INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

Global
Power Shifts

INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

1 | 2021

Dear Readers,

Power shifts are a fundamental phenomenon underpinning global politics. In 1990, as the bipolar world order finally unravelled, US political scientist Joseph S. Nye wrote: "Just as farmers and meteorologists try to forecast storms, so do leaders and analysts try to understand the dynamics of major changes in the distribution of power among nations."

Today, the world finds itself in a phase of major upheaval once again. The COVID-19 pandemic has accentuated and expedited certain geopolitical developments that have been brewing for some time and are associated with a fundamental shift in the international order. The rise of the People's Republic of China to become a great power is not the only expression of this change, but it is perhaps the most obvious. These changes have not blown in like a sudden storm, instead, they reflect the slow tectonic shifts of the earth's crust – and these shifts create tensions.

But what does this mean for Germany? And what course should the European Union set for its foreign policy to ensure it is not at the mercy of these changes but rather to actively shape them? It is clear that Europe must assume greater responsibility in the international arena – and it is high time for Germany to play a stronger role. However, increased commitment and independence do not mean that relations with the US would decline in importance. Germany and Europe need to maintain a close alliance with the United States if they are to successfully defend their interests. Therefore, it is important to seize the opportunities arising from Joe Biden's election as US president, says Peter Beyer, Member of the Bundestag and Transatlantic Coordinator of the Federal German Government.

The EU's vision of itself as a global actor is currently the subject of much debate. These discussions are important, because having a voice in a changing world order requires a clear set of goals and ambitions. Hardy Ostry and Ludger Bruckwilder believe the EU must seek to be a major player in shaping the international order. In an interview in this issue of International Reports, Christoph Heusgen, Germany's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, also stresses the importance of building an international system based on multilateral cooperation and binding rules, since these principles are coming under pressure from various sides.

The Indo-Pacific is a region where geopolitical rivalries and power shifts manifest themselves in a particularly striking way. China is expanding its influence there – and thus challenging the US and the rules-based order in the region. It is against this backdrop that Isabel Weininger and Lewe Paul analyse German and European policy in the Indo-Pacific region and highlight specific steps for intensifying security cooperation with key partner states. Beatrice Gorawantschy and Barbara Völkl take a detailed look at Australia's position in the region – and explain how the country is strategically positioning itself as a "creative regional power".

While the world is still grappling with the immediate repercussions of the coronavirus pandemic, its significance for a potential power shift in the realm of political systems is becoming increasingly clear. In their article, Anna Lena Sabroso-Wasserfall and Tom Bayes illustrate how China is trying to use the crisis to expand its ideological influence in Africa. It is presenting itself as a generous friend of African nations and a determined crisis manager, whose success in fighting the pandemic testifies to the superiority of its political system over that of liberal democracies. And when the Chinese Communist Party courts "friends" among Latin American political parties, as highlighted in the article by Sebastian Grundberger and Juan Pablo Cardenal, then here, too, it sells its authoritarian development model in an ever more aggressive way as a supposedly superior alternative to democracy.
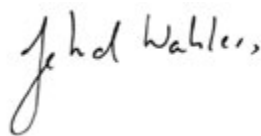
Turkey is a key player in the power politics of the Middle East. Is President Erdoğan pursuing a revisionist, "neo-Ottoman" foreign policy, as some observers believe? Walter Glos and Nils Lange disagree with this view while also dampening the expectations of those who see a post-Erdoğan Turkey as a much less complicated partner for the West.

In the battle for influence, traditional sources of power, such as military and economic strength, play a central role. However, they are now joining forces with another increasingly vital resource: cyber capabilities. Hacker attacks, cyber espionage, targeted influence through fake news – the digital power struggle is being fought with a variety of means. As Christina Stolte and Jason Chumtong explain, their comparatively low-threshold access means that countries that were previously not considered global players can now gain international influence.

Times of global power shifts are tantamount to times of heightened tension. They create cracks in the international order and harbour the potential for conflict. In such an environment, it is also important for Germany and Europe to reassert their position in the world, as we can see that this position has long ceased to be guaranteed. We must actively defend it, not only in terms of our economic and political interests, but in terms of our values, too. We must consistently emphasise what we stand for and what we advocate: a multilateral, liberal world order.
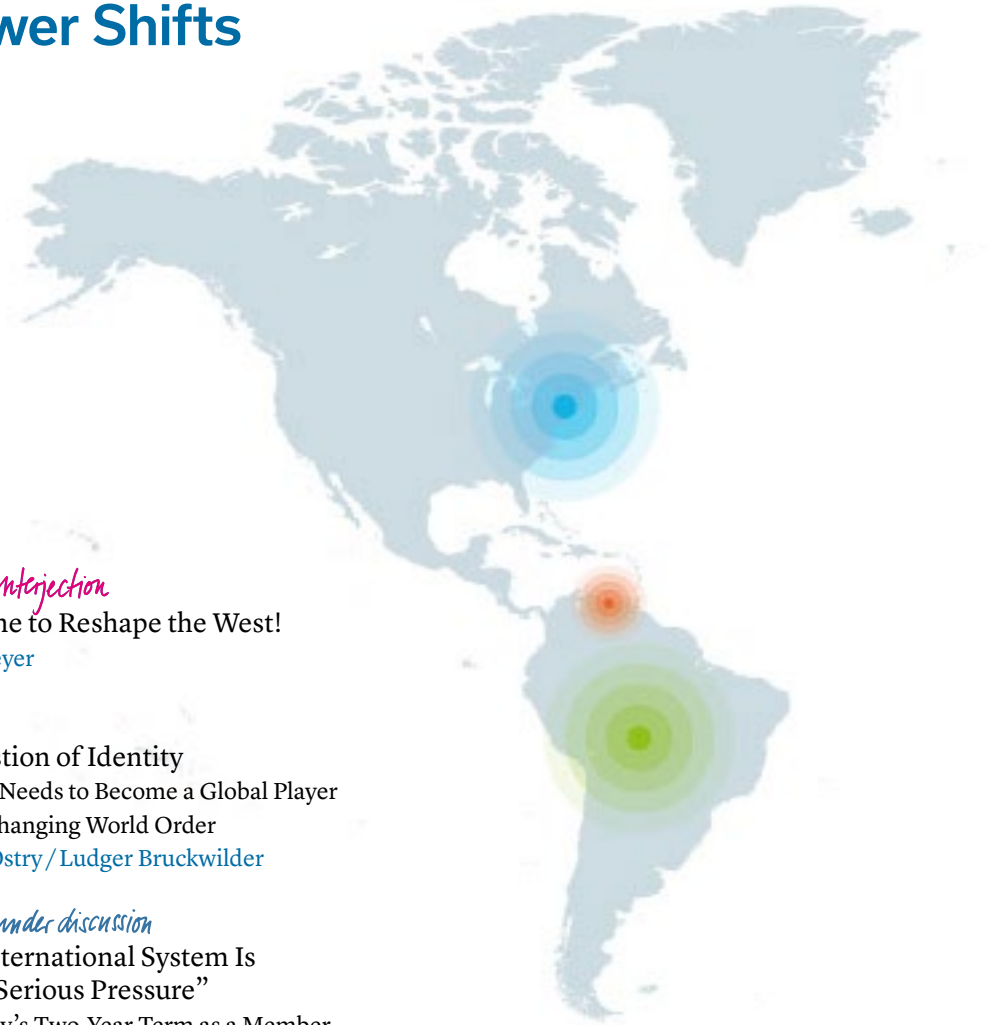
I wish you a stimulating read.

Yours,

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Global Power Shifts

Interjection

It's Time to Reshape
the West!

Peter Beyer

"America is back!": With US President Joe Biden, there is now potential for an ambitious transatlantic policy. We should devote all our energy to reforging the alliance between Europe and the US. Anything else would be fatal, as disunity in the West only plays into the hands of our systemic rivals China and Russia. What do we need to do right now?

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"Democracy will win!"
Thomas Mann

Without wanting to sound too euphoric, Joe Biden's election as the 46th US President presents the West with a new opportunity. In his speech at the virtual Munich Security Conference in February 2021, Biden said: "The transatlantic alliance is back." He spoke of a "new moment in history". There is something to this: We now have a window of opportunity to place our transatlantic partnership on a new, more stable foundation for the coming decades.

This is certainly necessary, as the West and democracy are under pressure both from the inside and outside. The fall of the Berlin Wall, the German reunification, and the disintegration of the Soviet Union in the epochal years 1989 to 1991 did not lead to "The End of History", as famously put forward at the time by Francis Fukuyama with a question mark. On the other hand, the world may have become less rigid, but this makes it a little more unpredictable and complex.

It feels as though we have been stumbling from crisis to crisis since the turn of the century, with the terrorist attacks of 11 September 2001, the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, the global financial crisis, the euro crisis, and the upheavals and wars in the wake of the "Arab Spring". This is not to mention the annexation of Crimea, the war in eastern Ukraine, the refugee crisis in Europe, the IS terror in major European cities, Brexit, and the election of Donald Trump as US President. And finally, the coronavirus pandemic, which is not just a health emergency but also an economic crisis that will continue to challenge us in the long-term. And these are just the more major crises we have faced.

Many of these crises are still smouldering and could erupt again, with other massive challenges being visible on the horizon. It is quite possible that historians in 40- or 50-years' time will see our era as the beginning of a new Cold War between China and the West. Then there are the uncertainties surrounding the tech revolution: Digitalisation and bioengineering are still in the embryonic stages, but what will be their impact on mankind and the international state system?

Despite these crises and challenges, we Germans and most Europeans are still doing well – living in freedom, security, and relative prosperity. This is also due to the prudent actions of the German government and EU Commission. However, things might well get tougher in world politics and crises could arise that we cannot even imagine yet. Therefore, we must ask ourselves how we can bring permanent stability to our system and structure. How do we achieve a degree of resilience in the face of internal and external upheavals and crises? And how do we position ourselves for the future?

For me, one thing is irrefutable: Europe needs a strong, ambitious alliance with the United States of America if it is to meet the challenges of the 21st century. If we succeed in working closely together on an equal footing and in a spirit of trust, we can build a *New West*.

Below are five points outlining what a new phalanx between Europe and the US might look like.

1. The US and the EU – Unbeatable as Joint Forces

Biden and his administration understand the complexity and contradictions underlying Europe, while also understanding what partnership means: the ability to compromise. For the most part, Donald Trump only wanted to push through maximum demands, which meant that we in Germany and Europe were happy if we could simply prevent the worst from happening. After taking office, Biden virtually swore an oath to uphold the transatlantic partnership, which has helped to restore lost trust. Now, however, is the time to turn rhetoric into tangible policies.

We do not need Europe going it alone or fantasising about decoupling from the US.

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This opportunity, therefore, presents us with both a test and an obligation alike. Europe needs to grow up – even if this is uncomfortable. After the First World War, the US refused to defend and shape an order it had helped to create. Following the Second World War, it was initially reluctant to accept this role. It is now up to Europe to take a step towards greater responsibility. France's President Emmanuel Macron erroneously calls NATO "brain-dead". But his analysis cannot be dismissed: If Europe "can't think of itself as a global power", it "will disappear".

However, we do not need Europe going it alone or fantasising about decoupling from the US. If it is to ensure a close alliance with America, Germany as a nation must act as a partner and leader in Europe. We owe this to ourselves and our allies. This includes, for instance, our defence budget continuing to grow towards the two per cent target, as agreed with our NATO partners. It includes a commitment to nuclear sharing – and to its technical modernisation. It includes the procurement of armed drones to protect the men and women we send into combat. It includes more engagement in NATO and European defence policy. It also includes making German foreign and security policy far more effective.

Therefore, I advocate for the establishment of a National Security Council, where these threads of foreign, defence, and economic policy can all come together. The German government's rules of procedure are outdated and have scarcely changed since the times of Konrad Adenauer – and must, at long last, be adapted to our times. We need to be able to translate the many ideas and concepts we are developing into policies. We need more flexibility, and we need to overcome old and rigid patterns of thinking. In a recent interview with the magazine Internationale Politik, the Christian Democratic party leader Armin Laschet rightly pointed out that German and European foreign policy is "always about both things – our values and our interests".

America will remain a superpower – its economy, innovative strength, and military capabilities speak for themselves. However, the country will not be able to increase its global commitment again. There are various reasons for this, among them the American people's scepticism following the wars in Afghanistan, and above all in Iraq. A president who miscalculates foreign policy, will lose the next election.

In order to support global political commitment from the US, Europe must do its homework in terms of security policy. In concrete terms, this means burden-sharing – for instance in the South China Sea – by which we show the Americans, but also the Chinese, that we mean business. But the EU must also adopt a stronger role on the periphery of our continent – including Libya and the Middle East. Russia is presenting a fait accompli in these regions. That the new US administration wants to take a clear, tough stance towards the Kremlin is good news. Biden has said that, unlike Trump, he will not be "kowtowing" to Moscow. This is a good approach for a transatlantic policy towards Russia.

2. Common Sense on Trade

In November 2020, China, Australia, and 13 other Asia-Pacific countries came together to sign the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) free trade agreement. The result is the largest free trade area in the world. The RCEP may not impose high standards or regulatory depth, but it still presents us with a wake-up call. China and Australia are bitter systemic rivals who have absolutely no trust in each other – and yet they successfully negotiated this agreement. There is still no free trade agreement between the close allies Europe and America, and there have not even been any negotiations since the end of TTIP. This is irresponsible – also because the reasons to dismantle trade barriers and set standards have grown even more numerous since the failure of TTIP.

> ## The West's disunity only helps our systemic rivals China and Russia.
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I believe the West needs to finally come back to its senses on trade policy. Firstly, the time of unilaterally imposed punitive tariffs on aluminium and steel as well as extraterritorially effective US sanctions should come to an end. We are friends bound together by Western values such as freedom, democracy, and the rule of law – not adversaries who should impose punitive tariffs on one another. Car tariffs threatened under the Trump administration must also be taken off the table for good. This disunity in the West only helps our systemic rivals China and Russia.

Secondly, we need to reattempt to negotiate a comprehensive and unbureaucratic free trade agreement between the EU and the US. Proposals for a deal that solely focus on industrial tariffs are too cautious and lack ambition. A free trade agreement with Biden, who campaigned on the slogan "Buy American", should not be considered a foregone conclusion, with his administration currently analysing their country's competitiveness.

Nevertheless, Europe should be quick to approach America with proposals and promote a comprehensive and ambitious free trade agreement benefiting all parties. The failure of TTIP has taught us that it is too complicated to negotiate and adopt a large treaty in one go. Instead, we should now act more flexibly, meaning we ought to negotiate individual sections – and immediately bring them into force. This will also increase public acceptance. A free trade agreement secures jobs and prosperity on both sides of the Atlantic – while also making us less dependent on China in terms of trade and, in future, less dependent on Russia in terms of energy.

3. Transatlantic China Strategies

One of the weaknesses of the German people and Europeans is that they are, at the very least, sceptical about strategic thinking. However, we are dealing with systemic rivals who adopt a strategic, rather than moral, approach to politics. President Xi Jinping leads China with the long-term goal of shaping the country into an economic, military, and technological superpower – thus, from China's perspective, restoring the "normal state of affairs".

We must learn to play to our strengths vis-à-vis Beijing, which means linking value-driven policies more strongly with interest-driven ones. And that means, as a first step: Europe and America need a joint China strategy.

The West's hope that the Middle Kingdom would become more democratic as its prosperity increased, turned out to be a fallacy. China's economic success has gone hand in hand with a regime that has become even more authoritarian. We are dealing with a regime that digitally monitors its citizens on a massive scale, fights democracy in Hong Kong and suppresses the Uyghur ethnic group. The rule of law, freedom of the press, and individual rights simply do not exist. At the same time, Beijing is rearming, exerting pressure on its neighbours, causing unrest in the South China Sea, and playing in the same league as Silicon Valley when it comes to the digital revolution.
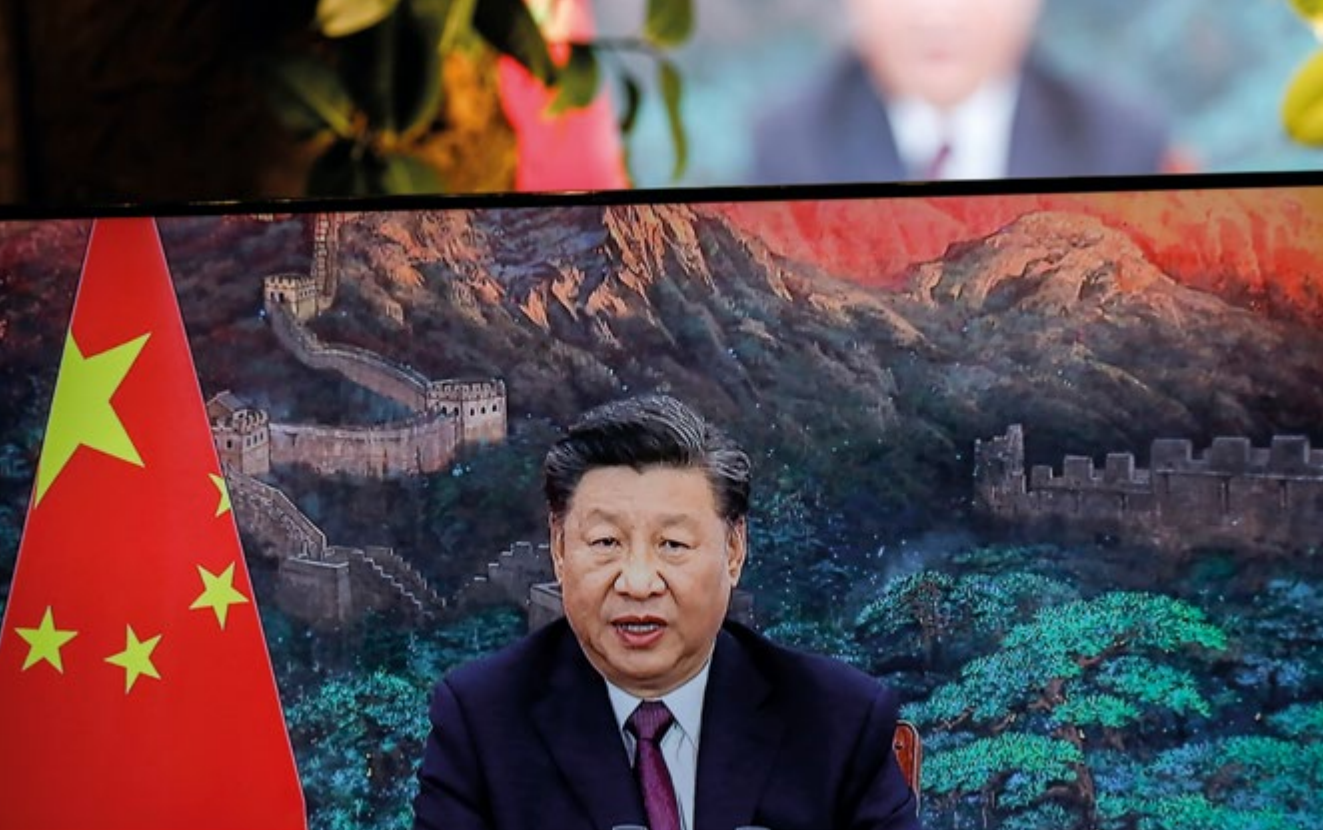
China as a systemic rival: President Xi Jinping leads the People's Republic with the long-term goal of shaping the country into an economic, military, and technological superpower – thus, from China's perspective, restoring the "normal state of affairs". Source: © Tingshu Wang, Reuters.

First and foremost, a transatlantic China strategy must start with trade – and the World Trade Organisation needs to be the lever for this. We need a long-awaited WTO reform that forces China to comply with international standards and rules. The Communist Party's state capitalism is currently abusing the WTO system. In future, this needs to imply tough sanctions. Decoupling from China, however, is unrealistic, as our economic relations are too close.

We must take advantage of the fact that China – unlike the US and the EU – has no natural allies. A China strategy must, therefore, also ask the question: How do we work with India or Vietnam? We should also think about overcoming the coronavirus pandemic from the perspective of systemic rivalry: China, as an authoritarian state, seems to be able to fight the virus better than Western democracies. We need to counter this narrative with good and far-sighted policies – and prove it in potential future pandemics. Biden

sees "extreme competition" between Washington and Beijing. His approach is: We only cooperate with China when it benefits us. This is a pragmatic approach to a transatlantic strategy.

4. Push for Digitalisation

In 50 or 100 years, life may look quite different to what we know today. Against the backdrop of the tech revolution that is starting to unfold, many questions arise: Will we be ruled by algorithms in the future? Or will our lives be mainly characterised by more prosperity and less work? The fact is it will be what we make it.

Cyberattacks originating from Russia are currently the order of the day, and China is also active in this field. But this is just the advent compared with what lies ahead. Whoever takes the lead in artificial intelligence, bioengineering, quantum computing and other innovations, will become the dominant power on this planet.
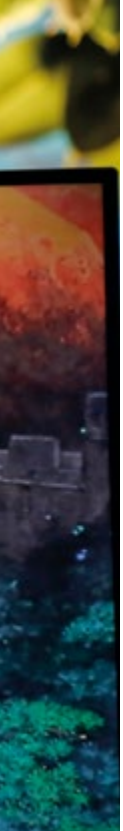
Beijing and Moscow are aware of this. Russia's President Vladimir Putin, referring to the issue, said frankly: "Whoever becomes the leader in this sphere will become the ruler of the world." A world in which the Chinese and Russians take the lead in tech is guaranteed to be a world much less worth living in, than one shaped according to our values.

Germany and Europe are currently sleepwalking through this trend – which poses a threat to our security, prosperity, and democracy. This is where we need massive investment – as well as close ties to the US and Silicon Valley. First and foremost, the initial stumbling blocks need to be cleared out of the way. We need a swift agreement on a successor to the Privacy Shield on transatlantic data security. Then it is a matter of protecting our critical infrastructure. The Chinese company Huawei, ultimately controlled by the Communist Party like everything else in the country, must not be allowed to install hardware in our 5G network under any circumstances. We must protect our sensitive data in order to avoid becoming easy prey for China. The same applies to digitalisation and research: We should set international standards and rules with North America – before the Chinese do. Intensive transatlantic tech cooperation must also go hand in hand with cooperation on climate protection, science, and pandemic control.

5. Promoting the Transatlantic Partnership

Recently, the new US Secretary of State Tony Blinken told a story from the spring of 1945. His stepfather, a Polish Jew, 16 years old at the time and a concentration camp survivor, encountered a US Army tank while fleeing. When the tank stopped, the hatch opened, and an Afro-American GI emerged. The boy said the only English phrase he knew: "God bless America!"

This story tells us something about the attraction of Western democracy, which the US in particular stood for at that time. For close transatlantic cooperation, we need a meaningful narrative that convinces the German people. Fortunately, this is crystal clear. First, in historical terms: the "raisin bombers", the Marshall Plan, the economic miracle, the integration with the West, German unity, supported by George H. W. Bush.

But our age also offers an attractive transatlantic narrative. Germany reaps enormous economic benefits from its good relations with the US. Washington's security guarantee ensures stability at the heart of Europe, resulting in strong economies and our relative prosperity. The US has many weaknesses and is currently more divided than it has been for a long time. Yet, like no other country in the world, it stands for freedom and individual opportunity. The four years of Trump and the turbulent months following the presidential election bore witness to the strength and effectiveness of American democracy.

We also need to raise public awareness of these facts. We must explain to people why an alliance with the US is far more attractive for Germany and Europe than neutrality or even rapprochement with Russia or China. We must vigorously and persistently campaign for the transatlantic partnership – and ensure that German and European foreign policy does not take on a skewed, anti-transatlantic tone.

In the end, it boils down to a sentence by Henry Kissinger from his book "World Order": "The United States, if separated from Europe in politics, economics, and defense, would become geopolitically an island off the shores of Eurasia, and Europe itself could turn into an appendage to the reaches of Asia and the Middle East." This means that Europe needs the US, but also that the US needs Europe. If a close alliance on an equal footing between Europe and the US succeeds, we will withstand every internal and external challenge facing us in the 21st century. In that case, Thomas Mann's inspiring sentence would retain its validity: "Democracy will win!"

–translated from German–

Peter Beyer is Transatlantic Coordinator of the Federal German Government and a CDU Member of the Bundestag.

A Question of Identity

The EU Needs to Become a Global Player in the Changing World Order

Hardy Ostry / Ludger Bruckwilder

The European Union's internal structures are currently plagued by division. These rifts all boil down to a question of identity: What is the EU? At the same time, the changing world order is forcing the EU to decide who it wants to be. The answer is clear: It must take steps to become a global player.

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Spring 2021 marks one year since the start of the coronavirus pandemic in Europe. For the last twelve months, the European Union's policies and actions have been dominated by the pandemic and its disastrous consequences. During this period, the EU should have been focusing on completely different issues, particularly relating to climate policy and sustainability. We also anxiously observe deepening rifts within the EU, and the impact the crisis will have on these divisions remains unclear. The pandemic has also highlighted the scale of the changes in the international order. This article assesses several overlapping issues from the perspective of foreign policy. It is worth looking at how the world order has changed and at the challenges confronting the EU. This reveals a growing need for the European Union to step up to the role of a truly global actor. An examination of these issues may also provide answers to how the EU could heal its internal divisions by building a shared sense of identity.

The European Union in a Changing International Order

If we look back to 30 years ago, we see that Europe existed within a completely different global order. The Two Plus Four Treaty and the disintegration of the Soviet Union signalled the end of a decades-long phase of bipolarity that dominated international relations. Despite all the confrontation and division, this bipolar phase still provided a relatively high degree of stability. And in the early 1990s, in the wake of upheavals, the balance of power was still clear to see. The United States was the only remaining great power, the world order was unipolar, and for a few years we continued to live in a clear and stable international system. Since that time, the world order has become increasingly complex, however. Specific incidents and crises, gradual processes, unavoidable trends such as demographic change – all these have contributed to the shift towards a multipolar international system.

Today, Europe – and therefore the European Union – finds itself in a confusing, often disorderly world with multiple centres of power. The situation is also beset with crises and characterised by rapid upheaval. Against this background, Donald Trump's recent term as US president was an unpleasant wake-up call for much of Europe. With his erratic style of politics and "America First" approach, Trump illustrated Europe's reliance on the US in terms of security above all, while simultaneously pointing out that it can no longer take US support for granted. In parallel, China's eventual emergence as a great power has presented Europeans with a new reality that we still have to learn how to deal with.

This foreign policy situation also confronts the EU with a series of problems in its immediate neighbourhood. In a nutshell, these include instability in the MENA region, the difficult partnership with Turkey, the outlook for the Western Balkan states, the multiple challenges in the Eastern Partnership countries, and the strained relations with Russia.

Over recent years, the EU's position – both globally and in terms of its immediate neighbourhood – has intensified the debate within EU institutions and in the Brussels political sphere about the EU's role in the world. A number of concepts are still being discussed with the aim of enabling the EU to suitably fulfil its role in the global context. If the Union is to consider

the big picture (not just on climate change); if it is to meet all the challenges mentioned here and those that lie ahead; if it is to keep up with the manifold changes occurring now and in the future, then it has no choice but to adopt a role in which it is on an equal footing with the US and China. This role will certainly be defined by the transatlantic relationship and cannot be understood as a position of equidistance. Should the EU be unwilling or unable to play such a role in future, it will inevitably lose influence, power, security, and prosperity in relative terms – a prospect that cannot be an option for the EU. At the same time, a return to purely nation-state perspectives will not bear fruit for Europe's member states within a global context over the long-term. No European state alone will be able to hold its own in competition with China and the US. Only the European Union has the collective power to do this. It is, therefore, imperative that the EU exploits this potential and works to transform itself into a political union that can compete on the world stage. On the face of it, this necessity is fuelled by exogenous factors, but a closer look reveals that endogenous factors are also at play.

