

SECURITY INDEX YEARBOOK

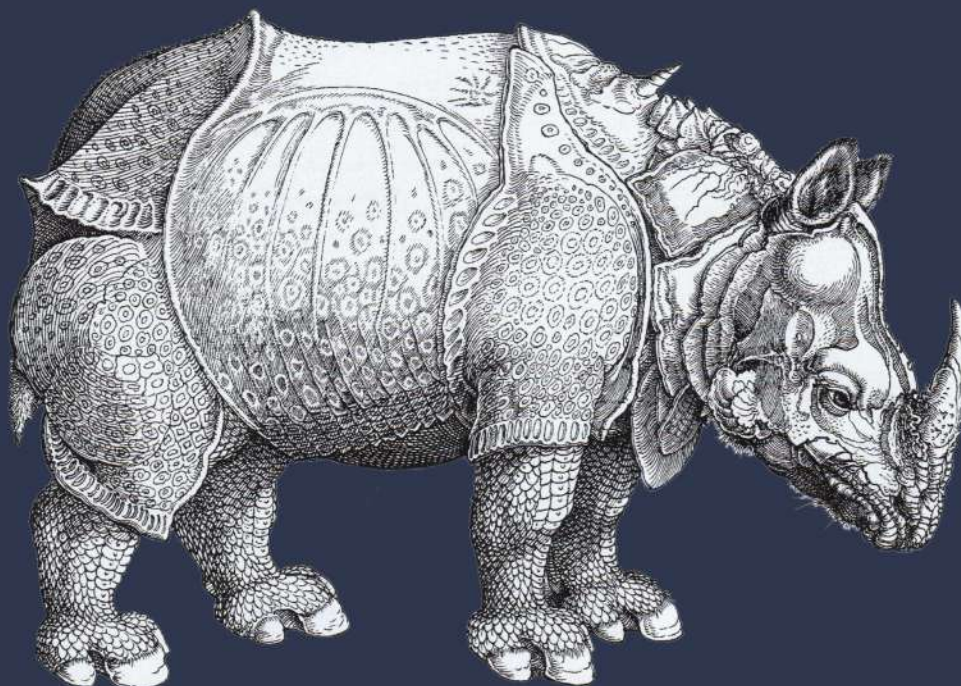


Editors:

Vladimir Orlov
Leonid Tsukanov

Foreword by
Anatoly Torkunov

Volume 2 • 2026 – 2027 • Global Edition





SECURITY INDEX YEARBOOK

Vol.2 | 2026 – 2027 | Global Edition

Vladimir Orlov
and Leonid Tsukanov (Editors)

Foreword by
Anatoly Torkunov

Published since 2024





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**Security Index Yearbook 2026-2027 Vol.2. Vladimir Orlov and Leonid Tsukanov (Editors).
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In the midst of escalating worldwide tensions and Russian responses to them, this handbook is a singular compilation of analytical resources on the most pressing topics of the regional and global agendas. Global concerns, including nuclear weapons and the strategic arms control agenda, the nonproliferation of WMDs, new conventional weapon types, space, and cyber security (including artificial intelligence), are all highlighted in this volume. In terms of regional security, it focuses on the Middle East and Africa, Russia-US, Russia-China ties, the evaluation of BRICS prospects, and security discussions on the Korean Peninsula, to name a few. *Security Index Yearbook* helps readers better grasp world events and Russia's position on them and is primarily aimed at experts, decision-makers, think tanks, business circles, and specialists in Russian studies. Its target audience includes individuals who wish to gain a new perspective on Russian foreign and defense policy, Russia's international activities, and the perception of threats. Vol. 1 presented to the global audience in 2024 with public events and expert discussions in Geneva, Minsk, Astana, and Zvenigorod, provoked high interest in its contents and demand for a follow-up. This is what PIR Center and MGIMO offer in this Vol. 2 (2026-2027) Global Edition”.

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* *Security Index* Yearbook Vol. 2 (2026-2027) Global Edition – Digital Edition only.

FOREWORD

Anatoly Torkunov

Dear reader,

The international landscape is increasingly moving away from the model of a global, centralized modernity. The rise of non-Western centers of power – driven not by a rejection of modernization but, on the contrary, by its successful appropriation and acceleration – has contributed to the decentering of modernity itself. In place of a single ‘center’ and a hierarchy of ‘peripheries’, a world of multiple civilizational actors is taking shape.

Crucially, these civilizations differ not merely at the level of culture, symbols, or values, but at a more fundamental level: in their social ontologies and epistemologies – how political communities are imagined, how authority is constituted, how order is justified, and how knowledge about international reality is produced and validated. This raises a consequential question for international scholarship and practice alike: what kind of global order can emerge among civilizational states, and which principles and institutions can sustain it under conditions of increasing plurality?

In this context, Russia can be understood as a civilizational state. This makes it all the more important to present to international audiences the perspective of the Russian epistemic community of international relations scholars and practitioners – those who analyze international politics professionally, develop conceptual frameworks for understanding security, and sustain expert dialogue across borders. The *Security Index Yearbook* contributes to this effort by articulating, in a rigorous and accessible form, the viewpoint of the Russian international-relations community – above all on the key challenges of international security.

The second volume of the *Security Index Yearbook*, which you now hold in your hands, maintains the high standard set by its predecessor. Each contribution reflects the work of leading Russian experts and practitioners representing key research centers.

The first part of the volume is traditionally devoted to global issues: the transformation of the world order; nuclear non-proliferation and arms control; information security and cybersecurity (including the rapidly developing field of artificial intelligence); and the space race. The second part focuses on more specific questions: the evolution of Russia’s approaches to relations with the United States and China in the context of international security; changes in Moscow’s policy in the Middle East and on the Korean Peninsula; and cooperation within BRICS amid growing global instability.

The fourth part – aptly titled ‘Under the Microscope’ – highlights the breadth of Russia’s contacts with those countries which, until relatively recently, were often described as ‘catch-up’ actors – particularly African states and Mongolia.

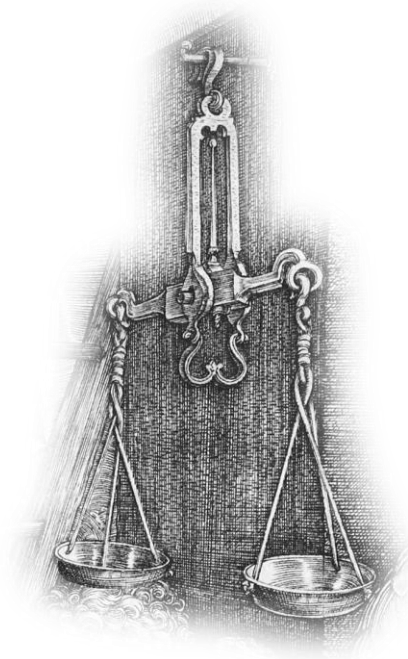
Part V presents, in the form of expert interviews, the accumulated experience and practical wisdom of leading Russian and foreign scholars, diplomats, and politicians. Part VI invites readers to seek responses to today’s pressing problems by turning to the recent past, through the pages of the PIR

Center's archival publications. The sixth and seventh sections of the Yearbook present notable academic works published in Russia in recent years, as well as Russia's 'vision of the future'. Reading the volume as a whole offers a coherent picture of Russia's foreign-policy priorities, its interests in international affairs, and the values it seeks to uphold globally – while also illuminating the concerns and achievements of the Russian scholarly community.

Another strength of the Yearbook lies in its diversity – not only of subject matter, but also of expertise. Alongside the substantial contribution made by MGIMO University (the largest group of authors), the volume includes substantive inputs from more than a dozen Russian research centers. I would also note that, compared with the first volume, the geographical range of contributors has expanded, allowing the *Security Index Yearbook* to present a wide range of contemporary Russian expert perspectives.

In conclusion, the *Security Index Yearbook* is intended as a platform for sustained scholarly reflection and professional exchange at a time when international security debates are becoming increasingly fragmented. By bringing together diverse strands of Russian expert analysis, the Yearbook seeks to contribute to a more plural and intellectually grounded discussion of global security challenges. It is my hope that this volume will be of value not only to specialists, but also to all those engaged in the study and practice of international relations who recognize the importance of dialogue across intellectual, institutional, and civilizational boundaries.

INTRODUCTION



WAR, PEACE AND NO PROPHECIES

Vladimir Orlov

Here is Volume Two of the *Security Index* Yearbook Global Edition, a joint project made by a consortium of two Russian institutions – PIR Center and MGIMO University. MGIMO University of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation is a well-recognized university which holds a leading position in the field of international relations. It was founded in 1944 and has significantly broadened the scope of its activities since then, including in the international arena. PIR Center was founded half a century later. It is a **compact** nongovernmental institution specializing in applied research and analysis of international security sphere.

The cooperation between PIR Center and MGIMO University began three decades ago and has borne fruit since then. It entered a new stage in 2022, turning into the consortium format. It is PIR Center–MGIMO University consortium that, among other materials, publishes *Security Index* Yearbook series which is the successor to the *Security Index* Journal, previously published by PIR Center under my guidance and editorial chairmanship.

Thus, *Security Index* has a solid history and is a well-recognized brand. Still, the year 2024 marks a new *milestone* in its development: it was then that Volume One of the Yearbook was published. It shared the same format as the edition you are now holding – whether as a paperback or in a digital version available at <https://pircenter.org/en/projects/security-index-yearbook/>¹ - and was of equal substantial scope as Volume Two. While focusing on the events of 2022-2023, Volume One also adopted a forward-looking perspective, with its analyses explicitly extending to 2024 and 2025. It is no coincidence that Volume One includes a Part “Forecasting Global Security” with a chapter entitled “Dance of the *Little Black Swans*”². Volume One, presented to the global audience with public events and expert discussions in Minsk, Geneva, Astana and Zvenigorod, and disseminated in 62 countries aimed at leaders, experts, and universities around the globe, provoked high interest in its contents and demand for a follow-up.

Volume Two reviews key global and regional security developments of relevance to Russia in 2024-2025 and projects forward to 2026-2027. This future-oriented analysis is not only concentrated in the final chapter “Times We Do Not Choose: Leading Powers, Intense Rivalries, and Global Security Landscape” (this was the chapter that I, as Editor-in-Chief, was reading and editing with a particular sense of responsibility for *looking at a far distant future*), but also permeates the majority of the Yearbook’s other chapters.

For those readers who are familiar with the Yearbook and its Volume One, it is worth noting that the International Editorial Board, chaired by MGIMO University rector Academician Anatoly Torkunov,

¹ We wish to advise our readers that the paperback and digital editions of the Yearbook are not entirely identical. The digital edition allows us to present the content of several parts and chapters in greater detail than the paperback one. Certain materials available in digital edition are not included in the paperback edition – *Editor’s note*.

² See: Dmitry Evstafiev. Chapter 29. Dance of the Little Black Swans, pp. 487-504. In: *Security Index Yearbook 2024-2025 Vol.1. Global Edition*. Vladimir Orlov and Elena Karnaukhova (Editors). PIR Library Series №37. Moscow: Aspect Press, 2024, 575 pp.

and the Yearbook's editorial team under my direction decided to abide by the previously established structure, narrative style and extensive use of infographics while preparing Volume Two.

At the same time, there was no goal to replicate the thematic structure of the previous volume. Instead, we chose a basket of topics deemed most relevant to 2025, the year during which the main work on this edition was conducted. Global concerns including nuclear weapons and the strategic arms control agenda, nonproliferation of weapons of mass destruction (WMD), new types of conventional weapons, outer space, and cyber security are all highlighted in this volume. In terms of regional security, it focuses on Africa, the Middle East, Russia-US, Russia-China, and Russia-Mongolia strategic relations, assessing of prospects for BRICS, and security dilemmas regarding the Korean Peninsula, to name a few. This handbook also reviews a chronology of recent (2024-2025) developments in regional and international security.

What features distinguish Volume Two from its predecessor? Let me outline three of the most salient.

Firstly, it is a deliberate shift away from a Eurocentric security paradigm. Russia is a Eurasian power. Its emblem, the double-headed eagle, gazes with equal intent towards both Atlantic ocean as well as to Indian and Pacific oceans. From the standpoint of Russia's current interests and future developments, I contend that European security should be viewed in concert with that of Central, South, East and Southeast Asia. This view is echoed by our authors – in particular, by Maxim Ryzhenkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, and Alexander Trofimov, Ambassador-at-Large at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Both of the authors **explore the contours of a Eurasian security architecture**.

Secondly, it is a focus on the **intensifying nexus between security and advanced technologies**. This volume pays significantly more attention to advanced technologies than the previous one. A dedicated chapter examines how AI and other advanced technologies are reshaping – one might say, in real time – the international security landscape. The security implications of advanced technologies are also thoroughly examined in chapters on space security, international information security and, notably, the future of arms control.

Thirdly, it is a dedicated section on Russia's strategic cooperation with countries from specific world regions. This volume concentrates on **Russia-Africa cooperation**, with a particular focus on advanced technologies (two chapters are dedicated to high-tech issues broadly and, specifically, to peaceful nuclear energy). The Volume also analyzes how the ongoing political transformation in the Sahel states affects Russia. In the future we plan to retain this Part on the regular basis profiling Russia's strategic engagement with a selected world region. Future editions may, for instance, focus on such regions as the Persian Gulf, Latin America or Southeast Asia.

What posed **the greatest challenge** in preparing Volume Two? The answer is clear for me: it is the **extreme volatility and pace of change in contemporary international affairs**. As the Russian poet Sergei Yesenin once noted “great things are seen only from afar”. Yet, our editorial team, bound by strict publication schedule, lacks the ability to step back and discern which of the current events will prove truly significant for history and for the future of our planet and which are transient, destined to

fade from memory. We are truly aware that some narratives analyzed by our authors in October-November 2025³ may be viewed from a different perspective in 2026.

Great dynamism is the parent of turbulence and unpredictability. We do engage in forecasting global trends. Moreover, we do find it necessary. At the same time, we do not practice pseudo-scientific charlatanry through prophecies and divination. Such an approach is *banned* in our Yearbook. We have therefore chosen the contrary one – it is aligned with the principle articulated by Alexander Pushkin via the character of the chronicler Pimen:

When you are free
From your spiritual feats
Write down unpretentiously⁴
All that you'll witness in your life:
War, peace, the rule of sovereigns...

It is precisely the principle of *unpretentious* direct analysis – without much ado! – that has guided our review of the latest global and regional security developments covered in this yearbook.

Security Index Yearbook (Vol.2) consists of **ten Parts** and **29 Chapters**.

Part I focuses on particular aspects of **global security amid the ongoing transition to a multipolar world**. This part includes seven chapters, which cover a wide range of issues related to the Russia's foreign and security priorities in the context of Special Military Operation, nuclear nonproliferation with its three pillars and arms control, new types of conventional weapons, outer space, artificial intelligence, cyber diplomacy and international information security.

This section opens with **Chapter 1 by Dr. Dmitry Trenin** dedicated to transformation of Russian approaches to defending national and foreign policy interests in the context of a changing world order. Despite the ongoing conflict in Ukraine and the new risks it poses, Russia maintains a confident posture on the global stage and continues to find new *areas of growth*.

Chapter 2 by Dmitry Stefanovich focuses on nuclear deterrence and arms control. The author examines nuclear weapons modernization process, which encompasses delivery systems, nuclear warheads, nuclear command and control infrastructure, as well as doctrinal and conceptual shifts, while also paying attention to rapidly developing hypersonic weapons. What tools will the powers choose to safeguard their interests?

In Chapter 3 Dr. Vladimir Orlov and Sergey Semenov discuss the future of the nuclear nonproliferation regime in the context of ongoing revisions and the gradual erosion of previously inviolable international agreements.

³ The facts and events presented in this Volume are current as of 15 November 2025. In certain cases, where feasible, they have been updated to reflect the situation as of 8 December 2025 when this edition went to press – *Editor's note*.

⁴ Another translation of this verse from Russian is: "Write down without much ado" – *Editor's note*.

Chapter 4 by Dr. Vladimir Orlov, Sergey Semenov and Dr. Leonid Tsukanov focuses on powers that could potentially, in one way or another, join the so-called *nuclear club*, having obtained restricted technologies either fraudulently or from *gullible sponsors*. A notable feature of the Chapter is its application of PIR Center's open-source intelligence (OSINT) methodology.

Dr. Andrey Malov in Chapter 5 tries to find an answer to the question whether outer space is the domain for peace or *arms race*. There are several aspects raised in the Chapter, including the challenges to long-term outer space sustainability and militarization of outer space. Special attention is paid to the problem of space debris, which became a new long-term challenge for the leading space states.

Chapter 6 by Dr. Elena Chernenko concentrates on Russia's cyber diplomacy and its evolution amid the great powers rivalry and the shaping of a multipolar world order. The author examines Russia's approach to building safe digital space as well as creating global regime of combating cybercrime under the auspices of the United Nations.

Chapter 7 by Dr. Vadim Kozyulin focuses on artificial intelligence and the specifics of its application in contemporary international conflicts. Dr. Kozyulin devotes particular attention to the issue of regulating AI and other dual-use technologies in the context of the development of international humanitarian law. Will artificial intelligence be tamed? And is it really such a good tool for warfare in the new century?

Part II focuses on Russia's relations with specific countries. The emphasis is placed both on relations with individual states (for example, the United States and China) and on building dialogue with specific regional groups (in particular, with the states of the Middle East). A distinctive feature of this Part lies in the fact that it is not a cross-section of data on Russian *Club of friends*. Attention is also paid to the prospects of building dialogue with states considered *unfriendly*.

Chapter 8 by Hon. Maxim Ryzhenkov, Minister of Foreign Affairs of Belarus, focuses on the development of the Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity. The new diplomatic initiative launched by Minsk could potentially become the starting point for a new system of security cooperation, supplanting the Helsinki Act. This is especially true given that support for this new approach is being expressed from across Eurasia.

In Chapter 9 Dr. Andrey Kortunov systematizes the *lessons* of the first months of Russia's interaction with the Republican administration headed by Donald Trump, who has returned to the White House. The author notes that while significant misunderstandings between Moscow and Washington have been less frequent during the current Trump's presidency than during Biden's, Moscow and Washington still remain far from achieving a full-fledged *détente*.

Chapter 10 by Dr. Leonid Tsukanov is entirely devoted to China – a country that, on the one hand, shares solidarity with Russia on most sensitive issues, yet, on the other, is a potential global competitor. How can we maintain a balance between friendship and rivalry? And what are the specific features of contemporary Russian-Chinese relations?

Chapter 11 by Dr. Elena Suponina explores the specifics of relations between Russia and the Middle East. Skillfully combining historical experience and examples from the contemporary international agenda, the author both explores Russia's ongoing vital role in the Middle East and underscores the region's continued strategic significance for Russia.

Chapter 12 by Dr. Alexander Vorontsov takes us to the Korean Peninsula. Over time, the *tilt* toward the DPRK has become increasingly pronounced, and the author explains why it happened so.

Part III is entirely devoted to the topic of **Russia-Africa relations**.

In Chapter 13 Dr. Leonid Tsukanov examines *the high-tech portfolios* of African countries, focusing on the development of digital technologies, space industry, and biotechnology sector. The author emphasizes that despite the exponential increase in the region's high-tech capabilities, it is still too early to talk about their full-fledged *high-tech transition*. At the same time, the growing cooperation between African countries and foreign powers (especially Russia) serves as a strong incentive to increase their level of technological readiness.

Svyatoslav Arov continues this line in **Chapter 14**, dedicated to the development of peaceful nuclear energy projects in Africa. How close is a nuclear renaissance in the region, and why could floating nuclear power plants potentially become a salvation for African energy systems? Answers to these and many other questions can be found in this chapter.

In Chapter 15 Alexandra Zubenko focuses on the Sub-Saharan region and the specifics of building relationships with this group of states in a new era characterized by an increasingly complex *threat landscape*.

Part IV gives a detailed analysis of specific global and regional issues *under a microscope*.

From Africa (considered comprehensively and from all sides in Chapters 13-15), we move back to Eurasia. **Chapter 16**, by **Alexander Trofimov**, is dedicated to the transformation of international relations in Eurasia. As the largest geopolitical unit, Eurasia is currently becoming the *assemblage point* of a new international security system. It also serves as a laboratory for testing local approaches to mitigating global threats.

In Chapter 17 Yuriy Shakhov provides a comprehensive examination of Australia's prospects for joining the *nuclear club*. Will the transfer of nuclear submarines to Canberra under the auspices of AUKUS remain an innocent Western *prank* or will it lead to some grave repercussions?

From Australia we move to Asia. More specifically, to Mongolia, which is the subject of **Chapter 18 by Roman Kalinin**. The author meticulously identifies and systematizes the shifts in Ulaanbaatar's foreign policy; he identifies areas where contacts between Russia and Mongolia could be particularly effective.

How do international experts perceive the current *tectonic shifts* in international relations? **Dr. Ivan Safranchuk** in **Chapter 19**, drawing on an original methodology offers a vision of the new world order through the lens of various academic schools.

Part V provides *dialogues and trialogues with prominent Russian and foreign experts and high-ranking officials*.

In **Chapter 20 Hon. Sergey Ryabkov** discusses the ongoing transformation of BRICS. Over the course of its existence, the format has undergone numerous changes, ultimately becoming a *point of attraction* for countries around the world. Sergey Ryabkov is optimistic and confident that BRICS can anticipate new diplomatic advances and substantive achievements under India's chairmanship, which starts in 2026.

Following the topic, we invite to take a closer look at one of the founding members of BRICS: China (**Chapter 21**). In a conversation with Julia Melnikova and Vladimir Legoyda, the renowned China expert, a former Russian Ambassador to China, **Andrey Denisov** explores the specifics of Russian-Chinese relations through the lens of culture, ideology, and the mutual perceptions. He also explains how the teachings of the *Great Helmsman* Mao Zedong can be useful for strategic planning – in the context of both Moscow's and Beijing's interests.

Chapter 22 by Amb. Marat Berdyev shifts our focus to APEC. The platform's formula for success lies in the combination of three key qualities: openness, dynamic development, and viability. These qualities help APEC effectively navigate international crises and flexibly respond to the transformation of the global order.

In **Chapter 23** we interview **Amb. Dayan Jayatilleka**, a prominent Sri Lankan diplomat and scholar. Looking through multiple prisms simultaneously (neo-Marxist theory, Sri Lankan national identity and foreign policy guidelines of South Asian countries), he offers a rather unusual interpretation of the current global transformations.

Chapter 24 focuses on the aspirations of the people of Oceania. What has been the global cost of Western nuclear weapons testing in the 20th century? Why doesn't remembering the past mean being angry at the world? The former President of Kiribati and the current UN Ambassador **Teburoro Tito** has the answer.

The concluding chapter of this section (**Chapter 25**) offers an analysis of recent developments in the Middle East through the lens of personal and professional experience of Academician **Vitaly Naumkin**, one of the most respected scholars of Oriental studies. Why does the legacy of "Arab Spring" continue to shape the political course of Arab countries, and where can we find the much-vaunted unity? Academician Naumkin, while laconic in his answers, does not leave any question unanswered.

Part VI Back to the Future encompasses three articles which were published in *Security Index* Journal and other PIR Center's publications from 2010 to 2024. Why did we decide to include

them? Just in order to demonstrate that back then we made an effort to be heard and to signal that the world could go in a wrong direction.

Chapter 26 by **Adlan Margoev** – leading Russian expert in the field of Iranian studies – is dedicated to the key milestones in the negotiation process surrounding the Iranian nuclear program (including the infamous and now defunct “nuclear deal”). Although originally published in 2024, the text provides a valuable framework for reassessing the approach to the Iranian *nuclear dossier*.

Chapter 27 *chronicles* a discussion between two experts, Amb. **Sergey Kislyak** and **William Potter**, regarding the prospects for the development and *reset* of Russian-American relations. Take a closer look at the arguments of 2009, and you’ll suddenly hear *echoes of today*.

Chapter 28 by **Gen. Evgeny Buzhinsky** is devoted to an issue without which it’s difficult to imagine any intense conflict today: the use of UAVs on the battlefield and in related sectors. A little over ten years have passed since the original text was published, and the world has changed beyond recognition. The first *tentative steps* of domestic and foreign UAV developers have already turned into a *marathon*.

Part VII takes the challenge to look into the near-term future. **Dr. Igor Istomin (Chapter 29)** outlines the contours of the future and demonstrates that *there is nothing new under the sun*. When predicting the future, we shouldn’t forget the lessons of the past. After all, we can’t choose our times.

Part VIII includes the reviews of the latest books and research papers published in Russia and by Russian experts and devoted to security issues, regional studies and foreign policy.

Part IX aptly titled “**To the Editor: letters from our readers**”, summarizes feedback from readers of the Volume One of the Yearbook. In the epistolary style, readers from all over the world express their opinions on covered topics, offer perspectives on the situations described, as well as share insights from their fieldwork.

Part X represents a review of the top events in global and regional security in 2024-2025. The information provided in the Chronology is based on a wide range of different open sources including Russian and foreign media, news agencies, post and press releases as well as official documents, communiques and declarations.

After the Volume One of the Yearbook was published, the main question for both the Editorial Board members and me as the Editor-in-Chief was the following: how would readers around the world assess it? Would there be a place for this weighty volume on the shelves of university libraries?

Today, I can say with both confidence and pride: not only was such a place *found*, but the *Security Index* Yearbook has pushed aside a number of other English-language publications on the bookshelves, including those that merely pretended to highlight *Russian voices and views*. In reality, their authors found themselves in an *intellectual impasse*, repeating well-worn, mossy theses that bore

no relation whatsoever to real *Russian views and voices*, but were convenient for those in the West who dreamed of Russia's *strategic defeat* and its disappearance from the *world's political stage*. And those of our readers who are open to understanding Russia's current role and place and its prospects in global affairs not only added the annual to their bookshelves but also shared their impressions.

For example, Colonel Bruno **Russi** wrote from **Bern**: «*Security Index* Yearbook is an indispensable trove. It contains a rare and at the same time extensive selection of authoritative analyses from experts in political, military, government, academic, diplomatic, as well as journalistic fields. It is not only convincing in covering global issues from nuclear weapons, strategic nuclear arms control, cyber space, and international terrorism to lethal autonomous weapons-systems and new conventional weapons-systems but also in presenting Russia's interests and positions concerning regional security».

Hubert K. **Foy** from **Accra** believes that «Packed with expert analysis, this is a practical resource for policymakers, researchers, and anyone curious about global security challenges and how different countries address them». Bruno **Rukavina** messaged from **Zagreb**: «The Yearbook's relevance lies in its function as both scholarship and positioning. While the analyses are clearly shaped by Russia's strategic worldview, they provide valuable insight into how Russian experts interpret the shifting world order, the failures of Western-led institutions, and the opportunities presented by new partnerships. Its narrative – of a declining West, a rising Global Majority, and Russia as a “security exporter” – may be ambitious, yet it is precisely this alternative framing that makes the volume an essential source of many useful alternative arguments and theses. In an era of fractured dialogue, the *Security Index* Yearbook offers a rare window into Russian academic discourse and its aspirations for shaping the emerging multipolar system». Abubakar **Abdi** Osman from **Mogadishu** is convinced that «*Security Index* Yearbook is a *must-read* for anyone seeking to understand the complex and evolving global security landscape», and Philippe **Grinenberger** adds from **Paris** that «*Security Index* Yearbook is an excellent source of information for French civil servants since it provides a different point of view from what is officially said in France»⁵.

As Editor-in-Chief, I invite readers of Volume Two of the Yearbook to share with our editorial team their feedback and insights on what you have read, as well as concrete suggestions on how to improve the Yearbook and expand its readership. Please, contact me via email (orlov@pircenter.org). The Editorial Board will analyze and consider your comments, and with your permission, we will publish excerpts from your letters on the Yearbook website and in the next Volume.

The productive work on Volume Two of the Yearbook – as well as on this ambitious project as a whole – would not have been possible without the *three fronts of support* that I have received and continue to receive.

First and foremost, this is the dedicated work of PIR Center's compact team, from the Chairman of Executive Board, General (Ret.) Evgeny **Buzhinsky**, to the interns and consultants. To a large extent,

⁵ For more information about our readers' feedback and reviews of the Volume One of the Yearbook, see: pp. 408-412 and pp. 444-453 of the Yearbook – *Editor's note*.

PIR Center team and the *Yearbook's editorial team* are synonymous. My special thanks go to Dr. Leonid **Tsukanov**, Executive editor of the Volume Two, for his reliability, comprehensive knowledge, and creative approach, as well as to Elena **Karnaukhova**, Executive editor of the Volume One, with whom we developed the Yearbook's structure and design, which we continue to adhere to in this Volume. Her high standards and commitment ensured our new product's timely release and, overall, *a mark of quality*.

Secondly, it's the creative and professional spirit of the authors of this volume and the members of the Yearbook's International Editorial Board. They all worked with passion, devotion, and responsibility to make this Volume Two a reality. I have enjoyed smooth collaboration with each of the authors and members of the editorial board, and I appreciate their friendly support, whether it came from Cairo, Minsk, Vienna, Stavropol, Yekaterinburg, or New Delhi. I consider this key to the success of *our* Yearbook.

Last but not least, this is the productive collaboration with our partners at MGIMO University within the framework of PIR Center – MGIMO University consortium and the *Priority 2030* program. My special thanks to MGIMO University rector, Academician Anatoly **Torkunov**, for his unwavering support of our joint *Security Index* project, for his involvement in the editorial board and its leadership, and for his wisdom.

PART I. GLOBAL SECURITY IN THE TIMES OF TRANSITION TO A MULTIPOLAR WORLD



CHAPTER 1.

RUSSIA'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY PRIORITIES IN THE ERA OF WORLD TURBULENCE

Dmitry Trenin

The proverbial “interesting times” are again upon us. Unlike at the turn of the 1990s, when the change of world order *per se* was essentially peaceful and consensual, this time rivalry among great powers is visible, and occasionally violent. *Realpolitik* is back, with a vengeance. The post-Cold War global hegemon, the United States of America, is fighting back to preserve its primacy, very much against the odds. China, longtime an *economic colossus* keeping a reasonably low geopolitical profile, is rising fast as a technological and military power, with a growing diplomatic clout. India, resentful over Western colonial domination that for two centuries held it back economically and technologically, is determined to repeat China's success, although in its own inimitably Indian way. Russia, having made a comeback from its catastrophic downfall as the Soviet Union, has ended its futile quest for an autonomous position within the wider West, and is charting its own way as a distinct “civilization state”.

Currently, these are the four truly sovereign major players in the world system whose policies will largely shape the new international order to replace the post-Cold War American dominance and the 500-years-old supremacy of the West.

The Leading Powers

The dynamics in the relations among these four players are high. Russia has been defending its vital national security interests against the collective West of NATO/EU countries in a proxy war in Ukraine. The conflict there, which began in 2014 with the Western-engineered *coup d'état* and Russia's reaction to it in Crimea and Donbass, escalated in 2022 to a full-scale war between Russia and the Western-backed/-trained/-equipped Ukrainian forces along a 2,000-km-long frontline. Early in the war, the Joe Biden Administration in Washington set the goal of inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia⁶ – something that American leaders carefully avoided during the Cold War. The Ukraine conflict then intensified and threatened to lead to a direct clash between Russia and NATO countries, raising the specter of a nuclear conflagration engulfing not just Europe, but much of the world.

Reacting to the challenge of China's economic and technological ascendance, the first Trump Administration in the United States dumped America's long-lasting “hedge and engage” mode of its China strategy and opened a trade and technology war against Beijing. This course was inherited and embraced by the Biden White House. Against this background, Sino-U.S. geostrategic tensions over Taiwan and the South China Sea have heightened. An arms race between the world's two biggest economies has quickened its pace. Donald Trump's second coming to the U.S. presidency resulted in

⁶ See statements by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin (*Stars and Stripes*, April 7, 2022; *New York Post*, *CNN*, April 26, 2022). Also, President Biden, according to Brazil's President Lula da Silva (in an interview with *Le Monde* on June 4, 2025), “believed that Russia should be destroyed”.

an even bigger emphasis in Washington's foreign policy on thwarting China's challenge to American global dominance.

Washington's attempt to simultaneously hold back China and Russia has naturally provided an additional impetus for the Sino-Russian strategic partnership. The partnership itself, which began as far back as 1989 with the reconciliation between Moscow and Beijing, is largely driven by the two countries' national interests and is not a latter-day version of the Sino-Soviet bloc of the 1950s. However, faced with American pressure, Russia and China have upgraded their cooperation and coordination, including in the politico-military field. In contrast to the 1970s, when the Nixon Administration, by means of the much-celebrated Triangle strategy, successfully managed to play Beijing off Moscow, or to the 1990s, when both Russia and China prioritized cooperation with Washington, the United States has now succeeded in turning two of Eurasia's principal powers into its adversaries: a major strategic blunder of American foreign policy.

Meanwhile, Eurasia's third major power, India, has been raising its international profile as a newly non-aligned power. India is on good terms with the United States, whom it sees as a vital partner in technology and a key market. New Delhi also entertains a close relationship with Russia, that has been India's premier source of defense equipment and a highly reliable political partner. India is wary of China due to historical disputes over the border in the Himalayas, Beijing's support for Pakistan, and more generally as an economic and geopolitical rival in Asia. In May 2025, India has had to fight a brief (87-hour) war against Pakistan, provoked by a gruesome terrorist attack against civilians in Kashmir. New Delhi's careful balancing game is illustrated by its simultaneous membership – alongside Russia and China – in the BRICS group and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and in the QUAD format with the United States and its allies Japan and Australia.

WORLD'S TOP 10 LEADING ECONOMIES (2020–2024)

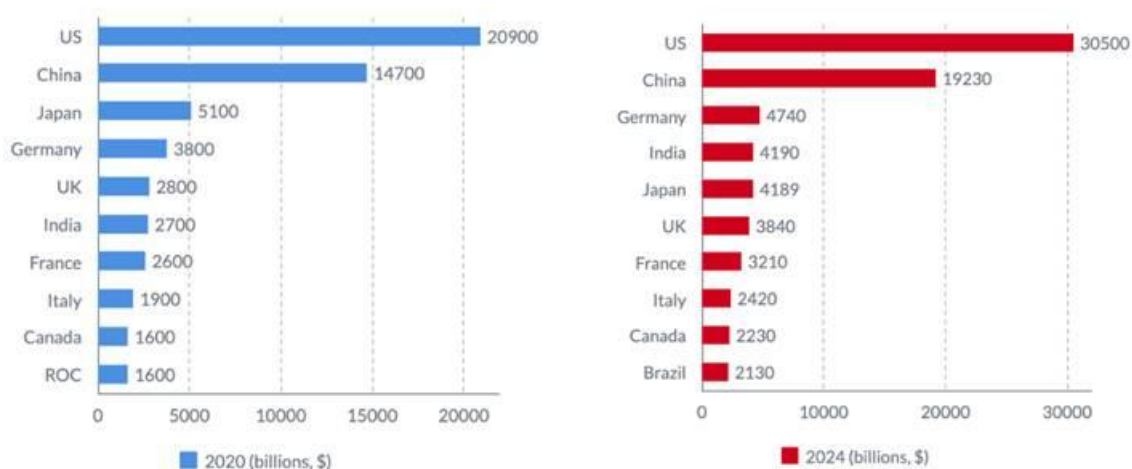


Figure 1. World's top 10 leading economies (2020-2024)
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

THE RANKING OF THE WORLD'S TOP 10 MILITARIES

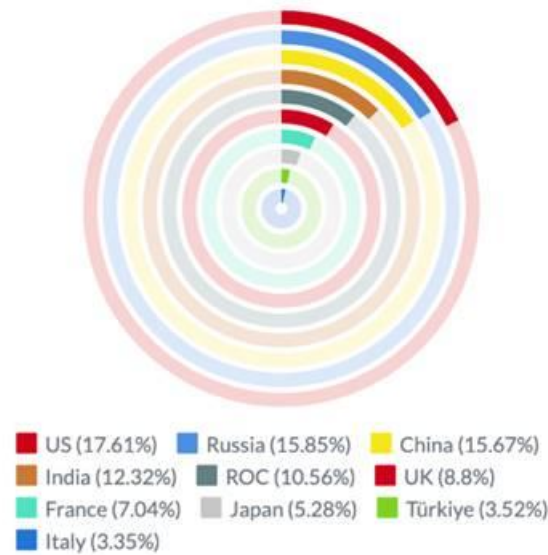


Figure 2. The Ranking of the World's Top-10 Militaries (as of 2025)

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Other Important Players

The four leading powers at the start of the second quarter of the 21st century are not the only significant players on the world stage, of course. The countries of Europe – the EU member states and the United Kingdom – are desperately trying to regain their international relevance in the face of the challenge posed by the Ukraine war and the policies of the Trump Administration. Essentially, Donald Trump has reversed the state of play within the Western world. He drastically reduced Washington's historical commitment to support and indulge U.S. allies and clients around the world. The focus of Trump's White House has shifted from ensuring that the periphery of the American empire can thrive and expand (enabling “the march of democracy without borders”) to shoring up the empire's somewhat hollowed-out imperial homeland (“making America great again”). Thus, Trump openly treated the Europeans, alongside Japan, Canada, Australia and others as simultaneously political vassals and economic competitors. The 47th U.S. president is capitalizing on American security commitments, which are no longer taken for granted. One can argue that Trump's putting price tag on U.S. support and raising tariffs at the same time is his pre-emptive strike at multipolarity. It is meant to ensure that, in a multipolar world, which is coming anyway, America is the biggest and the strongest pole of all, able to enjoy primacy with reduced responsibility.

Unable and unwilling to stand up to the United States, but adamant to remain in the game, the Europeans have used the Ukraine conflict to solidify their union by treating Russia as if it were a mortal danger to themselves. Within a few years starting from the mid-2010s, they have succeeded in re-identifying the core purpose of the EU as an anti-Russian bloc. This is a third iteration of the

prime objective of European integration, since preventing another war among the European powers (after 1945); and making Europe “whole and free” by means of incorporating the Eastern European countries – all the way to the Russian border (after 1989). This explains the massive European political, financial and military investment in Ukraine, and the deep involvement of the European countries, particularly of Britain, France, and Germany, in training, equipping, advising, and guiding Kiev’s war efforts against Russia, complete with their suspected involvement in the acts of sabotage and even terrorism inside Russia.

A CHART OF UKRAINE’S MAIN DONORS

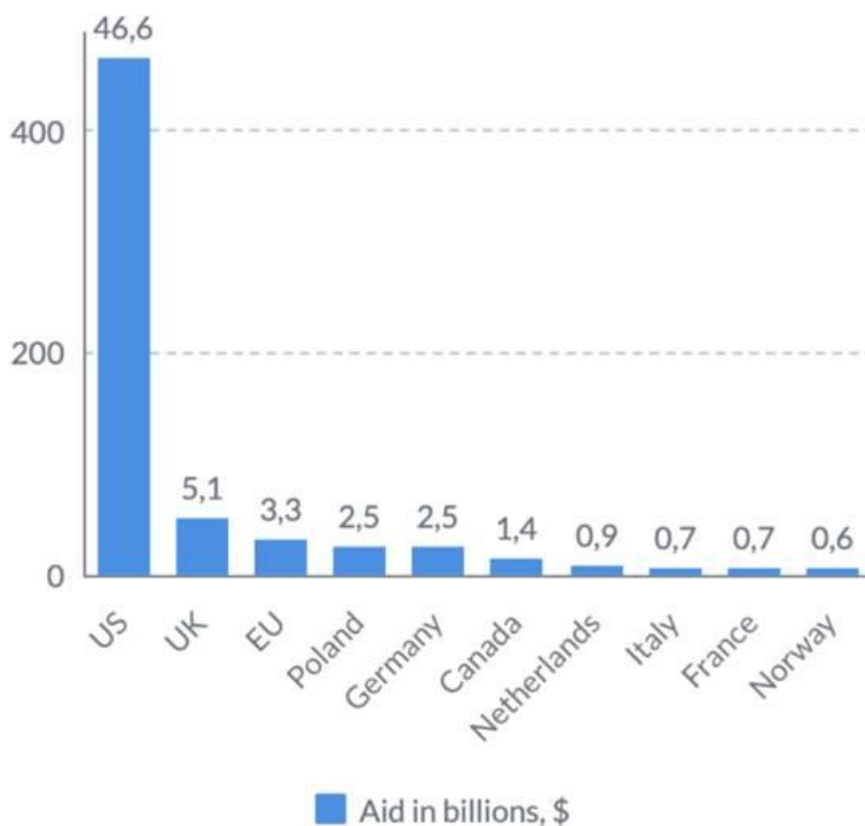


Figure 3. A chart of Ukraine’s main donors (as of October 2025).

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

These activities have made Moscow fundamentally reconsider its assessment of Europe. No longer Russia’s preferred foreign partner as in the post-Cold War times, or even a seemingly reluctant follower of Washington’s policies, as during the Cold War, Europe, in many Russian eyes, has re-emerged as a coalition of historical enemies driven by a desire to defeat and if possible, destroy Russia⁷. Today’s Europe, from that perspective, has much in common with the Europe under Napoleon that invaded Russia in 1812, or under Hitler in 1941. Both those invasions assembled

⁷ For a detailed and very candid discussion of how Europe is currently viewed in Moscow, see Sergei Lavrov’s remarks at a press conference in Moscow on July 22, 2025, as reported by *RIA Novosti* News Agency, TASS, *RBC* and others.

combined forces of many countries which were allied or subservient, respectively, to Paris and Berlin. The difference is that the united political Europe of the 2020s, while it has as much hatred, fear and contempt for Russia, has far less power than its historical predecessors. Yet, the degradation of Europe's strategic thinking as well as its absence, since the 1950s, from strategic decision-making, even about itself, raise concerns in Russia about the potential for European countries' fateful miscalculation.

What is particularly stunning is the change in Russian attitudes toward Germany. Russians forgave Germany for the horrendous civilian casualties (over 15 million out of 27 million people) resulting from Hitler's invasion. They gave their consent for the two German states' unification and withdrew their troops from East Germany. They subsequently even thought that Germany was their country's best friend in Europe, and approached it accordingly. Now, Russians are stunned to see Berlin as the frontrunner among the supporters of the Kiev regime – a regime whose ideological roots go all the way to erstwhile Nazi collaborators in western Ukraine who are elevated now to the position of father figures of the present-day Ukrainian state. Besides supporting Kiev, Berlin aims at massively expanding Germany's defense industry and turn the country into the main pillar of Europe's military might. Germany's and Europe's rearmament and remilitarization plans are being laid out explicitly with the objective of being able to fight Russia already in the medium term. Fifty years after the signing of the Helsinki Final Act of the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe which stabilized the Cold War's bipolar order, and 35 years after the Charter of Paris for a New Europe, which appeared to offer a prospect for cooperation and integration across the now defunct Iron Curtain, NATO and Russia are closer to a shooting war between themselves than they have been at any time since the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

East Asia and Eastern Europe are not the only battlefields in the new confrontation. In the Middle East, the decades-old Israeli-Arab/Palestinian conflict has been replaced by one between the leading regional powers, Israel and Iran. The Israeli leadership, with full backing of the United States, has used the 2023 mega-terrorist attack by HAMAS to try to deal a crushing blow to its main regional rival, Iran, which is a member of the China- and Russia-led Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and the BRICS group. In June 2025 Israel and the United States attacked Iran's nuclear facilities to annihilate the program. Iran hit back at Israel with its own missiles. As a result, Tehran's nuclear program has suffered a setback, but it has not been bombed out of existence. New clashes between Israel/U.S. and Iran are thus likely – unless Iran bows to the pressure and changes course, which cannot come without a major domestic clash of interests.

The fact that in the shooting wars between the nuclear powers: Russia, on the one hand, and America, Britain, France, on the other, in Ukraine; between India and Pakistan in South Asia; and between Israel and the United States against near-nuclear Iran in the Middle East, nuclear weapons have not been used, so far, should not breed illusions: for the major powers of the world, war has re-emerged as a usable tool not only in the peripheral engagements (as in, e.g., Afghanistan), but in direct major-power conflicts – by proxy or not.

Russian Transformation

Against this background, the trends in Russia's situation noted in the previous edition of the *Security Index* have grown stronger. Above all, the country's domestic transformation, while difficult, is deepening. The notion of Russia as a unique civilization state first enshrined in the 2023 Foreign Policy Concept⁸ is being more widely accepted. The country's political system – with its clear emphasis on the central role of the State and the importance of the unity of leadership – is being less and less linked to the Western concept of liberal democracy. Instead, it is being increasingly legitimized by Russia's own historical experience and the practical needs to withstand the pressures from the West and the complexities of the ongoing war environment. A new set of values is emerging – away from the post-Soviet dominance of money and material benefits, and closer to the traditional Russian emphasis on patriotism, family and things spiritual. Some sort of a cultural revolution is quietly taking place, though its victory is still far from assured.

Russia's war effort is being supported by its defense industry which has been able to dramatically increase production of weapons and materials. Russia is in fact competing against the combined capacities of Ukraine's Western backers. While the economy at large has not been completely mobilized for war, an industrial policy has begun to emerge, with the state becoming much more active in directing economic development than at any time since the end of the Soviet period. Despite the 30,000-plus Western sanctions and other restrictions imposed on Russia over the past decade, but particularly since 2022, and the inevitable hardships of the war, including its substantial human losses, patriotism is running high⁹, with the support for the Kremlin policies, including the conduct of the war, remaining steady at a record-high (around 80%) level.

One major change in Russia's international environment has been Europe emerging as the principal foreign adversary, and even an enemy of Russia, replacing the United States in that position. Britain, France and above all Germany are now widely considered Russia's principal foes, a throwback to the 19th and early 20th centuries. In Germany's case, a parallel with the 1941 Hitler invasion of the Soviet Union is all too obvious. This is a reaction in Moscow and across Russia to the Europeans' coming to the fore of the Western effort to support Kiev politically, financially and militarily – following Trump's desire to stop the fighting or at least distance himself from what he calls "Biden's war". The result is that Europe, which after the end of the Cold War was considered the world's model region in terms of demilitarization, reconciliation and cooperation, is becoming one of the main hotbeds of tension and a likely battlefield, even after the end of the shooting war in Ukraine.

Toward the United States, the attitudes in Russia have become more nuanced with the advent of the Trump Administration. America remains Russia's most formidable adversary; however, there is a hope that some sort of an understanding could be reached with Washington which at least would lead to Trump winding down its participation in the Ukraine war. Should that happen, there is a potential for a modicum of U.S.-Russian cooperation elsewhere, in particular in the economic field. This hope, which resulted from the August 2025 Alaska meeting between Presidents Putin and Trump, is tempered, however, by the existence of the dominant *anti-Russian majority* within the U.S. political class, with the neocons on both sides of the aisle still in positions of power and influence. Reversing

⁸ The Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation // MFA of the Russian Federation. March 31, 2023. URL: https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/fundamental_documents/1860586/ (in Russ.).

⁹ All-Russian Center for Public Opinion Polling (VCIOM) poll, released on August 19, 2025 // VCIOM. URL: <https://wciom.com/our-news/ratings>

that course and adopting a realist and pragmatic attitude toward Russia would require nothing less than a revolution in U.S. foreign policy. As Trump's attempts at brokering peace in Ukraine have demonstrated, a coalition of American Democrats; the neocons from both parties; and U.S. European allies can massively weigh in on Trump's policies.

Russian Priorities

Russian foreign policy priorities have basically remained unchanged since 2022. If anything, they have become more pronounced and better established. Top among them is strengthening the country's real sovereignty. This means enhancing Russia's economic resilience in the face of sanctions and restrictions; expanding the country's technological capabilities and reducing its dependence on others; acquiring intellectual sovereignty complete with the philosophical underpinnings of a unique worldview and some sort of a practical ideology that would guide the state and provide a clear orientation for the bulk of the Russian people. Four years into the war, all of this, of course, is still more of a plan than actual reality.

Moscow's short-term – up to three years – priorities are focused on achieving an acceptable outcome in Ukraine. This means a stable political settlement, not a truce. In *security terms*, this would mean transforming Ukraine into a neutral buffer state between Russia and the NATO/EU Europe. In future, Ukraine should be forever barred from joining NATO; host no foreign forces in its territory, whether on a permanent (bases) or a temporary basis (exercises, training missions, and the like); accept limits on its military power and defense industry. More broadly, Russia seeks a politico-military equilibrium on the dividing line between itself and NATO, making the situation on its western flank essentially predictable, but much of this is for the medium- and longer-term future.

In *territorial terms*, an acceptable settlement would mean securing the entire territories of the four regions – two in Donbass (Donetsk and Lugansk) and two in *Novorossia* (Zaporozhie and Kherson) which joined Russia in the fall of 2022 and are now part of the Russian Federation's constitutional space. Moscow is determined to assume full control all of those territories, about a third of which is still in Kiev's hands. To achieve this, Moscow is prepared to trade some small pieces of land in Kharkov, Sumy and other Ukrainian oblasts that Russian forces hold. Russia would also insist on the international recognition of the its borders, including, besides Donbass and Novorossiia, also Crimea and Sevastopol, which acceded to Russia in 2014.

In *political terms*, Russia wants a neutralist regime in Ukraine to replace the one which it sees as having Banderist (i.e., pro-Nazi) roots, and which espouses ultra-nationalist and Russophobic ideology, and practices terror. In a crude comparison, Moscow would probably settle for a regime that is reminiscent of the one established in Finland, a Hitler ally, which it defeated in 1944. This means a predictable government, broadly loyal to Russia in foreign and security policy terms, and widely autonomous in handling domestic affairs. Such a regime would need to rediscover Ukraine's bilingual (Ukrainian/Russian) character, restore the position of the Russian language and culture alongside the Ukrainian language and heritage, and honor the rights of the Ukrainian Orthodox Church that is affiliated with the Moscow Patriarchate.

To help achieve these objectives, Russia's foreign policy strategy would need to cement Moscow's relations with Minsk. In the course of the Special Military Operation in Ukraine, Belarus has emerged as Russia's only true ally among the former Soviet republics. The Union State of Russia and Belarus has recently acquired a nuclear dimension. Moscow's new nuclear doctrine has explicitly extended a *nuclear umbrella* to Belarus. For the first time since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, Russia has deployed its non-strategic nuclear weapons in the neighbouring country. Medium-range nuclear-capable missiles, such as the *Oreshnik*, are also on its way for deployment there. Belarusian leader Alexander Lukashenko, in power since 1994, won another five-year term in 2025. It is in the Russian interest that power transition in Belarus, whenever it happens, results in an even closer relationship between the two countries.



Map 1. Map of the countries near the Eastern EU border

Source: CNN (<https://edition.cnn.com/videos/world/2023/07/29/wagner-forces-poland-border-nato-leighton-nr-vpx.cnn>)

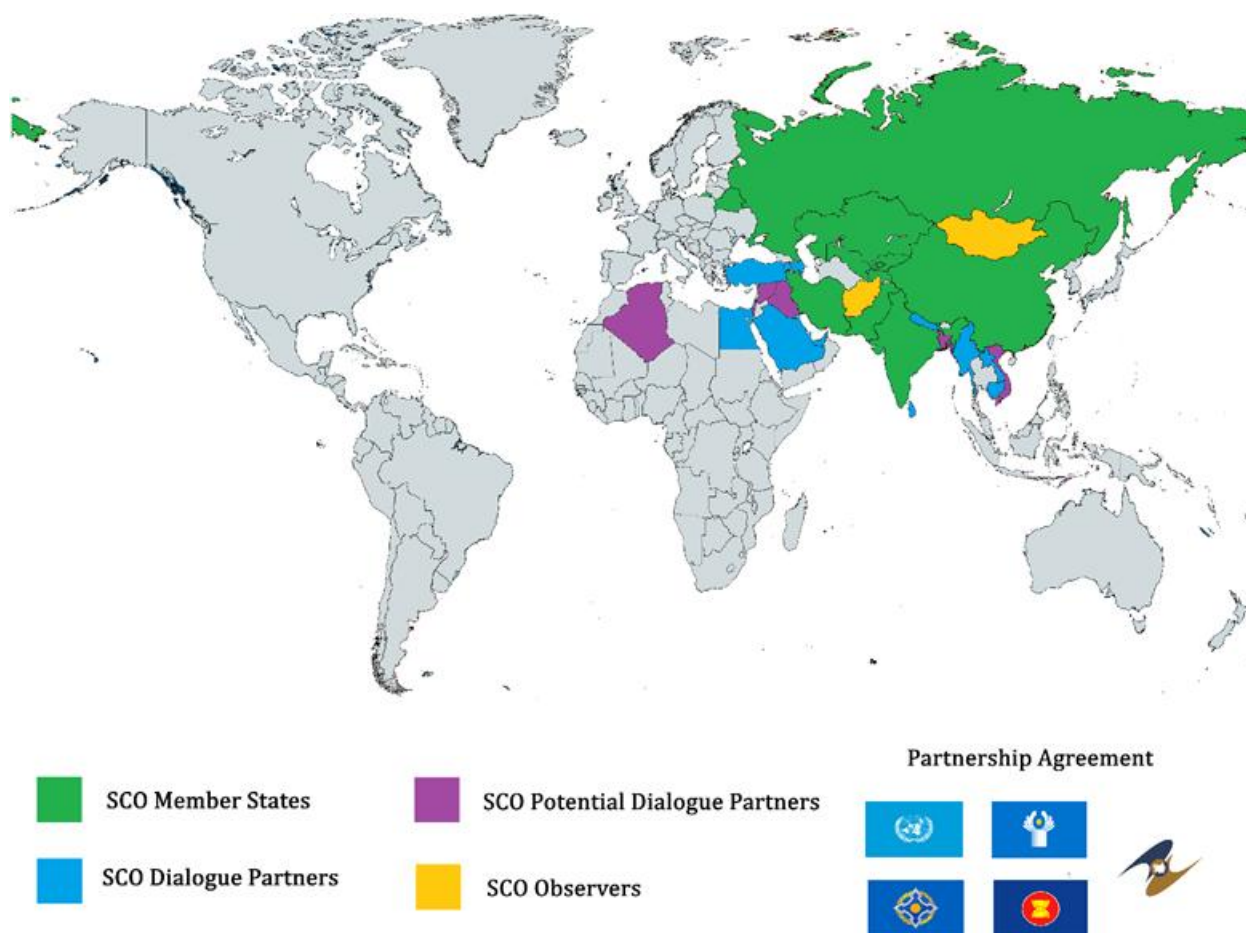
Moscow's other overt wartime ally has been the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). A friend in need is a friend indeed: Moscow's ties with Pyongyang have been strengthening rapidly. The Korean People's Army (KPA) 11,000-strong deployment to the Kursk region in 2024-2025 was instrumental in liberating part of the region from the Ukrainian forces. As long as the war continues, Russia would materially benefit from a fresh deployment of the KPA troops to the Russo-Ukrainian border that would relieve Russia's own forces to fight inside Ukraine. Continued provision to Russia of North Korean artillery ammunition and other materiel constitutes important assistance to Russia's war effort as it faces the Western coalition's massive support for Kiev. In return, Moscow is providing North Korea with the things that Pyongyang values, from energy to space technology. Based on the 2024 bilateral treaty on strategic partnership which includes a mutual military assistance clause, Russia and North Korea have upgraded their relationship to a functioning alliance.

Expanding and deepening ties with non-Western countries – often referred to now as the **Global Majority** – is Moscow's top diplomatic priority, particularly in terms of economic security and political dialogue. **BRICS** members stand out as the most important group in that category. In particular, Russia's relations with **China** are of critical importance, given the geopolitical position of both countries vis-à-vis each other, China's huge industrial capacity, its energy and other raw

materials requirements (which Russia can help satisfy), technological prowess, military power and diplomatic clout. Even though Beijing professes neutrality in the Ukraine conflict, and its stake in protecting its access to the Western markets makes it careful while doing business with Russia, China's de facto backing of Russia (even if it is limited) is of unique importance to Moscow. Making sure that the Russo-Chinese strategic partnership continues to grow strong and develop is a first-order priority to the Kremlin.

India is also Russia's strategic partner that needs constant attention. Even though Delhi entertains close relations with the United States (institutionally through the QUAD group) and rejects any notion that BRICS is an anti-Western bloc, it has emerged as a major buyer of a discounted Russian oil – and thus an alternative to the European market that has been closing fast to Russia. The rough handling of India by Donald Trump in his tariff wars and his demand that other countries do not buy Russian oil has infuriated many Indians and tempered somewhat the pro-U.S. tilt in Indian society. For Russia, this is a positive development, which strengthens India's strategic independence. A closer alignment among Eurasia's three great powers, Russia, India, and China (**RIC**) has been Moscow's strategic priority since the mid-1990s. Yet, realizing the potential of such an alignment it would require a fundamental improvement of the Sino-Indian relationship, which is plagued by mutual suspicion and grievances. In August 2025, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's first trip to China in seven years, to attend a SCO summit, inspired some hopes in Moscow.

Relations with other members of the BRICS group, which expanded in 2024, are also prioritized in Moscow's foreign policy, though in the short term they do not come close in significance to ties with Beijing and Delhi. Moscow's relative passivity during the 12-day war that Israel and the United States waged in 2025 against Iran revealed the shallowness of the strategic partnership – even now treaty-based – between Moscow and Tehran. The work on the North-South logistical corridor linking Russia to India via Iran, which Russia actively seeks to re-energize, has been marking time, creating little enthusiasm in Iran. Russia has had more interaction with Iran's Gulf neighbour and fellow BRICS member, the United Arab Emirates, which has turned into a gateway for Russians to the Middle East and beyond. The Shanghai Cooperation Organization (**SCO**) has not had a particularly good year, with two of its members – India and Pakistan – waging a short war in 2025.



Map 2. Map of SCO member states, Observers and Dialogue Partners (as of October 2025).

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Russia is not limiting its Global Majority priorities to the BRICS and SCO groups, of course. It works not to lose the momentum with the African states; is busy to organize the first Russia-the **Arab League** summit in the Fall of 2025; builds on the already vibrant **ASEAN** connection – especially with Vietnam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, Laos and Thailand. In 2024, Russia has had to witness the fall of a friendly regime in Damascus, but has been trying to salvage its two bases in Syria, which are important as a way station *en route* to **Africa**, the continent that Russia is now rediscovering for economic and other opportunities. Moscow’s decision to recognize the Taliban regime in **Afghanistan** signals its desire to secure its southern flank. Relations with **Turkey**, a NATO member with an autonomous regional policy in the Middle East, the South Caucasus and Central Asia, will continue to be a combination of competition and cooperation. It is in Moscow’s interest that the latter prevails over the former.

In **Central Asia**, Russia’s immediate priorities center on strengthening economic ties with the members of the **Eurasian Economic Union** – **Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan**, and also with **Uzbekistan**, the region’s biggest nation. In the South Caucasus, Russia is essentially acting in a holding pattern. It aims at containing the newly surfaced serious tensions with **Azerbaijan**, managing **Armenia** as it is drifting away toward the West, and keeping things steady with Georgia as Tbilisi defends its sovereignty now vis-à-vis the EU. At the same time, Moscow has markedly intensified its interaction with Abkhazia, materially integrating it with Russia. In Moldova, a cleft country between

the EU and Russia, Moscow supports groups that favor politico-military neutrality and restoring economic links with Russia. As long as the Ukraine war lasts and sucks a lot of energy of Russian foreign policy, the former Soviet countries will probably remain on the backburner of Moscow's foreign policy.

In the medium-term – from three to five years – Russia would need to manage the continuing confrontation with the West, promoting its interests while avoiding a head-on collision with its adversaries. The end of fighting in Ukraine will not bring peace and reconciliation with Russia's European neighbours. Moscow's goal would be to separate, to the extent possible, its relations with the United States from those with the European Union countries. America, with its basic self-confidence and a global agenda, may be more amenable to a more productive relationship with Russia. By contrast Europe, in a sharp contrast to Moscow's post-1945 worldview of its western neighbours, has emerged as Russia's main adversary. The current political elites of Europe, as they despair of the decline of their world role, appear weak, hysterical, and *blindly Russophobic*. In dealing with Europe, Moscow would prioritize deterrence of the anti-Russian forces, led by the United Kingdom, Germany and France, and selective engagement with those countries, like Hungary, Slovakia and potentially others, that are prepared to act in their national self-interest.

Russia's mid-term strategy would seek to prevent a major war between NATO and Russia, which might be sparked off by renewed tensions in Ukraine; some maladroit moves by the neighbours (such as the Baltic States), or provocations (engineered, e.g., by Britain) going awry. Deterrence based on Moscow's demonstration of its upgraded arsenal of weapons systems, now including medium-range ones, and its readiness to use them in a crisis situation, would be the chief means of war prevention.

U.S. adversity toward Russia, so deeply entrenched in the American ruling elite, will not disappear soon. Moscow, however, will remain open to contacts with Washington on some issues, from regional affairs – e.g. the Arctic, to economic cooperation – e.g., rare earths. Restoring a meaningful dialogue on strategic stability is another area of potential **Russo-American interaction**. Yet, the overall importance of relations with the United States in Russia's foreign policy will be far below the levels of the second half of the 20th and the early 21st centuries.

Should Russia-U.S. dialogue bear fruit or even continue in a sustained mode, this could at least partially unlock the potential of Russian-Japanese and Russian-South Korean economic exchanges. Tokyo and Seoul, which would not break with Washington's policies on Russia, bear little animus against Moscow – unlike Brussels and the European capitals. America's Asian allies' attitude toward relations with Russia could resemble the approach taken by Turkey, a NATO ally with a complex, but working relationship with Russia. If this happens, Moscow would be happy to resume economic cooperation.

Russia's long-term priorities are centered on the goal of self-empowerment. Having proclaimed itself a civilization state, Russia would need to live up to that notion. The bulk of the tasks it would have to complete before the goal is reached are domestic, from winning economic and technological sovereignty to achieving intellectual independence as a "sovereign humanity" on a par with the Euro-American community, China, India, the Muslim world, and others. In foreign policy terms, Moscow's

priorities are focused on helping create a new non-hegemonic world order – post-American and post-Western.

On the world level, this means creating institutions which would be free from Western domination. BRICS looks like a useful starting platform for this. There are no illusions about the unity of BRICS, which remains highly heterogeneous in a lot of ways, but interaction within BRICS offers precious experience of institution-building without Western guidance. Essentially, the world-level effort focuses on a new financial architecture but covers a wide range of issues, from energy and food security to a dialogue of civilizations as a new way of providing guidance to humanity as a whole.

On the level of Eurasia, the world's largest continent, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), for all its internal divisions, is a platform for managing a security and development agenda in Eurasia (without its westernmost peninsula, Europe). Russia has re-energized its effort to pioneer putting together a Eurasia-wide security architecture, which it sees as a network of close ties among the continent's existing institutions, bilateral treaties and agreements, logistical and other business projects, technological partnerships, cultural initiatives, and the like.

Within its own neighbourhood Russia will seek closer ties with Belarus within the framework of the Union State; with members of the Eurasian Economic Union and the CSTO, especially Kazakhstan, but also Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan; with Uzbekistan, Central Asia's most populous nation. These are the top priorities, linked to what was once called, creating a Russia-led power center in Northern Eurasia. Beyond the countries of the former Soviet Union, Russia will cement its renewed ties to North Korea, and develop its links with Mongolia. In the South Caucasus, next to integrating Abkhazia and South Ossetia with Russia, Moscow will seek to win back influence with Armenia and Azerbaijan, whose relations with Moscow have become badly frayed. There, as in Moldova, Russia's future influence will largely depend on the outcome of the war in the Ukraine.

