Opinion: Accordance with International Law of the Unilateral Declaration of Independence in Respect of Kosovo*, al. 52, disponibil la <http://www.icj-cij.org/docket/files/141/15987.pdf>, accesat în data de 5 noiembrie 2025.

³¹ *Ibidem*, al. 82-83.

³² *Ibidem*, al. 84.

³³ *Ibidem*, al. 114.

³⁴ Harun-ur-Rashid, „Side-stepping the legitimacy issue of Kosovo” in „The Daily Star” (Bangladesh), 4 august 2010, *apud* James Ker-Lindsay, „Not such a 'sui generis' case after all: assessing the ICJ opinion on Kosovo” in „Nationalities Papers”, vol. 39, 2011, nr. 1, p. 8.

³⁵ James Ker-Lindsay, „Not such a 'sui generis' case after all: assessing the ICJ opinion on Kosovo” in „Nationalities Papers”, vol. 39, 2011, nr. 1, p. 9.

³⁶ *Ibidem*.

³⁷ Paul Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 181.

³⁸ Aceasta normă controversată nu beneficiază de susținere unanimă nici în rândul practicienilor dreptului internațional, nici în cel al comunității internaționale.

³⁹ Paul Ivan, *op. cit.*, p. 183.

RECENZII

Christopher Phillips, 2024: *Battleground – Ten Conflicts that Explain the New Middle East*, Yale University Press, 2024, 320 p.

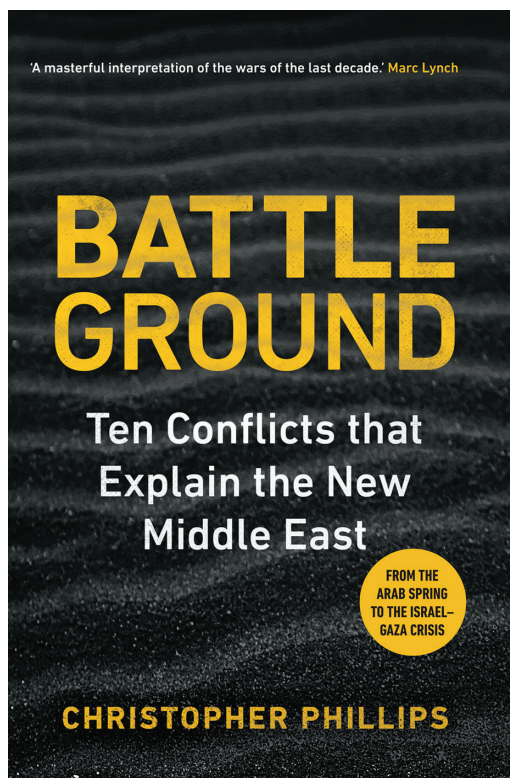
Andrei-Cristian FLORE¹

Volumul lui Christopher Phillips, *Battleground – Ten Conflicts that Explain the New Middle East* (*Câmp de luptă – Zece conflicte care explică Noul Orient Mijlociu*), este scris în limba engleză și nu a fost încă tradus și lansat pe piața din România, deși acest lucru, considerăm noi, ar fi necesar. Este o lucrare ce trebuie să fie parcursă de orice cititor interesat să aibă o perspectivă cât mai cuprinzătoare asupra a ceea ce numim Orientul Mijlociu. Nu în ultimul rând, celor care caută răspunsuri cât mai complexe, care nu simplifică dinamica geopolitică a Asiei de Vest, acest volum le va dezvălui o serie de factori a căror dinamică a influențat mai multe evenimente.

Christopher Phillips este profesor de relații internaționale la Universitatea Regina Maria din Londra (Queen Mary University of London), unde a ocupat în trecut poziția de director adjunct. Este licențiat al Universității Cambridge și deține un doctorat în relații internaționale la Școala de Economie și Științe Politice din Londra (London School of Economics and Political Science). Este autorul mai multor cărți despre Orientul Mijlociu, în special despre Siria. Printre acestea se numără *Battle for Syria: International Rivalry in the New Middle East* (2018, Yale University Press), *Everyday Arab Identity: The Daily Reproduction of the Arab World* (2013, Routledge).