The EU as a Global Actor – A Necessity Fuelled by Exogenous Factors

Let us begin with the exogenous factors and turn our attention to the aforementioned debate that has been going on for some years. This reveals a myriad ideas, arguments, and concepts for our consideration. Most of these contributions fall under the headings of "European sovereignty" and "strategic autonomy".[1] For its part, the European Commission makes extensive use of the term "resilience" in its strategic outlook – a term that observers interpret as falling short of the aspiration to be a player in its own right. Overall, therefore, much of the discourse is not new. There is still a great deal of disagreement, especially regarding the terminology used and how it should be understood in real terms. Last year, the European Office of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung worked in joint forces with the European Policy Centre (EPC) on a study relating to strategic autonomy. On

the one hand, it aimed to broaden the scope of the debate, which tended to be restricted to the military sphere in the past. While the study was also designed to contribute to a uniform, broad understanding of strategic autonomy and pave the way for taking concrete action in selected policy areas. During the project, it also became clear that the terms "sovereignty" and "autonomy" are already widely used by EU institutions to legitimise their political actions.[2] Those who sometimes revel in arguments about terminology overlook this political reality.

> **The EU has already made significant progress in certain areas to become a more relevant global actor.**
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In some areas and from an institutional perspective, over the past decade the European Union has already made significant progress towards becoming a more relevant global actor, a fact that should not be ignored here. As early as the Lisbon Treaty, the EU had developed the regulatory framework for dealing with the changes to the international system. Three key examples in this respect are the creation of the post of President of the European Council, the appointment of a High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy together with the creation of the European External Action Service, and the reform of the majority voting system for Council decisions. The EU's Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and Common Foreign and Security Policy (CFSP), whose roots go back still further, have gained greater weight as a result.

Nonetheless, the debate about how much weight these policy areas should carry for the EU has subsequently intensified. As mentioned previously, the focus was initially on security and defence. That 27 separate armies afford huge potential for creating synergies is still an evident fact. Having said that, national defence is linked to the inherent understanding of what

constitutes a nation state. Regarding Europe's collective security, NATO, to which the majority of member states belong, provides a protective framework as a defence alliance independent of EU aspirations. Despite this, it was right for the EU to create institutions such as the European Defence Agency (EDA), which supports member states in armaments planning, procurement, and research. The Permanent Structured Cooperation (PESCO) was also developed as part of the CSDP. Although certain PESCO projects have attracted justified criticism, it is heading in the right direction and should continue on this path. However, as recently observed in the debate on security and defence, opinions are divided about what this path could and should look like. Views diverge strongly about the extent to which EU defence policy should be less dependent on the United States. The recent election of Joe Biden has lent new weight to this question.

We cannot merely dismiss the fact that the EU needs the US for its security.

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Divergent views emerged in Germany and France on this issue around the time of the US presidential election. In an article published by Brussels-based Politico, German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer stated her belief that Europe must acknowledge that it will remain dependent on the United States for the foreseeable future.[3] In an immediate response, French President Emmanuel Macron voiced his incomprehension of this, saying in an interview that Kramp-Karrenbauer's statements were a "historical misinterpretation".[4] But Germany's Defence Minister remained undeterred. A few days later, in a keynote speech to students at the Helmut Schmidt University in Hamburg, she said: "The idea of strategic autonomy for Europe goes too far if it is taken to mean that we could guarantee security, stability and prosperity in Europe without NATO and without the US. That is an illusion. But if we take it to refer to our capacity to act independently as Europeans where our common

interests are concerned, then yes, that is our common goal and reflects our common understanding of sovereignty and ability to act."[5] Indeed, she is correct when she says the United States currently provides 75 per cent of all NATO equipment and capabilities. That's why we cannot merely dismiss her statement that Europe still needs the United States for its security, and that this will not change any time soon. However, we still have to ask whether this could or should be changed over the medium or long term.

There are two key aspects to addressing this issue. Firstly, EU countries, especially NATO members and Germany, in particular, will have no choice but to increase their contribution to joint security. This entails noticeable increases in defence spending, which must be used to build substantial capabilities so as to share the burden more fairly within NATO. The example of Airbus shows that European solutions can be competitive. Still, the US also has an interest in maintaining its security supremacy in Europe. Increased defence spending would bring the EU closer to the goal of gaining importance while strengthening the transatlantic alliance and improving the balance of NATO by bringing the EU's weight to bear. On the other hand, the ultimate goal of increased spending should not be breaking away from the US, as this would neither be of benefit to Europe nor to the United States.

Secondly, the question of whether the EU should remain dependent on the United States in military terms fails to adequately address the issue of Europe's role in the world. Rather, a much broader concept should be developed, moving away from a purely military understanding of this question.

Expanding our view of how the European Union could become a more powerful global actor presents numerous policy areas with countless opportunities for action. In economic terms, a glance at the key figures reveals that the EU is already a global heavyweight. What is more, Brussels has always spoken with one voice on trade policy. Trade agreements such as those with Canada (CETA), Japan (JEFTA), and

Strategic autonomy? In the view of German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, this idea "goes too far if it is taken to mean that we could guarantee security, stability and prosperity in Europe without NATO and without the US". Source: © Stephanie Lecocq, Reuters.

South America (MERCOSUR) are testament to the EU's standing and safeguard its prosperity. Talks on the proposed TTIP agreement with the US are currently on ice. Yet, Donald Trump's attempts to undermine the negotiations through bilateral deals with individual EU member states came to nothing. To date, the EU has always stood united on trade issues. Boris Johnson, too, realised that he was dealing with a Union that speaks with one voice when it came to the UK's new trading relationship with the EU. Particularly on trade issues, this approach of acting as a cohesive bloc is key. Leveraging the EU's full weight as an economic area achieves

equally strong results. The European Union has already embarked upon the right course here and should continue to pursue this path in order to support the rules-based international order. The trade wars witnessed over recent years do not benefit the EU. It can only move forward under a system with fixed rules. Whereas, at the same time, it cannot afford to be naive. A good example here is the recent investment agreement signed by the EU and China. At first glance it was a success, particularly from the point of view of the German Council Presidency; yet, it has attracted loud and justified criticism. Opposition from environmental and human rights

organisations was certainly to be expected in this context. But far more surprising was the scale of criticism emanating from business associations such as the Federation of German Industries (BDI) and the Association of German Chambers of Industry and Commerce (DIHK). In the face of this criticism, the Commission felt obliged to clarify that the deal is far from being a free trade agreement. Rather, its aim is to regulate market access and enable fair competitive conditions. The DIHK and BDI were particularly critical of the lack of effective protection for investors. This example illustrates the fact that despite the EU being a strong player when it comes to trade, the Union can only proceed in small steps especially when dealing with difficult partners. However, the fact that China was willing to agree to including a chapter on sustainability for the first time, is certainly a step in the right direction. Agreements on trade issues are usually the result of lengthy negotiations. If it is to preserve its status as a trading power, the EU must continue to pursue its path with unity and perseverance and be content with small advances when dealing with difficult partners.

European competition law fails to take global competition into account.

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In terms of economic policy, another area deserves attention when it comes to consolidating the EU's position among its global competitors – European competition law, which can have a very detrimental effect from a global perspective. It is currently aligned with the horizon of the European Single Market. Unfortunately, this can place member states at a serious disadvantage compared to their international competitors, as painfully demonstrated by the much-publicised collapse of the Siemens-Alstom merger. In 2019, in her role as Commissioner for Competition in the Juncker Commission, Margrethe Vestager blocked the proposed merger between the German and French train manufacturers Siemens and Alstom, citing European competition

law. The merger would have resulted in unfair competition when it comes to the European Single Market, so in this respect Vestager can be deemed to have acted correctly. However, if we bear in mind that the two companies together are still only around half the size of the China Railway Rolling Stock Corporation (CRRC), their largest global competitor, European competition law fails to take global market conditions into account.

Two more recent examples highlight other policy areas that must be considered if the EU is to become a truly global player. The first example relates to the COVID-19 pandemic, illustrating the light and shadows of Brussels' approach to the crisis. When the pandemic hit Europe hard in spring 2020, the EU soon discovered how dependent it is on even comparatively easy-to-produce goods like medical masks. Global demand exploded, stocks were far from sufficient, and it was impossible to ramp up domestic production quickly enough. The member states scrambled to find a solution and bought whatever masks they could find. The EU urgently needs to learn its lessons from this. If it is to maintain its resilience and ability to respond to crises, the institutions must improve their crisis management and prepare for worst-case scenarios, particularly with respect to medical supplies. In the long run, this will certainly include the capacity to manufacture and stockpile essential goods and protect sensitive infrastructures.

The second example also relates to the pandemic. An immediate lesson learnt from the first wave of the pandemic in spring 2020 was that the EU acted as a single bloc when ordering vaccines that following summer. Much criticism has been levelled against the vaccine procurement and distribution strategy, mainly fuelled by frustration and impatience about the sluggish start to the vaccine rollout across the EU. However, the EU's approach to negotiating, procuring, and distributing the vaccines could provide a promising example of the EU's future orientation regarding its role in the world. Right from the start, the EU tackled this vital strategic challenge by negotiating with the pharmaceutical giants as a single

bloc. This underscores the EU's image of itself and has the potential to sustainably enhance the reputation of and trust in the EU institutions, both internally and externally.

In 2020, the European Union also passed a new EU budget for the next seven years, which includes a multi-billion recovery fund – a financial package of unprecedented size. The process of agreeing this financial package was marred by obstacles and involved tough negotiations. One small aspect of this process may end up having a greater impact on the EU's future than was expected during the negotiations. In the public perception, the European Parliament has exerted pressure particularly regarding the rule of law. This is true, but it is only one side of the coin. The parliamentarians also made clear that they saw the funding for research and innovation contained in the package as being too low. In terms of volume, there is no doubt that the amount is rather low. Nevertheless, the Parliament has demonstrated that it has the right instincts in this respect. Precisely this expenditure is crucial for the future, and it is here that the EU faces particularly tough competition from the US and China. Meanwhile, Europe's success in developing vaccines has testified to the enormous potential of such investments. The question has rightly been asked whether Europe should be increasing spending on this area to become less dependent on research conducted elsewhere.

A final area requiring action from the European Union relates directly to the foreign policy decision-making processes of EU institutions. There are calls for renewed reform of the Council's decision-making procedures. As it stands, the principle of unanimity applies to decisions on the Common Foreign and Security Policy, meaning that they can be blocked by individual member states. Of late, these vetoes have

frequently been conflated with other issues. Most resolutions tend to be approved in the end, but it can be an agonisingly slow process that
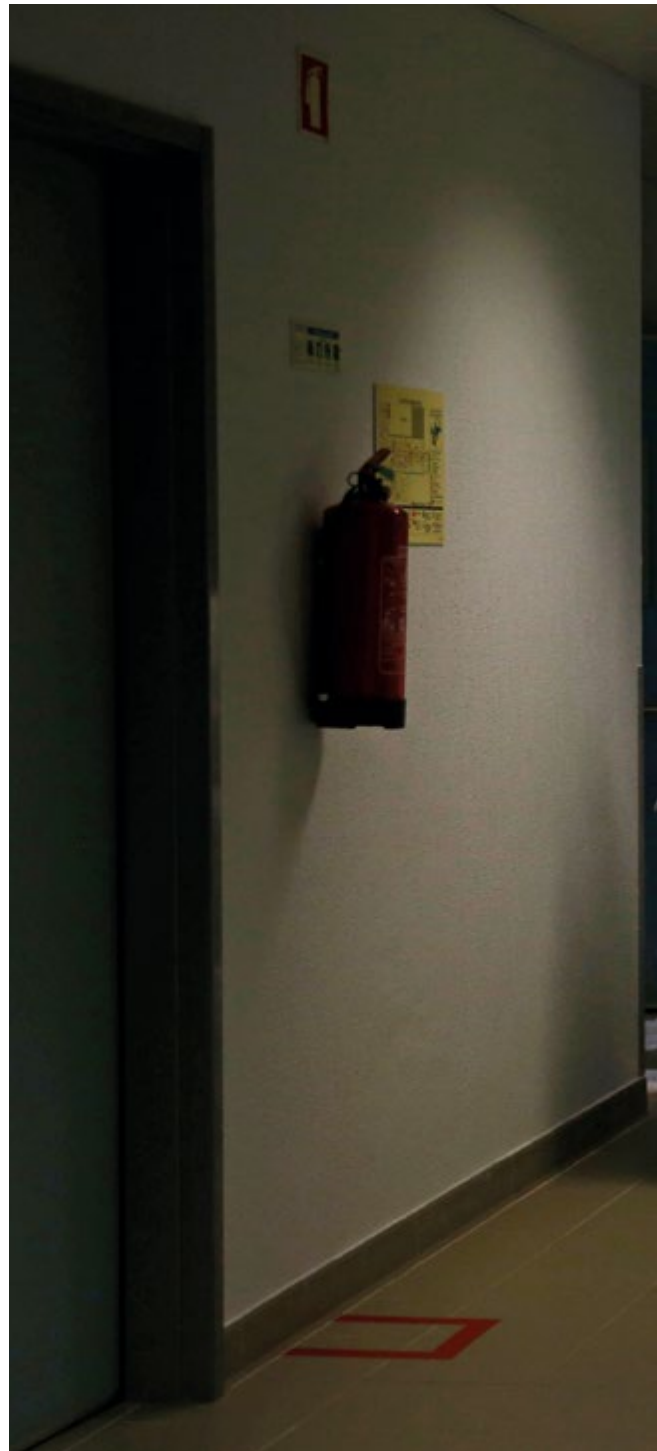
Sufficiently prepared? The EU needs to learn its lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic and prepare for worst-case scenarios, particularly with respect to medical supplies.
Source: © Pedro Nunes, Reuters.

seems out of sync with the fast pace of our age. This is why the principle of unanimity should be reviewed. Unfortunately, however, striving to reform this principle currently seems like a futile endeavour. Even though it is certainly desirable to reform the unanimity principle especially in

the long run, it is currently more expedient for the EU to exploit its existing toolbox of foreign policy options to the full. These range from the diplomatic work of the High Representative, to upholding the rules-based multilateral system through membership of international organisations, to development aid, and targeted sanctions regimes.

The above-mentioned broad understanding of a weightier role for the EU in the world allows us to identify a number of policy areas that harbour potential in this respect. The areas listed here are just a selection and do not claim to be comprehensive. The terms Green Deal, digital transformation, and demographic change alone reveal key issues that also need to be addressed for the future. We can also assume that other policy areas and issues, which cannot currently be foreseen, will be added to the list. What is more important, however, is that the EU develops and presents a view of itself as a global actor, irrespective of specific policy areas. It goes without saying that this process will be more focused on content than headlines, will be subject to constant change, and will probably never achieve a final, aggregate state.

Endogenous Factors also Favour the EU as a Global Player

We have shown how a few exogenous factors are pushing the European Union towards adopting a more powerful role in the global arena. The more we address the question of what this role might look like in real terms and the specific steps necessary to achieve it, the clearer it becomes that some of the answers go beyond the EU's external role. They relate to the question of the EU's identity. The question of what the EU can be, or wants to be, also resonates when we look at recent disputes within the Union.

Over recent years, we have observed divisions within the EU time and again that could not be resolved or appeased by the usual Brussels compromises. One example of this is the question of how to deal with refugee flows, particularly across the Mediterranean. For years, the Dublin

System had disadvantaged EU countries with a Mediterranean coastline, but it was not until the massive surge in refugee numbers in 2015 and 2016 that there was EU-wide acceptance of the need for reform. However, the reform process has been limping along for the past five years. There is still no unified concept on issues such as the right to asylum, fair distribution or cost sharing, an effective repatriation policy and developing a functioning but humane external border management system. Meanwhile, refugees are still drowning in the Mediterranean or living in dreadful conditions in camps on Greek islands on the EU's periphery. This sobering appraisal leads many to conclude that the member states must take steps to address this issue. And, as a global actor, it is essential for the Union to pursue its interests with credibility and moral integrity, the cornerstone of which are the universal human rights.

The coronavirus pandemic has revealed how the EU has struggled to organise an adequate and coordinated response.
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The next example takes us in a similar direction. Particularly over the past year, there has been sharp conflict within the European Union over the extent to which the Brussels institutions can set and enforce the rule of law. This is currently playing out in an infringement procedure, but the dispute is more about the principle and undoubtedly fuelled by domestic political motives in Hungary and Poland. When we recall that, quite rightly, the EU insists on these same rule of law criteria applying beyond its borders, particularly when it comes to its neighbourhood and enlargement policies, it seems strange that they are being so hotly contested internally. Although it may be inappropriate to compare member states with standards prevailing in very different, often fragile, neighbouring countries, we cannot overlook the fact that certain

occurrences in Poland and Hungary seriously contravene the EU's majority understanding of the rule of law. This particularly applies to judicial independence in Poland and the Hungarian government's attempts to control the media. Here, too, we come to the same conclusion: The EU as an external actor can only expect other countries to uphold standards relating to the rule of law if it credibly applies these standards internally and demonstrates that it has a clear identity in this respect.

Besides the deep rifts manifesting themselves in migration and the rule of law, the coronavirus pandemic has also inexorably revealed how the European Union has struggled to organise an adequate and coordinated response and to manage the crisis in a proactive manner. Most of the steps taken to contain the pandemic have been at national level. This is understandable in so far as health policy is a competence belonging to individual member states. Nevertheless, the EU has failed to impress, particularly during the first wave of the pandemic. It has, quite rightly, been accused of lacking resilience on several levels. As we said earlier, the joint vaccine procurement and distribution strategy is the right one and provides a sound model for the future. However, this cannot detract from the fact that the EU must put its crisis resilience, contingency plans, and crisis response mechanisms under scrutiny, not only to live up to its claim of protecting its own citizens, but also to avoid finding itself at a major disadvantage compared to other global actors. This is particularly important since the EU can realistically expect to face other similar crises in future due to population growth and climate change.

After considering these examples, we can conclude that the European Union must look inwards and answer a number of complex questions. What is its stance on rule of law standards? How can the EU's asylum system be reformed? How can the EU improve its resilience in the face of crises? These questions reveal how the EU's vision of itself as a global actor is one and indivisible with the identity that the Union creates for itself. For the sake of its future, the European Union has to actively seek answers to these questions and develop a vision of itself as a global player. To succeed, the EU has to be bold and consider the big picture.

–translated from German–

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under discussion

"The International System Is under Serious Pressure"

Germany's Two-Year Term as a Member of
the United Nations Security Council

An Interview with Ambassador Dr. Christoph Heusgen, Germany's
Permanent Representative to the United Nations (UN) in New York.

For the past two years, Germany has been a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council. For International Reports, Andrea Ellen Ostheimer, Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's New York office, talks to diplomat Christoph Heusgen about the challenges and achievements of this period, the role of China and Russia, and Germany's foreign policy compass.

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IR: Ambassador Heusgen, you have been Germany's Permanent Representative to the United Nations since summer 2017. Prior to that, you worked for twelve years as Chancellor Merkel's Foreign and Security Policy Adviser. Every eight years, Germany campaigns for one of the ten non-permanent seats on the United Nations Security Council, which are elected for two-year terms by the UN General Assembly. In 2019, Germany began its sixth term with an ambitious agenda and cooperated with other members as co-penholder on key regional issues, including Afghanistan, humanitarian aid for Syria, and Sudan. It chaired the Sanctions Committees on Libya and North Korea, too. Germany also set out to advance other key priorities in the Security Council, such as the Women, Peace and Security agenda and the climate-security nexus. Looking back over these two years, where would you say you have made a real impact?

Christoph Heusgen: Firstly, in these two years we did what we said we would do. We worked steadily to advocate the rule of law and a rules-based international order. This may sound obvious for a global organisation whose foremost task is to safeguard international peace and security. But – unfortunately – that is not the case. Over recent years, we have witnessed how the United Nations' founding concept – the peaceful resolution of crises and conflicts and promoting human rights around the world in the spirit of its Charter – has increasingly come under attack. When China commits massive human rights abuses against the Uyghurs, when Russia unscrupulously violates humanitarian law with its bombing of hospitals in Syria, and when even the former US administration left a void by withdrawing from key multilateral organisations, something must be done. Overall, I believe Germany sent out a clear signal as a strong advocate of multilateralism and supporter of the aims and values of the UN Charter.

I would like to just mention a couple of specific initiatives from Germany's Security Council presidencies that will be a legacy of our work. Sexual violence is all too often used as a terrible weapon of war. For us, it was a key priority to ensure the international community no longer stands by and watches. We found support in Nobel Peace Prize Laureates Nadia Murad and Denis Mukwege and in human rights lawyer Amal Clooney, who gave the Security Council an impressive account of the consequences of the serious human rights abuses that occur all too often in many war zones. In April 2019, the Security Council adopted a Resolution that, for the first time, focuses on the survivors of these crimes and paves the way for holding the perpetrators to account.

During our second presidency in July 2020, the provision of cross-border humanitarian aid to the people of Syria teetered on a knife-edge. We feared that Russia and China would cut off all humanitarian aid to the people who needed it so desperately. The extent to which these countries were purely motivated by political expediency was sobering, shocking even. We focused on the suffering civilians, consulted with the UN relief agencies, and, after tough negotiations, worked with our co-penholder Belgium to secure at least one access point for a longer period. This was not the result we were hoping for, but at least it provided many people with some vital relief from their hardship.

It also showed us that it's worth fighting for every single person threatened by crisis and conflict. This was and remains our motivation and driving force.

IR: Your work at the Security Council took place against the backdrop of some serious, at times unprecedented, geopolitical challenges. But despite all the obstacles you faced in recent years, there have also been some positive developments. What needs to be done to ensure these positive achievements continue after your term on the Security Council?

Christoph Heusgen: You're right, there have been many promising developments. For example, Germany and the UK co-sponsored a new political mission in the Security Council that will support the fragile process of political transition in Sudan. In Afghanistan, we joined forces with our Indonesian partners to ensure that the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan continues to assist this country.

Our unwavering dedication to a particularly polarised conflict on the doorstep of Europe has helped lay the groundwork for a potential political solution. As chair of the Sanctions Committee to oversee the Libya arms embargo, we have consistently urged all sides to honour their commitments. The Berlin Conference on Libya in support of the UN's peace efforts brought the two warring parties to the table for the first time in January 2020. We initiated a resolution, and, by giving its support, the Security Council lent additional weight to the outcome of the Berlin Conference. The ceasefire that is now in force and Libya's domestic political process with the prospect of elections in late 2021 give people hope for a better future.

IR: The UN Security Council consists of 15 members: the five permanent members (P5) China, France, the United Kingdom, Russia, and the United States, plus ten members elected based on regional proportional representation. How much influence do elected members wield? What instruments do they have at their disposal? And, in your daily work, how do you deal with the Sword of Damocles represented by the veto power of permanent members?

Christoph Heusgen: Of course, the five permanent members have a special, indeed privileged, role, which goes hand in hand with great responsibility. Their veto power is part of this, of course. I believe using it for purely political motives – we already mentioned the actions

of Russia and China regarding humanitarian aid in Syria – is extremely problematic and irresponsible. Russia and China's veto against providing the best possible humanitarian aid to the people of Syria is certainly a tragic climax, casting a shadow over this special privilege.

But – fortunately – we do not have to live with this Sword of Damocles hanging over the day-to-day work of the Security Council. That's because every Security Council member, including the P5, must persuade others and build majorities in order for resolutions to be adopted or to bring external briefers into the Security Council. In the end, nine affirmative votes are required.

While on the Security Council, we were always guided by the values underpinning our beliefs and goals, and we tried to persuade others to join us based on these values. So, over the past two years, I think we clearly demonstrated that elected members can also have specific aspirations and a willingness to shape affairs. Most substantive proposals, whether relating to the climate-security nexus or the mediation of protracted conflicts such as in Libya, came from elected members.

What's more, all Security Council Sanctions Committees are chaired by non-permanent members. This can be painstaking work, but for us, it went hand-in-hand with shaping specific policies. For instance, we facilitated the work of NGOs on behalf of the people of North Korea. This may sound very technical, but in practice it means that aid organisations can now reliably plan the delivery of life-saving food and medicines. This provides a sorely needed glimmer of hope for those people living under a brutal regime that places more importance on increasing its weapons arsenal than the welfare of its citizens.

IR: The past two years have once again seen a strong European presence on the Security Council. In addition to Europe's two permanent members France and the United Kingdom, Estonia, Poland, Belgium, and Germany had an opportunity to represent European values and positions in the UN Security Council. How much "European unity" was actually palpable in the Security Council? And which issues are made more complex or difficult because of the different interests of European Council members, despite their common values?

Christoph Heusgen: The consensus among EU members in the Security Council on all key issues has provided a solid foundation that we steadily built upon over the last two years. Of course, the positions of individual EU members are nuanced or have different focuses. But when it was crunch time, we all stuck together. EU members forged ahead together on every single Security Council vote. We often mentioned this in joint press statements before or after Security Council meetings.

In the wake of Brexit, the UK has continued to closely align itself with EU positions in the Security Council. Particularly regarding the difficult and ongoing struggle to preserve the Iran nuclear deal, the E3 – Germany, France, and the UK – have invariably formed a vital alliance in the Security Council and beyond. This alliance has held firm and proved its worth.

Reliant on humanitarian aid: In the Security Council, Germany has advocated support for people in need in Syria.
Source: © Khalil Ashawi, Reuters.

What could be further improved: As EU member states, there are times when we should not only be singing the same tune in the Security Council, but in fact speaking with one "EU ambassadorial voice". In other words, one EU member should speak for the whole group, as the African non-permanent members of the Security Council do, for example. We will keep working on this for our next term.

IR: In March/April 2019, Germany and France coordinated a joint presidency of the Security Council, another powerful symbol of Europe's voice on the Council. Among other things, the two countries launched the Alliance for Multilateralism. Why was this deemed necessary at precisely this time? And what is the added value of such an alliance?

Christoph Heusgen: This brings me back to your first question. The international system, from the World Health Organization, and the International Criminal Court, to the Paris Climate Agreement, and the World Trade Organization, is under serious pressure, and massive human rights violations are left unchecked. We need global bodies like the United Nations to have the power to act. We believe everyone should abide by the rules that they have agreed to. This is what we are fighting for. That is our foreign policy compass.

And this lies at the heart of the Alliance for Multilateralism, launched by Germany's Foreign Minister Heiko Maas together with his French counterpart and many other governments around the world. Particularly at a time when there is a need for more international cooperation, but when cohesion has come under severe pressure in the United Nations, too, the Alliance for Multilateralism holds great appeal for countries the world over. The success of the Alliance bears testimony to the strong global support for an international order based on rules and respect for international law. Germany must work consistantly to achieve this, and this is our aspiration.

IR: Together with Brazil, India, and Japan (G4), Germany has for many years been trying to gain support for Security Council reforms, including enlargement. Where are we in this process? And what are the chances of progress in this area, given the political realities?

Christoph Heusgen: The Security Council is in urgent need of reform because its present composition no longer reflects the real world – for example, not one African country holds a permanent seat. Other stakeholders also lack adequate

In urgent need of reform: The composition of the Security Council "no longer reflects the realities of the world", says Christoph Heusgen. Source: © Carlo Allegri, Reuters.

representation. With that said, the Security Council is gambling with its most precious currency: legitimacy. The vast majority of United Nations members share this view and are in favour of reform. Together with the G4 interest group, we are working to ensure that meaningful talks can finally begin. This is the core business of diplomacy: devising solutions, exploring options, forging compromises. However, a few fierce opponents of reform, led by China, continue to block this issue. Unfortunately, this has also been the case over the last two years. The fact that the COVID-19 pandemic has largely made diplomacy a virtual reality, has not been conducive to making substantial progress either. But we are working on it.

IR: In late March 2020, shortly after the World Health Organization declared the COVID-19 pandemic a global emergency, UN Secretary-General António Guterres called for a global ceasefire. However, unlike in previous situations (such as the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2014/2015), the Security Council remained silent for months. Could the Security Council have done more to support the United Nations system in

relation to the COVID-19 pandemic? And in hindsight, is there anything that could have been done better to negotiate a Security Council resolution in support of the global ceasefire?

Christoph Heusgen: In answer to your first question: absolutely! It was a real failure on the part of the Security Council when it did not immediately and publicly support the Secretary-General's call for a global ceasefire in spring 2020. In the Security Council, I myself once described this as a "deafening silence". The Security Council members were basically unanimous that the COVID-19 pandemic made people in crisis and conflict zones even more vulnerable and that the guns should be silenced. Unfortunately, a major disagreement between the US and China over the role of the World Health Organization led to weeks of deadlock in negotiations on the Security Council resolution that should have strengthened the Secretary-General's position.