Conclusion

With Russia increasingly focused on itself, its policies are likely to be more pragmatic. Moscow's actions in the wider world – beyond Eurasia – will be guided by its economic interests rather than its geopolitical ambitions. The war in Ukraine has been a harsh but realistic test of Russian capacity to promote and protect its vital interests. The results, which are coming in, are both positive and sobering. The positive side is that Russia has been able to stand up to the maximum economic, financial, political, and information pressure that anyone could have brought to bear on any country in today's world. Its domestic resilience to that combined pressure has been phenomenal. It has also been able to wage and win a limited conventional war against a medium-sized country supported, armed, trained, equipped, advised, and directed by the United States and the entire Western bloc. Within that struggle, it has been able to retain close friends and partners in the non-Western world. The war itself has provided a powerful stimulus to deal with a number of domestic weaknesses that Russia had been suffering from since the downfall of the Soviet Union.

At the same time, Russia has to reckon with the entire West, for the first time in history, lining up against it; Russians have also witnessed what a successful brainwashing campaign could do with the largely Russian-speaking and to a high degree ethnically Russian population of its closest neighbour;

Moscow has to take account of the dependence of virtually all countries of today's world on the U.S. dollar and the Western-centered financial system, and of the immense power of the Western media empire. An analysis of these vulnerabilities points to what needs to be done to make sure that Russia's security is better protected for the trials that lie ahead: turbulence in the world is unlikely to subside in the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER 2.

NUCLEAR WEAPONS: WHAT FUTURE FOR ARMS CONTROL?

Dmitry Stefanovich

There is no need to once again repeat all the current challenges facing arms control, whether nuclear or not. Arms control is in deep crisis with a possibility of further degradation. Almost no major treaties remain operational, although some lesser ones are still in effect (i.e. between Russia, China and Central Asian states regarding near-border military activities, or between India and Pakistan on non-targeting of nuclear infrastructure).

The only treaty limiting nuclear arsenals of great powers is the *New START*, and it remains to be seen if anything will come in its place after February 2026, although Russia has taken some measures to at least lay the foundation for possible arms control talks with the US and other partners. This is a crucial topic, and it will be addressed separately within this chapter.

...The *New START* Treaty will expire on February 5, 2026, signalling the imminent end of the last international accord directly limiting nuclear missile capabilities. A complete renunciation of this treaty's legacy would, from many points, be a grave and short-sighted mistake. It would also have adverse implications for the objectives of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons.

In order to prevent the emergence of a new strategic arms race and to preserve an acceptable degree of predictability and restraint, we consider it reasonable to maintain at this turbulent time the status quo established under *New START*. Accordingly, Russia is prepared to continue observing the treaty's central quantitative restrictions for one year after February 5, 2026.

Following that date, based on a careful assessment of the situation, we will make a definite decision on whether to uphold these voluntary self-limitations. We believe that this measure is only feasible if the United States acts in a similar spirit and refrains from steps that would undermine or disrupt the existing balance of deterrence.

Vladimir Putin
President of Russia
September 22, 2025

<http://www.en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78051>

The reasons for the existing arms control crisis are numerous but can be assembled into two major groups: political and technological. First, there have been dramatic shifts in military-political relations between countries over the last several decades. Old actors are less capable, new actors are eager to change the balance, and there has been increasingly less appetite for diplomacy and specifically for adapting what remained of arms control for the new global realities. Second, warfare itself has changed dramatically, and so-called "emerging and disruptive technologies" affected and continue to affect both the actual battlefield dynamics, the deterrent effects of selected weapons, and the perceptions of decision-makers and analysts alike.

While these are rather evolutionary processes, not revolutionary, the overall volume of ongoing changes on the global scale provides for dramatic cumulative results. In terms of impact related to the relations among nuclear powers, both positive, stabilizing and negative, destabilizing trends are observed.

Global Nuclear Weapons Dynamics

Before going deeper into details and effects of the ongoing developments in nuclear and conventional fields, several perspectives on the dynamics of the global nuclear stockpiles should be observed. While there are no doubts that current total numbers of nuclear weapons are no match for the peak of the previous Cold war, a *nuanced approach* can help to understand some specific issues that face us today.

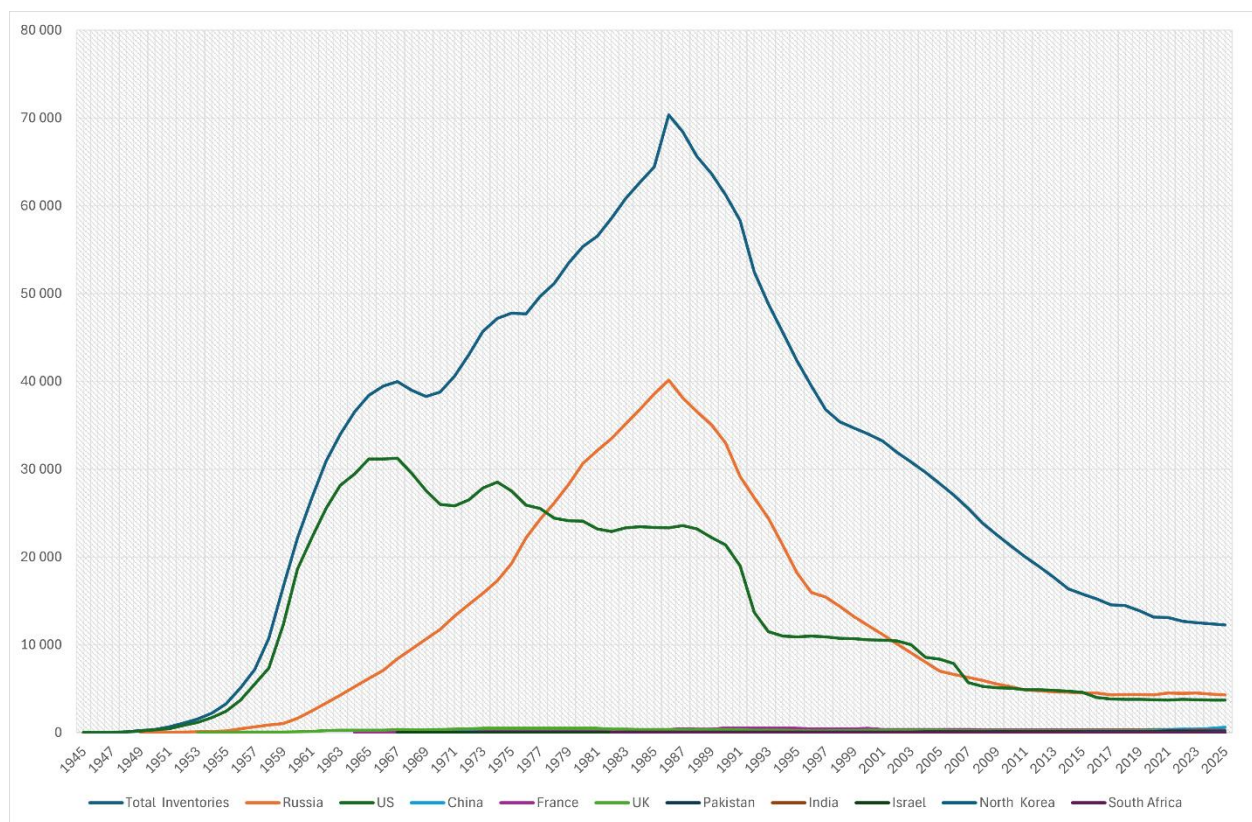


Figure 4. Estimated Global Nuclear Warhead Inventories Over Time

Source: Status of World Nuclear Forces, 2025, Federation of American Scientists (<https://fas.org/initiative/status-world-nuclear-forces/>)

If we look at the dynamics over the last 15 years and remove the Russian and American *nuclear behemoths*, the picture is significantly different.

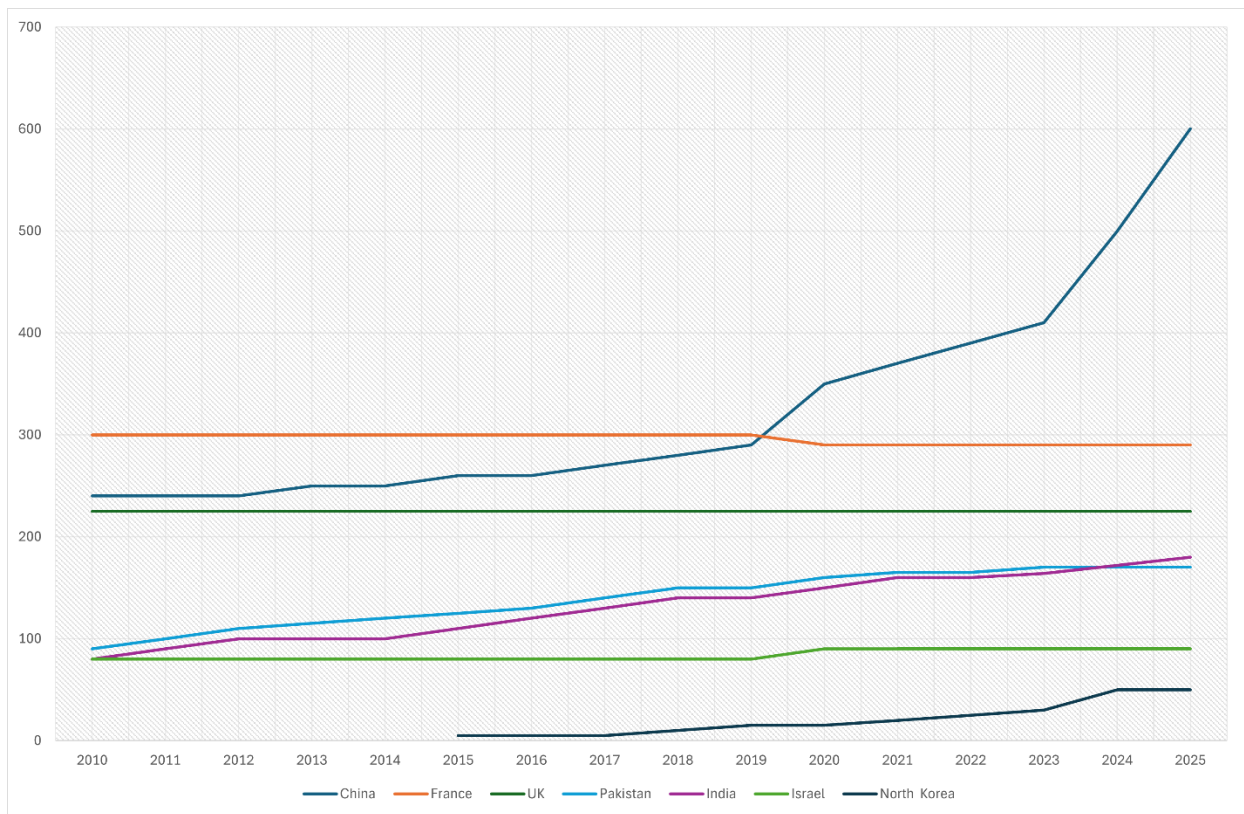


Figure 5. Selected nuclear stockpiles over 2010-2025

Source: Status of World Nuclear Forces, 2025 // Federation of American Scientists (Adapted from the data: <https://fas.org/initiative/status-world-nuclear-forces/>)

No surprises that there are very real concerns about a possible nuclear arms race on a global scale, not to mention the absence of progress in nuclear disarmament as provided in the NPT Article 6, although a more nuanced approach here might be useful as well, and it will be addressed in this chapter.

It gets even more interesting especially if one considers the growing emphasis on nuclear capabilities in France and the UK and their latest national and joint nuclear-related documents¹⁰ and rhetorics which open the possibility for future growth of nuclear stockpile in these European NATO countries.

¹⁰ The Strategic Defence Review 2025 // the UK Government. June 2, 2025. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/the-strategic-defence-review-2025-making-britain-safer-secure-at-home-strong-abroad>; National Strategic Review 2025 // Secretariat-General for National Defence and Security. URL: https://www.sgdsn.gouv.fr/files/files/Publications/20250713_NP_SGDSN_RNS2025_EN_0.pdf; Northwood Declaration (UK-France joint nuclear statement) // the UK Government, July 10, 2025. 10.07.2025. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/news/northwood-declaration-10-july-2025-uk-france-joint-nuclear-statement>

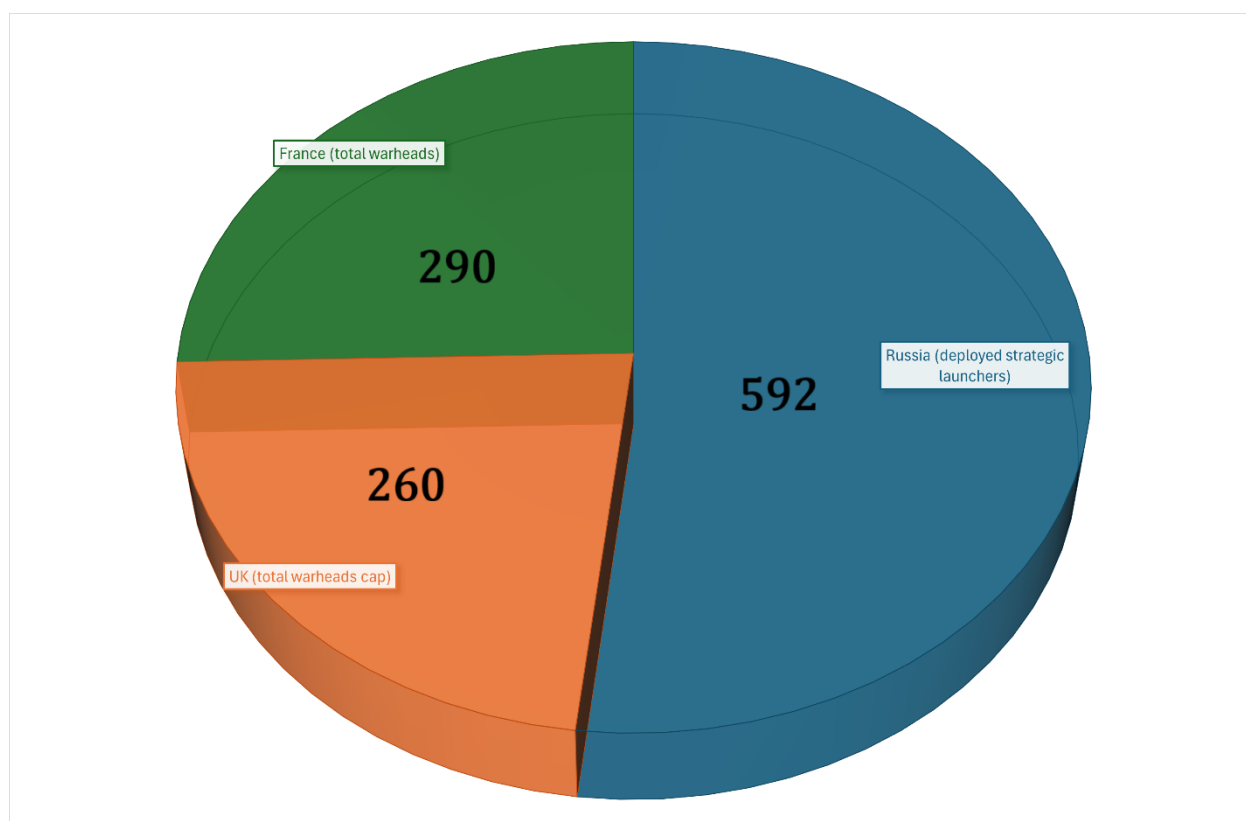


Figure 6. Russia-France-UK trilateral nuclear balance

Adapted from the data: Kristensen, H. M., Korda, M., Johns, E., & Knight, M. (2025). Russian nuclear weapons, 2025. *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 81(3), p. 208–237. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2025.2494386>; Kristensen, H. M., Korda, M., Johns, E., & Knight-Boyle, M. (2025). French nuclear weapons, 2025 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 81(4), 313–326. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2025.2524251>; Kristensen, H. M., Korda, M., Johns, E., & Knight, M. (2024). United Kingdom nuclear weapons, 2024 *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*, 80(6), 394–407. <https://doi.org/10.1080/00963402.2024.2420550>

Of course, comparing the total nuclear stockpile of these two countries with deployed strategic launchers in Russia only, especially given the geography and clear role for the Russian tactical nuclear weapons, can be considered a trick. Moreover, there are no doubts that no one will ever plan to use a single warhead per a single launcher. Nevertheless, this gives a good *taste of the changed global and regional security dynamics*.

The bottom line is that while Russia and the US remain the most capable nuclear weapon states, both quantitatively and qualitatively, China is rapidly bridging the gap¹¹, and other countries are becoming increasingly relevant. This is a combination of two trends: greater emphasis on nuclear deterrence and decades of Russian and US nuclear reductions.

Effects of Emerging and Disruptive Technologies

The rapid technological developments affecting nuclear and non-nuclear capabilities are a very important factor. For example, we can look at hypersonic missile technology, which, on the one hand,

¹¹ Kashin V. The Policy of the People's Republic of China on the Construction of the Military Component of the Strategic Deterrence System in 2020s. *World Economy and International Relations Journal*, 2023, vol. 67, №11, pp. 99-111. <https://doi.org/10.20542/0131-2227-2023-67-11-99-111> EDN: DGJQQX

enhance counterforce capabilities, and thus, can degrade strategic stability and thus, instigate arms race.

But on the other hand, hypersonic weapons increase missile defense penetration and defeat capabilities, thus, enhancing the deterrent effects, and thus, enhancing strategic stability. Moreover, if hypersonic glide vehicles are considered a more reliable way to deliver nuclear warheads, it even might contribute to future reductions in the total numbers of nuclear weapons.

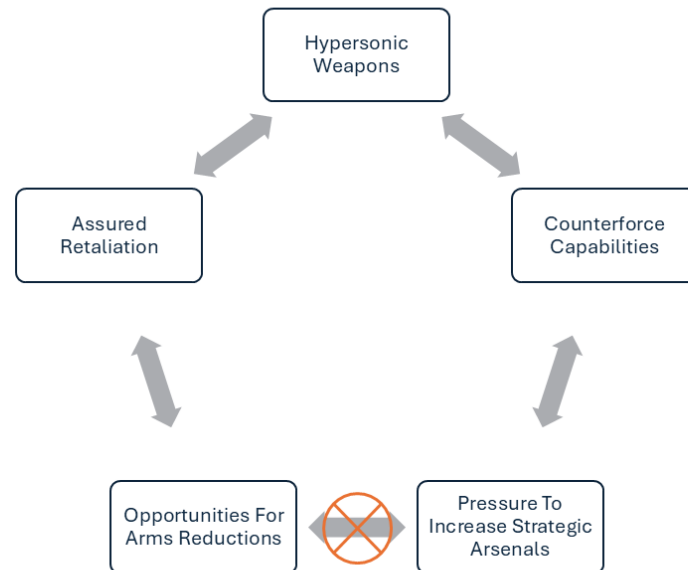


Figure 7. Hypersonic weapons effects

Compiled by the author based on open sources.

Another very important example is artificial intelligence (AI). A lot has been already said and written on the intersection of AI and nuclear (and especially on the challenges of the meaningful human control), of course, but sometimes it is important to try to simplify the landscape.

The most important effects are the following:

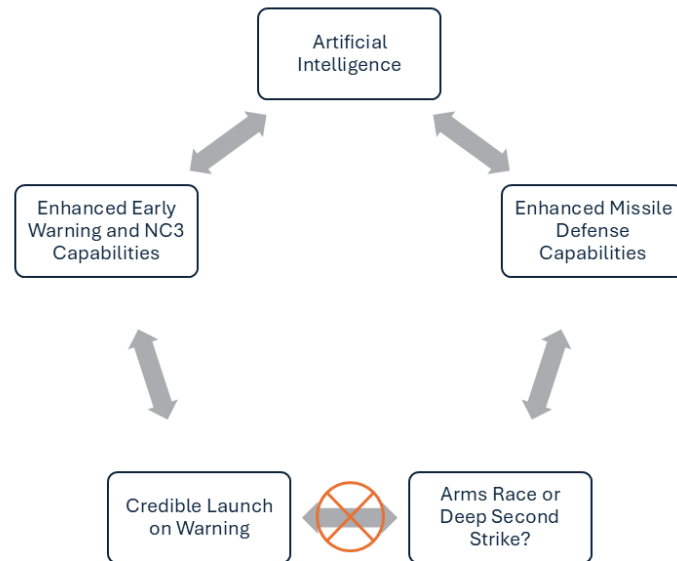


Figure 8. Artificial intelligence effects

Compiled by the author based on open sources.

AI can enhance nuclear command, control and communications, again enhancing deterrent effects, making nuclear retaliation inevitable. However, AI can be used, and is already being used to enhance targeting, both for counterforce, or the so-called “left-of-launch” missile defense, and also for ‘traditional’ missile defense, helping to enhance recognition of decoys and performance of interceptors. At the same time, same technologies contribute to the reliability of early warning systems – again making the situation more stable.

As shown on the diagrams above, some of the effects of these two broad technological categories are mutually exclusive, and this is one of the major reasons for a concern. Without proper communications between major global powers, the destabilizing effects are more likely, than the stabilizing ones.

Emerging technologies make conventional weapons much more capable, and accessible. This means that more work needs to be done on the concept of non-nuclear deterrence itself¹², as currently it remains somewhat under researched, despite real cases of strategic non-nuclear operations in Europe and in the Middle East.

Advanced Strategic Non-nuclear Weapons and the Wars of the Future

¹² Yermakov A., Stefanovich D. Is Non-Nuclear Deterrence Possible? // Russian International Affairs Council. June 30, 2020. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/is-non-nuclear-deterrence-possible/>

As covered by the author in the 2024-2025 edition on the *Security Index Yearbook*¹³, there are three main categories of strategic targets that can be destroyed by non-nuclear means (including but not limited to conventional missiles, drones and cyberattacks):

1. Strategic nuclear forces and their infrastructure and battle management systems. Strategic missile defense infrastructure, early warning systems (including both ground and space defense layer), space domain awareness systems.
2. Forces and means that enable and support the combat use of the strategic forces, specifically, general-purpose naval forces and air defense/nonstrategic missile defense forces that protect land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) and heavy bomber bases.
3. Dual-use critical infrastructure, i.e., ports, bridges, tunnels, factories, power plants, etc.

As of Autumn 2025, there is significant real-world evidence of such capabilities being used for precisely these tasks. There have been numerous attacks by Ukrainian drones against Russian heavy bombers and airbases, as well as Early Warning radars, not to mention critical infrastructure, and a massive Russian campaign against Ukrainian military industry, energy infrastructure (with a notable exception of nuclear powerplants) and even very specific operation against the solid fuel ballistic missile design and production facilities¹⁴.

In the Middle East, Israel used drones and precision munitions, including air-launched ballistic missiles, in its effort to degrade Iranian nuclear and missile capabilities, with US joining the operation with strategic bombers hitting nuclear sites with conventional munitions¹⁵. In turn, Iran demonstrated capability to hit strategic targets (headquarters, refineries, airbases) in Israel and even US communications infrastructure in Qatar with conventional missiles¹⁶.

This leads to several specific takeaways. First, *dual-capable* (nuclear and non-nuclear) weapons and platforms, especially in the form of heavy bombers, are quite usable, but also can become a liability and an escalation factor. Second, it is clear, that strategic targets can be hit by conventional weapons, although this would likely lead to disruption and degradation, as total destruction is relatively hard to achieve through non-nuclear mean and takes a lot of time and munitions. Third, nuclear weapons do not prevent conventional wars, not to mention armed conflicts on a smaller scale – but they never meant to. Fourth, there is no automation in escalation on the nuclear and non-nuclear “ladders”, or rather vortexes. So far use of force remains somewhat measured and gradual – which does not make it something good and positive, of course.

¹³ Stefanovich, D., Chapter 5. Assessing Development of New Types of Conventional Weapons. *Security Index Yearbook*, Vol. 1 (2024-2025) // PIR Center, 2024. URL: <https://pircenter.org/en/editions/security-index-yearbook-chapter-5-assessing-development-of-new-types-of-conventional-weapons/>

¹⁴ Russia derails Ukraine’s Western-backed missile program – FSB (VIDEO) // *Russia Today*. August 14, 2025. URL: <https://www.rt.com/russia/622868-russia-derails-ukraine-missile-program/>

¹⁵ Gordon, C. ‘15 Years of Incredible Work’: The Inside Story of the Mission to Bomb Iran’s Nuclear Sites // *Air&Space Forces Magazine*. June 26, 2025. URL: <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/inside-story-b-2-mission-bomb-iran-nuclear-sites/>

¹⁶ Greet K., Iranian Attack Destroyed U.S. Satellite Communications Dish at Al Udeid Air Base // *The Aviationist*. July 15, 2025. URL: <https://theaviationist.com/2025/07/15/iranian-attack-destroyed-satcom/>

...Now about the recent military exercise. I would ask the Chief of the General Staff to report on one more event that I briefly mentioned in my opening remarks – namely, the test of the *Burevestnik* nuclear-powered unlimited-range cruise missile. I have received a report from the industry and I am aware of the assessments made by the Ministry of Defence – this is indeed a unique weapon **that no other country possesses.**

I clearly remember that when we announced the development of this weapon, even very high-level, top-class specialists told me the goal was worthy and respectable but unattainable in the near historical perspective. Once again – that was the view of those high-class experts. And now the decisive tests have been completed.

Vladimir Putin
President of Russia
Visit to the Joint Force command post
October 26, 2025
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78301>

Technological developments are a very important factor in these dynamics. We are rapidly approaching a reality where offensive and defensive capabilities and even the munitions themselves are interconnected, as well as means of intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance and data analysis. Emerging technologies serve as a force multiplier, and as such are becoming a primary target for counter-attack – or even pre-emptive attacks. This calls for active international pursuit of risk reduction measures, but, unfortunately, such perspectives are rather distant.

Under such circumstances nuclear proliferation remains possible, especially given the fact that a lot of new technologies might help with design of nuclear weapons and even production of some of its parts through additive manufacturing, not to mention simulations – which can decrease the need for live nuclear testing both by future and by existing nuclear weapons possessors.

However, proliferation of conventional deep strike capabilities is of even greater concern.

The only way for reliable control of nuclear proliferation, as well as proliferation of advanced military technology, is to revitalize international cooperation. Unfortunately, under current circumstances counter-proliferation – actual military action against possible proliferators – is becoming a baseline option.

To conclude, as the conventional capabilities are growing and given the continuous rise of the global military spending¹⁷, there are hardly any prospects for general disarmament. The link between conventional and nuclear capabilities is also clear. So, further implementation of the NPT Article 6, which provides for both nuclear and general disarmament, is getting extremely hard to achieve.

Any Future for Arms Control?

¹⁷ Unprecedented rise in global military expenditure as European and Middle East spending surges // SIPRI. April 28, 2025. URL: <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges>

The future of global nuclear order is in the making right now. We still have the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty and moratorium on nuclear testing, International Atomic Energy Agency and the Preparatory Commission for Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty Organization International Monitoring System are operational, and there is a nuclear use *taboo*. However the pressure is high, and it is a task for everyone, including academic and expert communities, to support the existing and develop future arms control mechanisms that can be adapted to the existing and future challenges.

It is possible to start small, however, even such a simple thing and an easy win for everyone as a Russian post-INF moratorium initiative¹⁸ failed¹⁹. Still, this does not mean that we should stop trying, and Russian side tries to come up with new measures. For instance, in September 2025 President Putin proposed unconditional extension of the *New START* limits on strategic offensive arms for at least a year after its expiration in February 2026²⁰. Further extension is conditional depending on the actions of the United States, especially in the missile defense domain and their *Golden Dome* project.

Moreover, in October 2025 President Putin disclosed a somewhat broader understanding of the scope of the possible future arms control measures, should other nuclear weapon states be ready to engage in such discussions²¹. Those include ‘traditional’ strategic offensive arms as well as novel systems, INF-range weapons, multi-purpose nuclear-powered submarines, tactical nuclear weapons, nuclear arsenals of all nuclear weapon states.

The focus remains on preserving strategic parity between Russia and the United States, although it is also shifting from quantitative to qualitative dimension.

Russian idea of the security equation²², which “should take into account all factors significant for strategic stability in a comprehensive manner”, “is not limited to nuclear weapons” and intended “to embrace the entire spectrum of both nuclear and non-nuclear offensive and defensive arms that are capable of resolving strategic tasks”, remains relevant and seems as a good foundation for future discussions and negotiations.

¹⁸ Statement by Vladimir Putin on additional steps to de-escalate the situation in Europe after the termination of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF Treaty) // President of Russia. October 26, 2020. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/64270>

¹⁹ Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on the moratorium on the deployment of ground-launched intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles // MFA of the Russian Federation. August 4, 2025. URL: https://mid.ru/ru/press_service/spokesman/official_statement/2039749/?lang=en

²⁰ Meeting with permanent members of the Security Council // President of Russia. September 22, 2025. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/security-council/78051>

²¹ *Valdai* Discussion Club meeting // President of Russia. October 2, 2025. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78134>

²² Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov’s opening remarks at a briefing at the *Rossiia Segodnya* International Information Agency on arms control and strategic stability // MFA of the Russian Federation. February 11, 2021. URL: https://www.mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/1415641/

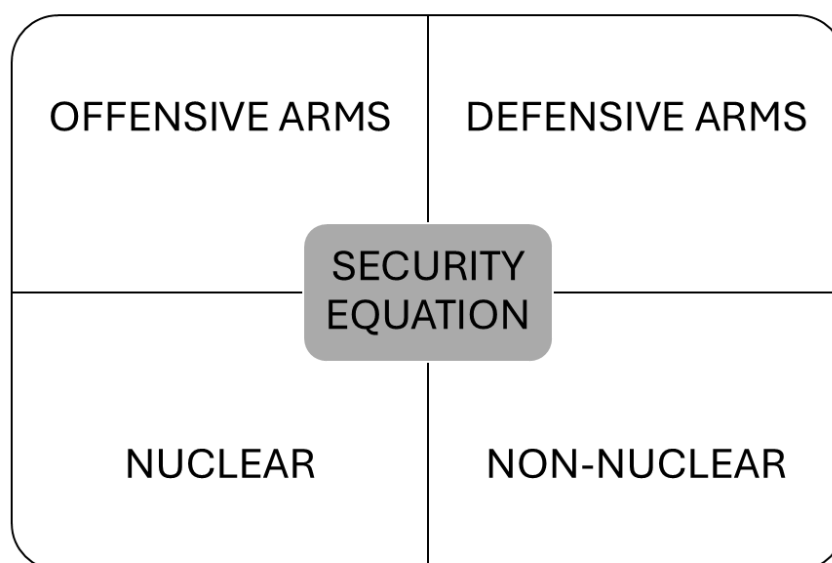


Figure 9. “The Security Equation”

Compiled by the author based on selected Russian official statements.

Major nuclear powers should and can come up with measures to stabilize their relations, based on the Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapons States²³ that the nuclear war cannot be won and should never be fought, and that any direct military confrontation between nuclear powers should be avoided. Unfortunately, a very real threat of such confrontations exists both in Europe and in Asia. The other documents can also be used as a basis for future joint arms control efforts, including but not limited to the Joint statement by the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on Global Strategic Stability²⁴.

It is crucial to emphasize that the main “task” of strategic stability is to remove incentives for a first nuclear strike. As there is somewhat limited understanding of what can explicitly lead to a nuclear use by a nuclear power (and it is by design), and the escalation dynamics can’t be fully managed, the discussions should include prevention any direct armed conflict between nuclear superpowers – as specifically said in the statements mentioned above.

Possible “incentives for a first nuclear strike” are based on the possible offensive actions by the adversary that will degrade one’s arsenal, or the enhanced defensive capabilities of the adversary that are being developed in a way that can undermine your retaliatory strike capability, or both. The “incentives” will require several technological and operational steps, and very probably an ongoing military conflict.

Strategic stability and strategic deterrence are related. “Full-spectrum cross-domain” activities are meant to enhance strategic deterrence, where one tries to prevent a course of actions by the adversary

²³ Joint Statement of the Leaders of the Five Nuclear-Weapons States on Preventing Nuclear War and Avoiding Arms Races // President of Russia. January 3, 2022. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/67551>

²⁴ Joint statement by the Russian Federation and the People’s Republic of China on Global Strategic Stability // President of Russia. May 8, 2025. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/6310>

that might lead to a conflict. However, the very same activities might be seen as destabilizing by the adversary, and, in turn, force him to pursue steps meant as a deterrence messaging, but perceived as threatening.

Thus, despite the intention to deter destabilizing actions, even more rapidly and dramatically destabilizing dynamics are possible. To counter this, strategic deterrence operations should include a very robust messaging (or even “interpreting”) element, and extra steps must be taken to ensure that the message is received and understood. The idea that a limited use of nuclear weapons can help to restore deterrence is a terminal stage of the flawed logic in this case.

Arms control can help to prevent an indefinite action-reaction spiral that by default leads to arms race and escalation. Transparency, limits and reductions are as good an instrument for national security as hard military power, however, it is rarely acknowledged. There is no lack of arguing for strategically stable balance achieved by extreme ambiguity and huge arsenals, but such stabilization will hardly survive for a prolonged period, especially in a situation with numerous actors and numerous domains are involved in the confrontation.

The world is an increasingly dangerous place, with technological advancements and political turmoil making use of force a more frequent option. Nuclear and advanced conventional weapons are a crucial piece on the *puzzle* of international military-political relations; however, the *puzzle* itself can hardly be solved in the short-term. Still, the academic and expert community should continue to diagnose the current illnesses and pursue stable long-term solutions.

CHAPTER 3.

NONPROLIFERATION *HOCKEY LEAGUE*: WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE NPT REVIEW PROCESS?

Vladimir Orlov, Sergey Semenov

Before moving on to an analysis of trends in the NPT review process, it's worth asking a simple question: is the NPT and its review process even necessary? What is its *raison d'être*, especially in an era of stingy travel allowances, late visas, and rampant politicization? Is there a hidden meaning behind three inconclusive preparatory committees in a row, all incapable of producing recommendations for the inevitably fruitless NPT Review Conference?

There's a temptation to give quick answers. Like, “we don't need that kind of hockey”²⁵.

But it seems we still need *hockey* (meaning nonproliferation as a diplomatic sport) itself. Therefore, the real question is: how to play on *changed ice*? And what are the limits of what is possible at the NPT Review Conference, which will be held from April 28 to May 22, 2026, in New York?

Formalities: Why is a Review Process necessary?

Let's start by going back to the basics. Article 8 of the NPT provides for the convening of a conference of the parties to the Treaty “*to review the operation of this Treaty with a view to ensuring that the objectives set forth in the Preamble and the provisions of the Treaty are being realized*”. At the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference, it was decided to hold Review Conferences every five years.

Three preparatory committees are convened three years before the Review Conference, and if necessary, Preparatory Committee IV is held in the year of the Conference. The stated goal is to review the principles and objectives of the Treaty, as well as ways to achieve them, and to develop recommendations for the Review Conference. The conferences, in turn, are to evaluate the results of the review cycle and identify areas and methods for further progress²⁶.

²⁵ The phrase is a quote from the famous Soviet sports commentator Nikolay Ozerov, who first used it in the 1960s. It refers to hockey played with excessive brutality or unsportsmanlike conduct, expressing a desire for a more skilled and fair game rather than a dirty one – *Editor's note*.

²⁶ Decisions and resolution adopted at the 1995 NPT Review and Extension Conference // NTI, 1995. URL: <https://media.nti.org/pdfs/npt95rc.pdf>

...The fact that the NPT was granted indefinite status reflected the international community's understanding of the need to preserve it as a universal instrument for ensuring international security and, at the same time, the agreement of States parties to undertake efforts to supplement the obligations contained in the Treaty with new measures for the practical implementation of its provisions. Further developments in subsequent review cycles have confirmed the validity and timeliness of the decision to extend the Treaty indefinitely. It has allowed States parties to more thoroughly address the strengthening of the Treaty regime, particularly with regard to the first two pillars – nuclear disarmament and nonproliferation. As a result, it was possible to agree on the so-called 13 steps of the 2000 Review Conference (RC), as well as the 2010 Action Plan adopted as a result of the successful conclusion of the next Review Conference.

Andrey Belousov
Deputy Permanent Representative of the Russian Mission to the UN Office
and other International Organizations in Geneva

<https://pircenter.org/en/editions/experts-on-the-npt-indefinite-extension-and-future-prospects-for-the-npt-2026-review-conference/>

However, the organizational aspects of the Preparatory Committee's work are not regulated in detail. The Final Document of the NPT Review Conference stipulates that the Third Preparatory Committee should submit consensus recommendations to the Review Conference. However, this has not been achieved since the decision to improve the effectiveness of the NPT review process was adopted, and a factual summary of the results of the work was only adopted in 2002²⁷.

It should be noted that the issue of improving the Review Process's mechanics has been raised repeatedly at events within the NPT Review Process. The latest round of this discussion began after the 10th NPT Review Conference in 2022, which concluded without adopting a final document. Following its conclusion, and in advance of the first session of the Preparatory Committee, it was decided to convene a working group on enhancing the effectiveness of the Review Process²⁸.

²⁷ Potter W. Behind the Scenes: How Not to Negotiate an Enhanced NPT Review Process // Arms Control Association, 2023. URL: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/behind-scenes-how-not-to-negotiate-enhanced-npt-review-process#endnote03>

²⁸ NPT/CONF.2020/DEC.2 // United Nations, 2020. URL: <https://docs.un.org/en/NPT/CONF.2020/DEC.2>

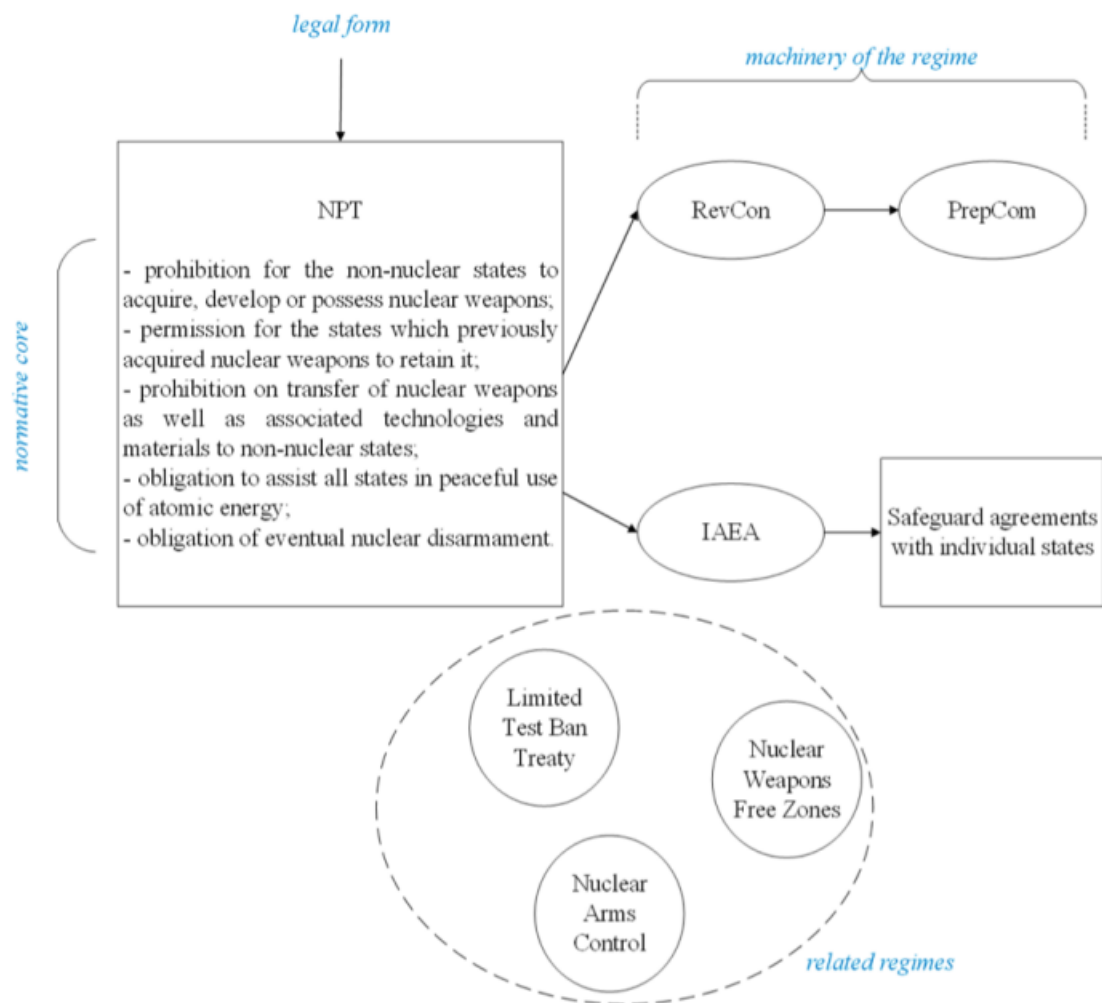


Figure 10. Key elements of the NPT Regime

Source: PIR Center

<https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/04/24-04-25-Nuclear-Nonproliferation-and-Arms-Control.-Digital-Papers.pdf>

It appears that the discussion that took place in 2023 reflects the sentiments of the States Parties to the Treaty regarding the specific parameters for reviewing its operation.

The following organizational and bureaucratic problems were noted: insufficient time for interactive discussions and duplication of ideas expressed within various PrepCom clusters, as well as a lack of a clear division of powers between the PrepCom and the RevCon. Specific considerations on this matter were presented by the United States²⁹. Among the most *unorthodox ideas* was abandoning the structuring of the RevCon's work into main committees. Instead, it is proposed to move directly to an article-by-article analysis of treaty implementation.

²⁹ Working Group on Strengthening the NPT Review Process U.S. Working Paper Practical Steps to Improve the Process and Reinforce Best Practices // Reaching Critical Will. July 24-28, 2023. URL: <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/prepcom23/wg/WG-WP-USA.pdf>

In addition, initiatives were put forward to create some kind of permanent operating body (from the NPT Secretariat to a support unit), to hold regional seminars and to appoint the Conference leadership in advance.

From the Russian side's perspective, the potential benefits of streamlining the review process, however, do not outweigh the existing gaps and shortcomings. In particular, the *added value* of the European Union speaking independently is questionable. As noted in the Russian delegation's statement, the European Union uses this platform to make unfounded accusations against member states and politicize the discussion. Furthermore, given the pressing need to save time, the rationale for a separate slot for non-governmental organizations to speak is unclear.

The most important thing, however, is that states' full participation in the review process is not impeded. In this context, the practice of refusing to issue or delaying visas to experts from the Russian delegation cannot be described as anything other than *outrageous*. Despite some progress in this area compared to previous years, in 2025, visas were issued to two Russian experts only on the day of the event and after the personal intervention of the Chair³⁰.

...The NPT indefinite extension was a very important step that confirmed its uniqueness for international security. It eliminated the need to decide every five years whether to keep the treaty or not. It gave us confidence that there is no more proliferation of nuclear weapons in the world. Only specific issues inside and outside the NPT will need to be addressed. Since there are five states outside the Treaty, four of which are nuclear-weapon states, it is obvious that simple co-optation is not the answer. It is necessary to consider this issue on a case-by-case basis.

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The *reporting dimension* of the debate around improving NPT implementation deserves special mention. Non-nuclear-weapon states have raised the issue of the nuclear-weapon states' national reports being subject to interactive review in terms of their implementation of Article VI of the Treaty. In fact, this idea became the core of the exchange of views within the relevant Working Group in 2023. As a compromise, the Philippines proposed the following wording, which would allocate a separate slot for reviewing national reports of states, and nuclear-weapon states in particular, in a manner that would allow for questions to be raised and clarifications to be provided regarding their

³⁰ See e.g.: Statement by the Deputy Head of the Delegation of the Russian Federation at the Third Session of the Preparatory Committee for the Eleventh Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (Improving the Review Process), New York, May 7, 2025 // MFA of the Russian Federation. May 7, 2025. URL: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/2014659/ (in Russ.).

content³¹. However, despite the absence of objections from the majority of working group participants, a consensus decision on this point was not reached.

In this case, we're talking about *form over substance*. Non-nuclear-weapon states have the capacity to discuss the nuclear doctrines of nuclear-weapon states: there are bilateral consultation mechanisms and a format for sideline events. Detailed information on this matter is included in national reports submitted according to the format agreed upon by the nuclear-weapon states. Adding specially allocated time for their discussion – especially given the previously expressed concerns about time constraints – would add nothing to this. *Sapienti sat*³².

At the same time, the authors of such initiatives, hoping that such discussions will increase transparency regarding existing nuclear arsenals, fail to take into account that the degree of such transparency is a purely national matter. The decision to publicize specific aspects of nuclear force activity must not undermine national security. In the context of the hybrid war unleashed against Russia, the added value of such transparency is, we repeat, unclear. At the same time, the Western “troika”, nodding at such approaches by the *anti-nuclear vanguard*, apparently hopes to disadvantage Russia and China by portraying them as opponents of nuclear disarmament.

Macro Trends of the Review Process

Two consecutive NPT Review Conferences (in 2015 and 2022) concluded without the adoption of a consensus final document. The third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 NPT Review Conference also failed to produce agreed recommendations for the Treaty's review. Thus, the Vietnamese Presidency of the Review Conference faces the virtually impossible task of finding *common ground* after failing to do so for over 16 years.

It would be incorrect to *hurl slogans* about the nuclear nonproliferation regime being on the brink of collapse. Nonproliferation still works. Since the last successful Review Conference (in terms of the adoption of a final document) in 2010, not a single new state has acquired nuclear weapons. IAEA safeguards continue to be implemented, the export control system functions, and reliable physical protection of nuclear facilities is generally ensured. Most importantly, Article IV of the Treaty, which provides for broad access for member states to the benefits of “atoms for peace”, is being implemented virtually without interruption.

It is also necessary to differentiate the reasons for the failures of the 2015 and 2022 Review Conferences. In the first case, the *trigger* was the unwillingness of the United States and Great Britain to join the consensus on the need to convene an international conference on the establishment of a Zone Free of Weapons of Mass Destruction and Their Means of Delivery in the Middle East³³. In the

³¹ Potter W. Behind the Scenes: How Not to Negotiate an Enhanced NPT Review Process // Arms Control Association, 2023. URL: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2023-10/features/behind-scenes-how-not-to-negotiate-enhanced-npt-review-process#endnote03>

³² *Sapienti sat* – a Latin expression meaning "it's enough for the wise" or "it's enough for the understanding." It implies that a wise person will understand the meaning of what is said without lengthy explanations, while for the understanding person, a hint or a brief allusion will suffice – *Editor's note*.

³³ See e.g.: Orlov V. The Glass Menagerie of Nonproliferation: Why the Review Conference Failed // *Russia in Global Affairs* Journal. August 24, 2015. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/steklyannyj-zverinecz-nerasprostraneniya/> (in

second case, it was the *Ukrainian issue*, fueled by a hysterical Euro-Atlantic minority, and specifically issues related to the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant³⁴. These issues will be discussed further.

...The indefinite extension of the NPT in 1995 made Israel more reticent in opposing the creation of a Nuclear-Weapon-Free Zone in the Middle East. As a result of all this, Egypt has refused to ratify the CTBT. No NPT party wanted to end the Treaty, and the alternative, which was a 25-year revolving extension, would have been much more effective and useful because it would have put the Treaty and the parties under constant review working for Nuclear proliferation. The indefinite extension was a big mistake that was detrimental and testimony that the best can be the enemy of the good.

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However, it should be noted that the absence of a final document is not a failure in itself. The key factor here is the fact that the Treaty's validity was reviewed in any event. This provides *food for thought*.

But, of course, it is also true that the discussion materials must sooner or later lead to concrete actions to strengthen the nonproliferation regime in all its aspects and to achieve the noble goals enshrined in the Treaty's preamble. At the present moment, the nuclear nonproliferation regime is plunging into a crisis, in essence rather than in form, calling into question its fundamental tenets. The lack of final documents at the 2015 and 2022 RevCons and the heated debates in the current review cycle are merely the result of the confluence of several alarming macro-trends.

Trend 1: *Modus operandi* between nuclear-armed states has slid toward conflict. The “P5” as a format is splintering into a Russian-Chinese *tandem* and a Western “troika”. In the absence of constructive interaction, the US, France, and the UK are attempting to shift responsibility for the dire state of strategic stability onto Russia and China. Anti-Russian and anti-Chinese rhetoric have become an integral part of every Western speech at *Prepcoms*³⁵.

Public *squabbles* are exacerbated by a reluctance to engage in concrete, substantive discussions behind closed doors. The issue isn't a divergence of positions, but rather a reluctance on the part of

Russ.); Potter W. Unfulfilled Promise of 2015 NPT Review Conference // VCDNP, 2020. URL: <https://course.vcdnp.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/00396338.2016.1142144.pdf>

³⁴ Selezneva D. Problems and Prospects of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons // *Analysis and Forecast*. IMEMO RAS Journal, 2022. URL: <https://www.afjournal.ru/2022/4/global-and-regional-security/treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons-problems-and-prospects/> (in Russ.).

³⁵ See e.g.: NPT News in Review. Vol.20, №2 // Reaching Critical Will. May 1, 2025. URL: <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Disarmament-fora/npt/NIR2025/NIR20.2.pdf>

Western capitals to make an effort to uphold the nonproliferation *acquis communautaire*³⁶, which is impossible without constructive dialogue.

Attempts to simply sideline the nuclear issue – to compartmentalize it, as the Biden administration has proposed – are not a solution in and of themselves. The current crisis in the multilateral architecture of international security is complex. Hypothetical agreements on individual issues, taken out of this context, will not resolve the overall negative trend of deepening interstate tensions. The most that can be achieved in this scenario is a fine-grained gesture under Article VI of the NPT, which does not imply any real progress.

Trend 2: Growing rejection of nuclear deterrence concept and practices by non-nuclear states. The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons has gained a *critical mass* of supporters and allows *anti-nuclear radicals* to further their narrative about the humanitarian consequences of nuclear weapons and the unacceptability of nuclear deterrence as a concept. As a result, relevant international forums are becoming saturated with a large number of initiatives that divert the discussion and fail to take into account the interests of states with strategic capabilities.

It must be acknowledged that, from the perspective of Russian interests, *anti-nuclear radicals* can be useful companions in their criticism of Western approaches to the NPT (for example, regarding NATO's joint nuclear missions). At the same time, the narrative they generate about the NPT's crisis, the failure of nuclear states to fulfill their disarmament obligations, and the creation of an “in-house” alternative in the form of the TPNW undermine faith in the nonproliferation regime and its intrinsic value.

Meanwhile, the proposed introduction of some kind of expanded reporting obligations as part of the review process *misses the mark*. Their added value is far from clear, as they address not the root causes of the international security crisis, but rather attempts to “concoct” some bureaucratic formula to simulate vigorous activity.

Trend 3: Attempts to use nonproliferation as a pretext for pursuing narrow, selfish political ambitions. It would be wrong to describe this as a new phenomenon – after all, the example of Iraq in 2003 remains resonant. The US-Israeli attacks on Iranian nuclear facilities only confirm the urgency of this problem.

It must be clearly and unambiguously stated that operations such as this, in the absence of a genuine international legal basis, pay nonproliferation a bad service. The main conclusion for *threshold* states is that the implementation of a weapons scenario cannot be delayed, as the opponent will seek a preemptive strike. This, at a minimum, risks the creation of a large number of nuclear and conventional umbrellas in the most security-sensitive regions – the cooperation between Saudi Arabia and Pakistan is a case in point.

Trend 4: In connection with the *Iranian case*, it is important to note that the countries of the *collective West* have embarked on a course of fragmentation of the “global nuclear family”, isolating their own

³⁶ *Acquis Communautaire* (often *acquis*) – is the body of laws, legal acts, and court decisions that has formed the basis of European Union law since 1993. In the text it is used in a figurative, metaphorical sense. – *Editor's note*.

space from fair competition in the peaceful use of nuclear energy. This includes both a series of “petty nastinesses”, such as the denial of visas for Prepcom-2025 to employees of China's CNNC and the delays in issuing them to specialists from the *Rosatom* State Corporation, and even more serious indecencies. These include sanctions that impede the implementation of current and prospective nuclear projects in third countries (a classic example is the blocking of funds for the construction of the *Akkuyu* NPP in Türkiye). These include unfair attempts to sabotage the *Paks-2* NPP project (Hungary) through administrative means. These include attempts to impose their own regulatory requirements and decisions regarding nuclear fuel at any cost, simply to squeeze Russian suppliers out of the nuclear fuel market for European NPPs. The list goes on – incidentally, this includes the Iranian example mentioned in the previous point.

However, the consequence of such steps is not the creation of a “flourishing atomic garden”, but the undermining of the letter and spirit of Article 4 of the NPT, which presupposes the fullest possible international cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear energy.

Finally, **Trend 5** is the emergence of a third category of states that cannot acquire nuclear weapons, but can touch them. This issue was highlighted at the 2025 PrepCom. Essentially, certain Western countries have been placed in a category of those that are allowed leniency and even exceptions in the area of nonproliferation due to their unblemished reputation.

An example is the continuation and expansion of NATO's practice of joint nuclear missions and the options being considered for replicating them in the Asia-Pacific region. The involvement of non-nuclear states, including new NATO members, in supporting such nuclear combat missions and practicing them during exercises.

Scenarios warned about by Russian experts are also coming to fruition. Specifically, South Korea has announced plans to build its own nuclear submarine in the AUKUS space. And there's little doubt that it will also be declared an exception to the rule.

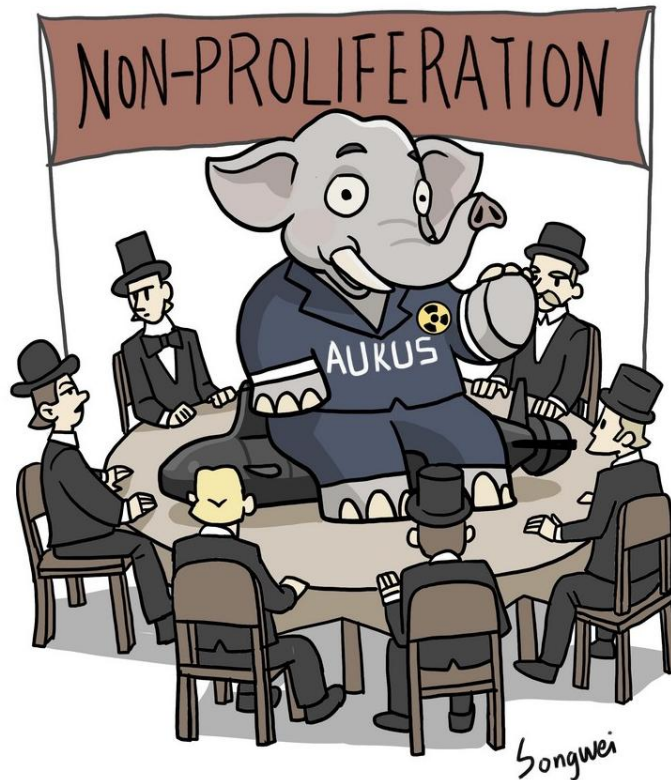


Figure 11. Cartoon “AUKUS is the elephant in the room for global nonproliferation efforts”

Source: Xinhua

<https://english.news.cn/20230328/936be3837d904375957ffc8d8f568ace/c.html>

Finally, the most egregious example is Ukraine, which effectively gets away with attacks on nuclear power plants despite the presence of IAEA specialists there. Essentially, this is a deliberate disregard for the prospect of a man-made nuclear catastrophe provoked by the Nazi regime in Kiev.

The 2026 Review Conference: Major Challenges

From the above, it is clear that the 11th NPT Review Conference will be held in a *combat-like environment*. And these battles are of global significance. Let us highlight the issues that could provoke the most intense clashes.

In the disarmament cluster:

The expiration of the *New START* Treaty on February 5, 2026, will cause a *vacuum* in arms control and create an extremely unfavorable backdrop for discussions on nuclear disarmament. The initiative put forward by Russian President Vladimir Putin to unilaterally maintain the *New START* ceilings for another year will help mitigate some of the negative impact. Much will depend on the US position going forward, both on this initiative specifically and in the context of the review of the *Nuclear Posture Review*, the fundamental document of American nuclear policy.

The most desirable development would be the launch of bilateral consultations on strategic stability. This would at least signal to the global majority that nuclear-weapon states take their Article VI

obligations seriously. This latter possibility, however, is *wishful thinking*. This is evidenced, in particular, by the US's commitment to resuming nuclear testing.

Accordingly, a far more likely scenario is a repeat of the *unsavory pattern* of previous NPT Review Conferences and Preparatory Committees, with mutual accusations across the entire strategic dossier. Fortunately, there are plenty of grounds for this: US plans to deploy the “Golden Dome”, the deployment of American medium-range missiles in the Philippines, Japan, and Germany, and preparations for the reintroduction of sea-launched cruise missiles with nuclear warheads. The Americans will attempt to blame our country for alleged violations of the *New START* and INF Treaty, its arsenal of non-strategic nuclear weapons, the testing of the new *Burevestnik* and *Poseidon* deterrent systems, and the alleged departure from the “zero standard” of nuclear testing.

There's enough *heresy*, where there's a will.

The progress of the 2023-2025 PrepComs suggests that Western countries' criticism of the People's Republic of China's nuclear modernization will be further developed. It's noteworthy, however, that at recent meetings, it wasn't even the United States that particularly emphasized this issue, but its Western and Eastern European satellites. Given the keen interest of Western publications in the products displayed at the PLA parade marking the 80th anniversary of victory in World War II, it seems entirely likely that the collective West's insinuating statements will include references to this event.

It must be emphasized that our Chinese comrades do not leave such attacks unanswered. This is especially true given that Washington regularly exposes itself to counter-criticism, provoking an arms race in the Asia-Pacific region by increasing its presence in that part of the world, deploying destabilizing military capabilities there (for example, the aforementioned intermediate- and shorter-range missiles), and developing nuclear alliances with regional partners (see, for example, the Washington Declaration with the Republic of Korea).

It's possible that “irresponsible nuclear rhetoric” will resurface again – from the West, in relation to the Russian Armed Forces' Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine. The ridiculousness of such statements requires no comment. What's important is that NATO's *dandruff* has begun to allow for provocative remarks – just recall the Belgian Defense Minister's threat to “wipe Moscow off the face of the earth”. This illustrates the pernicious and sinister role the Alliance plays in nonproliferation.

Thus, unity within the nuclear five is a scenario that is as desirable as it is unrealistic. Britain and France would form an alliance with the United States, which would create objective preconditions for a closer Russian-Chinese *tandem*.

Regarding multilateral nuclear disarmament – the object of desire for the *anti-nuclear vanguard* – the discussion will likely revolve around two positions. The most acute and focused is the idea of ensuring greater transparency in the implementation of obligations by nuclear-weapon states under Article VI of the Treaty. The *lowest common denominator* on this issue is the idea of a structured interactive discussion of the national reports of nuclear-weapon states – an idea, as emphasized above, that is not without controversy. In this context, at a minimum, the national reports of those states participating

in NATO joint nuclear missions or covered by so-called “extended deterrence commitments” from their nuclear sponsors should be analyzed just as closely.

In the nonproliferation cluster:

Even at the time of previous Review Conferences, this area was *plagued* by significant controversies. Among the most important topics were the functioning of the so-called “nuclear alliances”, the Iranian and North Korean dossiers, the functioning of the IAEA safeguards system, the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty, and the creation of a WMD-free zone in the Middle East.

The most long-term consequences for the nuclear nonproliferation regime undoubtedly stem from the unprovoked aggression of Israel and the United States against the Islamic Republic of Iran, which involved attacks on nuclear facilities under IAEA safeguards. The basic, indisputable fact is that what happened was a flagrant violation of the fundamental norms of international law. But most importantly, the actions of Washington and West Jerusalem demonstrated that there can be no *middle ground* on the issue of nuclear weapons possession, and that in the face of an acute geopolitical threat, the pursuit of a nuclear arsenal must be accelerated – for only strategic deterrence, i.e., nuclear deterrence, can prevent such attacks.

The launch by the United States, France, Germany and the United Kingdom of the process of reimposing all UN sanctions against Iran, lifted by Security Council Resolution 2231, is also having a corrosive effect on all nonproliferation diplomacy. Its immediate consequence is the further *balkanization* of the international legal system, dividing it into *de jure* and “the law of the strongest and most arrogant”. In the long term, this reduces any incentives for potential nuclear weapons possessors to reach agreements.

In this context, the North Korean nuclear dossier, from Russia's perspective, becomes purely a matter of pious wishes for the universalization of the Treaty. UN sanctions imposed against North Korea have lost all relevance. In this light, the Russian Federation's decision to block the work of the 1718 Committee appears unequivocally correct and logical – especially since it has become a *pliable tool* in the hands of those who wish to impede legitimate trade, economic, and humanitarian cooperation between Russia and North Korea. A completely logical step would be to officially recognize that North Korea has completed its withdrawal from the NPT and is no longer bound by its relevant obligations.

Regarding the Middle East's WMD-free zone, it should be noted that despite four UN-sponsored conferences on this issue, Arab states show no intention of easing the debate on this topic. Moreover, the genocide in Gaza Strip and the threat of using nuclear weapons against Palestinians are justifiably irritating states in the region. Even during the period of actual freezing of the conflict. Consequently, the potential for failure to hold a conference on this topic has not been exhausted.

An important point: a number of states are noticing “the smell of nuclear proliferation” in the air. It's advisable to bring them into the *spotlight*, as this poses a real threat to undermining the Treaty. Let those who speak of such scenarios be devoured by the TPNW radicals.

In the “peaceful atom” cluster:

It's clear that without a resolution to the Ukrainian crisis, the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant and everything related to Ukraine will remain on the agenda. Overall, the discussion around this country, while not fading into the background, is losing its urgency. As already noted, the key is ensuring the security of the Zaporozhye NPP, a Russian nuclear facility that is subject to daily attacks by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. The inadmissibility of such attacks must be clearly stated in any final document. This is a *sine qua non*³⁷.

Regarding other issues related to Ukraine, one thing is certain: the *less the stench of death, the better*. Any verbal provocations on this matter will be met with a factually accurate retort. And if Western governments feel like walking out of the meeting room in shame at this point, so much the better. Russia will not *mince words*, especially since, as Ukrainian Nazism retreats from Russia's regions, additional evidence of their atrocities is uncovered.

Conclusion

In light of the above, it's time to return to the question: “Do we need this kind of hockey?” And how should we “play the match” at the upcoming NPT Review Conference? Should we rely on “assists” with friendly powers or on outscoring opponents? *Feint* or *go all-out*?

...The decision to extend the Treaty reaffirmed the importance of its three pillars: nonproliferation, disarmament, and peaceful use of nuclear energy under IAEA safeguards.

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The answer is simple and obvious: act within the original, fundamental logic of Article 8 of the NPT – *review the operation of this Treaty to ensure that the objectives set out in the Preamble and the provisions of the Treaty are being realized. Its usefulness lies in its role as a mechanism for synchronizing watches and capturing the views of the global majority.* Its purpose is not to provide a paper-based nonproliferation document, but rather to confirm that the Treaty is needed and is being implemented – even if only at the lowest common denominator. This, in turn, will allow us, albeit informally, to determine the agenda for further measures to strengthen this regime.

³⁷ *Sine qua non* – a Latin expression that translates as “without which it is impossible” and refers to a necessary or indispensable condition. It can be an essential element, component, or requirement without which something cannot exist or be realized – *Editor's note*.

CHAPTER 4.

“NUCLEAR NEWCOMERS CLUB”: MAIN TRENDS IN THE SPHERE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS (NON)PROLIFERATION

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The Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and the nuclear nonproliferation regime based on it are undoubtedly *the pillars* of the modern global security system. This is all the more striking given that the Treaty's imminent collapse has been predicted almost since its signing in 1968, implying that politicians' desire to gain *universal leverage* (which is nuclear weapons) will sooner or later prevail over common sense.

There have indeed been occasions to take the *alarmists* at their word – whether it was India and Pakistan's unauthorized entry into the *Nuclear Club*, North Korea's withdrawal from the NPT, Iran's and South Africa's secret military programs, and so on. However, the international community managed to dismiss these incidents as isolated, preventing mass nuclearization.