Volumul care face obiectul textului de față este structurat pe 10 capitole, pentru a oferi o prezentare cât mai completă a ceea ce numim Orientul Mijlociu, capitole ce tratează un conflict dintr-o anumită țară sau regiune. Lucrarea conține, de asemenea, o introducere în care autorul trasează direcțiile de cercetare și o secțiune dedicată concluziilor.

În *Introducere (Introduction)*, autorul precizează că analiza sa asupra Orientului Mijlociu se va baza pe combinarea factorilor interni și externi. Christopher Phillips expune ceea ce el numește „Noul Orient Mijlociu”, pe care îl definește prin vidul de putere lăsat de SUA post-2011, care a condus la intensificarea activității altor actori în regiune (extraregionali sau interregionali), oriunde aceștia au găsit spațiu de manevră.



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Capitolul 1, intitulat *Siria: Mozaicul distrus (Syria: The Shattered Mosaic)*, consideră originea conflictului din Siria ca provenind din administrația colonială franceză ce a oferit drepturi politice minorităților, cu precădere celei alawite. În continuare se precizează că principalul factor care a dus la izbucnirea conflictului a fost discrepanța urban-rural. Autorul aduce în context actorii externi implicați: Rusia și Iran, de partea lui Bashar al-Assad, și Qatar, Arabia Saudită, Turcia, de partea rebelilor, punctând interesele fiecăruia. SUA sunt menționate ca actor extern, dar rolul său principal este combaterea ISIS. Capitolul se încheie la Acordurile de la Astana.

La începutul capitolului 2, intitulat *Libia: Anarhie pe Mediterana (Libya: Anarchy on the Mediterranean)*, Christopher Phillips descrie această țară ca fiind un pustiu cu vaste resurse de petrol. Se precizează că Muammar al-Qaddafi s-a folosit de veniturile petroliere pentru a-și finanța ambițiile externe. De asemenea, dictatorul a favorizat regiunea Africii de Nord, în detrimentul celorlalte regiuni, ceea ce a dus la revolta din 2011. Autorul punctează excelent natura tribală a politicii, deoarece, după căderea autocratului, facilitată de un sprijin occidental, guvernul interimar se prăbușește, dând naștere unui alt război civil. Printre actorii externi menționați sunt: Qatar, Emiratele Arabe Unite (EAU), Franța, Italia, Turcia și Rusia. Eșecul stabilizării Libiei este pus pe seama numărului ridicat de actori implicați, dar și pe divergențele dintre europeni.

Una dintre țările care și în 2025 este într-un profund război civil devastator este Yemen. Acest stat este subiectul capitolului 3, *Yemen: Cea mai gravă criză umanitară din lume (Yemen: 'The Worst Humanitarian Crisis of the World')*, iar primul lucru pe care îl dezvăluie autorul este cât de instabilă și violentă a fost istoria modernă a acestui stat, pradă războaielor civile. Christopher Phillips parcurge istoria Yemenului modern, unificat de Saleh, care a avut parte de conflicte interne și s-a folosit de resursele petroliere pentru a-și securiza loialști. Anul 2017 pune capăt conducerii sale, autocratul fiind executat de rebelii Houthis. Acest război civil atrage atenția Iranului, care susține tabăra šiită, dar și a Arabiei Saudite și Emiratelor Arabe Unite, care susțin opoziția, Riadul fiind îngrijorat de o influență prea mare a Teheranului.