It ultimately took far too long, but perhaps in the end it was something of a fortunate coincidence that Germany's Security Council Presidency began in July 2020 with the unanimous adoption of the French-Tunisian resolution.[1] It was also symbolic that Germany joined forces with Estonia to help build bridges and ensure the resolution was passed – which takes us back to the question of the influence wielded by elected members.

IR: Germany has made a major contribution to peace and security over the past two years. Now that the term has ended, which areas might Germany continue to engage with through other instruments?

Christoph Heusgen: It's true that leaving the Security Council means we no longer have the same direct opportunity to participate in and shape the UN's most important body. Yet, we endeavour to continue our active contribution towards preserving peace and security. The Berlin Process, which supports the United Nations with regard to Libya, still very much bears Germany's signature. The arrival of the new US administration holds much promise for the Security Council taking a systematic, consistent approach in order to tackle the impact of climate change. In summer 2020, Germany worked with a group of ten Security Council members to draw up a strong joint draft resolution in this respect. This is something that our successors in the Security Council can specifically build upon. The Alliance for Multilateralism will also continue to devise potential solutions to urgent global issues.

IR: Germany will run for the Security Council again in eight years' time. What issues do you think will be on the table then?

Christoph Heusgen: We will still be discussing the world's pressing crises and conflicts. Too many of them remain unresolved. I'm thinking of the suffering of the people of Yemen or the situation in Syria, which is still a long way from reaching a political resolution.

And we'll certainly still be talking about how climate change impacts security. When climate change robs people of their livelihoods, drives them from their homeland and

forces them to compete with local communities elsewhere in order to survive, this is a question of security. We are also directly impacted by whether people can lead a dignified and secure life in their own countries or whether they are drawn to Europe or elsewhere. This should also be on the Security Council's agenda in eight years' time.

The same goes for human rights. We fear that serious violations to fundamental human rights will also occur in future. We will continue to stand up for the victims and voice our criticism of those who breach international law.

IR: Mr Ambassador, would you allow us to finish with a rather personal question? You are one of Germany's most experienced diplomats. What special skills does one need to be a Permanent Representative to the United Nations in New York? What recommendations can you give to your Irish and Norwegian colleagues who began their two-year terms on the Security Council in January 2021?

Christoph Heusgen: The most important qualities of a diplomat are the ability to listen and never let the dialogue break down. Have clear positions and advocate for them in a clear manner. And above all, always remain curious and open-minded. I think these are all also important qualities for a UN ambassador.

With Ireland and Norway, two very experienced ambassadors have joined the Security Council. If I were to give them one piece of advice, then perhaps it would be something I said in one of my last sessions: "Even if you suffer personal attacks, never give up. The non-permanent members of the Security Council are elected to defend international law and the United Nations."

Questions were posed by Andrea Ellen Ostheimer. She is Head of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung's office in New York.

–translated from German–

1   Early in May 2020, permanent member France and elected member Tunisia put forward a draft resolution to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the Security Council. This called for an immediate global ceasefire to deal with the effects of the pandemic. However, the draft was locked in a stalemate for two months because of a dispute between China and the US over the role of the WHO. During the negotiations, the elected members Germany and Estonia played a substantial role in overcoming the blockade.

[Global Power Shifts]

Security Policy in the Indo-Pacific

How Can Germany Turn its Words into Deeds?

Lewe Paul / Isabel Weininger

> In its new "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific", the German government commits to assuming greater responsibility for foreign policy to address shifts in the global balance of power and regional challenges. But what exactly could an ambitious Indo-Pacific policy look like? And what does the region expect of Germany? An analysis based on the examples of India, Japan, and Singapore.

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Response to Global Power Shifts

With the "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" adopted in September 2020, the Federal Government is opening a new chapter in its foreign policy. Germany leaves no doubt that it recognises the importance of this most dynamic of world regions. The wording is also important here: Germany has not published a "strategy" leading to a specific result. Rather, the guidelines state that Germany's actions will be determined by seven clearly defined, whole-of-government principles: European action, multilateralism, the rules-based order, the United Nations Development Goals, human rights, inclusivity, and a partnership among equals.[1] This provides the basis for the Federal Government's commitment to closer cooperation with countries within the Indo-Pacific region.

The "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" provide a concept for responding to shifts in global power. Firstly, the willingness of the United States to work with Europe and other partners to preserve the rules-based order has decreased sharply over recent years. At the same time, an increasingly belligerent China exerts growing influence on international organisations, creates political dependencies, and strengthens its power projection capabilities in strategic territories such as the South China Sea. In light of these developments, Germany and Europe cannot limit themselves to the role of mere commenting observers. With its guidelines, the German government seeks to establish itself as an influential player and to uphold the interests of Germany, Europe, but also of its partners in the region.

There is broad consensus that Germany, as an exporting country, depends on a functioning, secure network of global trade routes. The special importance of the Indian and Pacific Oceans for this network is also an established fact. Yet, whereas Germany has made a name for itself as a strong economic and (to a lesser extent) diplomatic partner to Asian countries, Germany – and the European Union – still only make a modest contribution in terms of security cooperation. This discrepancy has not escaped the attention of the region's representatives, who are increasingly voicing their concerns.

It is hardly surprising that the Indo-Pacific countries have generally responded positively to the announcement of increased German engagement. However, an initial survey of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung has revealed that the guidelines were viewed as being only "moderately courageous".[2] Through the decidedly inclusive approach of the guidelines, which entails China's role as a partner as well as a challenger, Germany wants to take a stance against the formation of bipolar structures. Having said that, the reaction of the region's media makes it clear that the guidelines are viewed as an attempt to contain the rise of China and its influence in the region. Indeed, one publication even called it the end of Germany's "honeymoon" with China.[3] The region's greatest expectations of Germany are in foreign policy and security. The country may have less weight than Australia or the US when it comes to security policy in the region and cannot and does not wish to act as a military counterpart to Chinese aggression, but the Indo-Pacific countries still value Germany as a neutral partner in the great power tussle.

By using India, Japan, and Singapore as case studies, we will highlight what can be expected of Germany and how the Federal Government could work with these three partner countries to consolidate its role as a security policy player. In conclusion, we will consider the possibility of a common European approach to security policy in the Indo-Pacific.

Challenges for Three "Like-Minded" Countries

India, Japan, and Singapore are often loosely categorised as countries that share Germany's values,[4] although their political, economic, and security conditions are quite different and they represent the three different sub-regions: East Asia, Southeast Asia, and South Asia. The concept of a partnership based on shared values refers less to the comparability of political systems, which is difficult particularly in the case of Singapore but also India; but rather, it refers to a shared view of a rules-based multipolar world order in terms of economic and security issues. Despite a certain degree of political concordance, Germany's work with its partners in the Indo-Pacific cannot be compared to the close cooperation existing within the transatlantic defence alliance, NATO.

Singapore, Japan, and India face two major challenges: non-conventional security threats such as environmental disasters, cybercrime and terrorism, and China's path of confrontation.

China is clearly the bull in the Indo-Pacific china shop. The conflict between the US and China has exacerbated existing tensions across Asia; territorial disputes on land and at sea are challenging the rules-based world order – and multilateral organisations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are being undermined by China's "divide et impera" strategy and disunity among its members.[5]

India is facing a growing Chinese presence both along its northern borders in the Himalayas and in the Indian Ocean. In summer 2020, this escalated into the most serious and violent clashes in recent years. China is also gradually penetrating India's neighbourhood with its Belt and Road Initiative and lending its support to Pakistan: New Delhi's main adversary.

Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region is multi-layered.
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Indian analysts are also concerned about the closer ties developing between China and Russia, and the possibility of a new bloc forming on the Eurasian continent.[6] Meanwhile, Japan also expects its relations with China to worsen in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic. For example, in a discussion with German Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer, her Japanese colleague Nobuo Kishi emphasised how Beijing is continuing to expand its military capacities, while other countries are having to focus on fighting the pandemic.[7] For Japanese foreign policy, economic and security challenges are therefore increasingly merging.[8] In the city-state of Singapore, China is significantly expanding its soft power influence within ethnic Chinese communities so as to sway political public opinion, and neutralise potential critics. On the whole, Chinese influence in the Indo-Pacific region is multi-layered – targeted diplomatic pressure is creating political and economic constraints, and ramped up military capabilities often enable China to assert itself in acute conflict situations.[9]

On top of this, there are unconventional security threats such as ethnic and religious radicalisation and terrorism, as well as threats posed by cyberattacks, climate change, and natural disasters, which are a particular danger for Asia's megacities and coastal areas.[10] In India, we are currently witnessing how urgent it is to implement preventative policies against pollution, the destruction of ecosystems, but also to mitigate the effects of natural disasters, many of which are caused by climate change.

Against this backdrop and considering these varying expectations, Germany is pursuing a

differentiated approach to its security cooperation with these three countries in the areas of armaments cooperation, maritime security, and cybersecurity.

India's Potential Requires Stronger Commitment

India and Germany are bound by a strategic partnership explicitly based on democratic values, free and fair trade, and a rules-based order.[11] The two countries meet regularly for intergovernmental consultations, with Germany being keen to inject fresh momentum into the currently suspended negotiations on a free trade agreement between India and the European Union.[12] However, security policy has tended to play a subordinate role in bilateral relations to date. Indian experts concede that there have so far been few overlaps in the direct strategic interests. However, there is also a widespread feeling in New Delhi that German foreign policy has focused too much on China while neglecting the challenges faced by India.[13]

Since 2006, defence cooperation between India and Germany has been based on a cooperation agreement that was expanded to include an implementation agreement at a ministerial meeting in early 2019. The aim of this agreement is to establish closer ties between the two countries' armed forces, particularly with respect to collaboration in the field of armaments.[14] In fact, India is showing an interest in products made in Germany: ThyssenKrupp is currently involved in the procurement process for six submarines for the Indian Navy and consideration is being given to equipping Indian-built tanks with German engines.[15] A programme has also been developed to allow Indian officers to take part in Bundeswehr training courses in Germany; and a slight increase in capacity is planned in this respect.[16]

However, the Indo-German defence cooperation is still limited and in need of expansion. The only significant joint exercise by the two navies was held in the Arabian Sea in 2008.[17] Training capacity is at a low level and, apart from ad-hoc

high-level dialogues, there are no permanent formats for talks between military personnel. Indian experts also believe Germany falls short with respect to armaments cooperation. For example, France actively promotes its products in India and carefully ascertains demand, whereas Germany is too passive.[18]

> **Indian experts believe that Germany's international influence could above all be brought to bear on securing sea routes.**
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During the most recent intergovernmental consultations between Germany and India in November 2019, Chancellor Merkel and Prime Minister Modi identified specific areas for deeper security cooperation, including armaments collaboration, maritime security, and cybersecurity. Indian experts believe that Germany's international influence could above all be brought to bear on securing sea routes as a way of underscoring the two countries' shared interest in upholding the rules-based order. In addition to more intensive and coordinated multilateral diplomacy, physical participation in maritime exercises would also be important in this respect.[19] In addition, India is in particular need of underwater reconnaissance capabilities in the eastern Indian Ocean due to the presence of Chinese submarines.[20]

On top of the immediate and growing pressures in the maritime sphere, India is facing a myriad of security problems at home, too. Indian experts view the fight against transnational crime and terrorism as an ongoing challenge. It is also important for the subcontinent to promote resilience and draw up contingency plans with it being particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change. Germany could be an important partner in solving problems of an international nature; however, India believes it has so far been too reticent in deploying its resources.

Japan Wants a More Visible German Presence

As export-oriented nations, Japan and Germany both have a keen interest in preserving the rules-based international order. Along with its strained relations with Beijing, Japan faces an ongoing threat from North Korea's nuclear and missile programmes. Tokyo sees this as an enormous threat to the security and stability of the international community and insists upon

united action against North Korea. This is one of the reasons why the Japanese Ministry of Defence has created areas of competence to meet novel security challenges, such as cyberattacks, electromagnetic weapon systems, and space warfare.[21]

Expandable: Indian experts believe Germany falls short of its potential with respect to armaments cooperation. For example, France actively promotes its products in India and carefully ascertains demand, whereas Germany is too passive. Source: © Shailesh Andrade, Reuters.

Relations between Germany and Japan have always been predominantly economic. Their role in the Second World War has resulted in both countries exercising restraint when it comes to active military engagement. However, Berlin and Tokyo agree that the rules-based order is a global asset that needs to be actively protected. This includes resolving conflicts between nations via the designated international institutions, and not unilaterally by force. To counter such behaviour, Japan and Germany have announced increased security cooperation to advocate the principles set out in Germany's "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific".[22]

Germany and Japan have already worked together on security issues in the past within the framework of multilateral forums. The Japanese Navy is cooperating with the EU's Operation Atalanta in the Indian Ocean to fight against piracy in the region. What is more, the two countries have been involved in joint UN peace missions and worked together within the OSCE and NATO. NATO counts Japan as one of its "partners across the globe" with their alliance having been intensified since 2014 through an Individual Partnership and Cooperation Programme.[23]

Within the European Union, the UK was Japan's key political partner for many years.[24] Now that Britain has left the EU, all indications suggest that Tokyo will gradually shift this relationship in Germany's favour. However, Japanese experts concede that there is an obstacle to a common understanding of foreign policy: Many policymakers in Tokyo believe Germany is too soft on China because of economic considerations and has so far done too little to curb China's encroachments.[25]

Long before the Federal Government adopted its "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific", Japan placed the concept of a Free and Open

Indo-Pacific (FOIP) at the heart of its foreign and security policy. Since then, the Japanese government has taken pains to rally support for this political strategy. The "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" exhibit many overlaps with Japan's FOIP approach. However, experts in Tokyo still wish Germany would do even more to present itself as a military ally. Above all, this could be achieved through the physical presence of a German naval unit and by scaling up talks at the highest political level. In light of Japan's perception of the increased security threat in the Indo-Pacific and Germany's acknowledgement of this region's importance, the conditions for strengthening the security component of bilateral cooperation are more favourable than ever before.

> **Japan should examine ways of supporting Germany and Europe on security issues not directly related to the Indo-Pacific.**
> ____

There is considerable potential for closer cooperation in three areas. Firstly, both countries could clearly signal their determination to join forces to defend their interests. Even if Germany cannot ultimately exert a substantial influence on the military balance in the Indo-Pacific, the widely anticipated deployment of a German naval unit sends an important political signal that principles should be underpinned with concrete actions.[26] Secondly, Germany and Japan could build mutual trust through intensified cooperation on concrete projects. This might include German participation in Japan's existing support for ASEAN states regarding coastal protection or targeted cooperation against unconventional threats such as cyber warfare and space warfare – areas where Japan is already displaying a strong commitment.[27] However, building a sustainable foundation for this cooperation would also require Japan to examine ways of supporting Germany and Europe on security issues not directly related to the Indo-Pacific. Thirdly,

both countries could work together more closely on armaments cooperation and examine opportunities for the joint development of technologies. An important prerequisite for this is the imminent conclusion of the Security of Information Agreement, which some experts believe has been delayed for too long.[28]

Singapore As a Bastion Against Disinformation

Since 2005, Singapore and Germany have established and formalised a close and trusting security cooperation. A new, enhanced Agreement on Defence Cooperation signed in 2018 took this to a new level and defined current priorities, especially on cybersecurity and hybrid threats.[29] Despite the two countries having different priorities and perceptions of immediate threats owing to their geographical distance, which limits the scope of their defence cooperation, they both have a strong interest in maintaining a multilateral, rules-based global order. The enhanced cooperation between Singapore and Germany encompasses both security and foreign policy issues, as confirmed by a joint statement issued by the two foreign ministers in 2018. Here, Germany sees Singapore as the European Union's central point of contact for the South-East Asia region and within ASEAN.[30] These excellent bilateral relations are complemented by high-level political visits.

In the "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific", Singapore is explicitly mentioned regarding three issues: peace and security, information security, and connectivity. Specifically, the following actions are planned in this respect: the deployment of a German naval liaison officer to the Singapore Information Fusion Centre (IFC) in order to strengthen dialogue with like-minded partners concerning the protection of information and communication systems, along with the establishment of a Regional German Information Centre to counter propaganda and fake news in the region. The European Union's 2019 free trade agreement with Singapore will foster economic and rules-based ties between the Asian and European trading areas. Germany

will also work more closely with Singapore on key technologies and promote their responsible use.[31] Apart from the establishment of the Regional German Information Centre and the implementation of the trade agreements, further plans continue to be somewhat vague, however.

> **Maintaining its defence capabilities and military performance compared to its neighbours is a challenge for Singapore.**
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> ———

In the area of security and defence policy, Exercise Panzer Strike is a joint military exercise that began in 2009. Since then, the exercise has increased its complexity and scale and is held in high esteem by the Singapore Armed Forces (SAF). Defence Minister Ng Eng Hen also highlighted the provision of the Oberlausitz Military Training Area (OMTA), pointing out its importance according to a Singapore expert.[32] Since OMTA equals approximately one fourth of the size of Singapore, the SAF are provided with a new kind of flexibility to train without space limitations. The eleventh series of Exercise Panzer Strike also featured a bilateral live-firing exercise in March 2019.[33] As the second pillar of the defence cooperation agreement, Germany is a key supplier of defence equipment to Singapore. Most recently, it supplied four 218SG submarines and Leopard 2 tanks, with Singapore being open to working with Germany on additional armaments cooperation. Military recruitment poses a particular problem for Singapore due to demographic trends, so maintaining its defence capabilities and military performance compared to its neighbours is a challenge, particularly as cheaper weapons systems become more readily available.[34]

Bilateral security relations between Singapore and Germany have intensified over recent years. The city-state views German arms exports and the provision of military training facilities as a successful bilateral cooperation and alliance in the face of those seeking to overturn the international order. The Regional German Information Centre is primarily a civilian facility, but it could also be set up to throw light on disinformation campaigns and offer alternative narratives. This could be complemented by more in-depth intelligence sharing and confidence-building measures to better evaluate threat situations.

Priorities for German Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific Region

These three case studies relating to Germany's security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific demonstrate that there are many opportunities for Germany to establish itself as a value-based, trusted partner in the region. In light of Germany's size and global influence, its partners in the region have high expectations – whether regarding stabilising the international order or specific issues such as securing trade routes.

Critics of the "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific" see a risk of Germany becoming a one-stop shop that is expected to be (more) active in every country in the region in all areas, from sustainability over security to digital transformation. The guidelines also contain very few new projects, and their aims are yet to be implemented. But precisely this could also be considered as their strength. They do not set out a rigid, ready-made strategy but instead offer the possibility of redesigning or deepening cooperation depending on the partner countries' needs. What is needed here are small, targeted steps rather than a drastic change of course. The three case studies reveal that the same applies to security policy – only interaction and steady work on a range of projects lead to a qualitative leap forward in the overall picture.

With its existing projects relating to armaments cooperation, joint training, and efforts to share information, Germany still falls short of its partners' expectations. A real *Zeitenwende*[35] for Germany's security policy – in the Indo-Pacific but also elsewhere – would have to involve the following steps:

Reliable partnership: Singapore and Germany have established and formalised a close and trusting security cooperation. Source: © Fabrizio Bensch, Reuters.

- Firstly, the region needs to know more about Germany's interests, capabilities, and projects. Moreover, **discussions on security policy issues** must be intensified and institutionalised, **especially at working level**.

- Secondly, the signal effect of a physical German defence presence can hardly be overestimated; it is vital that Germany fulfils its **promise to deploy a naval unit**, thus sending a visible sign that it upholds a free, open maritime order. This requires appropriate planning regarding procurement and budgeting.

- Thirdly, Germany should seek to conduct **joint military and naval exercises** and explore the possibility of participating as an observer in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) exercises.

- Fourthly, the three countries would like to see a consolidation of existing armaments cooperation and for Germany to more actively pursue its interests in this area.

- Fifth, it is important to significantly increase **cooperation in cybersecurity and information**. The **Regional German Information Centre** in Singapore and the **connectivity partnership** with Japan give grounds for optimism. But even in this area, there is still plenty of scope for German and European narratives in the region. Increased cooperation between intelligence services plays a role here, too.

- Finally, every possibility of cooperation with partner countries in **multilateral forums** should be expanded and supplemented with **bi- and tri-national formats**. A joint meeting of foreign and defence ministers should be held with Japan as part of the **Two-plus-two format**.

These recommendations apply in a similar way to the European Union. At the end of the day, Germany's increased security engagement in the Indo-Pacific region can only have a tangible impact if it is flanked by EU action.

A European Vision for the Indo-Pacific?

Particularly over the last year, discussions about a European "pivot to Asia" have gathered momentum once again. France and Britain have long been active in the region with their overseas territories in the Indo-Pacific and as established maritime security powers. Against this background, the French Ministry of Defence published a security strategy paper on the Indo-Pacific back in 2019.[36] Germany's guidelines followed in September 2020 and the Netherlands published a Policy Memo two months later.[37] Germany and the Netherlands focus above all on pursuing their economic interests in the region; they do so by diversifying their trading partners, reducing dependency on China, and strengthening relations with countries with shared values. However, their programmes are broader than that of the French and cover areas such as human rights, rule of law, connectivity, climate change, cultural diplomacy, and multi-lateralism.

Despite all their differences, the three written concepts as well as the EU's new Strategic Partnership with ASEAN[38] and the joint position of the E3 countries at the United Nations regarding the South China Sea, all bear testimony to a growing unity among European countries with strategic ambitions. Individually, no European nation carries real weight on the global arena. The EU can only credibly assert itself by pooling its capacities and resources and recommitting to common values. Unifying the various Indo-Pacific programmes of Germany, France, and the Netherlands to create a European approach, based on existing European papers such as the EU-China Strategic Outlook from 2019 and the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy (2018), could inject much greater coherence into the EU's activities across the region. This also applies to smaller member states that do not currently have an agenda in this respect but could bring specific capabilities to the table. Such coordinated security action in the Indo-Pacific would restart the Franco-German engine of the Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP), while proving to their transatlantic partners that they

are willing to share the burden. But this would also mean not having to get involved in moves to form blocs and renewed US-China confrontation.[39] Instead, Europe could regain at least a degree of strategic capability in the face of geopolitical power shifts.

–translated from German–

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Global Power Shifts

"A New and Less Benign Strategic Area"

Australia as a Strategic Power in the Indo-Pacific Region

Beatrice Gorawantschy / Barbara Völkl

When Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison unveiled his country's new defence strategy in 2020, he announced a shift towards "a new and less benign strategic area".[1] With the dawn of a new era, defined by the end of the unchallenged hegemony of the US and the seemingly unstoppable rise of China, Australia is starting to view itself as a regional power and the guardian of a rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. The geoeconomic and geostrategic balance of the Indo-Pacific has perhaps shifted more rapidly and dramatically than in any other region of the world. With its key position in the South West Pacific and Eastern Indian Ocean, Australia is taking on a proactive leadership role – together with like-minded partners in the region and around the globe.

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Pivot to Power: Australia as a Creative Middle Power

Over the last few years, Australia – a relatively isolated nation of 25 million people, surrounded by "friends and fish"[2] – has positioned itself as a global middle power. Up to now, its national strategic interests with regard to defence policy have focussed on the continent itself, while its more far-reaching economic and foreign policy activities have had a global orientation. It has now defined and repositioned itself as a "creative middle power".[3] In terms of security and defence, Australia is broadening its gaze and focussing particularly on the South Pacific and Southeast Asia, while its foreign policy is setting its sights on the Indo-Pacific. This previously rather undefined space between Delhi and Tokyo has been gaining political importance over recent years. Alongside Australia, this is particularly true for Japan, as well as for the US and India – all important allies. European countries such as Germany, France, and the Netherlands have also been paying closer attention to the significance of this region. In September 2020, the German government published its "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific", in which it stressed the need for diversified relations, especially with countries with shared values such as Australia.[4] With this

strategic realignment, Australia is consolidating two areas: its ties to Western and like-minded partners and its integration into the Asian sphere.

Arena of Great Power Rivalry: The Indo-Pacific between Washington and Beijing

One of the reasons for Australia's new policy direction is undoubtedly the increasing systems rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. Under President Trump, the US became an unstable ally, while China is trying to consolidate its status as a new superpower and expand its influence through diplomatic and paradiplomatic means. China's territorial claims and military build-up in places such as the South China Sea have, in recent years, regularly challenged US supremacy in the region. Along with such territorial conflicts, China's geoeconomic (and geopolitical) Belt and Road Initiative is fuelling the rivalry between the two great powers. With its megaproject of a global trading network from Guangzhou to Rotterdam, China is dangling the prospect of economic incentives in front of smaller countries in the Indo-Pacific and beyond. However, above all, China hopes that this key foreign policy project will shift the international order closer to its own ideas. Often described as a loan-to-own financing model, the Belt and Road Initiative is

just one example of how Chinese trade, foreign and security policy is intertwined. So far, the US, European actors, and other guardians of rules-based systems have failed to offer a convincing alternative to the Belt and Road Initiative.
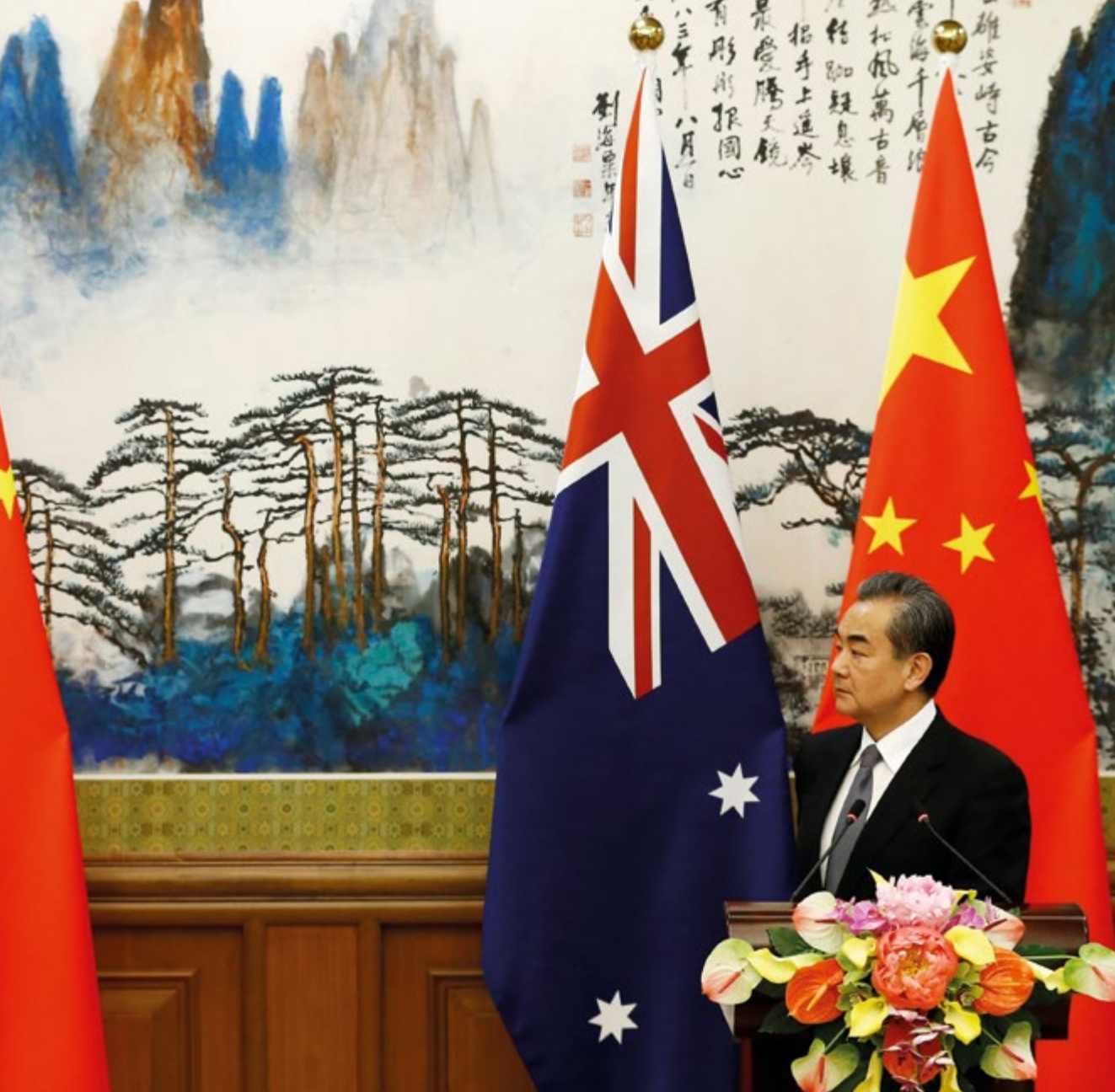
Relations between Australia and China have been in free fall since the beginning of 2020 at the latest.