However, the situation has changed over time, not for the better: the increasing level of conflict in the world, coupled with the escalation of old conflicts (the Indo-Pakistani standoff, the conflict between Iran and Israel, rising tensions in the South China Sea, etc.) – all this provokes repeated attempts to revise the global nuclear status quo. However, for many, this remains limited to the rhetorical question “What if...” – the *checks and balances* generally work.

The *clash of swords* is becoming increasingly clear from Europe as well – *hawks*, dreaming of reconsidering their country's place in the global security system, are preparing to arm themselves. Moreover, they are arming themselves collectively, under the *umbrella* of the European Union—calling it, with the flexible term, *Eurodeterrence*. And hiding behind the convenient guise of the “Permanent Russian threat”, of course.

However, *Nomina sunt odiosa*³⁸. It's important not to blame individual *minions*, but to look ahead, promptly identifying dangerous trends and nipping them in the bud. Especially since not all potential candidates for the *Nuclear Club* are vocal about their intentions. There are those who maintain their silence and commitment to the NPT regime to the very end, while simultaneously gathering strength in case a *decisive breakthrough* is required.

This chapter is based on upcoming volume of PIR Center's collective expert study, which analyzes, using open sources, the nuclear weapons capabilities of several “threshold” states: South Korea, Japan, Ukraine, Türkiye, Iran, Saudi Arabia, Australia, and Germany. It also examines current trends in the NPT review process and debates around the prospects for *European deterrence*. A summary of its key points is provided below.

³⁸ *Nomina sunt odiosa* – is a Latin phrase that translates to “names are hateful” and is used when avoiding direct blame or criticism. It suggests that naming individuals in a reproachful situation is unpleasant or distasteful, and it is often used to avoid making the criticism personal or specific. – *Editor's note*.

Most Turkish people say Turkey should obtain nuclear weapons in new poll

Although the government has no intention to acquire nuclear weapons, Israeli attacks on Iran have spooked the public

The lethal legacy of Aukus nuclear submarines will remain for millennia – and there's no plan to deal with it

“Nuclear Bombs On Rent”? Has Saudi Arabia Just Rented Pakistan’s Nukes By Signing Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement? OPED

Germany Is Rethinking Everything Nuclear

Berlin is rapidly reconsidering its nuclear weapons posture.

“NATO or Nukes”: Why Ukraine’s nuclear revival refuses to die

Iran is again making nuclear weapons? UN Nuclear chief drops shocking hint

Why fears about Japan going nuclear are likely overblown

GABRIELA BERNAL

The atomic weapons taboo remains just that.

Trump will arm South Korea with a nuclear submarine

Figure 12. Publications from leading global news agencies and think tanks on the possible expansion of the “nuclear club” (press clipping, 2024-2025)

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

South Korea: First Among Equals?

The Republic of Korea (ROK) is **among the most obvious candidates** to become the next nuclear-weapon state.

In terms of formal doctrinal guidelines, Seoul remains committed to the nuclear nonproliferation regime. Gaffes by relevant South Korean officials regarding the development of their own nuclear arsenal are *muted*³⁹. Moreover, during a recent meeting with US President Donald Trump, South Korean President Lee Jae-myung emphasized that his country has no plans to develop nuclear weapons.

Currently, the Republic of Korea truly lacks the necessary political capacity for *nuclear sprint*. For example, the country lacks domestic uranium mining, uranium enrichment facilities, or spent nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities. Therefore, the key challenge for implementing a military nuclear program – obtaining sufficient fissile material – has not been resolved. Implementation of the relevant stages of the nuclear fuel cycle is hampered by the provisions of the 2015 US-South Korean 123 *Agreement*⁴⁰. There is also no reliable information on theoretical nuclear weapons research or the development of non-nuclear components for special munitions.

³⁹ In shift, South Korea’s top diplomat says nuclear armament ‘not off the table’ // NK News. February 27, 2025. URL: <https://www.nknews.org/2025/02/in-shift-south-koreas-top-diplomat-says-nuclear-armament-not-off-the-table/>

⁴⁰ 123 Agreements // US Dept. of State. URL: <https://www.state.gov/bureau-of-international-security-and-nonproliferation/releases/2025/01/123-agreements>

Conducting OSINT research is fraught with two potential pitfalls. The first is the *echo effect*, when information from a single source spreads rapidly. In this case, there's a temptation to assume it's reliable due to the large number of publications. It's important to remember that the desire to confirm an already formed opinion is one of the mental distortions inherent in the human psyche.

The second pitfall is the tendency for unreliable information to spread rapidly, which also clouds the information space.

“Methodology and Practice of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) for International Security, Arms Control, and WMD Nonproliferation Studies”

<https://pircenter.org/editions/methodology-osint/>

At the same time, the Republic of Korea has a solid foundation for the rapid launch of such a project. The country operates 26 nuclear power units, has established nuclear fuel production, and has developed its own technologies in both uranium enrichment and radiochemical reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel. Tens of thousands of nuclear specialists have been trained, and scientific and technical capabilities have been established, including for the fabrication of high explosive lenses and the associated automation used in nuclear munitions.

ROK's wide range of missile systems, including submarine-launched ones, deserves special mention. In 2021, Seoul succeeded in lifting US-imposed restrictions on the range of domestically produced missiles. According to open media reports, the most powerful South Korean missile (*Hyunmoo-5*) currently has a range of approximately 3,000 kilometers and a payload of up to 8 tons⁴¹.

It appears that the South Koreans are diligently preparing the technical and ideological foundation that could support the political decision to develop nuclear weapons. In this context, Seoul's attempts to secure US support for the development of its own nuclear submarine are noteworthy. An agreement to hold substantive consultations on this issue was reached during the US-South Korean summit in October 2025.

Another *sign of change* is the announced negotiations to lift the aforementioned restrictions on South Korea's nuclear fuel cycle programs. If such an agreement is reached, the Republic of Korea will pave the way for itself to obtain the fissile material needed for nuclear weapons.

The *target* of potential nuclear deterrence in South Korea is clear: the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK), an ally of our country. However, the actual dynamics of Seoul's advancement toward a strategic arsenal will depend not on Pyongyang's specific actions, but on the perceived reliability of the American *nuclear umbrella*. It is important to emphasize that the US-ROK alliance, according to the 2023 *Washington Declaration*, already has nuclear status, and its evolution toward

⁴¹ See e.g.: What is South Korea's 'monster missile', and what does it mean for relations with the North? // *the Guardian*. October 23, 2025. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/oct/23/south-korea-monster-missile-hyunmoo-5-balance-power-north>

enhanced extended deterrence formats, modeled on NATO's joint nuclear missions, would in any case pose a threat to Russian interests.

Basic public acceptance of the nuclear option, given the simmering inter-Korean conflict, has been established. According to public opinion polls, approximately 77% of South Koreans support developing their own nuclear weapons. However, these figures reflect more emotion than substance. A survey of South Korean academics and experts shows that actual support, given the risks to the alliance with the US, is around 30-40%.

The further evolution of Seoul's nuclear policy, as already noted, will depend on the dynamics of relations with the United States. At the same time, concerns about possible sanctions from Washington appear to be less pressing than they once were. Given the importance of the bilateral alliance, there is no guarantee that the Americans, in the event of another rebalancing of their interests, will take effective measures to prevent South Korea from acquiring its own nuclear weapons or to *punish* it for such aspirations.

In these conditions, from the nonproliferation standpoint, a coordinated response from ROK's neighbours in the region, and above all, Russia and China, is of key importance.

Japan: Under the *Shadow of the Past*

The analysis shows that Japan remains **far from developing its own nuclear weapons**, despite statements from right-wing Japanese politicians (*nuclear hawks*), including the current prime minister. Anti-nuclear sentiment in Japanese society and the lack of a clear strategic deterrent requirement comparable to South Korea's currently keep Tokyo in the *non-nuclear camp*.

It should be noted that, according to sociological surveys, the majority of Japanese people remain anti-nuclear. For example, 51.8% of those surveyed by the Japanese *Red Cross Society* (June 2025) opposed Tokyo's acquisition of nuclear status. It is also noteworthy that 28.3% of respondents consider the possession of nuclear weapons for self-defense inevitable, and 27.3% consider nuclear weapons an effective deterrent⁴².

⁴² Sample size: 1200 people. See: Almost 70% of respondents believe a world without war will never become a reality. About half of respondents believe Japan is currently at peace, but they also express concern about the future // *Red Cross Japan*. July 29, 2025. URL: https://www.jrc.or.jp/press/2025/0729_048166.html (in Jap.)

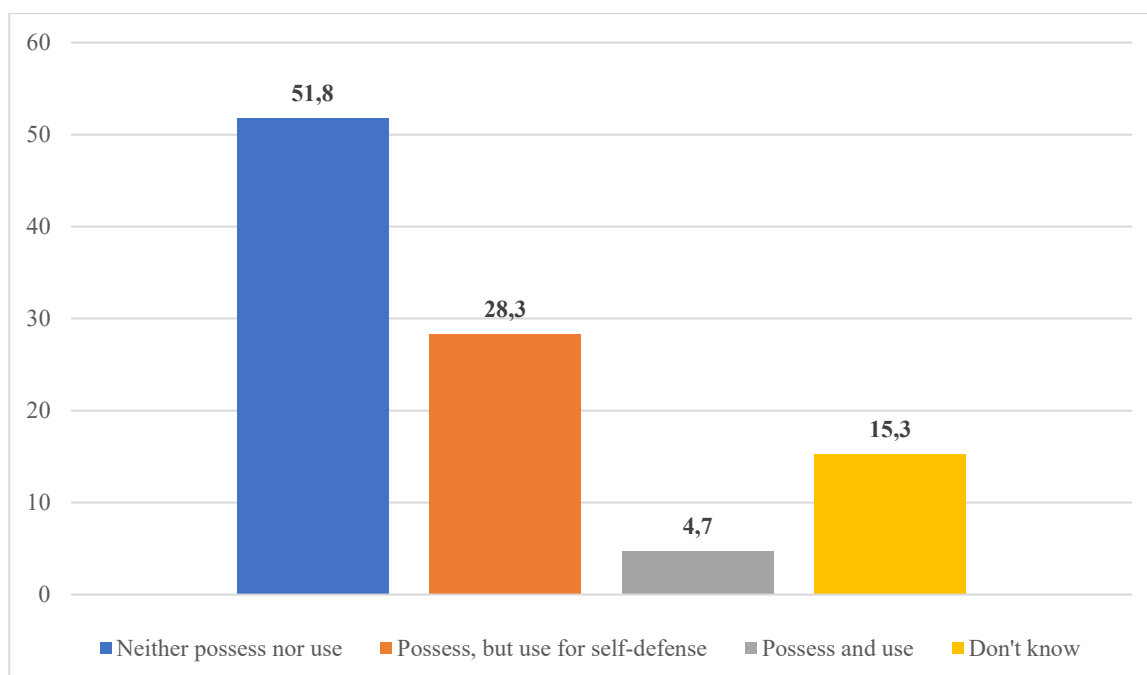


Figure 13. If Japan had nuclear weapons, what should it do with them? (as of July 2025, 1200 respondents, %)

Based on: Red Cross Japan (https://www.jrc.or.jp/press/2025/0729_048166.html)

Over the past 10 years, this represents a gradual increase in support for the concept of nuclear deterrence in Japanese society. In 2015, only 10.3% of respondents believed the US *nuclear umbrella* was necessary to maintain security⁴³. In 2020, three-quarters of respondents also supported Japan's accession to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (17.3% opposed)⁴⁴.

The trend toward increasing public acceptability doesn't play a dominant role. Japanese society still appears to live in the *shadow* of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and there's no clear demand to abandon the three non-nuclear principles. At the same time, the topic of nuclear weapons **is no longer taboo**. Right-wing experts and politicians are inclined to further hype the nuclear issue to boost their popularity.

In terms of technical capabilities, Japan has everything it needs. In the context of its military-applied nuclear program, the planned launch of the spent nuclear fuel reprocessing plant in Rokasho in 2027 and the expected delivery of American *Tomahawk* cruise missiles to the *Land of the Rising Sun* are noteworthy.

The current primary scenario is maintaining a non-nuclear status while simultaneously strengthening the American presence and possibly strengthening trilateral coordination with Seoul and Washington on nuclear issues. However, should relations with these capitals deteriorate, the real marker of the Japanese leadership's plans will be, at the political level, further mobilization of public opinion in favor of abandoning the three “non-nuclear principles”, and, alternatively, attempts to return

⁴³ Atomic Bomb Awareness Survey (Hiroshima, Nagasaki, and Nationwide) Simple Count Results. URL: https://www.nhk.or.jp/bunken/research/yoron/pdf/20150805_1.pdf (in Jap.)

⁴⁴ Japanese Public Opinion, Political Persuasion, and the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons // Belfer Center. URL: <http://belfercenter.org/publication/japanese-public-opinion-political-persuasion-and-treaty-prohibition-nuclear-weapons>

plutonium stockpiles stored in France and the UK—possibly under the pretext of fabricating MOX fuel (such plans already exist) to expand the national nuclear energy program.

Ukraine: Empty Vessel Makes the Most Noise

In 2024-2025, Ukraine continued to “warm up” public opinion about the possibility of developing its own nuclear weapons. In this context, it's worth highlighting both Volodimir Zelenskyy's statements about the need to acquire a strategic missile defense system in case Kiev is not accepted into NATO, as well as expert publications asserting Ukraine's significant nuclear weapons potential.

The rationale behind such invective is clear. Through such *verbal provocations*, Kiev hopes to extract additional economic investment from its European and American “patrons” and, more importantly, to provide military support for the regime.

Kiev has few real opportunities to play the *nuclear card*. Given the lack of its own uranium enrichment capacity, the “plutonium route” to nuclear weapons appears more tempting for Ukraine. The country's spent nuclear fuel does contain approximately 7.4 tons of reactor-grade plutonium. However, Ukraine lacks industrial-scale capacity for its separation, and developing it would realistically require at least two to three years and several billion US dollars.

The situation with delivery vehicles is slightly better. Specifically, *Flamingo* cruise missiles could be used to deliver a potential nuclear warhead (but their actual deployment status is still unclear).

At the same time, from the perspective of our country's interests, any *flirtation* with the topic of nuclear weapons by a state that poses an acute threat to us and has become a *springboard* for waging a hybrid war against Russia is unacceptable. In this context, any research infrastructure potentially suitable for creating a “Ukrainian bomb” must be destroyed in a Special Military Operation. The previous strikes (presumably) on the Kharkov Institute of Physics and Technology, where, according to *RIA Novosti* News Agency, potential weapons-grade research was underway, confirm Russia's determination to act preemptively.

Australia: the Controversial AUKUS Factor⁴⁵

Given Australia's lack of domestic uranium enrichment capacity, nuclear power plants, and, consequently, spent nuclear fuel reprocessing facilities, **the prospects for launching an Australian military nuclear program are slim.** Given the completed AUKUS review in the United States, it seems entirely possible that the program could reach a *point of no return* within the next few years.

Clearly, transferring large quantities of highly enriched uranium to a non-nuclear state poses a serious challenge to the nonproliferation regime. The missile component of the partnership is already fueling an arms race in the Asia-Pacific region. However, the project's main impact is ideological. In the future, the practice of transferring nuclear submarines could be replicated in other states with *impeccable nonproliferation records*, such as Japan or South Korea. Given their more developed

⁴⁵ For more information on the topic, see Chapter 17 of this Yearbook – *Editor's note*.

nuclear fuel cycle infrastructure and potential loopholes in the verification regime, it cannot be ruled out that the deployment of nuclear submarines in these countries will be a *prelude* to nuclear proliferation.

Germany: Choosing a Trajectory

The start of the Russian Armed Forces' Special Military Operation in Ukraine came as a shock to the German military-political elite and led to **a fundamental change** (*Zettenweide*) **in Germany's defense policy**. The following points deserve attention in the long term.

It's clear that, over the next five to ten years, pacifist and anti-nuclear sentiments in German society will be leveled out. While, since the late 2000s, approximately half of Germans favored the removal of American nuclear weapons from German soil, now approximately half of respondents in Germany support maintaining and even deepening cooperation with Washington in this area. Former Chancellor Olaf Scholz's decision to purchase American *F-35A* aircraft cements Berlin's participation in NATO nuclear missions.

With the second Trump administration, discussions have resumed in German politics about a contingency plan, should Washington at some point decide to abandon the European theater of operations. Among the options discussed are developing its own nuclear weapons or participating in a collective European nuclear deterrent force based on the French and, possibly, British nuclear arsenals.

Regarding an independent military-applied nuclear program, Berlin currently views such a scenario as **purely hypothetical**. It appears that the German leadership, partly due to the conservatism of German strategic culture, will delay such a decision until *the last minute*. Moreover, despite Germany's considerable technical potential (in particular, it has a uranium enrichment plant), the comprehensive weaponization work will require some time. However, given its developed technical infrastructure, the availability of a powerful supercomputer base for calculating and theoretically justifying nuclear weapons, and the country's own production of high-performance conventional explosives, there is no doubt that this work will be implemented relatively quickly if a political decision is made.

Regarding *Eurodeterrence*, judging by expert publications from French think tanks and statements by Emmanuel Macron, Paris is only prepared for a conceptual discussion of the role of French nuclear weapons in ensuring European security. For the current French leadership, this is a *PR opportunity* and a way to highlight its role in ensuring European strategic autonomy. In reality, however, the French arsenal lacks the flexibility of the American forces and assets deployed in NATO's joint nuclear missions.

It appears that the American leadership may respond to the concerns of its European *satellites* and deploy more non-nuclear weapons in the European theater of operations. In a worst-case scenario, this could entail the creation of infrastructure for nuclear missions on NATO's Eastern European border (in Poland, the Czech Republic, and the Baltic states), or even the direct involvement of these

countries in nuclear weapons. From a Russian perspective, this is a *casus belli* requiring a decisive and, possibly, preemptive response.

Saudi Arabia: Ambiguous Ambitions

Despite having built a certain scientific, technical, and human resource base, Saudi Arabia's starting position **is far from sufficient for developing a military-grade nuclear program**. Previous speculation about a secret nuclear project has either been deemed unfounded (due to objective discrepancies between defectors' statements and reality) or requires further verification.

There's also no political decision from the Saudi elites (which, moreover, must be synchronized with the position of the theological community – at least at the level of conducting the necessary “ideological preparation” involving the Kingdom's spiritual authorities). The *scare* mongering of recent years about *symmetrical steps* in the event of Iran acquiring nuclear weapons has become depersonalized⁴⁶ and is rarely raised in official discourse. There are also no signs of public opinion preparing for unpopular and escalatory steps. There are also no attempts (except for statements by unnamed courtiers to the foreign press) to emphasize that the defense pact with Pakistan has a clear *nuclear basis*⁴⁷.

To verify the veracity of information, you can use an eight-question algorithm:

1. Who is the author of the content?
2. What precisely did you discover? Is it a thorough description, a validated idea, a succinct analysis, or only a theoretical presentation?
3. Where was the outcome discovered? What sort of resource is it?
4. Is there a link to it?
5. Who contributed to the creation of this data? Where is the server hosted, and who owns it?
6. Why was this content produced and made available online?
7. How was the content produced? Was it a fake created in less than a day, or was it the product of years of research?
8. When was the resource that held this data developed, published, and updated?

“Methodology and Practice of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) for International Security, Arms Control, and WMD Nonproliferation Studies”, 2025

<https://pircenter.org/editions/methodology-osint/>

Modern Saudi nuclear policy is based on a sober analysis of the benefits and costs of a hypothetical nuclear arsenal. The negatives far outweigh the potential benefits. Furthermore, thanks to active international cooperation and developing military contacts with the US and China, Riyadh has no need to acquire additional tools to defend its national interests beyond those already available.

⁴⁶ Saudi prince warns of 'war with the entire world' in the event of a nuclear strike // *Russian Gazette*. September 21, 2023. URL: <https://rg.ru/2023/09/21/saudovskij-princ-predupredil-o-vojne-so-vsem-mirom-v-sluchae-iadernogo-udara.html> (in Russ.).

⁴⁷ Saudi Arabia, nuclear-armed Pakistan sign mutual defence pact // *Reuters*. September 17, 2025. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/saudi-arabia-nuclear-armed-pakistan-sign-mutual-defence-pact-2025-09-17/>

Saudi elites continue to emphasize peaceful nuclear energy as an indicator of the Kingdom's prosperity and accelerated transformation. Switching to a military approach before achieving a certain level of peaceful nuclear energy risks cutting off access to advanced technologies, which would push Riyadh back into the *race* among Arabian monarchies to become the leading power in the Gulf. The minimum goal for Riyadh is to bring its national nuclear program up to the level of the UAE, and the maximum is to elevate it to the level of Iran. However, for now, the Saudis are focused only on the first stage.

Of course, it's possible that Saudi Arabia would be interested in maintaining uncertainty about its actual capabilities and intentions; it would continue to monitor the Iranian nuclear project and respond to any negative developments (from Riyadh's perspective). However, even in this case, the prospect of Saudi Arabia acquiring its own nuclear arsenal can currently be assessed as unlikely.

Türkiye: a Strategy of “Cautious Populism”

Despite the Turkish elite's periodic attempts to probe public opinion on the issue of acquiring a nuclear arsenal⁴⁸, Türkiye is **still technologically far** from being able to independently launch a military nuclear project.

The country has a good *starting position*, but its technological potential remains underdeveloped: the most sensitive elements of the nuclear fuel cycle – uranium enrichment and spent nuclear fuel reprocessing – are missing. Given the current IAEA *Additional Protocol*, it is highly unlikely that Ankara has the capacity to create such infrastructure undetected. Furthermore, the delivery vehicle development program is only just gaining momentum—current resources are insufficient, and ambitious IRBM projects are still at the prototype stage, preventing Ankara from quickly consolidating its achievements and stockpiling a sufficient number of warheads before the punitive measures are activated.

Diplomatic *restraints* are also effective. For example, the potential military conversion of Ankara's nuclear ambitions is guaranteed to deepen Ankara's rifts with its neighbours, provoking not only estrangement in relations with the US and EU countries but also exacerbating the conflict with Israel. Israeli *hawks* led by Benjamin Netanyahu will not allow the emergence of another nuclear-armed power in the Middle East (even one de facto not hostile to it) and, to maintain the balance of power, will not hesitate to sacrifice trade and economic cooperation with Türkiye.

However, even in the face of a forceful response from Israel, Türkiye, having decided to pursue its own nuclear arsenal, would almost certainly find itself in diplomatic and economic isolation. Given its heavy dependence on foreign trade and the instability of the country's financial system, this would guarantee a sharp decline in living standards and a surge in social tensions. Recep Erdoğan's government is clearly unwilling to take such risks.

⁴⁸ See e.g.: How can we prevent this evil purpose? // *Yeni Safak*. URL: <https://www.yenisafak.com/yazarlar/hayreddin-karaman/bu-melun-amaci-nasil-engelleriz-4643524> (in Turkish); Fatwas as Tools of Religious Populism: The Case of Turkish Islamist Scholar Hayrettin Karaman // European Center of Populism Studies. September 1, 2024. URL: <https://www.populismstudies.org/fatwas-as-tools-of-religious-populism-the-case-of-turkish-islamist-scholar-hayrettin-karaman/>

On the other hand, Erdoğan hasn't forgotten about *nuclear populism*. He also notes the gradually emerging demand in Turkish society for an effective deterrent against Israel and other regional adversaries⁴⁹.

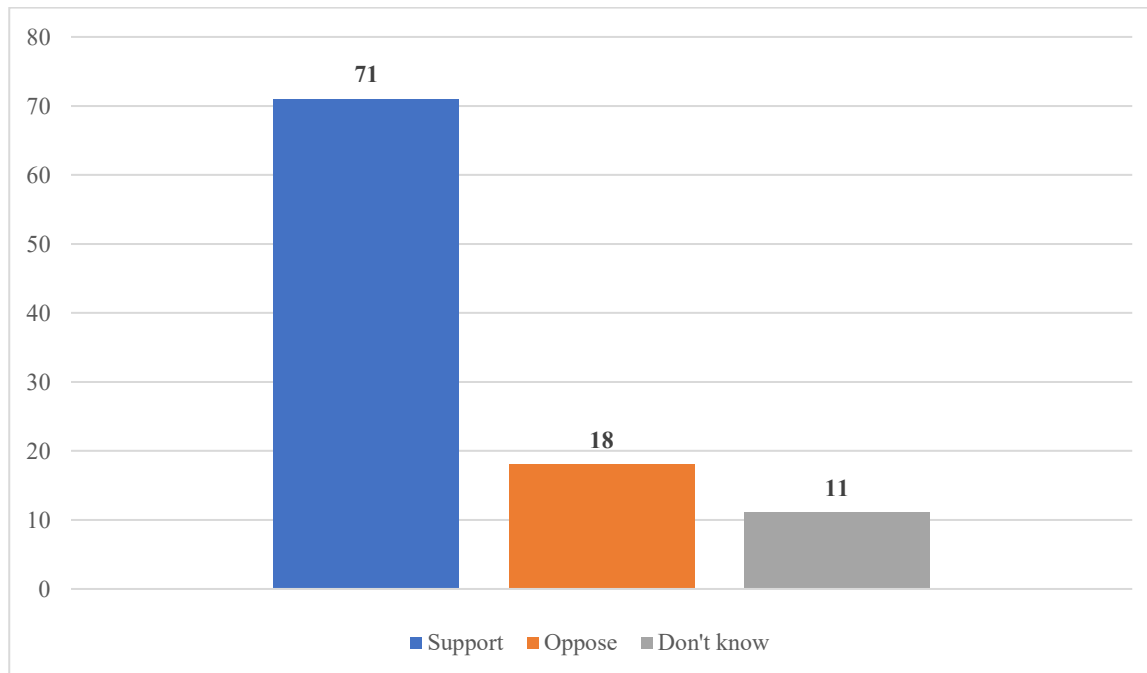


Figure 14. Should Türkiye obtain nuclear weapons? (as of July, 2025. 2 000 respondents in Türkiye, %)

Based on: Middle East Eye (<https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/most-turks-say-turkey-should-obtain-nuclear-weapons-poll>)

For now, this issue has been mitigated by shifting the focus to hypersonic weapons. However, nuclear arsenals appear more deadly and threatening to the public. This means Ankara will sooner or later be forced to revisit the topic. However, even then, the nuclear weapons issue will be used more as a platform for attracting voters than as an area where the country intends to take real escalatory steps.

Iran: A Controversial Dossier

Among the potential “nuclear newcomers”, Iran remains the player most *hotly debated*. Estimates of the time Iran would need to develop warheads, prevalent among experts (especially Western ones), are generally oversimplified and range from three months to a year and a half, periodically shifting upward or downward to suit political expediency. Moreover, such time estimates are typically based on mathematical modeling of centrifuge efficiency and do not take into account the subsequent work of so-called weaponization.

Iranian capabilities are estimated solely on the basis of open data, which, given the closure of Iranian production facilities from *prying eyes*, increases the margin of error. At the same time, researchers from various schools of thought generally agree: despite some damage inflicted on Iran during the standoff with Israel (and the US and several European countries that supported it), Tehran **still**

⁴⁹ Most Turkish people say Turkey should obtain nuclear weapons in new poll // *Middle East Eye*. July 17, 2025. URL: <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/most-turks-say-turkey-should-obtain-nuclear-weapons-poll>

possesses the technical potential sufficient to create nuclear weapons. While continuing to adhere to the symbolic self-restraints that have been taken upon themselves.

The prospect of resuming the previously closed *Amad* project (or even accelerating it) under current conditions appears extremely dim, due both to *gaps* in the work of Iranian scientists at the time (and the objective obsolescence of some data and technologies), and to Tehran's loss of some of its unique knowledge holders. Furthermore, despite a relatively high level of scientific and technological development (as well as the gradual “closure” of the Iranian nuclear sector from prying eyes after the collapse of the JCPOA in 2018), Tehran has still not resolved the issue of protecting key scientists – a resource that is much more difficult to restore than technical infrastructure. Furthermore, the possibility of completely moving work on the nuclear project underground is also questionable, given the active attention of foreign intelligence agencies (not only those of unfriendly states) to this area of Iranian scientific work.



Figure 15. Taleghani 2 (as of September 27, 2025)

Source: Institute for Science and International Security (<https://isis-online.org/isis-reports/taleghani-2-pre-and-post-strike-assessment>)

The data available to date remains insufficient to conclude with a high degree of certainty that the authorities have made a political decision to abandon the exclusively peaceful nature of the nuclear program. The upheavals surrounding the JCPOA, Iran's reduction of its commitments under the deal, and the final escalation of the conflict with Israel into an existential standoff continue to blur the line between signs of peace enforcement and the initiation of a military nuclear program. Clearly, opposition to IAEA inspection activities is consistent with the logic of a response to US actions, and the strengthening of measures to protect nuclear physicists is driven by the risk of sabotage.

There are no signs of public sentiment being whipped up in favor of the nuclear option to justify the growing economic difficulties in the eyes of the population (although the issue is being probed in

both directions – toward escalation and a new “deal” with the West). There is no reliable information about the creation of any superstructures empowered to coordinate the military-applied nuclear program.

Israel: *Double Uncertainty* Continues

Israel **retains its informal status as the Middle East's “only nuclear power”** – although it does not officially confirm (but also does not deny) the existence of a nuclear triad (the so-called *Amimut* concept).

Within the country (and within the global Jewish community as a whole), its future remains a subject of ongoing debate. At various times, Israeli military and civilian officials, as well as members of the scientific community, have opposed *Amimut*, believing that public self-restraint hinders the development of national nuclear science and the military-industrial complex and creates leverage for external pressure (primarily in the interests of the United States)⁵⁰. However, the number of supporters of maintaining this “double uncertainty” still far outweighs those opposed. Even the most ardent skeptics acknowledge that *Amimut*, despite its ambiguity, is an effective tool for curbing the ambitions of Arab countries and Türkiye. The latter allegedly hesitate to use conventional weapons against Israel for fear of facing “an exponentially greater response”. Meanwhile, *Amimut* has been less effective against Iran in recent years, but other restraints available to Tel Aviv come into play here.

The most interesting results usually come from comparative analysis of images of the same object taken at different times, looking for changes. Look for changes in the terrain, land clearing, buildings, or roads. Sometimes, changes in the terrain are obvious. In other cases, it's impossible to clearly determine from satellite images whether a building has actually been constructed or whether construction is still underway. In this case, careful observation of shadows can help. If a tall building or object is under construction, a shadow will appear in the image, which can be used to determine the degree of development and even the time and distance.

“Methodology and Practice of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) for International Security, Arms Control, and WMD Nonproliferation Studies”, 2025

<https://pircenter.org/editions/methodology-osint/>

The balance of power and the tone of assessments are also influenced by the political climate. Israeli society has been tilting to the right for several years now, accelerating after the escalation of tensions in the Gaza Strip (i.e., since October 2023). The authorities' tendency to portray Israel as a *besieged fortress* creates a predisposed negative attitude toward its neighbours and regional opponents.

⁵⁰ Cohen A. The Worst-Kept Secret. Israel's Bargain with the Bomb // Columbia University Press. URL: <http://cup.columbia.edu/book/978-0-231-13698-3/the-worstkept-secret>

At the same time, political forces in Israel are fragmented – there is no absolute consensus either within the *opposition camp* or in the ruling coalition; certain figures (mostly former high-ranking security officials) prefer to keep their distance, attempting to independently form a “third force”. It is important to understand, however, that a fully formed and accepted anti-nuclear force currently does not exist in Israel. Both the ruling and opposition camps do not support further adherence to the principle of nuclear ambiguity or the deliberate overstatement of their own capabilities in order to deter and intimidate opponents. The only difference is that the right-winged fractions, led by Netanyahu, intends to continue raising the stakes in the conflict with Iran, hinting at inevitable new clashes “until the nuclear threat is completely eliminated”, while the opposition allows for the possibility of a minor “détente” with Tehran and forces loyal to it – at least until the level of 2021–2022. Supporters of nuclear transparency, however, are generally disunited; They belong to small-scale (usually left-wing) parties and organizations and have a relatively low chance of crossing the electoral threshold for the Knesset. Furthermore, anti-nuclear rhetoric is not the main focus of their speeches and has recently been almost completely replaced by Palestinian themes.



Figure 16. Construction work at the Shimon Peres Negev Nuclear Research Center near the city of Dimona (Israel).
Source: open data

Overall, it's unlikely to see any fundamental changes in Israel's nuclear policy in the foreseeable future – it will continue to be based on the same principles as before. At the same time, Tel Aviv is almost guaranteed to begin increasing its intelligence and subversive activities against Iran in order to more effectively and promptly prevent potential nuclear weapons development.

Conclusion

The emergence of new nuclear states on the world political map remains unlikely – most players that have approached “threshold status” on one track or another still lack the comprehensive capability to convert their nuclear programs to military use.

Moreover, existing restraining factors – the continued stability of the NPT as an international norm, the vulnerability of potential *troublemakers* to economic sanctions, and the high cost of full-fledged nuclear programs and the development of delivery systems – are currently sufficient to keep these states on the brink of collapse. There are clearly no plans to expand the *Nuclear Club* or open a “newcomers' section” within it.

However, it's not worth making any final decisions here, nor should we fall prey to false complacency. The US's excessive indulgence of several *nuclear aspirants* (Australia and South Korea), Japan's revanchism, which is acquiring *nuclear overtones*, and Ukraine's ongoing attempts to turn the nuclear weapons issue into a *bargaining chip* in negotiations and thereby compensate for setbacks on the battlefield – all of this is creating dangerous turbulence and undermining confidence in the sustainability of the international nonproliferation regime in its current form.

Russia – as a superpower and one of the depositaries of the NPT – should constantly focus on the small nuclear steps taken by other players, combat *double standards*, and build a new security architecture with minimal dividing lines. This is one of the key ideas enshrined in the *Greater Eurasia* security concept, and it can (and should) be applied to nuclear nonproliferation. Otherwise, carelessness and overconfidence in the NPT's steadfastness could *backfire* in the near future.

And not just on us.

CHAPTER 5.

OUTER SPACE: ARENA FOR AN ARMS RACE OR A PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION?

Andrey Malov

Nowadays, the intensity of space activities is rapidly growing, especially in the military sphere, new technologies are emerging that change strategic approaches and capabilities, private companies are becoming increasingly involved in space exploration, the intensity of space traffic has increased sharply, which together have made the possibility of dual use of almost all spacecraft a reality⁵¹.

In this context, the very nature of space security is changing – a “narrow” understanding of security no longer corresponds to reality.

The militarization of space, including its “weaponization”, that is, the deliberate deployment of precursors of strike systems, the development of anti-satellite weapons, space-based missile defense elements, the possibility of non-kinetic – non-observable impact on individual spacecraft and satellite constellations, the uncontrolled increase in space debris, as well as cyber threats – all this creates a complex and interconnected system of risks for various areas of activity in space and requires a systematic and comprehensive approach.

As the scope of space activities expanded, the number of launching states increased, new technological capabilities emerged, and the number of spacecrafts increased dramatically, space became a potential arena for confrontation⁵².

A striking example of how space security issues became increasingly linked to global strategic stability was the American *Strategic Defense Initiative* (SDI) program⁵³.

⁵¹ Launches // *Roscosmos*. URL: <https://www.roscosmos.ru/launch/2022/> (in Russ.); United Nations Register of Objects Launched into Outer Space // UNOOSA. URL: <https://www.unoosa.org/oosa/en/spaceobjectregister/submissions/states-organisations.html>

⁵² Countries with Space Programs 2023 // World Population Review. URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-space-programs>

⁵³ See: Stares P. The militarization of space: U.S. policy, 1945-1984 // Ithaca, N.Y.: Cornell University Press, 1985. P.147-149; National Security Space Strategy. Unclassified Summary. January 11, 2011. URL: <http://archive.defense.gov/home/features/2011/0111/docs/NationalSecuritySpaceStrategyUnclassifiedSummary/Jan2011.pdf>; FitzGerald F. Way out there in the blue: Reagan, Star Wars, and the end of the Cold War // N.Y.: Simon & Schuster, 2000; Wright D., Grego L., Anti-satellite Capabilities of Planned US Missile Defense Systems // Disarmament Diplomacy. 2002. №68. URL <http://www.acronym.org.uk/old/archive/dd/dd68/68op02.htm>

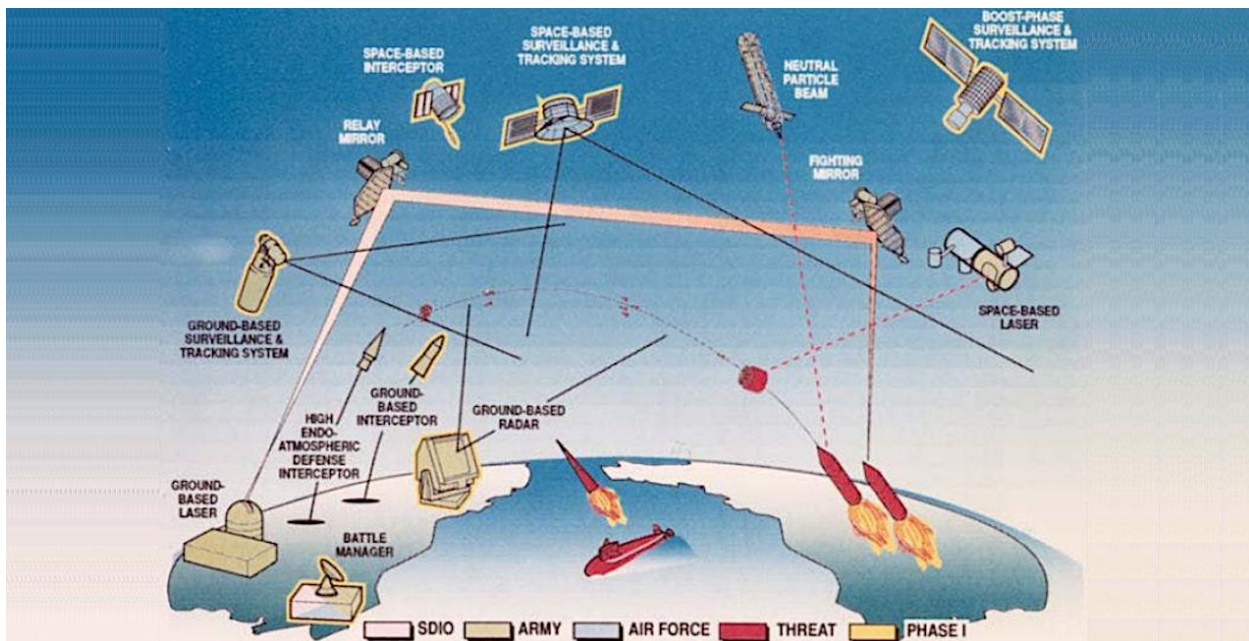


Figure 17. The United States Star Wars (Strategic Defense Initiative, SDI) Program proposed by President Reagan in 1983

Source: NASA Watch (<https://nasawatch.com/trumpspace/back-to-the-future-sdi-2-0/>)

These trends were accompanied by the increasing complexity of space activities, the densification of space traffic with the simultaneous development of space cooperation. A broader concept of space activity security began to form.

Even despite the progressive role of a number of international agreements, primarily the basic Outer Space Treaty of 1967 and subsequent international instruments in this area, in modern conditions space security faces growing new challenges⁵⁴.

In this context, the increasing dependence on space infrastructure in virtually all areas of human civilization as a whole makes us vulnerable to a wide variety of threats, ranging from cyberattacks to deliberate destruction or unobserved negative impact on spacecraft⁵⁵. Thus, the security of space activities, without which **cooperation and collaboration are impossible**, is called upon to evolve from a narrow focus on the protection of space property to a broader understanding, including ensuring sustainable and responsible exploration of space in the long term.

In this context, it should be recognized that we are currently approaching a situation where, due to the development of new military-technical and information capabilities, space is already effectively becoming a new sphere of confrontation and even, potentially, a theater of military operations.

⁵⁴ Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies // United Nations. URL: http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/outer_space_governing.shtml (in Russ).

⁵⁵ On the Impact of the Militarization of Outer Space on Strategic Stability and International Security // MFA of the Russian Federation. URL: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/1709128/ (in Russ.); Designation Of U.S. Air Force Projects. URL: <https://www.designation-systems.net/usmilav/projects.html>; Robotic Manipulation and Capture in Space: A Survey // *Frontiers*. July 19, 2021. URL: <https://www.frontiersin.org/journals/robotics-and-ai/articles/10.3389/frobt.2021.686723/full>

To avoid a catastrophic scenario, it is necessary to move towards strengthening international cooperation, accompanying these efforts with measures to create effective mechanisms of international legal control, including the still existing possibility of preemptive measures to prevent space from becoming a “battlefield”. We are talking about a legally binding agreement. The basis is there – the PPWT project, as well as a number of basic parameters, enshrined in the final report of the Second Groups of Governmental Experts (GGE) on Prevention of an arms race in space (PAROS) from August 2024⁵⁶.

Certainly, such agreements, supported by qualitatively new technological solutions, in particular, a space situation monitoring system, would allow the foundations to be laid for agreements on strategic stability, space security and cooperation.

Arms Race in Space – How Real is It?

Are there currently grounds to speak of the existence of prerequisites for the deployment of weapons in outer space? The answer to this question is more likely *affirmative* than negative. There is a widespread opinion that, in essence, the space arms race has already been unleashed. There are international legal gaps that allow the deployment of weapons in outer space, and corresponding military-strategic prerequisites and, as one might assume, scientific and technical capabilities.

How might the possible implementation of concepts for placing weapons in space affect strategic stability and international security, as well as the safety of space activities in general? To answer this question, it seems appropriate to consider some possible strategic situations.

It is impossible to rule out the possibility that other countries will not be able to counter the US efforts to create space weapons for various purposes, as well as anti-satellite weapons of various types of basing, with adequate measures for military-technical and economic reasons. The United States, through substantial financial injections into the relevant branches of science and industry, can achieve a technological “breakaway” and create a powerful structure of space weapons. In combination with a global missile defense system with possible elements of space basing, the factor of the US monopoly on space weapons and anti-satellite weapons can play a primary role in shaping the military-political situation in the world, ensuring dominance both in “peaceful” space and on Earth⁵⁷.

The monopoly of space weapons would cause the international community a constant psychological feeling of the *sword of Damocles*. The strategic situation in space would become difficult to predict

⁵⁶ Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space // UNODA. URL: <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/67322>; Draft – Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects // United Nations. URL: <http://www.un.org/ru/document/ods.asp?m=CD/1985>

⁵⁷ Defense Space Strategy Summary. June 2020 / US Department of Defense. July 17, 2020. URL: <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2223539/department-of-defense-releases-defense-space-strategy/>; “We are in danger”: how the USA will defend space // *Gazeta.ru*. June 18, 2020. URL: <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/06/18/13121929.shtml> (in Russ.); Ensuring U.S. leadership in space // Space Foundation. 04.03.2016. URL: <http://www.spacefoundation.org>. Graham W. SpaceX launches first X-37B launch with a Falcon 9 // NASA Space Flight. September 6, 2017. URL: <http://www.nasaspacesflight.com/2017/09/spacex-first-x-37b-launch-falcon-9/>; NATO approves alliance concept for deterrence in space // *TASS*. June 27, 2019. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/6600988> (in Russ.), etc.

due to the global zone of action of space weapons, the possibility of covert influence on space objects of other countries and their disabling.

The international situation would be subject to a strong destabilizing effect due to the possibility of a sudden use of space weapons. At the same time, selective space weapons would sharply lower the “threshold” for their use.

The deployment of strike weapons in space would lead to the emergence of suspicion in relations between states.

However, it seems more realistic to proceed from the fact that industrially developed countries are unlikely to remain indifferent to the possible intentions of one state to place strike weapons in outer space. Most likely, attempts may be made to prevent this and to counteract such intentions by creating and deploying their own types of space weapons, means of countering space weapons systems, or by building up other types of weapons, including nuclear weapons. The result will be a qualitative arms race, the danger of armed confrontation, the undermining of the nonproliferation regime, the stimulation of armed rivalry, but now with the coverage of a new sphere – outer space.

In this case, the prospect of the gradual transformation of outer space into an arena of armed confrontation, into a potential theater of military operations is not something abstract. In these conditions, talking about the safety of space activities, about cooperation and collaboration in the exploration of outer space and celestial bodies will hardly be appropriate at all.

As of 2025, no nation has deployed a strike weapon into space that was specifically designed and produced as a “weapon”. However, this does not mean that the elements of such weapons systems, their precursors are no longer being tested in space. Unfortunately, evidence of such trends is only multiplying. In addition, unobservable methods of influence can also be used to destroy or disable objects in space – lasers, directed energy, high-frequency and electromagnetic radiation, etc.⁵⁸.

At the same time, it is becoming increasingly difficult to draw a line between “peaceful” spacecraft and military spacecraft, which leads to the realization that almost the entire space potential of states can be considered as potential that can be used for military purposes. This new reality is gradually making its way and, in part, has already found its reflection, for example, in the report of the second GGE on PAROS from August 2022⁵⁹.

The preparation of the foundations for the development of a full-scale arms race in space is becoming a reality. This worst-case scenario can only be avoided by developing and adopting a legally binding document containing reliable guarantees against the introduction of weapons into space, to which all significant space powers will become participants. An analysis of the existing indirect and direct signs

⁵⁸ Richelson J. The wizards of Langley: inside the CIA's Directorate of Science and Technology. Boulder: Westview Press, 2001. P. 247-249; Space Threats: Orbit Militarization in 2025 // *AviaPro* Agency. April 19, 2025. URL: <https://avia.pro/blog/kosmicheskie-ugrozy-militarizaciya-orbity-v-2025-godu> (in Russ.); NASA Space Flight. *Soyuz 2-1B* launches *EKS-1* to upgrade Russian Early Warning System // NASA Space Flight. URL: <https://www.nasaspaceflight.com/2015/11soyuz-2-1b-eks-1-russian-early-warning-system/>

⁵⁹ Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space // UNODA. URL: <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/67322>

of preparation for an arms race in space allows us to assert that there is less and less time and opportunity **for preemptive diplomatic steps on PAROS.**

Modern Militarization of Space

It should be recognized that in modern realities, space is considered a vital environment that creates conditions for ensuring strategic superiority in the military sphere and specific economic advantages in the light of the intensifying competition in outer space.

Using the US as an example, we can talk about colossal budgets for space exploration and the broad involvement of the private sector in military space activities.

In this context, it is appropriate to recall that the US withdrawal from the ABM Treaty in 2002, which contained a direct ban on the creation, testing, and deployment of space-based missile defense systems or components (Article V), in fact, opened the way to the creation and deployment of space-based strike systems, as well as anti-satellite weapons, due to the proximity of the targets and technologies.

It is also quite significant that the United States, with its “Defense Space Strategy” of 2020, have officially recognized the process of turning space into a sphere of confrontation and the emergence of armed conflict as inevitable⁶⁰.

	National Security Space Strategy (2011)	Defense Space Strategy (2020)
Key objectives	– Strengthen Safety, Stability and Security in Space; – Maintain and enhance the strategic national security advantages afforded to the United States by Space; – Energize the space industrial base that supports US national security.	– Maintain Space Superiority; – Provide Space Support to National, Joint and Combined Operations; – Ensure Space Stability.
Key “lines of effort” (approaches)	– Promote responsible, peaceful and safe use of space; – Provide improved US space capabilities;	– Build a comprehensive military advantage in space; – Integrate military space power into National, Joint and Combined Operations;

⁶⁰ Defense Space Strategy Summary. June 17, 2020 // US Department of Defense. URL: <https://www.defense.gov/Newsroom/Releases/Release/Article/2223539/departments-of-defense-releases-defense-space-strategy/>; “We are in danger”: how the USA will defend space // *Gazeta.ru*. June 18, 2020. URL: <https://www.gazeta.ru/army/2020/06/18/13121929.shtml> (in Russ.); Ensuring U.S. leadership in space // Space Foundation. March 4, 2016. URL: <http://www.spacefoundation.org>; New National Space Strategy emphasizes «America first» policies // SpaceNews. March 24, 2018. URL: <https://spacenews.com/new-national-space-strategy-emphasizes-america-first-policies/>; Trump Authorizes a Space Command. Next, He Wants a Space Force. // *New York Times*. August 29, 2019. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/08/29/us/politics/trump-space-command-force.html>

	– Partner with responsible nations, international organizations and commercial firms; – Prevent and deter aggression against space infrastructure that supports US national security; – Prepare to defeat attacks and to operate in a degraded environment.	– Share the strategic environment; – Cooperate with allies, partners, industry, US Government departments and agencies.

Table 1. US National Security Space Strategy (2011) and Defense Space Strategy (2020): a brief comparison

Compiled by the author based on the open sources.

An important modern area of US military-technical preparations in space is monitoring the geostationary orbit, which has strategic significance, since it is where the so-called “hovering points” of spacecraft are located, performing reconnaissance, communications, and surveillance functions, and key elements of the early warning system for a missile attack.

With the help of the Geosynchronous Space Situational Awareness Program (GSSAP) constellation of inspector satellites, which uses pairs of small inspector satellites, the United States not only tracks space objects in this distant orbit, but also reserves the ability to influence them, which could have far-reaching strategic consequences. GSSAP demonstrates the US desire not only to control, but also to actively interfere in the activities of space infrastructure, and in an externally unobservable manner⁶¹.

New threats in space also include ensuring cybersecurity of spacecraft and satellite constellations. New risks include:

- interception and decryption of commands sent to the satellite;
- sending false commands and downloading malicious software to change the satellite's orbit, disable systems or even destroy it;
- hacking satellite modems and communication protocols, which makes it possible to intercept and modify data transmitted via satellite. Cyberattacks on space infrastructure have already occurred and in the future may be associated with much more destructive consequences⁶².

An example worth mentioning is the 2022 cyberattack on *Viasat*, a company that provides satellite internet to tens of thousands of subscribers in Europe⁶³.

The new reality requires **new international legal approaches**. International instruments mainly focus on physical security, but cyber security issues also require additional efforts. Under these conditions it is becoming increasingly important to put a legal barrier to the weaponization of space through concrete proposals.

⁶¹ The US has revealed that it is preparing weapons against Russian and Chinese satellites // *RBC*. October 26, 2024. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/26/10/2024/671c1f189a79476cdb78944e> (in Russ.).

⁶² The five deadly Ds of the Air Force's cyber arsenal // *Foreign Policy*. December 4, 2024. URL: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2013/04/12/the-five-deadly-ds-of-the-air-forces-cyber-arsenal/>

⁶³ Case Study: *Viasat* // CyberPeace Institute. June 11, 2022. URL: <https://cyberconflicts.cyberpeaceinstitute.org/law-and-policy/cases/viasat>

In this context it should be noted that the US and its close allies are still politicizing the problem, looking for pretexts and bottlenecks to reject such proposals. It is becoming more obvious that the goal pursued by the West is to ensure a **strategic advantage** in this most important area. It is through space and the information environment that the US is trying to maintain its leading position in the conditions of sharply intensified competition in the world. This is as well the goal of attempts to develop acceptable “norms” and “rules” of “behavior” of countries in space, where the US would retain control functions⁶⁴.

Efforts to turn technological advances and achievements in space into strategic advantages are clearly demonstrated by the ability to effectively use the essentially civilian *Starlink* low-orbit broadband Internet system to support ground-based military operations by providing intelligence data from civilian satellites to engage over-the-horizon ground targets⁶⁵.

One of the most dangerous developments is using new generations of communication the US satellites for IBMs launch denial⁶⁶. This could have a profound negative influence on strategic stability.

In turn, space debris can also become a weapon, since a collision with it can cause a cascade reaction of spacecraft destruction, which can actually lead to a state where access to space or space activities will be either sharply hampered or impossible. Such a chain reaction of collisions has been called the “Kessler Syndrome”⁶⁷, the risk of which is increasingly growing in modern conditions⁶⁸.

In the context of the above, it is appropriate to cite the words of US President J.F. Kennedy, spoken by him during the Cold War: “The cold expanses of the universe must not become the arena of an even colder war”⁶⁹.

Cooperation in Space: Achievements, Prospects, Problems

In recent years, there has been an active growth of international cooperation in space. It is enough to cite the example of the International Space Station (ISS) project, approved in 1998 in the relevant intergovernmental agreement. It is noteworthy that other “players” such as Japan, Canada and the European Space Agency have joined the ISS project. The role of China and India is strengthening, the capabilities of international organizations, non-governmental actors and private companies are expanding.

⁶⁴ Ensuring U.S. leadership in space // Space Foundation. March 4, 2016. URL: <http://www.spacefoundation.org>

⁶⁵ Berman M. The “Space Laser” Wars Have Begun – And America Wants to First to Develop the High-Powered Weapons // *Popular Mechanics*. May 20, 2025. URL: <https://www.popularmechanics.com/military/weapons/a64244333/space-laser-satellite/>; Siegel E. Will Musk’s *Starlink* satellites lead to Kessler Syndrome? // Big Think. September 28, 2023. URL: <https://bigthink.com/starts-with-a-bang/musk-starlink-satellites-kessler-syndrome/>

⁶⁶ Advanced Extremely High Frequency (AEHF) Military Communications Satellite // *Air and Space Force Magazine*. URL: <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/weapons/ae hf/>

⁶⁷ *Kessler Syndrome* – is a hypothetical scenario in which the density of orbiting space debris becomes so high that a cascade of collisions occurs, creating more and more debris and rendering Earth's orbit unusable. First proposed by NASA scientist Donald Kessler in 1978, the syndrome predicts that collisions would create a chain reaction that could jeopardize existing satellites, space stations, and future space activities for many years – *Editor’s note*.

⁶⁸ Siegel E. Will Musk’s *Starlink* satellites lead to Kessler Syndrome? // Big Think. September 28, 2023. URL: <https://bigthink.com/starts-with-a-bang/musk-starlink-satellites-kessler-syndrome/>

⁶⁹ Eidenmuller M. American rhetoric: John F. Kennedy – Address to the UN General Assembly. URL: <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/jfkunitednations.htm>

Most projects are joint. There is a consolidation of scientific experience, which ultimately allows for the implementation of a joint scientific mission.

It should be noted that certain areas of cooperation in space have quite successfully withstood the crisis phenomena in world politics. Even the geopolitical crisis in Ukraine, which has hit a number of international space projects with Russia's participation, such as the *ExoMars* mission, has not had a negative impact on the work of Russian specialists with Western partners within the framework of such a large and existentially important project as the ISS. Moreover, *Roscosmos* and NASA signed an agreement regarding the flights of integrated crews on Russian and American manned transport ships in July 2022, and already in the fall of 2022 and winter of 2023, two Russian cosmonauts went to the ISS on American *Crew Dragon* spacecraft⁷⁰.

However, the ISS service life is coming to an end. Therefore, it is important to look for alternative forms of interaction that would allow for active joint work to continue in the future, after the station's service life has expired. A logical continuation of the partnership between states on the ISS project could be the Russian-Chinese initiative on the International Scientific Lunar Station (ISLS), secured by the relevant intergovernmental agreement of 2022⁷¹.

In contrast to this project, there is the American initiative *Gateway*, which also involves the creation of a lunar station. Unlike the International Scientific Lunar Station (ISLS) project, *Gateway* does not have parity principles, the leading role of the United States is fixed, which was the reason for Russia's refusal to participate in this project. The *Gateway* project goes in conjunction with the *Artemis Accords* signed in 2020⁷².

The principles and technical standards adopted at the international level, which, despite general geopolitical tensions, contribute to the expansion of cooperation in space.

An example of international standardization in the field of space technology and space exploration are standards in terms of life support systems in manned space missions⁷³.

⁷⁰ *Roscosmos* and NASA Sign Agreement on Cross-Flights to ISS // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. July 15, 2022. URL: <https://ria.ru/20220715/mks-1802761742.html> (in Russ.).

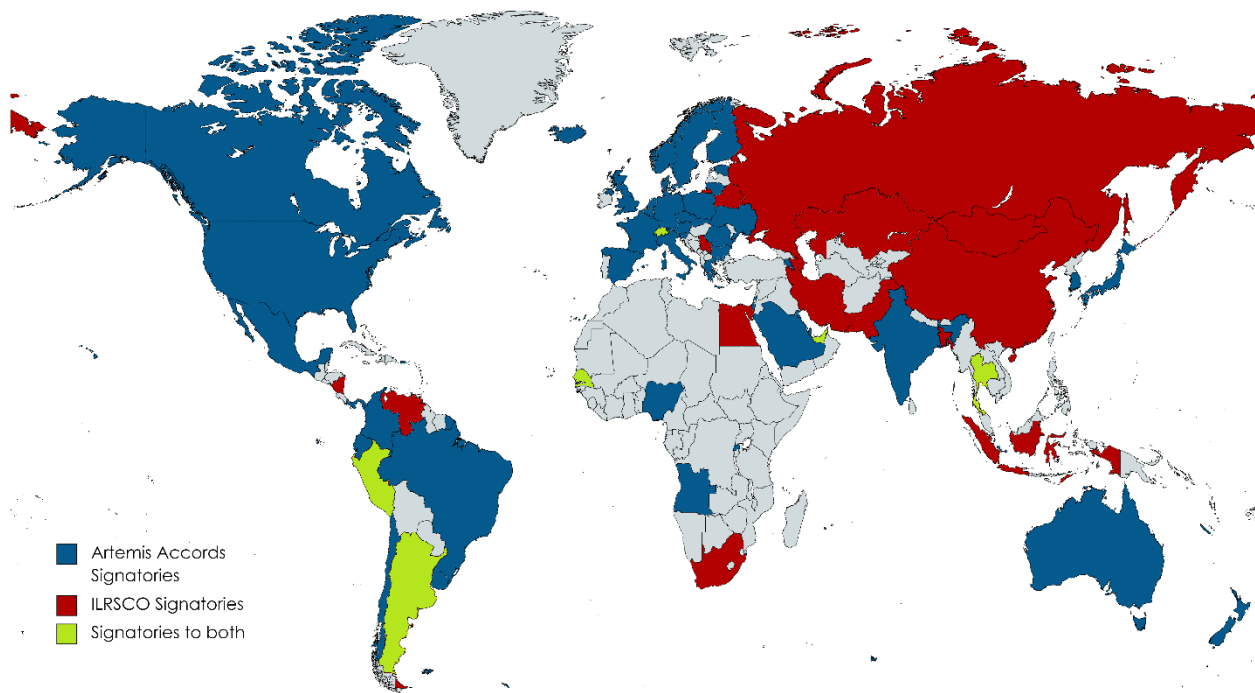
⁷¹ Agreements between the Government of the Russian Federation and the Government of the People's Republic of China on cooperation in the field of creating an international scientific lunar station // MFA of the Russian Federation. 25.11.2022. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_contracts/international_contracts/2_contract/61731/ (in Russ.).

⁷² Memorandum of Understanding between the UNITED STATES OF AMERICA and CANADA // US Department of State. December 11, 2020. 20 p. N9–2022: *ExoMars* suspended // European Space Agency. March 17, 2022. URL: https://www.esa.int/Newsroom/Press_Releases/ExoMars_suspended; The *Artemis Accords*: Past, Present, and Future. December 12, 2022. URL: <https://swfound.org/events/2022/theartemis-accords-past-present-and-future>

⁷³ New international standards for space environment research developed by Russian experts // *Rosstandart*. URL: <https://www.rst.gov.ru/portal/gost/home/presscenter/news?portal:componentId=88beae40-0e16-414c-b176-d0ab5de82e16&navigationalstate> (in Russ.).

In many ways, international technical standardization correlates with the Guidelines for Ensuring the Long-Term Sustainability of Outer Space Activities, adopted in 2019 during the 59th session of the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space⁷⁴.

These guidelines were adopted at the initiative of Russia and address key issues on the space agenda: space traffic management, space weather, space debris, raising awareness of space activities, scientific and technical research and development. The guidelines themselves serve as another example of the possibility of creating a universal mechanism for developing a single vector in space exploration.



Map 3. Signatories of Artemis Accords and International Lunar Research Station Cooperation Organization (ILRSCO), as of October, 2025

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Regional powers that do not have a sufficient resource base join either one or the other initiative. In turn, the initiatives of the Russian Federation and China, together with American initiatives, form the trends of space cooperation, leading regional powers and the rest of the world community.

However, such relative space “bipolarity” can provoke mistrust and division. Therefore, it is important to find common ground and develop a consensus base for preventing potential crisis situations in space.

Commercialization of Space – Forms and Possible Consequences

The process of commercialization of space opens up significant economic opportunities. The global space market is currently valued at \$400 billion and includes spacecraft manufacturing, launch services, data collection and processing, and ground infrastructure. The main driving force behind

⁷⁴ Guiding principles for the long-term sustainability of outer space activities // UNOOSA. 20.08.2019. URL: https://www.unoosa.org/res/oosadoc/data/documents/2019/a/a7420_0_html/V1906079.pdf

this growth is private companies such as *SpaceX*, which, thanks to innovations such as the reusable *Falcon 9* rocket, have significantly reduced the cost of launching cargo into orbit. For example, launching an astronaut into orbit on *Crew Dragon* costs \$55 million, which is significantly cheaper than traditional launch vehicles.

Technological progress serves as the basis. The process itself is implemented in the creation of reusable carriers, micro and nanosatellites, as well as systems for collecting and processing space data. All this, in turn, changes the structure of the market. *SpaceX* has not only provided cheaper access to space, but also created the infrastructure for projects such as Starlink, which provides global Internet. And although the total investment in the space market over the past decade does not exceed \$30 billion, its potential is enormous.

However, there is also a downside – the emergence of new challenges, such as an increase in the volume of space debris, unregulated norms and standards, and growing competition, which could lead to increased conflict⁷⁵.

Commercialization of space raises complex issues. The Outer Space Treaty declares space to be **the common property of all mankind**, but does not regulate private companies⁷⁶.

At the same time, this basic document lacks a clear legal position on the issue of extraction and commercial use of space resources. Such legal uncertainty may in the future give rise to conflicts between states and between states and private entities.

The monopolization of space by large corporations could increase global inequality, and resource extraction on celestial bodies could cause unwanted physical changes with unpredictable consequences⁷⁷.

The problem is aggravated by the fact that a number of states have already undertaken legal efforts that effectively allow their companies to engage in resource extraction in space. A very clear example in this context was the adoption of an executive order by President Donald Trump in his first term approving the commercial development of resources on the Moon and planets of the Solar System. It is quite expected that such steps have caused a negative reaction from a number of countries, including Russia. Potentially, such unilateral steps may rather lead to an aggravation of interstate relations, an increase in the potential for conflict and a weakening of space security than pave the way for cooperation in this area⁷⁸.

⁷⁵ Danilin I. Commercial Space and the Phenomenon of “Astropartnerships” // RIAC. June 16, 2020. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/kommercheskiy-kosmos-i-fenomen-astroprenyerstva/> (in Russ.).

⁷⁶ Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies // United Nations. URL: http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/outer_space_governing.shtml (in Russ.).

⁷⁷ UK Space Agency/Axiom Space Astronaut Mission Projects // The UK Government. December 4, 2023. URL: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/request-for-information-uk-space-agencyaxiom-space-astronaut-mission-projects-20242025>

⁷⁸ Hadley G. Space Force Wants Your Help Naming all Its Satellites // *Air and Space Force Magazine*, 2024. URL: <https://www.airandspaceforces.com/space-force-satellites-weapons-names-and-it-wants-guardians-help>

Thus, in the field of space resource extraction, there is a significant contradiction between the established universal approaches and national interests, as well as the planned practice, which allows us to consider this area **more as a conflict zone, rather than an area of constructive cooperation**. This, in turn, already at this stage requires understanding and specific international legal steps.

The *Artemis* program and the corresponding Accords can serve as a very indicative example of attempts to monopolize certain areas of space activity related to the prospective exploration of the Moon and celestial bodies.