Unul dintre cele mai cunoscute conflicte din regiunea în discuție este subiectul capitolului 4, *Palestina: Pământul care dispare (Palestine: The Vanishing Land)*. Autorul începe prin a prezenta creația Israelului ca fiind rezultatul lobbyului sionist combinat cu interesul Marii Britanii de a-și menține prezența în apropierea Canalului Suez. Printre factorii care sunt considerați relevanți se numără lipsa de coordonare a arabilor, ideea de partiție indusă de britanici și arbitrarea preferențială a Statelor Unite ale Americii. Autorul descrie conflictul între Israel și Organizația pentru Eliberarea Palestinei, punctul de cotitură fiind cele două Intifade. Acesta laudă tentativele diplomatice ale Tel Avivului, dar remarcă eșecul acestora și radicalizarea ambelor populații, ceea ce a dus la războiul din Gaza.

Capitolul 5, *Irak: Republica distrusă (Iraq: The Broken Republic)* descrie cum s-a format Irakul ca monarhie sub administrare britanică, care nu a ținut cont de diversitatea etnică și religioasă la crearea acestui stat. După ce a căzut monarhia, baathiștii au ajuns la putere și au transformat țara. Prosperitatea a fost distrusă de războaiele lui Saddam Hussein, care au atras și intervenția străină și, eventual, înlăturarea acestuia. SUA au urmărit după 2003 să remodeleze Irakul și să-l „de-baathizeze”. De aici au rezultat un număr mare de șomeri și crearea unui sistem politic bazat pe sectarism. Două consecințe ale acestui proces pot fi menționate: radicalism religios și un spațiu de influență mai mare pentru Iran. Totuși, autorul expune un moment în care Washington și Teheran au colaborat împotriva ISIS.

Capitolul 6, *Egipt: Gigantul căzut (Egypt: Fallen Giant)* debutează cu o foarte scurtă istorie a Egiptului, mai detaliată în ceea ce privește istoria modernă a acestui stat. Autorul identifică armata drept clasă privilegiată, descriind în amănunt modul în care ofițerii participau la economia statului prin întreprinderile lor. La celălalt capăt politic se află Frăția Musulmană, care a oferit servicii populației neglijate de stat. Dictatorul Egiptului, Hosni Mubarak, a fost înlăturat de la putere în 2011, în urma unor ample proteste populare. La conducerea Egiptului i-a urmat Mohamed Morsi, din partea Frăției Musulmane (care s-a bucurat de susținerea Qatarului și Turciei). Conducerea sa a fost de scurtă durată și a provocat reacții ostile, în special din partea armatei.

Astfel, autorul analizează perioada actuală, când Abdel Fattah al-Sissi se află în fruntea statului, iar meritele acestuia sunt în mare măsură doar în ceea ce privește politica externă. Susținerea acestuia se datorează mai ales Arabiei Saudite și Emiratelor Arabe Unite.

Capitolul 7, *Liban: Un stat care se prăbușește (Lebanon: A Crumbling State)*, este un studiu de caz dedicat statului înfloritor care era Liban, cu o libertate politică suficient de ridicată pentru coordonatele geografice și temporale la care ne referim. Principalele probleme ale Libanului au fost sistemul politic sectar, care era mult prea rigid pentru schimbările demografice, și faptul că găzduia mulți dizidenți politici pan-arabiști, precum și milițiile palestiniene. Autorul descrie războiul civil libanez ca fiind haotic, cu lupte între confesiuni, dar și în interiorul acestora. Sunt menționați actorii externi implicați, mai ales Iran, Israel și Siria. Cel din urmă a ținut sub ocupație Libanul până în 2005. După retragerea armatei siriene, autorul dezvăluie tensiunile politice interne și războiul dintre Israel și Hezbollah (miliție šiită susținută de Iran). Christopher Phillips subliniază și preocuparea elitei politice de a restaura zonele luxoase ale Libanului, ceea ce a stârnit nemulțumiri în rândul populației.

În capitolul 8, *Kurdistan: Lupta în munți (Kurdistan: The Struggle in the Mountains)*, subiectul este populația kurdă în relație cu statele gazdă. La început sunt explicate contextul istoric specific al populației kurde și situația acesteia de după Primul Război Mondial și ulterior, ca minoritate în mai multe țări (Siria, Irak, Turcia și Iran). Autorul descrie tratamentul și soarta pe care le-au avut kurzii în fiecare stat, de la represiunea din Turcia la autonomia din Irak, de la oportunismul din Siria la controlul din Iran. Se menționează rolul special pe care l-au avut în combaterea ISIS (cu sprijin din partea Statelor Unite și a Rusiei). Potrivit sursei citate, problemele fundamentale ce au împiedicat solidaritatea între kurzi au fost divergențele interne, interesele locale și diferențele ideologice.