As traditional allies, the US and Australia still hold their alliance in high regard. Despite a bumpy start to bilateral relations during Trump's tenure, under the 45th president they still compared favourably to relations with other like-minded countries – albeit marred by the derogatory rhetoric. However, American influence in Australia's neighbourhood has clearly declined – which is not only due to Trump's withdrawal from the Trans-Pacific Partnership – and China has not been shy about filling the gap. Yet, despite the rhetorical volatility, the US-Australia alliance remains on a firm footing. At the 2018 G20 summit, Donald Trump described it as "one of our oldest and one of our best".[5] Their shared values were reaffirmed at the Australia-United States Ministerial Consultations, for which Australian Foreign Minister Marise Payne and then Defence Minister Linda Reynolds flew to Washington in the midst of the pandemic to highlight the warm ties between the two countries. At the same time, however, Payne made it clear: "[W]e make our own decisions, our own judgments in the Australian national interests."[6]

In contrast, since the beginning of 2020 at the latest, relations between Australia and China – its most important trading partner – have been more or less in free fall. For some time now, the Australian government has been openly critical of China's territorial expansion and militarisation in the South China Sea. It also barred Chinese telecommunications provider Huawei from building its 5G network back in 2018, but it refrained from voicing broader criticisms in

order to protect its trading relationship. However, positions hardened early on in the COVID-19 pandemic, triggered by the Australian government's call for an independent international investigation into the origins of the coronavirus in China. China responded with a raft of measures, including restrictions on the import of vital Australian exports, such as barley and beef. Tensions ramped up still further when Prime

Tense relations: The climate between Australia and China has recently deteriorated significantly.
Source: © Thomas Peter, Reuters.

Minister Morrison responded to the new Hong Kong Security Bill with visa concessions and simplified citizenship procedures for Hongkongers living in Australia and by suspending the extradition treaty with the Special Administrative Region. As a result, sales of Australian coal – the country's biggest export product – collapsed in China, presumably because state-controlled power plants and steel manufacturers were instructed to stop buying coal from Australia. Australia also suspects that China is behind a wave of cyberattacks on its critical infrastructure. In November 2020, a Chinese diplomat in Canberra gave a document to Australian media outlets outlining 14 grievances and accusing the nation of "poisoning bilateral relations".[7] Prime Minister Morrison was unimpressed, and his visit to his Japanese counterpart Yoshihide Suga

highlighted Australia's efforts to work with partners sharing similar values so as to defend the rules-based, liberal democratic order. Along with trade policy tools, China is now also turning to methods that go beyond the remit of the World Trade Organisation. It tweeted a photo montage that (allegedly) showed an Australian soldier holding a knife to the throat of an Afghan child. In this way, the Communist Party provoked a statement from Prime Minister Morrison, who pointed out how war crimes are thoroughly investigated in democratic countries and demanded an apology from Beijing.

A New Era: Australia's New Security and Defence Strategy

Australia finds itself in a fast-changing, highly complex environment, beset by uncertainty and sources of conflict. As a result, regional conflicts and the US-China rivalry in the Indo-Pacific region have a direct impact on the nation's stability and security. Its national defence policy has to safeguard the country from these ever-changing risks. In addition to direct threats, the country increasingly has to deal with the weakening of the rules-based order and the emergence of "grey zone activities" including cyberattacks, external interference, economic pressures, and disinformation campaigns. The volatility of the region has led Australia to make ongoing strategic adjustments to its security and defence policy over the last few years, such as increasing its defence budget and ramping up its rearmament programme.

> **A recession, coupled with an increased risk of military conflicts, necessitates a reorientation of Australia's defence policy.**
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"[W]e need to [...] prepare for a post-COVID world that is poorer, that is more dangerous, and that is more disorderly."[8] With these words, Prime Minister Morrison introduced the launch of the Australian government's 2020 Defence Strategic Update[9] and compared the current dimension of global economic and strategic uncertainty to the collapse of the international order in the 1930s. The coronavirus pandemic will have unprecedented consequences for the Australian economic miracle – a country that had not experienced a recession in the last 30 years. The allusion to 1930 symbolises the seriousness of the situation: A recession, coupled with an increased risk of military conflicts, necessitates a reorientation of defence policy, and a shift towards regionally deployable armed forces.

"The Indo-Pacific is the epicentre of rising strategic competition"[10] – this is another key phrase used by the Australian Prime Minister, not only when launching the Strategic Update but in all his recent foreign policy speeches, including his UK Policy Exchange Virtual Address: "Now, in the 21st century, the Indo-Pacific will shape the destiny of the world."[11] The centre of global economic and military power now lies in the Indo-Pacific region. However, geopolitical challenges have intensified once again since the adoption of the 2016 Defence White Paper, and the pandemic has accelerated and accentuated trends, such as the prioritisation of the country's immediate neighbourhood, particularly the South West Pacific and Northeast Indian Ocean.

The new defence doctrine sets out the country's three new strategic objectives, as follows: "Firstly, to shape our strategic environment. Secondly, to deter actions against Australia's interests. And thirdly, to respond with credible military force – when we require it."[12] Most importantly, the update provides clarity on how the Australian Defence Force will position itself and prepare for the aforementioned unprecedented challenges. The strategic objectives will "guide all defence planning, including force structure." They will prioritise the "immediate region", meaning the area ranging from the "Northeast Indian Ocean through maritime and mainland South-East Asia to Papua New

Guinea and the South West Pacific." The Strategic Update provides a balanced approach to risk management and a guarantee against uncertainty in the region.

The Strategic Update 2020 with its new regional focus defines the Indo-Pacific as being central to Australia's geographic positioning.
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It also reveals a gradual change in the narrative: While deepening the alliance with the US remains an important part of Australia's security policy, it also seeks to expand its cooperation with regional partners, particularly India, Japan, the states of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Pacific Island countries – in the sense of concerted efforts to restore the strategic balance of the Indo-Pacific.

The Strategic Update 2020 is the start of a gradual transition and marks a historic milestone. With its new regional focus, it defines the Indo-Pacific as being central to Australia's geographic positioning. The new strategy is not only a sign of Australia's growing confidence, but its implementation is also linked to Australia's increased trust in its regional partners.

Southeast Asia: A Key Region for Geostrategic Competition

The Australian government's Foreign Policy White Paper, which was published in November 2017 and, alongside the recent Strategic Defence Update, forms the basis of Australia's foreign, security and defence policy, places the regional focus on the Indo-Pacific as a whole. However, it also specifically emphasises the successes of ASEAN, which has contributed to security and prosperity in the region for the past 50 plus years.[13] Australia is proud to be ASEAN's oldest dialogue partner and has supported its vision of a rules-based, "inclusive"

and economically integrated regional community of nations since 1974.

The geographical location of Southeast Asia explains Australia's ambitions. For Australia, Southeast Asia is a key region for geostrategic competition because it connects the Pacific to the Indian Ocean and hosts vital trade routes. ASEAN plays an important role in convening regional forums, such as the East Asia Summit, to which Australia attaches particular importance in terms of strategic dialogue and maintaining peace in the Indo-Pacific. The White Paper highlights the importance of Australia's bilateral relationship with individual nations in Southeast Asia and with the ASEAN Community as a whole, in order to increase engagement and create a more robust Southeast Asia. The ASEAN Special Summit, hosted by Australia in Sydney in 2018, can be described as a preliminary highlight in its relations with the neighbouring region. Beyond all the symbolism, the Summit also led to concrete action, such as measures to counter terrorism and extremism, and the strengthening of dialogue mechanisms relating to cybersecurity in the region.

Improving security cooperation is a key element of the comprehensive strategic partnership with the region. An example of this is the Strategic Partnership Agreement that Australia signed with Vietnam in 2018. Against the backdrop of a shifting environment, it also signed a new agreement on military training with Singapore, in March 2020, and recently renewed the Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) on Cybersecurity Cooperation that was signed in 2017.[14] Close cooperation with Singapore and Malaysia through the Five Power Defence Arrangements is also an important component of Australia's security engagement with Southeast Asia. On the Australian side, certain voices are now calling for the defence agreement to be expanded to include other Southeast Asian countries.[15] Australia already works closely with the Philippines and Indonesia in the fight against terrorism in the region. And, as part of Australia's International Cyber Engagement Strategy, the country signed an MoU with Thailand on Cyber and Digital Cooperation in early 2019.[16]

"We have a vision of an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific": Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison sees his country as a creative regional power that plays a decisive role in shaping the development of a regional security architecture. Source: © Issei Kato, Reuters.

Scott Morrison's remarks at the 2019 Shangri-La Dialogue also made clear Australia's continued commitment to the close integration of foreign and economic policy in the region, noting: "We have a vision of an open, inclusive and prosperous Indo-Pacific. This includes wanting to see an inclusive architecture for regional trade as Singapore, Australia and other partners work

to finalise RCEP and that our existing trade arrangements keep pace with technological change, especially the digital economy."[17]

Overcoming common health challenges takes on a whole new meaning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

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In her speech at the February 2020 ASEAN Defence Ministers' Informal Meeting in Hanoi then Australian Defence Minister Linda Reynolds reaffirmed that the Morrison government also sees ASEAN as the most important regional organisation in terms of security and defence policy: "ASEAN sits at the heart of the Indo-Pacific and we will work with our ASEAN partners to achieve common goals and priorities and reflect shared values."[18] Cooperation will continue to be based on six fundamental principles: mutual respect; recognition of "ASEAN centrality"; supporting the resilience, independence, and sovereignty of individual member states; addressing areas of shared priority; transparency; and respect for international law and norms. The defence cooperation covers eight core areas:

1. training;
2. working to increase women's participation in peace and security processes;
3. providing support for UN peacekeeping missions;
4. counterterrorism;
5. maritime security;
6. addressing common health challenges – something that takes on a whole new meaning in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic;
7. disaster relief;
8. promoting communication, new forms of cooperation and interoperability.

In light of today's global challenges and the regional geopolitical situation, consideration is being given to institutionalising the hitherto informal format. During the virtual ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM Plus) in December 2020, then Australian Defence Minister Reynolds reiterated the importance of regional security cooperation based on the Strategic Update: "COVID-19 has altered the region's economic and strategic landscape dramatically and accelerated the geostrategic trends that affect Australia's interests. The 2020 Defence Strategic Update reinforced Defence's focus on our immediate region, including Southeast Asia, and the value of working with our partners to shape the future of the region."[19]

The Pacific Step-Up

In addition to the focus on Southeast Asia, another region is central to Australia's foreign policy: the Pacific. The new Pacific Step-Up policy was highlighted in the Foreign Policy White Paper[20] and has gathered momentum since Scott Morrison became Prime Minister in August 2018. He is keen to open a new chapter in relations with the "Pacific family" in light of China's growing influence in the region: "Australia has a long history of cooperation with our Pacific neighbours. We want to work with our Pacific Islands partners to build a Pacific region that is secure strategically, stable economically and sovereign politically."[21]

Australia's Pacific Step-Up is guided by strategic interests. The Pacific Island countries are on Australia's doorstep, and the South West Pacific in particular is Australia's natural sphere of influence. Australia is the most powerful member of the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and the largest donor of development aid to the Pacific countries.

Australia has also established an Office of the Pacific within the Department of Foreign Affairs, a whole-of-government institution, to enhance coordination with the Pacific Island countries. A new infrastructure bank for the Pacific has also been set up. This strategy, which encompasses both regional economic integration and strategic interests, also includes efforts to conclude a free trade agreement (FTA) with the Pacific Island countries. The Pacific Agreement on Closer Economic Relations (PACER) Plus was

ratified in December 2020. The only fly in the ointment is that Papua New Guinea and Fiji have not yet signed. Strengthening ties with the Pacific also involves deepening security cooperation, such as through the new Australian-sponsored Pacific Cyber Security Operational Network. All these developments are accompanied by an increase in Australia's military presence. COVID-19 has exposed the already fragile "democracies" of the Pacific region to an even higher risk of internal instability. The pandemic has increased competition for spheres of influence in the region and prompted the Australian government to reaffirm its commitment to the region. This was accompanied by an increase in Australian development aid and large deliveries of medical supplies – not least because China had been ramping up its activities in this respect with its "coronavirus diplomacy".

Australia has slashed its development aid programmes in Southeast Asia in favour of the Pacific.

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However, analysts and leading diplomats fear that the step-up policy in the Pacific could be accompanied by a step-down policy in Southeast Asia. This is because Australia has simultaneously slashed its development aid programmes in Southeast Asia in favour of the Pacific. However, in light of current political developments in the region and the associated geostrategic challenges, there are good reasons to assume that Australia will continue to attach great importance to Southeast Asia in terms of its foreign, security and defence policy.

Australia's Commitment to the Quad

The intensification of cooperation between Australia, India, Japan, and the US against the backdrop of increasingly aggressive power claims by China in the Indo-Pacific raises the question of whether, from Australia's perspective, the Quadrilateral Security Cooperation (known as the Quad) could be an effective instrument for restoring the strategic balance of power in the region. Since 2017, the Quad has been undergoing something of a revival with the goal of a "free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific region".[22] Although all four Quad countries have different threat perceptions, military capabilities, and strategic priorities, they all have a common interest in maintaining a stable balance of power in the region, freedom of the sea-lanes, and a rules-based economic order. Particularly in the military sphere, the Quad could counter Chinese attempts to alter the status quo.

The fact that naval units from all four Quad countries joined in the Malabar naval exercises in November 2020 reflects a new level of cooperation. Albeit informal, the Quad could nonetheless develop into a serious instrument for containing China's hegemonic aspirations via, inter alia, greater military engagement from Australia. Operation Malabar has made it clear that the Quad is willing to be involved in concrete, visible military exercises. Over the last few years, Australia has clearly encountered policy strategies in the region that threaten the liberal rules-based order or attack the integrity of Australia's liberal democratic political system. The Quad gives Canberra the opportunity to collaborate on economic and military initiatives and diplomatic positions in cases of shared values being threatened – and avoids the need for Australia to stand up to China alone.

A New Geoeconomic Reality? Australia Joins the RCEP

Australia is set to become the world's 12th largest economy[23] and, as a commodity-based exporting nation, enjoys a trade surplus. China is Australia's biggest trading partner for both imports and exports – but even here, Australia has a trade surplus and high reciprocity. In the words of Deputy Prime Minister Michael McCormack: "We need China as much as China needs us."[24]

Although it has yet to be ratified, since November 2020 Australia has been part of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the

largest FTA in the Indo-Pacific. RCEP negotiations were originally launched by ASEAN countries (including Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam) along with Australia, China, India, Japan, New Zealand, and South Korea. The FTA has now been signed by all these countries, except India.

> **Complex issues such as state subsidies, labour law, and environmental standards are nowhere to be found in the RCEP.**
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The RCEP covers a market of 2.2 billion people and a trade volume of 26.2 trillion US dollars. These figures are certainly impressive but is the agreement really the "coup for China" that was initially touted in the media?[25] It is worth taking an objective look and focussing on what is missing from the agreement. The 20 chapters of the agreement set uniform standards, provide for simplified bureaucratic processes, and create a framework for investment. They also enhance value chains in the Asia-Pacific region by determining the origin of products and setting rules of origin. The agreement regulates tariff reductions down to zero tariffs, which sounds significant. Yet, at a time when basic tariffs are already low and countries regularly impose politically motivated punitive tariffs, its main impact lies in the enormous volume of trade. Moreover, long transitional periods of up to 20 years have been agreed for these tariff reductions. Complex issues such as state subsidies, labour law, and environmental standards are nowhere to be found, and the agricultural sector is also largely excluded. For Australia, the RCEP builds on its existing FTAs with the other 14 nations (see Fig. 1). More specifically, this means, for example, that iron ore – Australia's main export to China – is already duty-free, regardless of RCEP. In principle, the RCEP agreement would eliminate China's import tariffs on Australian coal

Fig. 1: Australia's Trade Ties in the Region.
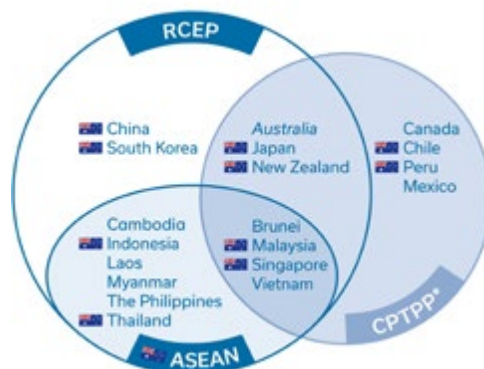
🇦🇺 Australia's existing bilateral or trilateral (with New Zealand) free trade agreements.
* Comprehensive and Progressive Agreement for Trans-Pacific Partnership.
Source: own illustration based on Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade 2020: Trade and investment, in: https://bit.ly/3s8eqiZ [19 Feb 2021].

in 2021 – though this will have little benefit if China refuses to grant unloading permits to Australian cargo ships, as is the case in the current dispute. Pursuant to RCEP, import tariffs on Australian wine should also fall in 2021. Yet, China has now imposed punitive tariffs of 200 per cent on Australian wine and officially called it an anti-dumping measure. These actions weigh particularly heavily on Australia in the midst of its first recession in 30 years.

Nevertheless, the RCEP shows that the Indo-Pacific is no longer primarily looking to Western trading partners but increasingly building a regional structure. The European Union, which is currently negotiating FTAs with Australia and New Zealand, thus runs the risk of being gradually sidelined when it comes to trade and regulatory issues.

Quo Vadis, Down Under?

In his first major foreign policy speech, Prime Minister Morrison elucidated Australia's view of itself as a creative regional power. In an age of growing rivalries between the great powers,

China's increasingly aggressive stance, and the effects of the coronavirus pandemic, Australia not only wants to be involved in developing a regional security architecture but also desires to be a serious player – and not just to play the "deputy sheriff" in tensions between the US and China.[26]

As a result, the Australian Government is increasingly seeking to forge partnerships in the region and to exert greater influence in regional and international organisations, as well as in forums such as ASEAN, the ASEAN Regional Forum, ADMM Plus, PIF, the Asia-Pacific Economic

Economic powerhouse: Australia is set to become the world's 12th largest economy and, as a commodity-based exporting nation, enjoys a trade surplus. Source: © David Gray, Reuters.

Cooperation Forum, the G20, the East Asia Summit, the Quad Dialogue Forum, and as a partner in the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE) and the NATO. However, as far as Australia is concerned, this is not so much an expression of a confrontational approach towards China as a sign of greater political responsibility, a pragmatic realignment of its foreign policy, and also a desire "to manage China" without compromising national security or its basic values.

The advantage with regard to the Indo-Pacific – and Southeast Asia in particular – is that Australia is perceived as a team player in the region rather than as an external actor. Australia and ASEAN can work together to address challenges, especially with regard to counterterrorism and cybersecurity, digital capacity building, and the digital economy. Having decided to exclude "risky" tech companies from the 5G network rollout back in 2018 citing national security concerns, Australia could set an example when it comes to protecting critical infrastructure. The same is true of Australia's policy to combat the spread of COVID-19.

The future of Australia is not solely dependent on China or the US.
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The partnership with the Pacific Island countries is not only designed to counter Chinese ambitions in the region but also to guarantee lasting relations with neighbouring states in the form of joint initiatives. For example, implementing the travel bubble between Australia, New Zealand, and the South Pacific could help the island nations that are so heavily dependent on tourism.

The Indo-Pacific region is characterised by rapid shifts in the geostrategic and geoeconomic balance of power and a steady increase in cross-border competition and conflicts at sea, on land, and in the air. These are highly complex, interrelated issues that require detailed analysis and potential actions have to be weighed carefully. The future of Australia and the region is not solely dependent on the behaviour of China or the US. New players with growing ambitions are entering the arena. Australia's alliance with the US remains the most strategically relevant. Australia
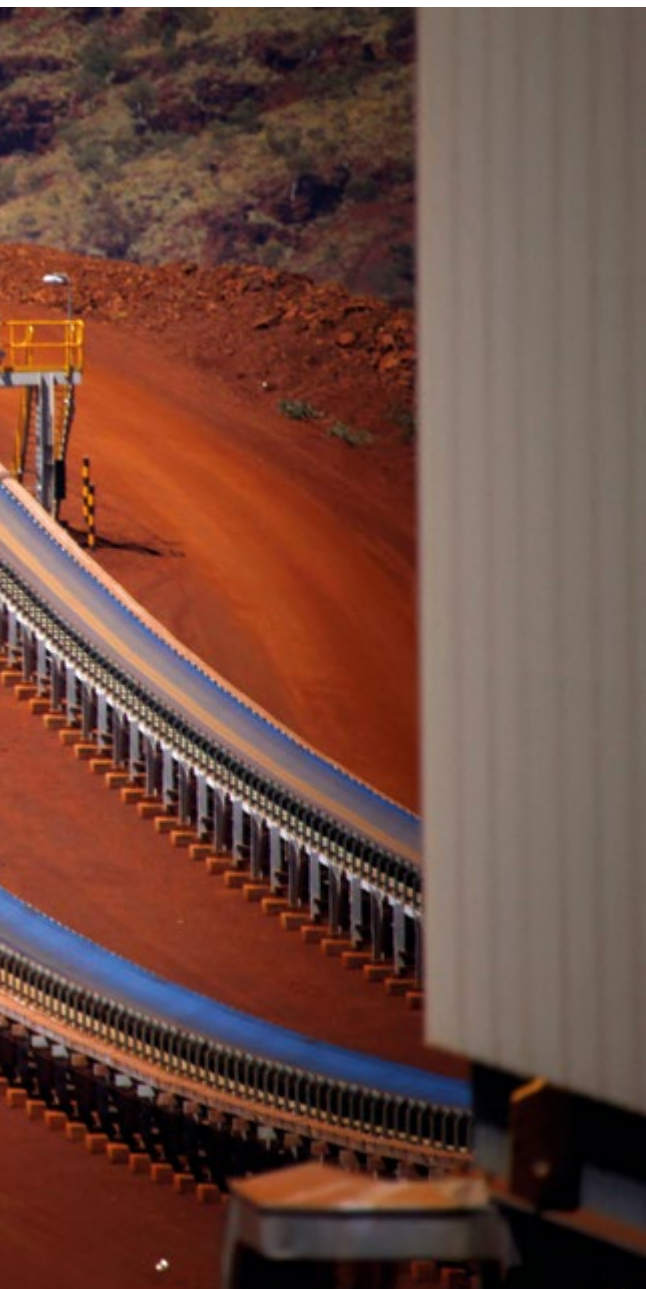
should try to feed its viewpoint into the Indo-Pacific strategy of newly elected US president Joe Biden, for example in terms of an increased naval presence in the region. Australia will only be able to increase its influence in the Indo-Pacific if it works with "like-minded" partners. Germany has also stepped forward as a potential partner within the framework of the so-called Alliance for Multilateralism[27] and through its "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific".

Germany and the European Union: "Strategic" Partners of Australia in the Indo-Pacific?

German-Australian relations have a long history and the two countries have had a strategic partnership since 2013. Bilateral relations also reached a peak with the establishment of the Australia-Germany Advisory Group in 2015 and with reciprocal visits by leading politicians. The partnership between the European Union and Australia dates back to the 1960s and is guided by shared values and interests. Although this partnership was reaffirmed with the ratification of the EU/Australia Framework Agreement in 2018, the EU still lacks political visibility. Australia watches the crises within Europe and the risk of increasing fragmentation with concern. A speedy conclusion of the FTA currently being negotiated between the EU and Australia, its third largest trading partner, will, therefore, bring more than just economic opportunities. It is also about strengthening relations with a like-minded partner and working together to shape a globalisation that is rules-based, liberal, and sustainable.

Ultimately, for Australia, the perception of Germany and the EU "co-shaping" policies in the Indo-Pacific will be measured by their positioning vis-à-vis China. Closer cooperation between Germany and the EU and the Morrison government – coined by political realism – through the aforementioned interregional forums, along with joint support for regional processes such as the China-ASEAN South China Sea Code of Conduct, are potential instruments for building greater global resilience.

With its "Policy guidelines for the Indo-Pacific", the German government claims, albeit cautiously, to be "helping shape the international order of tomorrow". This raises expectations that must now be met with action. In a keynote speech in 2019, Defence Minister Annegret Kramp-Karrenbauer called for Germany to assume greater military responsibility: "Our partners in the Indo-Pacific region – such as Australia, Japan and South Korea, but also India – feel increasingly encroached upon by China's claim to power. They would like to see a clear sign of solidarity, in support of applicable international law, inviolable territory, and free shipping routes. The time has come for Germany to give such a sign, to be present in the region together with our allies."[28] Accordingly, the announced deployment of a frigate to the Indo-Pacific region in 2021 sends an important signal from Germany to Australia that it is a credible strategic partner in maintaining a rules-based order and freedom of the sea-lanes.[29]

– translated from German –

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Will COVID-19 Accelerate a Global Power Shift?

China's Growing Ideological Influence in Africa

Anna Lena Sabroso-Wasserfall / Tom Bayes

> The fight against the COVID-19 pandemic is not only a fight against SARS-CoV-2 but also part of the rivalry to dominate the global narrative and to exert political and economic influence. Particularly in light of the worsening relations between China and the US, management of the pandemic and respective policy successes or failures are becoming political issues. Accordingly, the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) is using the pandemic on an ideological level to drive the shift in global power – with a particular focus on Africa.

At the start of the pandemic, Beijing was primarily concerned with repairing the damage to its image, but the tide turned when it successfully contained the spread of the virus within its own borders, even as the pandemic took hold in other parts of the world. China's President Xi Jinping quickly recognised this as an opportunity to present China as the victor in an ideological competition between political systems. Since Xi Jinping came to power, the CCP has been pursuing this rivalry with a focus and determination that far surpasses that of his recent predecessors. China's response to the challenges posed by COVID-19, and how it takes strategic advantage of the opportunities it presents, tells us a great deal about the CCP's aims, and about how it seeks to expand its influence, both in Africa and elsewhere in the world.

Is the Pandemic a Turning Point in a Global Competition?

In China, the COVID-19 pandemic has coincided with a major ideological and political shift. Since coming to power in 2012/2013, Xi Jinping has attained a level of personal power that goes far beyond that of his recent predecessors. He has focused on restoring ideological discipline within the CCP and consolidating the party's power and influence in every area of Chinese society. This is seen as a deliberate correction of the "ideological drift" that occurred under his immediate predecessors. The Communiqué on the Current State of the Ideological Sphere, better known as Document Number 9, clearly reveals his determination to resist the ideological threat that he believes is emanating from the West. According to the communiqué, this threat is primarily composed of promoting "Western constitutional democracy", "universal values", civil society and the Western understanding of journalism as the fourth estate.[1]

However, in Xi Jinping's "new era", the CCP is to regain its ideological self-confidence within the People's Republic, but also to broadcast its political convictions more strongly to the outside world. In one of the key moments of his rule so far, at the 19th CCP Party Congress in 2017, Xi Jinping proclaimed that the model of "socialism with Chinese characteristics for a new era" represents "China's contribution to the political advancement of mankind" and offers a "new option" for other countries to make rapid advances while retaining their independence.[2] Under Xi Jinping, ideology and nationalism have regained prominence in every area of life and politics, while China's power has multiplied in parallel. As a consequence, the view taken by certain political and academic circles in China is that the US is in terminal decline, and that China is destined to replace it as the world's most powerful country. In China, this perception has received a massive boost by the two nations' relative performance in managing the pandemic, and in some quarters COVID-19 is seen as a crucial turning point in an ideologically driven, strategic competition for global domination.