In 2017, Trump signed Directive No.1 on the return of the United States to the Moon and in the same year launched NASA's *Artemis* program, worth \$35 trillion, with the goal of landing a crew on the Moon by the mid-2020s. In 2020, Trump signed an Executive Order in support of commercial development of resources on the Moon and other celestial bodies. Against this background, the *Artemis Accords* appeared⁷⁹.

The bulk of the program's implementation was expected to fall on the private sector: Musk's *SpaceX*, Bezos's *Blue Origin*, and Branson's *Virgin Galactic*.

It is quite significant that the Accords attempt to circumvent the provisions of the Outer Space Treaty of 1967 by promoting the concept of “safety zones” and the provision on privatization of resources with the aim of securing exclusive rights to the development of the Moon for the United States and its allies⁸⁰.

Thus, international space law is being seriously transformed, essentially emasculating the principle of space as the property of all mankind and calling into question the principle of equality of all in the exploration of outer space.

Moreover, promoting the *Accords* through bilateral formats contradicts the principles of functioning of the UN multilateral mechanisms, emphasizing the strategic goal of the United States to establish dominance in the governance of outer space.

At the same time, the *Artemis Accords* does not have legal force and the fact that it is based on a set of bilateral agreements, and not the product of multilateral negotiations, effectively deprives the document of the status of a binding international legal act. Thus, paradoxically, in practice the “soft law” underlying the development of the Agreements largely allows the United States to turn them into an *instrument of dominance* in the management of space and space activities in general.

There are still concerns that the race for the richest resources in space may take uncontrolled forms, the chances of developing a universal treaty on resource development may not be realized, and a special body within the UN will not be created to regulate the access of private individuals to resource

⁷⁹ *Artemis Accords* // NASA. October 13, 2020. URL: <https://www.nasa.gov/wo-content/uploads/2022/11/Artemis-Accords-signed-13Oct2020.pdf?emrc=6719de61ec3cf>

⁸⁰ Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies // United Nations. URL: http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/outer_space_governing.shtml (in Russ).

extraction in space. In fact, the *Artemis Accords* are being formed bypassing the UN Committee on Outer Space.

Thus, such forms of cooperation in space activities rather “work” not for universal interaction, but for a split into opposing blocs – after all, Russia and China, not wanting to accept these “rules of the game”, deliberately quitted participating in it, although Russian representatives initially took part in the discussion of the provisions of the Accords.

A format of cooperation under the auspices of the UN, being it the product of multilateral negotiating efforts, could be a truly effective alternative.

The principles of a “zero-sum game” in this context clearly do not work, but only create additional conflict potential.

The Problem of Space Debris – Possible Solutions

Another type of problematic aspect is the issue of space debris, which is discussed at the Scientific and Technical Subcommittee of the UN Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space (COPUOS). From the array of information on this “fashionable” topic, it is worth highlighting a number of aspects that are relevant to the subject of our research.

Space debris issue could pose a threefold threat. Firstly, it is a potential threat of collision with spacecraft in Earth orbit. Secondly, – the fall of large man-made objects on Earth. Moreover, the higher the activity in space, the greater this kind of a threat manifests itself. Thirdly, there is a danger of a chain reaction of spacecraft collisions, creating “fields” of debris, which will be more dangerous with more numerous mega-groups of satellites in orbit. The situation will be complicated by the use of mini and nano-satellites using the "swarm" method.

The result is a complete inability to further use space in practice and the virtual paralysis of human civilization. In terms of international law, as well as in terms of security, potential actions to forcibly remove spacecraft from orbit under the pretext of their “garbage” danger, without regard to its jurisdiction, may cause particular concern.

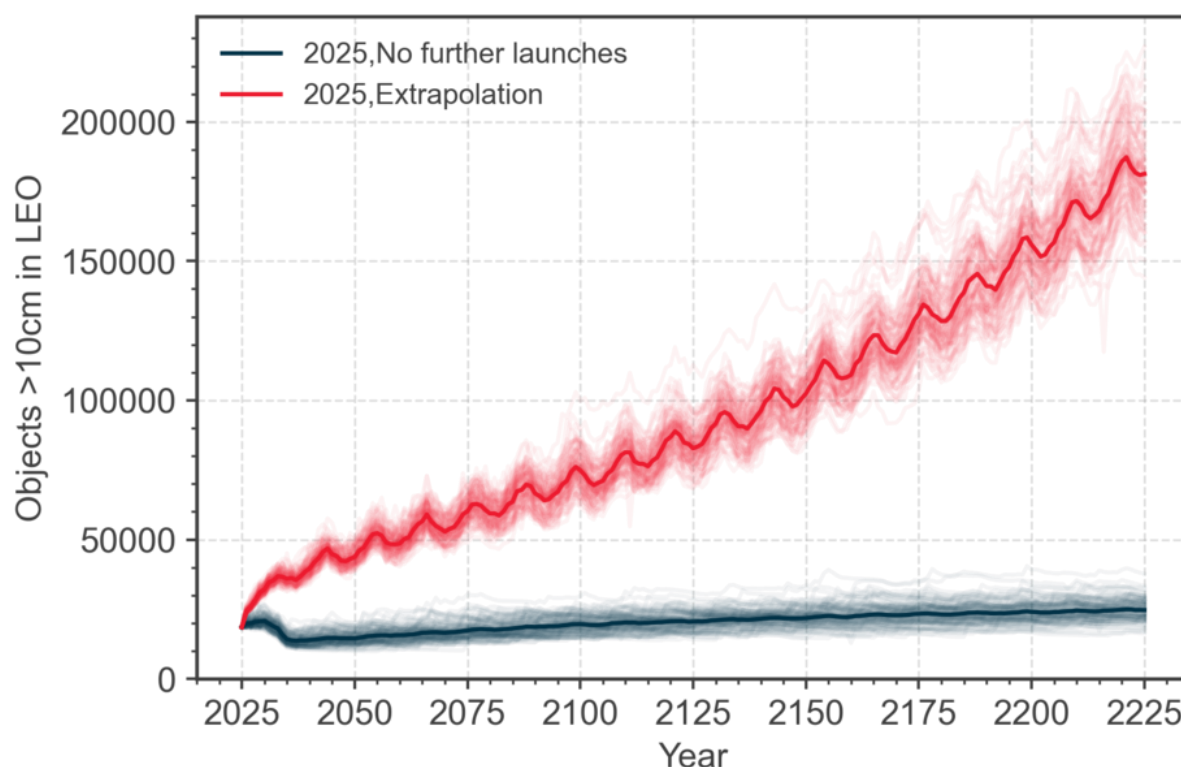


Figure 18. The future number of catastrophic collisions in Earth orbit

Source: ESA Space Environment Report 2025

(https://www.esa.int/Space_Safety/Space_Debris/ESA_Space_Environment_Report_2025)

Such attempts, in particular, were recorded at one time in the draft Code of Conduct in Outer Space prepared by the EU. Article 4.a of the draft directly spoke about this kind of possibility⁸¹.

The most adequate method of combating space debris may be the further development of relevant norms, including legal ones, in this area, as well as the establishment of a mechanism for exchanging information between countries on the presence of space debris objects in orbit.

Attempts in this direction are being made, but they are at best very limited in nature, agreements between a number of specific countries. An example is the draft Rules for the stay of upper stages of launch vehicles in Earth orbit presented by NASA in 2023 – “Mitigation Methods for Launch Vehicle Upper Stages on the Creation of Orbital Debris”⁸². This set of rules is aimed at standardizing the approach in this area between the public and private sectors, as well as with the regulation of the *Zero Debris Approach* adopted by the European Space Agency in 2023, aimed at stopping the growth of space debris by 2030⁸³.

⁸¹ Draft International Code of Conduct in Outer Space // European Union External Action. March 31, 2014. URL: https://eeas.europa.eu/sites/eeas/files/space_code_conduct_draft_vers_31-march-2014_en.pdf

⁸² Mitigating Methods for Launch Vehicle Upper Stages on the Creation of Orbital Debris // Department of Transportation Federal Aviation Administration. URL: https://www.faa.gov/newsroom/Orbital-Debris_NRRM-Issuance.pdf

⁸³ The Zero Debris Charter // European Space Agency. URL: https://www.esa.int/Space_Safety/Clean_Space/The_Zero_Debris_Charter

It is fundamentally important to understand that talking about practical international efforts in this area will be useless in case of the development of a qualitative arms race in space and the launching of strike space vehicles into space.

It would be important to ensure transparency in the regulation of the orbital debris clearance process by involving international structures, in particular COPUOS, while ensuring rotation of leadership positions and equal access to information. This could increase trust in global institutions and prevent their excessive politicization – a “disease” that unfortunately affects many specialized international organizations.

Efforts to Keep Space Peaceful – Should We Continue?

It is appropriate to emphasize that at multilateral specialized platforms, as well as during bilateral contacts, Russia consistently implements the key thesis that without the development and adoption of an international legally binding document containing reliable guarantees of non-placement of weapons in outer space, it is already becoming practically impossible to resolve any serious issues of ensuring international security, strategic stability and space activities in their various aspects. A solid and essentially the only basis for such negotiations (no one has proposed other alternatives) is the Russian-Chinese draft treaty on the prevention of the placement of weapons in outer space, the threat or use of force against space objects (PPWT, an updated version was presented at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva in June 2014)⁸⁴.

Russia is also promoting an international initiative/political commitment, put forward in 2004, not to be the first to place weapons in outer space. The number of full-fledged participants in the initiative has grown to 30. At the same time, the United States and its allies consistently ignore Russian initiatives in this area.

An international legally binding agreement on the prevention of an arms race in space (PAROS), elements of which the specialized first and second UN GGE attempted to develop, would also be of great significance⁸⁵. The initiative to create the first GGE belongs to Russia and China, whose goal was to give additional impetus to the discussion of the PAROS issue with subsequent negotiations at the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva. Unfortunately, the first group failed to adopt the final report in 2018 – it was blocked by the American representative. As for the second group, which completed its work by adopting a final report in August 2024, the initiative to create it belongs to Russia.

When talking about possible agreements, the following should be kept in mind. International law is intended to form the basis of any agreement on space. At the same time, space has its own specifics. It is appropriate to distinguish the threat posed by the placement of weapons in space from the risks associated with the objective development of space activities. Approaches to solving these problems also might differ.

⁸⁴ Draft – Treaty on the Prevention of the Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat or Use of Force against Outer Space Objects // United Nations. URL: <http://www.un.org/ru/document/ods.asp?m=CD/1985> (in Russ.).

⁸⁵ Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on further practical measures for the prevention of an arms race in outer space // UNODA. URL: <https://meetings.unoda.org/meeting/67322>

In case of placing weapons in space, we can still talk about taking preventive measures. It is important to note that in the context of the possible deployment of strike weapons in space, agreements are ensured through the development of a legally binding instrument. Diplomatic practice shows that this is the only way to develop effective international legal instruments.

At the same time, efforts are continuing to promote the PAROS idea at multilateral diplomatic venues, within the framework of the so-called UN disarmament “triad” – the First Committee of the UN General Assembly, the UN Disarmament Commission and the Conference on Disarmament.

Thus, the First Committee, within the framework of the 79th session of the UN General Assembly, adopted a report for its main body and, based on its recommendations, the General Assembly adopted a number of traditional “space” resolutions, in particular, the key resolution 79/19 “prevention of an arms race in outer space”⁸⁶.

What is important is that the resolution clearly states the special responsibility of states with major space potential for keeping space free of weapons.

Along with resolution 79/20, “No first placement of weapons in outer space”, resolutions 79/21 and 79/22, “Further practical measures to prevent an arms race in outer space”, and resolution 79/51, “Transparency and confidence-building measures in outer space activities”, were also adopted⁸⁷.

The purpose of these resolutions is to promote the PAROS issue by considering the results of the work of the groups of governmental experts and open-ended working groups (OEWG) in the relevant areas. It seems important that in order to increase the productivity of work on this topic, the First Committee decided to establish a new OEWG for the period 2024-2028, which could consolidate the results of the activities of the previous groups and consider the broadest possible range of issues related to the PAROS topic in its various aspects, including complex issues of space security⁸⁸.

⁸⁶ Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space. Report of the First Committee // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/en/A/79/406>; Resolution 79/19 // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/RES/79/19> (in Russ.).

⁸⁷ Resolution 79/20 // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/RES/79/20> (in Russ.); Resolution 79/21 // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/RES/79/21> (in Russ.); Resolution 79/22. // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/RES/79/22> (in Russ.) etc.

⁸⁸ Prevention of Arms Race in Outer Space. Report of the First Committee // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/79/406> (in Russ.).

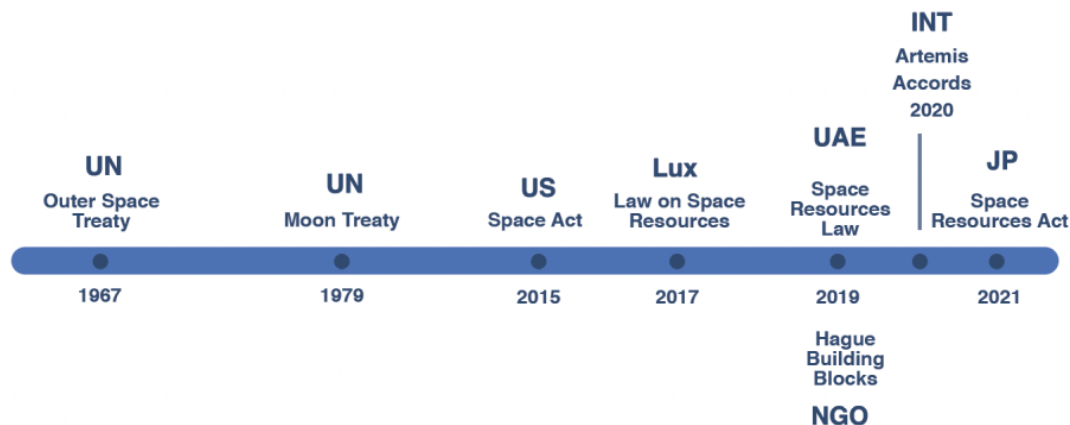


Figure 19. Timeline of the development of major space policies

Source: *Space Ambition Initiative* (<https://spaceambition.substack.com/p/international-agreements-isru>)

At the same time, discussions on “space” within the UN also reflected serious contradictions in approaches to key aspects of space security.

Evidence of this was the adoption of the "strange" resolution 79/18, entitled “Weapons of Mass Destruction in Outer Space”, at the 79th session of the UN General Assembly. That was actually for the first time in modern history that such a document has been adopted. The document was initiated by a group of states led by the United States. The resolution essentially duplicates the provisions of other similar documents, in particular, it calls for work on measures to prohibit the placement of weapons in space, while referring to the key provisions (Article IV) of the 1967 Outer Space Treaty on the prohibition of placement of WMD into space and reminding all states of this obligation. The motive for introducing the document has been based on a false premise, not supported by facts, about Russia's alleged intentions to launch nuclear weapons into space⁸⁹.

It seemed that the US was deliberately diverting international attention from the real practical threats of launching space strike systems into space, trying to reduce the discussion on PAROS to the WMD issue. Not to mention that these efforts practically weaken the existing legal norm regarding the direct ban on launching WMD into space, already contained in the Outer Space Treaty of 1967.

Quite expectedly, Russia voted against this resolution, using its veto power. It is quite significant that, while explaining the reasons for the decision to veto, Russian representatives pointed to the rejection of amendments proposed by the Russian side, which would have expanded the scope of the resolution and would have affected not only nuclear weapons but also other types of weapons⁹⁰.

⁸⁹ Resolution 79/18 // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/RES/79/18> (in Russ.); Treaty on Principles Governing the Activities of States in the Exploration and Use of Outer Space including the Moon and Other Celestial Bodies // United Nations. URL: http://www.un.org/ru/documents/decl_conv/conventions/outer_space_governing.shtml (in Russ).

⁹⁰ US Tells Russia May Launch Anti-Satellite Nuclear Weapon into Space This Year // *Bloomberg*. February 20, 2024. URL: <https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2024-02-20/us-tells-allies-russia-may-put-anti-satellite-nuclear->

Unfortunately, the ability of another key element of the UN disarmament “triad” – the Conference on Disarmament – is sharply limited due to its continued inability to launch a meaningful negotiation process, including on the topic of PAROS.

As for the UNDC, despite the importance of the body, its decisions are advisory in nature. However, it should be noted that the Commission has done a significant amount of work to prepare the final report for 2023, where the topic of space in various aspects was touched upon very broadly.

Unfortunately, the final report of 2024 no longer contained any significant “space” elements⁹¹.

An important potential for expanding the possibilities of constructive interaction in the development of outer space is contained in the joint activities of the First and Fourth Committees of the UN General Assembly. The Fourth Committee, among other things, considers issues of “peaceful” outer space, interacting for these purposes with the Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space.

Conclusion

The efforts undertaken have not yet resulted in the imposition of legal obligations on states not to place weapons in outer space. Attempts to launch negotiations on this issue or to develop such norms through the UN Security Council have also not led to concrete results.

As a consequence, despite the fact that the majority of states support the idea of banning the deployment of strike weapons into space, due to the position of a number of states that are in the quantitative minority but have significant space potential, it is not yet possible to develop practical legally binding barriers to the “weaponization” of space.

To prevent a qualitative arms race in space, a good amount of work is needed along the several directions. Among them:

- to continue to shape and present a consolidated position of the group of countries supporting PAROS at international venues, primarily the UN. Such work can be carried out both in the direction of adopting new resolutions and within the framework of the formed OEWG;
- to continue efforts to unblock the substantive negotiating work of the Conference on Disarmament with a view to beginning substantive consideration of the draft PAROS document.

It is important to fully comprehend that with the introduction of strike weapons into space, the global strategic situation in the world would undergo significant negative changes. The development of large-scale space activities and international cooperation in these conditions will be deprived of practical prospects.

[weapon-in-space-this-year](#); Russia Blocks UN Security Council Resolution on Non-Deployment of Nuclear Weapons in Outer Space // *Interfax*. 24.04.2024. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/world/957640> (in Russ.).

⁹¹ Report of the UN Disarmament Commission. 2024 // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/r/A/RES/79/42> (in Russ.); Report of the UN Disarmament Commission, 2023 // United Nations. URL: <https://docs.un.org/r/A/RES/78/42> (in Russ.); Conference on Disarmament // United Nations. URL: <https://disarmament.unoda.org/conference-on-disarmament>; Report of the Conference on Disarmament. 2024 session // United Nations. URL: https://digitallibrary.un.org/records/4050670/files/A_79_42-ENG.pdf

CHAPTER 6.

INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SECURITY AND RUSSIA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

Elena Chernenko

The modern information space is becoming increasingly integrated and simultaneously vulnerable to various types of cyber threats, which can significantly impact the national security of states. Russia, as one of the world's leading powers, has developed a comprehensive strategy to ensure international information security, taking into account both national interests and the need to form joint international mechanisms. Russian scientists and experts in the field of international information security consider information as a "gold and foreign currency reserve" and a strategic resource for ensuring stability and sovereignty in the national information space⁹². At the same time, information and its use through modern information and communication technologies (ICT) are also regarded as an effective offensive and defensive potential of the state.

To better understand Russia's national interests in this sphere and how they developed over time, it is worth paying attention to a number of doctrinal documents adopted in recent years, the newest of which is the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation, adopted in 2023⁹³.

The development of a safe information space and the protection of Russian society from destructive foreign informational and psychological influence are listed as the fifth of nine points in the section "national interests of the Russian Federation in the foreign policy sphere". The Concept particularly emphasizes that in case of "hostile actions by foreign states or their associations representing a threat to the sovereignty and territorial integrity" of Russia, including (...) "using modern information and communication technologies", its authorities reserve the right to "take symmetrical and asymmetrical measures necessary to stop such hostile actions, as well as to prevent their recurrence in the future".

The most important tasks of Russia in ensuring international information security, countering threats to it, and strengthening Russian sovereignty in the global information space are listed in a separate section. If grouped, three spheres of interest can be distinguished.

First, this is "strengthening and improving the international legal regime for preventing and resolving interstate conflicts and regulating activities in the global information space", as well as "taking political-diplomatic and other measures aimed at countering the policies of unfriendly states regarding the militarization of the global information space, the use of information and communication technologies for interference in the internal affairs of states and military purposes, as well as limiting access of other states to advanced information and communication technologies and increasing their technological dependence".

⁹² Korotkov S. Russia's independence is directly dependent on the state's ability to ensure national sovereignty in the information space. // *International Affairs Journal*. April 4, 2023 URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/39760> (in Russ.).

⁹³ Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation // MFA of the Russian Federation. March 31, 2023. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1860586/> (in Russ.).

Second, it is “forming and improving the international legal foundations for countering the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes”.

Third, “ensuring the safe and stable functioning and development of the Internet telecommunications network based on equal participation of states in managing this network and preventing foreign control over its national segments.”

These tasks are listed in more detail in the Presidential Decree of the Russian Federation dated April 12, 2021, No. 213, which approved the updated Fundamentals of State Policy of the Russian Federation in the field of international information security⁹⁴. Among other things, this document also provides the Russian understanding of international information security: “It is such a state of the global information space in which, based on generally recognized principles and norms of international law and on the basis of equal partnership, international peace, security, and stability are maintained”⁹⁵.

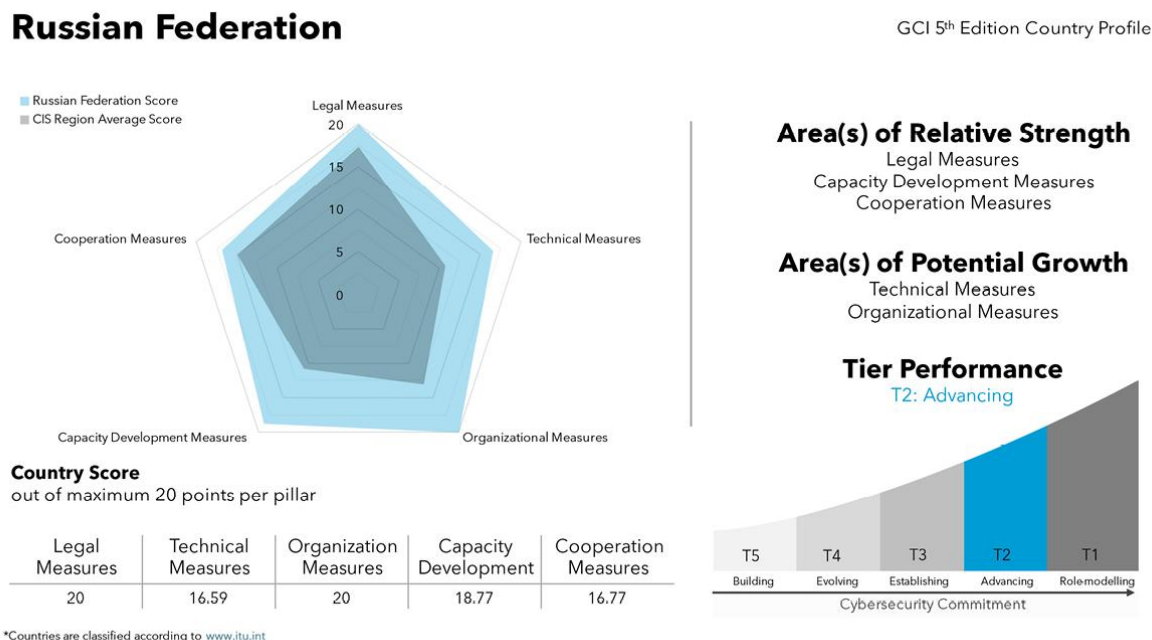


Figure 20. The Russian Federation Score on cybersecurity issues (out of maximum 20 points per pillar), as of the end of 2024

Source: ITU Global Cybersecurity Index (<https://www.itu.int/epublications/publication/global-cybersecurity-index-2024>)

Russia’s national interests in international information security are multilayered by nature. Many sub-tasks can be distinguished within each of the three areas of work listed above, and the directions largely overlap. To better understand what exactly Russia strives to achieve in each of the specified areas, it is worth delving a little into the history of Russian diplomacy.

⁹⁴ Fundamentals of the State Policy of the Russian Federation in the field of international information security // MFA of the Russian Federation. 12.04.2021. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/official_documents/1871845/ (in Russ.).

⁹⁵ Ibid.

Moral Code

For almost 30 years, Russia has been the initiator of key diplomatic mechanisms and processes in the field of international information security. It was at Russia's initiative that the first dedicated resolution "Achievements in the field of informatization and telecommunications in the context of international security" was adopted on December 4, 1998⁹⁶. According to Sergey Boyko, an expert of the Russian Security Council apparatus, this resolution opened the era of Russian initiatives in the field of international information security at United Nations⁹⁷.

A little-known detail (noted in his article by Sergey Boyko) is that before the adoption of this resolution, then Russian Foreign Minister Igor Ivanov sent a letter to then UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan warning of the threats that could arise from the emerging widespread use of information and communication technologies⁹⁸. The Russian authorities had already foreseen the risks of an arms race, interstate conflicts, and other problems in this area and considered it important to bring this issue to the discussion at the UN.

Therefore, the Russian-proposed resolution spoke of the "expediency of developing international legal regimes to ensure the security of global information and telecommunication systems and combat information terrorism and crime". However, this wording caused objections from a number of countries (mainly Western, including the USA), and it was softened to "international principles" instead of "international legal regimes", which allowed the resolution to be adopted by consensus. According to Sergey Boyko, thanks to this Russian initiative, current issues of security in the use of ICT and ICT themselves have firmly entered the agenda of the First Committee of the UN General Assembly⁹⁹.

Russia devoted the following decades to working on the tasks proposed in the resolution. However, the contradiction between its desire to develop legally binding rules and the reluctance of some states to accept such restrictions, preferring instead soft law, has remained (and remains) one of the key contentious issues. This issue provoked some of the most heated discussions within the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (GGE) – a mechanism created in 2004 also at Russia's initiative on the UN platform to discuss international information security issues.

In 2010, 2013, and 2015, this group, initially composed of 15, then 20, and later 25 states, presented a series of important reports containing the first lists of principles for responsible state behavior in the information space. A particularly significant report was issued in 2015. It recommended that states cooperate in preventing the malicious use of ICT and avoid knowingly allowing their territory to be

⁹⁶ United Nations General Assembly Resolution A/RES/53/70 of December 4, 1998 "Achievements in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security" // United Nations. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/265311> (in Russ.).

⁹⁷ Boyko S. International Information Security: Russia in the UN. The beginning of history (1998-2009) // *International Affairs Journal*. November 20, 2023. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/43346> (in Russ.).

⁹⁸ Letter dated September 23, 1998 from the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation I.Ivanov addressed to the UN Secretary-General K.Annan // United Nations. October 30, 1998. URL: <https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/261158> (in Russ.).

⁹⁹ Boyko S. International Information Security: Russia in the UN. The beginning of history (1998-2009) // *International Affairs Journal*. November 20, 2023. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/43346> (in Russ.).

used for internationally wrongful acts involving ICT. It called for enhancing information exchange and mutual assistance aimed at pursuing terrorists and preventing criminal uses of ICT. The group underscored that states must ensure comprehensive respect for human rights, including the rights to privacy and freedom of expression.

Another important recommendation is that states should not carry out or knowingly support ICT activities intended to cause deliberate harm to critical infrastructure or create other obstacles in its use or operation. In addition, states must take appropriate measures to protect their own critical infrastructure from ICT threats. States should not harm the information systems of other states’ Computer Emergency Response Teams (CERTs) or use such teams for malicious international activities. States should maintain responsible disclosure about ICT vulnerabilities, adopt reasonable measures to protect the integrity of supply chains, and prevent the spread of malicious ICT software, technical means, or harmful hidden functions (so-called “backdoors”)¹⁰⁰.

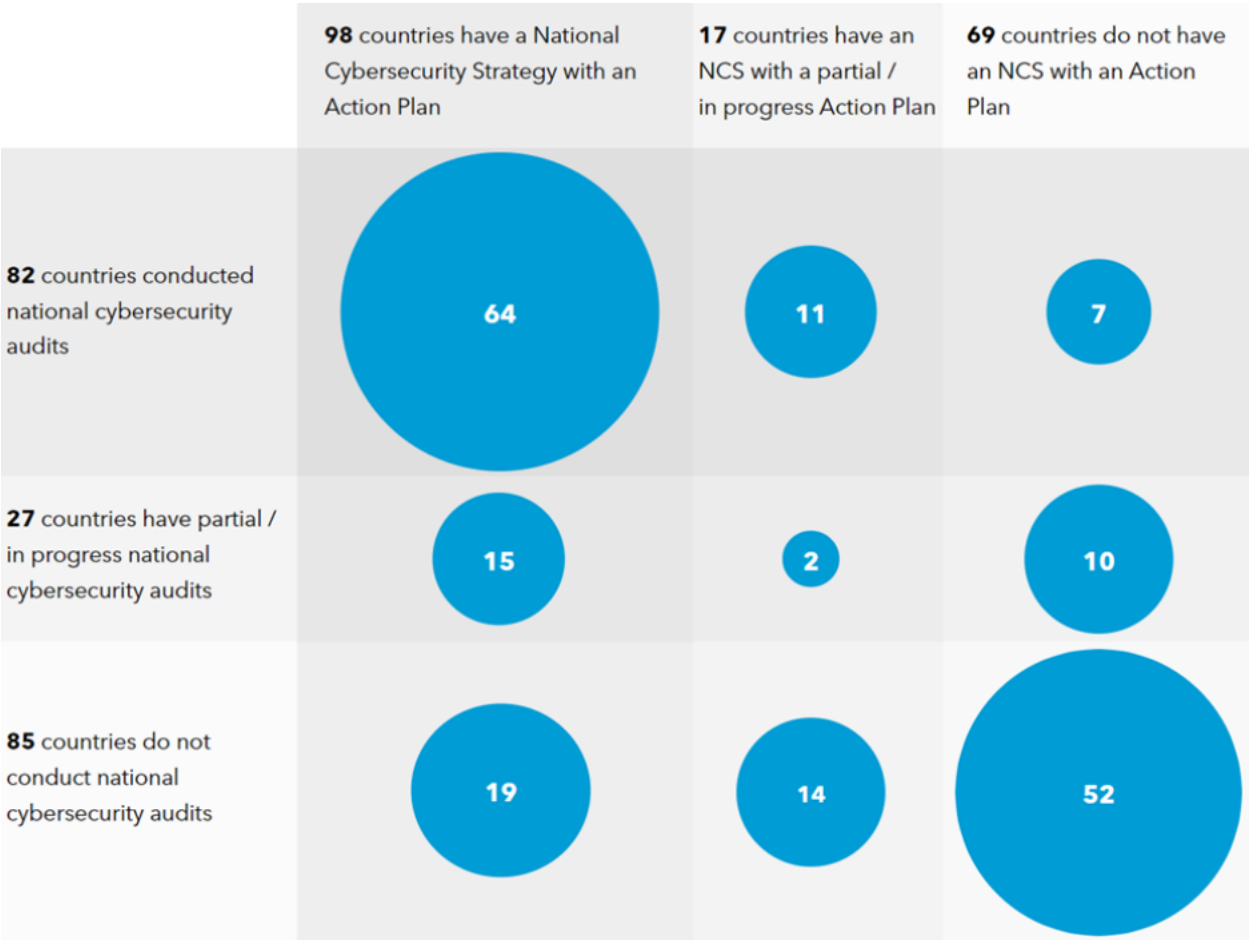


Figure 21. Overlap of having a National Cybersecurity Strategy (NCS) with an action plan and conducting national cybersecurity audits

Source: ITU Global Cybersecurity Index, 2024 (<https://www.itu.int/epublications/publication/global-cybersecurity-index-2024>)

¹⁰⁰ Report of the Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (A/70/174) // United Nations. July 22, 2015. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n15/228/37/pdf/n1522837.pdf>

The Russian Foreign Ministry, commenting on the group's results, called the final report “an important politico-legal document laying down the general framework for state interaction in the information space”¹⁰¹. The ministry's statement emphasized that international law applies to the use of ICT, but where necessary, it can be developed further, including through the adoption of new principles and norms. This last part was especially important to Russia, which continued to seek legally binding rules. The norms outlined in the GGE report, however, remained voluntary, with no sanctions for non-compliance.

...The final report builds on the key provisions of the 2010 and 2013 GGE reports and develops them in line with contemporary realities. A new element of it is the requirement that any accusations against states of organizing and committing illegal acts using ICTs must be proven. This precludes the possibility of “indiscriminate” prosecution of states for attacks allegedly committed in the information space.

The report recognizes that international law is applicable to the use of ICTs; however, if necessary, it can be developed, including through the adoption of new principles and norms. In this context, special attention is paid to the development of norms, rules, and principles for responsible state behavior in the ICT space. <...> Discussions on international information security (IIS) issues at the key international forum – the UN – are maintained. The recommendatory section of the report suggests that regular institutional dialogue on IIS should continue within this organization.

MFA of the Russian Federation

June 30, 2015

https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/un/1511194/

The GGE worked intermittently until 2021. In parallel, from 2019, another UN mechanism initiated by Russia was launched – the Open-ended Working Group (OWEG) on security in the use of ICT. Like the GGE, the OWEG aimed to develop rules of responsible state behavior in the information space but was more inclusive and democratic. Almost all UN member states participated, along with intergovernmental and non-governmental organizations and business delegations.

The OWEG built upon the voluntary norms established earlier by the GGE but further clarified and developed them. These norms remained voluntary, although, at Russia's insistence, the OWEG documents repeatedly stressed that states might need legally binding rules in the future.

Russia also succeeded in realizing a practical proposal – the creation of a “Global Directory of Points of Contact” to facilitate communication among national computer incident response teams (CERTs) of different countries (in Russia, this is the National Coordination Center for Computer Incidents, created by the FSB) and generally facilitate bilateral and multilateral information exchange¹⁰². This directory, launched in 2024 (available on the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs website,

¹⁰¹ On the results of the final meeting of the UN Group of Governmental Experts on International Information Security // MFA of the Russian Federation. June 30, 2015. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/un/1511194/ (in Russ.).

¹⁰² Chernenko E. Digital responsibility will be formalized with a report // *Kommersant* Publishing House. July 7, 2025. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7871382> (in Russ.).

UNODA¹⁰³), became the first universal confidence-building measure implemented within the OEWG.

The OEWG, initiated in 2019, experienced several compositions and completed its work in mid-2025. It was decided to replace it with a permanent mechanism – a decision supported and promoted by Russian authorities. According to statements by Russian Foreign Ministry representatives, Moscow still hopes that work in this area (the first of the three outlined in the Foreign Policy Concept) will ultimately lead to the development of comprehensive international legal instruments focusing on the prevention and resolution of interstate conflicts¹⁰⁴.

A Convention Concept

Russia has also submitted the draft of such a full-fledged international legal instrument – not once but three times. It refers to the UN Convention on Ensuring International Information Security. The first concept was presented by Russian authorities in 2011, the second in 2021, and the third in 2023. The latest document was co-submitted by Russia with Belarus, North Korea, Nicaragua, and Syria as an official document of the 77th session of the UN General Assembly¹⁰⁵.

The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed confidence that the international discussion on international information security reflects “growing support among UN member states for the idea of adopting a universal legally binding instrument that would ensure stability and security in the global information space”¹⁰⁶. The initiative jointly presented by Russia and its like-minded states is considered in Moscow as a prototype of such an international treaty.

For the understanding of Russian interests in international information security this document is extremely important because it clearly reflects what Russia ideally aims to achieve in this sphere. It builds upon the works of the GGE and OEWG but specifically reflects the Russian vision of how international information security should be ensured.

Two principles run as a red thread throughout the document: the principles of sovereign equality of states and non-interference in their internal affairs.

Based on these principles, Russian authorities propose the following critically important provisions in the Convention concept from Russia’s perspective¹⁰⁷:

¹⁰³ Global Intergovernmental Points of Contact Directory on the Use of Information and Communications Technologies in the Context of International Security // UNODA. URL: <https://poc-ict.unoda.org/>

¹⁰⁴ Vershinin S. Speech at the round table on international information security within the framework of the XIII International Meeting of High Representatives in charge of security issues, Moscow // MFA of the Russian Federation. May 29, 2025. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/2021689/ (in Russ.).

¹⁰⁵ Updated concept of the United Nations Convention on International Information Security // The Security Council of the Russian Federation URL:

<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/media/files/file/P7ehXmaBUDOAACATW2Rwa3yNK1bNAWI9.pdf> (in Russ.).

¹⁰⁶ On the concept of the UN Convention on International Information Security // MFA of the Russian Federation. May 16, 2023. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1870609/ (in Russ.).

¹⁰⁷ Updated concept of the United Nations Convention on International Information Security // The Security Council of the Russian Federation URL:

<http://www.scrf.gov.ru/media/files/file/P7ehXmaBUDOAACATW2Rwa3yNK1bNAWI9.pdf> (in Russ.).

- Sovereign rights of every state to ensure the security of its national information space, establishing norms and mechanisms for managing its information and cultural space in accordance with national legislation;
- Sovereign equality and equal rights and obligations of states regardless of economic, social, political, or other differences within the international information security system;
- Refraining from threats or use of force against the ICT infrastructure of other states or as a means of conflict resolution;
- Prohibiting the use of ICT to undermine or encroach upon sovereignty, violate territorial integrity and independence of states;
- Refusal to use ICT to interfere in the internal affairs of sovereign states;
- Impermissibility of baseless accusations against other states regarding organizing and committing ICT offenses, including cyberattacks, especially when used to justify unilateral economic sanctions and other measures;
- Resolving interstate conflicts through negotiation, mediation, reconciliation, or other peaceful means of their choice, including consultations involving national bodies responsible for detecting, preventing, mitigating the consequences of cyberattacks, and responding to cyber incidents.

This is not an exhaustive list of provisions that the Russian side would like to see in a legally binding Convention on international information security, but these points clearly demonstrate the basis of the Russian position.

The Convention draft also includes a section “Main threats to international information security and influencing factors”, which clearly shows what Russia does *not* want to see in this area¹⁰⁸. Among such actions are:

- Using ICT by states in military-political and other spheres to undermine (encroach upon) sovereignty, violate territorial integrity, social and economic stability of sovereign states, interfere in their internal affairs, and perform other actions in the global information space impeding the maintenance of international peace and security;
- Conducting cyberattacks against states’ information resources, including critical information infrastructure;
- Monopoly by individual states and/or their supported private companies over the ICT market by limiting access of other states to advanced ICT and increasing their technological dependence on dominant informatization states, increasing digital inequality;
- Unfounded accusations by some states against others in organizing or committing ICT offenses, including cyberattacks;
- Using information resources under the jurisdiction of another state without coordination with that state’s competent authorities;
- Including undeclared capabilities in ICT and concealing vulnerabilities in products by manufacturers;
- Disseminating information through ICT that harms the political, social, economic, spiritual, moral, and cultural foundations of states, as well as threatening life and safety of citizens.

¹⁰⁸ Ibid.

By submitting the Convention draft for consideration by UN member states, Russia, as noted by the Foreign Ministry, aimed to prevent and resolve conflicts, establish interstate cooperation, including strengthening the capacity of developing countries in the sphere of information security. The Ministry emphasized that Russia and co-authors are open to further discussion, taking possible proposals and comments into account, and called on foreign partners to join the initiative “in the interests of building a fair and comprehensive international information security system.”¹⁰⁹.

So far, however, a substantive discussion on this document has not started yet. The discourse within the framework of the GGE, and then the OEWG, gradually moved towards the idea of legally binding rules, but slowly, and constantly encountering opposition from skeptics. In addition, the chances of the Russian initiative on international information security to pass were negatively affected by the between Russia and the West confrontation around Ukraine. However, Moscow remains focused on results and refers to the success of Russian diplomacy in the second area – the formation of an international legal framework to counter the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes¹¹⁰.

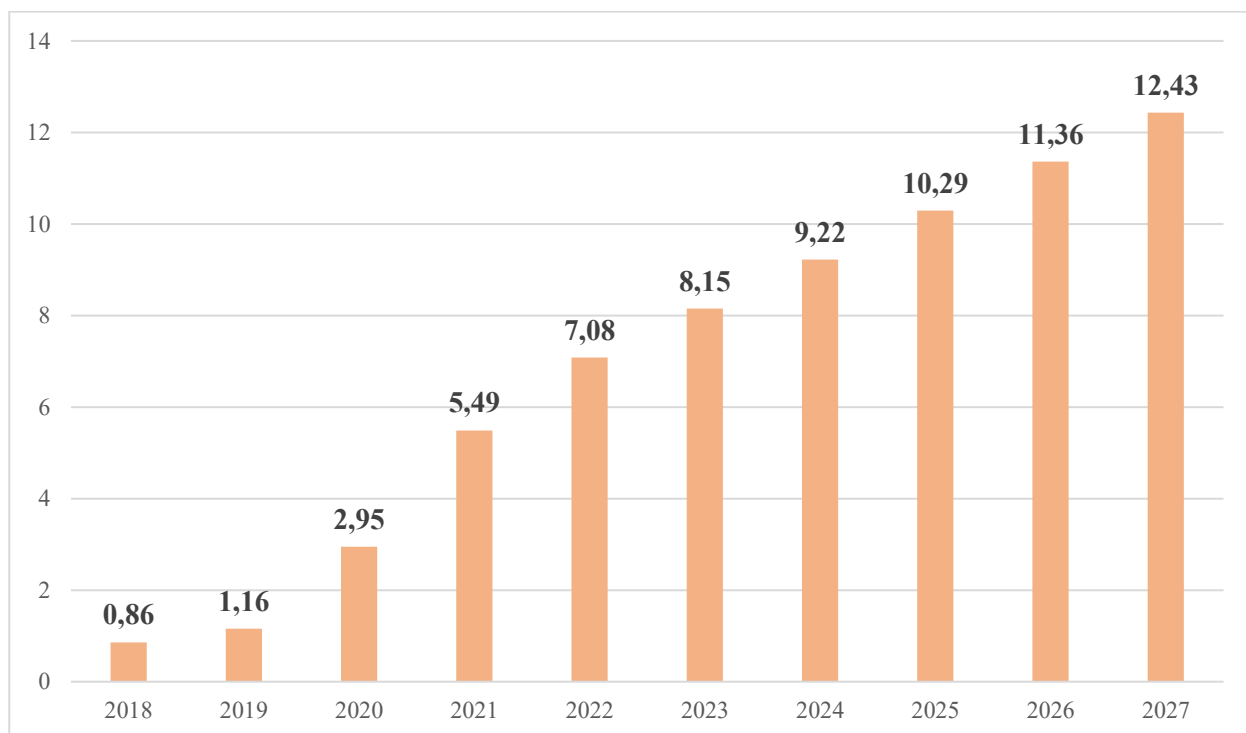


Figure 22. Estimated annual cost of cybercrime worldwide (in trillion US dollars)

Based on: Statista

Source: <https://www.statista.com/topics/13546/cybercrime-worldwide/>

First Universal Treaty

In December 2024, the UN General Assembly approved the Convention against Cybercrime – the first universal international treaty on international information security. Russia was also the initiator

¹⁰⁹ On the concept of the UN Convention on International Information Security // MFA of the Russian Federation. May 16, 2023. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1870609 (in Russ.).

¹¹⁰ Vershinin S. Speech at the round table on international information security within the framework of the XIII International Meeting of High Representatives in charge of security issues, Moscow // MFA of the Russian Federation. May 29, 2025. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/2021689/ (in Russ.).

of its development. Since 2017, Russia promoted at the UN an alternative to the Budapest Convention of the Council of Europe on Cybercrime. The Budapest Convention, signed in 2001, had been the most significant intergovernmental mechanism to combat cybercrime, ratified by 68 countries (mostly Western)¹¹¹.

However, Russian authorities initially regarded the Budapest Convention as a tool for interference in the internal affairs of other states and a violation of their sovereignty. Moscow was particularly dissatisfied with Article 32 of the Budapest Convention on cross-border access to stored computer data, which Russian authorities interpreted as allowing various intelligence services to conduct operations inside third countries' computer networks without official notification. Russian authorities believed granting foreigners such access would threaten Russia's security and sovereignty.

In 2019, Russia succeeded in getting the UN General Assembly to adopt Resolution 74/247 establishing a Special Committee "to develop a comprehensive international convention on countering the use of ICT for criminal purposes"¹¹². Most Western countries opposed this; they aimed not to draft a new document but to expand the scope of the Budapest Convention. However, Western states eventually revised their position and actively joined the Special Committee's work, which involved experts from over 160 countries and 200 non-governmental organizations.

Russia submitted its own draft versions of the Convention to the UN twice – in 2017 and 2021. The preparation involved the Prosecutor General's Office, Ministry of Interior, Foreign Ministry, and other Russian agencies. Moscow insisted that the Convention cover the broadest possible range of criminal acts in the information sphere, emphasizing the UN General Assembly Resolution 74/247's task of developing a "comprehensive Convention". Russia's 2021 draft proposed criminalizing 23 types of offenses. Western countries, conversely, sought to narrow the scope of the new legal instrument, which Russia saw as an attempt to "dilute and undermine the new agreement"¹¹³.

The negotiations were extremely difficult. Many Russian proposals were included in the final text, but not all. Notably, provisions criminalizing the use of cyber technology for incitement to subversive activities, extremism, and terrorism were excluded. Western negotiators, including NGOs, argued that there was no universally accepted definition of these terms and feared that including such articles could enable authoritarian governments to crack down on dissent online¹¹⁴.

Some other provisions insisted on by Western states, mainly related to human rights, drew criticism from Russia¹¹⁵.

¹¹¹ For comparison, in the first 48 hours since the start of the signing procedure for the UN Convention against Cybercrime, the number of its participants exceeded 70 countries – *Editor's note*.

¹¹² UN General Assembly Resolution A/RES/74/247 "Countering the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes" // United Nations. December 27, 2019. URL: <https://documents.un.org/doc/undoc/gen/n19/440/31/pdf/n1944031.pdf>

¹¹³ Chernenko E. Not everything fitted under the law // *Kommersant* Publishing House. January 12, 2024. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6452715> (in Russ.).

¹¹⁴ Ibid.

¹¹⁵ Chernenko E. A cyber-sensitive topic // *Kommersant* Publishing House. July 30, 2024. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/6864552> (in Russ.).

Despite the tense negotiations, the participants managed to reach a compromise, and the draft Convention was approved – first by the Special Committee, then by the Third Committee of the UN General Assembly, and finally, in December 2024, by the full General Assembly. The document received a complex title reflecting the compromises: “United Nations Convention against Cybercrime; enhancing international cooperation in combating certain crimes committed through information and communication systems, and in the exchange of electronic evidence relating to serious crimes.” Its opening for signature was planned for October 2025 in Hanoi, Vietnam. The Convention will enter into force after at least 40 countries ratify it.

The document covers ten categories of crimes, including unauthorized access to information and communication systems, illegal interception of data, interference with electronic data and systems, misuse of devices, forgery, theft or fraud using ICT, child pornography, and non-consensual dissemination of intimate images¹¹⁶.

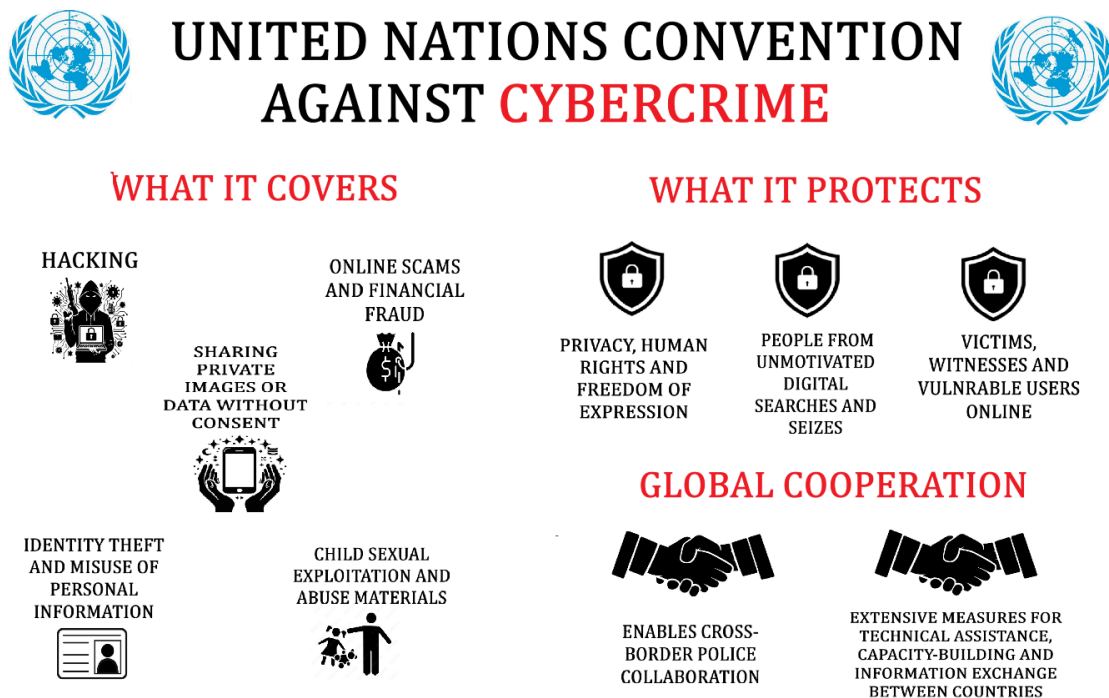


Figure 23. United Nations Convention against Cybercrime

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Although not all of Russia’s proposals were accepted, Russian authorities welcomed the adoption of the Convention. The Russian Foreign Ministry expressed hope that it would become “a solid foundation for establishing law enforcement cooperation to combat the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes”¹¹⁷. Regarding offenses not included in the new treaty, the Ministry indicated Russia’s expectation that the convention’s scope could be extended in

¹¹⁶ United Nations Convention against Cybercrime; strengthening international cooperation in combating certain crimes committed using information and communication systems and in the exchange of electronic evidence related to serious crimes // United Nations. URL: <https://www.unodc.org/unodc/ru/cybercrime/convention/text/convention-full-text.html> (in Russ.).

¹¹⁷ On the Convention Against Cybercrime of the United Nations // MFA of the Russian Federation. December 26, 2024. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/mezdunarodnaa-informacionnaa-bezopasnost/1989289/ (in Russ.).

the future through protocols covering additional crimes, focusing on combating the use of ICT for terrorism and extremism, as well as drug and arms trafficking.

Internet Governance

Regarding Russia's interests in the third area mentioned in the Foreign Policy Concept of the Russian Federation – ensuring safe and stable functioning of the Internet based on the equal participation of states in its governance and preventing the establishment of foreign control over its national segments – the key element of Russian strategy is supporting the internationalization of Internet governance and enhancing the role of states in this process.

Russia advocates for reforming the global model of Internet governance, which is currently largely dominated by the international organization The Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers (ICANN, headquartered in Los Angeles, USA) and multilateral multi-stakeholder structures. The role of states in this ecosystem is limited. The Russian authorities believe that the current model does not provide sufficient security and protection of users' rights and propose strengthening the role of states as guarantors of rights, the economy, security, and stability of Internet infrastructure¹¹⁸. Leading Russian academic experts and practitioners in the field mostly share this view¹¹⁹.

Within the UN system, Russia insists on adopting a range of coordinated measures, such as increasing the role of states in the Internet governance process, developing a global policy on Internet governance at the interstate level, ensuring its stable and secure functioning based on international law, and preserving the sovereign right of states to regulate their national segments of the Internet. Russia would like to endow a specialized UN structure – the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) – with these functions and powers¹²⁰. According to Russian authorities, the ITU has the necessary competencies and is widely involved in developing various Internet standards and protocols. The ITU includes companies, international and regional organizations, and scientific institutions, but states play the key role, which explains Russia's choice of it as a possible international platform for developing legal norms and standards in Internet governance.

In 2021, the Russian communications administration nominated Rashid Ismailov (President of PJSC *VimpelCom*, 2014–2018 Deputy Minister of Communications and Mass Media of the Russian Federation) as a candidate for ITU Secretary-General. Among the priorities of his program were support for a human-centered digital economy and society; bridging the gap in access to information and communication technologies and developing human potential in third-world countries; managing risks, problems, and opportunities arising from the rapid development of communications

¹¹⁸ Global Cyber Campaign: a Diplomatic Victory // *International Affairs Journal*, issue 7, 2021. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2529> (in Russ.).

¹¹⁹ International Internet Governance. (by the Coordination Center for .Ru/.PФ Domains and MGIMO University). Edited by Zinovyeva E. Moscow: 2025 (in Russ.).

¹²⁰ Global Cyber Campaign: a Diplomatic Victory // *International Affairs Journal*, issue 7, 2021. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2529> (in Russ.).

technologies; creating an antimonopoly environment for innovation in telecommunications and information technology; strengthening cooperation among ITU members¹²¹.

However, at the ITU Plenipotentiary Conference elections in 2022, the American Dorin Bogdan-Martin won. According to official results, out of 164 valid votes, Dorin Bogdan-Martin received 139, and Rashid Ismailov received 25¹²². Afterward, Russian authorities emphasized that Russia is ready to continue working with the ITU and is open to cooperating with the new Secretary-General¹²³.

An Outlook

It can be expected that Russia will continue to develop and adapt its international information security policy in the future, considering dynamic technological changes and increasing geopolitical complexity. A crucial task will be balancing national interests and the demands of global and regional cooperation (primarily within integration structures such as BRICS, SCO, CSTO, and CIS) and developing effective measures to counter new forms of information threats.

From the standpoint of practical results, it is promising and expedient to continue working on concluding bilateral agreements on cooperation in information security with interested partners. Starting with the USA in 2013, Russia has now signed such agreements with several dozen countries (this topic is covered in a dedicated article in the Volume One of the *Security Index Yearbook*¹²⁴).

Overall, the field of international information security can be called one of the key arenas for shaping new models of global policy, where civilizational values, technological, economic, and humanitarian interests closely interact with the challenges of the 21st century. New concepts are taking center stage in the Russian (but also in many other countries') official and expert discourse, such as the notion of digital sovereignty, a category that now supplements state sovereignty. Broadly understood digital sovereignty is the independence of a state in both domestic and foreign policy in the digital sphere, and according to leading Russian experts, it is becoming the most important measure of a state's viability, security, and economic potential¹²⁵. One of the main tasks and challenges of the Russian government for the coming years will undoubtedly be to ensure that the country is digitally sovereign.

Another key challenge today is the rapid development of artificial intelligence (AI) technologies, which are already penetrating virtually all spheres of life. Russia, seeking to take a leading position in ICT, is now actively formulating its national interests in the field of AI as well. As with ICTs in general one can expect them to blend ambitions for technological sovereignty, economic

¹²¹ Chebakova D. The Russian candidate lost the election of the head of the International Telecommunication Union // RBC. September 29, 2022. URL: https://www.rbc.ru/technology_and_media/29/09/2022/633572c89a79477524f43603 (in Russ.).

¹²² Bogdan Martin, a candidate from the United States, was elected the new Secretary General of the International Telecommunication Union // TASS. September 29, 2022. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/15905329> (in Russ.).

¹²³ Russia will continue to work with the International Telecommunication Union // RIA Novosti News Agency, September 29, 2022. URL: <https://ria.ru/20220929/mintsifry-1820305241.html> (in Russ.).

¹²⁴ Chernenko E. Russia's Cyber Diplomacy: A Change in Progress // *Security Index Yearbook*. Vol. 1. 2024-2025. URL: <https://pircenter.org/en/editions/security-index-yearbook-chapter-8-russia-s-cyber-diplomacy-a-change-in-progress/>

¹²⁵ Zinovyeva E., Shitkov S. Digital sovereignty in the practice of international relations // *International Affairs Journal*, Issue 3, 2023. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2798> (in Russ.).

modernization, military security, and enhanced geopolitical influence through AI development and international partnerships.

CHAPTER 7.

HACKING THE FUTURE: HOW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES RESHAPE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

Vadim Kozyulin

Globalization and technological progress have *blurred the boundaries* between civilian and military applications of a wide range of digital solutions – from microelectronics to artificial intelligence. This has resulted in the emergence of new types of threats that require thorough scholarly consideration and effective legal regulation. A significant place in this process is occupied by so-called *dual-use technologies*, which, although initially intended for civilian purposes in medicine, industry, and ecology, are increasingly used in the defense sector, forming the foundation for new types of weaponry and military equipment.

As security analyst Mark Galeotti notes, the “weaponization of everything”¹²⁶ has become a hallmark of the present era: even hashtags, memes, and selfies can be used as instruments in information confrontations, and everyday means of communication and data exchange are turning into elements of new conflicts. This phenomenon gives rise to new kinds of threats and concerns, linked to the possibility of exploiting vulnerabilities in everyday devices for cyberattacks or other destructive actions.

The development of the Internet of Things (IoT) is of particular significance, becoming an integral part of urban infrastructure and daily life. IoT devices (cameras, sensors, etc.) ensure control over technological processes and personal comfort, creating massive volumes of data used to automate the management of various spheres of life. However, their vulnerability to cyberattacks makes them potential tools for attacking or interfering in critical systems.

ICTs have become a strategic resource that demands new legal regulation, especially in the context of their military or destructive use. Russia is actively contributing to the reshaping of regulatory approaches in this field.

When a Pager Becomes a Mine

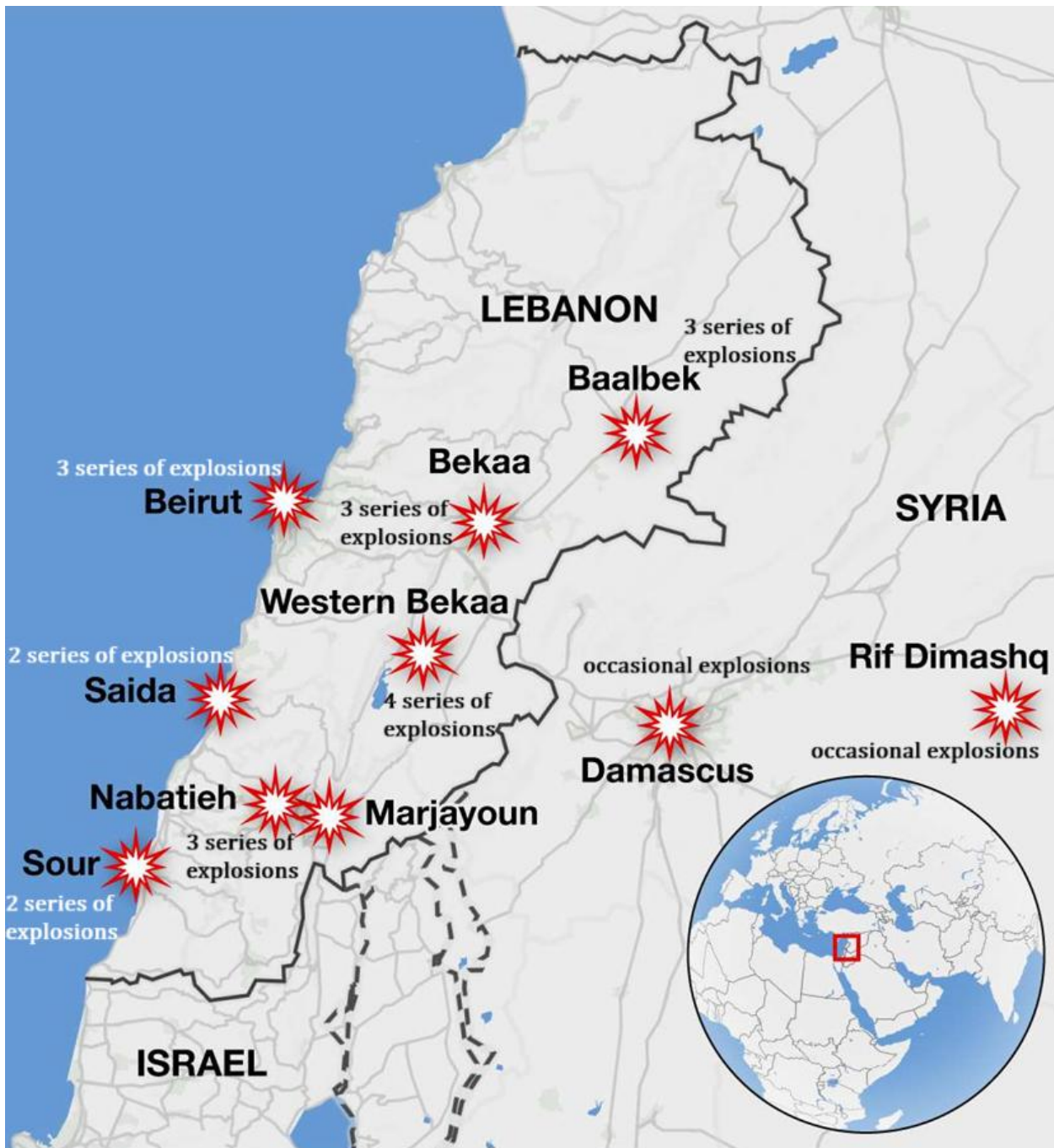
On September 17, 2024, a series of explosions of Hezbollah members’ pagers occurred in Lebanon, killing 12 people and injuring about 3,000¹²⁷. Lebanese authorities and Hezbollah representatives attributed responsibility for the attacks to Israel’s *Mossad*, claiming that explosives had been integrated into the devices during production and activation occurred remotely through electronic signals. The devices exploded several seconds after receiving the relevant message.

This incident became the subject of a broad international discussion, as it was the first large-scale attack carried out by hacking and modifying civilian IoT devices, raising questions about the

¹²⁶ Abid A. The Weaponisation of Everything: A Field Guide to the New Way of War // Journal of Security & Strategic Analyses, July 2023. p. 94-96.

¹²⁷ Lebanon pager blast death toll rises to 4,000 // RBC. September 17, 2024 URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/17/09/2024/66e9dd649a794707f731e229> (in Russ.).

transformation of everyday items into potential weapons. International law and ethics experts drew attention to the attack's indiscriminate nature: it was impossible to determine in advance who the victims would be, casting doubt on compliance with the principles of proportionality and precaution enshrined in international humanitarian law (IHL). The significant harm to civilians, including the deaths of children, was deemed disproportionate to any conceivable military advantage¹²⁸. Russia classified the incident as a violation of international law and called for the creation of binding agreements to prevent similar attacks¹²⁹.



¹²⁸ Exploding pagers and radios: A terrifying violation of international law, say UN experts // OHCHR. September 19, 2024. URL: <https://www.ohchr.org/en/press-releases/2024/09/exploding-pagers-and-radios-terrifying-violation-international-law-say-un>

¹²⁹ Interview of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Vershinin to the online news publication 'Lenta.ru' // MFA of Russia. November 5, 2024. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1979481/ (in Russ.).

Map 4. Locations of confirmed device explosions (Lebanon and Syria), September 2024

Based on *Haaretz* (<https://www.haaretz.com/middle-east-news/2024-09-17/ty-article/.premium/reports-hundreds-wounded-in-pager-blasts-targeting-hezbollah-operatives-across-lebanon/>), updated by the author.

The international expert community also voiced serious concern. Legal scholars identified two key aspects. First, the legality of an attack depends on the status of the conflict and the parties involved. Helmut Aust (Free University of Berlin) noted that Hezbollah's status as a non-state actor complicates the qualification of the conflict as international. At the same time, Stefan Talmon (University of Bonn) argued that members of armed groups may be considered lawful military targets if they perform combat functions. However, critics point out that the scale of the explosions and the deaths of civilians, including children, contradict the principle of proportionality and the prohibition of indiscriminate attacks enshrined in international humanitarian law¹³⁰.

Second, the use of pagers as disguised explosive devices falls under Protocol II of the 1996 UN Convention prohibiting booby-trap mines disguised as harmless objects. UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk characterized the incident as a war crime, noting that the attack made no distinction between combatants and civilians and was terrorist in nature¹³¹. European politicians, including Josep Borrell, condemned the actions for their indiscriminate nature and emphasized the risk of escalating conflict across the region.