Capitolul 9, *Golful Persic: Bogăție și incertitudine*, prezintă, la început, o istorie a evoluției importanței Peninsulei Arabice în plan strategic, atât în contextul poziției geografice, cât și al resurselor naturale, care au transformat statele din Golful Persic. Autorul se axează pe țările membre din Consiliul de Cooperare al Golfului (Gulf Cooperation Council – GCC), cu preponderență pe Arabia Saudită, EAU și Qatar. Situația dintre aceste trei state este marcată de numeroase tensiuni geopolitice. Acest lucru a reieșit în timpul Primăverii arabe, când Doha a susținut tabere ce erau contrare intereselor Riadului și Abu Dhabiului, dar și cooperând în anumite cazuri (de exemplu, Bahrain). Pentru acțiunile sale sfidătoare, Qatar a fost supus unei blocade, în 2017, de către Arabia Saudită și EAU. Totuși, această măsură a fost inefficientă, deoarece Doha a reușit să aducă bunurile necesare pe cale aeriană și navală, Iranul fiind un stat care i-a ajutat prin acces aerian. Autorul explică eșecul blocadei prin specificul globalizării economiilor din Golf, care vine în urma conștientizării resursei limitate de petrol.

În ultimul capitol este vorba despre o regiune separată, obiect al intereselor mai multor actori, printre care și cei din Orientul Mijlociu. *Cornul Africii: O nouă arenă (The Horn of Africa: A New Arena)* începe prin a descrie regiunea ca fiind marcată de conflicte încă din timpul Războiului Rece. Autorul descrie pe rând parcursul mai multor țări, cea mai importantă fiind Etiopia, dată fiind susținerea din partea ambilor poli de putere în Războiul Rece, un actor mult prea mare pentru a fi controlat total, dar vulnerabil la separatism și fără acces la mare. În cazul Somaliei, se pune accentul pe revizionismul bazat pe criterii etnice. Acest stat a cunoscut un război civil bazat pe clanuri, cu o puternică prezență a facțiunilor aliniate cu Al-Qaeda, și se confruntă, totodată, cu existența regiunii separatiste Somaliland, fiind, în același timp, în centrul atenției UE și SUA. O altă țară de interes strategic discutată în acest capitol este Djibouti. Rolul său este acela de centru portuar ce găzduiește diferite baze militare și reprezintă un element vital pentru Etiopia, ca facilitator al transportului naval. Eritreea este descrisă preponderent prin lupta sa pentru independență, autorul explicând modul în care conflictul dintre Asmara și Addis-Ababa a fost mediat prin intermediul EAU. Cazul Sudanului este prezentat ca fiind cel mai tragic, ca urmare a unui război civil și a existenței unor teritorii separatiste, cu o multitudine de actori externi ce își manifestă interesul de a controla resurse și teritorii.

În ultima secțiune a volumului, *Concluzii (Conclusion)*, autorul motivează că obiectivul lucrării este explicarea dinamicii relațiilor internaționale din Orientul Mijlociu, prin interacțiunea dintre factorii interni și externi. De asemenea, punctează similaritatea dintre anumite cazuri expuse, afirmând că erodarea internă a unui stat în regiune este o oportunitate pentru o sumedenie de actori regionali. Tot aici, autorul subliniază că actorii externi implicați nu s-au bucurat întotdeauna de succes deplin.

Opiniile și concluziile exprimate în articolele publicate în *Monitor Strategic* aparțin exclusiv autorilor și nu reflectă poziția oficială a Institutului pentru studii politice de apărare și istorie militară, care este exonerat de orice răspundere juridică privind conținutul acestora.

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