Africa plays an important part in this competition. The continent is not only economically important for China's rise, but Beijing also views its 54 recognised states[3] as valuable supporters on global issues. Thus, Beijing constantly stresses the historical ties and parallels between China and Africa – as victims of imperialism and, in many cases, as fellow combatants in anti-colonial struggles for independence. In the rhetoric of the CCP, they are natural partners in a Sino-African Community of Common Destiny. Moreover, the nations of Africa are an obvious target group for promoting authoritarian rule and a CCP-style state-centred economy as a development model. This is why the whole African continent was and remains particularly important for Beijing's narratives and for its influence-building attempts during the coronavirus pandemic.

> **In Africa, there is also a perception that the EU's crisis management has been characterised by a lack of coherent measures and strategies.**
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The Battle of Narratives

Josep Borrell, High Representative of the European Union for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, seemed well aware of the political implications of the pandemic at an early stage. On 24 March 2020 he said: "COVID-19 will reshape our world. We don't yet know when the crisis will end. But we can be sure that by the time it does, our world will look very different."[4] Borrell also spoke of a global battle of narratives and stressed that the fight against the pandemic has a geopolitical component, including a struggle for influence through the "politics of generosity". This "politics of generosity" is just one example of how China is using its so-called mask diplomacy to shape the narrative and impose its own version of events on the world.

Many of China's partners consider that the West has failed to take the lead and prove its dependability in the fight against COVID-19 – and this has played into Beijing's hands. While in 2014 Barack Obama was able to rally more than 60 countries to combat Ebola in West Africa, the US has recently been wedded to a strategy of

Best relations? In the rhetoric of the CCP, China and Africa are natural partners in a Sino–African Community of Common Destiny. Source: © Madoka Ikegami, Reuters.

downplaying the COVID-19 pandemic, along with isolationism and an "America First" mentality. Meanwhile, Beijing was ostentatiously taking the lead by hosting its Extraordinary China-Africa Summit on Solidarity Against COVID-19, in June 2020. At times, the European Union has also seemed so preoccupied with itself that even some of its member states and European neighbours had the impression that it failed to provide adequate solidarity and support. For example, Serbian President Aleksandar Vučić declared: "I believe in my brother and friend Xi Jinping" and called the much-invoked European solidarity a "fairytale".[5] In Africa there is also a

perception that the EU's crisis management has been characterised by a lack of coherent measures and strategies, especially at the beginning, and that the discourse has at times been dominated by internal disputes and criticisms.[6]

The Western powers' apparent failure to deal effectively with the challenges of the coronavirus within their own borders and to provide meaningful support and leadership to their partners abroad has provided fertile ground for the CCP's narratives and for their strategic outreach in Africa, which now aim to demonstrate that China is Africa's truest and most generous friend and even a role model worth following.

China's Narratives

During the COVID-19 pandemic, the Chinese party-state leveraged its extensive networks and connections in Africa to exert influence and promote certain key narratives about the pandemic – some more on the defensive side, others proactive, and some even aggressive. These narratives and their significance have evolved over time, largely in response to the changing pandemic situation in China, Africa, and worldwide.

> **Beijing proactively set out to find African voices that praised China's handling of the crisis.**
> ───

1. Deflecting Criticism and Promoting Alternative Explanations for the Origin of the Virus

Among many African audiences, China's status as the country of origin of SARS-CoV-2 caused massive damage to its reputation. For the CCP, this challenge was exacerbated by perceptions that the authorities mishandled the early stages of the outbreak in Hubei Province and that vital information was deliberately withheld, allowing the virus to spread in the first place. In response, Beijing proactively set out to find African voices that praised China's handling of the crisis and amplified them around the world. This

included making direct approaches to political parties and asking them to sign letters praising Beijing's performance in combatting the pandemic.[7] However, Beijing has also promoted more radical narratives in order to absolve itself of any blame for the spread of the virus, such as repeated claims that the virus actually originated outside China – or even that China was the victim of a targeted attack. For months, Chinese officials disseminated their own theories, such as speculation that the American military could have brought the virus to Wuhan.

2. Handling the PR Crisis

One episode that was particularly damaging to Sino-African relations was the discrimination suffered by African nationals in Guangzhou. After the original outbreak in Wuhan was brought under control, rumours spread on Chinese social media that the African community in Guangzhou was causing a second wave of the coronavirus. As a result, many African residents of the city were subjected to forced quarantines and evictions. Some shops, hotels, and restaurants refused to serve African customers. These events were widely reported and discussed on African social media until the protests were finally taken up by official diplomatic channels. African ambassadors in Beijing complained to the Chinese authorities, and African politicians were unusually outspoken about this discrimination. For example, a video posted on social media showed Femi Gbajabiamila, Speaker of Nigeria's House of Representatives, voicing fierce criticism to China's ambassador to Abuja.

China's targeted defensive response consisted of reports that denied or downplayed the discriminatory treatment and statements to the effect that it was a local matter or limited to the behaviour of a few individuals. Statements by prominent Africans, such as Nigerian Foreign Minister Geoffrey Onyeama, who testified that there was no evidence of discrimination, were also proactively disseminated via Sino-African media channels.[8] However, this flashpoint in Sino-African relations was not the first time that

instances of anti-African discrimination by the Chinese media, authorities, or individuals have damaged African perceptions of China. The incident once again highlights the challenges Beijing faces in overcoming the cultural unfamiliarity and existing prejudices between Chinese and African people and in giving credibility to its claim that Sino-African relations are a fraternal encounter of mutually respectful partners, united in a community of common destiny.

3. China as a Responsible Great Power and Africa's Most Generous Friend? The Health Silk Road

On the other hand, pushing other, more positive narratives has given Beijing a promising opportunity to change the discourse and to steer it in its favour. Central to this is the portrayal of China as Africa's truest, most generous friend. This narrative has primarily been cultivated through widespread coverage of China's provision of masks and other medical equipment and later on through its promise to provide African nations with privileged access to vaccines developed in China. The accompanying advertising campaigns sought to portray China as a "responsible great power" that came to Africa's aid in its time of need. The official response from the African side has been predominantly positive, as demonstrated when South African Health Minister Zweli Mkhize publicly thanked China for its "lending a hand".[9] But there have also been negative reactions, which highlight the difficulties faced by Beijing in effectively asserting this positive narrative. One example is the outrage expressed by some Africans on hearing reports that Chinese equipment was of inferior quality, coupled with the fact that it was not always made clear that some of the equipment was being sold, not donated.

Beijing also uses specific branding strategies as a way of increasing positive perceptions. The Belt and Road Initiative brand has served China well by attracting international attention and recognition, so Beijing has now wrapped its medical support into the concept of a Health Silk Road. This is not a new idea in itself, originally dating back to 2015. However, the term began to be used in the international media when Xi Jinping mentioned it in a conversation with then Italian Prime Minister Giuseppe Conte in March 2020.[10] The Health Silk Road has gained much greater significance in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, but the practical scope of the project remains unclear. According to one interpretation in the Chinese media, the Health Silk Road includes current COVID-19 aid and all other activities that contribute to China's vision of global public health governance.

> **The targeted Chinese response is explicitly contrasted with how Western countries have managed the crisis.**
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4. China as a Superior Crisis Manager and Role Model

China's positive narratives go beyond trumpeting Beijing's generosity and the related branding. Indeed, they actively present China's handling of the pandemic as being the most successful model – and tout their political system as a viable alternative to the Western model of governance. For example, Chinese state media launched extensive coverage of the rapid construction of emergency hospitals in Wuhan. In June 2020, the State Council Information Office released a lengthy English-language report titled "Fighting COVID-19: China in Action", which detailed Beijing's response, while Chinese officials publicly offered to share their experience of fighting COVID-19 with their African counterparts.[11] Beijing's targeted response is explicitly contrasted with how Western countries have managed the crisis – with particular reference to the turmoil at the end of the Trump administration – to suggest that CCP-style authoritarianism has inherent advantages over liberal democracy when it comes to mobilising resources. Senior party official Guo Shengkun expressed it as follows: "During the pandemic, we made great strides in a short time, highlighting the stark contrast between China's

orderliness and the chaos of the West."[12] The pandemic has given a powerful boost to Xi Jinping's efforts to present CCP rule as a model for other countries to follow – and has proven a compelling case.

The Instruments of Chinese Influence in Africa

The successful dissemination of Beijing's narratives cannot, however, be solely attributed to

Chinese vaccine: Beijing is using the pandemic to portray itself as Africa's most reliable partner. Source: © Philimon Bulawayo, Reuters.

African media landscape and deepening Beijing's ties with African political parties.

1. Expansion of Chinese Media Presence in Africa

Right from the start, the media was a key instrument in Xi Jinping's efforts to reassert the party's influence in every area of Chinese life, and since then he has taken further steps to ensure the media remains loyal to the party. This also has a global dimension, with Xi Jinping repeatedly urging Chinese media to "tell China's stories well" to foreign audiences and thereby increase the country's international influence.[13] Under Xi Jinping, analysts have noted a shift in Beijing's attitude towards censorship and information management, moving from a purely defensive approach aimed at preventing unwanted information from entering China to a strategy that seeks to proactively reshape the information environment abroad to suit its own narrative.

This is happening in a variety of ways, including through the expansion of China's state-run media. Africa was considered the first target continent and test case for this approach and remains the region where China is doing the most extensive work in this respect. This is also subject of a newly published study by the KAS Media Programme Sub-Saharan Africa, called "It is about their story – How China, Turkey and Russia influence the media in Africa".[14] The cornerstones of China's strategy in Africa are the China Global Television Network Africa; the monthly magazine ChinAfrica, which describes its target group as "a high-end readership, which includes: government officials, major political parties and business executives in Africa"; China Daily, China's main English-language state-run newspaper, which publishes an African edition, as well as the special supplement African Weekly.[15] Beijing has also expanded China Radio International's broadcasting operations in Africa, both directly and through licensing its content. In addition to

skilful storytelling. It also relies on the extensive infrastructure and networks that can be used for such purposes, and China now coordinates their use as part of a multidimensional approach. This includes increasing China's presence in the

the expansion of leading state media organisations in Africa, Beijing has also used public funds and partnerships with state-owned enterprises to support the expansion of private Chinese media companies on the continent. The combined outreach of Chinese state-owned and private media organisations has significantly increased its African audience in recent years – although the true extent of its success and influence remains a subject for research and debate.

2. Use of Social Media

Another instrument that has become increasingly important in recent years and that has played a significant role in the dissemination of the above-mentioned narratives is social media. Despite the fact that many international websites and social media platforms are banned in China, for some years now they have played a major role in how China presents itself to the rest of the world. Since 2019 in particular, Chinese officials have flocked to open accounts on platforms like Twitter and Facebook, and many official Chinese organisations and institutions are now also active on social media, including the State Council Information Office, the Foreign Ministry Spokesperson's Office, and even Qiushi, the ideological journal of the CCP. In addition, more than 40 Chinese embassies, ambassadors, and diplomats in Africa have opened Twitter and Facebook accounts and are actively using them to share their messages.

Admittedly, most of China's diplomatic Twitterers in Africa limit themselves to fairly bland posts and mainly share and promote articles from Chinese state media. But one or two stand out from the crowd and have become known as "wolf warrior diplomats", a phrase derived from a popular series of Chinese action movies. This trend is in line with Foreign Minister Wang Yi's call for Chinese diplomats to display "fighting spirit".[16] Some Chinese diplomats in Africa have already been demonstrating this spirit. For instance, at the end of 2019, China's former ambassador to South Africa, Lin Songtian, garnered much attention with tweets in which he fiercely criticised the US administration. Soon

after this, Lin was promoted to a higher position in Beijing – a powerful demonstration of the career benefits that can be accrued by displaying a fighting spirit on overseas social media.

3. Training African Journalists

Beijing's ability to "sell" its favoured narratives is due in part to its generously funded training programmes for African journalists. Since 2012, China has trained around 1,000 African journalists per year in a range of courses and seminars. Every year, the centrepiece of this programme, the China-Africa Press Centre, brings some 30 African journalists to spend several months in China, where they attend training courses and seminars, take tours of China and intern with some of China's leading media organisations.

> **Under Xi Jinping, the CCP has also significantly increased its engagement with African political parties.**
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4. Cooperation with Political Parties

Under Xi Jinping, the CCP has also significantly increased its engagement with African political parties through the party's internal diplomatic service, the International Department of the CCP Central Committee. This is not a new department, but it has grown in importance and stature under Xi Jinping. 2013 marked a significant upswing in its international activities. The CCP currently maintains relations with over 60 political parties in Africa, ranging from traditional ties to former independence movements with socialist, Marxist, or Maoist roots (such as Tanzania's Chama Cha Mapinduzi or the Communist Party of South Africa) to newer, pragmatic ties to governing parties across the political spectrum. However, while the CCP continues to maintain particularly close relations with its oldest African friends – many of them in southern Africa – its party diplomacy network

now extends to all regions of Africa, whether anglophone, francophone, or lusophone, and encompasses both democracies and the continent's more authoritarian states.

The International Department also runs, inter alia, an extensive training programme for cadres and officials of African political parties. These programmes and seminars are held in both Africa and China (and also online during the pandemic) and are an important tool for sharing and disseminating the CCP's views on governance and development. While their concrete success is difficult to gauge, it is clear that some parties, at least, are receptive to these programmes. This can be seen by the growing number of African political parties that are setting up academies in emulation of the CCP's model. And in Namibia, in 2018 the ruling SWAPO party decided to amend its constitution to describe its ideology as "socialism with a Namibian character"[17]. Beijing's success in combatting the coronavirus will enhance China's credibility with its political partners, and the International Department's engagement now consistently includes instruction in the CCP's epidemic response system. More broadly, the CCP's cultivation of strong ties with its African partners has created a receptive audience for its narratives, as demonstrated by the number of political parties that signed letters supporting the CCP's response to the coronavirus.

**Europe Must Be a Reliable
and Visible Partner**

A detailed examination of the facts suggests that, during the pandemic, China has made effective use of its narratives and toolkit and, in so doing, outmanoeuvred the West. Seen against this backdrop, the long-term political implications of SARS-CoV-2 may end up being all the more profound, for they have coincided with a period of growing global competition. Political trends that were already discernible prior to the outbreak of the pandemic have deepened and intensified in its wake. More than a year after the outbreak of the virus, it can be concluded that COVID-19 has actually accelerated changes in the global power structure.

This prompts the question of what the West can do in practical terms to counter this trend. After all, it is not as if the US and the European Union have not already made a significant contribution to the global fight against the virus, including on the African continent. Rather, the main challenge in this respect relates to the often significantly lower visibility and lack of public awareness of Western aid. Above all, this is due to the fact that neither the US nor the EU have a comparable strategic or comprehensive concept to counter Beijing's multidimensional and highly coordinated mode of communication and action. The fact that a considerable proportion of European aid flows into regional organisations, such as the African Union (AU), or multilateral organisations, such as the World Health Organization, also reduces their visibility, because support of this kind is much more difficult to translate into a catchy narrative that can be picked up by the media. The same applies to the frequently used narrative that an authoritarian system of government led by a "strong man" is more effective in times of crisis. This approach is much easier to present and communicate, compared to the complex political structures of the EU and is simultaneously closer to the political cultures of many African nations.

> **Liberal democracy is challenged by an alternative model that has gained credibility for many partners in the pandemic.**
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2020 should have marked the start of even stronger relations between Europe and Africa with the new EU-Africa Strategy and a corresponding focus during Germany's presidency of the EU Council. Instead, Africa now perceives a new vulnerability in the EU as a result of its, at times, weak management of the pandemic and due to the fact that the EU, unlike China, has not managed to offer (virtual) alternatives to essential forums such as the postponed EU-AU summit. In view of this, we need to ask what European actors can learn from China's

deliberate focus on expanding its influence and promoting its narrative in Africa, and what such approaches could look like:

- The model of liberal democracy is being challenged by an alternative model that has now gained credibility in the eyes of many partners in the context of the pandemic. European actors must, therefore, do more to promote the advantages of democracy and, above all, to increase their visibility. They should work with their numerous African partners who share these values.

- European actors should closely monitor how China is building and expanding mechanisms to spread alternative narratives in Africa and take appropriate steps to counter them. These steps could include maintaining and increasing the budgets of independent, state-funded European media that already have a large audience share in Africa, such as Radio France Internationale, the BBC and Deutsche Welle. African journalists should also be given more opportunities to collaborate with European media organisations, including through work exchanges and training.

- European political parties should work more closely with their counterparts in Africa to support an effective democratic political culture – including greater use of facilities such as party academies by European parties.

- Relevant European actors should make efforts to ensure COVID-19 vaccines are visibly equitably distributed in Africa and other developing regions. Although the general view is that the EU is willing to provide support, doubts are being expressed about whether it can actually deliver, in view of its crisis management to date. With this in mind, it is essential to promote a narrative of solidarity and to actively counter Beijing's portrayal of China as "Africa's only true friend".

- Despite all the delays and obstacles experienced during the pandemic, the EU-Africa Strategy should once again move to the fore

and continue to be an important element of the discussions and negotiations between Europe and Africa. The strategy should also be supplemented by a health component and coherently communicate specific proposals for action to African partners and to the African public. It is an opportunity for the EU to present itself as a reliable partner in overcoming the economic challenges that will follow the crisis, for example by investing more heavily in the African health sector.

For Europe and the West in general, it will now be essential to present itself to its African and international partners as a reliable and, above all, visible actor and to proactively strengthen its own narratives and networks – not only during the rest of the pandemic, but also far into the future.

– translated from German –

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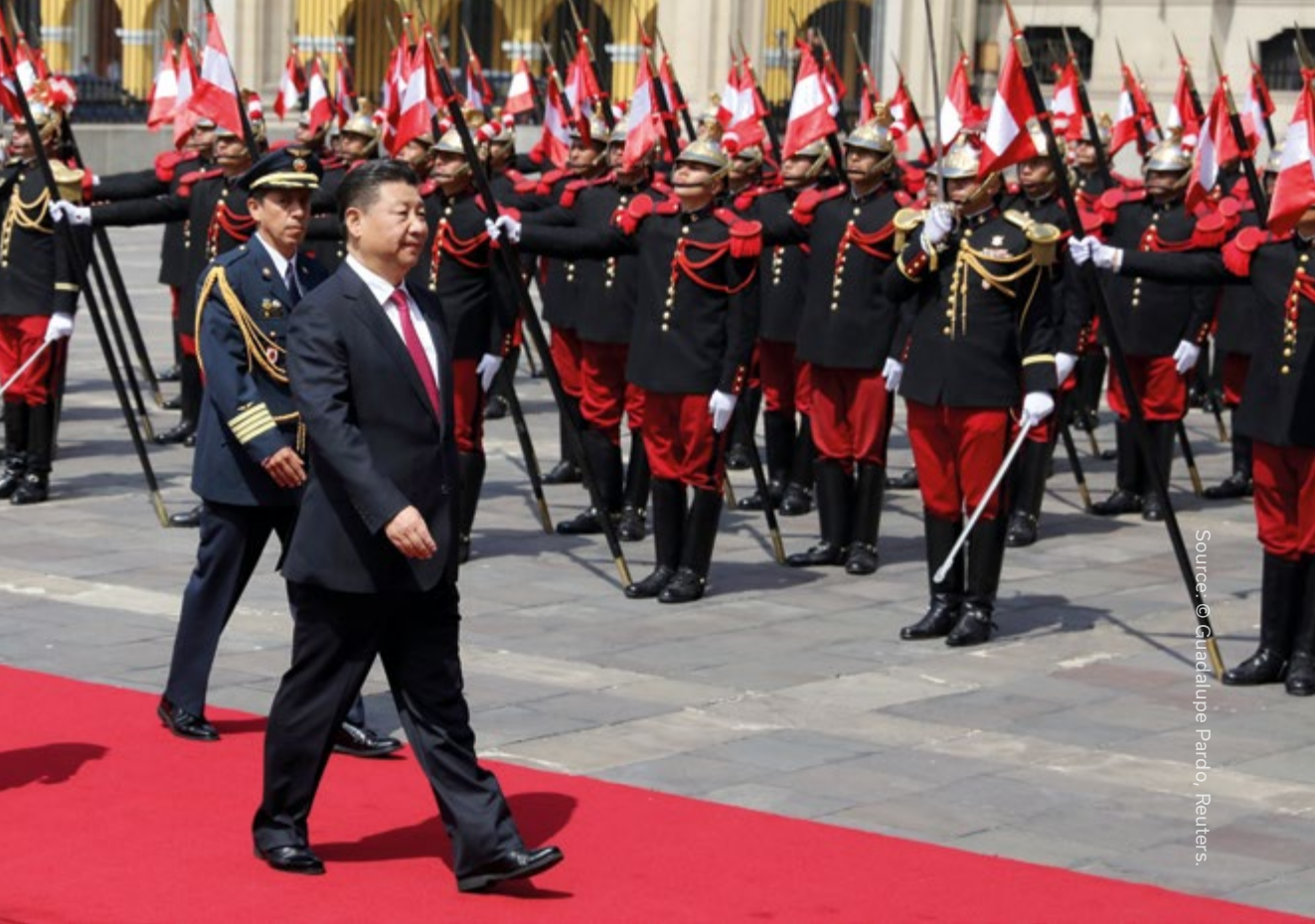
The Art of Making Friends

How the Chinese Communist Party
Seduces Political Parties in Latin America

Juan Pablo Cardenal / Sebastian Grundberger

China is increasingly turning its attention to Latin America's political parties. Beijing is using lavish official visits and diplomatic pressure to yoke Latin American party officials to its geopolitical ambitions. Without critical public debate, the rhetoric of bilateral "friendship" threatens to undermine democracy in Latin America. Any belief that the Chinese Communist Party will engage in an equal dialogue with Latin America's democratic parties remains a dangerous illusion.

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At the height of the first wave of the COVID-19 pandemic in March 2020, many political parties in Latin America received a letter from the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).[1] Transmitted by the Chinese ambassadors in each country, the CCP urged them to sign the "joint open letter from world political parties concerning closer international cooperation against COVID-19".[2] This seemingly constructive rhetoric concealed the note's true purpose. China emphasised its "open, transparent and responsible attitude" in the pandemic, and rejected "stigmatisation" and "discriminatory comments and practices"[3] – an implicit reference to the international criticism that the country was attracting for its information control policy. But it did not end there. The missive stated that the crisis had highlighted the weakness of global governance, which is why it was time to reassess the world order. The statement was accompanied by a diplomatic offensive on the part of the CCP to enable political parties to "impartially evaluate the sacrifices and contributions China has made to the global fight against epidemics and underlying manifestations, and refute false statements by a few political forces"[4], as unequivocally summarised by the CCP's party newspaper Qiushi (Seeking Truth). Official sources claimed that the joint statement was signed by "more than 240 parties from 110 countries", including 40 from Latin America.[5] A remarkable endorsement that is at odds with the fact that the list of signatories was never made public. Consulting a variety of sources reveals that the statement was signed by the following Latin American parties, among others: the Peronist Partido Justicialista and the Partido

Propuesta Republicana in Argentina, the Workers' Party in Brazil, the left-wing Frente Amplio in Uruguay, and the Socialist Party of Chile. It was hardly surprising when Fu Jie, vice-director of the Latin American and Caribbean Bureau of the CCP's International Department, celebrated the stronger allegiance as deepening "friendship, mutual understanding and support" between the two sides.[6] In this respect, it is important to mention that the word "friendship" always has a political dimension in the language of the Chinese regime, and denotes a strategic, rather than personal, relationship.[7] It is not for nothing that, at a party event in 2015, China's President and party leader Xi Jinping urged delegates to practice the art of "making friends".[8]

The Vision: Turning Latin America's Parties into Geostrategic Allies

China is building Latin America firmly into its geopolitical plans as a way of asserting its power. Since taking office in 2013, Xi Jinping has visited twelve countries in Latin America – more than US Presidents Obama and Trump combined.[9] It is not a new phenomenon for Latin American parties to be the focus of Chinese foreign policy. In the late 1970s and 1980s, more and more Latin American parties shifted away from recognising Taiwan to establishing relations with the CCP. The ties between political parties in China and Latin America have deepened over recent years, providing a foundation for Beijing to build on during the coronavirus pandemic. According to data from the Central Committee's International Department, the CCP held at least

326 meetings with political parties and legislators from Latin American parliaments between 2002 and 2020. There were at least 24 formal contacts between January and October 2020 alone, mainly in digital form.[10]

In December 2017, at a first global "high-level meeting of political parties" in Beijing, China's President and party leader Xi Jinping also called for a "new type" of party relations in which parties concentrate on their "commonalities", and "respect" each other instead of focussing on their differences.[11] With regard to Latin America, the CCP had already established the China-CELAC Political Parties Forum in 2015. At the peak of the "pink tide" in Latin America, delegates from 27 mainly left-wing but also more centrist and conservative parties in the region were invited to Beijing for the conference.[12]

Interparty relations present the CCP with more flexible opportunities to pursue China's interests than intergovernmental relations.

This stronger affinity with leftist political alliances such as the Foro de São Paulo and the Grupo de Puebla, the "progressive" Permanent Conference of Political Parties of Latin American and the Caribbean (COPPPAL) and the Latin American branch of Socialist International has not prevented the CCP from also establishing relations with the Christian Democrat Organisation of America (Organización Demócrata Cristiana de América, ODCA), the centre-right Unión de los Partidos Latinoamericanos (UPLA) and their member parties, as reflected in the visits of their delegates to China (see below).

Latin American parties are strategic partners for the CCP, both in implementing the hard, geostrategic goals of Chinese foreign policy, and in establishing a benevolent, idealised Chinese narrative. Key elements of this include

China's aggressive call for Latin America to support the Belt and Road Initiative,[13] which it likes to sell – not only in Latin America – as a global development project rather than a geostrategic power play, and the One-China policy that seeks the diplomatic isolation of Taiwan. The CCP has held at least 38 meetings since 2002 with the four Central American countries that, successively since 2007, decided to break diplomatic ties with Taiwan: Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, and Panama. Party relations are often a precursor to official political initiatives. For instance, before Panama officially recognised China, the Chinese ambassador to Panama claimed that the CCP maintained "very close and warm ties"[14] with the ruling centre-left party PRD. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, this relationship was cemented by a three-day virtual seminar attended by around 60 people (according to the PRD), including "senior officials from both parties"[15], along with the announcement of an imminent visit to China by a party delegation, and Chinese donations of masks and medical equipment. In Costa Rica, five political parties of different stripes were caught up in a legal wrangle because electoral law forbade the acceptance of Chinese donations of masks.[16] In Paraguay, the last Latin American country to maintain diplomatic ties with Taiwan, the CCP has a close relationship with the leftist Frente Guasú. In April 2020, this party presented a formal motion in the Paraguayan Senate to establish diplomatic relations with Beijing, a proposal that was rejected.

In the more informal environment of Latin American politics, the CCP's interparty relations present an opportunity to pursue China's interests in a more flexible manner than that offered by intergovernmental relations. A recent example is when the head of the CCP's International Department, Song Tao, took part in a video conference on COVID-19 with several Latin American Communist parties. He took advantage of the opportunity to assert that the Hong Kong National Security Law was sacrosanct, and resolutely opposed any interference in China's internal affairs.[17]

Also available in Spanish and Portuguese: Books by Chinese leader Xi Jinping are on display at the first High-Level Dialogue with World Political Parties in Beijing 2017. Source: © Fred Dufour, Reuters.

The intertwining of party and state leadership in China leads to a merely rhetorical dividing line between the two spheres in Beijing. Not least because of this, every party contact for the CCP is directly linked to China's massive political and economic interests. This clear connection is not always obvious to Latin American party representatives, who tend to be accustomed to the strict separation of party and state activities.