The legal consequences of the incident include the need for an independent investigation, the possibility of appeal to the International Criminal Court, and tightened controls on cyberweapons. The events in Lebanon have intensified debates about regulating hybrid warfare methods, in which civilian technologies are used for military purposes. The lack of unequivocal attribution of responsibility complicates the application of sanctions¹³².

The Lebanon pager explosions vividly demonstrate the vulnerability of IoT devices and their potential for weaponization. This raises questions about the need to strengthen security standards for civilian digital technologies and to develop international legal frameworks restricting their use to harm civilian populations. Currently, universally applicable international standards regulating the military use of digital technologies are absent, creating a substantial gap in civilian protection in modern conflicts.

Thus, the incident underscores the necessity of revisiting approaches to legal regulation of digital technologies, especially in the context of their *dual-use nature* and growing integration into daily life. The development of effective international mechanisms for preventing and responding to such threats has become one of the key challenges to maintaining global security in the digital age.

War by the Formula “AI Will Decide Who Survives”

¹³⁰ Explosion of pagers in Lebanon assessed as a violation of international law, Victoria Kondratieva // *Lenta.RU*. September 18, 2024. URL: <https://lenta.ru/news/2024/09/18/vzryv-peydzherov-v-livane-otsenili-kak-narushenie-mezhdunarodnogo-prava/> (In Russ.).

¹³¹ UN calls Lebanon pager blasts a war crime // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. September 20, 2024. URL: <https://ria.ru/20240920/podryv-1973937120.html> (In Russ.).

¹³² Israel planted explosives in Hezbollah's Taiwan-made pagers, say sources // *Reuters*. September 18, 2024. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/middle-east/israel-planted-explosives-hezbollahs-taiwan-made-pagers-say-sources-2024-09-18/>

One of the most prominent examples of artificial intelligence use in contemporary armed conflicts is Israel's deployment of the AI systems *Lavender* and *Gospel* during military operations in the Gaza Strip between 2023 and 2025. These systems, developed by Israel's military *Unit 8200*, illustrate how digital technologies have become instruments not only of warfare but also of geopolitical influence, forming new challenges for international law and ethics.

Lavender is intended for analyzing intelligence data collected from drones, surveillance cameras, and mobile communications, with the aim of compiling lists of individuals associated with HAMAS and the Palestinian Islamic Jihad. Its algorithms processed information on most of the enclave's 2.3 million residents, assigning each a probability score for affiliation with militants, on a scale from 1 to 100. At the peak of operations, the system identified up to 37,000 Palestinians as potential targets.

Simultaneously, *Gospel* analyzed geodata and movement routes, making recommendations for target selection. Both systems allowed attack decisions to be made within 20 seconds, with up to 80% of targets determined by algorithms without detailed human verification. According to researchers, the software included a threshold for "collateral damage" – up to 15–20 civilians per presumed militant. In practice, however, for each militant eliminated, there were up to 100 or more civilian casualties¹³³, and in 10% of cases, the systems made identification errors¹³⁴. The use of *Lavender* and *Gospel* sparked broad debate in expert circles about compliance with international humanitarian law and fundamental ethical principles. Critics argue that automating target selection led to the use of indiscriminate warfare methods, mass strikes on residential neighbourhoods, and disproportionately high civilian casualties, contravening the principles of distinction and proportionality enshrined in international humanitarian law.

This creates legal *grey zones* and exacerbates conflict asymmetry. Analysis of the functioning of *Lavender* and *Gospel* revealed that key decisions and limits were programmed and controlled by humans-programmers and operators. Thus, the responsibility for violations lies not with the algorithms, but with those who set their parameters.

Therefore, the case of Israeli AI systems underscores the need to further develop international legal mechanisms that can ensure both the effectiveness of military technologies and the protection of fundamental rights of civilian populations in the context of the digital transformation of armed conflict.

Civilian sector applications of such technologies also create risks for ordinary citizens. Identification errors and failures in automated systems threaten life and health, reduce access to services, and foster discrimination against specific groups. Cybersecurity and infrastructure resilience issues are especially acute: attacks on energy grids, medical databases, and transport nodes highlight the scale of threats to the peaceful population.

¹³³ 'Lavender': The AI machine directing Israel's bombing spree in Gaza // Prepare for Change. April 10, 2024. URL: <https://prepareforchange.net/2024/04/10/lavender-the-ai-machine-directing-israels-bombing-sprees-in-gaza/>

¹³⁴ New Recruits Help Israel Track HAMAS Operatives In Gaza. They Are Both AI // NDTV World. April 28, 2024. URL: <https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/explained-what-are-lavender-and-gospel-ai-israel-is-using-to-bomb-gaza-5540086>

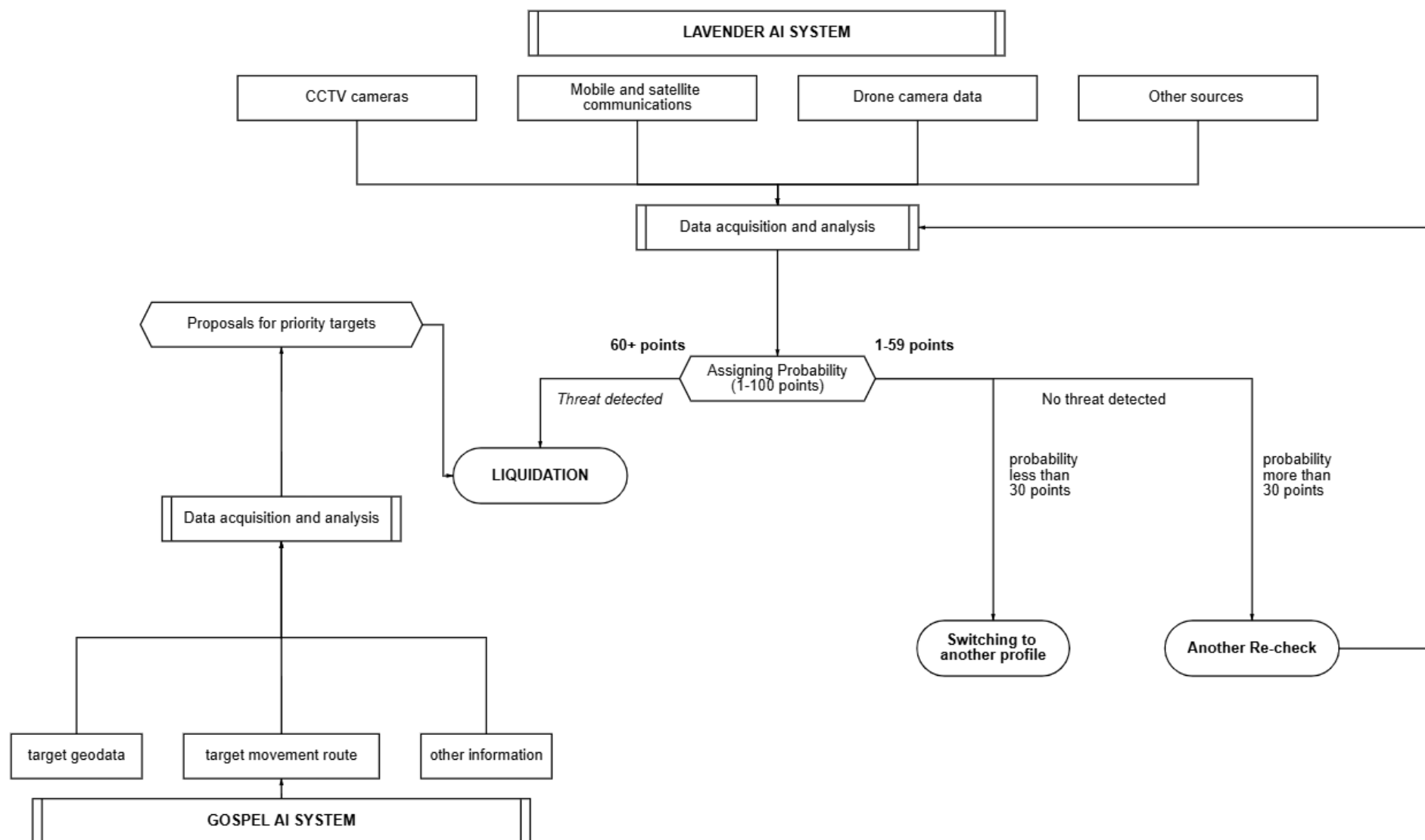


Figure 24. Decision-making scheme for the liquidation of a target in the Gaza Strip (using *Lavender* and *Gospel* AI Systems)
 Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Digital Command: Artificial Intelligence in Headquarters

Modern military AI technologies are not solely focused on inflicting direct damage on opponents. A prime example of the comprehensive use of AI in defense is the United States Department of Defense's *COMPASS* (*Collection and Monitoring Platform for Advanced Situational Scenarios*) program. This system is designed to integrate and analyze heterogeneous intelligence data to enhance situational awareness and forecast potential enemy actions in real time.

COMPASS algorithms employ machine learning methods to process a multiplicity of parameters. The system executes hybrid analysis, combining military intelligence with data from open sources such as social networks, financial transactions, and political records. Such an approach permits the formation of composite forecasts of enemy behavior and early identification of potential threats.

COMPASS operates in several phases. The first involves analyzing adversary behavioral patterns using AI algorithms, generating projections of likely future scenarios. The second phase can include information operations, such as influencing public opinion¹³⁵. The third phase encompasses “provocative probing” tactics to uncover enemy strategies and produces recommendations for military command.

Firstly, the large-scale collection and processing of data, including personal information, raises concerns about privacy and data protection. Secondly, automating target selection and forecasting entails risks of misclassification: limitations in training datasets or contextual errors may lead to faulty identification of targets, violating the principle of distinction in international humanitarian law. Automated assessment of expected collateral damage also requires algorithm adjustment in line with IHL standards to minimize civilian risk.

Additionally, the use of commercial cloud platforms (for example, *Google Cloud*) for military purposes generates further ethical questions and criticism from human rights organizations. Scientific literature highlights the risk of so-called “algorithmic drift” – the gradual expansion of targeting criteria and impact radius resulting from adaptive system learning.

Company	Project / Contract	Amount (\$ billion)	Period
Palantir	Project Maven (Maven Smart System)	1.3	2025-2029
Microsoft	HoloLens (IVAS)	21.9	2021
Amazon	CIA Commercial Cloud Enterprise	Dozens	2020
Google/Alphabet	Joint Warfighting Cloud Capability	9.0	2022
Microsoft	Army Software Contract	10.0	2025-2035
Amazon	Special Operations Cloud	0.22	2024
Oracle	Pentagon Cloud Computing	2.5	2022
IBM	Pentagon Cloud Computing	2.5	2022
SpaceX	Starlink/Stargate Project	0.5	2025

¹³⁵ The Pentagon Wants to Flood Social Media With Fake AI People // *Futurism*. October 19, 2024. URL: <https://futurism.com/the-byte/pentagon-wants-fake-ai-people>

Anduril	UAV Defense Systems	0.642	2024
United States – Total Military Expenditures		997.0	2024

Table 2. US Companies contracts in the field of AI and smart military systems

Compiled by the author based on open sources.

Finally, acceleration of the decision-making cycle – from target discovery to striking – within mere minutes increases the likelihood of mistakes under conditions of incomplete or unreliable source data. This brings to the fore questions of responsibility allocation among developers, operators, and command staff for international law violations involving autonomous systems.

Overall, the experience of implementing *COMPASS* illustrates not only AI’s potential to boost the effectiveness of military command but also the need to establish clear legal and ethical standards governing the use of such technologies in modern conflicts. In civilian contexts, the evolution of IoT, *big data*, and automation increasingly poses risks of data leaks and mass data collection. Ensuring privacy is now not only a technical but a social concern: hacker attacks on banks, healthcare, and city networks threaten not only financial losses but also fundamental individual rights.

Moreover, automation in staff recruitment, credit scoring, and distribution of social benefits leads to issues of algorithmic bias and discrimination of certain populations based on social, gender, or ethnic criteria.

The *Dual Life* of Algorithms: When AI Serves Both Markets and Militaries

A significant aspect of contemporary technological processes is the spillover of military artificial intelligence technologies into the civilian sector. AI systems originally developed for processing large volumes of data in military operations find application in business environments – from market analysis and demand forecasting to strategy optimization. However, their use is associated with risks of unfair competition, including the displacement of competitors, tender manipulation, and market monopolization.

Military AI algorithms demonstrate high effectiveness in forecasting market events. By analyzing news flows, financial reports, and social media data, they identify trends and potential disruptions, allowing manipulators to make decisions about buying or selling assets before changes become obvious to other market participants. Moreover, these technologies can artificially alter market sentiment through the generation and dissemination of false information. The creation of fake news about a company's financial performance can trigger sharp fluctuations in stock prices, as observed in 2024 during *meme wars* on cryptocurrency exchanges.

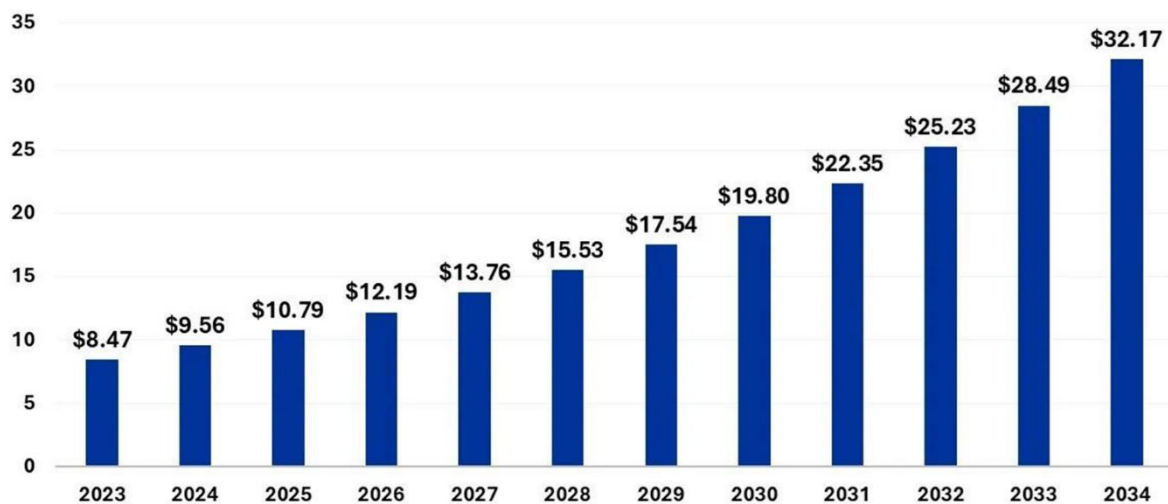


Figure 25. Artificial Intelligence in Military Market Size, 2023-2034 Forecast (\$, billions)

Source: Global Market Insights (<https://www.gminsights.com/industry-analysis/artificial-intelligence-in-military-market>).

The provocative nature of technical analysis enhanced by military algorithms presents particular dangers. Through automated content creation and social media manipulation, the illusion of certain trends is formed, influencing investor behavior. For example, modeling “natural” market corrections through bots using *Natural Language Processing* (NLP) violates principles of transparency and equal access to information¹³⁶.

Dual-use technologies are actively penetrating social and economic life: AI platforms are used for *big data* analysis in the financial sector, workforce management, and educational and medical services. This can both optimize processes and create new challenges for protecting workers' rights, countering systemic discrimination, and ensuring compliance with labor standards. The growth of automation contributes to the emergence of new professions while simultaneously intensifying digital inequality and complex social stratifications.

International AI regulation standards and control mechanisms are required to prevent abuses.

Artificial Intelligence as a *Catalyst* for Digital Threat Evolution

In recent years, artificial intelligence has become a key factor in transforming the offensive capabilities of cybercriminals. AI creates a new generation of autonomous cyberweapons. Such systems are capable not only of analyzing protected environments but also of dynamically changing their own code or behavior to circumvent even the most advanced detection and countermeasure systems.

The application of AI allows for the automation of processes that previously required manual intervention, including the generation of thousands of variants of malicious software, identification and exploitation of zero-day vulnerabilities, and adaptation to protective measures in real time. This

¹³⁶ Market manipulation // Clusterdelta. URL: <https://clusterdelta.com/ru/market-manipulation> (*In Russ.*).

significantly increases the speed, scale, and complexity of attacks, making them more destructive and difficult to predict for cybersecurity specialists.

Experts identify three main areas of AI use in cybercrime: automation of traditional attacks, creation of new channels of influence (including those extending beyond virtual space), and attacks on other artificial intelligence systems. Autonomous malicious programs based on AI are capable of self-improvement and continuous learning based on new data, significantly enhancing their resilience and adaptability in rapidly changing digital environments.

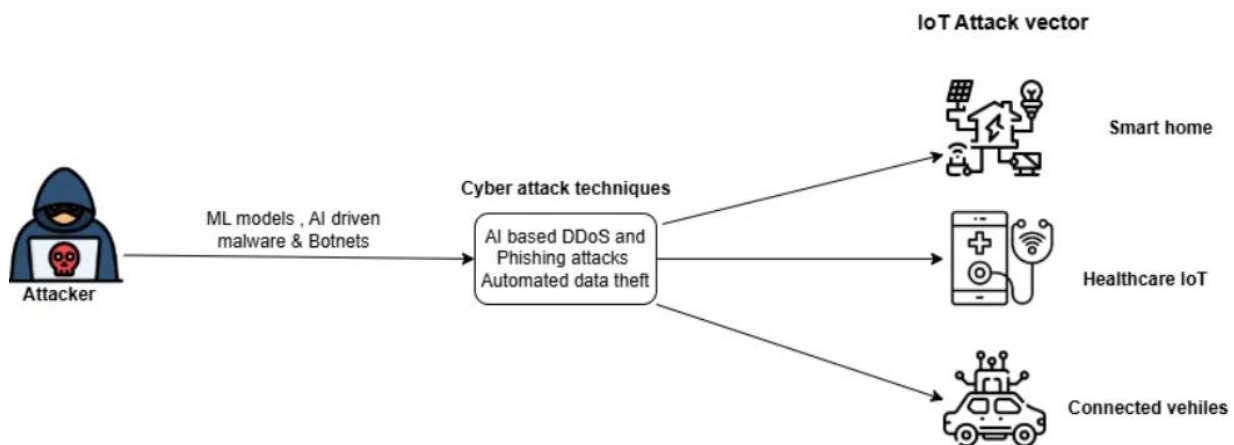


Figure 26. AI Powered Attacks on IoT Devices (simplified diagram)

Source: Karthik V. The Rise of AI Powered Attacks on IoT Devices, 2025.

In the civilian sector, the widespread use of cloud services and artificial intelligence becomes a vulnerability factor not only for individual companies but for society as a whole. Major data breaches and examples of attacks on government service systems, educational portals, and transport platforms underscore the necessity of developing complex multilayered strategies for ensuring digital sovereignty and protecting citizens' personal data.

Militarization of Digital Technologies and International Legal Conflicts

The militarization of digital technologies exacerbates existing international legal contradictions. The integration of civilian information and communication technologies into military systems creates asymmetric advantages, forming the foundation for network-centric warfare. The implementation of 5G/6G standards and cloud platforms (*Huawei, Amazon Web Services*) transforms into instruments of geopolitical influence. A striking example is the pressure from the US administration on European allies to exclude the Chinese company Huawei from EU 5G infrastructure. Simultaneously, China implements aggressive technological expansion in African countries, offering cyber-infrastructure leasing under conditions that critics call a form of *digital colonialism*.

Legal dilemmas arise: to what extent are data collected by *Amazon* and *Alibaba*, *Microsoft* and *Google* corporations protected from military use? How can compliance with international law be ensured if commercial platforms become elements of hybrid conflicts?

The absence of clear international norms regulating the dual use of digital technologies creates “gray zones” in law. Cloud services can be adapted for cyber-espionage or military operations, as demonstrated by cases of AWS and *Google Cloud* integration into US Department of Defense projects. The militarization of the digital sphere requires a revision of technological sovereignty principles.

Algorithm Diplomacy: The UN on the Digital *Front Line*

The history of discussing the militarization of information and communication technologies within the United Nations clearly demonstrates the complexity of finding international solutions to limit the military use of digital technologies. The Group of Governmental Experts on Developments in the Field of Information and Telecommunications in the Context of International Security (GGE) was established in 2004 on Russia's initiative and became the first specialized platform for discussing international information security issues, including the application of international law in cyberspace, principles of state sovereignty, state responsibility, and confidence-building measures.

The GGE operated in a closed format with a limited number of experts appointed by states, and despite difficulties in achieving consensus on final documents, its reports from 2010, 2013, and 2015 laid the foundations for forming international norms of state behavior in the ICT sphere. In 2019, on Russia's initiative, an Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG) was created, accessible to all UN member states, which responded to the exhaustion of the narrow expert format's potential and allowed for democratizing the negotiation process, increasing transparency and inclusivity in discussing cyber threats, norms of responsible behavior, confidence-building and capacity development measures, and creating mechanisms for international cooperation in cybersecurity.

In 2021, a second Open-Ended Working Group (OEWG II, Resolution 75/240) was established, continuing work in an open and inclusive format, and in 2025, the creation of a permanent open-ended mechanism for ICT security under UN auspices is planned¹³⁷, oriented toward operational aspects of cybersecurity, analysis of specific cyber threats through the lens of international law, development of confidence-building measures, and preparation of technical recommendations for the UN General Assembly¹³⁸. Within the OEWG framework, initiatives are being considered for developing a legally binding convention on international information security (Russia's proposal), creating thematic working groups on cyber-resilience, application of international law and artificial intelligence regulation, and establishing a voluntary cybersecurity fund to support developing countries¹³⁹.

Issues of ICT militarization and their use as instruments of geopolitical and economic influence remain central to both working groups, though participants' approaches differ: the first OEWG

¹³⁷ Towards a Regular Institutional Dialogue on International ICT Security: Review of Current Proposals and Considerations for Effective Dialogue // UNIDIR. November 29, 2024. URL: <https://unidir.org/publication/towards-regular-institutional-dialogue-on-international-ict-security-review-of-current-proposals-and-considerations-for-effective-dialogue/>

¹³⁸ Developments in the field of information and telecommunications in the context of international security, UN General Assembly Resolution 75/240 // United Nations. December 31, 2020. URL: <https://docs.un.org/ru/A/RES/75/240> (in Russ.).

¹³⁹ UN OEWG 2021-2025 10th substantive session, Opening of the session // DigWatch. February 17, 2025. URL: <https://dig.watch/event/un-oweg-2021-2025-10th-substantive-session/opening-of-the-session-oweg-2025>

insisted on creating universal legal frameworks, while OEWG II focuses on voluntary cooperation within existing norms, reflecting fundamental geopolitical opposition between supporters of multilateral regulation (Russia, China) and Western countries advocating flexible, legally non-binding formats. Russia consistently promotes the idea of internationalizing Internet governance and asserts states' sovereign right to manage national network segments, while Western countries insist on the transboundary nature of technologies and oppose national barriers, considering them contrary to the global Internet's nature.

Russian diplomacy views the OEWG format as a democratic and open mechanism for developing universal solutions, criticizing alternative Western projects (such as France's Programme of Action) as attempts to undermine OEWG activities and exclude developing countries from decision-making processes. Western countries prefer narrow specialized formats, focusing primarily on technical aspects such as critical infrastructure protection, and tend to divert discussion toward topics less significant for most states. As a result, contradictions between Russian and Western positions acquire a long-term character: Russia seeks to strengthen digital sovereignty and create mandatory international frameworks for cyberspace regulation, while the West defends a model of global and free Internet without rigid legal restrictions. These disagreements reflect a broader conflict of values and strategies, determining prospects for forming universal rules of state behavior in the digital environment¹⁴⁰.

International Oversight in Question: Drones, Robots, and the Legal Void

Within the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW), the issue of military artificial intelligence is discussed within the Group of Governmental Experts on Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems (LAWS), established in December 2016¹⁴¹. The Group received a mandate to consider LAWS parameters, the role of the human factor, potential military applications, and options for countering international security challenges, including humanitarian aspects. Information and communication technologies are an integral part of modern autonomous weapons systems, providing control, navigation, targeting, communication, and data analysis. The high level of automation achieved through ICTs allows such systems to operate effectively in complex combat situations while simultaneously creating new risks for international security. Issues considered by the CCW GGE intersect with themes of weapons technological evolution, international law applicability, threat assessment, and development of international norms for civilian protection.

Within the CCW, various, sometimes opposing views on LAWS regulation have emerged. Several states (Austria, Argentina, Mexico, New Zealand, Chile, and others) advocate for developing a new international treaty completely prohibiting or strictly limiting LAWS¹⁴². Some countries, including most European states, support the idea of developing new norms and guiding principles but are not

¹⁴⁰ Boyko S. International Information Security: Russia in the UN. Two Dialogue Format (2018-2021) // *International Affairs Journal*. March 21, 2024. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/45168> (In Russ.).

¹⁴¹ The official title of the so-called "Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons" is "Convention on Prohibitions or Restrictions on the Use of Certain Conventional Weapons Which May Be Deemed to Be Excessively Injurious or to Have Indiscriminate Effects".

¹⁴² Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons // MFA of the Russian Federation. April 28, 2021. URL: https://www.mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/international_safety/disarmament/obychnye_vooruzheniya/konventsia_o_negu_mannom_oruzhii/1413307/ (In Russ.).

ready for a complete ban. The largest military powers and weapons manufacturers (Russia, USA, China, India, and others) insist on continuing discussions within the CCW, consider the GGE on LAWS the only legitimate platform, oppose transferring the discussion to other international forums and against rigid new restrictions, emphasizing the need for balance between humanitarian concerns and defense interests¹⁴³.

Russia's position is that existing international humanitarian law norms are sufficient for regulating autonomous systems, and excessive attention to human rights and ethical aspects regarding LAWS is inappropriate¹⁴⁴; the USA and Israel hold similar views. Official statements emphasize: “We proceed from the fact that international law, including IHL, is fully applicable to LAWS and does not require modernization or adaptation due to their specificity. We oppose developing any international legally binding instrument regarding LAWS and introducing a moratorium on the development and use of such systems and technologies used for their creation”¹⁴⁵. In 2019, the GGE adopted 11 guiding principles, including mandatory preservation of human control over the use of force and state responsibility for compliance with international humanitarian law, but significant disagreements persist on key issues – prohibition or regulation¹⁴⁶.

Some states consider the CCW GGE format insufficiently effective for discussing military artificial intelligence issues due to geopolitical contradictions and differences in approaches to military technology regulation. As alternatives, international summits and coalitions dedicated to responsible AI use in the military sphere are launched. Russia and several other countries oppose such initiatives, believing they may lead to unilateral approaches. As noted by Deputy Permanent Representative of Russia to the UN Office and other international organizations in Geneva A.I. Belousov, Russia considers the CCW Group of Governmental Experts the only optimal platform for discussing all LAWS-related issues, confirmed in the consensus-approved 11 guiding principles and final document of the 6th CCW Review Conference.

One alternative initiative became the REAIM (*Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain*) international summits held in the Netherlands (2023) and South Korea (2024), bringing together representatives from over 90 countries, experts, business, and civil society. Russia was not invited to the summit. Based on REAIM, a Global Commission on Responsible AI Use in the Military Sphere was created, including experts from various countries. In 2024, at the second REAIM summit, an “Action Plan” was presented, supported by about 60 countries, though several delegations refused to sign the document, which was criticized for ignoring parts of the international community's interests.

¹⁴³ On the approaches of the Russian Federation to the problem of new technologies in the field of “Lethal Autonomous Weapons” // UNODA. May 14, 2024. URL: [https://docs-library.unoda.org/Convention_on_Certain_Conventional_Weapons_-_Group_of_Governmental_Experts_on_Lethal_Autonomous_Weapons_Systems_\(2024\)/CCW-GGE.1-2024-WP.2_Russian.pdf](https://docs-library.unoda.org/Convention_on_Certain_Conventional_Weapons_-_Group_of_Governmental_Experts_on_Lethal_Autonomous_Weapons_Systems_(2024)/CCW-GGE.1-2024-WP.2_Russian.pdf) (in Russ.).

¹⁴⁴ Speech by Deputy Head of the Russian delegation A.I. Belousov explaining the position on the draft resolution “Lethal Autonomous Weapons” in the First Committee of the 78th session of the UN General Assembly // United Nations. November 1, 2023. URL: <https://russiaun.ru/ru/news/811123> (in Russ.).

¹⁴⁵ Ibid.

¹⁴⁶ Group of governmental experts on emerging technologies in the area of “Lethal Autonomous Weapons”, Commonalities in national commentaries on guiding principles, 2019 // UNODA. URL: <https://documents.unoda.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/09/Commonalities-paper-on-operationalization-of-11-Guiding-Principles.pdf>

Discussions are conducted in the UN, UNIDIR¹⁴⁷, the EU, and other international institutions with participation from corporations and civil society. IT corporations, academic circles, and civil society are actively involved in discussions.

In Russia, military AI themes annually become subjects of discussion at the international military-technical forum “Army”. Against the backdrop of new initiatives, competition between international platforms and approaches to military AI regulation is forming, reflecting disagreements about paths to ensuring global security and control over new technologies.

Who Will Write Laws for Digital Armies?

As a result of international discussions, understanding of the military artificial intelligence phenomenon is gradually forming, and key spheres that may become subjects of global legal regulation are being defined.

For the civilian sphere, the development and implementation of algorithm transparency standards, artificial intelligence ethics, quality control mechanisms, and digital service accessibility acquire particular importance. International responsible AI initiatives, GDPR, biometric data regulation, and rights to algorithmic decision explanations become key instruments for ensuring comprehensive security in the era of digital transformation.

The application of digital and information-communication technologies in the military sphere encompasses a wide range of tasks: combat systems with various levels of autonomy, cyber-operations, logistics, intelligence, analysis and targeting, command, control, and decision-making support.

The scale and complexity of these processes make the task of developing global legal regulation extremely challenging. For effective international dialogue, it is necessary to unify terminology, define regulatory responsibility zones, and implement risk-oriented approaches to system certification.

A telling example of institutionalizing such efforts is the Netherlands Research Council (NWO) initiative, which began modeling international legislation applicable to the use of AI and information-communication technologies for military purposes¹⁴⁸. The final work will be titled the “West Point Manual” on International Law Applicable to Artificial Intelligence in Warfare. Like the *Tallinn Manual*, the new project has NATO military structure support¹⁴⁹.

Russia's Choice in Military AI Regulation

¹⁴⁷ RAISE: The Roundtable for AI, Security and Ethics /// UNIDIR. URL: <https://unidir.org/raise/>

¹⁴⁸ Designing International Law and Ethics into Military Artificial Intelligence (DILEMA). URL: <https://www.nwo.nl/en/projects/mvi19017>

¹⁴⁹ West Point Manual // West Point. URL: <https://www.westpoint.edu/michael-n-schmitt>

The Russian Federation consistently advocates for the principle of mandatory preservation of human control over all military technologies, including autonomous weapons systems. According to Russia's official position, existing international humanitarian law, including its fundamental principles of distinction and proportionality, already fully regulates the use of any types of weapons, including systems with artificial intelligence elements. Russia proceeds from the premise that international law does not require special adaptation or development of new norms regarding autonomous weapons systems, as existing legal frameworks provide the necessary level of regulation.

In this regard, Russia opposes the introduction of additional legal restrictions, considering them excessive and capable of undermining states' sovereign right to develop their own defense technologies. The Russian Federation objects to preparing any international legally binding document or introducing a moratorium on development and application.

Russia attaches special importance to the Group of Governmental Experts under the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons, viewing it as the only optimal international platform for discussing issues related to autonomous weapons systems and other military AI technologies. Russia categorically rejects transferring this issue to other international forums, considering it ineffective and politically motivated.

A similar position is evident regarding international information security issues. Russia views the Open-Ended Working Group as the only legitimate mechanism for decision-making on ICT security issues under UN auspices. The Russian Federation opposes Western states' attempts to replace this format with a program of action resolution reflecting primarily their interests.

On these platforms, Russia consistently advocates for forming an international information security system on a solid legal basis, founded on principles of sovereign equality of states and non-interference in internal affairs. Russia emphasizes the priority of fighting cybercrime while unconditionally observing state sovereignty and insists on prohibiting the use of digital technologies for interfering in other countries' internal affairs, including organizing “color revolutions” and conducting cognitive attacks¹⁵⁰. Additionally, Russia defends states' rights to independently determine rules for artificial intelligence use in the defense sphere and opposes extraterritorial application of foreign legislation in the digital environment.

Time for New Norms: How to Regulate AI Tomorrow

Contemporary disagreements between states on digital technology regulation reflect a fundamental contradiction between sovereignty and globalization principles. However, the rapid development of AI, especially autonomous agents and generative systems, questions the very possibility of preserving traditional norm-creation models. As cases of AI implementation in the military sphere show, technologies already outpace legal frameworks, creating "gray zones" of responsibility.

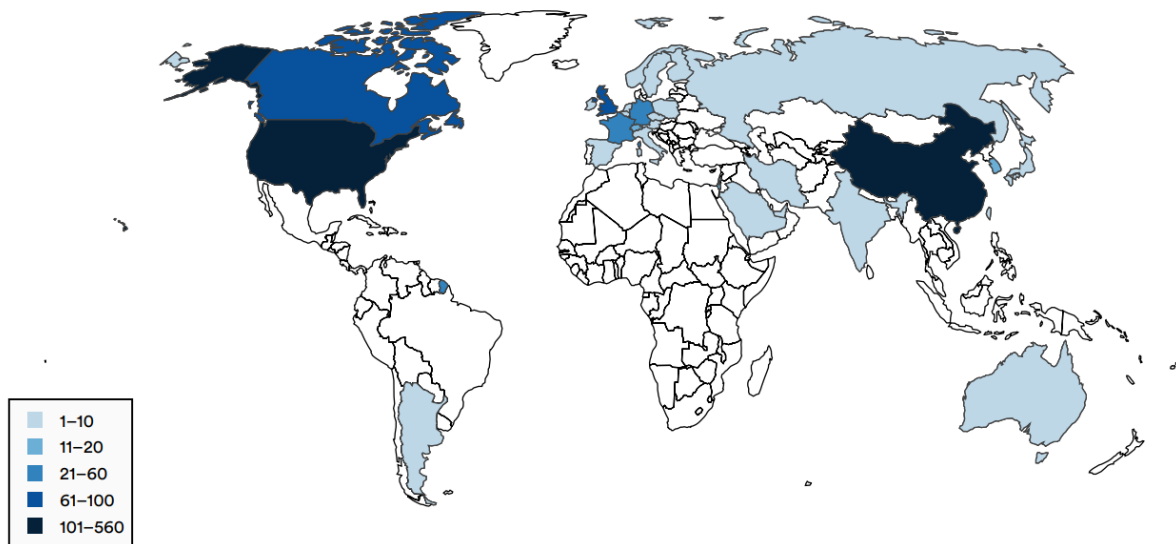
¹⁵⁰ First Committee Approves New Resolution on “Lethal Autonomous Weapons”, as Speaker Warns ‘An Algorithm Must Not Be in Full Control of Decisions Involving Killing’ // United Nations. November 1, 2023. URL: <https://press.un.org/en/2023/gadis3731.doc.htm>

In 2024, notable expansion in the use of *intelligent agents* (AI-agents) is observed, indicating the growing role of algorithms in decision-making processes, including in some cases with minimal human participation. This trend actualizes discussion about the need to rethink the principle of "meaningful human control", enshrined in several international documents and considered a fundamental element in regulating autonomous systems, including military technologies.

Currently, artificial intelligence is primarily used for processing and analyzing large data arrays and supporting management decisions. However, some algorithmic systems today can formulate proposals for optimizing regulatory and management procedures, potentially contributing to reducing interstate contradictions in certain spheres. Nevertheless, such decisions are often made on non-transparent bases, raising questions about their validity and compliance with ethical and legal standards.

Number of notable AI models by geographic area, 2003–24 (sum)

Source: Epoch AI, 2025 | Chart: 2025 AI Index report



Map 5. Number of notable AI models by geographic area (2003-2024, sum)

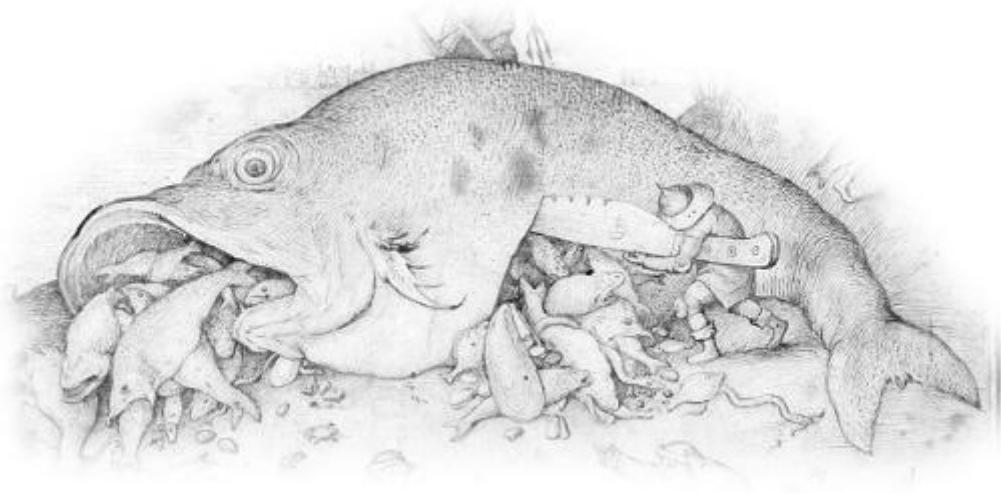
Source: The 2025 AI Index Report (https://hai-production.s3.amazonaws.com/files/hai_ai_index_report_2025.pdf)

In perspective, the emergence of dynamic legal regimes capable of adapting to artificial intelligence evolution is not excluded, for example, in the form of modular conventions with possibilities for automatic updating of technical appendices. In this regard, it seems appropriate to consider creating international AI audit bodies analogous to the IAEA, which could control algorithm compliance with international humanitarian law and ethics requirements.

Discussion about artificial intelligence legal personality and its potential role as a participant in legal relations remains predominantly theoretical. However, as algorithmic systems become more complex and their functionality expands, questions of responsibility distribution between developer, operator, and the AI itself require additional scientific and legal consideration.

Overall, the development of digital technologies and artificial intelligence not only poses new challenges to law but requires rethinking established regulatory principles. In conditions where human roles in partnership with AI are gradually decreasing, the formation of flexible, adaptive, and

transparent legal regulation models becomes particularly significant, capable of ensuring balance between innovation efficiency and protection of fundamental rights and interests of individuals, society, and the state.



PART II. REGIONAL SECURITY & RUSSIA'S INTERESTS

CHAPTER 8.

EURASIAN CHARTER OF DIVERSITY AND MULTIPOLARITY IN THE XXI CENTURY¹⁵¹

Maxim Ryzhenkov

One initiative associated with Belarus has been attracting much interest recently. It is an idea to develop a Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI Century. It was first voiced at the International Conference on Eurasian Security, held in Minsk in October 2023, when Belarus suggested to develop the Eurasian Charter “as a guidance for our own consolidation and common progressive development”.

The initiative did not emerge out of the blue. Rather, it was brought into existence by real geopolitical needs and aspirations arising from the ground. Moreover, it followed logically from another long-standing initiative of Belarus that called upon the world’s countries to recognize diversity of ways towards progressive development. That call was first made by President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko at the United Nations Summit in 2005.

The “diversity” initiative came up at a time of global uncertainty that resulted from the so-called *Unipolar Moment* with its concomitant unilateralism and disregard of international law. Therefore, through its initiative Belarus was seeking to contribute to the efforts of other countries to forge a fair international order, in which nations would be able to live in peace and realize their aspirations.

Many may wonder why the Charter’s idea is linked to the notions of “diversity” and “multipolarity”. Simply put, it is basically the case because the two notions are the defining features of our time.

Today’s world, however, is more uncertain than the one during the *Unipolar Moment*. As a matter of fact, it is even more unstable than the world that was in place four decades ago, because for all their ideological and geopolitical rivalry, the Soviet Union and the United States managed to co-exist in a kind of equilibrium that provided stability and predictability necessary for peace and development. But the mess created at the time of the *Unipolar Moment* – wars, conflicts, grave violations of international law, massive human displacement – is still with us, due to the perpetuation of unilateral approaches by Western countries in their foreign policies.

Against this background, Belarus came forward with an idea to devise the Eurasia Charter. The initiative is grounded in Belarus’ many previous efforts besides the “diversity” initiative such as, among others, President Lukashenko’s recent call for a global security dialogue in a true spirit of San-Francisco. These initiatives all seek to make a contribution to making the world and, specifically, Eurasia, a safer and better place.

As a matter of fact, diversity has always been present in the world, but today its importance becomes increasingly evident with the rapid spread of ICTs, as people everywhere become aware of their

¹⁵¹ First published at *Russia in Global Affairs* Journal. See: Ryzhenkov, M.V., 2025. A Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the 21st Century. *Russia in Global Affairs*, 23(4), pp. 74–90. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2025-23-4-74-90. Published here upon permission from the publisher.

civilizational differences. As a result, they demand greater respect for diversity, which has been threatened over the past few decades by policies of diktat, violence, sanctions, color revolutions and similar attempts by Western countries to impose some alien “pseudo-universal” forms of governance on indigenous institutions and ways of life.

As for multipolarity, there is ever growing consensus all around the world that multipolarity is already an objective reality. The demise of the *Unipolar Moment* inaugurated the emergence of multiple power centers – or poles – that define our international life. What is more, we are absolutely convinced of the need to strengthen multipolarity insofar as it is essential to effective multilateralism, whereby all countries could engage in *win-win* cooperation.

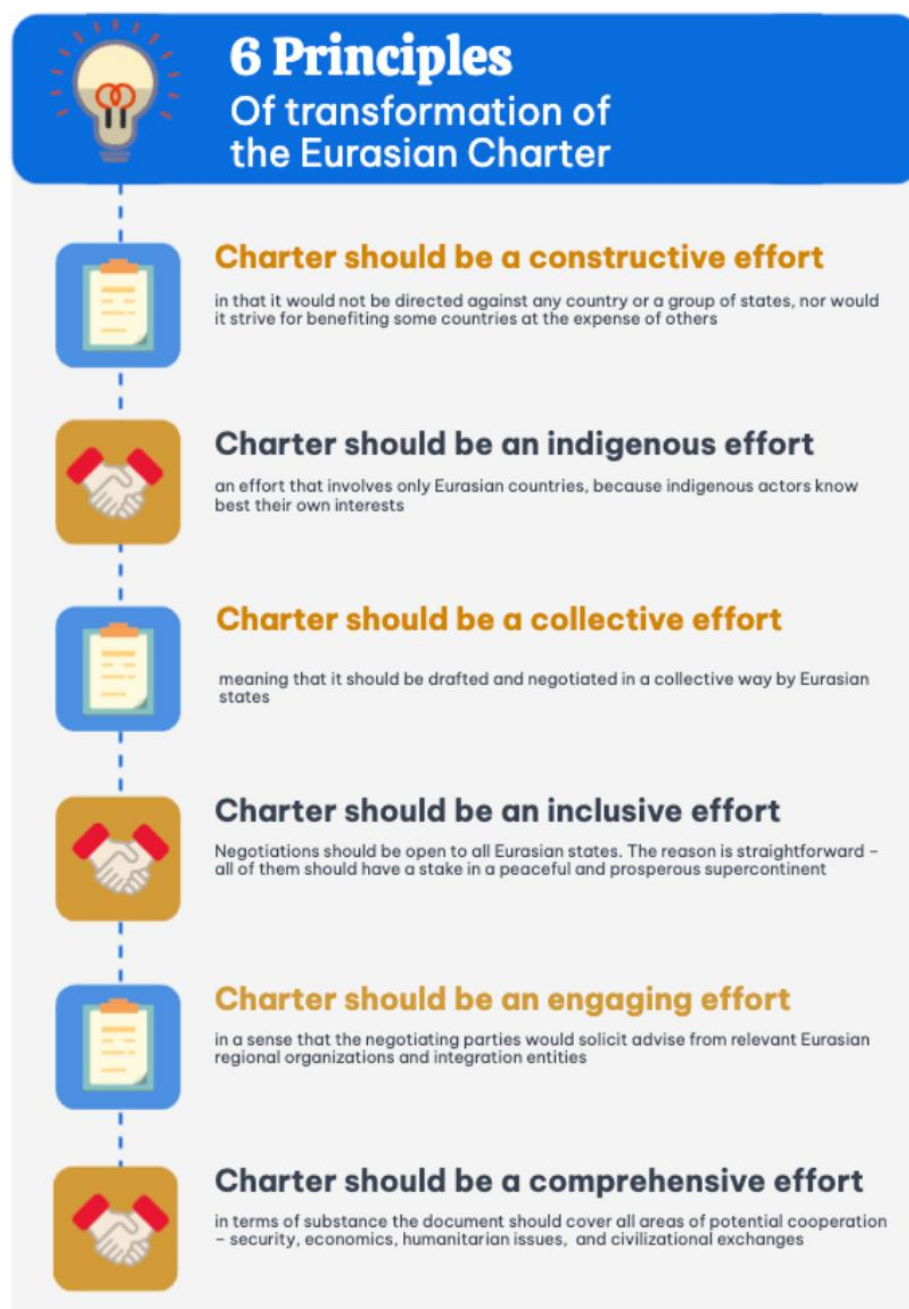


Figure 27. Key Principles of the Eurasian Charter
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

The idea has already been discussed in some international forums and triggered further interest. Importantly, the Presidents of Belarus and Russia voiced support to the idea in their public statements.

Belarus and Russia drafted their “preliminary views” on the Charter in a document titled “Common Vision of Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI century”. In this 21-paragraph long document, the two countries outlined, among other points, how they viewed diversity and multipolarity, how they assessed Eurasia’s importance and its impact worldwide, and what they committed themselves to do to realize their vision.

Despite this Charter-related activities, Minsk cannot escape the feeling that our Eurasian partners would like to see greater clarity about the initiative, and, specifically, regarding its geopolitical rationale, objectives, process, etc. While the above mentioned “Common Vision” provides some clues to the above questions, we cannot help but agree that a more substantive and elaborate response is required indeed, particularly through the lens of evolving geopolitical developments in Eurasia.

Eurasia: Europe Finally Meets Asia or Distances from It?

The notion of Eurasia is in vogue nowadays. Indeed, it is a *supercontinent* that covers a very significant part of the globe and that is home to some 70 percent of the world’s population. Eurasia is a very diverse region in terms of civilizations, races, cultures, religions, values, countries, their political, economic and social systems, etc. Importantly, it is also the key driver of global economic development today insofar as it hosts the most dynamically growing countries and their vibrant regional economic blocks.

Yet until some decades ago, the notion of Eurasia was not so much in fashion. Indeed, until recently, such a notion would have been viewed as a paradox, because Eurasia was a continent containing essentially two separate worlds – Europe and Asia. While the border between Europe and Asia was always uncertain and illusory, the separation between the two regions was real, most certainly in political and temporal terms, but also, to a certain extent, in special terms as the two were rather poorly connected by physical infrastructure and cooperation mechanisms.

The political separation between Europe and Asia was established by West Europe’s predatory policies *vis-à-vis* Asia in the past, which sought to subjugate and pillage Asian nations. Interestingly, no significant change has occurred in European attitudes towards Asia since then as the current European Union still views Asia as both a challenger and danger to its own interests, while Asian nations have never seen Europe in a similar light.

For a number of ultimate and proximate factors Europe was able to gain a significant head start over Asia. One of the key factors among those was the Industrial Revolution, which enabled European countries to develop, modernize and subjugate Asia in a very fast way. Asia, meanwhile, as the conventional wisdom goes, kept to its “traditional ways”, missed the initial stages of the Industrial Revolution and was overrun by Europe militarily. As a result, the early XIX century saw a *gap* in development between Europe and Asia to emerge and to widen throughout the XIX and much of the XX century.

But there was a hope that due to a rising nationalism in Asia and general technological development, Europe and Asia would meet at some point in a future. It all depended on when and how Asia would be able to catch up with Europe. The collapse of European empires in Asia after World War II was the first step in that direction. It was soon followed by the rise of some Asian countries, which began to work together in order to advance their common developmental priorities. The most prominent example is the establishment of ASEAN in 1967, a 10 Member State body today, which has been excelling in the implementation of its objectives for many decades.

The end of the Cold War and the onset of globalization accompanied by the rapid proliferation of free trade, knowledge, finance, investment and technology has been another powerful tailwind in Asia's *catch-up effort*. Indeed, the outsourcing of manufacturing from advanced countries enabled many Asian states to run double-digit growth figures for decades and helped them lift hundreds of millions of their people out of poverty.

Moreover, in recent decades Europe and Asia became interconnected by a multitude of supply chains, transport corridors, air, land and sea traffic, banks, cultural exchanges, etc. These developments transformed Asia in a most dramatic and unrecognizable way. Likewise, these developments transformed Europe as well, because global trends in recent decades served to diminish its standing in the world while increasing its dependence on other powers in Eurasia.

The past three decades have also been marked by vigorous integration and development in the post-Soviet space. Some former Soviet states used European integration as a model for their own similar process, which the Europeans today prefer to disregard when they refuse interaction with the Eurasian Economic Union and other regional structures operating in the post-Soviet space. Sometimes it comes to absurdity on the part of some of their members as, for example, when one of Belarus' Baltic neighbours deliberately set itself on a path of straining relations with China. All in all, the new integration structures that arose from the former Soviet Union fitted well into the growth of Asia and became part of the incipient Eurasian model of cooperation.

So, the gap in development that separated Europe and Asia for nearly two centuries has been steadily narrowing and today has become significantly less consequential than it used to be in the past. Therefore, these developments made it possible to start talking about Europe and Asia as one continent, as a whole and a unified structure and think from now on in terms of a uniform Eurasia stretching from Lisbon to Manila. One of the best and most effective manifestations of these new realities in Eurasia is China's "Belt and Road initiative", which, in an effort to revive the ancient *Silk Road*, connects dozens of countries in Asia and Europe so that all its participants share the fruits of economic development and prosperity. Belarus, like some other European countries, is also benefiting from this vital pan-continental initiative.

This forward-looking initiative could have certainly outlasted the Cold War once it came to an end. Unfortunately, it did not live up to the high promises of that historical moment because a group of its members decided to advance its own selfish agenda at the expense of other participants.

Due to the previous unequal development of Europe and Asia, nations and peoples in Eurasia generally have not been able to make full and efficient use of that immense potential for development that the continent's enormous resources afforded. Nor have they ever enjoyed a continent-wide security under which they could have realized their development priorities. Instead, its security landscape has been consistently divided and fragmented, like, for instance under the CSCE/OSCE framework that will be discussed later in the article. As a consequence, hardly has any other continent witnessed so many armed conflicts and human suffering as Eurasia has.

So, Eurasia stands at present as a place of immense opportunities for its countries and peoples. The way to realize these opportunities is through comprehensive approaches that would account for Eurasia's wholeness, uniqueness, complexity and diversity and that would also help consolidate and integrate the supercontinent in the interests of its inhabitants. Belarus believes that the above task can be realized by means of the Eurasian Charter for Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI century.

But before laying out some specifics with regard to the Charter, it is worth reviewing some efforts undertaken in the past that sought to consolidate Eurasia or parts of the continent. Such an exercise should, in turn, help better grasp the rationale for the Charter and see ways to advance the initiative.

The CSCE/OSCE Experiment or the West's Secret Instrument?

The past half a century has seen an interesting experiment in Eurasia that may be characterized as an attempt at consolidation, not of the entire continent, but just of some parts of it. It is the experiment with the functioning of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE) followed by the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE). Essentially, it was a Euro-centric or, if you will, a Euro-Atlantic experiment attesting to the separation of Europe and Asia existing five decades ago.

Initially, it was a pragmatic and mutually beneficial experiment that brought important positive results, most crucially, in reducing the threat of a nuclear and conventional war in Europe, establishing mechanisms for arms control, as well as nurturing trust and understanding between the parties.

Indeed, what laid at the core of the process was the belief in the possibility not just of reconciling the two ideological camps in Europe, but also of forging between them a pattern of pragmatic, predictable and trustworthy interaction. Then Soviet leadership deserves full credit for formulating the idea, which it began circulating in contacts with Western colleagues from around the mid-1960s with the suggestion to launch a relevant process.

The initiative found a responsive ear in the West's decision-making circles a few years later, in the early 1970s, when the US came to embrace the politics of *détente* and when politicians with the "outside the box" mindset, like West Germany's Willy Brandt¹⁵², came to power in some key Western countries. So, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act and the CSCE can be rightly called children of the *détente*.

¹⁵² *Willy Brandt* – a German politician and statesman who was leader of the Social Democratic Party of Germany from 1964 to 1987 and concurrently served as the chancellor of West Germany from 1969 to 1974. He was awarded the *Nobel*

In retrospect, it can be argued today that the *Helsinki Final Act* must be credited with two achievements. **First**, it set forth 10 pragmatic principles (the so-called *Decalogue*), formulated in a very balanced way that allowed the two camps to embrace them in their entirety. **Second**, the Act inaugurated a new understanding of the concept of security with its three baskets: the politico-military, the economic-ecological and the humanitarian that helped the two opposite sides stop viewing each other exclusively through a military and political lens.

The *Decalogue* of principles and a comprehensive concept of security produced a framework in the form of a conference that helped guide, maintain and normalize relations between the Participating States at a time of enmity and uncertainty prevalent during the Cold War. It was done through regular contacts, various kinds of exchanges, confidence-building measures, etc. As a result, the relations between the East and the West became to a certain extent predictable and normalized. Thus, it is fair to argue that the CSCE helped “manage” the Cold War and diminish the threat of a *nuclear Armageddon*.

Peace Prize in 1971 for his efforts to strengthen cooperation in Western Europe and to achieve reconciliation between West Germany and the countries of Eastern Europe – *editor's note*.



Figure 28. The OSCE Decalogue of principles, the 1975 Helsinki Final Act.

Adapted from the data: Dessi A. The Search for Stability in Libya: OSCE's Role Between Internal Obstacles and External Challenges, 2018 (<https://www.researchgate.net/publication/326328513>)

So, the end of the Cold War put before the CSCE the question of adapting to the new realities. The early 1990s was a period of détente again, but of a different kind from the time when the CSCE was conceived. It was a period that may be called an incipient strategic partnership. Indeed, such a vision was embedded in a key CSCE document of that time, the 1990 Paris Charter.

As a result, the early 1990s were marked by the CSCE's rebranding into the OSCE and the emergence of some new institutions – the OSCE Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights (ODIHR), the OSCE High Commissioner National Minorities and OSCE field missions. The OSCE began focusing, inter alia, on advancing democratization and good governance, human and minority rights, election monitoring as well as conflict prevention and resolution. As a result, these new OSCE institutions and field missions in particular fixated on the above sensitive political issues made the OSCE worse than its predecessor.

The missions made the OSCE different from other regional organizations, as they made the Organization “field-heavy” and ultimately set it on a path to irrelevance. The missions were established in Participating States, which allegedly experienced problems in their domestic development. But what is interesting is that the missions were set up exclusively in countries east of Vienna, never in countries of Western Europe given the impression that Western European countries had never experienced challenges with human rights, minority rights, etc. With this approach, the OSCE has essentially introduced a ranking among its Participating States, which did not exist under the CSCE.

In theory, the OSCE missions were supposed to help the hosting countries to implement various kinds of reforms. In practice, however, relying on the OSCE humanitarian mandate, the missions began interfering in internal affairs of the hosting Participating States in pursuit of the agendas and narratives favored by OSCE Western countries. So, what actually happened was that the OSCE began implementing the vision of other key Western institutions like NATO, EU, OECD. The OSCE thus became a biased international player, not a neutral regional organization that it was mandated to be.

Belarus was among those that had the misfortune of going through this scenario. Indeed, we agreed to receive an OSCE Mission in Minsk in 1998 with the mandate to consult and assist the government with democratization and development of national institutions. The Mission, meanwhile, evolved into a biased party as its head German Ambassador Hans-Georg Wieck engaged actively with the opposition in order to bring it to power in the 2001 Presidential election. Belarus had no choice other than to ask for Wieck’s recall. Some years later, we decided to close down the Mission altogether, seeing no added value in its work to our domestic development.

So, there is a paradoxical situation. The CSCE was able to address successfully the challenges of its time. What was remarkable about its success was that the CSCE managed to deliver in a highly tense international and regional environment. The OSCE, on its part, failed to successfully tackle the challenges of its time. And the failure is particular conspicuous given the fact that it occurred in a period of a seemingly benign international and regional environment.

Is the OSCE capable of changing itself for the better? We in Belarus doubt it very much. The OSCE has lost the advantage that was the key feature in the CSCE period – it ceased to be a forum for political dialogue and became instead a place for politicization of discussion, a tool of pressure and influence used by some Participating States against others. No wonder, then, that the OSCE failed to live up to its recognition of the indivisibility of security in Europe as has been set forth in the Helsinki Final Act. As a consequence, the OSCE failed to prevent European security from unraveling over the past few decades, which resulted in the ongoing conflict in Ukraine.

It is necessary to acknowledge that the OSCE was essentially hijacked by its Western Participating States for the purpose of using the Organization as just another tool for encroaching into and forcing political change in those Participating States that refused to embrace Western “recipes” for their domestic development. What is more, the OSCE has, essentially, helped the West to expand NATO eastward, not least with its negative involvement in internal affairs of countries comprising the former Yugoslavia. These policies put the OSCE in identity crisis and deprived the Organization of a strategic orientation that would be shared by all of its Participating States. Therefore, it is hardly

surprising that trust among the Participating States has been lost and that the Organization has been getting increasingly irrelevant.

Key Post-Cold War Strategies for Eurasia

While the CSCE/OSCE experiment represents a failed attempt to consolidate some parts of Eurasia, the immediate post-Cold War period has witnessed the emergence of some ideas and strategies to shape Eurasia in its entirety. Interestingly, some of the most influential and consequential of those ideas actually came from an outside power – the United States.

The end of the Cold War left the USA in the role of a sole global superpower. Therefore, the US was in search for a new strategic orientation, because its old one – containment that was suitable for the Cold War period – was not useful for a new era. The new strategic orientation was soon presented in a famous speech by former US President Clinton’s National Security Advisor Anthony Lake in September 1993. The speech was titled “From Containment to Enlargement”.

Posited as a successor to the containment strategy, the enlargement strategy sought to expand the “world’s free community of market democracies”. In this, the strategy was clearly based on Francis Fukuyama’s famous thesis about the *End of History*, because it actually discarded the fact that the world was extremely diverse in political and socio-economic systems, as well as local cultures and traditions, but presumed instead that every country around the globe either wanted or had to be compelled to embrace so-called “democracy and market economy”.

For all its intents and purposes, *Lake’s speech* became a spiritual guidance for the US’ post-Cold War policies as the idea of enlargement drove NATO’s eastward expansion, interference in domestic affairs of many countries, attempts at forced “democratization” and “colour” revolutions that sparked numerous wars and conflicts. Therefore, it is thanks to the idea of enlargement that the world has come to see in the post- Cold War period many countries becoming destroyed and many societies getting uprooted, as well as dozens of millions of displaced people and many other related woes.

Like many other Eurasian countries, the Republic of Belarus has also found itself to be the target of this strategy.

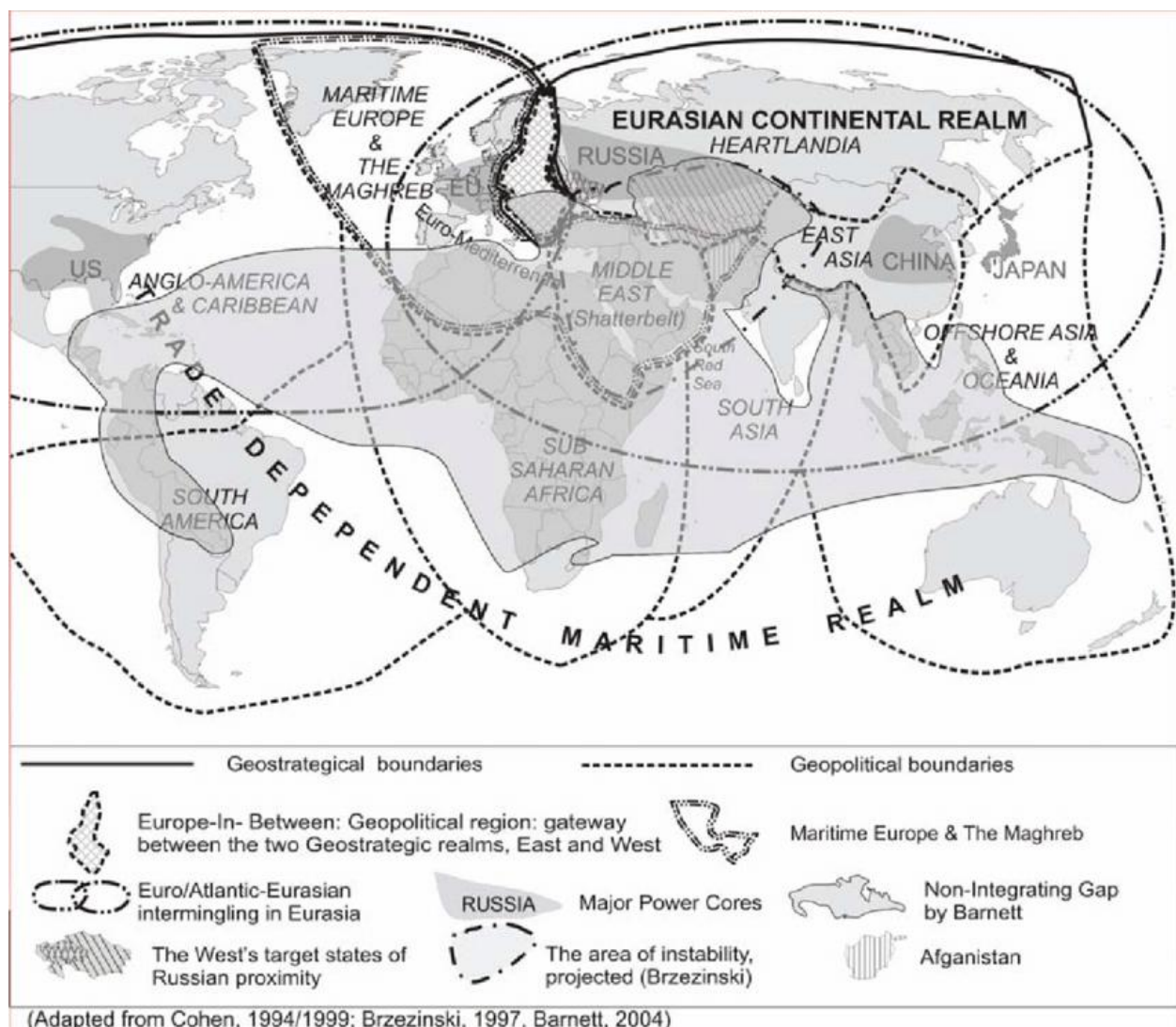
It is fair to say that the strategy was not specifically invented for the Eurasian region, but undoubtedly it was most diligently implemented in Eurasia, in places, among others, like the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, Ukraine, which were of overriding importance to the US in its long-standing effort to achieve dominance over the Eurasian continent. Seen in retrospect, the strategy also served the objective of anchoring Europe firmly and consistently in the US’ sphere of influence in Eurasia.

Typically, it was most vigorously applied against us by its proponents during various elections, most recently during the Presidential election in 2020. Notwithstanding, all such attempts against Belarus miserably failed for the simple reason that the Belarusian people firmly stood behind its elected leadership and refused to be manipulated by external forces.

Another “contribution” to the external effort to consolidate Eurasia was made by former US President Carter’s National Security Advisor Zbigniew Brzezinski. In 1997, *Foreign Affairs* published his extremely provocative piece titled “A Geostrategy for Eurasia”.

The author’s key point was that America’s emergence as the sole global superpower forced it to develop and implement an integrated and comprehensive strategy for Eurasia in order to preserve its preponderant position in the world. With this, the American political thinker essentially admitted that US global primacy very much depended on developments occurring far away from the US shores.

Brzezinski viewed Eurasia as the world’s axial continent that exerted huge influence over other regions believing that a country dominant in Eurasia would automatically control the Middle East and Africa. Therefore, separate strategies for Europe and Asia would not suffice. Only an integrated and comprehensive American strategy could prevent a hostile coalition in Eurasia from taking shape that could challenge US’ global primacy. According to the American, the US must dominate and control Eurasia and perpetuate beyond a generation its decisive role as Eurasia’s arbitrator.



But how to achieve those goals? By establishing a transcontinental Eurasian security system with NATO at its core, because NATO entrenches American presence and influence in Eurasia. Europe, as Brzezinski viewed it, was a US bridgehead to Eurasia. America's central goal was to continue to expand the democratic European bridgehead. As far as Russia was concerned, Brzezinski clearly saw it as a potential future rival due to its central position in the Eurasian continent. Hence, his "solution" for Russia was a loosely confederated state emerging in its place in the future consisting of a European Russia, a Siberian Russia, and a Far Eastern Russia.

With the benefit of hindsight, it can be safely stated that Brzezinski's recipes have been rather diligently implemented by policymakers in his own country. Indeed, NATO enlargement happened exactly in those deliberate stages suggested by Brzezinski in his *Foreign Affairs* piece.

So, if Anthony Lake's "Enlargement" idea was a spiritual guidance for US policies to shape Eurasia in its own interests, Zbigniew Brzezinski's suggestions presented a practical guide for such policies. Needless to say, both proved to be extremely harmful for the supercontinent, its countries and its population.

But on one particular point in his piece Brzezinski appears to have been right, namely, in suggesting that "defining the substance and institutionalizing the form of a trans-Eurasian security system could become the major architectural initiative of the XXI century"¹⁵³.

Need for Eurasian Order

So, as has been demonstrated in the previous sections, some attempts undertaken in the past 50 years to consolidate either parts of Eurasia or the entire supercontinent failed. Actually, they were doomed to go awry, because their key objective was to shape Eurasia or its parts in accordance with the wishes and visions of external rather than indigenous actors. Therefore, it should come as no surprise that the external "recipes" failed to take root in an environment that was alien to them. It is true of both the CSCE/OSCE experiment and the post-Cold War US-driven politics in Eurasia.

In retrospect, however, it would be somewhat fair to suggest that these failures served a rather useful purpose of their own. Indeed, they proved to be useful in a sense that they helped many Eurasian states shake off the illusion that they would benefit from a purportedly benign US-led liberal global order and see instead the need to seek solutions to contemporary challenges primarily in their own backyard.

As a result, many Eurasian states began to coalesce around the need to resist the external pressure and to work together to advance their common cause in their own huge region. A strategic partnership between China and Russia, Eurasia's key powers, was indispensable for propelling these indigenous dynamics as these two countries were the powerful drivers behind numerous initiatives and ideas that served to promote integration and consolidation of Eurasia.

¹⁵³ Brzezinski, Z., 1997. A Geostrategy for Eurasia. *Foreign Affairs*, 76(5), p. 64.

Importantly, these developments in Eurasia have been taking place at a time when globalization began to decline in general. Indeed, the world has not become flat as American writer Thomas Friedman has famously predicted in his bestselling book (*The World is Flat*, 2005). Instead, the world has become a bumpy road in economic terms.

What is more, today it is not just developing countries that lost faith in economic globalization, it is also the traditional ardent proponents of globalization like the United States of America.

Indeed, economic globalization began to unravel in 2008 with the onset of the global economic and financial crisis, which exposed the nature of US-led unregulated and predatory capitalism with its adverse effects on the global economy. In the years following the crisis, it was becoming increasingly evident that economic globalization driven by that type of capitalism was not a “wave that lifted all boats”, as global inequality was steadily on the rise.

Indeed, this longtime champion of open markets and *laissez-faire* economics has been shunning its commitment to free trade and multilateral cooperation, it turns inward, it is keen to reindustrialize, it introduces sweeping tariffs on nearly all countries in the world, it talks about “decoupling and de-risking”, and it shapes its foreign policy around the interests of its own middle class.

So, if the USA is indeed about to turn inward and abandon its quest for global hegemony, that would certainly constitute a very positive development. Such a step would essentially mark a belated recognition of reality, namely, of the fact that the US-led liberal international order has been crumbling under the weight of its own contradictions and is being increasingly replaced by regional dynamics.

These developments were well anticipated a decade ago by the world’s foreign policy doyen Henry Kissinger in his book “World Order” (2014). Two points from the book are particularly worth citing. First, Kissinger explained why a universal order is impossible, arguing that “no single society has ever had the power, no leadership had the resilience, and no faith had the dynamism to impose its writ enduringly throughout the world”¹⁵⁴. This premise, in turn, led Kissinger to suggest the idea to “establish a concept of order within the various regions, and to relate these regional orders to one another”¹⁵⁵.

We in Belarus cannot help but share the above Kissingerean idea that all regions need to establish their internal orders and work to connect them with each other.

This belief comes from our conviction that with the demise of the liberal international order the world will lack any hierarchical system with a single dominant center.

Eurasian Charter to Forge Eurasian Order

So, what Eurasia needs is a regional order, which would help Eurasian states steer clear of the present global disorder. But how to build it? Perhaps, Belarus’ idea to develop the Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI Century may be timely and helpful in this regard. As we see

¹⁵⁴ Kissinger, H., 2014. *World Order*. New York: Penguin Press. P. 105.

¹⁵⁵ Ibid. P. 371.

it, the Charter can indeed provide a useful guidance to Eurasian states in their effort to establish Eurasian order and, given the importance of the supercontinent for the entire globe, to connect Eurasian order to orders in other regions.

Essentially, we view the Charter as a kind of a wholistic and coherent long-term geostrategy for our supercontinent in all its dimensions – security, economics, science, technology, culture, civilizational and some other aspects. As any strategic document it should build on some principles and elements. We foresee the following.

First and foremost, **the Charter should be a constructive effort** in that it would not be directed against any country or a group of states, nor would it strive for benefiting some countries at the expense of others. In that sense it would represent a drastic departure from the previous adversarial and confrontational strategies for Eurasia practiced in the past. Moreover, the Eurasian Charter should be based on the norms and principles of international law set forth in the United Nations Charter and other international legally binding documents.

Second, **the Charter should be an indigenous effort**, that is, an effort that involves only Eurasian countries, because indigenous actors know best their own interests, they can identify common objectives and means to achieve them and afterwards diligently realize their commonly devised commitments. The past is a good guidance here as it amply demonstrated that solutions for Eurasia invented and imposed by external actors did not and cannot take root in principle.

Third, **the Charter should be a collective effort**, meaning that it should be drafted and negotiated in a collective way by Eurasian states. We are absolutely convinced that each and every country in Eurasia must feel its ownership of this document and see its position and preferences reflected in the Charter. If that were to be the case, every state would then feel sufficient inducement to uphold the Charter's provisions.

Fourth, **the Charter should be an inclusive effort**. It means that the negotiations should be open to all Eurasian states. The reason is straightforward – all of them should have a stake in a peaceful and prosperous *supercontinent*. At this moment in time, however, it appears doubtful that European NATO countries and its partners would be willing to engage in the work on the Charter. But these potential hold-outs should ask themselves where such a rejectionist stance would ultimately leave them in the context of rapidly evolving global and regional changes. Let us consider.

True, Europe presents a very successful experiment of integration and consolidation. In some respects, it is really close to becoming a United States of Europe, a notion that Victor Hugo famously invoked at the International Peace Congress in Paris in 1849. But the European experiment succeeded in the past because of some specific enabling environment like, above all, enormous wealth accumulated in Europe over centuries of exploitation of others, US security umbrella provided since WWII, free trade and ample access to cheap resources to its east. These factors have nearly all disappeared now. Instead, Europe is being flooded with challenges like, among others, massive migration from the Global South, loss of economic competitiveness, increased indebtedness, rising societal inequality, dysfunctional multiculturalism, rapidly ageing societies. Some of these challenges

Europe generated itself by its own involvement in the pursuit of unilateral policies in violation of international law.

By the way, similar factors affect some advanced Eurasian countries in the eastern rim. So, both these groups will ultimately find themselves in a position of agents that would no longer be needed by the external player, which relied on them and backed their development in the past, but now turns inward.

Brussels' machinery is currently refusing to engage with Eurasian integration entities allegedly out of its sense of superiority. But this sense of superiority is totally unjustified. As Samuel Huntington put it in his famous book [The Clash of Civilizations, 1996]: "The West won the world not by the superiority of its ideas or values or religion but rather by its superiority in applying organized violence. Westerners often forget this fact; non-Westerners never do"¹⁵⁶.

So, Europe should put its complex of superiority aside and stop viewing others in Eurasia as a kind of *modern-day barbarians*. Instead, Europe and those advanced countries in East Asia would be well-advised to embrace the Eurasian concept insofar as it provides a way for them to address their mounting challenges. Just one example: the migration crisis affecting Europe can be successfully handled only through concerted efforts by both European and Eurasian countries.

Fifth, **the Charter should be an engaging effort** in a sense that the negotiating parties would solicit advice from relevant Eurasian regional organizations and integration entities like, among others, the Eurasian Economic Union, ASEAN, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, the Commonwealth of Independent States, the League of Arab States, the Gulf Cooperation Council, the Collective Security Treaty Organization, the Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia, the Union State of Belarus and Russia. It goes without saying that if Europe gets on board, the Western European institutions like the European Commission, the Council of Europe and some others would also be welcome to engage in the Charter process.

Sixth, **the Charter should be a comprehensive effort**. It means that in terms of substance the document should cover all areas of potential cooperation – security, economics, humanitarian issues, civilizational exchanges, etc. Naturally, however, the topic of Eurasian security should be of paramount importance in the Charter. The Charter should essentially help establish a new architecture of Eurasian security. This kind of pan-continental security is needed because previous attempts at security provision either under the CSCE/OSCE mantle or in the post-Cold War period failed, not least because they all sought to achieve security of some countries at the expense of others.

With this experience in mind, the principle of indivisible security should lie at the core of a new security architecture. The idea of indivisible security *per se* was present in the *Helsinki Final Act*, but not in the *Decalogue* of principles, only in a preambular part. This time around this principle should be put front and center in the Charter. Importantly, erecting a Eurasian security architecture would be vital for generating a new concept of global indivisible security given Eurasia's central role in global affairs.

¹⁵⁶ Huntington, S., 2002. The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order. New York: Simon and Shuster. P. 51.

In economic terms, the Charter should help Eurasian states move away from Western-centric economic interdependence because it was weaponized by the West against its opponents and instead attempt to spur further economic integration and connectivity in Eurasia. Successful economic processes in Eurasia, in turn, could help revive the idea of fair economic globalization.

Seventh, **the Charter should be a well-conceived procedural effort.** It implies that Eurasian states negotiating the Charter's text should have a clear understanding of their end game. We in Belarus believe that the process to develop the Eurasian Charter may in many respects look like the one that resulted five decades ago in the Helsinki Final Act. If so, the past process may serve the purpose of being a useful point of reference for planning the forthcoming negotiations on the Charter. In particular, we believe that it would make sense to replicate the rather successful experience of the Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe by setting up a similar conference that would cover the entire supercontinent.

We are convinced that with the idea of the Eurasian Charter we have chosen ourselves and suggested for other Eurasian countries a path in a right direction.

Finally, **the Charter should be a forward-looking effort.** In our view, it should seek not only to establish principles whose implementation throughout the continent would bring about a safer, stabler and more prosperous Eurasia, but also to reach beyond the region with the view to seeking partnerships with other regions. The gist of such kind of thinking was well captured in the 2024 Annual Report of Russia's *Valdai* Discussion Club: "Eurasia's connection to the rest of the world is so deep that Eurasian processes will have a decisive impact on the other parts of the planet and on approaches to addressing crucial security and sustainability issues, such as food, energy, and the environment"¹⁵⁷.

So, all in all, the Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI Century should help establish a system of pan-continental security that would enable the region's stable and progressive development, which, in turn, would help shape a global system capable of addressing the planet's complexity and diversity thereby transforming the globe into a better place for everyone.

It is necessary to note that Belarus does not claim the prerogative of knowing alone how to turn matters for the better in Eurasia. As a matter of fact, we support any effort that aims to realize the above objective like, for instance, the idea to establish a Great Eurasian Partnership put forward by Russia's President Vladimir Putin in 2015. In the meantime, we are ready for the work lying ahead of us on the Charter and call upon our Eurasian partners to join this endeavor.

¹⁵⁷ The World from the Bottom Up or the Masterpieces of Eurasian Architecture. The Annual Report of the *Valdai* Discussion Club, November 2024. P. 6.

CHAPTER 9.

THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND THE RUSSIA-US RELATIONS

Andrey Kortunov

Though in early November of 2024 decision-makers in the Kremlin had no compelling reasons to stand by Vice President Kamala Harris, who was destined to continue the tough Joe Biden's policy towards Russia, their immediate reaction to the victory of Donald Trump was predictably cautious and restrained. The relatively fresh experience of the first Trump Administration (2017–2021) called for a careful expectation management on the Russian side.

During the election campaign in the autumn of 2016 the Republican candidate made a couple of far-reaching statements underscoring his firm commitment to deliver positive changes to already quite complicated and difficult relations between Washington and Moscow. The surprising Trump's victory in November of 2016 over *Russia-skeptical* Hillary Clinton generated a high wave of enthusiasm and hope among many Russia's politicians, opinion-makers and experts¹⁵⁸.

However, this enthusiasm turned out to be unreasonable and short-lived. The overall decline of Barak Obama's *Reset Policy*¹⁵⁹ that had graphically manifested itself already in 2012–2016, continued through the four years of the first Trump Administration as well despite all the encouraging rhetoric of the 45th President of the United States.

The only full-fledged bilateral Trump-Putin summit meeting in four years that took place in Helsinki on July 16, 2018 failed to change this negative trajectory; quite amicable discussions in the Finnish capital were followed by an avalanche of US sanctions and other hostile moves from the American side. It is hard to say whether most of these moves were initiated by Trump himself or were imposed on the reluctant leader by powerful political coalitions on the Capitol Hill and within the *Deep State*, but the bilateral US-Russian relationship continued to deteriorate. Moreover, it was during the first Trump Administration, when the United States began large-scale supplies of modern weapons to Ukraine – the fact that Donald Trump later on reminded Volodymyr Zelensky of during their heated exchange in the Oval Office on February 28, 2025¹⁶⁰.

In sum, there were many reasons for politicians in Moscow to take all the pro-Russian statements made by Trump in course of the 2024 election campaign with a *grain of salt*¹⁶¹. Besides, there should have been concerns in the Kremlin about another likely round of US accusations regarding a “malign Russian interference” into the American politics. Therefore, Russian leaders did their best to distance themselves from the 2024 elections, and President Putin even half-jokingly stated that Russia should

¹⁵⁸ State Duma greets news of Trump's victory with applause // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. November 9, 2016. URL: <https://ria.ru/20161109/1480965810.html> (in Russ.).

¹⁵⁹ *Reset Policy* (also known as *The Russian Reset*) was an attempt by the Obama administration to improve relations between the United States and Russia in 2009–2013 – *Editor's note*.

¹⁶⁰ Zhao H. The New 'Reset' of US-Russia Relations and Its Possible Prospects // *Valdai Discussion Club*. March 14, 2025. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-new-reset-of-us-russia-relations/>

¹⁶¹ Sergei Ryabkov: We know Trump from his previous run for power // *Interfax*. November 9, 2024. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/interview/990928> (in Russ.).

support the Democratic candidate¹⁶². There is no factual evidence suggesting that Russian officials could have already built direct contacts to Trump's team prior to November elections and could have discussed in advance possible changes in the bilateral relations. This cautious approach, however, did not prevent the Biden Administration from accusing Russia (together with China and Iran) of interfering into the 2024 election campaign by spreading disinformation through social media; the perceived perpetrators were put under sanctions¹⁶³.

Expectation Management

When the news of the second Trump's victory reached Moscow in the morning of November 6, the Russian leadership made clear its intention to work with the new Republican Administration, but also indicated that it had no illusions regarding the overall US foreign policy goals and anticipated a tough and protracted negotiating process with no guaranteed positive outcomes¹⁶⁴. Many Trump's statements made during the election campaign, especially on Ukraine, sounded ambiguous and controversial or at least detached from existing political realities. Likewise, not all of Trump's nominations suggested a swift change in the bilateral relations for the better. In particular, former US Senator Marco Rubio, selected as the new Secretary of State, and Keith Kellogg, Trump's special envoy for Ukraine, were considered to share quite hawkish positions towards Moscow, while Vice President JD Vance and Steve Witkoff, special envoy to the Middle East, were allegedly more Russia-friendly.

¹⁶² Teasing Putin says Russia backs Kamala Harris, cites her 'infectious' laugh // *Reuters*. September 6, 2024. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/putin-says-moscow-supported-its-own-citizens-major-east-west-prisoner-swap-2024-09-05/>

¹⁶³ US imposes sanctions on Russian and Iranian groups over disinformation targeting American voters // *The Associated Press*. January 1, 2025. URL: <https://apnews.com/article/russia-iran-trump-disinformation-election-959d3f36ffc81f3e5d07386122076e7e>

¹⁶⁴ Later on Sergey Ryabkov, Deputy Russia's Foreign Minister confirmed this position: "We are open to dialogue, and we are ready for hardcore negotiations with due regard for realities on the ground and our national interests based on history and geography". See: Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Ryabkov's answer to a question // MFA of the Russian Federation. February 5, 2025. URL: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1994864/ (in Russ.).

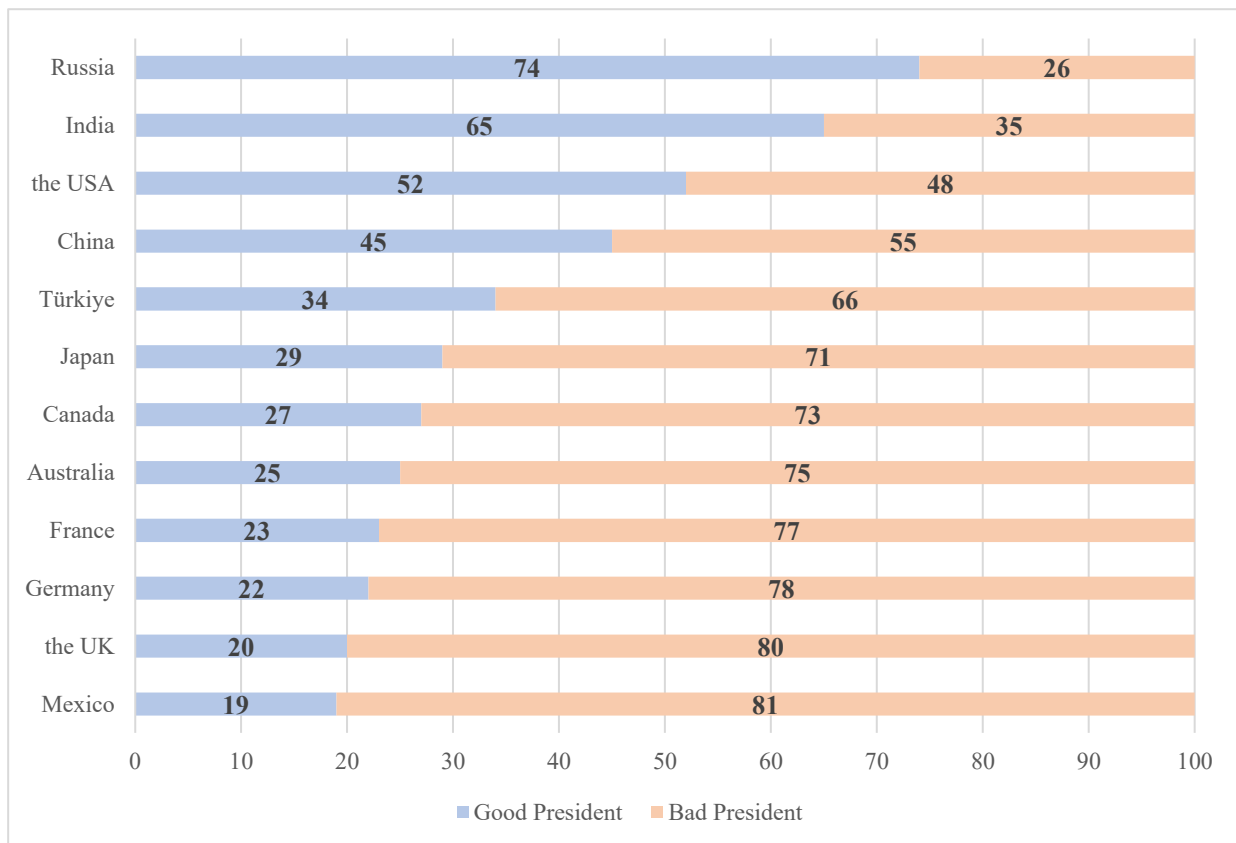


Figure 29. Global Expectation of Trump's Presidency (% of thinking Donald Trump will be good/bad President, selected countries, 2017).

Based on: Statista (<https://www.statista.com/chart/7750/global-expectations-of-trumps-presidency/>)

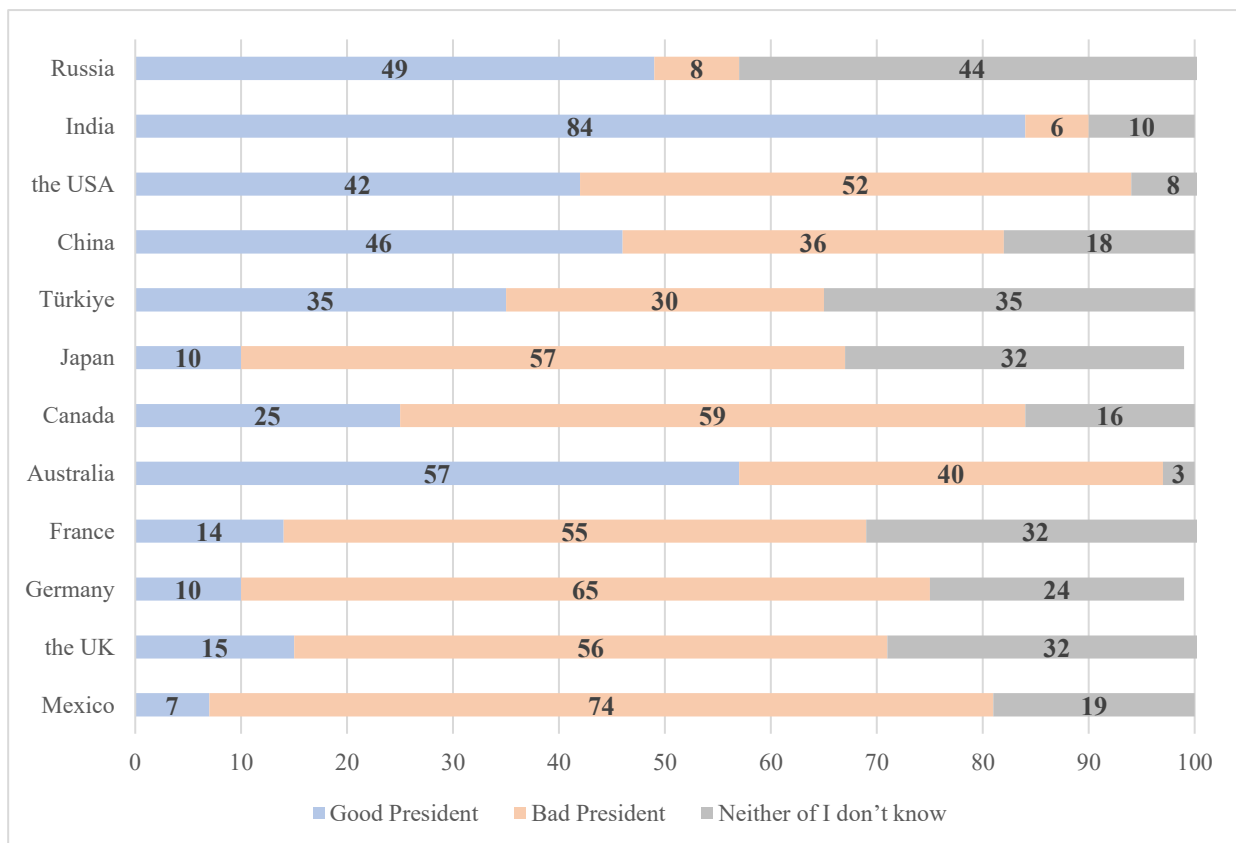


Figure 30. Global Expectation of Trump's Presidency (% of thinking Donald Trump will be good/bad President, selected countries, 2025)

The predominant views on Russia in the US Congress remained mostly adversarial and focused on potential punitive US measures, particularly through new economic sanctions. To some extent, these moods reflected the long-standing perceptions within both Republican and Democratic Parties electorates¹⁶⁵. Some of US experts also argued that the moods on the Capitol Hill were at least partially shaped by the American defense sector that used the bugbear of a new “Russia’s threat” to lobby for more spending on military procurement¹⁶⁶. In any case, the Trump Administration could not count on any major support for its efforts to reinvent US relations with Moscow to come from the Hill.

It is fair to say that given the above-mentioned grounds for skepticism and doubts on the Russian side, the 47th President of the United States exceeded initial expectations in the Kremlin; he demonstrated a clear intention to thoroughly review and to radically revise some of the approaches to Moscow practiced by his predecessor. For instance, he radically changed the established US official narrative about the origins of the Russian-Ukrainian conflict arguing that Kiev itself was responsible for the outbreak of military activities since the Ukrainian side had not done enough to avoid it through diplomatic means¹⁶⁷. Furthermore, in early March of 2025 the White House ordered a pause on military aid to Ukraine¹⁶⁸ – a move that was predictably welcomed in Moscow and criticized in most of European capitals.

The initially cautious and reactive approach to the new US leadership gradually gave way to a more energetic and proactive Russian policy with the intention to engage the Republican Administration into a productive dialogue. The two sides agreed to start working on a broad range of problems in their bilateral relations and to activate political and diplomatic contacts at various levels. The first important US-Russian governmental meeting took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia on February, 18. From the Russian side it was attended by Sergey Lavrov, Russia’s Foreign Minister, Yuriy Ushakov, Foreign Affairs Assistant to the President, and Kirill Dmitriev, CEO of the Russian Direct Investment Fund (RDIF). The US side was represented by Marco Rubio, Secretary of State, Mike Waltz, National Security Advisor to the President and Steve Witkoff, US special envoy to the Middle East. The agenda of the 4.5-hour meeting was broad; participants discussed means to restore the *crippled* diplomatic relations, political settlement in Ukraine and a number of other regional crises. Later on, President Putin expressed his satisfaction with the outcomes of the meeting and argued that such meetings could raise the level of trust between the two nations¹⁶⁹.

¹⁶⁵ Dunn A. Republicans and Democrats alike view Russia more as a competitor than an enemy of the U.S. // PewResearch Center. January 26, 2025. URL: <https://www.pewresearch.org/short-reads/2022/01/26/republicans-and-democrats-alike-view-russia-more-as-a-competitor-than-an-enemy-of-the-u-s/>

¹⁶⁶ Shapiro D., Martirosyan A. Why Does Congress Not Care About Normalizing Relations With Russia? // Russia Matters. Harvard Kennedy School, Belfer Center for Science and International Affairs. February 26, 2020. URL: <https://www.russiamatters.org/analysis/why-does-congress-not-care-about-normalizing-relations-russia>

¹⁶⁷ Trump says Ukraine 'should have never started' war in Ukraine // *NBC News*. February 19, 2025. URL: <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/donald-trump/trump-says-ukraine-should-never-have-started-it-remarks-war-russia-rcna192710>

¹⁶⁸ Trump Suspends Military Aid to Ukraine After Oval Office Blowup // *The New York Times*. March 5, 2025. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/03/03/us/politics/trump-ukraine-military-aid.html>

¹⁶⁹ Putin comments for the first time on the results of Russia-US talks in Riyadh // *Forbes*. February 19, 2025. URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/society/531170-putin-vpervye-prokommentiroval-rezul-taty-peregovorov-rossii-i-ssa-v-er-riade> (in Russ.).

On March 24, Russia and the United States held another meeting in Riyadh. This time the Kremlin dispatched to the Saudi capital Grigory Karasin, Head of the Council of Federation's International Affairs Committee, and Sergey Beseda, Advisor to the head of FSB. The US negotiating group was led by Michael Anton, Director of Policy Planning at State Department. The details of the meeting have never been made public since the participants focused on *technical matters*¹⁷⁰. One of these technical matters was the Black Sea "grain initiative", but since the meeting lasted for about twelve hours, one can conclude that it was not the only topic discussed in Riyadh.

Centrality of the *Ukrainian Problem*

The core aspect of the relationship was, of course, the White House attitude to the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Trump, who on many occasions directly blamed the Biden Administration for the military confrontation in the very center of Europe, came up with his own *Peace plan* that was much more conducive to Russia's aspirations and expectations than any official Western proposal that had been articulated over the first three years of the conflict. It took the Trump team about three months to move from rather general political statements on how to end the conflict to more specific suggestions and proposals; the main components of the *Trump Plan* were made public by mid-April. The plan included a number of important concessions to Moscow, including a de-jure US recognition of Crimea as a Russian region, a de-facto acceptance of other Russia's territorial acquisitions made since February of 2022, a commitment not to allow Kiev joining NATO and gradual lifting of Western sanctions imposed on Moscow¹⁷¹.

It goes without saying that Trump invested a lot of his personal *political capital* in forging the new US approach to the conflict and he apparently expected his plan to be welcomed by the Russian side. After the tense meeting with President Zelensky in Washington in the end of February the Republican Administration had reasons to believe that it would encounter more resistance to the US mediation coming from Kiev than from Moscow. It was also clear that the US President had better *personal chemistry* with his Russian colleague than with the Ukrainian leader – partially due to his earlier track record with each of them¹⁷². Apparently, in the White House they expected the Kremlin to seize the opportunity to put an early end to a protracted military confrontation even without guaranteed prospects for a more comprehensive political settlement in the immediate future.

Yet, as it turned out, the *Trump Plan* still fell short of what they could readily accept in the Kremlin in spring – summer of 2025. For instance, it did not include any quantitative or qualitative restrictions on the Ukrainian military capabilities, on the Western security assistance to Kiev or on a direct military presence of selected European NATO member-states on the territory of Ukraine. Neither it included any "denazification", i. e. any reload of the Ukrainian political system with the aim to

¹⁷⁰ Peskov explained why they decided not to make public the content of the talks in Riyadh // *RTVI*. March 25, 2025. URL: <https://rtvi.com/news/peskov-obyasnil-pochemu-reshili-ne-obnarodovat-soderzhanie-peregovorov-v-er-riyade/> (in Russ.).

¹⁷¹ Trump Pressures Ukraine to Accept a Peace Plan That Sharply Favors Russia // *The New York Times*. April 23, 2025. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/04/23/world/europe/ukraine-cease-fire-talks-london.html>

¹⁷² How Trump's history with Putin and Zelenskyy set the stage for an Oval Office blowup // *PBS News*. March 3, 2025. URL: <https://www.pbs.org/newshour/politics/how-trumps-history-with-putin-and-zelenskyy-set-the-stage-for-an-oval-office-blowup>

exclude from this system all the radical nationalist parties and movements. In his view, Russia was not in a position and should not be allowed to “take all of Ukraine” or to have a veto power over Ukraine’s political future.

Disagreements between the White House and the Kremlin on the future of Ukraine became explicit already by mid-spring¹⁷³. When in late March President Putin suggested that Ukraine should be put under an international control as a *failed state*¹⁷⁴, this suggestion was promptly and unambiguously turned down by the White House¹⁷⁵. In sum, Trump insisted on keeping Ukraine fully sovereign, heavily armed, pro-US and potentially hostile to Russia for years to come, even with a significant loss of territory and an imposed neutral status. Moreover, as a *consolation prize* for offering Kiev a NATO membership, Trump suggested that Ukraine should instead receive a *fast track* in its future accession to the European Union. Given the growing security ties between the EU and NATO, one could conclude that the Trump Administration was looking for a way to have an upper hand in future Ukraine’s security matters without taking any binding security commitments to the Ukrainian state.

Diversifying the Political Investment *Portfolio*

It seems that these deep, if not irreconcilable, divisions between US and Russia’s positions on the settlement in Ukraine were evident to the political leadership in Moscow already at the earliest stage of the renewed Russia–US dialogue in winter – spring of 2025. However, to put the overall relations with the United States back on track was perceived in the Kremlin as an impotent foreign policy goal in itself, even if the chances to reconcile diverging positions of the two sides on Ukraine looked disappointingly low. Since early spring of 2025 the Russian side tried to use its newly restored connections to Washington in order to diversify Moscow’s political investment portfolio with the United States and, hopefully, to broaden the extremely narrow pro-Russian political and economic power groups within the US establishment¹⁷⁶.

In particular, in early April Kirill Dmitriev, head of the RDIF, paid a visit to Washington, where he discussed possible joint Russia-US projects ranging from restoring a direct air traffic between the two countries to a US access to Russia’s *rare-earth deposits* to joint bilateral initiatives in the Arctic region¹⁷⁷. Within the Russian expert community, they also discussed future collaboration in space research, public health and AI. In the end of July Dmitri Bakanov, Head of *Roskosmos*, visited Houston to have discussions with his counterpart at NASA, which was the first meeting between the two national space agencies in eight years¹⁷⁸. The idea evidently was to make sure that even if the

¹⁷³ Saradzhyan S., Arreguín-Toft I., Flood A. Readouts of Trump-Putin Call Reaffirm Divergence of US, RF Views on Path to Peace // Russia Matters. March 20, 2025. URL: <https://www.russiamatters.org/blog/readouts-trump-putin-call-reaffirm-divergence-us-rf-views-path-peace>

¹⁷⁴ “External Management Is One of the Options”: Putin Proposes New Plan for Ukraine // *Gazeta.ru*. March 26, 2025. URL: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2025/03/28/20783252.shtml> (in Russ.).

¹⁷⁵ Trump administration rejects Putin's proposal that the U.N. should govern Ukraine // *NBC News*. March 28, 2025. URL: <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/world/putin-trump-russia-ukraine-zelenskyy-un-guinea-timor-yugoslavia-rcna198520>

¹⁷⁶ Matviyenko urged not to reduce relations between Russia and the US to the Ukrainian case only // *Gazeta.ru*. July 24, 2025. URL: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2025/07/24/26340776.shtml> (in Russ.).

¹⁷⁷ Key points from Kirill Dmitriev's statements following his trip to Washington // *Expert Journal*. April 4, 2025. URL: <https://expert.ru/news/glavnoe-iz-zayavleniy-kirilla-dmitrieva-po-itogam-ego-poezdki-v-vashington/> (in Russ.).

¹⁷⁸ Head of *Roskosmos* Arrives in the US // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. July 29, 2025. URL: <https://ria.ru/20250729/bakanov-2032045162.html> (in Russ.).

sides fail to agree on Ukraine, they would still have a lot of potential areas of cooperation. This approach appeared to be *preemptive tactics* with the goal to mitigate likely Trump's discontent resulting from a slow progress in Ukraine's settlement.

There were two rounds of consultations *on the irritants* in the diplomatic dimension of the relations addressing mostly reciprocal restoration of almost completely frozen activities of Embassies and consulate services. It is also worth mentioning multiple trips of Steve Witkoff, the US special envoy, to meet with Vladimir Putin (in February, in March, two times in April and one more time in early August).

However, if in Washington they hoped that prospects for a broad economic cooperation and for resuming a meaningful political dialogue could change the Russian position on Ukraine in the direction of a greater flexibility, such hopes never came through. There were no even symbolic changes in the proposed terms for a peace settlement since Vladimir Putin outlined his views on this matter at a meeting with the Russian Foreign Ministry senior personnel on June 14, 2024¹⁷⁹. Moreover, in spring – summer of 2025 the pace of the Russian offensive in Ukraine increased, which apparently further consolidated the existing consensus on desirable and acceptable to Russia terms on the settlement with Ukraine.

At the same time, Russian officials tried hard to avoid any direct criticism of President Trump and his team; the changed US “pragmatic” approach to Moscow was juxtaposed to the ideology driven “Russo-phobia” of the European *political mainstream*. The public reports on Putin-Trump phone conversations sounded optimistic and respectful to the US leader even if the two Presidents could not reach any specific agreements¹⁸⁰. This new rhetoric was a radical departure from the 2022-2024 Russia's foreign policy narrative, in which the United States was routinely presented as the omnipotent center of the global anti-Russian alliance, while European states were presented as powerless satellites and even puppets of Washington forced by the latter to follow the US hostile strategy towards Russia against their own will and fundamental interests¹⁸¹.

Limited Opportunities for Cooperation

If the intention on the Russian side was indeed to diversify the agenda of the dialogue with the Republican Administration, it could not change the centrality of Ukraine in the overall Trump's approach to Russia. “Peace” in Ukraine – even in the form of a very preliminary ceasefire without a comprehensive political settlement – is not just another item on the agenda of US-Russian negotiations, it is the critical precondition for progress in all other dimensions of interaction between the White House and the Kremlin. In the eyes of Donald Trump, it is the ultimate test of Russia leadership's credibility and its good will. Any US-Russian “deal” that did not include a Russian-

¹⁷⁹ The President held a meeting with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation // President of Russia. June 14, 2024. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74285> (in Russ.).

¹⁸⁰ Commentary by Aide to the President of Russia Yuriy Ushakov following the telephone conversation between Vladimir Putin and President of the United States Donald Trump // President of Russia. July 3, 2025. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/77354>

¹⁸¹ The Concept of Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (approved by the President of the Russian Federation on March 31, 2023) // MFA of the Russian Federation. March 31, 2023. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1860586/?ysclid=mdlsv0kuj3315630024> (in Russ.).

Ukrainian settlement, would appear in Trump's eyes if not as a complete failure, then at least as an unfinished business.

One should also note that beyond Ukraine opportunities for any large-scale bilateral cooperation between Moscow and Washington remain limited at best.

Donald Trump has never been particularly interested in bilateral strategic arms control that for half a century was the cornerstone of US-Soviet and later on – of US – Russian relations. Back in 2018, he decided that the United States should withdraw from the US-Soviet *INF Treaty* signed in 1987. The Republican Administration demonstrated no commitment to the *New START Treaty* concluded in 2010 with the expiration date in early 2021; the Treaty was hastily extended till 2026 only when the Biden Administration took office in January of 2021. Today (in September of 2025) there are no signs that Moscow and Washington might be in a position to agree on a replacement for the *New START* by early 2026, when the 2021 extension finally expires. At best, the two sides can reach a political (non-binding) agreement that they will stay within the *New START* ceilings after the Treaty expires¹⁸². In fact, Trump has never cared much about strategic stability at large, given his stated intention to develop and to deploy the so-called *Golden Dome* that should grossly devalue the Russian strategic deterrence capacity. If there is limited interest in managing the ongoing global arms race, the interest is directed towards Beijing rather than Moscow. In early August of 2025, the Russian leadership decided to terminate its unilateral moratorium on the deployment of ground-launched intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles¹⁸³, which can be regarded as an implicit recognition that the *INF Treaty* is finally and irrevocably dead.

In the end of September Vladimir Putin came up with a proposal that Russia and the United States could extend their *New START* arms control treaty that expires in February of 2026 till at least February of 2027 without imposing any additional conditions; one extra year could be used by Moscow and Washington to work on a new arrangement in this area¹⁸⁴. It took the US President about two weeks to react to the proposal; finally, Donald Trump stated that it was “a good idea”¹⁸⁵. However, it remains unclear whether any serious negotiations on this matter can take place in the absence of a visible progress on the Russian-Ukrainian track.

Economically, the bilateral trade has never been critically important for either side. Even at its *peak* during the heydays of Barak Obama's “Reset” it constituted only 3,3% of the overall Russia's trade turnout compared to 49,4% share of the European Union¹⁸⁶ and remained fundamentally unbalanced in Russia's favor. The trade plummeted after 2014 and especially after 2022; today its levels (\$3.5 billion in 2024) are the lowest since the times of the Soviet disintegration. Some Russian experts

¹⁸² Kimball D. Making Sense of Trump's Talk of ‘Denuclearization’ // Arms Control Association. March 10, 2025. URL: <https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2025-03/focus/making-sense-trumps-talk-denuclearization>

¹⁸³ Statement by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation on the moratorium on the deployment of ground-launched intermediate-range and shorter-range missiles // MFA of the Russian Federation. August 4, 2025. URL: https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/news/2039749/ (in Russ.).

¹⁸⁴ A meeting with permanent members of the Security Council // President of the Russian Federation. September 22, 2025. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78051> (in Russ.).

¹⁸⁵ Trump says Putin's proposal on New START ‘sounds like a good idea’ // TASS. October 5, 2025. URL: <https://tass.com/world/2025407> (in Russ.).

¹⁸⁶ Presidents' Dreams: Why Nothing Will Change in US-Russia Trade Relations // Finam.ru. May 20, 2025. URL: <https://www.finam.ru/publications/item/mechty-prezidentov-pochemu-v-torgovykh-otnosheniyakh-ssha-i-rossii-nichego-ne-izmenitsya-20250520-1748/> (in Russ.).

argue that with positive geopolitical dynamics the bilateral trade can more than double in 2025 reaching \$6–8 bln.¹⁸⁷, but even this steep rise would not constitute a new solid foundation for the bilateral relationship. Furthermore, the Russian and the US economies are not mutually complimentary as, for instance, Russia's and China's economies; in many important global markets (hydrocarbons, food stock, arms) Russian and the United States are outright competitors rather than potential partners.

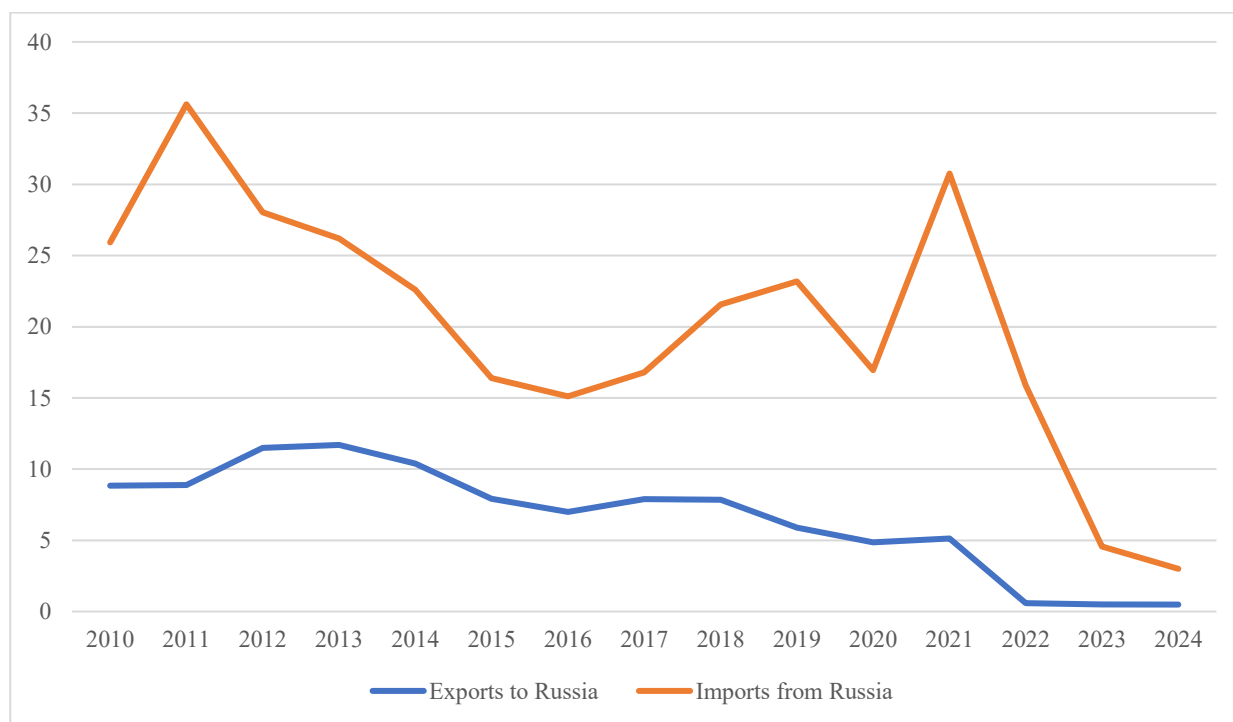


Figure 31. Dynamics of imports and exports in trade between Russia and the USA from 2010 to 2024 (nominal indicators, without taking into account seasonal fluctuations)

Based on: United States Census Bureau (<https://www.census.gov/>)

Of course, the United States might benefit from purchasing Russia's titanium for *Boeing*, enriched Uranium for US nuclear power-plants or even the Russian heavy oil for some of American refineries. It might explore opportunities with the Russia rare-earth resources. However, Russia is not a sole source of any of these commodities for the United States; there are many alternative suppliers that the US side can consider. Besides, even Trump is not in a position to remove all the US anti-Russian sanctions overnight, which means that any US-Russian economic cooperation in the foreseeable future will be seriously constrained. In any case, by the end of July, 2025 no single major US investor indicated its intention to launch new projects in Russia¹⁸⁸. There were rumors that the US energy giant *Exxon Mobile* might reclaim its share within the *Sakhalin-I* oil project¹⁸⁹, but the odds are that such a comeback can happen only after the military conflict in Europe comes to its end. The odds are that if US investment institutions do consider opportunities in Russia in the immediate future, these

¹⁸⁷ You owe the goods: Russia-US trade could double in 2025 // *Izvestia*. May 20, 2025. URL: <https://iz.ru/1856762/olga-anaseva/s-vas-tovar-torgovlya-rf-i-ssha-mozhet-vozhzrast-v-2025-m> (in Russ.).

¹⁸⁸ Ministry of Finance: No applications from foreign companies to return to Russia have been received // *Russian Gazette*. July 24, 2025. URL: <https://rg.ru/2025/07/24/minfin-zaiavok-ot-zarubezhnyh-kompanij-o-vozvrashchenii-v-rf-ne-postupalo.html> (in Russ.).

¹⁸⁹ Wallace J., Paris C., Leary A., Eaton C. *Exxon* Held Secret Talks With *Rosneft* About Going Back to Russia // *The Wall Street Journal*. August 26, 2025. URL: <https://www.wsj.com/business/energy-oil/exxon-rosneft-russia-oil-talks-f524e81f>

opportunities will be looked for in short-term speculative operations in the national financial markets rather in long-term direct investments into the Russian economy.

Prospects for an intense cooperation between the White House and the Kremlin on *burning* regional matters look doubtful at best. US and Russian interests in most of them hardly significantly overlap; in many cases in Washington, they consider Russia's direct or indirect engagement in regional crises to be a part of the problem rather than a part of the solution. It was not surprising that Trump flatly rejected Putin's offer to serve as a mediator in the recent cycle of military escalation between Israel and Iran¹⁹⁰. On the other hand, it looks almost inconceivable that the Kremlin might opt for any significant changes in its current approaches to Tehran, Pyongyang, Havana or Caracas, not even to mention Beijing, in order to accommodate US interests and concerns. Such a step would seriously undermine Moscow's credibility as a strategic partner and might have significant negative repercussions for Russia's positions in various regions of the world. Critics of Trump argue that his policies – especially related to rearranging the NATO Alliance – might eventually further consolidate the Russia-China strategic partnership rather than weaken it¹⁹¹.

Finally, given the present high level of anti-Russian sentiments within the US public, it is hard to imagine that bilateral relations in education and *R&D*, arts and culture, civil society and media could boom in the immediate future. Donald Trump did have an impact on the US public views on Russia, but it is at least premature to talk about a radical shift of the public opinion. The public opinion shift in Russia toward a more positive approach to the United States might be more visible and articulated, but it might also be only skin-deep and highly vulnerable to unpredictable changes in the geopolitical atmospheres. There is a numerous and mostly economically successful Russian – or rather post-Soviet diaspora in the United States; according to various estimates, this community comprises from 2.5 to 6 million people. But this diaspora is split along very many lines and a large share of post-Soviet immigrants to America remain explicitly hostile to the political system that exists in Russia today.

Fading Hopes

When it became clear that no fast progress on the Ukrainian track is achievable, the White House started losing most of its interest in other areas of potential cooperation. After the first two rounds of negotiations (February 27 and April 10), the proceedings of the bilateral group on *irritants* in bilateral relations were frozen by the US side.¹⁹² Though initially the Russian Foreign Ministry was insisting on resuming the negotiations as soon as possible, by the end of July the Russian approach started changing and Deputy Foreign Minister Sergey Vershinin argued that “the irritants should be removed foremost by the US side, and decisions regarding a new round of negotiations on these matters are premature”¹⁹³.

¹⁹⁰ Shane Croucher. Trump Rejected Putin's Iran Offer: 'I Need Help With You' // *Newsweek*. June 24, 2025. URL: <https://www.newsweek.com/trump-putin-iran-deal-ukraine-war-russia-2089972>

¹⁹¹ Turker H. Trump's Russia Strategy: Breaking the Sino-Russian Alliance or Strengthening It? // *Geopolitical Monitor*. February 23, 2025. URL: <https://www.geopoliticalmonitor.com/trumps-russia-strategy-breaking-the-sino-russian-alliance-or-strengthening-it/>

¹⁹² The Foreign Ministry announced the cancellation of talks on "irritants" at the initiative of the United States // *RBC*. June 16, 2025. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/16/06/2025/685014689a7947fdda1ef4b3> (in Russ.).

¹⁹³ The Foreign Ministry called for eliminating irritants in relations between Russia and the US // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. July 31, 2025. URL: <https://ria.ru/20250731/diplomatiya-2032505235.html> (in Russ.).

In July, the Administration made a politically important decision to resume its arms supplies to Ukraine¹⁹⁴, including the most controversial deliveries of the *Patriot* missile defense systems, though it changed the terms of American military hardware deliveries imposing their costs on the US European allies. Though it would be wrong to argue that in half a year the Trump Administration fully returned to the *old Biden's approaches* to the Russian-Ukrainian conflict, it definitely retreated from some of its initial explicitly critical and condescending positions toward Ukraine.

In February – June of 2025, Trump had three face-to-face meetings with Zelensky (February 28 – a tense encounter at the *Oval Office* in Washington, April 26 – a more constructive private meeting inside St. Peter's Basilica at the Vatican during Pope Francis's funeral, a lengthy and substantive conversation on the sidelines of the NATO summit in the Hague), but not a single such meeting with Vladimir Putin. True, over the first five months of the Republican Administration the two leaders had at least six phone calls¹⁹⁵, but this form of communication cannot fully replace face-to-face meetings.

Half a year after Donald Trump had returned to power in Washington, Dmitry Peskov, Putin's Press Secretary, argued that the time for a Russia-US summit was not yet ripe and that the two sides have to do "a great deal of work" to make it possible¹⁹⁶. By early August there were no indications that any practical preparation for a summit meeting had already started. Over time, the US President became more and more critical in his public statements related to his Russian colleague and started entertaining the idea of imposing new economic sanctions on Russia and on its main trading partners. In July this approach resulted in the "Trump's Ultimatum" that implied a broad package of sanctions focused mostly on Russia's energy sector and its clients – countries like China and India. The "Ultimatum" should be enforced if there is now Russian-Ukrainian ceasefire agreement in 50 days after its announcement. Later on, the US President change the announced deadline to ten days indicating that he had no hopes to see any significant change in Russia's performance in Ukraine.

¹⁹⁴ US to send more weapons to Ukraine, Trump says // *Al Jazeera*. July 8, 2025. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/7/8/us-to-send-more-weapons-to-ukraine-trump-says>

¹⁹⁵ Putin, Trump hold 2025's sixth phone talk // *TASS*. July 3, 2025. URL: <https://tass.com/politics/1985185> (in Russ.).

¹⁹⁶ Peskov said that Putin's meeting with Trump "will definitely happen" // *Forbes*. July 20, 2025. URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/society/542237-peskov-zaavil-cto-vstreca-putina-s-trampom-obazatel-no-slucitsa> (in Russ.).

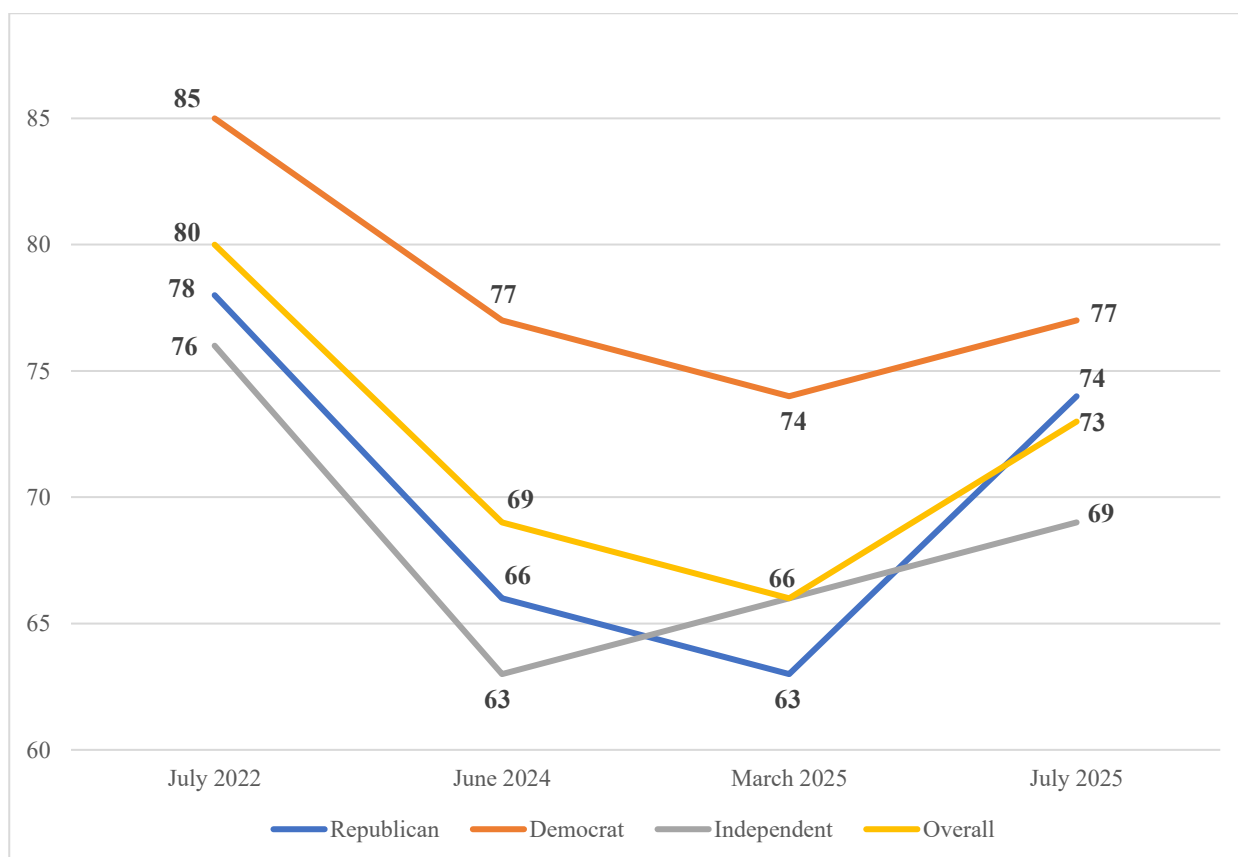


Figure 32. Support for Increased Sanctions against Russia (% of support, as of July 2025)

Based on: Chicago Council on Global Affairs (<https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/dramatic-rise-republican-support-ukraine>)

The initial Russian reaction of the *Ultimatum* was explicitly dismissive though many experts predicted that such a US move would significantly complicate Russian trade relations with a number of key partners in the *Global South*. Yet, Russia's officials continued avoiding any harsh criticism of Trump personally apparently anticipating remaining potential for at least a limited progress in bilateral relations. In the beginning of August, the Russian leadership abstained from any comments on Trump's threats, except for a rather emotional exchange between Dmitri Medvedev, Deputy Chairperson of Russia's Security Council and US Republican Senator Lindsey Graham (*added by Rosfinmonitoring to the list of individuals and organizations believed to be involved in extremist or terrorist activities since February 20, 2024*)¹⁹⁷. At the same time, on August 1 Russia's Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov expressed a rather positive view on the state of Russian – US relationship, arguing that the “substantive discussion of the Ukrainian matters is very useful and yields results. It was exactly thanks to the persistent efforts of President Trump that the regime in Kiev agreed to our proposal to resume the Istanbul negotiations”¹⁹⁸.

A Tale of Two Summits

¹⁹⁷ How Medvedev and Senator Graham Argued Over the Ultimatum on Ukraine // RBC. July 29, 2025. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/29/07/2025/688887169a794771e0c35949?ysclid=mdr0szthh4657303999> (in Russ.).

¹⁹⁸ Answer of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Sergey Lavrov to the media question // MFA of the Russian Federation. August 1, 2025. URL: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/2039314/ (in Russ.).

The improvised US-Russian summit meeting in Alaska, which took place on August 15, was a concerted attempt by both sides to reverse the negative dynamics in the bilateral relationship. On the eve of the summit meeting, both sides did their best to secure themselves against a possible failure. They announced quite in advance that no documents were supposed to be signed in Anchorage and that no specific agreements were expected to come out of the negotiations. Shortly before the meeting, the White House Spokesperson Karoline Leavitt described the summit as a “listening exercise for the president”¹⁹⁹, and Russian President Vladimir Putin argued that in negotiations too high expectations inevitably lead to disappointments²⁰⁰.

Furthermore, the preparation of the summit, as far as one can judge, did not in any significant way affect the intensity of military confrontation along the line of Russian–Ukrainian contact. Attacks of Ukrainian drones against a number of Russia’s regions and the consistent advances of Russian forces deeper into the Ukrainian territory continued with no pauses or interruptions; both sides routinely accused each other of continuous strikes against civilian targets. There were no signs of even a limited de-escalation on the eve of the Alaska meeting; on the contrary, many observers argued that the overall intensity of the conflict even increased in early August.

The announcement of the summit did not stop or slow down the work of Brussels officials on the next, 19th package of European Union sanctions against Russia. Neither it removed the prospect of an increased American economic pressure on Moscow and its trading partners from among the leading countries of the South. The deadline of the *Trump ultimatum* to Putin expired on August 8, but the US President did not take this threat off the table, apparently hoping to use it as a bargaining chip at the meeting in Anchorage.

Nevertheless, expectations from the meeting remained high – not only in Moscow and in Washington, but all over the world as well. An unusual haste in organizing, the lack of reliable leaks on the substantial outcome of Steve Witkoff earlier visit to Moscow and, finally, the very representative composition of the delegations of Russia and the United States in Anchorage, which suggested discussing a wide range of issues from strategic arms control to joint economic projects, contributed to the political and media hype around the event. There was no shortage of speculations about possible agreements in various exotic areas like large-scale cooperation in the Arctic region or resurrecting US-Russian collaboration in space.

¹⁹⁹ Iordache R. White House tames expectations for Trump-Putin summit // CNBC. August 13, 2025. URL: <https://www.cnbc.com/2025/08/13/white-house-tames-expectations-for-trump-putin-summit.html>

²⁰⁰ Putin: All disappointments in negotiations occur due to excessive expectations // TASS. August 1, 2025. URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/24687549> (in Russ.).

Putin won in Anchorage. Now Zelenskyy and Europe are in an even more perilous position

ANALYSES | 2025-08-18



Alaska summit: a victory for Putin, concessions from Trump

Anchorage summit appears to be part of Russia's ongoing hybrid war

The summit is a turning point for Arctic regional security

'May God give the right words to President Trump': Anchorage hosts Putin summit

Russia's triumphant return to Alaska and the dark symbolism behind the Trump-Putin summit

AUG 16, 2025 10:22 PM YST

Putin Got Three Major Wins From Trump in Anchorage, But the Talks Aren't Over

Trump and Putin have history. That adds to the intrigue for Anchorage summit

Alaska, once ruled by Russia, greets Trump-Putin summit with mix of hope and anger

Trump and Putin meet in Anchorage for historic summit

August 19, 2025 • Murat Demir

'No deal until...': What Donald Trump, Vladimir Putin said after historic Alaska summit

If Alaska seeks diplomatic clout, it needs to build better venues

Alaska wants to host geopolitical get-togethers, but where?

Figure 33. Publications from leading global News Agencies dedicated to the summit in Alaska. August 15, 2025 (press clipping)

Based on open sources.

If in Moscow many hoped for a *miracle*, then in Kiev and in most European capitals they were scared that a *miracle* might indeed happen. The Western media were filled with the gloomiest forecasts, painting “conspiracy of the two autocrats” and prospects of a *New Yalta* to be decided over the heads of other international actors and out of the frameworks of the established multilateral bodies. The mere fact of the bilateral meeting was interpreted as a major foreign policy victory for Russia²⁰¹. The opinions were also expressed that the experienced, cautious and prudent to details Putin would easily outplay the impulsive, exalted and details-blind Trump.

The summit in Alaska is commonly and rightfully regarded as a major foreign policy victory for President Putin though not as a crushing defeat for President Trump. The Russian leader demonstrated his impressive power of persuasion, completely reversing the most recent negative dynamics of Trump's attitude to Russia and its leadership. First, Putin was able to convince his US counterpart that a comprehensive political settlement of the conflict with Ukraine is more important than a temporary ceasefire and that the ceasefire should not be a precondition for negotiating the peace settlement. Second, after the US-Russian summit the idea of a new devastating US secondary sanctions package against major Russian trade partners was put on a back-burner, if not completely abrogated. Third, Putin managed to shoot the ball into Zelensky's court; after the negotiations in

²⁰¹ Kupchan C., Fix L., Stares P. What to Expect From the Trump-Putin Alaska Summit // Council on Foreign Relations. August 14, 2025. URL: <https://www.cfr.org/article/what-expect-trump-putin-alaska-summit>

Alaska Trump stated that the Ukrainian President could immediately end the conflict if he only accepted the terms being offered to him²⁰².

Ukrainian and European leaders were summoned on August 18 in the White House, where they desperately tried to undo these outcomes. They thoroughly avoided any discussions of possible Ukrainian concessions – at least in the open part of their meeting. President Zelensky stated that the Ukrainian Constitution did not allow any territorial changes and also argued that all territorial matters should be discussed only between him and President Putin²⁰³. The main focus of the Washington's summit was on future security guarantees for Ukraine short of the full membership to the NATO Alliance, but similar to what Article 5 of the North Atlantic Treaty offers. Predictably, Trump's interlocutors called for more US military hardware for Ukraine and for more American economic pressure on Russia. Finally, Europeans tried hard to make sure that when peace talks start, Europe will have its rightful seat at the negotiating table.

Did European and Ukrainian leaders succeed in their attempts to “cancel” Anchorage and to restore the *pre-Anchorage geopolitical momentum* around the conflict? Probably not. Donald Trump did not change his negative view on the prospect of the US boots on the Ukrainian ground though he vaguely promised to consider some kind of air support for a future peace settlement in and around Ukraine. He showed no interest in a more direct European engagement in the peace negotiations, which could complicate these uneasy negotiations even further. Neither he demonstrated any intention to promptly follow Europeans on their next 19th *sanction package* against Moscow that bureaucrats in Brussels intended to approve already in September²⁰⁴. Ukraine could get more US-made weaponry in future, but only if it or its European partners were in a position to pay for it. Whether Europe can afford to foot the US bill remained an open question.