It is no coincidence that the CCP feels most comfortable with Latin America's autocratic ruling parties. Supporting the regimes in Cuba or Venezuela always means supporting the ruling party – and vice versa. The CCP also perfectly understands the desire of such parties to prevent any move towards democracy or challenges to their monopoly on power. Therefore, it was not a surprise when, in 2017, China supplied

the ruling United Socialist Party of Venezuela (Partido Socialista Unido de Venezuela, PSUV) with equipment to help it subdue democratic protests.[18] The CCP finds regimes supported by authoritarian ruling parties to be more predictable than democratically legitimised governments of changing party-political hues – and, thus, in the long term better suited to promoting its geopolitical interests.

Against the backdrop of the fact that China understands state and party as a unity it is hardly surprising that China also has a particular interest in maintaining close relations with the governments and governing parties of democratic states in Latin America. Examples of this are the CCP's links to the governing parties in the particularly resource-rich countries of Brazil (Partido dos Trabalhadores, 2003–2016), Ecuador (Alianza

País, 2007–2017), and Peru (Partido Nacionalista Peruano, 2011–2016), as well as to Argentina's Propuesta Republicana (PRO, 2015–2019).

The Strategy: Lavish Invitations and Diplomatic Pressure

Personal diplomacy through invitations to visit China is perhaps Beijing's key instrument when dealing with political parties in Latin America. At the High-Level Dialogue with World Political Parties held in 2017, Xi Jinping announced plans to bring 15,000 party members to China for "exchange" by 2023.[19] Party politicians are either invited to various forums and study programmes, or the CCP organises trips for delegations from particular parties or alliances.

The remarkable network of informal "friendships" provides the CCP with a strategic treasure.

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While invitations to China are extended to individuals across the political spectrum, they are very strategically selected. The focus is on active and former legislators, members of parties in power or in opposition, active parliamentarians and young politicians who seem destined to play key roles in future. According to an expert at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, the links are so close that certain Latin American party officials have even been invited "to spend their vacations in China".[20] This strategy seems to be proving effective. By 2012 China had invited around 20 leading Latin American politicians who went on to be elected presidents of their countries.[21] These kinds of all-expenses-paid trips to China seem to mesmerise many of the guests. They fly business class, are accommodated in five-star hotels, and are overwhelmed by Chinese hospitality. But what impresses them the most is the "Chinese miracle". Filtered by the CCP, they are presented with the history of the transition from Maoism to the present day, the cultural monuments, the vibrant

commercial atmosphere, the imposing infrastructure, the poverty reduction figures, the economic growth, the country's many millionaires, and, to top it all, the prospect of a Chinese moon landing. According to one Latin American politician: "They buy mediocre people by taking them to China, where they show them the country's majesty. Those who can't get their heads around it all, fall to their knees."[22] Interviews with other delegates who have been on such trips also reveal that Latin American politicians are driven into the waiting arms of the CCP because they are made to feel so important and esteemed. This experience makes a welcome change from the often hard grind of political life, the daily hostility at home and the sense of losing political significance as a person or party. It has a major impact when, as happened at the second China-CELAC Political Parties Forum in 2018, they are shown how the city of Shenzhen went from being a small fishing village to a modern metropolis in just three decades; visit the 55-kilometre-long bridge and tunnel system that connects Hong Kong with Macao; and are welcomed to the Zhuhai special economic zones as VIP guests. One of the delegates on this trip comments: "The Chinese sold us their development model implicitly. They didn't need to make it explicit but they projected the idea that things can be done if the political will is there."[23]

This remarkable network of informal "friendships" provides the CCP with a strategic treasure in the form of loyal and often influential interlocutors throughout Latin America. The ongoing honeymoon between the Latin American political class and China is accompanied by the regional elite's astonishing ignorance about China's history, its state capitalism, the dark side of its development model, and the general nature of the CCP's modus operandi. This provides the CCP with an opportunity to ensure the benevolent Chinese narrative is embedded in their target individuals with minimal external interference. In this way, the visits are more educational trips than friendly contacts. Javier Miranda, leader of Uruguay's left-wing coalition Frente Amplio, describes his trips to China as "lessons that have enabled us to understand

the construction of a nation"[24] and which led him to conclude that the CCP is a "trustworthy party". This camaraderie between the CCP and Uruguay's former governing party from 2005 to 2020 was forged by Miranda's three trips to China in just two years, and the reception of several Chinese delegations in Montevideo.

The purpose of these invitations is not to promote exchange, show the delegates different facets of China, or allow them to get to know the people. On the contrary, the visitors are only allowed to talk to people who are affiliated with the CCP and intensively treated to the same mantras of "friendship", "mutual respect", the "shared future of humankind" and to the legitimisation and praise of the Chinese state model. The aim is to gain uncritical multipliers of these narratives in support of China's geostrategic ambitions. At the same time, the foreign visitors are instrumentalised in the service of the regime's domestic propaganda via reports in the state-run media.

> **There is widespread concern among Latin Americans about a new economic dependency.**
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Although relations with China are far from prioritised in the public debate of Latin American countries, research shows that the people of Latin America do not share the enthusiasm for China that is felt by certain political elites. On the contrary, in an analysis of numerous surveys, Morgenstern and Bohigues found that many Latin Americans still have no firm opinions about China.[25] Interestingly, in a 2014 LAPOP survey only 16 per cent of respondents approved of the authoritarian Chinese development model.[26] There is also widespread concern about a new economic dependency.[27]

In contrast, many members of the Latin American political class see their relationship with Beijing primarily through the prism of economic opportunities. The authoritarian nature of the Chinese regime and its serious human rights violations are rarely mentioned. It is also remarkable that there is almost total silence about the often far from beneficial conditions tied to Chinese investment in Latin America, and the asymmetry in trade relations. Furthermore, the tense – and emotional – relationship of many Latin American political elites with the US contributes to China being seen as a welcome alternative for establishing a geostrategic balance with their northern neighbour.

At the same time, in Latin America the CCP is increasingly displaying a facet that is fundamentally different from the "friendship" between equals that it has been proclaiming for years. An example of this is an incident that occurred during the 2016 APEC summit in Lima, when Marco Arana, a congressman for the leftist Frente Amplio, objected to Xi Jinping being awarded a medal of honour by the Peruvian Congress due to the "neocolonial" nature of the Chinese regime. According to Marco Arana, the Chinese ambassador accused him not only of "inadequately assessing the importance of Chinese investments" and demanded that he should not interfere in China's internal affairs,[28] but also threatened the APRA party, which has been closely linked to the CCP for years, to stop all invitations for Peruvians to China as well as all investment projects if there were any unpleasant incidents surrounding Xi Jinping's visit to Peru. The fact that the congressman involved was in a different political camp to the APRA party had no bearing on the issue. Jaime Naranjo, a Socialist legislator in the Chilean parliament and a fierce critic of China also denounced the "complicit silence"[29] of Chile's political parties on human rights violations, the status of Hong Kong or China's economic activities in the country, linking it to the "steady parliamentary tourism" to China.

The Temptation: A Development Model Without Democracy

The blatantly assured propagation of the Chinese development model as a superior system to a pluralistic democratic state system is becoming increasingly visible in Chinese activities in Latin

America. A particularly striking example of this is a June 2020 seminar organised by the CCP on the "Superiority of Communist Parties' Values in the Fight Against COVID-19" to which delegates from various Latin American countries were invited.

The fundamental purpose of international party summits in China is to legitimise the regime's rule and political system through propaganda. An example of this is the High-Level Dialogue with World Political Parties held in 2017, when democratic Latin American parties seemingly had no problem signing the statement drafted by the CCP that read: "We highly praise the great effort and major contributions made by the Chinese Communist Party with General Secretary Xi Jinping as its core leader to build a community of shared future for mankind and a peaceful and fine world."[30] At the China-CELAC Summit in 2018, representatives of 58 parties, the majority of which can be called democratic, promised to "respect the different development paths" of the "political parties of Latin America and the Caribbean and the Chinese Communist Party".[31] On such occasions, the Chinese state party enjoys the appearance of being a party among parties – on the same level as established democratic parties in Latin America.

Recently, in its propaganda in Latin America, the CCP has been moving away from a focus on the parity of different systems, and instead highlighting its own superiority, propagating a "new trail for other developing countries to achieve modernization".[32] At a mainly virtual summit in September 2020, attended by 200 representatives of 70 Latin American parties, the CCP stressed the importance of Latin American countries learning from China's experience in poverty reduction. According to Song Tao, head of the CCP's International Department, CCP leadership is the "fundamental guarantee" and "China's wisdom" is the driving force behind successfully alleviating poverty, as he told delegates from more than 100 developing countries at another seminar, in early October 2020.[33] As pointed out by Clive Hamilton and Mareike Ohlberg, the regime "wants international support for the idea that the CCP is the sole party fit to rule China. It also craves recognition that its political and economic system is superior to Western democracy and the liberal-capitalist economic order."[34]

According to this logic, China's work with representatives of Latin American democratic parties is nothing more than an attempt to undermine

Not representative: Members of the Chinese community in Buenos Aires gave President Xi Jinping a friendly reception in November 2018. Nevertheless, many Latin Americans have a more reserved stance on the Chinese engagement in their region. Source: © Marcos Brindicci, Reuters.

the processes of democratic decision-making. It is all the more striking that democratic party representatives are also singing lustily from the same Chinese hymn sheet, as shown by the example of Argentina. José Luis Gioja, a Peronist deputy and avid visitor to China, declared that China is "in its own way, a democracy".[35] During a party debate on alleviating poverty in August 2020, his party colleague and Secretary of State for Defence, Francisco Cafiero, justified his party's relations with the CCP by saying that it was his party's strategy to maintain "relations with different democratic parties around the world", adding that they also have ties to the US Democrats and with other parties, and do not want to "favour anyone".[36] And in 2016,

Humberto Schiavoni, leader of the centre-right PRO party, praised China in an article for Argentine newspaper Clarín, calling it a "compass for our development".[37] Between 2016 and 2018 alone, representatives of Argentina's two main parties, from which the aforementioned representatives hail, flew to China at least seven times.

Latin America's recent history is replete with attempts by individual politicians to secure their own personal power by undemocratic means. In some cases, as was recently seen in Venezuela and Nicaragua, this led to authoritarian forms of government. Often, however, such attempts failed because of democratic and constitutional institutions, and a critical public. It is to be feared that the Chinese temptation of authoritarian development without democracy could give such efforts a new basis for legitimacy. The massive decline in approval ratings for democracy in most Latin American countries[38] over the last few years is an additional alarm signal in this regard.

The Challenge: Talking to Latin American Parties about China

China has long been the most important trading partner of numerous Latin American countries – with explosive growth in investments by Chinese state-owned enterprises in strategic sectors of the economy. Between 2001 and 2019, China invested around 135 billion US dollars on the subcontinent.[39] Beijing's global rise is therefore seen by many Latin American politicians not only as an inevitability but also as a source of opportunities that other foreign powers would struggle to provide. It is difficult to assess how much incomprehension, ignorance or deliberate distortion of the facts lie behind statements such as those mentioned above.

In Latin America's daily political life, which is characterised by short, erratic political cycles and elections in rapid succession, political actors tend to lack an understanding of China's long-term global strategy. In particular, however, there is also a lack of understanding that this strategy does not simply stop at the country's own borders, but that the acceptance of Chinese "offers of friendship" threatens to undermine the country's own democracy and institutions from within. In this respect, statements such as that made by the aforementioned Argentine deputy Gioja to the effect that one should not interfere in China's internal affairs because Beijing does not meddle in Argentina's internal affairs[40] are inaccurate. This also leads to the seemingly banal realisation that it is a dangerous illusion to believe any dialogue between the CCP and democratic parties can be a dialogue of equals.

> **There are few political costs for Latin American politicians who fling open the gates to Chinese investors.**

China is well down the list of public concerns, which means there are few political costs for Latin American politicians who sign declarations of solidarity, or seek to fling open the gates to Chinese investors. There is far too little discussion in Latin America about the small print, how politicians lay themselves open to political blackmail, or even the effects on their own democracy. Public opinion is largely uncritical about China, in stark contrast to the subcontinent's relationship with the United States, with whom it has had a rollercoaster relationship for centuries, and whose foreign policy activities can spark passionate debate among the Latin American public.

There is an urgent need for Latin America's parties and the public sphere to debate their relationship with China in order to be in a position to conduct a realistic and morally and intellectually sound dialogue with the CCP. Politicians are normally sensitive to the public mood, so the fact that the image of China is still fairly vague in the minds of many Latin Americans could provide an opportunity. For example, if buzzwords like "neo-colonialism" and "imperialism" were no longer applied solely to the United States, this would represent an initial, important step towards a more objective engagement with China.

If Germany and Europe want to create lasting ties with Latin America as strategic partners in the fight for freedom, democracy, and human rights, it is high time that they talk to these countries about Chinese activities on the subcontinent. In particular, there is a need to ensure that Latin America's party elites gain a much deeper understanding of the situation. International stakeholders who are active in Latin America also have to realise that the "friendly" exchanges between the CCP and democratic parties in Latin America are part of the global competition between liberal democracy and the authoritarian Chinese model. It is, therefore, important to convey the fact that Europe is far from indifferent about how Latin American countries, and especially Latin American political parties, respond to some of China's offers and demands.

If Europe, in its official and unofficial diplomacy, fails to counter the China narratives that the CCP is so skilfully embedding at different levels, it will give the CCP the upper hand in the discourse as it seeks to propagate a new anti-liberal, anti-democratic development model. This is why Europe has to talk to Latin America about China as a matter of urgency.

– translated from German –

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Global Power Shifts

Of Bridges and Gateways

Turkey's Regional Power Aspirations

Walter Glos / Nils Lange

The bridge to Asia. A gateway to the Middle East and Europe. For centuries, Turkey has been considered a country linking the Western and Eastern worlds. Whether that be due to Turkish military bases used by NATO as bridgeheads to the Middle East, or the threats made by its president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan to "open the gates" to Europe for the millions of refugees accommodated by Turkey[1], NATO member and EU candidate Turkey has been increasingly presenting the Western alliance with a fait accompli over recent years.

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Turkey is militarily engaged in the most significant conflicts in its region, while also having ramped up its global military presence in recent years. Turkish influence extends from the Balkans to the Horn of Africa.[2] 2020 witnessed a re-escalation of decades-old conflicts with its neighbours Greece, Cyprus, and thus also the EU over the demarcation of territorial waters, exclusive economic zones, and the exploitation of the continental shelf. Turkey increasingly interferes in domestic political debates of other states, and openly claims a leadership role in its neighbourhood. Against the backdrop of America's absence in the Eastern Mediterranean and the Middle East, a power shift is thus currently taking place. Turkey is increasingly pursuing a standalone policy independent of its Western allies.

In this context, the Western world readily refers to the Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdoğan as the new sultan. The AK Party's foreign policy, often dubbed[3] neo-Ottoman and revisionist, conveys the idea in the West that the government under Erdoğan wants to resurrect the former Ottoman Empire's expansion and grandeur from the ashes. While Turkey wants to increase its global influence – and claims to be involved in the issues of its neighbourhood as a regional power – it certainly has no desire to be an imperial power. Contrary to the Western perception that Turkey's foreign policy under Erdoğan primarily pursues Islamist goals, Ankara's seemingly new, proactive foreign policy is rather intended to consolidate the regime's internal legitimacy. This neo-Ottoman rhetoric serves primarily to maintain the Turkish president's power. He wants to be perceived as a strong man, both domestically and externally, thus creating a bargaining chip for talks with the EU or Russia, for instance. Still, explaining Turkey's current foreign policy solely in connection with Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's personality falls short of the mark. Rather, it is important to look at Turkey's foreign policy in a broader historical context to realise that its current policies in its neighbourhood are much more opportunistic than strategic in nature, pursuing a deeply rooted Turkish *Realpolitik* that is by no means a new phenomenon. The West tends to overemphasise the importance of Islam as a basis for Turkish foreign policy, which, in turn, fails to recognise the complexity and background of Turkish security policy.

The following analysis shows that while Ankara's rhetoric might be different under other administrations, the direction of its foreign policy would be largely the same. This article highlights the real and constructed drivers of Turkey's view of the world and resulting foreign policy.

If we take a look at Turkey's recent history, we will see what has really changed and what forms the foundations of the country's regional power aspirations. It will also shed light on how sustainable this seemingly new policy is, and what role Turkey might assume in the context of global power shifts.

The Historical Context: From Reaction to Prevention

When the modern Turkish Republic emerged from the ruins of the Ottoman Empire in 1923, the maxim "peace at home, peace in the world" voiced by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, the founder of modern Turkey, applied in Ankara. Oriented towards this anti-imperial doctrine, Turkish policy primarily pursued domestic stability and the preservation of territorial integrity. The struggle for liberation following the Treaty of Sèvres with its Western occupation left its mark on a nationalism that continues to shape the collective historical consciousness in Turkey to this day. Forgotten in the West, the spectre of Sèvres and the narrative of encirclement still looms large in Turkey.

> ## The idea of foreign powers attempting to weaken and divide Turkey is a powerful force in Turkish politics.
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The idea that the major Western powers would undermine Turkey's ambitions has been deeply rooted in Turkish society since time immemorial – and this is not completely unfounded. In the late 19th and early 20th centuries, major European powers such as France, Russia, and Britain systematically undermined the Ottoman Empire's sovereignty and integrity by supporting separatist movements in what was still the Ottoman Balkans back then, and later in the Arab world, while also assuring the Ottoman government that they would help to maintain the status quo. The idea of foreign powers trying to weaken and divide Turkey remains so prevalent that it is a powerful force in Turkey's domestic and foreign policy. According to a 2018 study by Istanbul Bilgi University, 87 per cent of Turks believe that European states want to divide and split Turkey.[4] It is thus hardly surprising that Turkish politicians and the media were quick to identify the West as one of the culprits for the failed coup attempt on 15 July 2016.[5]

The memory of losing the Ottoman Empire to ethnic nationalism and separatism has resulted in hypersensitivity to outside interference in "Turkish" issues. In both Syria and Iraq, Washington sided with the Kurds without taking Turkish security perceptions into account. US support for the Kurdish YPG must, therefore, also be seen against this background and has twice as much impact on Turkish politics and society.

Constants of Foreign Policy

Traditionally, Turkish foreign policy has been shaped by precisely those historical experiences of the Ottoman Empire, its geostrategic location, and the political ideology of its Kemalist founding fathers.

Turkey's geopolitical position notably shapes its foreign policy and has ensured that its actions in recent decades have been primarily driven by changing (geopolitical) circumstances. Turkey is an excellent example of how and to what extent geography determines a country's foreign policy. When the fledgling republic came under increasing pressure from the Soviet Union, which demanded territorial concessions from Turkey and bases on the Bosporus, the Turkish government sought to align itself with the West by becoming a member of NATO on 18 February 1952.

This location and orientation increase Turkey's value as a NATO ally, and ensure that Turkey is considered within the Western defence alliance primarily as a functional ally[6]; above all, its geographical location and military power make it an essential part of NATO. NATO's second-largest army after the US has been firmly embedded in the Western alliance system since the Cold War and continues to represent the most important component of the alliance's southern flank. Despite all the anti-Western rhetoric, there are times when NATO is the only international platform where Turkey can act on an equal footing. The fact that there is still no realistic alternative to ties with the West, is also reflected in the importance Ankara attaches to NATO. On

1 January 2021, Turkey took over the command of the VJTF (Very High Readiness Joint Task Force), the alliance's rapid response force.[7] This spearhead consists of a reinforced combat brigade with some 6,400 soldiers who can be deployed in a matter of days. Moreover, Turkey is embedded in numerous NATO and UN missions as a virtually indispensable contributor of troops.[8] This testifies that despite its difficulties with some of its NATO allies, Turkey remains an integral part of military structures. Similarly, Turkey has committed itself to ensure that an international military presence remains in the country after the planned US withdrawal from Afghanistan. Turkish soldiers will continue their training mission for Afghan security forces.[9]

New World – New Security Environment

While other European NATO countries such as Germany could rely on NATO's security guarantee, Turkey, since its accession, has always had to rely on itself. Following the Johnson Letter of 1964, in which the American president threatened Ankara that, in the event of an attack on Turkey by the USSR, NATO would not help Turkey if it were to become involved in Cyprus, Ankara began to improve its relations with the USSR and increasingly pursued its own agenda, independent from the rest of NATO.[10] Since the fall of the Berlin Wall and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Western Europe has found itself surrounded by friends and security, whereas Turkey has found itself engulfed by instability. Over the last three decades, the collapse of the Soviet Union and the bloody disintegration of Yugoslavia created dozens of new states in its vicinity. The demise of Iraq and the collapse of Syria, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, and the war against the PKK at home have shaped Turkey's understanding of security policy. In particular, the Middle East – and thus Turkey's immediate neighbourhood – has been consistently marked by instability since the collapse of the Ottoman Empire. This has posed immense security problems to Ankara, particularly since the dawning of the new millennium.[11] Accordingly, preserving a stable status quo in the neighbourhood is of particular interest to Ankara. In this sense, Atatürk's abovementioned doctrine was weakened from an early stage when Turkey saw its security interests threatened. With the annexation of Hatay in 1939 and the military intervention in Northern Cyprus in 1974 on the basis of the Zurich and London Agreements of 1959, establishing Turkey as one of the guarantor powers for the new Republic of Cyprus[12], the Turkish Republic demonstrated its willingness to respond militarily and act unilaterally when Turkey's security interests were at stake.

> **The shift from a policy of non-intervention to more active participation in regional developments has increased Turkey's political reach.**
> ⸻

Turkey had traditionally avoided getting involved in regional politics and conflicts. But geopolitical developments, as well as events at home, forced Turkey to become more engaged with the outside world, and to assume greater prominence in international relations. Terror by the PKK, the experience of the almost failed Cyprus operation[13], and the end of the Cold War led to Turkey's security policies undergoing a paradigm shift.[14] The Turkish military established the maxim of the two and a half wars, according to which the armed forces must be able to defend the country both in its Western and Eastern regions, as well as withstanding the threat from the PKK at home.[15]

These changing circumstances have presented completely new possibilities for Turkish foreign policy, too. The independence of the Turkic republics and strengthening of the Muslim population in the Balkans have given rise to historical parallels, and enabled Turkey to exploit positive memories of the Ottoman Empire for its foreign and economic policy purposes.[16] As part of this new foreign policy presence, Turkey contributed

The new Sultan? The foreign policy of Turkish president Erdoğan is often referred to as being neo-Ottoman.
Source: © Lucas Jackson, Reuters.

to NATO multilateral military operations in the 1990s and took sides throughout its neighbourhood, from the Balkans (Bosnia-Herzegovina and Kosovo) to the Caucasus (Nagorno-Karabakh) and the Middle East (Kuwait and Iraq).

While a shift from its traditional policy of isolation and non-intervention to Turkey's increasingly active participation in regional

developments has afforded the country the potential to increase its economic and political reach, this has unleashed new challenges and security concerns at the same time. Owing to the "Arab Spring" of 2011 and its aftermath, the rapid deterioration of Turkey's regional and domestic security environment has coincided with a growing perception that its Western allies do not pay sufficient attention to Turkish key

security interests. The overthrow of Saddam Hussein reignited the Kurdish issue in Iraq, with this having become important once again in the wake of the Syrian civil war.

Dünya beşten büyüktür –
"The World Is Bigger than Five"

Regional power ambitions have been reinforced in recent years by the role of Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, who has been in power for 18 years. Erdoğan sees his country as a regional power that is neither dependent on Europe nor the US, and certainly should not be patronised by them. This vision culminates in his mantra that "the world is bigger than five".[17] Here, he refers to the permanent members of the United Nations Security Council, which he wants to reform to reflect a global shift in power since the end of the Cold War. As early as 2012, when the council failed to pass a resolution on Syria, he criticised its composition in the media.[18] Recently, in autumn 2020, Erdoğan denounced the ineffectiveness of global mechanisms in the wake of the COVID-19 pandemic and called for drastic reforms.[19]

Turkey seeks strategic independence without abandoning its traditional ties to the West.

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The "New Turkey"[20] is about independence at any price. Despite a disastrous economic situation and a strongly devalued lira, the Turkish government thus continues to vehemently refuse the acceptance of an International Monetary Fund aid programme. In Turkey, there is an unspoken expectation that it is entitled to assume a leadership role in a changed world. Gülnur Aybet, one of the Turkish president's foreign and security policy advisers, describes this new role for Turkey as a "self-help state" that "provides for its own national security priorities (and) balances its relations between the major powers and regional actors to find the best fitting solution to serve its interests".[21] This serious regional power aspiration has only now become possible, since Turkey lacked the necessary resources and policy-making capabilities in the past. With the economic upturn and the stabilisation and consolidation of governmental relations in the early 2000s, along with changed geopolitical circumstances, for the first time in decades Turkey has the opportunity to expand what it considers its natural and rightful supremacy within the region.

Independence at Any Price

The desire for emancipation from "Western paternalism" is in some ways a perpetuation of the Atatürk republican doctrine for achieving independence. While it still depended on its Western allies in the early years of the republic and during the Cold War, today Turkey seeks strategic independence without abandoning its traditional ties to the West. This Gaullist understanding underscores the fact that what its Western allies perceive as a new tone in Turkish foreign policy has less to do with religious or imperial/revisionist ambitions, and more to do with the pursuit of independence, driven by a deep-seated nationalism.[22] The aggressive rhetoric and the obvious domestic power calculations behind it, are less the cause than the catalyst for developments witnessed over recent years. Despite the AK Party having pursued a liberal and much less confrontational course than the country's Kemalist elites when it first took power, with the inclusion of the ultranationalist MHP, it has appropriated the latter's nationalist course for itself over recent years. After losing its absolute majority for the first time in 2015, the AK Party was forced to seek cooperation with conservative/nationalist elites to maintain its power, particularly after the attempted coup in 2016. The influence of this alliance on foreign policy has become visible in the renewed crackdown on Kurds, and the now four separate interventions in Syria.[23] Shortly after the attempted coup, Erdoğan declared that Turkey could no longer afford to wait for problems to "come knocking on our door"[24], underlining the shift from reaction to prevention.

This logic of the pre-emptive strike[25] and military power politics exploits Turkey's deeply rooted nationalism. The current melange of political Islam and Kemalist hardliners can be explained by the very nationalism that connects today's polarised Turkish society. This also explains why the Turkish government, despite being increasingly isolated internationally and seemingly waging a war against everything and everyone, can enforce its foreign policy agenda without any notable domestic opposition. In fact, in recent years, President Erdoğan has dramatically expanded his coalition on foreign policy issues and received support from opposition parties, except for the Kurdish HDP. In the last local elections, leading politicians from the largest opposition party, the Kemalist CHP, also won with conservative and nationalist programmes, for example Ekrem İmamoğlu and Mansur Yavaş. In particular, the mayor of Ankara, Mansur Yavaş, who gained popularity last year and is being considered a potential presidential candidate, comes from the nationalist camp.[26] Until 2013, Yavaş was a member of the ultra-nationalist MHP.[27] In some cases, such as developments surrounding the Turkish research vessel Oruç Reis in the eastern Mediterranean, the CHP's opposition leader Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu has insisted on a much more aggressive tone in foreign policy, for instance.[28]

> **The nationalist foreign policy course would not change if the opposition succeeded the AK Party.**
>
> ⸻

This nationalist government rhetoric, motivated by domestic politics, inevitably distorts the perception of external and internal threats. Nationalism and nativism are thus stronger drivers of the Erdoğan government's foreign policy course than religious conservatism and Islamism. It is a fallacy to believe that this nationalist foreign policy course would change if one day the opposition succeeded the AK Party.[29]

In the Tradition of Turgut Özal

The conservative/liberal Turgut Özal laid the foundation for this new foreign policy concept. During his time as Turkey's prime minister and president (from 1983 to 1993 in total), foreign policy increasingly became an extension of domestic policy. Özal believed the end of the Cold War to be an opportunity for Turkey to play "two cards" – one with its traditional Western allies, and the other with the Arab and Islamic world. During his time as prime minister and president, he began to re-emphasise their Ottoman heritage and exploit it for foreign policy initiatives. What's more, a liberalisation took place that, for the first time since the republic's founding, made Islam fit for statehood again and brought it back into society and, above all, politics. His altogether more active foreign policy, which aimed to help Turkey modernise and position itself in the new world, thus laid the cornerstone for Ankara's foreign policy presence today.[30]

However, the painful experience of Turkey's participation in the Second Gulf War in 1991 alongside the US, which ultimately caused more harm than good for Turkey, once again showed the strategists that the Western allies' interests were not necessarily in line with those of Ankara.[31] While in the Second Gulf War Ankara still allowed the US to launch air strikes on Iraq from İncirlik, in 2003 Turkey warned against the long-term impact of a renewed invasion of Iraq for the region and, like France and Germany, opposed the Bush administration.