Still, in the Kremlin they could not simply brush off the results of the Washington summit as irrelevant and not worthy of consideration. The *ball was back* to the Russian court – Trump firmly supported Zelensky in his quest for an early Russian-Ukrainian summit. This was clearly not an easy situation for the Kremlin. Any excessive delays in reacting to the political show in Washington could start eroding the most important Alaska accomplishments and destroying personal trust between the Russian and the US leaders. On the other hand, a poorly prepared Russian-Ukrainian summit could turn into an epic failure blocking any immediate prospects for a peace settlement. In early September Vladimir Putin suggested that his meeting with President Zelensky could take place in Moscow²⁰⁵, this proposal was promptly rejected by the Ukrainian side²⁰⁶.

A Shaky Foundation

²⁰² Trump says Ukraine's Zelenskyy could end war 'almost immediately' // *Al Jazeera*. August 18, 2025. URL: <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2025/8/18/trump-says-ukraines-zelenskyy-can-end-war-almost-immediately>

²⁰³ Zelensky: Territorial issues should be discussed with Putin // *Kommersant Publishing House*. August 18, 2025. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/7973458> (in Russ.).

²⁰⁴ Broadwater L., MacFarquhar M. Takeaways From Trump's Meeting With Zelensky and European Leaders // *The New York Times*. August 18, 2025. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/18/us/politics/takeaways-trump-zelensky-putin.html>; Ultimately, the sanctions package was approved at the end of October 2025. The US Government also imposed sanctions against a number of major Russian energy companies in October 2025 – *Editor's note*.

²⁰⁵ Putin said that his meeting with Zelensky is possible // *Gazeta.ru*. September 3, 2025. URL: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/news/2025/09/03/26645120.shtml> (in Russ.).

²⁰⁶ “He can come to Kiev”: Zelensky refused to go to Moscow and invited Putin to Ukraine // *Gazeta.ru*. September 6, 2025. URL: <https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2025/09/06/21655634.shtml> (in Russ.).

One should note that many powerful political groups on the Capitol Hill, within the federal government, in mainstream media and influential think tanks and foundations across the United States had never supported the revisionist approach of Donald Trump to Russia, considering it to be a self-defeating “appeasement”. Even within the Trump Administration itself, there have always been many skeptics, who have had many doubts about feasibility of “resetting” US-Russian relations. As early as March of 2025, the majority of US citizens, including 25% of the Republican Party supporters, expressed their concerns about the “pro-Russian bias” in Trump’s foreign policy²⁰⁷.

A more general shift in the US public opinion typical for post-election phases in the US political cycles became another factor limiting potential Trump’s ‘reset’ initiatives. After the first six month of the second Trump’s term in power his overall popularity in the United States plummeted: the president’s approval ratings went down to 37% from 47% in January. Only 33% of Americans supported Trump’s approach to the Russian–Ukrainian conflict, which was significantly lower than the public support of Trump’s foreign policy in general (41%)²⁰⁸.

This is not to say that the Russia-US relations are doomed to get back to where they were prior to November 6, 2024. First, Trump understands that Russia is winning, not losing in Ukraine and all the Western assistance cannot change the overall dynamics of the conflict²⁰⁹.

Second, in US strategic priorities Ukraine is inevitably getting overshadowed by other foreign policy challenges and concerns related to China, Iran, Palestine and so on. Third, mounting social and economic problems at home will also require more attention from the White House. It is hard to imagine that Trump might decide to put the Russian-Ukrainian crisis back into the very center of the US foreign policy and security agendas, where it was under the Biden Administration. The US military and other assistance to Ukraine will be more modest and with many more strings attached than it was back in 2022–2024.

In fall of 2025 the Trump Administration demonstrated many examples of its ambiguous and not always consistent approach to Russia. On the one hand, it tried hard to display its readiness to impose more pressure on Moscow in order to incentivize the Russian leadership to show more flexibility on a future settlement with Ukraine. On the other hand, it clearly indicated its intention to avoid a collapse in the bilateral communications or to provoke an excessively hard reaction to US actions from the Kremlin. For instance, on October 16, Trump announced a forthcoming US-Russian summit

²⁰⁷ Americans worry Trump too closely aligned with Russia, Reuters/Ipsos poll finds // *Reuters*. March 13, 2025. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/us/americans-worry-trump-too-closely-aligned-with-russia-reutersipsos-poll-finds-2025-03-13/>

²⁰⁸ Independents Drive Trump's Approval to 37% Second-Term Low // *Gallup*. July 24, 2025. URL: <https://news.gallup.com/poll/692879/independents-drive-trump-approval-second-term-low.aspx>

²⁰⁹ On the other hand, the United States continues to provide significant assistance to Ukraine as an arms donor. Moreover, discussions are ongoing in the *Oval Office* regarding the possible supply of *Tomahawk* missile systems to Ukraine – *Editor’s note*.

to be held in Budapest²¹⁰. However, as soon as October 22, the US leader cancelled the meeting over the alleged Russia's refusal to back down from its *maximalist claims* on Ukraine²¹¹.

Simultaneously, the US Department of the Treasury's Office of Foreign Assets Control (OFAC) announced new sanctions against Russia's *Rosneft* and *Lukoil* energy corporations calling for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine²¹². But already on December 1, top ranking Trump's representatives Steve Witkoff and Jared Kushner after having talked with Vladimir Putin for around five hours in the Kremlin, seemed to be satisfied with the overall spirit of the meeting²¹³.

Arguably, the most significant signal of the changing US attitude towards Russia was the release the 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) on December 4-5, which adopted a less confrontational tone compared with earlier NSS versions, prioritizing dialogue, strategic stability, and an "expeditious end to the Ukraine conflict over containment"²¹⁴. Not surprisingly, Vladimir Putin's Press Secretary Dmitry Peskov promptly reacted to NSS-2025, stating that the changes in the American strategic posture to a large extent coincide with the Kremlin's vision of the world²¹⁵.

...It is a core interest of the United States to negotiate an expeditious cessation of hostilities in Ukraine, in order to stabilize European economies, prevent unintended escalation or expansion of the war, and reestablish strategic stability with Russia, as well as to enable the post-hostilities reconstruction of Ukraine to enable its survival as a viable state (p.25).

<...>

Our broad policy for Europe should prioritize reestablishing conditions of stability within Europe and strategic stability with Russia (p.27).

**National Security Strategy of the United States of America
November 2025**

<https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

In sum, the first year of the second Trump Administration, all the unquestionable changes in the US approaches to Moscow notwithstanding, has already demonstrated how hard it is to reverse the negative dynamic of the US-Russia relations. It seems obvious that even political will of the top leaders on both sides does not guarantee a successful outcome of this ambitious undertaking.

²¹⁰ Trump says he will meet with Putin in Budapest to discuss war in Ukraine // CNN. October 17, 2025. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/10/16/politics/putin-trump-hungary-ukraine-war>

²¹¹ Trump's hopes for quick second summit with Putin have stalled out // CNN. October 22, 2025. URL: <https://edition.cnn.com/2025/10/20/politics/trump-putin-meeting-possible-delay-russia-ukraine>

²¹² Treasury Sanctions Major Russian Oil Companies, Calls on Moscow to Immediately Agree to Ceasefire // U.S. Department of the Treasury. October 22, 2025. URL: <https://home.treasury.gov/news/press-releases/sb0290>.

²¹³ Witkoff and Kushner met Putin for five hours on Ukraine plan // Axios. December 2, 2025. URL: <https://www.axios.com/2025/12/02/putin-witkoff-kushner-meeting-ukraine-plan>

²¹⁴ National Security Strategy of the United States of America // The White House, November 2025. URL: <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2025/12/2025-National-Security-Strategy.pdf>

²¹⁵ Peskov Commented on Changes to the US National Security Strategy // RIA-Novosti News Agency. December 7, 2025. URL: <https://ria.ru/20251207/usa-2060397469.html> (in Russ.).

CHAPTER 10.

DRAGON, BEAR AND HARD TIMES: THE CURRENT STATE AND PROSPECTS OF RUSSIAN-CHINESE RELATIONS

Leonid Tsukanov

The history of relations between Russia and China is multifaceted and eventful. Depending on the chosen *starting point*, it can span either nearly seven centuries (the sporadic and often unofficial contacts between the Russian principalities and the Yuan Dynasty in the first half of the 14th century²¹⁶) or just over three centuries (especially if we start from the signing of the Treaty of Nerchinsk in 1689²¹⁷).

It's also possible to “start” from early October 1949 – the date when the Soviet Union recognized the legitimacy of the People's Republic of China (PRC) and became the first global player to establish diplomatic relations with it. With this approach, Russian-Chinese relations have already *surpassed* the 75-year mark.

Those who are *truly sophisticated* might take 1991 as a starting point – when, after the collapse of the USSR, Russia (as a successor state) *took up the banner* of dialogue with the PRC – or 2001, when the Russian-Chinese Treaty on Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship, and Cooperation was signed²¹⁸, marking a new era in relations between Moscow and Beijing.

Whatever the starting point, Moscow and Beijing have seen all sorts of things – the two powers have either worked together to counter a common threat, or found themselves on the brink of conflict, or coexisted in a “cold peace”. However, *dredging up the past* is the job of historians. Our task is to look forward and respond promptly to emerging challenges (while also taking into account the lessons of the past), especially now that the world has passed the “minor equator of the century” (the first quarter of the 21st century) and is entering a new phase.

Friendship in the Age of *Black Swans*

The third decade of the 21st century, as predicted by Russian experts²¹⁹, has proven turbulent: following the global COVID-19 pandemic (for which Western countries continue to blame China²²⁰)

²¹⁶ Kirilloff, C. The early relations between Russia and China // *New Zealand Slavonic Journal*, 1969, P. 1–32.

²¹⁷ The Treaty of Nerchinsk (1689) – the first official treaty between Russia and China, defining relations between the two states and, in particular, the state border. The terms of the Treaty of Nerchinsk were later revised by the Treaties of Kyakhta (1727), Aigun (1858), and subsequently Peking (1860) – *Editor's note*.

²¹⁸ Treaty of Good-Neighbourliness, Friendship and Cooperation between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China // President of the Russian Federation. July 16, 2001. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/supplement/3418> (*in Russ.*)

²¹⁹ Dmitry Trenin. On a New Global Order and Its Nuclear Dimension. An Interview / Ed. Elena Karnaukhova, Leonid Tsukanov. M.: PIR Center, 2023. – 20 p. – (*Security Index Occasional Paper Series*). URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/03/SI-INT-2-36-Trenin.pdf>

²²⁰ White House site blames China for Covid-19 'lab leak' // *Le Monde*. April 19, 2025. URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2025/04/18/white-house-site-blames-china-for-covid-19-lab-leak_6740396_4.html

and the subsequent series of economic shocks, the world has faced the thawing of a number of forgotten conflicts – in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East.

The Special Military Operation (SMO), initiated by Russia in February 2022, aimed at protecting the rights of the Russian-speaking population and dismantling the neo-Nazi regime in Ukraine, also brought about adjustments to international relations. The transformation of the global order, which experts have been discussing for the past decade, has accelerated exponentially, as has the division of the international community into opposing camps.

Amid ongoing changes, Russia and China, at first glance, have seemingly maintained the same vector and positive dynamics in their relations as at the beginning of the decade. Their current cooperation can be divided into several groups.

Trade and economic cooperation between Moscow and Beijing is characterized by high dynamism. China remains Russia's largest foreign trade partner. In 2024, bilateral trade reached a record \$244 billion, surpassing the 2023 level of \$240.11 billion. Although trade turnover is likely to decline slightly by the end of 2025²²¹, even by the most pessimistic estimates it is unlikely to fall below the 2022 level of \$190 billion. This can be considered a positive result given the growing sanctions pressure on Moscow and Beijing.

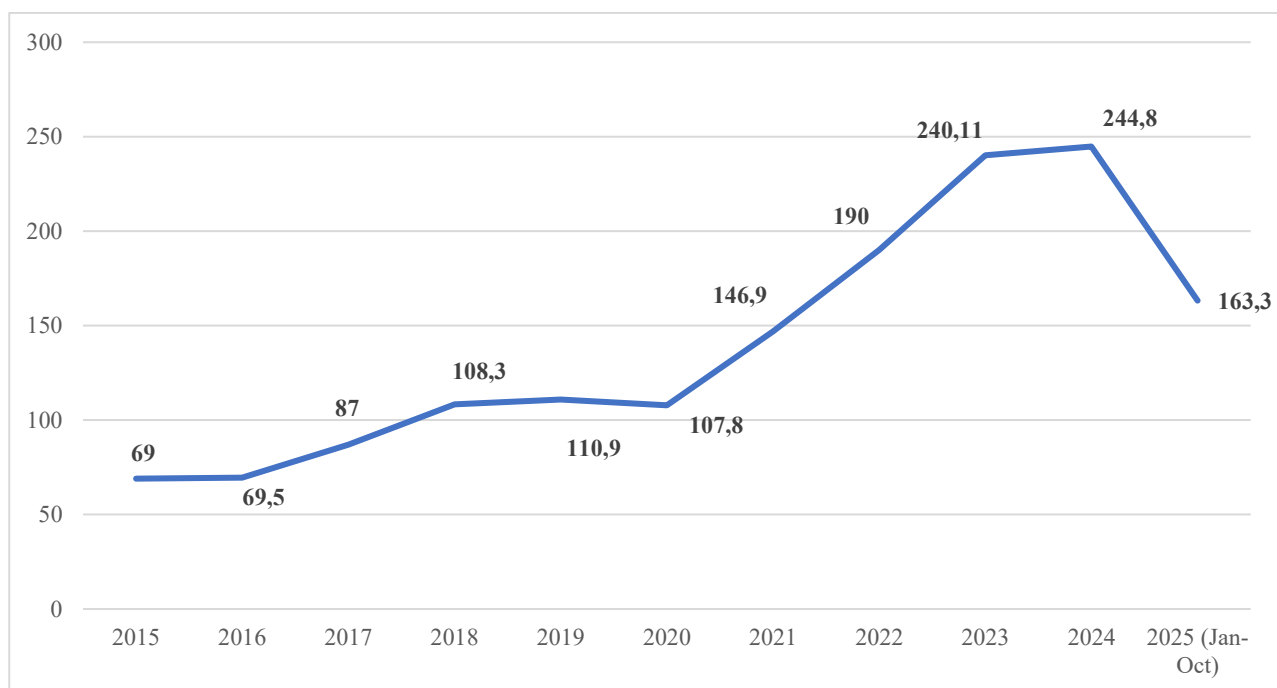


Figure 34. Trade turnover between Russia and China (2015-2025), \$ billions.

Compiled by the author based on open sources.

As of 2025, Russia's top export commodities by value are oil, gas, and coal, followed by copper, ore, wood, liquid fuels, and seafood. Most categories (except Russian ore and metals) have declined

²²¹ The trade turnover between Russia and the PRC for the first ten months amounted to \$163.3 billion, which is 9.5% less than for the same period in 2024. See: 中俄贸易额今年大幅下滑·俄罗斯经济出了哪些问题? (Chinese-Russian trade has plummeted this year. What challenges is the Russian economy facing?) // Kan China. November 5, 2025, URL: <https://kan.china.com/article/5415222.html> (in Chinese).

between 8% and 18% compared to the previous period. Ore and metal exports, on the other hand, have shown explosive growth: from January to September 2025, nickel shipments to China doubled compared to 2024 (to \$1 billion), copper increased by 88% (to \$2 billion), and metal ores and aluminum increased by 1.5 times (to \$2.7 billion). Non-ferrous metals accounted for half of the increase, one-time nuclear fuel shipments accounted for a quarter, and various types of ores accounted for 10%²²².

China exports automobiles, special-purpose machinery, electronics, equipment, and textiles to Russia²²³. Experts estimate that the main decline in Chinese exports is in automobiles and spare parts. Between January and September, they fell to \$8.5 billion (down 56% from a record \$19 billion in 2024)²²⁴, reflecting a *market glut* in this category in 2024.

At the same time, Russia and China are working to improve the effectiveness of trade cooperation: through the creation of joint industrial clusters in border areas, the development of R&D, and the expansion of trade and economic contacts in general²²⁵.

Energy cooperation also plays a key role in Russian-Chinese relations. The *Power of Siberia* gas pipeline, which has been transporting gas from the Kovyktinskoye and Chayandinskoye fields to China since 2019, has become the primary symbol of Moscow-Beijing cooperation in this area²²⁶. Also, in the autumn of 2025, the actual launch of other major energy projects – the *Power of Siberia 2* and *Soyuz-Vostok* gas pipelines – was announced²²⁷. Naturally, gas supplies are not the only avenue of cooperation in the energy sector. Moscow and Beijing are developing joint hydrocarbon production projects in the Arctic, advancing initiatives in nuclear and hydrogen energy, and collaborating on joint research in the field of renewable energy.

Furthermore, following the meeting of the heads of government of Russia and China in Hangzhou (November 3, 2025), cooperation was given a new positive impetus: the parties agreed to support the deepening of cooperation between enterprises of the two countries in the oil, gas, coal and electric power sectors, to promote the strengthening of the interconnectedness of energy infrastructure, and to jointly ensure safe and stable operation of cross-border energy routes²²⁸.

It's not a secret that, given the increased sanctions pressure on Moscow and Beijing, cooperation in the **financial sector** has grown in importance. Russia and China have been consistently increasing

²²² Experts explain the decline in Russian-Chinese trade turnover for three consecutive quarters // *Vedomosti* Newspaper. November 7, 2025. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/economics/articles/2025/11/07/1152863-eksperti-obyasnilisnizhenie-rossiisko-kitaiskogo-tovarooborota> (in Russ.).

²²³ Ibid.

²²⁴ Ibid.

²²⁵ The Future of Russia-China Partnership: From Imports to Joint R&D // *RBC*. November 5, 2025. URL: <https://companies.rbc.ru/news/9m2mMZrj9P/budushee-partnerstva-rossii-i-kitaya-ot-importa-k-sovmestnyim-niokr/> (in Russ.).

²²⁶ *Power of Siberia* // *Gazprom*. URL: <https://www.gazprom.ru/projects/power-of-siberia/> (in Russ.).

²²⁷ Miller stated that the *Power of Siberia 2* project is already being implemented // *Interfax*. September 7, 2025. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/1046049> (in Russ.).

²²⁸ Russia and China intend to expand their energy partnership // *1Prime* Agency. November 4, 2025. URL: <https://1prime.ru/2025/11/04/energetika-864199074.html> (in Russ.).

the use of their national currencies in mutual settlements (as of early November 2025, their share in mutual settlements had risen to 99.1%²²⁹).

Furthermore, both countries are working on developing their own alternatives to the SWIFT system. Russia's alternative is the Bank of Russia's Financial Messaging System (in Russian abbreviated as SPFS), while China's is the Cross-Border Interbank Payments System (CIPS). Since 2023, both systems have been mutually integrated, enabling cross-border payments and thereby reducing dependence on foreign financial platforms²³⁰.

Technological partnership. Russia and China have a *solid portfolio* of joint technology projects in the ICT and digital security sectors, as well as space and chemical-biological research. However, the emphasis has increasingly shifted toward the joint development of scientific potential. The most recent agreements between Moscow and Beijing demonstrate a commitment to facilitating the joint use of “megascience” facilities, consistently implementing key joint research projects, creating new areas for cooperation, and supporting exchanges between scientists and research institutions²³¹.

It should be noted that despite the apparent differences in strategic cultures, Moscow and Beijing's positions in the **security sector** are quite close: the countries have “consonant approaches”²³² to key international and regional issues. Among the key intersections are the following:

- Focus on building a multipolar security system, respecting the balance of power and interests of the main poles.
- Striving to maintain security in the regions of presence, both internally and with the involvement of regional powers.
- Strengthening the role of international organizations as a link in the system of international relations and modernizing them to meet the challenges of the new era.
- Improving the arms control and nonproliferation system, preventing the erosion of key agreements (NPT, CTBT, etc.).
- Building a proactive system to counter classic and new security challenges.
- Focusing on the comprehensive protection of sovereignty and national identity, preventing interference in internal affairs.
- Rejection of economic sanctions as an instrument of blackmail and pressure.
- Striving to create platforms for cooperation alternative to Western ones (BRICS).
- Rejection of building confrontational alliances.
- Improving national security and defense systems (including the modernization of strategic nuclear weapons).

²²⁹ Siluanov: The share of settlements between Russia and China in national currencies has reached 99.1% // TASS. November 4, 2025. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/25530697> (in Russ.).

²³⁰ China is gradually de-dollarizing // Izvestia Newspaper. November 8, 2025. URL: <https://iz.ru/1985865/dmitrii-migunov/vezlivyi-otkaz-kitai-vedet-plavnuu-dedollarizaciu> (in Russ.).

²³¹ Russia and China will cooperate in the field of high technology // RIA Novosti News Agency. November 4, 2025. URL: <https://ria.ru/20251104/rossija-2052719429.html> (in Russ.).

²³² Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation Sergei Shoigu met with Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi in Beijing // Security Council of the Russian Federation, November 12, 2024. URL: <http://www.scrf.gov.ru/news/allnews/3743/> (in Russ.); China supported Russia's efforts to ensure security // RIA Novosti News Agency. URL: <https://ria.ru/20251104/kitaj-2052717413.html> (in Russ.).

Moreover, in terms of the frequency with which the parties addressed various security topics, it is clear that China has prioritized developing international cooperation in the area of international security (with an emphasis on the Chinese perspective) and striving for multipolarity. Russia's priorities, meanwhile, can be characterized by three categories: “sovereignty, multipolarity, and national security”.

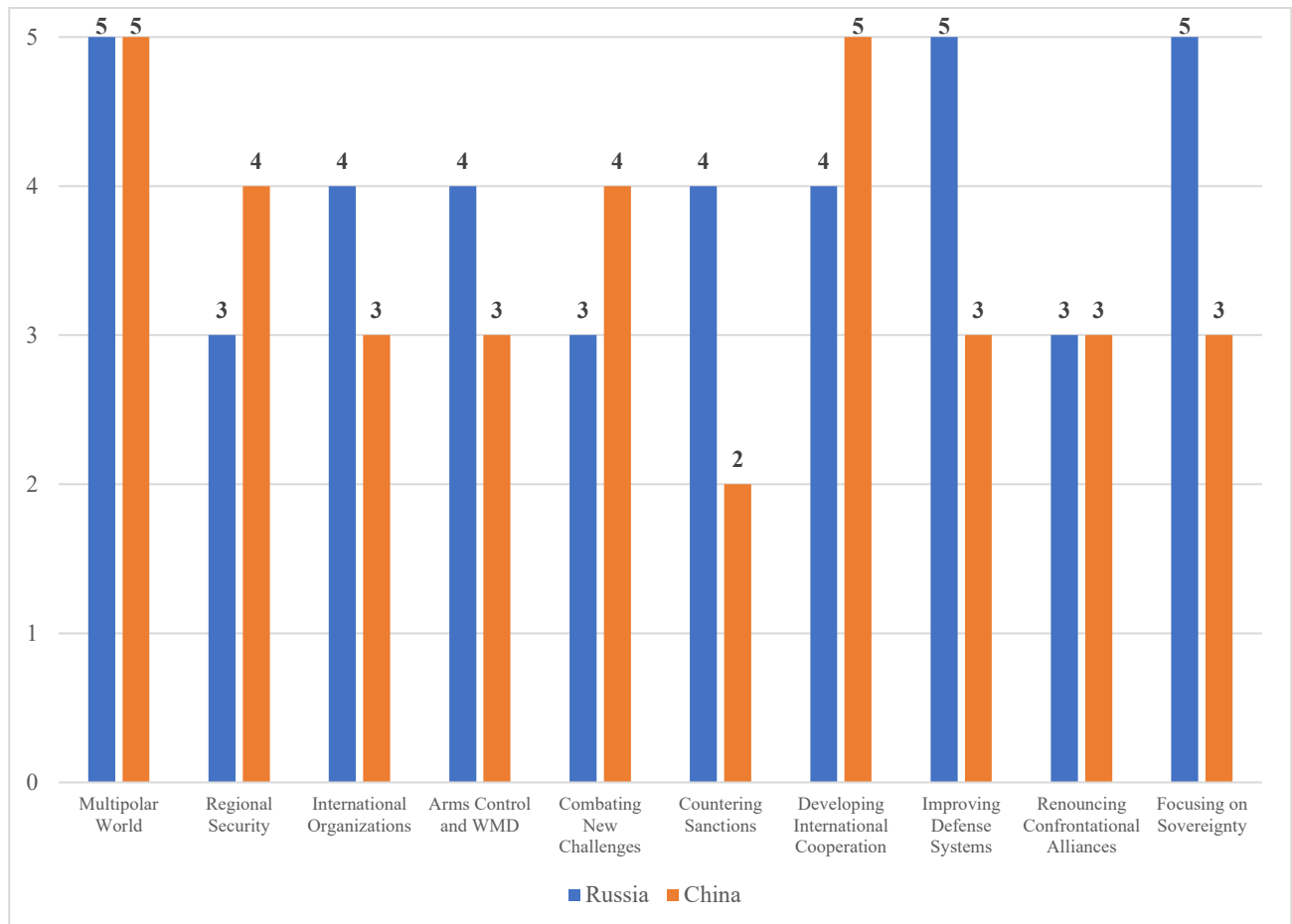


Figure 35. Frequency of mentions of key topics from the “security” block in speeches by Russian and Chinese officials, 2020-2025 (on a 5-point scale, where 1 = very rarely mentioned; 2 = periodically mentioned; 3 = mentioned relatively often; 4 = mentioned frequently; 5 = mentioned very often)

Compiled by the author based on open sources.

Parliamentary (and inter-party) diplomacy, which both sides are increasingly emphasizing, deserves special mention. In terms of the frequency of contacts with Russian political forces, the Communist Party of China (CPC) is the absolute leader among foreign political forces: over a five-year period (2020-2025), the number of meetings between Russian and Chinese parliamentarians was greater than that of all European, Asian, and African political forces combined²³³.

²³³ Calculated by the author based on open sources.

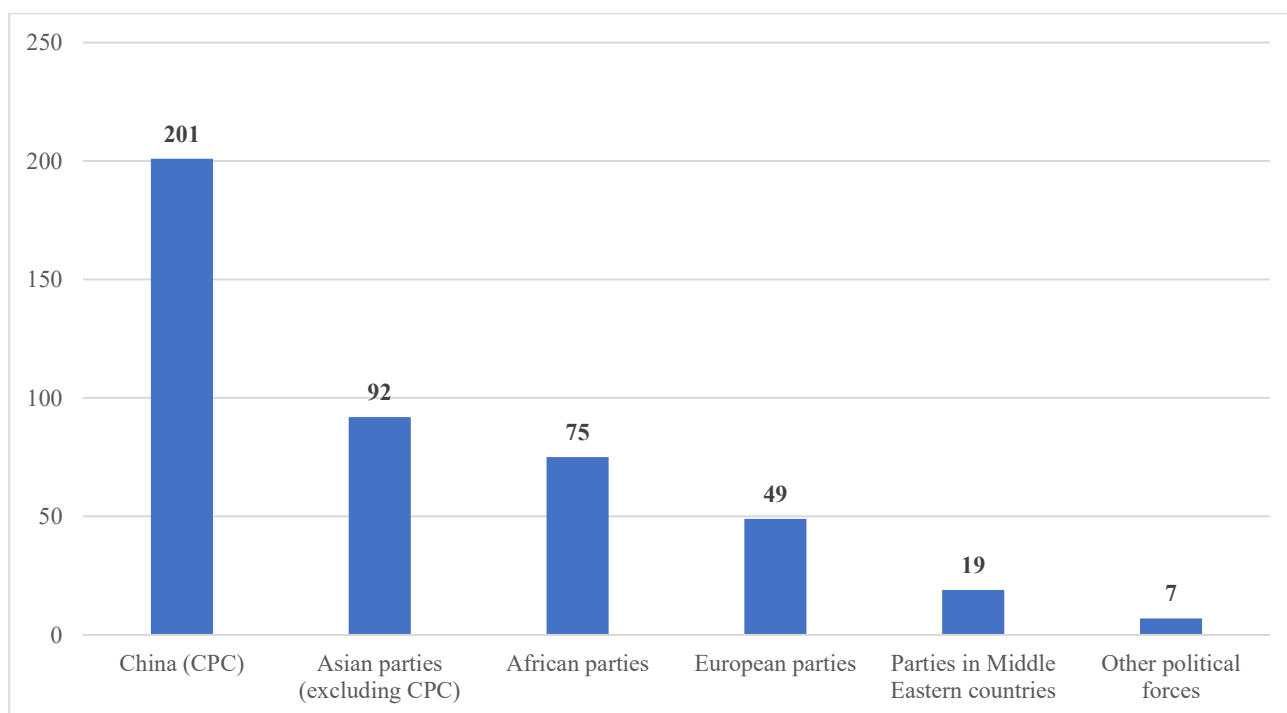


Figure 36. Number of meetings between CPC representatives and representatives of parliamentary parties in Russia (2020-2025)

Compiled by the author based on open sources ²³⁴.

Interestingly, at the inter-parliamentary level, Moscow and Beijing are jointly developing an approach to countering *electoral neocolonialism*, one of the most obvious threats to countries in the *Global South*. In the long term, jointly combating this threat should complement the “security basket” being formed to ensure stability in *Greater Eurasia*.

At the same time, Russian and Chinese elites repeatedly emphasize that Russian-Chinese friendship is not aimed against third countries, but rather at creating conditions for “joint and universal prosperity”²³⁵. This thesis remains the dominant rhetoric in both Moscow and Beijing.

In the Eye of the Beholder

Public opinion surveys reveal a qualitative shift in the attitudes of ordinary Russians toward China over the past few years. For example, the share of Russians who rate relations with China as good-neighbourly has more than tripled over the past two decades (from 22% to 72%), while the number of *alarmists* (those who tended to see Beijing as an enemy or rival) has decreased more than 6.5-fold (from 53% across all categories to 8%).

²³⁴ The data included meetings within the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation and inter-party negotiations between Chinese representatives and *United Russia*, the Communist Party of the Russian Federation, the Liberal Democratic Party of Russia, and other systemic parties, as well as meetings between youth organizations.

²³⁵ MFA of the PRC: Cooperation between China and Russia is not directed against any third party and does not depend on external factors // *Xinhua News Agency*. February 14, 2025. URL: <http://www.news.cn/world/20250214/be815ef7ffd345dea4c78ebb5ed488e3/c.html> (in Chinese); Russia and China have stated that their relations are not directed against third countries // *Interfax*. November 5, 2025. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/russia/1056247> (in Russ.).

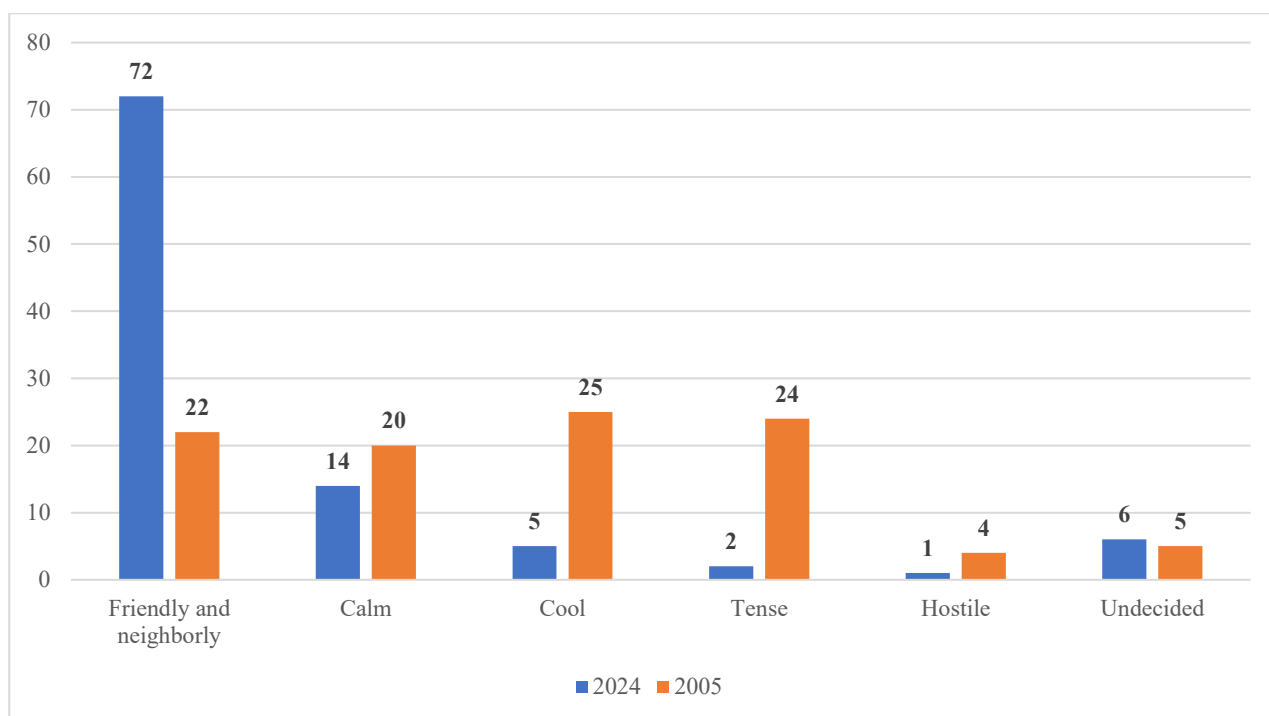


Figure 37. Results of a sociological survey of Russians about China and Russian-Chinese relations (comparison of results from 2005 and 2024), 1,600 respondents, %

Compiled by: VCIOM

Source:

<https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/russkii-s-kitaicem-bratja-navek>

<https://wciom.ru/analytical-reviews/analiticheskii-obzor/kitaj-dlya-rossii-partner-ili-konkurent>

The Chinese view of relations with Russia, however, demonstrates a greater focus not on the nature of the relationship, but on its foundation. It is noted that Chinese counterparts prioritize shared values between Moscow and Beijing (44% of respondents) or trade and economic ties (33% of respondents). Security issues, however, receive the least attention – barely one in five respondents mentioned them.

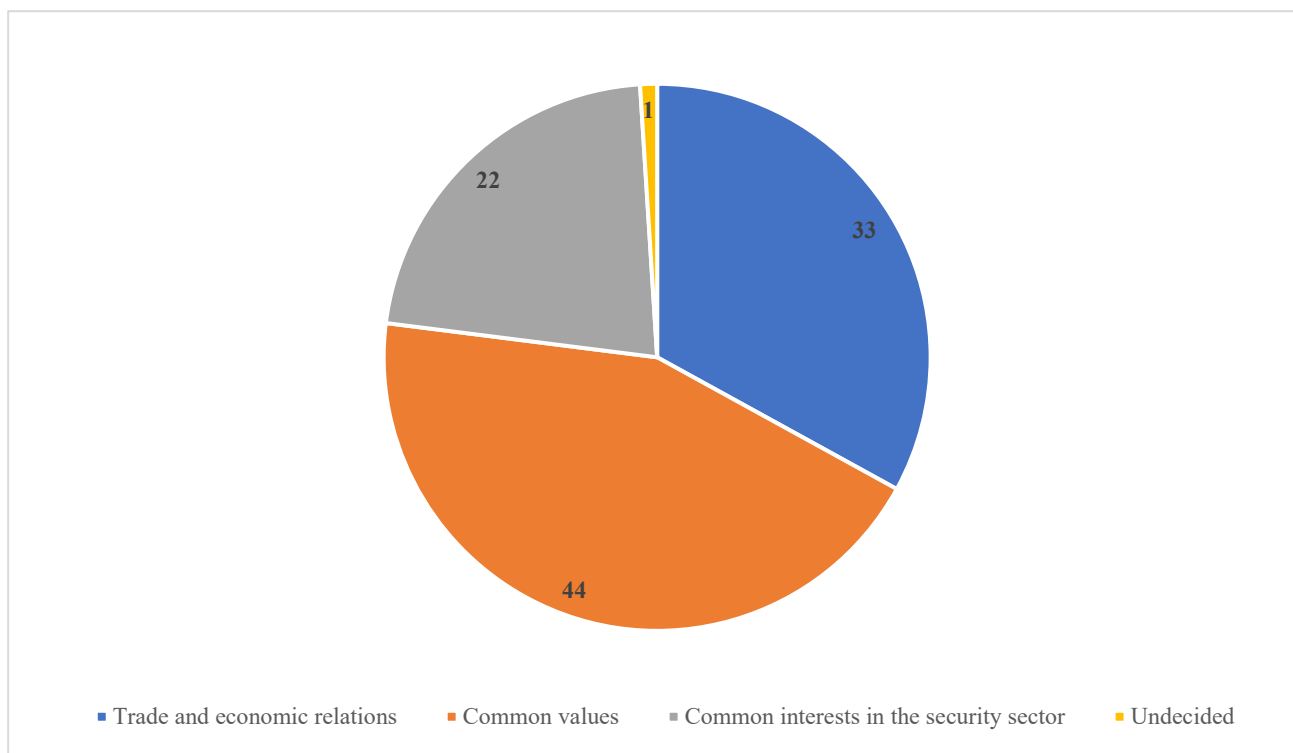


Figure 38. What is the basis for relations between China and Russia? (public opinion poll, June 2025), 1002 respondents, %

Adapted from the data: Chicago Council on Global Affairs

Source: <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/friends-benefits-chinese-see-russia-and-north-korea-beijings-closest>

Public opinion surveys (including those conducted by Western *think tanks*) show that more than 80% of respondents consider Russia a friendly country²³⁶, and this number has increased significantly compared to the early 2000s (when the overall figure barely exceeded 37%).

Commenting on the influence of the SMO factor on international security (and the attitude towards Russia as a participant in this conflict), 75% of respondents expressed support for Moscow's position in 2022 to one degree or another.

²³⁶ By comparison, Russia was considered a friendly country by approximately 83% of respondents. This figure is higher than for North Korea (76%), Australia (51%), and the EU countries (50%). See: Friends with Benefits: Chinese See Russia and North Korea as Beijing's Closest Comrades // Chicago Council on Global Affairs. September 2, 2025. URL: <https://globalaffairs.org/research/public-opinion-survey/friends-benefits-chinese-see-russia-and-north-korea-beijings-closest>

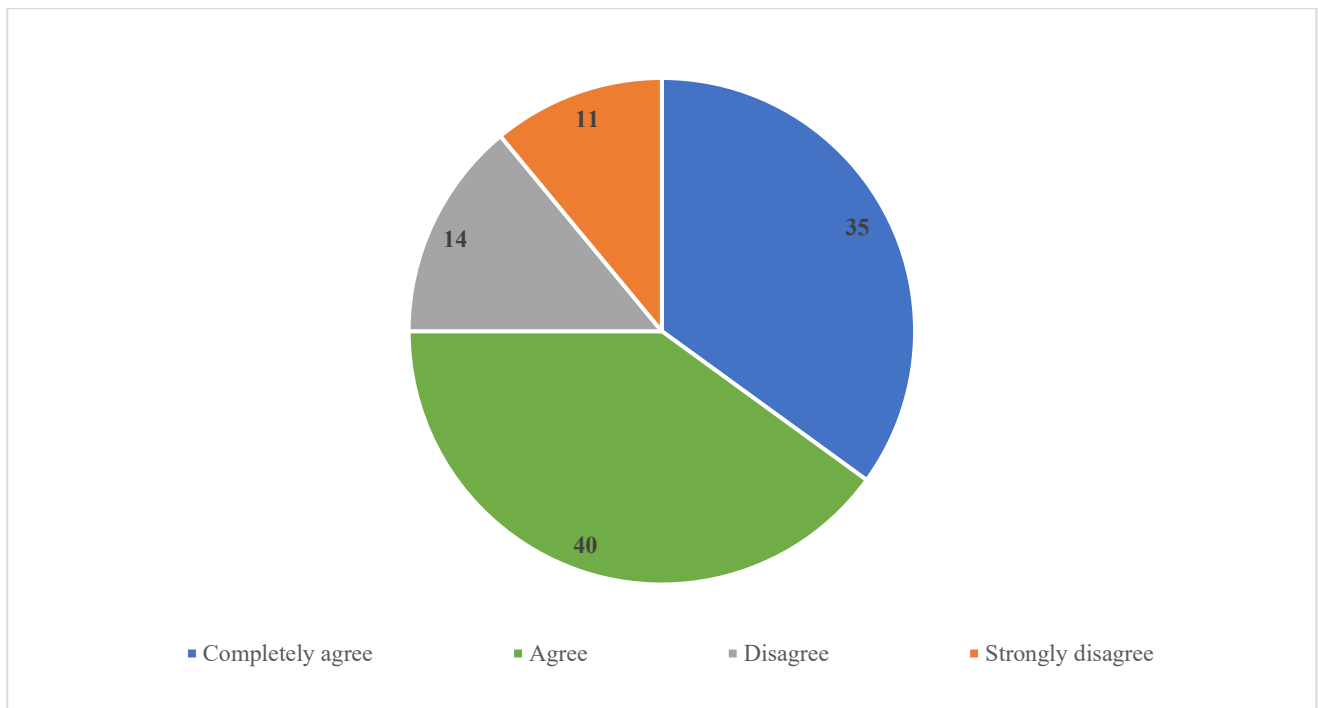


Figure 39. Poll: “Do you agree that supporting Russia in the Russian-Ukrainian conflict is in China’s national interests?”, 2022. 4866 respondents, %

Adapted from the data: INDSR

Source: <https://indsr.org.tw/respublicationcon?uid=12&resid=1889&pid=2227>

At the same time, a public opinion survey for 2024 conducted by “China-US Focus” and dedicated, among other things, to the attitude of Chinese residents towards the conflict in Ukraine, demonstrated the stability of this position: more than 40% of respondents (42.41%) noted that responsibility for this crisis lies primarily with “third parties” (the US and EU countries)²³⁷.

Breaking the “Porcelain Tandem”

Despite the fact that Russia and China have not given serious reason to doubt the strength of their bilateral relations, their tandem continues to provoke heated debate in international expert communities.

Among other things, the West long held the view that the confrontation with the United States gave a significant (if not decisive) impetus to Russian-Chinese cooperation: Russia entered into a *standoff* with Washington in 2014, and four years later (during Donald Trump's first presidential term), the United States initiated a *trade war* with China. As a result, the two countries found themselves facing a common adversary, against which they “joined forces” – despite previously allegedly demonstrating a “gradual cooling of interest in each other”²³⁸.

²³⁷ Also, 16% of respondents blamed Ukraine for inciting the conflict (while less than 6% blamed Russia). See: 民意调查报告 中国人的国际安全观 (Public Opinion Survey Report: Chinese People's Perspective on International Security) // China-US Focus, 2024. URL: <https://www.chinausfocus.com/publication/2024/2024-Chinese-Outlook-on-International-Security-CN-CISS.pdf> (in Chinese).

²³⁸ The Enemy of My Enemy is My Friend: Russia-China Relations in the Face of U.S.-China Tensions // Institute for Security and Development Policy. August 17, 2020, URL: <https://www.isdp.eu/the-enemy-of-my-enemy-is-my-friend-russia-china-relations-in-the-face-of-u-s-china-tensions/>

Western experts still sometimes like to refer to the Russian-Chinese alliance as “porcelain”, hinting at its fragility and instability in the face of external challenges. At the same time, they extol the role of the United States as a kind of *bogeyman* for Moscow and Beijing. In other words, the idea was floated that Washington's reconciliation with either side would automatically put an end to this tandem, which the United States increasingly saw as a threat to its strategic interests.

With Trump's return to the White House in early 2025, this thesis was gradually *elevated to absolute* form and projected not only onto relations between Moscow and Beijing but also onto the surrounding geopolitical space. BRICS, which the US president called an “anti-American project”, came under attack in particular²³⁹. Meanwhile, the idea of separating Moscow and Beijing hasn't disappeared from the agenda – it's simply been less talked about, disguised as various “peacekeeping initiatives” under Washington's auspices. And since a *quick reconciliation* with Russia based on the Ukrainian track failed to materialize (at least in the format the Republicans had hoped for²⁴⁰ – including Moscow's “redirection” toward an economic standoff with Beijing²⁴¹), the United States attempted to shift the *focus of détente* to China.

The APEC summit in Busan (October 31 – November 1, 2025, South Korea) at first glance appeared to have brought some *relaxation* to the dialogue between Beijing and Washington. China, among other things, agreed to relax (and eventually completely abolish) export controls on rare earth metals and minimize non-tariff countermeasures against the United States²⁴². In return, Washington pledged to revise the *phenyl tariff* (10%)²⁴³ and extend the moratorium on the additional protective tariff (24%) on Chinese goods until the end of 2026²⁴⁴. Furthermore, the two leaders agreed to continue high-level meetings – Trump plans to visit China in April 2026, and Xi is expected to make a return trip to the United States, either to Florida or Washington²⁴⁵.

Some Chinese experts are also hinting at the advisability of a “thaw” in relations between the US and China. Noting that the meeting between the leaders of China and the US established a relatively equal status for the two countries, creating a balance of power in which neither side can “completely overpower the other” – either politically or economically.

At the same time, talk of the imminent establishment of the notorious *Chimerica* (China & America)²⁴⁶, the discussions surrounding which have been ongoing since the mid-2000s, is hardly

²³⁹ For more details on BRICS, see Chapter 20 of the Yearbook – *Editor's note*.

²⁴⁰ For more details on the specifics of relations between Moscow and Washington in the first months after Trump's return to the White House in 2025, see Chapter 9 of the Yearbook – *Editor's note*.

²⁴¹ Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on relations with the US, EU, and Ukraine // *Kommersant* Publishing House. October 15, 2025. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/8120945> (in Russ.).

²⁴² On the sidelines of the trade war: how Donald Trump and Xi Jinping met // *Forbes*, November 1, 2025. URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/mneniya/549068-na-polah-torgovoj-voyny-kak-prosla-vstreca-donal-da-trampa-i-si-czin-pina> (in Russ.).

²⁴³ Ibid.

²⁴⁴ Following Trump's steps, the overall value of tariffs on China has dropped to 47%.

²⁴⁵ On the sidelines of the trade war: how Donald Trump and Xi Jinping met // *Forbes*, November 1, 2025. URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/mneniya/549068-na-polah-torgovoj-voyny-kak-prosla-vstreca-donal-da-trampa-i-si-czin-pina> (in Russ.).

²⁴⁶ *Chimerica* – a neologism coined in 2007 by British historian Neil Ferguson and German economist Moritz Schularick. The term describes the symbiotic relationship between China and the United States. While primarily an economic term,

appropriate at the present time. The reduction in tensions between Beijing and Washington following the Busan meeting should be viewed more as a *tactical pause* than a permanent and long-term détente. Moreover, the fundamental contradictions between the two countries (including growing trade, economic, and military-political rivalry in other regions) remain unresolved.

Beijing is also mindful of the White House's *shifting mood* and is therefore in no rush to change its position on key foreign policy issues. Moreover, joint statements with their Russian counterparts (made after the US-Chinese meetings in Busan) show a more pronounced emphasis on criticizing US attempts to split the established tandem, including through the use of economic and political leverage²⁴⁷.

...And Other Challenges of the Times

Clearly, the United States isn't *the only thing on earth*. Moscow and China's bilateral relations are also full of their own issues, which (without proper attention) could degenerate into real problems. Let's briefly examine the most obvious ones.

When discussing the *pitfalls* of the Russian-Chinese tandem, ***economic rivalry*** immediately comes to mind: the interests of Russia and China extend far beyond their national borders and increasingly clash. Of course, the competition is still quite *mild* – Russian and Chinese business interests generally coexist within the same country. In some cases, the two powers are even collaborating on projects in third countries (for example, the *Soyuz-Vostok* gas transit pipeline in Mongolia) and are expanding their portfolio of large-scale joint initiatives²⁴⁸.

At the same time, the balance of power is shifting in certain areas. For example, the *export gap* between the two countries by the end of 2024 is more than eightfold in China's favor (\$3.57 trillion versus \$434 billion)²⁴⁹. At the same time, Russia remains the leader, for example, in the construction of nuclear power plants abroad (39 units in 10 countries²⁵⁰), while China is currently focusing primarily on building generation facilities domestically (and, moreover, using Russian contractors).

Chinese experts tend to avoid emphasizing the shifting balance of power in regions adjacent to Russia. Although they periodically (often *equivocally*) say that Russia is gradually losing ground in the “gentlemen's competition” for Afghanistan, where Chinese private capital is much more widely

it also has political connotations. The term replaced *Nichibei* – a similarly structured Japanese-American economic model and relationship that existed in the second half of the 20th century.

²⁴⁷ Russia and China have spoken out against bullying in the global economy // *Interfax*. November 4, 2025. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/1056252> (in Russ.); China's Foreign Ministry: Putting pressure on Russia will not resolve the Ukrainian crisis // *Vedomosti* Newspaper. October 23, 2025. URL: <https://www.vedomosti.ru/politics/news/2025/10/23/1149158-mid-kitaya> (in Russ.).

²⁴⁸ Russia and China plan to collaborate on fourth-generation nuclear energy // *TASS*. November 3, 2025. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/25527347> (in Russ.); Russia and China have begun developing a nuclear power plant for a lunar station, *RBC*. May 8, 2024. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/politics/08/05/2024/663b16249a7947453e5f1ea7> (in Russ.); Construction of an interstate cargo port has begun on the border between China and Russia // *RBC*. August 23, 2025. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreeneews/68a9898d9a7947275101e147> (in Russ.) etc.

²⁴⁹ China increased exports by 7.1% and imports by 2.3% in 2024 // *Interfax*. January 13, 2025. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/1002543> (in Russ.); Russia's trade balance increased by 7.8% in 2024 // *Interfax*. February 26, 2025. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/1010906> (in Russ.).

²⁵⁰ Nuclear power plants under construction // *Rosatom*. URL: <https://rosatom.ru/production/design/stroyashchiesya-aes/> (in Russ.).

represented²⁵¹. And in the future, it could similarly lose its dominance in Syria (provided, however, that Damascus heeds Beijing's key *red lines*²⁵²).

At the same time, Moscow's attempts to “regain influence” in other countries formally within China's *orbit* (in particular, North Korea) are perceived by China's expert community as a “symbolic balancing act” that poses no significant threat to China's long-term interests. As a result, both sides view the ongoing redistribution of power in regional areas as normal practice and are not particularly eager to interfere with each other.

Another sensitive issue being pressed by *alarmists* is China's transformation of its approach to developing global logistics routes under the auspices of the *Belt and Road Initiative*. China is seeking to reduce the time and cost of shipping goods to Europe and is increasingly focusing on the *sleeve* route through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (which is 900 km shorter than the route through Kazakhstan and Russia)²⁵³. This, in turn, threatens to reduce freight volumes via the *Trans-Siberian Railway* and ports in the Far East, as well as through Russian-Kazakh transport hubs, and, potentially, to relegate Moscow to the periphery of new logistics routes.

²⁵¹ 朱永彪：相对宽松的国际环境能否促进阿富汗现代化？塔利班需要作出回答 (Zhu Yongbiao: Can a relatively relaxed international environment promote the modernization of Afghanistan? The Taliban needs to answer this question) // Guancha. October 2, 2025. URL: https://www.guancha.cn/zhuyongbiao/2025_10_02_792101.shtml (in Chinese); China Institute of Contemporary International Relations. URL: <http://www.cicir.ac.cn/new/opinion.html?id=1f023220-43a5-4624-9f18-2f9fbd447a64> (in Chinese)

²⁵² One such "red line" is the disarmament of the so-called "Uyghur Guard" (the 84th Special Forces Division of the Syrian Armed Forces, approximately 3,500 men), the *backbone* of which is made up of former militants of Uyghur origin. Damascus refuses to disarm this unit.

²⁵³ The Window Is Closing: How China Is Building Transport Corridors Bypassing Russia // *Forbes*. November 6, 2025. URL: <https://www.forbes.ru/mneniya/549258-okno-zakryvaetsa-kak-kitaj-stroit-transportnye-koridory-v-obhod-rossii> (in Russ.).



Map 7. Proposed routes of the China-Kyrgyzstan-Uzbekistan Railway

Source: ERAI

<https://index1520.com/en/analytics/malenkiy-proekt-bri-kitaya-po-prezhnemu-myslit-masshtabno-vozvrashchenie-k-grandioznoy-infrastruktur/>

However, this fear may be exaggerated: the full launch of the transport route through Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan (given the pace of construction and the local landscape) is not expected before 2030. And it won't be fully operational until 2040. This gives Moscow considerable room to maneuver and leaves the opportunity to take measures to mitigate the economic threat.

The previous point raises the risk of a *clash of interests between Russia and China in the Arctic*. Beijing (positioning itself as a “near-Arctic” state) continues its rapid advance in the region, considering its economic and political development a key to its status as a leading global power. The *Polar Silk Road*, part of the *Belt and Road Initiative*, also runs through the Arctic, demonstrating China's growing interest in this area.



Map 8. Polar Silk Route (the four major transatlantic maritime routes in Arctic)

Source: Arctic Portal

<https://arcticportal.org/ap-library/news/2985-polar-silk-route-in-graphic-detail>

Despite Moscow and Beijing actively cooperating and developing joint Arctic projects and initiatives (including unique ones, such as the Russian-Chinese commission on shipping along the Northern Sea Route²⁵⁴) and positioning each other as “equal players”, China continually tries to *steal the show* by increasing its investment stake in Arctic projects. While Beijing's investments have certainly become an important source of funding for oil, gas, and logistics initiatives, reducing the burden on the Russian budget, they also pose the risk of losing control over strategically important projects and facilities. *Alarmists* constantly point out that Russia could become hostage to Chinese “checkbook diplomacy” and fall into a classic *debt trap*, sacrificing strategic interests for tactical gains. Even though Moscow retains an absolute lead in icebreaker fleet size (making it the leading force on Arctic Sea trade routes), too much dependence on Chinese capital could *weaken its momentum* in the region.

²⁵⁴ Russia and China will create a commission to develop the Northern Sea Route // TASS. March 16, 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/20819733> (in Russ.).

The Russian side is seeking to hedge risks – for example, by expanding the pool of investors in Arctic projects and gradually *blurring* their “national boundaries”. For example, by creating joint initiatives in which, in addition to China, other Arctic players (including the United States) could openly invest. However, this approach is currently primarily limited to public calls and statements and requires time to implement²⁵⁵.

However, the main vulnerability actually lies elsewhere. China's approach to the *Arctic consensus* is more flexible than Russia's: Beijing is more committed to the internationalization of the Arctic than to establishing control over it (which is not in line with the US) and is reluctant to acknowledge the specifics of Russia's approach to the region²⁵⁶. This could potentially create grounds for disagreement in Russian-Chinese dialogue, and therefore worries Moscow far more than the ephemeral risk of falling into China's *debt trap*.

Military and political rivalry is also a potential *area of friction*. This is especially true as China gradually erodes the boundaries of its “Peaceful Rise” concept²⁵⁷ (which focused on economic gains) and expands its military portfolio. This is reflected in the expansion of overseas military bases, the development of new strategies for the use of armed forces abroad²⁵⁸, and an increase in the country's share of the global arms market.

Beijing is even attempting to compete with other global players for the role of *security provider* – for example, by weakening US military influence in the Gulf region, which until recently was considered virtually uncontested, and by taking over the role of key mediator in regional conflicts from Moscow and Washington.

Similar trends are also evident in the Sahara-Sahel region, where China is converting its former economic influence into military and political influence, quickly replacing its defunct European competitors (primarily France). China's increased activity in the Middle East and Africa could pose some threat to Moscow's long-term interests, but at this stage, it does not clearly conflict with Russia's foreign policy priorities.

The ***scientific and technological sector*** deserves special attention. According to the *three technopoles* concept, global technological leadership is shared between the United States, China (which is vying for primacy), and the EU. Russia, despite its high level of scientific and technological development,

²⁵⁵ RDIF: Russia is considering joint projects with China and the United States in the Arctic // *TASS*. September 2, 2025. URL: <https://tass.ru/ekonomika/24930723> (in Russ.).

²⁵⁶ After February 2022, Russia tightened navigation regulations within its internal waters in the Arctic Ocean, regulated the passage of warships, updated the set of coordinates for defining straight baselines (the boundaries of the internal sea), and received approval for its bid to expand its continental shelf. Beijing, meanwhile, adhered to its 2018 position "on protecting all countries and the international community" (White Paper, 2018). See: Zhilin R. China and the Peculiarities of Russian Sovereignty in the Arctic // *Russia in Global Affairs Journal*. September 9, 2024. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/kitaj-i-arktika-zhilin/> (in Russ.).

²⁵⁷ *Peaceful Rise* – is the official policy and political slogan of the PRC, implemented under former General Secretary of the Communist Party of China Hu Jintao. This slogan was intended to reassure the international community that China's growing political, economic, and military power would not pose a threat to international peace and security – *Editor's note*.

²⁵⁸ Goncharenko A. China's Hybrid Warfare Strategies: A Western Perspective // *International Affairs Journal*, 2022. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/2694> (in Russ.).

is still *playing catch-up*²⁵⁹. Even allowing for some imperfections in this methodological approach (for example, the authors of the concept overstate the damage to the Russian technology sector caused by Western sanctions after 2022 and also "attribute" some outstanding R&D results to Moscow's allies), the gap between Russia and China remains significant, and closing it will take time.

At the same time, we can speak of a certain "movement towards each other": Beijing and Moscow are strengthening cooperation in the scientific and technological sector (with an emphasis on AI technologies)²⁶⁰. Moreover, the initiative is coming alternately from both sides, creating a good foundation for further deepening bilateral relations.

The *historical claims factor* has long been formally removed from the bilateral relations agenda, but external observers (especially those critical of Moscow and Beijing) periodically attempt to bring this issue *back to the forefront*, citing, among other things, the "complex and convoluted history" of the Russian-Chinese neighbourhood. Meanwhile, the main source of *revanchist* statements about "historical claims" to Russian cities (as well as claims about the gradual *Sinicization* of border regions) are social media platforms (such as *Weibo*)²⁶¹, while officials do not address this topic. Furthermore, some of the arguments fueling the myth of China's growing territorial claims against Russia are being pushed from Taiwan²⁶², where they are voiced, among others, by top officials of the unrecognized administration and used as a basis for criticism of Beijing's *two-faced* foreign policy strategy²⁶³.

In practice, all officially existing territorial disputes between Russia and China were settled back in the mid-2000s – with the signing of the additional agreement between the Russian Federation and the People's Republic of China on the eastern section of the Russian-Chinese state border²⁶⁴ – which ensured a broader framework for cooperation "without stones in the bosom".

Conclusion

Current Russian-Chinese cooperation demonstrates that relations between Moscow and Beijing have withstood the test of major crises without suffering any losses. The parties remain committed to expanding contacts and implementing and expanding joint projects and initiatives (including multilateral ones).

²⁵⁹ Schmid S., Lambach D., Diehl C., Reuter C. Arms Race or Innovation Race? Geopolitical AI Development // *Geopolitics*. 2025. Vol. 30. Iss. 4. P. 1907–1936. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14650045.2025.2456019>

²⁶⁰ See e.g.: Russia and China are ready to work on the creation of a Global AI Organization // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. November 4, 2025. URL: <https://ria.ru/20251104/rossija-2052719841.html> (in Russ.).

²⁶¹ Why Russia's Vladivostok celebration prompted a nationalist backlash in China // *the South China Morning Post*. July 2, 2020. URL: <https://www.scmp.com/news/china/diplomacy/article/3091611/why-russias-vladivostok-celebration-prompted-nationalist>

²⁶² Russia does not recognize Taiwan as an independent state and considers it an integral part of China – *Editor's note*.

²⁶³ If China wants Taiwan it should also take back land from Russia, president says // *Reuters*. September 2, 2024. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/if-china-wants-taiwan-it-should-also-take-back-land-russia-president-says-2024-09-02/>

²⁶⁴ In accordance with the agreement, China received a number of territories with a total area of 337 km², including a plot of land in the area of Bolshoy Island (the upper reaches of the Argun River in the Chita Region) and two plots of land in the area of Tarabarov and Bolshoy Ussuriysky Islands in the area of the confluence of the Amur and Ussuri Rivers. See: Russia and China have completed the legal process of delimiting their common state border // President of the Russian Federation. October 14, 2004. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/31925>

Russia has no intention of deviating from its path in the fight for a just, rules-based world order that respects the interests of its participants, regardless of their geographic location. China is also committed to a “marathon” and is preparing to work toward changing the global balance of power “over the coming decades” – as evidenced, among other things, by the decisions of the Fourth Plenum of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China²⁶⁵. This means Moscow and Beijing will remain *on the same path* for a long time to come.

As Lao Tzu once said, “A journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step”. And it's much easier to travel it *hand in hand*, as Moscow and Beijing are doing today. However, to freely interpret the great Chinese philosopher's thought, it's worth adding that Russia and China face many challenges and trials ahead, aimed at testing the strength of their allied ties. These challenges will come from both outside and within.

This means that it is hardly worth expecting an “easy walk”.

²⁶⁵ 中国共产党第二十届中央委员会第四次全体会议公报 (Communiqué of the Fourth Plenary Session of the Twentieth Central Committee of the Communist Party of China) // Government of the PRC. October 23, 2025. URL: https://www.gov.cn/yaowen/liebiao/202510/content_7045444.htm (in Chinese).

CHAPTER 11.

THE MIDDLE EAST: REGIONAL SECURITY AND THE ROLE OF RUSSIA

Elena Suponina

Russia should be in the Middle East. The Middle East needs Russia. And Russia needs the Middle East.

These simple theses cause delight among supporters, cautious curiosity among doubters and irritation among opponents, resulting in attempts to push Russia out of this field or, on the contrary, to push it to *overloading* in this area with the main goal of weakening it. And the weak are not respected in the Middle East.

To be in the Middle East, you have to be strong. There are enough allies and partners who want Russia to be presented in the region. The principle is mutual benefit and justice. Common security is at the forefront. Indivisible and equal. Not more for someone, less for someone else, or even nothing at all. No.

Russia advocates a unified concept of regional security. With the understanding that the Middle East is not even at the beginning of this path, and, worse, is moving in the opposite direction in some places. There is a rollback and degradation at the main *sore points*. Nevertheless, sooner or later this concept will work, and Russia remains its faithful adherent, if not its initiator.

A Course Towards Conservatism: Say No to Bomb Neither to Collapse of States

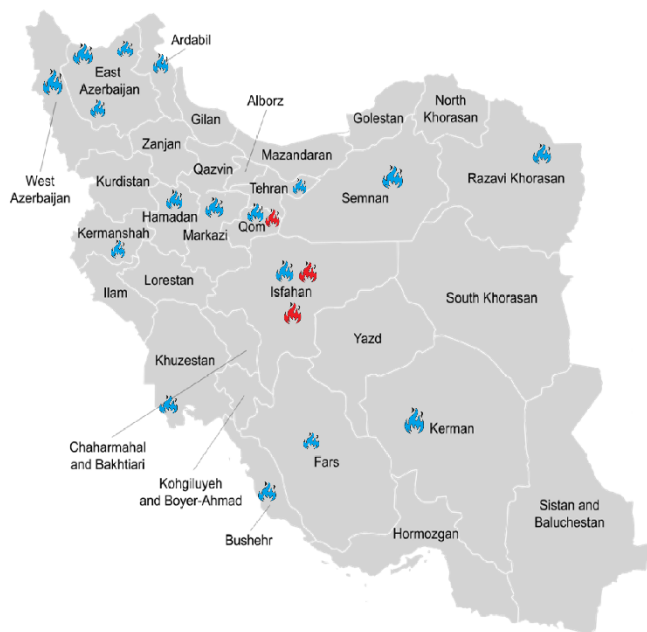
Russia, like many other countries, assumes that turbulence in the Middle East will increase. The threat of escalating regional conflicts, particularly the Iranian-Israeli one, remains. The Palestinian problem is not being resolved, and the situation in the Gaza Strip has slid into a humanitarian catastrophe.