This strategic reorientation continued in the vision of Erdoğan's former foreign minister, Ahmed Davutoğlu – a vision of an active and multidimensional foreign and regional policy in which Turkey, in joint forces with other actors, takes on a shaping role, especially in its neighbourhood.[32] However, this "zero problems towards neighbors"[33] policy failed spectacularly when the Arab uprisings of 2010/2011 and their repercussions tore the entire region apart. The decision to position itself at an early stage, and support Islamist forces such as the Muslim

Brotherhood at the beginning of the protests, led to Turkey's increasing isolation in parts of the Arab world after these organisations collapsed; an isolation that continues to this day.[34]

Arms Independence by 2023

Beginning with Özal, continuing with Davutoğlu and moving on to the present situation, Ankara has gradually adopted an increasingly active foreign policy. So, what has changed from just a few years ago? The actual change is from a policy of active "soft power" to "hard power" in the form of an increasingly militarised foreign policy. This is mainly due to Turkey now having options that were denied to it only a few years ago. An expression of this militarisation is the expansion of forward deployed military bases close to home and in distant countries. Mogadishu, for example, has been home to the largest Turkish training facility outside of Turkey since 2017. Turkey has thus positioned itself – in addition to its naval presence in the Gulf of Aden – at a crucial bottleneck near the entrance to the Red Sea.[35]

Davutoğlu's multidimensional approach is still in place, but, particularly since 2015, the scales have been tipped in favour of militarised "hard power", flanked by the build-up of a large national defence industry – with the aim of achieving military self-sufficiency in a few years' time.[36]

But this trend also did not start with the AK Party either. When the US imposed arms sanctions on Ankara following the Turkish intervention in Cyprus in 1974, this triggered a massive build-up of the Turkish national defence sector. The arms embargo had a serious impact on the Turkish economy and defence capability, as the Cyprus campaign required continuous logistical support and Turkey was dependent on US military supplies at that time. The Cuban Missile Crisis and the related withdrawal of American Jupiter missiles had already made Ankara realise the need for a sovereign defence industry. Following the arms embargo, in the 1980s Turkey began requiring foreign arms suppliers to shift a percentage of their production to

Turkey to facilitate a transfer of technology to the domestic market.[37] Today, with an export volume of three billion US dollars, Turkey is the 14th largest arms exporter worldwide.[38] Although Ankara has reduced the proportion of imports of its arms purchases to 30 per cent, it still remains dependent on technology from abroad.[39]

Drones Leading the Way to Independence

Nothing is more symbolic of the quest for regional dominance than the armed drone, which serves the Turkish army as a multiplier of its combat strength (thus increasing the effectiveness of its armed forces) and boosts the Turkish economy as a successful export commodity. In its decades-long struggle against the PKK, Turkey recognised early on that indigenous strategic capabilities and such multipliers of combat power are key to a high degree of strategic independence, and success on the battlefield.[40] Moreover, analysis of successful drone usage by the US and the UK in Afghanistan and Iraq has led Turkey to correctly assess the importance

Regional power Turkey: A strengthened national defence industry enables the country to expand its military operations in the region. Source: © Khalil Ashawi, Reuters.

of drones from the outset. Turkey now ranks among one of the world's leading drone manufacturers.[41] Their successful use in a wide variety of combat zones has earned them the seal of combat capability, which in turn gives Turkish manufacturers the upper hand when selling this product.[42] Turkish drones are used in Turkey by all branches of its armed forces and by its MIT intelligence service. Their successful deployment has now become a key element of Turkey's foreign policy.[43] The Turkish army has gained expertise in the effective use of drones by deploying them in asymmetric conflicts such as the fight against the PKK in Northern Iraq,[44] as well as by testing them on foreign battlefields. The successful use of Turkish drones, in addition to Israeli drones, by Azerbaijan proved to be a great tactical success.[45] The air support provided by Turkish drones in Libya to stabilise the UN-recognised government, which has restored the balance in the fight against the insurgent General Khalifa Haftar, continues to bolster exports of Turkish drones.[46] The systematic deployment of drones in Turkish military operations in Syria bears witness to this technology's vital importance in underpinning Turkish foreign policy.[47]

In addition to the development of its first light aircraft carrier TCG Anadolu, which is to be commissioned shortly, this advance shows that Turkey is now capable of projecting power and deploying larger expeditionary forces quickly and effectively.[48]

New Partners – New Alliances?

That a weak economy will ultimately curtail this active foreign policy is far from certain. There is much to suggest that the domestic political situation is not so much a constraint, but rather the source of Turkey's confident foreign policy stance.[49] The fact that there is broad support among the Turkish population for intensified commitment to foreign policy allows the government in Ankara to continue channelling resources in this direction, despite their absence elsewhere in the country.

If we look at Turkish foreign policy in the region with this in mind, it appears anything but arbitrary. Rather, it is rational and mainly or exclusively based on the assertion of national interests. This Turkish *Realpolitik* manifests itself in its dealings with Russia, its involvement in Libya, its military operations in Syria and Iraq, and its strained relations with Western allies.[50] New partnerships are being forged as part of these efforts, some of them tactical, others long-term and strategic.

> **While the Western world is preoccupied with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Russia and Turkey consolidate their military influence.**
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The US absence in recent years and the resulting political vacuum have ensured that Ankara has at times been the only military counterweight to Russia in several conflicts in Turkey's immediate neighbourhood. Contrary to what the dispute over the procurement of the Russian S-400 air defence system and the associated non-delivery of US F-35 fighter jets lead us to believe, Ankara's current actions towards Moscow are less an expression of Turkey's reorientation towards Russia, and more a sign of a regional power's self-confident bearing. Its selective cooperation with Russia and China, viewed critically by NATO partners, is therefore of a purely tactical and opportunistic nature at this time, while also serving to achieve the country's own short-term goals. In the medium term, both Russia and China are strategic competitors that are pursuing contrary goals to Turkey in the Turkish neighbourhood as well as in Africa. While the Western states' diplomacy and foreign policy are also preoccupied with the impact of the coronavirus pandemic, Russia and Turkey continue to establish themselves in Libya and consolidate their military influence. Only recently, the Turkish parliament extended its mandate to send troops for a further 18 months.[51] Reinforced by

diplomatic and increasingly military efforts in neighbouring Niger, Tunisia, and Algeria, Ankara is successively expanding its influence and infrastructure.[52] In the summer of 2020, the Turkish government also demonstratively backed Azerbaijan in the conflict over Nagorno-Karabakh, based on the slogan "Two states one nation" addressed to its nationalist clientele.[53] Ankara's ability to establish a de facto state-like territory on its southern border, independent of the central Syrian state, with infrastructure that will soon accommodate half a million Syrian refugees, also underlines its claim to leadership in the region.[54]

> **Developments over recent years reveal that Turkey is not merely striving for the status of a regional power but has long since become one.**
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This is also evident in the example of the Ankara-Baku-Kiev strategic axis. At a joint press conference with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, Erdoğan stressed that Ukraine is "a key country for stability, peace, security and prosperity in the region" and that Ankara supports Ukraine's "sovereignty and territorial integrity, including [the formerly Ottoman] Crimea".[55] Since the incident on the Sea of Azov in November 2018, Turkey has provided strong support for reconstructing the Ukrainian navy with arms deliveries such as T-MILGEM class corvettes.[56] The two countries have also forged a strategic partnership to manufacture drones and other armaments, which was recently expanded again.[57]

Turkey's alliance with Qatar in the wake of the Arab Spring serves as an ideological and financial counterweight to the UAE- and Saudi Arabia-led Gulf Cooperation Council, and to Egypt. In merely five years, Qatar has become the second-largest investor in Turkey, which now accounts for 15 per cent of all direct foreign investment. Meanwhile, Turkey has Qatar's back in the conflict with Doha's Gulf neighbours and

opposes their regional policies in Libya, Yemen, and Syria. With the end of the embargo against Qatar and the beginning of reintegration into the Arab world[58], as well as Israeli integration, Turkey, precisely for these *Realpolitik* reasons, will try to find a modus vivendi with Israel, the UAE and other Arab countries in order to adjust to the geopolitical shifts in the region.[59] The attempts at rapprochement with Egypt and the signals of détente with Israel reinforce this assumption.

Conclusion

Developments over recent years, and especially in 2020, reveal that Turkey is not merely striving for the status of a regional power but, de facto, has long since become one. The non-recognition of this development is a thorn in the side of the Turkish leadership, which is driving the trend towards unilateral actionism. However, in the last two years it has become unequivocally clear that Ankara has mastered the language of power, which the EU is still reluctant to speak.

In 2022, Turkey will celebrate 70 years of NATO membership. This makes it a more longstanding member than Germany. 2023 marks the 100th anniversary of the proclamation and founding of Turkey by Mustafa Kemal Atatürk. Whoever leads the country after its next elections will be aware of Turkey's importance and will continue to demand a seat at the table. That is why dialogue and strategic cooperation with Turkey will be all the more important for Germany, Europe, and the NATO transatlantic alliance.

Despite the decline in the region's importance in global terms and the associated global shift of power towards the Indo-Pacific, Turkey's relevance for Germany and Europe will continue to increase and make dialogue essential. Turkey may no longer be indispensable for the US in the future, but if Europe wants to prevent a Turkey driven by circumstances, the EU must take a stronger, more strategic stance in its neighbourhood.

Whether through its increasing influence in Africa or in South Asia, Turkey could form the gateway and bridge to important regions for Germany

and Europe in terms of strategic, economic, and security policy – or it could become an ever-stronger strategic challenger. The success of this stance and Turkey's long-term influence in the region are limited by two factors: economic and industrial resources and long-term domestic political stability. From the Turkish government's point of view, benefits and costs of military expansionism, from Qatar to Somalia to Libya, will have to be measured against Ankara's ability to not only use this new foreign policy to protect national security interests, but also to diversify its trading partners and economic relations and thus monetise them.

To handle the "New Turkey", Turkish concerns and the EU member states' sometimes contradictory interests and interdependencies with Turkey must be taken into account and respected. The US will turn its attention to other regions of the world in the medium to long term. It is therefore up to the EU, and Germany in particular, not to pull up the drawbridge or close the gates. Instead, if they are to prevent Turkey going it alone, they must take Turkey seriously as an equal partner and work with it rather than isolate it.

– translated from German –

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Global Power Shifts

Cyber Capabilities as a New Resource of Power

Conflicts in the Digital Sphere

Jason Chumtong / Christina Stolte

Cyber capabilities are becoming increasingly important in international relations. States with the ability to conduct cyber operations are in a strong position to expand their scope of influence in the international arena. This is particularly true for small and medium-sized countries with few traditional power resources, as cyber capabilities allow them to seriously weaken more powerful states.

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Invisible Shifts of Power

Over the last 20 years, the growth of China and other emerging nations has given rise to a tectonic shift in the global power structure.[1] Despite today's global players having been on the fringes and largely excluded from the processes of international decision-making at the turn of the millennium, today it is hard to imagine decisions of global significance being made without the involvement of countries like China and India. The rapid rise of these former emerging nations is particularly evident in the economic and military spheres. Their increased power is impressively demonstrated in their global rankings on GDP, economic growth, military spending, and technology. Glittering skyscrapers, nuclear technology, and spectacular space missions all herald this new power, exploiting most of the usual power symbols of the late 20th century in their quest to flaunt their newly acquired capabilities and status.

In parallel, a power shift of a less visible kind has almost gone unnoticed by the international community because it is silent, invisible, and shows no conspicuous demonstrations of power: the power shift in cyberspace.[2] Over the last decade, a number of countries have increasingly focused on developing and expanding their cyber capabilities. They have thus found new ways of gaining power by influencing international decisions and events to their own advantage.

Similar to the rise of the Global South, we are experiencing a very surprising and comparatively rapid power shift that has occurred within just a few years. This is partly because cyberspace – defined as a virtual space that encompasses the global network of all information technology infrastructures – is, on the whole, a new sphere of state action. This sense of surprise is also due to the unusual nature of this means of exercising power. Unlike the traditional resources that nations draw on in order to compete for power and influence, such as their military capabilities, economic strength, and prosperity, cyber power is difficult to quantify and rarely truly visible. But even though it is an invisible, largely intangible form of power, it still complies with the traditional definition of power as the ability to enforce a nation's interests[3] vis-à-vis another country, as contended in the National Cyber Power Index.[4] In this way, cyber espionage and cyberattacks may inflict severe financial and even humanitarian damage on other countries. Yet, even simple influence campaigns could endanger the credibility or even stability of another country and severely weaken the opponent by spreading propaganda and targeted disinformation.[5]

The analogue world has also always had an "invisible" sphere for pursuing strategic objectives, namely the intelligence services. Small and middle powers compensate for their lesser military strength by pursuing a wide range of intelligence activities. The battle between states to gain power through digital means can, therefore, be seen as an extension of this sphere because it has a low threshold for entry. Although terms such as "cyber powers" recall the world's leading, most technologically advanced countries, the new cyber powers are not only found among the usual global players.

Instead, they include nations with few conventional capabilities for exercising power on the international stage.

> **Digital technology affords new opportunities to smaller states that lack traditional capabilities in this respect to influence international relations.**
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However, great powers such as the US and China continue to be the dominant players when exercising cyber power.[6] But while cyberspace is merely another sphere for the established great powers to assert their interests and exercise power, digital technology affords new opportunities to smaller states that lack traditional capabilities in this respect to influence international relations, and aggressively pursue their interests. In addition to this power shift towards cyberspace, whose importance has grown significantly compared to that of the traditional military sphere, another shift has occurred in favour of countries that recognised and exploited the potential of cyber capabilities at an early stage.

This report turns the spotlight on Russia, Venezuela, and Iran as emerging cyber powers. It uses the case studies of countries with varying degrees of influence to highlight the broad spectrum and diversity of this new form of power and to raise awareness of the opportunities presented by this new capability – not only for the most technologically advanced cyber powers, but also for second- and third-tier countries in international relations.

The Internet as an Arena for International Power Struggles

To understand the role of cyberspace as an arena for international power struggles and conflicts, it helps to look at different stages of international conflicts in the analogue world. Let us imagine that country A expels the ambassador of country B. Instead of responding by summoning the ambassador, country B decides to send its tanks to its border. If country A then also responds with "tougher" measures, such as firing warning shots at the tanks, the confrontation escalates from a diplomatic to a military level. Every action taken in this game of tit for tat ramps up the aggression. In conflict theory, these stages are mapped on escalation scales or escalation ladders.[7] They aim to show which mode of attack corresponds to which level of escalation. The variability of cyberattacks can also be represented on a scale, as shown below.

The Cyber Escalation Ladder:[8]

Level 1 Preparation: recruiting and training hackers; preparing attacks

Level 2 Minor harassment: influencing the information space through propaganda and fake news; cyber espionage and data theft via trojans

Level 3 Major harassment: temporary shutdown of services via DDoS attacks (Distributed Denial of Service); Swatting (hoax calls to emergency services, police, fire services, emergency doctors)

Level 4 Minor damaging attacks: destruction of critical data; targeted assaults on military infrastructure via malware (e.g. Stuxnet)[9]

Level 5 Major damaging attacks: targeted impairment of military capabilities, destruction of military infrastructure (no examples to date)

Level 6 Catastrophic attacks: permanent damage to the civilian population due to destruction of civilian infrastructure (no examples to date)

Level 7 Existential attacks: damage on the scale of a nuclear pre-emptive strike (no examples to date)

Intuitively, cyberspace offers a great range of possibilities for conflicts to escalate, especially because every connection to the Internet is, due to digital networking, a potential weak point and provides attack vectors. Yet, as effective means for counterattacks the cyberspace has few advantages. These are the reasons:

1. Cyberattacks are not target agnostic. While conventional weapons can be used against a variety of different targets without major adjustments, cyberattacks have to be adapted to their particular target. In principle, no matter whether a missile is fired at a building or a vehicle, it is likely to cause damage when it detonates.[10] However, a trojan that has been designed for system X usually does not work in system Y.

2. Cyberattacks are inflexible. The large volume of different (operating) systems used in information and telecommunication technology makes selecting an attack vector and preparing a suitable attack very time consuming. Chris Inglis, former Deputy Director of the NSA, confirms that a cyberattack is 90 per cent preparation, making it unsuitable for rapid counterreactions.[11]

3. Cyberattacks are short-lived. Since software, as a non-physical component of a technology, can be developed with relatively few resources, cyberspace is subject to dynamic change. Successful cyberattacks act as a catalyst for this development, since as a reaction the respective weak points within the software are fixed in the long term. The myth of the cyber offence purports that the attacker always has an advantage over the defender. This is countered by Paul Nakasone, Director of the NSA, who says that offensive cyber capabilities rarely last more than six months.[12]

With this in mind, the benefit of cyberattacks clearly lies above all in their ability to manipulate an enemy's use of cyberspace, and to covertly infiltrate its information networks.[13] Essentially, they are conventional methods of espionage and manipulation. They have fewer advantages for conventional attacks but are generally used to support modern military operations.[14] Contrary to Clausewitz's dichotomy of war and peace, cyberattacks operate in a space between the two that remains a grey area in international law.[15] However, low-threshold cyber operations provide aggressor states with a way to increase their influence precisely due to the absence of an open declaration of war, and the low risk of escalation. This is a decisive factor, especially vis-à-vis countries with greater military might.

In cyberspace, the weak spot is often people and their careless internet use, as opposed to systems.
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Cyber Superpowers and Rising Cyber Powers: The Spectrum of Cyber Capabilities

The success of a cyberattack does not necessarily come down to the complexity of the malware, the quality of the resources available, or the skill of the hackers. The key to effective espionage is infiltrating systems via the simplest methods of obtaining passwords and, hence, accessing more gateways. Gateways such as phishing emails or infected USB sticks are frequently used and illustrate how easy it is for malware to get into the system. In cyberspace, the weak spot is often people, as opposed to systems. Careless internet use, using default passwords on network routers, reusing private passwords for professional applications, or even storing access data in text files or emails – these are just a few of the critical vulnerabilities that open the door to cyberattacks. The following examples from Russia, Iran, and Venezuela reveal the extent to which cyberattacks are currently being used to manipulate the global balance of power.

Influencing public opinion: With disinformation campaigns tailored towards specific national contexts, Russia actively contributes to the polarisation of societies in Western democracies. Source: © Gleb Garanich, Reuters.

Russia

As a traditional great power and former super-power in the duel with the US, it is hardly surprising that Russia is active in cyberspace. Over the last decade, Russia has invested enormously in regaining its former status and implemented an extensive rearmament programme. Digital technologies and cyber capabilities have played a central role from the start. As early as 2013, Russia's Chief of the General Staff Valery Gerasimov laid the groundwork for Russia's new approach to power projection. This involved the adoption of disinformation and other non-military measures and far exceeded the concepts underpinning conventional warfare. Various aspects of cyber warfare, such as cyberattacks on other nations' institutions and infrastructure and online influence campaigns to manipulate political opinion formation, were combined in a holistic approach. This soon bridged the gap between conventional and cyber warfare that had long prevailed in the West, and Russia quickly recognised and harnessed the potential of this new way of exerting its influence.[16]

Russia's information warfare aims at fomenting social discord and political chaos.

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Russia adopted a pioneering role in cyberspace from the outset. For example, the first known cyberattack – targeting government bodies in Estonia's capital Tallinn in 2007 – is attributed to Russia. Russia was also responsible for the

first cyberattack on critical energy infrastructure when hackers disrupted electricity supplies in the Ukrainian region of Ivano-Frankivsk in 2015. Cyberattacks on the German Bundestag in 2015 and on US government institutions between 2014 and 2016, orchestrated by Russian intelligence services and carried out by hacker groups such as APT28, also known as Fancy Bear, grabbed headlines in Germany for the first time as they illustrated how even seemingly secure government institutions, such as the White House, were vulnerable to attacks. Today, Russia can look back on 15 years of international cyber activities and is one of the so-called cyber superpowers, along with the United States, the United Kingdom, Israel, and China.[17]

In addition to the cyberattacks described above, which Russia has perfected over the past 15 years, the former superpower is also making its mark around the world in another area of cyber warfare. Global disinformation campaigns as well

Contrasts: Despite not even being able to provide its people with basic services, the Venezuelan government is a serious player in the field of disinformation. Source: © Manaure Quintero, Reuters.

as those tailored towards specific national contexts, have cast doubt on the credibility of hostile governments, vilified political opponents, and actively contributed to the polarisation of Western democracies.[18] Interestingly, these campaigns are not primarily about Russia, nor does the content directly or indirectly pertain to Russia. Rather, this form of information warfare aims at fomenting social discord and political chaos, thus systematically weakening hostile nations from within. The means used to achieve this are as simple as they are effective. With the help of a few hundred employees, fake social media accounts, troll armies, and bots, the Internet Research Agency in St Petersburg has succeeded in stirring up controversy, inciting social protests, and intervening in electoral processes.[19] Exercising this kind of influence is technically simple but has far-reaching effects. This was recently demonstrated not least in the 2016 US presidential election campaign, which Russia manipulated with hacker attacks and social media campaigns in favour of Donald Trump as detailed in the report by Special Counsel Robert Mueller.[20] There have been many proven cases of Russian interference, including the independence referendum in Catalonia (2017), the Brexit referendum (2016), and the international coverage on Russian opposition leader Alexei Nawalny. These all complete the picture of an almost omnipresent cyber power that subversively intervenes in the political discourses and electoral processes of other nations.

Venezuela

By contrast, Venezuela is a more surprising player in the realm of cyberspace. This South American country has been in the throes of a humanitarian crisis for many years. Its people are plagued by food shortages, hyperinflation, and abject poverty, with one-fifth of Venezuela's population having fled from their desperate circumstances since 2018. But despite the country neither being able to feed its people nor provide reliable supplies of electricity and water, it is a serious player in the field of digital subversion. It is with good reason that, in 2019, Oxford University's Global Inventory of Organised Social Media Manipulation ranked the South American nation as one of the world's leading manipulators in terms of cyber troop capacity.[21]

The Venezuelan troll army tries to control the narrative of the regime by disseminating fake news on a massive scale.

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What may come as a surprise for many is that Venezuela has been pursuing a cyber strategy for several years – a strategy that international analysts describe as extremely powerful, especially as regards disseminating propaganda. Even back in 2010, President Hugo Chávez pursued a strategy of actively using social media to spread his political message and mobilise support. By 2017 at the latest, Venezuela was building its cyber troops to arm itself for information warfare in cyberspace according to a leaked document from the Venezuelan Interior Ministry titled "Project to Create a Troll Army of the Bolivarian Revolution".[22]

According to experts, the Venezuelan troll army is at least 500 persons strong. Reinforced by digital bots, they besiege social networks such as YouTube, Facebook, Instagram, Telegram, WhatsApp, and especially Twitter, seeking to ensure Venezuela's regime controls the narrative by spreading its political messages, disrupting the democratic opposition's social media communications, and disseminating fake news on a massive scale.[23] The Venezuelan cyber army's "disinformation units" have a military-style structure, with each unit operating over one thousand social media accounts. At the height of the information war, such as during protests against Hugo Chávez's successor, Nicolás Maduro, or the US decision to impose international sanctions on Venezuela in 2019, research shows that more than 80 per cent of pro-regime social media traffic was generated by automated bots. However, unlike other states that manipulate social networks for propaganda purposes, Venezuela has relatively large numbers of flesh-and-blood trolls at work.[24] They are partly

paid in food vouchers, which, in this crisis-ridden country, are more valuable than cash in view of the prevailing food shortages and hyperinflationary national currency.

Venezuela's cyber activities also go beyond its national borders. According to the Atlantic Council, Venezuela is the first country in Latin America to use cybertechnology to spread strategic propaganda – and not only within its own territory.[25] Indeed, a comparative study by Oxford University shows that the economically impoverished country is in fact among the world's leaders in terms of its capacity for running information campaigns with a global reach.[26] The last few years have borne witness to Venezuela's success in using this capability to exert influence in other countries. For example, Venezuela has interfered in a variety of socio-political controversies, not only in Latin America but also in Spain, thanks to the use of fake social media accounts and automated dissemination tools, sometimes in conjunction with Russia. There is evidence that it has fuelled social tensions and helped to radicalise emerging protest movements.[27] It is no coincidence that precisely those states that had previously spoken out against the Maduro regime have found themselves the target of Venezuela's subversive disinformation campaigns.[28] The various protests that spread like wildfire in Chile, Ecuador, and Colombia and spilled over into the entire region in autumn 2019 cannot solely be attributed to Venezuela's actions; however, the country's successful interference campaigns impressively demonstrate the potential of digital technologies to project power in countries that lack traditional resources for doing so, such as Venezuela.

Iran

The Islamic Republic of Iran began developing its cyber capabilities at an early stage. Against the backdrop of the painful experience of the 2009 Green Revolution social media campaigns, which placed the regime under immense pressure, and the devastating cyberattack on Iranian nuclear enrichment facilities caused by the Stuxnet computer worm in 2010, Iran's

revolutionary leader, Ali Khamenei, set up the Supreme Council of Cyberspace in early 2012. The Council is responsible for all decisions relating to cyber policy. It censors any web content that it deems inappropriate, counters the (relatively frequent) cyberattacks on Iran, and is actively building the country's capacity to carry out cyberattacks on its opponents. With its lack of conventional military capabilities and economic isolation due to strict international sanctions, Iran sees the development and use of cyber technology as a way of acquiring asymmetric warfare capabilities, thus enhancing its ability to project power.

Iran has evolved from an early cyber victim to an offensive cyber power.

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While Iran still lags behind Russia, the US, and Israel in terms of cyber capabilities, the Islamic Republic has made great strides in recent years, evolving from an early cyber victim to an offensive cyber power capable of inflicting serious damage, even on countries with superior technology.[29] Intentionally, its attacks are not directed against government or military institutions, but instead target private-sector businesses in countries it deems hostile. For example, in 2012 Iran inflicted enormous financial damage through DDoS attacks on more than a dozen major US banks, forcing individual banks to invest tens of millions of dollars in protecting themselves against future Iranian hacking. On Wall Street, too, a hacker group close to Iran was able to cause considerable damage in 2013 – at least temporarily – by hacking the Twitter account of the Associated Press news agency. As a result, it spread fake news about explosions at the White House and alleged injuries to the US president. By the time this news was identified as fake, the Dow Jones had fallen 150 points and wiped out 136 billion US dollars in value.[30]

In addition to technically simple hacker attacks with a serious financial impact on their victims,

Iran's cyber capabilities also include disinformation campaigns. Particularly in the Arab world, Iran is fighting for influence via social media and using concerted propaganda campaigns to weaken its rival, Saudi Arabia. In addition to normal computer-based social media campaigns, Iran has created elaborate imitations of Arab news sites to disseminate the Iranian narrative as well as to publish content that is critical of the Saudi government throughout the Arab region.[31]

As an international pariah state with very few conventional resources for wielding influence, in less than a decade Iran has evolved into a serious player in the field of cyber warfare. It may not have joined the ranks of the cyber superpowers, but it is skilfully pursuing its regional power ambitions in cyberspace.

Conclusion

As different as the above examples of cyber powers large and small are, they all highlight a clear trend: Cyber capabilities are becoming more important in international relations. Countries capable of conducting cyber operations are witnessing a noticeable increase in their power, while countries without this capability are experiencing a loss of influence on the international stage.

Interestingly, traditional sources of power, such as military and economic strength, are not a prerequisite for success in cyberspace. It is true that the premier league of cyber powers also includes many traditional major powers in its ranks. But states need very few resources to build their cyber capabilities and exploit them to project influence, as the examples of international outsiders like Iran and Venezuela demonstrate. In some ways, cyber capabilities even seem ideally suited to allowing small and medium-sized countries to increase their influence because they represent an effective tool of asymmetric warfare. Even though they require relatively few resources and low-threshold technology, they have the potential to inflict considerable damage when deployed against other countries.

Attacks on poorly protected public authorities, businesses, or even infrastructure can cause serious damage to other countries.

> **In the field of information warfare, states that were never previously on the radar as global players are now increasing their international influence.**
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The risks for the attacker are reasonably low because attribution of the attacks is usually difficult and time-consuming. On top of this, the evidence is seldom clear, and consistent denial of any involvement is part and parcel of cyber warfare.[32] This is also one of the key differences from previous power struggles at the international level. While the global battle for power and influence has always been accompanied by visible demonstrations of power and the accumulation of status symbols, the struggle in cyberspace takes place under the radar.

This makes it especially difficult to identify shifts of power occurring today. Particularly in the field of information warfare, an area of growing importance in both national and international conflicts, states that were never previously on the radar as global players are now increasing their international influence. Yet, these countries recognised the potential of digital technologies at an early stage and are exploiting them with great success. Many of them have a wealth of experience in this respect due to having deployed the tools of information warfare against their own citizens and political opponents for many years. They can now direct this expertise towards other countries to wield global influence.

Government bodies in Germany are strongly aware of the danger, as documented by the sections on cyber activities in the country's annual domestic intelligence reports and the creation of the National Cyberdefence Centre already in

2011. Yet, the public is still largely unaware of the scale of the subversive cyber activities carried out by foreign governments. They are not only designed to spy on public authorities and businesses, but also use disinformation campaigns to manipulate public opinion – and hence the population. There is a need for widespread awareness campaigns to highlight specific attempts by foreign states to exert their influence. These should be conducted in such a way that they attract media attention and actively raise public awareness of this subtle form of external meddling. Germany needs to raise public awareness of the scale and potential threat posed by cyberattacks if it is to avoid becoming their target.

– translated from German –

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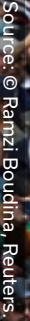
Outdated Elites, New Sense of Identity

Leaderless Revolutions and the
Crisis of Arab Authorities

Simon Engelkes

Ten years after the onset of the "Arab Spring", cracks are appearing again in the autocratic façade of the Middle East and North Africa. However, the struggle to find an alternative to the ruling elite has failed due to the lack of organised political parties capable of translating anger on the streets into constructive political participation.

The COVID-19 pandemic has left parts of the Middle East and North Africa in a state of limbo. Before its outbreak in spring 2020, more than one million people had taken to the streets again in Beirut, Algiers, Khartoum, and Baghdad to call for economic, political, and social change. Sweeping government restrictions to combat COVID-19 may have temporarily stymied the protests, but their underlying socioeconomic and political causes persist. It is now ten years since the start of a wave of mass protests opposing despotism and injustice that led to the overthrow of five longstanding rulers in the region. Three countries descended into civil war, one returned to dictatorship, and one achieved a transition to democracy – and the Arab world is still in turmoil.

The second wave of Arab uprisings, which began in Sudan in December 2018 and has since spread to Algeria, Iraq, and Lebanon, prolongs the dispute between the people and their political elites about what is required of a modern state. A lack of confidence prevails in public institutions, and particularly parliaments and political parties; this is often part of a pronounced rejection of any kind of organised interest representation. The leaderless protests – with no common strategies, hierarchies, or ideologies – increasingly focus their demands on specific governance issues, while their lack of structure hampers both their effectiveness and suppression. This article examines the reasons for the new wave of protests and looks at their demands. It considers the background to their lack of leadership and draws conclusions about the need for rapprochement between the people and their rulers.

A Second Wave of Protest

Triggers for the new wave of protests varied from country to country. In Sudan, a government decision to triple the price of bread brought eight months of protests and civil disobedience resulting in the overthrow of the country's ruler, Omar al-Bashir. Al-Bashir ruled the country as a dictatorship over a period of three decades. In Algeria, it was President Abdelaziz Bouteflika's announcement that he would run for a fifth term in the next presidential elections that sparked the mass protest movement *Hirak*. Bouteflika, who was seriously ill and rarely seen in public, and the generals and businessmen who surrounded him (known as *le pouvoir* – the power) had a firm hold on the country's reins for 20 years. In Iraq, it was the demotion of General Abdel-Wahab Al-Saedi, a popular figure symbolising the fight against corruption and nepotism and a hero in the fight against so-called Islamic State, that drove people onto the streets in October 2019. Despite the victory over the terrorist organisation three years ago, Iraq is deeply divided and – as one of the world's most oil-rich countries – unable to provide for its people. In Lebanon, protests opposing a planned tax on voice calls via apps like WhatsApp sparked nationwide demonstrations. Mired in poverty and national bankruptcy, the Cedar State is in the throes of the worst crisis since the 15-year civil war that ended 30 years ago.

Well-Known Causes …

These sparks were able to ignite a firestorm because there was already plenty of fuel in the form of the region's severe socioeconomic problems that had remained unresolved since 2011.

With the exception of Tunisia's transition to a democratic system, the protests of ten years ago came to an end either because they were violently suppressed by the regime and authoritarianism was restored; the people were co-opted with material incentives and appeased with the odd institutional adjustment; or, in some Arab countries, people looked at what was happening in Syria, Libya, and Yemen and were not prepared to risk their own country sliding into civil war. Yet, even though the demonstrators may have disappeared from the streets, the problems that brought them there still loom large.

A decade later, many countries in the region still suffer from inadequate basic public services, high unemployment, and poverty. In Lebanon, almost half of the population lives below the poverty line.[1] This is exacerbated by regional currency and economic crises, overdependence on (declining) revenues from oil exports and foreign development aid, a toxic politicisation of identity, and widespread corruption in the public sector. Particularly for young people, material deprivation, fear of the future, and a lack of confidence in the ability or will of their governments to solve these fundamental problems,

Poverty, unemployment, and barely any prospects: In many countries of the region, severe socioeconomic problems remained unresolved in the last decade. Source: © Zohra Bensemra, Reuters.

are leading to despair and protest. National and regional surveys reveal that corruption and bad governance are viewed as serious problems and the main reasons for protests. 97 per cent of young people in the Levant and North Africa believe at least some members of the political elite to be corrupt.[2]

... New Demands

The second wave of protests does not repeat the demands of 2011 but moves beyond them. With chants like "All of them means all of them" in Lebanon and "The system must go" in Algeria, demonstrators are not only calling for the removal of elite networks of politicians, businesspeople, and military officers who rule the country but rather a complete dismantling of the political structures and economic systems that sustain them.[3] It is not a case of moving a few political chess pieces but of changing the basic rules of the game. Despite protestors in Algeria and Sudan seeking opportunities to participate in the democratic process, the streets echo with far fewer calls for democracy. Nowadays, demands for political freedoms only tend to be heard on the fringes.[4] This is largely due to the realisation that, in the public perception, even more advanced electoral democracies such as Iraq and Lebanon – which both hold relatively free and fair elections – only serve to bolster the corrupt political elite.

> **It is particularly noteworthy that the recent protests have transcended sectarian and identitarian divides.**
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The call for *ʿaish, hurriya, ʿadala ijtimaʿiya* – bread, freedom and social justice – still resounds today, yet the protesters are now more uncompromising in their demands for socioeconomic participation.[5] The desire for a new political system has been ignited by the everyday, socioeconomic realities of life, which seem to take precedence over immediate political objectives.

The protest movements are calling for far-reaching socioeconomic reform, improved public services, especially water, electricity, and health care, better job opportunities and prospects for the future, and more effective efforts to combat corruption.

One phenomenon undermining the cohesion necessary for effective reform and preserving anti-democratic rule is the sectarian model of social order.[6] In Iraq and Lebanon, despotic minority rule and civil war have led to the establishment of political and legal mechanisms of sectarian power-sharing that allocate the highest political offices to members of the Sunni, Shiite, Christian, or Kurdish communities. This institutionalised identitarian division of society fosters nepotism (*wasta*) and clientelism, while also cementing the impermeability of political structures and preventing the development of a citizen-oriented understanding of the state.[7]

It is, therefore, particularly noteworthy that the recent protests have transcended sectarian and identitarian divides.[8] At the height of the *Hirak* movement, the whole of Algeria, from its Berber regions to its predominantly Arab towns and cities echoed with the cry: "No Berbers, no Arabs, no race or religion! We are all Algerians!" This is the first time since independence in 1962 that there has been such a unity in the calls for change.[9] A similar phenomenon was observed in Sudan, where the regime initially wanted to place the blame for protests on the Fur ethnic group, resulting in the streets of the capital Khartoum resonating with cries of "We are all Darfur".[10] It was in Lebanon, a country riven by sectarianism for most of its history, where, in October 2019, hundreds of thousands of Lebanese from every denomination waved the Lebanese flag and cried: "We are all Lebanese. On the street we are not Shiites, Sunnis or Christians. We are citizens."[11] In Iraq, too, the demands of the demonstrators have taken on a national flavour and provide a basis for building a national identity.[12] United in their opposition to any distinctions based on ethnicity or religion, the protesters called for a common national identity – bound by their shared plight and destiny.

Structural Adjustments in Political Activism

However, protagonists of the second wave of protests have also adapted their approach. One lesson from 2011 is that violence affords regimes the opportunity to reframe political protests as civil war so that they can clamp down hard and stifle any hope of peaceful transition. Despite demonstrators in Sudan, Algeria, and Iraq having faced violence and repression from government forces and non-state militias, they remained true to their non-violent approach for the most part. This prevented the alienation of moderate supporters and attracted broad national and international support.[13]

Over the last few years, leaderless movements have been growing and thriving around the globe.

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Experience has also shown that the fall of a ruler does not necessarily spell the demise of the political system. Hence, in Sudan and Algeria, protests continued even after the military coup against Omar al-Bashir and the resignation of Abdelaziz Bouteflika. The same can be said for Iraq, where protests continued following the prime minister's resignation in November 2019 and the new government's promises of reform. More recently, curfews and assembly bans enacted by governments in response to the COVID-19 pandemic have taken the wind out of the sails of some of the protests. But even if the protests have become less visible, they have not disappeared and still flare up whenever restrictions are eased. "We fear hunger, not coronavirus", was how one Lebanese protester summarised it.[14]

What is particularly notable, however, is that the protest movements tend to be leaderless. At present, this is a phenomenon witnessed not only in the Middle East. These kinds of movements have been growing and thriving around the globe, from Hong Kong to Thailand and

France to Chile in recent years. They reflect how, the world over, power is shifting from institutionalised actors to informal political movements and types of political activism. This global trend has tempted some commentators to proclaim the "age of leaderless revolution".[15] These movements are fuelled by crises, directed against the political establishment and they distance themselves from existing political parties.[16] Before we can understand their significance in the context of the Middle East and North Africa, we need to look at the region's political systems.

Competitive Authoritarianism and Political Clientelism

The Arab world's political model has long been described as "competitive authoritarianism", a system in which non-democratic regimes employ (sham) democratic methods to consolidate their power. Formal democratic institutions such as parliaments and parties have been and continue to be used as a way of legitimising political authority, despite the political elite routinely abusing public resources in elections, denying opposition forces media coverage, publicly harassing opponents, and manipulating election results.[17] Parliaments or comparable institutions now exist everywhere in the Middle East and North Africa, and members of parliament are, for the most part, mandated in direct elections. The influence on politics varies from country to country; however, in most of the region, the era of closed authoritarian regimes is now a thing of the past. In recent decades, the region has been dominated by one- or two-party systems that have severely restricted political competition. Today, pluralistic party systems are prevalent in most Arab countries. In Lebanon and Iraq, where a confusingly large number of parties is constantly forging new alliances with changing names, we can even refer to a "hyperpluralistic" system.

In democratic theory, political parties are often described as the most important political organisations in our modern world.[18] They serve to formulate policy programmes by articulating and aggregating citizens' interests and subsequently
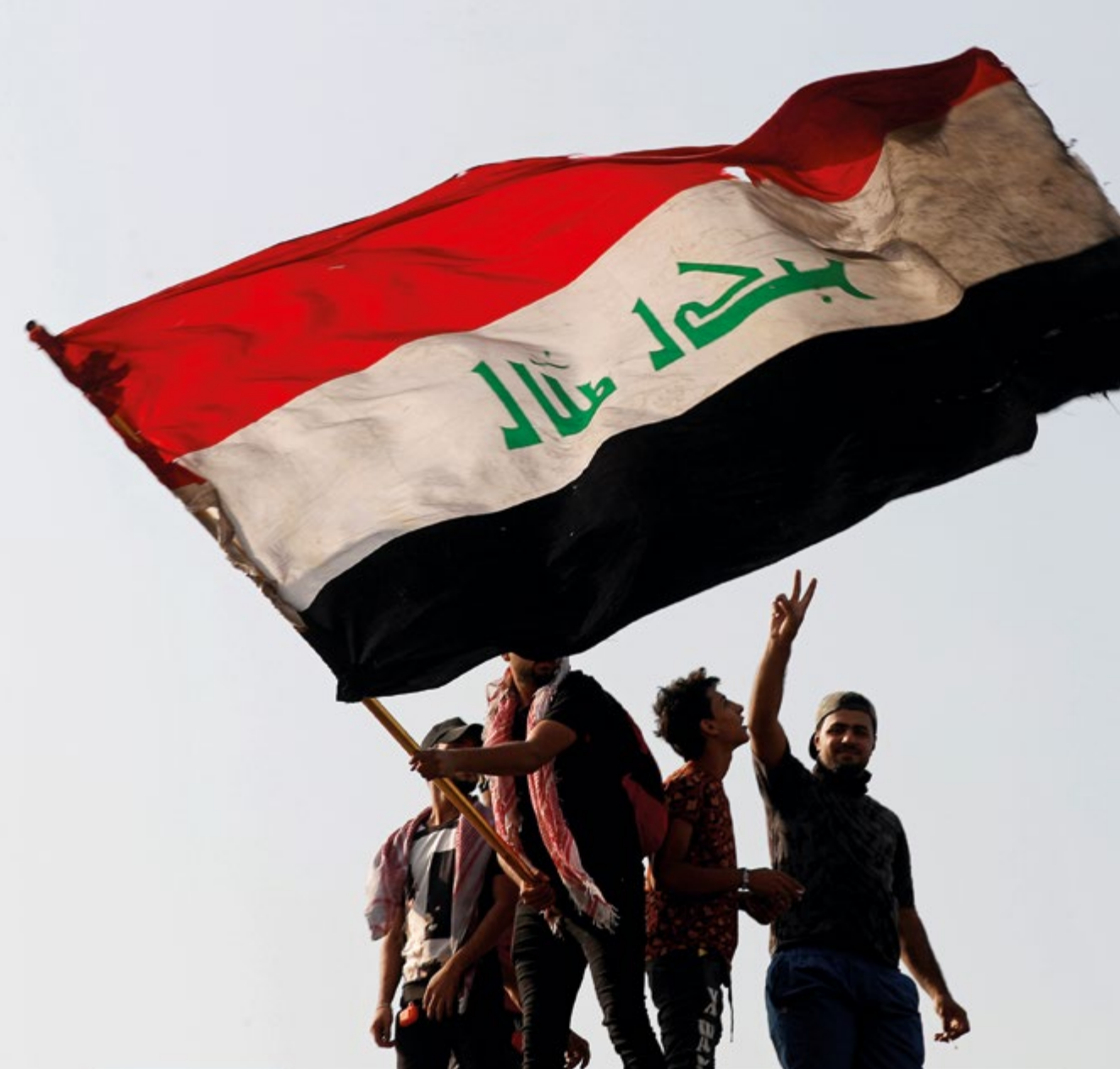
United under one flag: The recent protests have transcended ethnic and sectarian divides, their demands have taken on a national flavour. Source: © Thaier Al-Sudani, Reuters.

mobilising voters behind an agenda. In this way, they create a relationship between government and citizens and, in addition to voting, enable their members to directly participate and demand accountability from their elected representatives.

In the Arab world, this connection is largely clientelistic, in other words, people vote for a party that they think will provide them with specific benefits. Political parties also tend to be poorly organised and ideologically vague in many countries across the region. They do not represent the interests of their citizens but are there for the personal benefit of their members. They often exhibit a personalistic nature, with weak internal democracy and limited influence on policymaking.[19] André Sleiman, Lebanon Country Representative at Democracy Reporting International, describes the parties in Lebanon as "gangs"

characterised by autocratic structures, focused on their own interests, and built on loyalty and obedience. "You cannot reform them."[20]

Crisis of Confidence in Arab Parties

This belief is shared by many in the region and particularly the younger generation. Hence, it is not surprising that confidence in public institutions and willingness to participate in politics are almost non-existent. In surveys, 61 per cent of respondents in the Arab world state that their views are not represented by any existing political group.[21] 71 per cent of Lebanese citizens distrust political parties and four out of five distrust parliament. In Iraq, only five per cent of the population have a positive attitude towards political parties.[22] This alienation from the political elite is reflected in the declining voter turnout. When, ten years ago, certain regimes ignored the demonstrators' demands, it was not unusual for protesters to turn to opposition leaders. But now all political leaders are viewed with distrust.[23]

By contrast, the informal protest movements represent large swathes of the population. In all four countries, the protest movements enjoy broad support. An overwhelming majority of Sudanese (81 per cent), Algerians (71 per cent), Lebanese (67 per cent), and Iraqis (82 per cent) back the demonstrators' demands; in Sudan, over one third of respondents said they had taken part in the protests.[24] Deep alienation between the predominantly young population and these countries' ruling elites is driving many people onto the streets. This reveals enormous political potential that has not yet been exploited. With the decline of the political parties, a key element of the political system – their role as intermediaries between the people and the rulers – is removed from the equation, leading to direct confrontation.

In the wake of radical political projects during the second half of the 20th century, including Arab nationalism, pan-Arabism and Baathism, the rise of Islamism, and, most recently, the "Arab Spring's" calls for democracy, we are now witnessing a politically activated but largely disoriented, almost post-ideological, generation growing up in the region. Governments consisting of political parties no longer offer a solution. This has led to a desire for technocrats to take the reins as they seem more capable of ensuring good governance. In a regional KAS poll, 40 per cent of Algerians and 55 per cent of Lebanese said elections should be abolished and technocrats given government responsibility.[25] A prototype in this respect is Sudan, where a three-year transition period led by a civilian technocrat government was agreed in the aftermath of the military coup that toppled dictator Omar al-Bashir in 2019. Linked to this is the hope of an end to autocratic "divide and rule" strategies and the beginning of *administra et impera* (administer and rule). The 2011 efforts were hampered by political and ideological divisions, particularly between Islamists and secularists, which led to a strong focus on identity issues while more pressing matters such as socioeconomic improvements were put on the back burner. A technocratic interim solution may help to ease tensions over the medium term, yet it fails to solve the underlying problems and once again opens a vacuum of legitimacy.

Social movements are increasingly at the heart of society's processes of negotiation.

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The post-war political projects of the Middle East – in pursuit of Arab unity, national independence, decolonisation, and socioeconomic transformation – were often led by charismatic leaders and their one-party systems. Today, however, the role and significance of political parties as "gatekeeper to the levers and trappings of power" is being called into question,[26] while social movements are increasingly at the heart of society's processes of negotiation. In this respect, they serve less as political actors than as watchdogs, self-avowed corrective agents, and warnings to the rulers. The ineffectiveness of political parties and the capricious

state suppression of public insurrection are changing the forms of political activism. Citizens are increasingly turning to informal mechanisms of protest and boycott.[27]

The Background to Lack of Leadership

Even prior to the developments of 2011, sociologist Asef Bayat saw social change in the Middle East as related to *nonmovements*; "collective actions of noncollective actors", which trigger change but are rarely guided by an ideology or recognisable leaderships and organisations.[28] According to Bayat, these non-structured protests, characteristic of authoritarian systems, may bring about change where organised movements fail. Lack of leadership promotes fast responses, high adaptability, and agility as well as the ability to adopt innovations in types of protest/tactics, which can spread horizontally more quickly. However, it also leads to a strategy vacuum and inefficient use of resources. Why is it that the recent wave of protests remained leaderless?

> **Leadership structures make it easier for state authorities to target, co-opt, arrest, or even execute individuals.**
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Diversification as an Organisational Challenge

Many of the recent protests had their origins in leaderless ad-hoc uprisings that subsequently grew into mass nationwide protests. While young people are the key driving forces behind the protests, they also attracted a broad range of citizens beyond the urban middle class and the strong participation of women was striking. The diversity of the protesters and the resulting differences in the scope of their demands have made it difficult to create a unified leadership. It is a classic chicken-and-egg situation: Disunity is symptomatic of lack of leadership, but disunity is also what makes it difficult for leaders to emerge in the first place. In Algeria, ideological differences led to the movement becoming

fragmented. The diversity of the protest movements went from being a strength to a weakness.

The Iron Hand of the State

Another reason for the growth of largely leaderless movements is the way state authorities have responded to the protests. In (semi-)authoritarian contexts, state actors respond to opposition with a mixture of concessions, co-optation, and coercion. The violence perpetrated against protesters in Iraq and the arrests in Algeria certainly engendered support and, thus, mobilised more people to protest, whereas they also deterred potential leaders from taking on more responsibility. This is because leadership structures make it easier for state authorities to target and co-opt, arrest, or even execute individuals, which can rapidly result in the movement being fragmented or suppressed. On the other hand, leaderless protests, with their guerrilla-like structures, are more difficult to quash.[29]

Nevertheless, attempts to co-opt advocates of the protest movement have had some success. Several Iraqi protesters have left the movement to take up political roles. For most demonstrators, however, entering negotiations with the regime was tantamount to participating in the rigged system and, thus, deciding to become "part of the problem". By the same token, this made them wary of assuming a leadership role. The protests are directed against the perceived concentration of power, which is why many participants are critical of similar developments within their own ranks.[30]

The Unusual Suspects

Like in 2011, the protagonists of the second wave of protests were not established civil society actors but rather the "unusual suspects"[31] – people with little previous political experience, who neither believed they needed an organisation nor possessed the expertise they needed to create one. They had no concrete political vision or clearly formulated strategic agenda for talks with the government for which they would have needed representatives. For instance, during

Without leaders for a better future: A Sudanese woman demonstrates in the capital Khartoum. Source: © Umit Bektas, Reuters.

the latest wave of protests in Lebanon – unlike during the waste protests of 2015, which were largely led by established civil society organisations – no leader figures or new, structured organisations emerged that were able to claim to be a contender on the political stage. It is true that some protesters united behind political movements that emerged in 2015, such as *Li Haqqi* (for my rights) or existing secular opposition parties that sought to form an anti-establishment alliance. Nevertheless, a diffuse and

dispersed type of collective leadership emerged – as a "grassroots movement [largely] outside the control of political parties and emerging civil society structures".[32]

Technology Enables Leaderlessness

Here, as in 2011, social media played a significant role in this by enabling protesters to communicate in a decentralised manner. At least when it comes to organising protest actions, leaders

were made obsolete by difficult-to-monitor messaging services with end-to-end encryption such as Telegram, Twitter for disseminating calls to action, and Facebook groups for sharing slogans and protest calls. Most of the protests in Lebanon and Iraq were mobilised through small groups and social media.

Do We Need a New Structure?

However, this type of leaderless protest structure makes it difficult to achieve its goals. Scaling up these small groups of political "amateurs" requires skill, organisational experience, resources, and – above all – time. In addition, highly organised structures with a strategic agenda are needed to accomplish political results – as evidenced by the counterrevolutions and descent into civil war following 2011. The experiences of 2011, coupled with the political elite's will to survive, demonstrates the inability of these forms of protest to end the decades-old, deeply entrenched structures of political and economic rule, however. At that time, most governments were able to outmanoeuvre the social movements in their countries.

The demonstrators in the second wave of protests have made it clear that they will not fall silent until their problems are taken seriously. The protests are an indication of the system's lack of responsiveness to the needs of its people. How can the varied demands of citizens in a pre-political space be brought into the political debate and the anger of the street be translated into constructive political participation and the power to shape policy – and how can political parties participate in this dialogue?

Reforming Established Parties

Political parties that mobilise according to political beliefs and across sectarian lines, that promote a national identity and inspire confidence in their ability to govern – beginning at local level – may just stand a chance. They would have to propose reforms to the economic model and be constrained by party laws that formulate rules and conditions for the new formation and continued existence of political parties. They would have to develop a culture of responsibility through internal party reform processes and regain citizens' confidence in traditional participation mechanisms such as elections and candidacies. However, experts in the region see little chance of this happening within the established parties.

> **Independent civil society institutions are essential for drawing up political and socioeconomic solutions.**
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Iraqi analyst Sajad Jiyad believes it is possible for parties to retain the confidence of their base and their traditional voters; but thinks winning back the "disempowered masses" is highly unlikely. This would require a great deal of time and effort involving a range of measures, including transparency initiatives, internal restructuring, and changes to parliamentary activities. What's more, the current socioeconomic situation does not allow for a continuation of the clientelism model.[33] Lebanese expert André Sleiman also sees little prospect of reform by the established parties, given their lack of internal democracy, freedom of speech, and accountability. However, there is still a degree of confidence in political parties as an organisational element of the political structure.[34] In Algeria, formal political institutions and political parties have been completely discredited due to their ties with the old Bouteflika regime. Hence, Yahia Zoubir foresees their gradual slide towards irrelevance and believes a potential solution lies in dissolving all the parties and rebuilding them under stricter rules.[35]

Overcoming Lack of Political Leadership

The struggle to find an alternative to the ruling elite is undermined above all by the lack of alternative, credible political groupings with the ability to organise themselves effectively. As a result, the route out of the current crisis seems

possible only through the intrinsic development of organisations with policy platforms from within the ranks of the protesters. The work of international institutions on the ground could help to overcome this lack of political leadership.

Many countries in the region lack platforms where young people can come together to discuss political ideas and build organisational structures, and particularly for future leaders in civil society and the political sphere. There is a need for training facilities where young people can learn about the workings of political processes and the legal background to founding parties and associations, where they are motivated to become involved in their communities and given the scope to discuss concepts such as citizenship, transparency, and accountability. Employees of public institutions also need to gain a better understanding of basic government work, the mechanisms and principles of good governance, public order, and administration. This is where local actors such as town councils and their mayors have a particular role to play, as there is often more room for action at municipal level, and improved governance has a more tangible impact in this context.

International institutions can provide additional support in expanding the previously weak local think tank culture. Independent civil society institutions are essential for drawing up political and socioeconomic solutions. However, external support should invariably be adapted to the country's political possibilities and directed towards specific needs. Many countries are deeply critical of foreign interference. This is where Europe should enter an open exchange of experiences – also so as not to discredit the protest movements by interfering.

Developing a Modern Understanding of the State

Even ten years after the start of the "Arab Spring", it is not over and done with. It is a process, a shifting culture of protest and demands for accountability that can be observed in many countries of the region since 2010/11. It has become a

reference point for Arab youth to continue pressing their demands. Overriding all of this is the renegotiation of a viable political settlement and the creation of a sustainable citizen-state relationship – one of the main motivations behind the protests ten years ago. The perception of this relationship has changed. In many countries in the region, even those that have not witnessed the recent outbreaks of protest, citizens are demanding that the government abide by its duty of care.

The authoritarian social contract of the old system, based on material rewards in the context of dysfunctional rentier economies, failed to deliver on the core components of good governance, and large swathes of the population now believe it has run its course. To mitigate some of the tensions currently brewing and to promote long-term stability, there is a need to come up with a citizen-centred, modern Arab state based on the rule of law, good governance, and social justice. To this end, demonstrations on the streets must be transformed into dialogue and channelled into the political process as participation. Many of the countries in the region are holding elections this year, including the parliamentary elections in Iraq in late 2021. This could afford an opportunity to achieve this goal.

For more publications and political analysis on the tenth anniversary of the "Arab Spring", visit our website at: www.kas.de/arab-spring.

– translated from German –

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Cover Illustration:
National flags of different states on torn soil.
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Other sources indicated accordingly.

Proofreading:
i. e. editing, London
Philippa Carr, Munich

Translation:
RedKeyTranslations, Salzhemmendorf