We will not list the *hotbeds of tension*; they are well known. Let us just note that the region has always been distinguished by heightened danger. Even in Soviet times, Foreign Minister Andrei Gromyko told his subordinates working in the Middle East Department that they “don’t need to read detective novels”, saying, “you do this at work from morning until night”: “Either murders, or conspiracies, or coups, or even kidnappings”²⁶⁶.

Today, the situation is even more alarming. The United States, without a strategy towards the Iranian nuclear program, launched bunker buster bombs on nuclear facilities in Iran on June 22, 2025. Before that, on June 13, the Israelis had been launching strikes on Iran. Iran responded with ballistic missiles and drones. Until June 24, when the armed confrontation ceased, there was a discussion in the information space about whether World War III would start in the Middle East.

²⁶⁶ Grinevsky O. Scenario for the Third World War. How Israel Almost Became Its Cause // Moscow: OLMA-Press Education, 2002. 383 p. P. 134. (*in Russ.*)

AIRSTRIKES ON IRAN (JUNE, 2025)



US strikes ("Midnight Hammer" Operation)



Israeli strikes ("Rising Lion" Operation)

*Including reconnaissance aircraft and tanker aircraft

RIISING LION: KEY STATS



Number of Jets used: **200***



Air bombs of different types used: **330**



Number of targets: **100+**

MIDNIGHT HAMMER: KEY STATS



Number of Jets used: **125***



Number of submarines used: **1**



GBU-57 Bombs used: **14**



Tomahawk Cruise Missiles used: **90**



Number of targets: **3**

Map 9. Airstrikes on Iran (June, 2025)

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

In 2024, Iran and Israel exchanged blows in April and October, each time becoming more destructive. Escalation was inevitable.

This development was predicted. For example, a report by the International Crisis Group back in 2019, that is, during Donald Trump's first presidency, warned that the American policy of "maximum pressure" on Iran would lead to "maximum risks". Experts from this authoritative organization, whose headquarters are located in Brussels, warned: "The assassin's bullet that killed Archduke Franz Ferdinand of Austria put the entire European continent on fire. Today, a single attack by rocket, drone or limpet mine could play the same role"²⁶⁷.

The authors of the report suggested as an alternative to "save the 2015 international agreement on the Iranian nuclear program", from which the United States withdrew in May 2018, that is, again, under Donald Trump. At the same time, Russia, Europe and China at the beginning of Trump's second presidency in 2025 still considered possible a practical return to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of

²⁶⁷ Averting the Middle East's 1914 Moment, International Crisis Group: Middle East Report No. 205 // Crisis Group. August 1, 2019. URL: <https://crisisgroup.org/sites/default/files/205-averting-the-middle-east-1914.pdf>

Action (JCPOA) on Iran signed in 2015. Up until the expiration of this plan in October 2025, amendments to the text were discussed, if the participants agreed to them.

There were also proposals to develop a new agreement, with old ideas serving as the basis. Among them was the creation of a regional consortium that, under the control of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), would use Iran's achievements in peaceful nuclear energy for the needs of neighbouring countries such as the UAE, Saudi Arabia, the Sultanate of Oman, and others. According to the authors of the initiative, Türkiye and Egypt could join the consortium. Coordination would be carried out with the help of the United States, Russia, China, France, Germany, Great Britain, the Netherlands, and other countries advanced in the nuclear sphere²⁶⁸.

Another plan has been developed in more detail – involving Russia, as a state that Iran trusts and with which it concluded the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty in January 2025²⁶⁹, in close control over the nuclear enrichment cycle, including the temporary removal of part of the enriched Iranian uranium to Russian territory. It is noteworthy that preliminary agreements with the West on such participation by Russia were reached back in 2006²⁷⁰. They were never implemented, however, their presence on the negotiating table indicated the possibility of a peaceful solution.

Compliance with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which Iran adheres to, is also fundamentally important. There are nine nuclear states in the world, one of them in the Middle East (Israel, which is not part of the NPT). By 2030 many analysts believe, this situation will not change and no one else, especially in the Middle East, will get a nuclear bomb, no matter how hard they try²⁷¹.

But while Russia is in favor of negotiations, the United States, under pressure from its main regional ally, Israel, is moving ever closer to the *red line* of a military solution. This leads to the suspicion that Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's plan, aimed at eventual regime change in Iran and previously rejected in the United States, is quietly finding supporters among decision-makers there. And this after the discouraging results of military campaigns in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya.

Russia's approach to the Middle East is based on the principle that democracy cannot be exported through outside interference. "The desire to introduce democracy through forceful methods can and often does lead to the exact opposite result", said the then Prime Minister and presidential candidate Vladimir Putin in his article "Russia and the Changing World" (2012)²⁷².

²⁶⁸ Mousavian S., von Hippel F., Glaser A., Mian Z. A nuclear consortium in the Gulf as a basis for a new nuclear deal between the United States and Iran // Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists. June 2, 2025. URL: <https://thebulletin.org/2025/06/a-nuclear-consortium-in-the-persian-gulf-as-a-basis-for-a-new-nuclear-deal-between-the-united-states-and-iran/>

²⁶⁹ Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty between the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran // President of Russia. January 17, 2025. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/supplement/6258> (in Russ.).

²⁷⁰ Wright R. Dreams and Shadows. The future of the Middle East // New York: The Penguin Press, 2008. 464 p. P. 328.

²⁷¹ 11 questions for the next decade: Superforecasting global and regional political and economic trends // Arab Strategy Forum (UAE) and Good Judgment (USA). December 20, 2019. 88 p. URL: <https://arabstrategyforum.org/en/stream-report/11-questions-for-the-next-decade>

²⁷² Putin V. Russia and the Changing World // Moscow News Newspaper. February 7, 2012. URL: <http://www.mn.ru/politics/20120227/312306749.html> (in Russ.; archived).

...We are interested in stepping up our political, trade and economic ties with all Arab countries, including those that, let me repeat, have gone through domestic upheaval. Moreover, I see real possibilities that will enable Russia to fully preserve its leading position in the Middle East, where we have always had many friends.

As for the Arab-Israeli conflict, to this day, *the magic recipe* that will produce a final settlement has not been invented. It would be unacceptable to give up on this issue. Considering our close ties with the Israeli and Palestinian leaders, Russian diplomacy will continue to work for the resumption of the peace process both on a bilateral basis and within the format of the Quartet on the Middle East, while coordinating its steps with the Arab League.

<...>

Whether we like it or not, foreign interference suggests this train of thought. This is why the number of threshold countries that are one step away from “military atom” technology, is growing rather than decreasing. Under these conditions, zones free of weapons of mass destruction are being established in different parts of the world and are becoming increasingly important. Russia has initiated the discussion of the parameters for a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East.

Vladimir Putin
Prime Minister and presidential candidate
Valdai Discussion Club
February 27, 2012

https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/vladimir_putin_on_foreign_policy_russia_and_the_changing_world/

Since then, Moscow's position has not changed. But if in 2003 in Iraq and in 2011 in Libya this protest was expressed through political statements and voting in the UN Security Council, then in the autumn of 2015, a strengthened Russia, having thwarted the West's plans, decided to launch an anti-terrorist operation in Syria. In 2017, French military expert Michel Goya in his article “Red Star” (later renamed as “Red Storm”) noted that in Syria, the Russian military gained invaluable experience, tested the operation of new types of weapons and technologies in practice, and the campaign itself did not require large resources²⁷³.

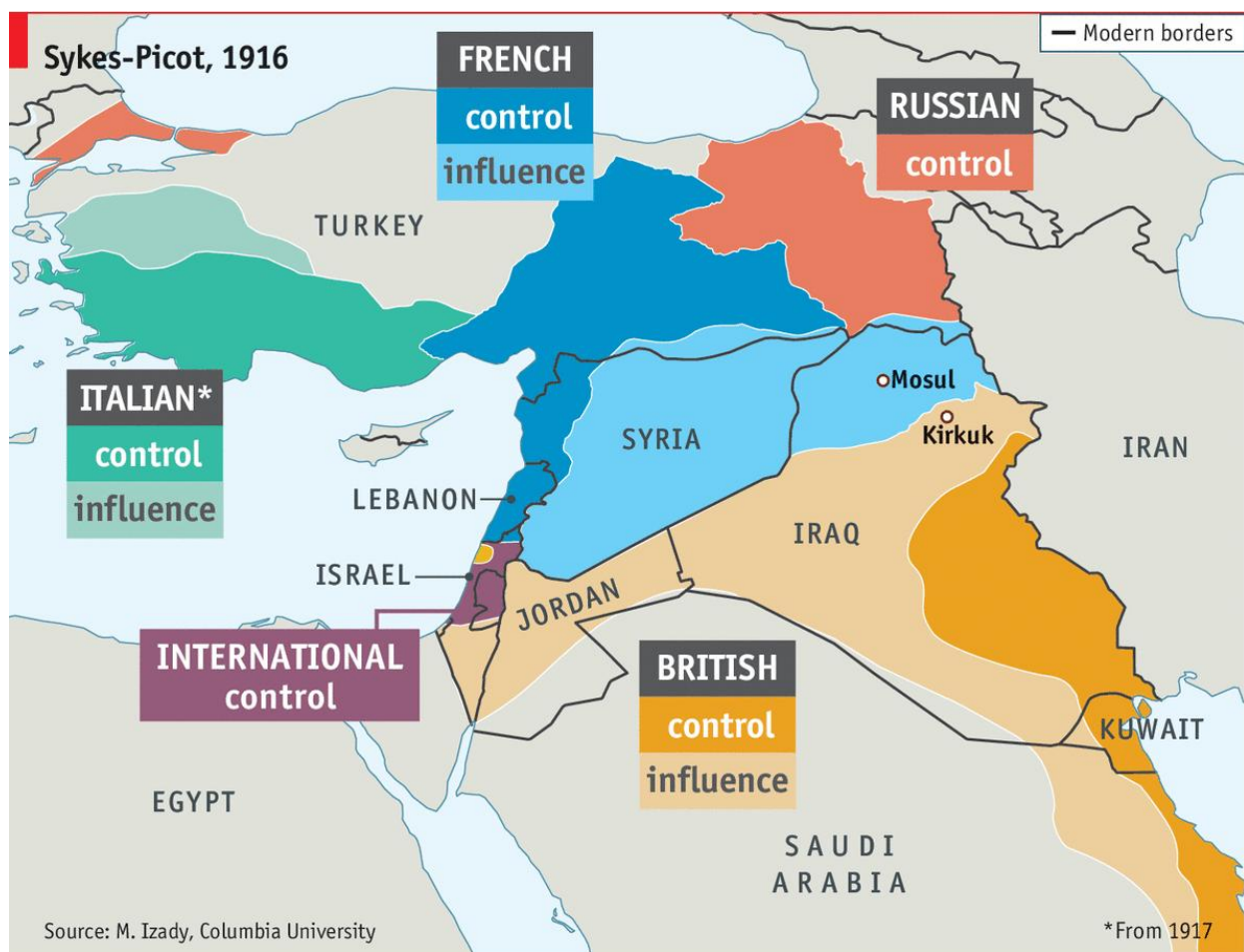
By the end of 2024, when President Bashar al-Assad finally fell, the situation had changed both in Syria and in Russia. Assad's government had ignored advice to establish a dialogue with the opposition and improve relations with Türkiye. The socio-economic situation in Syria had deteriorated sharply. At the same time, the Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine, launched on February 24, 2022, required Russia to concentrate its political attention and military-technical resources on the western direction.

Russia's priority in Syria remains the same: helping to preserve the territorial integrity of that country, as well as Iraq, Libya, Yemen, Iran, since we are talking about attempts by external forces to destabilize the situation there. In Syria, it is undoubtedly necessary to carry out administrative

²⁷³ Goya M. Etoile Rouge: Enseignements opérationnels de deux ans d'engagement russe en Syrie // La voie de l'épée. September 12, 2017. URL: <https://lavoiedelepee.blogspot.com/2017/09/tempete-rouge-enseignements.html> (in French).

reforms, in which the rights of national and religious minorities must be respected: Kurds, Christians, Alawites, Druze. Representatives of the Sunni majority, who came to power in 2024, are making attempts to establish a comprehensive dialogue. For its part, Moscow provides humanitarian aid to Damascus and is ready to do so in the future. The stability of Syria is in Russia's interests.

The borders of many Middle Eastern states were drawn based on agreements reached during World War I. *The Sykes-Picot Agreement* of 1916, which divided the region between colonial powers and was named after the British and French diplomats who worked on it²⁷⁴, is far from ideal and no longer fits the changed reality. However, there is no replacement for it yet, and abrupt moves could lead to huge human losses.



Economist.com

Map 10. *Sykes-Picot Agreement* and the modern borders of the Middle East

Source: *The Economist* (<https://www.economist.com/graphic-detail/2016/05/16/sykes-picot-100-years-on>)

A revision of the *Sykes-Picot Agreement*, signed more than 109 years ago, is, of course, inevitable. “There is nothing new under the sun”, but nothing is permanent either. Russia will have to react to *redrawing the borders* of the Middle East. However, Moscow prefers to act as a conservative force, containing centrifugal processes and reducing the severity of conflicts along fault lines. The “Old world order” is collapsing. Russia calls for an agreement, saying no to the irresponsible destruction and disintegration of states.

²⁷⁴ Barr J. *A Line in the Sand. Britain, France and the struggle that shaped the Middle East* // Simon & Schuster. UK. 2012. 454 p. P. 20–21.

This position is attractive to most Middle Eastern countries, with the possible exception of Israel, which often initiates revisions of the borders defined both by agreements reached during World War I and the collapse of the Ottoman Empire, and by resolutions of the UN General Assembly and Security Council issued after World War II.

Russia's strategy towards the Middle East is thus built on the need to counter growing negative trends. This also includes the terrorist threat.

Contradictions of Jihad: Fighting Terrorists and Reconciling with Radicals

The problem of terrorism is a long-standing problem in the Middle East. For Russia, it is even more sensitive because – after the overthrow in 2003 of Saddam Hussein in Iraq by the Americans and the emergence of the terrorist group Islamic State (ISIS²⁷⁵) there – thousands of people from America, Europe and Asia, including Russian speakers, have joined the groups scattered across the Middle East²⁷⁶. They maintain ties with the *underground* in Central Asia and a number of regions of Russia.

From 2013 to 2016, that is, at the peak of the jihadist upsurge, estimates of the number of people from Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) fighting on the side of the banned ISIS fluctuated between 5,000 and 7,000 militants²⁷⁷. They were concentrated primarily in Iraq and Syria. In 2014–2015, the Asian branch of the group, *ISIS in Khorasan*²⁷⁸, burst into the scene in Afghanistan and Pakistan²⁷⁹.

And yet, the international fight against terrorism has borne fruit. The figures show a trend (which, unfortunately, has not yet become sustainable) of a decrease in the number of terrorist attacks in the region over the past 10 years. The number of attacks has decreased worldwide significantly, threefold (3,492 in 2024). The number of deaths as a result has also decreased (7,555 fatalities in the same 2024)²⁸⁰.

This is connected both with the achievement of internal political agreements in a number of countries, for example, in Iraq, and with the implementation, since 2015, of more active counter-terrorism operations by local authorities and external players, including Russia and the United States.

Russia and the United States, despite their differences, have avoided direct clashes in Syria during this struggle, maintaining coordination through special channels. Moreover, when the Americans, whose contingent is located in eastern Syria, were preparing to take the ISIS stronghold in Raqqa in 2017, according to the author of these lines, the Russian leadership offered support, which the United States did not dare to do.

²⁷⁵ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

²⁷⁶ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

²⁷⁷ Meeting of the CIS Council of Heads of Government. Speech by President Vladimir Putin // President of Russia. October 16, 2015. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/page/461> (in Russ.)

²⁷⁸ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

²⁷⁹ US Suspects more direct threats beyond ISIS // *The New York Times*. September 21, 2014. URL: <http://www.nytimes.com/2014/09/21/world/middleeast/us-sees-other-more-direct-threats-beyond-isis-.html>

²⁸⁰ Global Terrorism Index 2025: Measuring the Impact of Terrorism // Institute for Economics and Peace. URL: <https://www.economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/Global-Terrorism-Index-2025.pdf>

In 2016, there were 6,110 terrorist attacks in the Middle East and North Africa (out of 13,400 worldwide, with 34,000 killed as a result). But in the following 2017, there were 3,780 attacks (out of 11,000 worldwide), a 40 % reduction from the previous year. The number of people killed by terrorism was halved. Improvements were seen in Iraq, Türkiye, Libya, Yemen and, to a lesser extent, Syria²⁸¹. At the same time, a number of Asian and African countries became less secure.

In 2016, 45% of terrorist attacks from the global total occurred in the Middle East and North Africa²⁸². In 2017, 34%. The number of attacks in the Middle East has decreased. Syria, however, remains a hotbed of terrorist threats. The tragedy of October 7, 2023 in Israel and the bloody drama in the Palestinian Gaza Strip also show that it is too early to talk about successes.

However, terrorist attacks are more often occurring not in the Middle East, but in the Southern Asia and Africa's Sahel (Pakistan, Burkina Faso, Niger, Mali, Nigeria, Somalia etc.)²⁸³. The vector of terrorism has changed. It is noteworthy that in the last few years the number of attacks has increased slightly in Iran and Russia, but decreased in Iraq, which immediately after the US invasion in 2003 remained the main *supplier* of the most severe terror statistics for a long time.

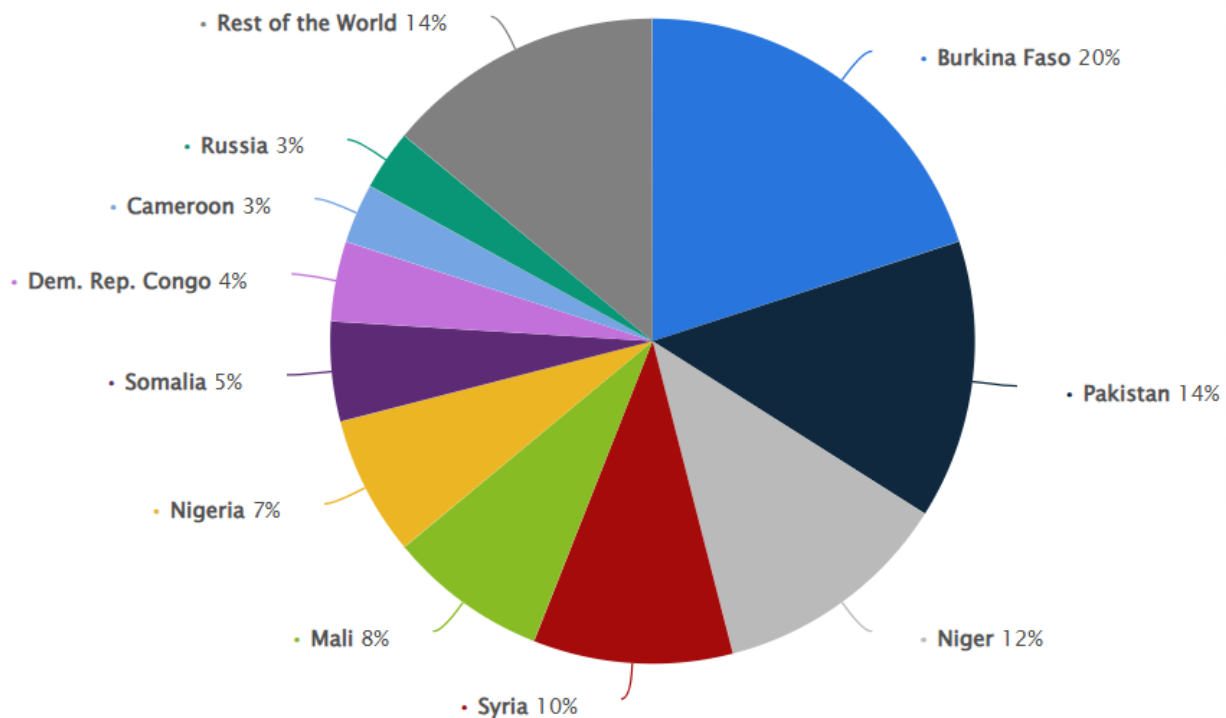


Figure 40. Countries with the highest share of deaths by terrorism, %

Source: Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/377061/countries-with-the-highest-number-of-deaths-by-terrorism/>)

²⁸¹ Terrorist Attacks in the Middle East and North Africa fell by almost 40% last year // The Global Terrorism Database. August 9, 2018. URL: <https://www.start.umd.edu/news/start-in-the-news/quartz-terrorist-attacks-middle-east-and-north-africa-fell-almost-40-last>

²⁸² Overview: Terrorism in 2016. Background Report // The Global Terrorism Database. August 17, 2017. URL: https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/START_GTD_OverviewTerrorism2016_August2017.pdf

²⁸³ Countries with the highest share of deaths by terrorism in 2024 // The Statistics Portale for Market Data (Statista). March 3, 2025. URL: <http://www.statista.com/statistics/377061/countries-with-the-highest-number-of-deaths-by-terrorism/>

The ISIS terrorist group, despite its weakening, continues to operate. Groups close to it and individuals who share its ideology are going beyond the Near and Middle East, carrying out attacks in other parts of the world. Tragic evidence is the terrorist attacks at the “Crocus City Hall” – a large concert venue outside Moscow – on March 22, 2024.

The need to combat terrorism leaves no doubt. However, the events of December 2024, when opposition groups overthrew President Bashar al-Assad overnight, have posed, including for Russia, a difficult question about determining the attitude towards radical organizations, the criteria for adding them to blacklists or excluding them from there.

The coming to power in Damascus of the leaders of the *al-Nusra Front*²⁸⁴ (*Jabhat al-Nusra*, translated from Arabic as “Support Front”), which is banned in Russia, has put everyone who is establishing relations with the victors in a delicate position. Russia, maintaining a military presence in Syria in the form of the *Khmeimim* air base and a logistics point in the port of Tartus, has also demonstrated pragmatic flexibility and quickly established relations with the new authorities.

At the end of 2024, the United States canceled the \$10 million reward for the capture of the leader of the *al-Nusra Front*, Muhammad al-Julani, now known not by his combat nickname, but by his real name, Ahmad al-Sharaa²⁸⁵. In May 2025, President Donald Trump, visiting the Gulf states, met with Ahmad al-Sharaa in Saudi Arabia. The Syrian came to Riyadh already as the president of Syria for the transitional period.

There is also the example of the Taliban in Afghanistan, who were removed from the Russian *blacklist* of 69 organizations in April-May 2025²⁸⁶. However, it turns out that the narratives that accompanied the fight against radicals are being eroded. Flexibility has been demonstrated. Theoretical justification and legislative support are required. In addition, much still depends on the state of affairs in the explosive region.

The Middle East has faced a surge in terrorist activity in the 21st century. Over the past quarter century, the region has experienced several external interventions and plunged into severe internal discord: the US war in Iraq in 2003, the NATO operation in Libya in 2011, long-term bloody conflicts in Yemen and Syria, the events of the “Arab Spring” that began in late 2010 and never lived up to expectations for improvement, financial and military-political crises in Lebanon, and much more.

The situation is aggravated by general instability. International structures formed as a result of the World War II are unable to cope with the multiplying conflicts. It has long been recognized that these bodies need at least serious reform, and at most – replacement. Building a new international security architecture takes time. Upheavals are inevitable.

²⁸⁴ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor’s note*.

²⁸⁵ US removes \$10 million bounty on HTS (*banned in Russia*) leaders following talks in Damascus // *Middle East Monitor*. December 20, 2024. URL: <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20241220-us-removes-10m-bounty-on-hts-leader-following-talks-in-damascus/>

²⁸⁶Single federal list of Organization, including foreign and international ones, designated as terrorist under Russian law. As of September, 2025 // Federal Security Service. URL: <http://www.fsb.ru/fsb/npd/terror.htm> (*in Russ.*).

Other troubles are *adding fuel to the fire*: natural disasters, including earthquakes in the seismically active Middle East, the struggle for water resources, the coronavirus pandemic (in addition to the medical ones, the new disease has exacerbated economic and social problems), volatility in oil prices, exported by many countries in the region, refugee flows, drug trafficking, trade wars, *tariff ultimatums*, sanctions and the fear of a global recession²⁸⁷. Let's take into account rapid demographic growth and acute unemployment, a decline in living standards.

The disastrous consequences of misfortunes and challenges, as if converging at one historical bifurcation point, have not yet been exhausted. In the Middle East, constantly seething, they are refracted with particular sophistication and surprise with their cruel forms. And sometimes the question arises: do external players need this “headache”? The region is strategically important, but very restless. Let's ask directly: do we need this?

The Middle East Dilemma: to Leave Impossible to Stay

Looking ahead, let us note right away: it is impossible to leave the Middle East. But they tried to leave the Middle East. And not only Russia. In the US, former President Barack Obama once spoke about the Middle East most vividly: “This region is like the Mob is to Corleone. Just when I thought I was out – it pulls you back in”²⁸⁸. This refers to the book and film of the same name, “The Godfather”, in which Michael Corleone complains about his failure to break ties with organized crime.

A strong comparison, what else to say. But President Barack Obama, who was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for 2009, almost ruined his image in 2013, when, under pressure from *hawks*, he was going to launch a missile strike on Syria in August. The reason was rumors that Damascus was using chemical weapons in an internal conflict. Obama later called August 30, 2013, when additional consultations were scheduled instead of strikes, one of the most important days of his life²⁸⁹.

On September 5, 2013, President Obama arrived in St. Petersburg for the G20 summit. After his meeting with President Putin, something stunning happened: Russia announced an initiative to destroy Syria's arsenal of chemical weapons²⁹⁰. Russian-American talks began in Geneva. An agreement was reached on September 14, and the day before, Syria signed the Chemical Weapons Convention. The joint commitments were reinforced by UN Security Council Resolution 2118 and an agreement with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW)²⁹¹.

The OPCW, the UN, Russia, the USA, China, Denmark, Norway, Finland, Italy, Great Britain, and Germany participated in the large-scale operation to remove chemical weapons precursors from Syria

²⁸⁷Suponina E. Weakness of the Virus and strength of the Corona (about meeting of East and West waiting for the end of Pandemic and the beginning of Apocalypse) // National Strategy Issues. Moscow, 2020. No. 6. P. 172–187. (*in Russ.*).

²⁸⁸ The Obama doctrine: The US president talks through his hardest decisions about America's role in the world // *The Atlantic Magazine*. April 4, 2016 URL: <https://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/archive/2016/04/the-obama-doctrine/471525/>

²⁸⁹ Ibid.

²⁹⁰Commentary on the situation with chemical weapons in Syria. // President of Russia. September 10, 2013. URL: <https://kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/statements/19194> (*in Russ.*).

²⁹¹Destruction of chemical weapons in Syria // MFA of the Russian Federation. April 23, 2018. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/sy/1569376/> (*in Russ.*).

and destroy them, which lasted for three years²⁹². The Russian initiative was beneficial not only to the USA, which was given the opportunity to abandon military plans that were unpleasant to Barack Obama, but also to Syria's southwestern neighbour – Israel, as well as to Jordan and Türkiye. And President Obama also became convinced how quickly the Middle East, from involvement in whose affairs he wanted to go out, pulled him back into the funnel of armed conflicts. It is also significant that a way out was found through joint efforts through the establishment of international cooperation.

Donald Trump also intends to leave the Middle East, having spoken about it during his first presidency. He promises this now. After the US strikes on Iran, however, this looks contradictory, with the imprint of Trump's unpredictability.

The United States is objectively much less concerned about the Middle East than it was in the mid- and late 20th century. The doctrine of President Jimmy Carter, proclaimed in January 1980, is no longer relevant. It was then announced, in particular, in particular: “An attempt by any outside forces to gain control over the Persian Gulf region will be regarded as an assault on the vital interests of the United States of America and such an assault will be repelled by any means necessary, including military force”²⁹³.

However, the US was then dependent on oil and gas supplies from the Middle East, which has lost its significance in recent years with the growth, due to technological breakthrough, of domestic hydrocarbon production, as well as with the development of alternative sources of energy worldwide. And although the US still depends on fluctuations in oil prices, which, in turn, react to events in the Middle East, this connection is no longer direct. The Middle East is no more a *barometer* for measuring the state of the energy market.

“Can the *Pax Americana* endure? And if it cannot, what will replace it?”²⁹⁴. With the first part of this question it is clear: American leadership is ending. The second part (“what will replace it?”) still needs to be sorted out. In any case, the Americans are more concerned about Asia, the confrontation with China, which, by the way, is dependent on Middle Eastern oil. For Trump even everything outside of America seems less important.

William Wechsler, director of the Rafik Hariri Center for the Middle East and former deputy assistant secretary of defense, noted during Trump's first term that President takes very seriously his campaign promises to “stop the endless wars in the Middle East”²⁹⁵. Trump even declared the signing of the *Abraham Accords* on September 15, 2020, between Israel on the one hand and the Emirates and Bahrain on the other, as evidence of an even more American withdrawal from the daily routine of the Middle East. “We don't need to be there anymore. We don't need that oil anymore. We don't need

²⁹²Contribution of States to the Process of Elimination of Chemical Weapons in Syria. Dossier // TASS. January 14, 2014. URL: <https://tass.ru/info/884952> (in Russ.).

²⁹³ Bunzel C. Whither The Carter Doctrine? The Biden Administration and the Gulf // The Hoover Institution. September 12, 2023. URL: <https://www.hoover.org/research/whither-carter-doctrine-biden-administration-and-gulf>

²⁹⁴ Ikenberry G., Parmar I., Stokes D. Introduction: Ordering the world? Liberal internationalism in theory and practice // International Affairs, Vol. 94, Issue 1, 2018. P. 1–5.

²⁹⁵ Wechsler W. The US and the Middle East in 2021: Disengagement or Re-engagement? // Italian Institute for International Political Studies. September 14, 2020. URL: <https://www.ispionline.it/en/publication/four-years-trump-us-and-world-27375>

those Straits anymore”, he said on August 13, 2020, at the time the *Abraham Accords* were negotiated²⁹⁶.

William Wechsler criticizes this approach. In his opinion, Trump thus “made a gift” to Russia and China and “allowed Russia to fill the vacuum created in the Middle East”²⁹⁷. Here however the American political analyst is exaggerating. Russia is not going to fill the voids created by the United States, and the latter does not ignore the Middle East.

Russia does not intend and is not capable of becoming a dominant force in the Middle East. But Russia knows how to build relationships with the Arabs, the Turks, the Iranians, and the Israelis. And the region needs neutral and predictable arbitrators who can positively influence the security situation. Russia can play an important role in the Middle East.

It should also be noted that Russia's return to the Middle East began long before Donald Trump came to power. But there was also a period, immediately after the collapse of the Soviet Union, when this presence diminished and did not correspond to Russia's *weight* on the international arena.

The main contradiction of Russia in those years was between the desired and the possible, between ambitions and real resources. However, we must pay tribute to the fact that Moscow, with the exception of the first six years after the collapse of the USSR, demonstrated anyway highly professional diplomacy and often achieved its goals, operating with small resources.

The leaders of Russia, which emerged in 1991 from part of the former Soviet Union, immediately determined that the country's foreign policy interests should be pragmatic, aimed at ensuring the safety of citizens and creating conditions for obtaining economic benefits. This differed from the ideological principles of the Soviet era. At the same time, the imbalances were corrected. During Soviet times, from the summer of 1967 to the autumn of 1991, Moscow did not maintain diplomatic relations with Israel. In October 1991, two months before the collapse of the USSR, they were restored.

During the era of the first President of Russia Boris Yeltsin, the Middle East region was not considered a priority. It is enough to mention that Yeltsin, who underestimated the importance of this region, visited it only once during his presidency, and even then, unwillingly, when in February 1999 he came to the funeral of King Hussein of Jordan, with whom he was in sympathy.

Yeltsin's next visit (in January 2000 to Jerusalem and Bethlehem for the Millennium Celebration, marking the 2000th anniversary of the birth of Jesus Christ) took place after the president announced on December 31, 1999 that he had resigned, paving the way for Vladimir Putin to become the President following the election results.

But it took Putin more than four years before he went to the region for the first time. In late 2004, he visited Türkiye, and in April 2005, Egypt and Israel, including the Palestinian Authority. The author also traveled along this route as part of a group of analysts and journalists accompanying the

²⁹⁶ Ibid.

²⁹⁷ Ibid.

President. Interest in Russia's return was enormous. Many have pinned their hopes on Moscow, especially in issues of regional security.

Russia, due to internal situation, as we see, once has distanced itself from the Middle East. And during its absence, Russia realized that to distance itself from the Middle East's problems will be more expensive. And now Russia is back. And it is here to stay.

The Rules of the Game instead of No Rules Fighting

“An illustration of Russia's desire to maintain real influence in the Middle East was President Vladimir Putin's decision to host first Russia-Arab summit in October 2025” – this is not a quote from the official announcement of the Arab leaders' arrival in Moscow. But from an article by a Western political scientist discussing how “pragmatism” and “flexibility” help Russia maneuver in the Middle East even in turbulent time²⁹⁸.

Similar to the Russia-Africa summit, which was held in 2019 and for a second time in 2023, the Russia-Arab summit is conceived to discuss a wide range of topics. The League of Arab States, with headquarters in Cairo, was formed in 1945 and has since expanded from seven to 22 members. It is an important platform for articulating of views and political positions. The organization maintains regular contacts with Russia.

Unfortunately, the event scheduled for mid-October 2025 was postponed due to developments in the Middle East. However, the new Syrian leader, Ahmad al-Sharaa, arrived in Moscow on the scheduled date for talks with President Vladimir Putin. While contentious issues between Moscow and Damascus remain, the very fact of the Syrian delegation's arrival is very important. The difficulties arising in this area, as well as the technical obstacles encountered during preparations for the first Russia-Arab summit, once again demonstrate how difficult it is for Russia to maintain influence in the Middle East, despite its clear desire to do so.

A strategic dialogue, since November 2011, but unfortunately intermittently, has also been ongoing with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). It was formed in May 1981 as an alliance of six monarchies: Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Kuwait, Bahrain, and the Sultanate of Oman. Today, they look like real *islands of stability*.

Russia has significantly strengthened its ties with the Gulf monarchies in recent years, both as a group and with each state individually. The GCC states are interested in Russia's mediation in the Middle East, and they themselves are already involved in bearing fruit diplomacy, especially in the humanitarian sphere, over the Ukrainian crisis.

In 2005, Russia joined as an observer the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), which includes 57 states, Middle Eastern ones too. The impetus for the formation of the OIC in 1969 (it was initially called the Organization of the Islamic Conference) was the Middle East conflict: the Arab defeat in

²⁹⁸ Born W. Quelle stratégie russe au Moyen-Orient depuis la chute du régime de Bachar al-Assad? // Institut FMES – Fondation méditerranéenne d'études stratégiques. January 8, 2025. URL: <https://fmes-france.org/the-strategy-of-russia-in-the-moment-of-orientation-depuis-la-chute-du-regime-de-bachar-al-assad/> (in French).

the war with Israel in 1967 and the burning of the *Al-Aqsa* Mosque by a crazy Australian tourist in August 1969²⁹⁹. The regional security is a topic of priority for the OIC.

An important part of the joint efforts is energy security. Cooperation between Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and other producers has been going on, more or less, since the mid-1990s. In 2016, despite competition, they not only agreed on quotas, but created an informal alliance what is now known as “OPEC Plus”. The forum consists of 12 OPEC members, including its *first fiddle* Saudi Arabia, alongside 10 independent producers, including Russia.

There is also the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) which gathers Russia, Qatar, Algeria and others natural gas producing countries.

Russia proceeds from the fact that ensuring security in the Middle East is a common matter, and no one can handle it alone. Hence the desire to institutionalize the approach to solving problems that have long been common, to insert them into a broader organizational context. Largely due to Russia's efforts, Iran joined the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in 2023. Seven Middle Eastern countries became SCO dialogue partners. Russia's BRICS one-year rotating chairmanship, which began in January 2024, was marked by the accession of Egypt, Ethiopia Iran and the UAE. Saudi Arabia began the process of joining.

Western opponents, primarily Europeans, perceive Russia as a “dangerous” rival in the Middle East and Africa due to its increased activity. The confrontation between the US and China also has a negative impact in the region. The annual reports of the Munich Security Conference always point to this rivalry.

In 2024, an analytical report by this German organization suggested that something urgently needed to be done about the trend of rapprochement between Russia and the countries of the Middle East and Africa. Countries that did not interrupt cooperation with Russia despite pressure from the West were called by the offensive term “gray zone”³⁰⁰. That is, they are with the West, but also with Russia and China, and it would be good to choose. However, the bloc approach to diplomacy of the European Union did not seem attractive to the states of the Middle East and Africa.

Russia, interacting with the Middle East, does not impose anything. It treats the choices of partners with respect. When putting forward initiatives, it does not insist on their immediate adoption, but follows the discussion with interest and understanding. This was the case, for example, when in the summer of 2019, Russia put forward the “Collective Security Concept for the Persian Gulf”, based on proposals elaborated in the late 1990s, but updated according to new realities. Soon after the Russians, in September 2019, then Iranian President Hassan Rouhani proposed the “Hormuz Peace Initiative”, briefly called “Hope” (acronym HOPE – *Hormuz Peace Endeavor*). “The countries of the

²⁹⁹ Suponina E. The horse Buraq and the Russian eagle // *Notes of the Fatherland Magazine*, 2003. URL: <https://strana-oz.ru/2003/5/kon-burak-i-rossiyskiy-orel> (in Russ.).

³⁰⁰ Mudie-Mantz A, Witte S. Chapter 4 – Middle East: Abraham Discord. Lose – Lose. Munich Security Report 2024 // The Munich Security Conference. February 1, 2024. URL: <https://securityconference.org/en/publications/munich-security-report-2024/foreword/>

region should come together and agree”, summed up Iran’s position, then-Foreign Minister Javad Zarif³⁰¹.

Hormuz Peace Endeavor: pro et contra

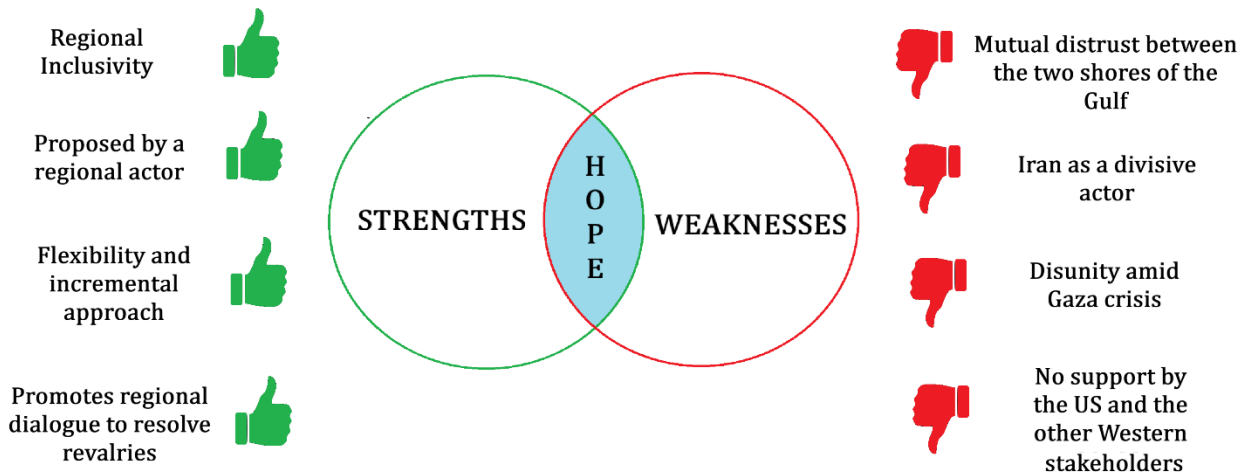


Figure 41. Hormuz Peace Endeavor (HOPE)

Adapted from the data: Dessi A., Colombo S. *Fostering a New Security Architecture in the Middle East* / FEPS-IAI, Rome: Nuova Cultura, 2020 (updated as of 2025).

At the same time, the GCC structures, as the author knows from conversations with Arab politicians, began to think about their vision of security in the region. The Arabs did not come to a common point of view. At that time, tensions remained between Qatar and the group represented by Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt due to a dispute over a number of regional issues. Later, relations improved, but when talking about problems in the Gulf, we must keep in mind not only the complexity of relations between the Arabs and Iranians, but also between the Arabs themselves. Qatari professor Muhammad al-Musfir reminds us that “the prosperity of the region depends on whether neighbours manage to overcome their differences and agree on a solid foundation for cooperation”³⁰².

The above-mentioned Russia’s Concept, which was updated in August 2021, speaks specifically about “establishment a common Middle East post-crisis architecture”³⁰³. These should include steps to “develop confidence-building measures in the military field”: exchange of observers, establishment of “hotlines”, creation of demilitarized zones, collective cooperation to prevent and respond natural and man-made disasters, organized crime, terrorism, and drug trafficking. The document also contains a paragraph on the taking steps to make an entire Middle East region a zone free of weapons of mass destruction and their means of delivery.

³⁰¹ From a conversation between Iranian Foreign Minister Javad Zarif and several international experts, including the author, on the sidelines of the Doha Conference in Qatar. 15.12.2019.

³⁰² al-Musfir M. Relations between the Gulf States. The Problem of Fragmentation and Strategic Vacuum (al-alaqat al-khalijiyya – al-khalijiyya. Muidylat al-farag al-istratijyy wa at-tajziya) // Al Jazeera Center for Political Studies, 2018. 318 p. P. 276. (in Arabic).

³⁰³ Russia's Collective Security Concept for the Persian Gulf // MFA of the Russian Federation. August 21, 2021. URL: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/vnesnepoliticeskoe-dos-e/krizisnoe-uregulirovanie-regional-nye-konflikty/rossiyskaya_kontseptsiya_kollektivnoy_bezopasnosti_v_zone_persidskogo_zaliva/1466420/ (in Russ.).

The idea, which originated in Soviet times, despite the occasional skepticism, invariably finds support in the region and beyond. Russia is systematically promoting it. “The creation of such a zone is fully in Russia’s national interests”, says Dr. Vladimir Orlov, founding director of PIR Center, who deals with this issue. “However, Russia cannot do *homework* for those who are responsible for it, namely, the states of the region themselves”³⁰⁴. Discussions on this matter, which continue at the suggestion of Moscow, are helping the Middle East gradually move forward on this path, which, however, is thorny and long.

And yet, the Middle East region does not look hopeless. There are *glimmers of hope*. The “light at the end of the Middle East tunnel” flickers time and time again. Dim, of course, but it serves as a guide.

Thus, the Madrid Middle East Peace Conference, held in October 1991 under the joint sponsorship of the USA and the USSR on the eve of its collapse, although it received a fair share of criticism, became a step towards the prototype of a new security architecture. The breakthrough was short-lived, reflecting a shift in the balance of power in favor of the Americans. The rounds of Arab-Israeli negotiations were difficult. The participants were biding their time. Nevertheless, as Professor Alexey Vasiliev noted, “a psychological atmosphere was created that was necessary for mutual understanding”³⁰⁵.

A *tough nut* of the Middle East conflict, according to the Russian diplomat Viktor Posuvalyuk, “almost cracked more than once”, although it “remained unshelled”: “The peace process did not acquire an irreversible character, and yet we almost believed in its “irreversibility”. This is an excerpt from the article “Peace and Security in the Middle East – Is the Goal Achievable?”, which Viktor Posuvalyuk published in 1998 in the Russian “International Affairs” Journal³⁰⁶.

A brief historical excursion is important for a better understanding of the current situation. The basis for peaceful coexistence in the region was laid back in the 20th century. Its instability, however, was visible from the very beginning. But the *Abraham Accords*, signed in the 21st century and mediated by the US, as a series of agreement between Israel and Arab countries, such as the UAE, Bahrain, and then Morocco, certainly relied on this foundation.

The United States tried in vain to monopolize this process. As expected, but alone they are not able to cope with. The decision to put the long-standing Palestinian problem out of the picture and out of the negotiations maximally aggravated the situation and led the participants to a political dead end. The tragedy of October 7, 2023 in Israel and the subsequent new war in the Gaza Strip required decisive action from the United States, which took on the burden of Middle East mediation. However, the efforts made by U.S. have not been constant, and the recommendations were non-objective. Not

³⁰⁴ Orlov V. WMD-Free Zone in the Middle East – Reflecting on the Results of the November (2019) WMD-Free Zone Conference in New York // PIR Center. March 26, 2020. URL: <https://pircenter.org/editions/zona-svobodnaja-ot-omu-na-blizhnem-vostokey-osmysljaja-itogi-nojabrskoj-2019-g-konferencii-po-zsomu-v-nju-jorke/> (*in Russ.*).

³⁰⁵ Vasiliev A. Russia in the Near and Middle East: from messianism to pragmatism // Moscow: Science. Eastern education, 1993. 399 p. P. 370 (*in Russ.*).

³⁰⁶ Posuvalyuk V. The Crimson Sky of Baghdad // St. Petersburg: Aletya, 2012. 400 p. P. 214 (*in Russ.*).

without reason the famous Arab political scientist Dr. Jasim al-Azzawi called the United States “the main loser” after the events of October, 7³⁰⁷.

Meanwhile, Russia, which condemned both the terrorist attacks against Israelis and the extermination of the Palestinian population in the Gaza Strip, has always insisted that the core of the Middle East conflict is the problem of Palestine. It can only be resolved through dialogue between Israelis and Palestinians and only by combining the efforts of international mediators, and not just by the actions of one, overseas one.

About five years ago, my attention was drawn to a forecast made by Israeli experts from the Institute for National Security Studies about what the Middle East would be like in 2030³⁰⁸. They developed several basic scenarios depending on how closely the United States would continue to engage with the region. All options painted a gloomy picture. The differences were only in the degree.

In the “multi-level chess” scenario, which implied that the players would at least adhere to some agreements and norms of decency, the deterioration was supposed to be controlled. The worst-looking option was called “free-for-all” or “no rules fighting”. It was about an inexorably growing chaos. And this is in a region where, according to researchers, by 2030 will be around 581 million people, that is 15% more than at present³⁰⁹.

Many in the Middle East fear this development. That is why we need rules. We need a security system and urgent measures to reduce risks. Russia is neither an optimist nor a pessimist, but a realist and a pragmatist. As we know, times are not chosen. But we choose the path. The scenario will be as we write it.

³⁰⁷ al-Azzawi J. Winners and losers of the 7 October War // *Middle East Monitor*. July 20, 2025. URL:

<https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20250720-winners-and-losers-of-the-7-october-war/>

³⁰⁸ Heistein A., Rakov D., Guzanski Y. What will the Middle East look like in 2030? An Israeli perspective // INSS. 25.03.2021. URL: <https://www.inss.org.il/publication/what-will-the-middle-east-look-like-in-2030-an-israeli-perspective/>

³⁰⁹ Ibid.

CHAPTER 12.

A NEW ALLIANCE OR AN AD-HOC PARTNERSHIP? NEW REALITIES FOR THE KOREAN PENINSULA³¹⁰

Alexander Vorontsov

The dynamics of the development of bilateral relations between the Russian Federation and the DPRK after the signing of the *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty* on June 19, 2024 leads analysts to conclude that cooperation between Moscow and Pyongyang has now reached an unprecedented high level, perhaps even surpassing the corresponding parameters of the Soviet Union period. This phenomenon is based primarily on two factors: Pyongyang's uncompromising support for Russia's Special Military Operation (SMO) in Ukraine and the unique trusting personal relationship that has developed between the leaders of our two countries.

There is plenty of evidence for this statement. There is a regular exchange of visits between representatives at a high political level, who perform, among other things, the functions of special envoys of heads of State. During February 2025 Lee Hee Yong, a member of the Political Bureau of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea (WPK), visited Moscow, and Sergei Shoigu, Secretary of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, visited Pyongyang twice in March and June. Both of them were accepted by the heads of state.

The 10th and 11th Meetings of the intergovernmental commission of the Russian Federation and the DPRK on trade, economic, scientific and technical cooperation, held in Pyongyang in November 2023 and 2024. The events were unprecedented in terms of the number and composition of participants: the Russian delegation exceeded 100 people, in each case included ministers and deputy ministers. Over the past two years, the heads of almost all leading Russian agencies have visited the DPRK. Inter-party relations are actively developing: Dmitry Medvedev, Chairman of the *United Russia* Party, met with Lee Hee Yong, Secretary of the Central Committee of the WPK, on 26 February, 2025, and inter-parliamentary relations have become systemic. Chairman of the State *Duma* of the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation Vyacheslav Volodin visited the capital of the DPRK on August 14-15, 2025 to participate in celebrations dedicated to the 80th anniversary of the liberation of Korea from Japanese colonial rule, was hosted by the DPRK leader Kim Jong Un.

³¹⁰ This chapter is based on the keynote speech by Dr. Alexander Vorontsov at the 125th Spring Session of the *Dialogue Club International* entitled "Russia and the DPRK: A New Alliance or an Ad-hoc Partnership? New Realities for the Korean Peninsula" (April 7, 2025). – *Editor's note*.

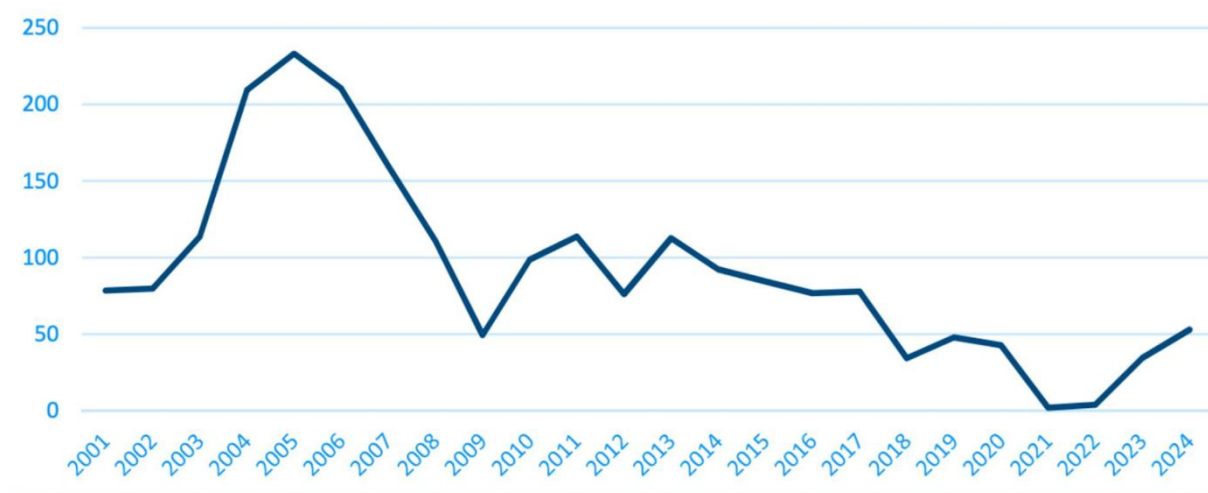


Figure 42. Trade trends between Russia and DPRK from 2001 to 2024, billion dollars

Based on: open sources.

Although cooperation in the economic sphere is burdened by international sanctions, there are areas that are not affected by them, where there is a high dynamic of interaction. The signed Agreements on cooperation in the field of healthcare and the development of road transport are being vigorously implemented. So, in the near future, a ceremony will be conducted to begin the construction of an automobile bridge over the Tumangan border river and practical work is in full swing.

Cooperation is actively developing in the educational, cultural, sports, tourism, and humanitarian fields in general. More and more Russian students are showing interest in learning the North Korean version of the Korean language. The fact that several hundred Russian servicemen who were injured in the course of their military operations were accepted free of charge to undergo rehabilitation courses in medical institutions in North Korea was highly appreciated in Russian society.

The culmination of the materialization of allied relations was the participation of North Korean military units in the fighting for the liberation of the Kursk region in 2025, the fact which was first officially announced in the report of the Chief of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Russian Federation Valeriy Gerasimov on April 26, 2025, after which the corresponding official assessments were made by the top officials of both states. President of Russia Vladimir Putin on April 28, 2025: “Units of the Korean People's Army took an active part in defeating the *neo-Nazi formations* of the Kiev regime that invaded our territory – in full compliance with international law, according to the letter and spirit of the *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement* between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea dated June 19, 2024 <...> The Russian people will never forget the feat of the Korean special forces soldiers. We will always honor the Korean heroes who gave their lives for Russia, for our common freedom, along with our Russian brothers in arms.”³¹¹.

The Russian and international expert community is increasingly voicing the following assessments: after signing the said *Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement* with Russia, the DPRK now finds itself in a uniquely favorable position; it has become the only state in the world that has alliance treaties with two superpowers. The reality is that most of the tasks of the 8th Congress of the WPK

³¹¹Statement by the President of the Russian Federation // President of the Russian Federation. April 28, 2025. URL: <http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/76805> (in Russ.).

2021 have been accomplished. Among other things, the “10 x 20” project for the development of the periphery is now being successfully implemented, where not only local industry and grain storage facilities, but also modern hospitals are being built in the district centers. There is reason to believe that this is facilitated by cooperation with Russia, including in the medical sphere.

Based on these facts, there are even *bold judgments* that the DPRK’s star is now rising on the Korean Peninsula, which is successfully emerging from the economic crisis and geopolitical isolation, while South Korea has entered a period of serious crisis turbulence.

In military and political terms, the Korean Peninsula is teetering on the brink of conflict, the likelihood of which has increased during the administrations of Joe Biden in the United States and Yoon Suk Yeol in the Republic of Korea (ROK). The strategic goals of the governments of both of the above-mentioned countries have been de facto aimed at the liquidation of the DPRK. Among other things, the strategy of *Korean unification* announced by Yoon Suk Yeol openly denies the DPRK the right to exist, which is an amazing example of non-recognition of the realities in the form of the existence of two Korean states, members of the UN.

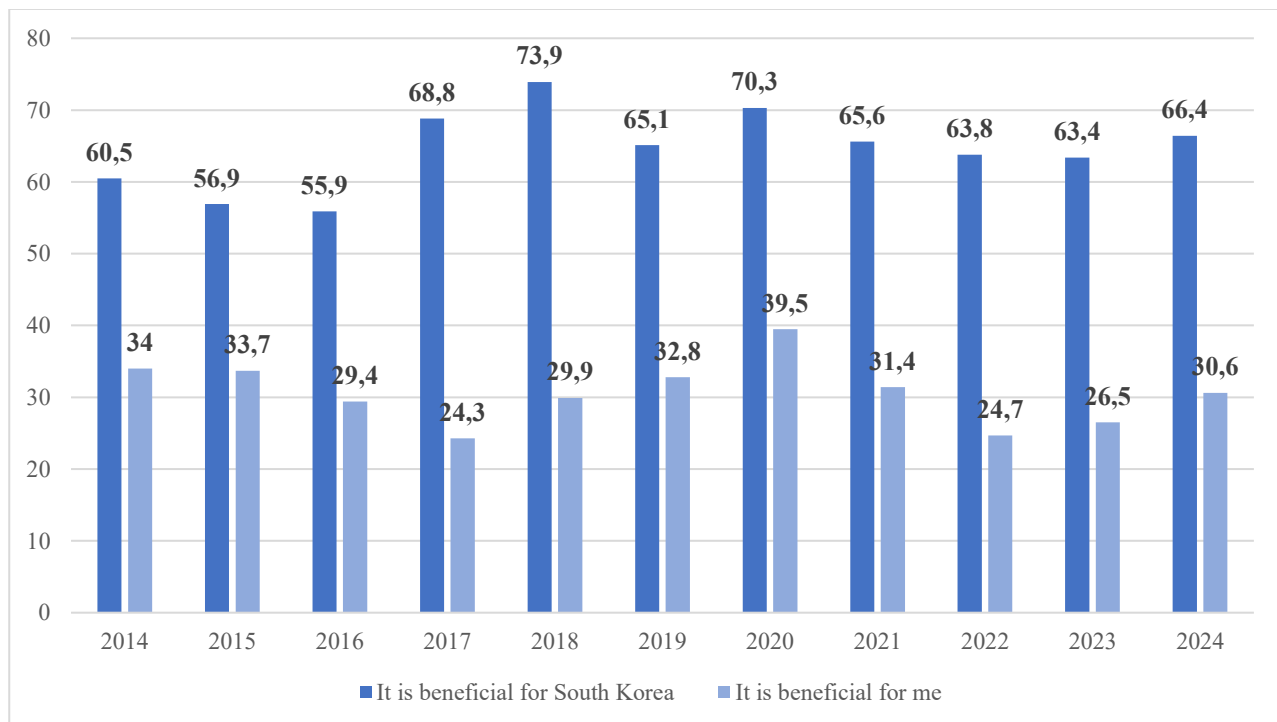


Figure 43. Opinions on the perceived benefits of unification with North Korea among South Koreans from 2014 to 2024 (Face-to-face interview, 2000 respondents), %

Source: Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/708152/south-korea-expectation-on-benefit-from-korean-reunification/>)

In this context, both Pyongyang’s choice in recent years to strengthen its national defense capabilities, including its nuclear missile component, and Moscow’s conclusion that under the current circumstances the ideas and attempts to restore the negotiation processes based on the principles of denuclearization of the DPRK have lost their relevance and realism become more understandable.

It is well-known, the fundamental permanent basis of Russia’s policy towards the Korean Peninsula is the approach, the essence of which is as follows. Korea is Russia’s neighbour, and each of the

Korean states represents its own special, unique, but extremely important value for Moscow. Therefore, the course aimed at careful attitude and cultivation of good-neighbourly, friendly relations with both Korean states correspond to the fundamental national interests of Russia.

These strategic attitudes remain vital today. At the same time, naturally, the events of world politics in recent years, which arose in connection with the military conflict in Ukraine, predetermined a serious transformation of both Russian-North Korean and Russian-South Korean relations.

Russia was forced to launch SMO in Ukraine on February 24, 2022 in response to the long-term expansion of the NATO bloc to the East, which ignored numerous appeals, proposals and warnings from Moscow, brought its military infrastructure close to Russia's borders, began to actively develop the territory of Ukraine militarily and decided to use the Kiev regime as the main tool for inflicting a "strategic defeat" on Russia.

The DPRK and the Republic of Korea reacted to this epoch-making event in diametrically opposite ways. Pyongyang fully shared and supported the Russian assessments of the causes of the conflict, as well as the motives for actions conditioned by the protection of national sovereignty and security. Seoul, bound by allied obligations with the United States, supported Washington's position, seeking to present Russia's actions as allegedly *unprovoked aggression* in order to "restore the Russian empire," etc., and joined the anti-Russian sanctions of the West.

Naturally, these new realities have profoundly affected Moscow's policy towards both Pyongyang and Seoul.

Russian-North Korean Relations

From the very beginning of SMO to this day, the DPRK has taken a position of resolute, firm support for Russia's actions both at the level of political and international rhetoric and at the level of practical actions. A fundamentally important action of the DPRK was the vote in solidarity with Moscow on the anti-Russian resolution at the UN General Assembly, adopted on March 2, 2022, February 23, 2023 and further on Ukraine. Pyongyang has voted against this resolution every time.

The DPRK media periodically and in detail, from an objective position of full solidarity with Russia, truthfully covered the course of its war, the reasons for its beginning, including the factors that forced Moscow to make such a difficult decision, etc. In this context, it is advisable to highlight a detailed article by the well-known political scientist Kim Myong-chol, dedicated to the anniversary of the beginning of the SMO and a detailed analysis of the events that occurred during this period. The Korean expert focused readers' attention, among other things, on the following theses: "The policy of *Eastward expansion* of NATO, which is pursued by the United States and the West, is aimed at accelerating the encirclement of Russia, the successor of the USSR, by an *enemy ring* and, ultimately, at splitting and weakening Russia, at its eternal destruction – this is already a clear fact. ... The policy of hegemony of the United States and the West ... forced Russia to take preventive military action to eliminate the military threat to its country from the outside."³¹².

³¹² Kim Myung Chol. What the current situation in Ukraine shows // KCNA. February 23, 2023. URL: <http://www.kcna.kp/kp/article/q/671327b553252807403a3440e35d4028.kcmsf>

One of the culminating manifestations of categorical support and solidarity with Russia was the statement of Kim Yo Jong, Kim Jong Un's sister, on January 27, 2023, filled with powerful energy and imagery, in which it was emphasized that "we are in the same trench" with Russia.

In this statement, it was emphasized: "I express serious concern and strongly condemn the actions of the United States, which are escalating the military situation by transferring military offensive equipment to Ukraine, including its main tank. ... I have no doubt that any military equipment that the United States and the West are proud of will burn down and become a *pile of iron* in front of the indestructible *fighting spirit* and power of the heroic Russian army and people. No matter how desperate the allied imperialist forces may be, they will never break the heroic spirit of the Russian army and people with high patriotism, fortitude and strong spirit. We will always stand in the same trench on the battlefield with the Russian army and people who are fighting for the dignity and honor of the country, its sovereignty and security."³¹³.

The DPRK has taken not only statements, but also practical steps to support Russia. In July 2022, the DPRK established official diplomatic relations with the Donetsk and Lugansk People's Republics (DPR and LPR). Thus, the DPRK became the fifth country to recognize the DPR and the LPR after South Ossetia, the Russian Federation, Abkhazia and Syria. At the same time, Kiev, as expected, broke off diplomatic relations with the DPRK in response³¹⁴.

Moreover, the DPRK's political organizations have resolutely engaged in a *fierce polemic* with representatives of the West, including the EU, on this issue. Pyongyang noted "due to the fact that our country recognized the independence of the DPR and the LPR, on July 20, the EU representative found fault with us, ranting that this was a "violation of international rights" and "a hostile act against sovereignty and territorial integrity. ... The EU should not pry into its own business, condemning the use of sovereignty by other countries, but should first of all learn how to treat all issues fairly in accordance with the UN Charter, the principle of which is respect for sovereignty, sovereign equality and non-interference in internal affairs, and international law."³¹⁵.

Then another important event took place both on the way to further strengthen friendly relations between the Russian Federation and the DPRK, and in the process of consistent implementation of the North Korean line to support its own. On October 4, 2022, Pyongyang officially supported the results of referendums in the DPR, LPR, Zaporozhye and Kherson regions on joining Russia and recognized the legality of their very fact of becoming part of the Russian Federation³¹⁶.

Explaining this decision of his government, the head of the Department of International Organizations of the DPRK Foreign Ministry, Cho Chol Su, stressed: "We respect the will of the residents who

³¹³ Statement by Kim Yo Jong, Vice Chairman of the Department of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea // KCNA. January 27, 2023. URL: <http://www.kcna.kp/kp/article/q/5d8e1c0cbb0d7d5830c453c815fd28f4.kcmsf>

³¹⁴ The DPRK became the fifth country to recognize the DNR and LNR // TASS. July 13, 2022. URL: <https://tass.ru/mezhdunarodnaya-panorama/15207891> (in Russ.).

³¹⁵ Press statement by Cho Chol Su, head of the DPRK Foreign Ministry's Department of International Organizations // KCNA. October 4, 2022. URL: <http://www.kcna.kp/kp/article/q/4a0d9f84e39656021be7603d93d75fe4.kcmsf>

³¹⁶ North Korea recognized the results of the referendums in Donbass, Zaporozhye and Kherson // Rambler. October 4, 2022. URL: <https://news.rambler.ru/world/49452235-severnaya-koreya-priznala-rezultaty-referendumov-v-donbasse-zaporozhe-i-hersone/> (in Russ.).

wanted to reunite with Russia, and support the position of the Russian government on making these regions part of the country.” He also highlighted the fact that “Referendums were held in accordance with the UN Charter, which enshrines the principles of equal rights of people and their right to self-determination, in accordance with legitimate procedures that allowed reflecting the will of the inhabitants of two republics and two regions,”³¹⁷ and the overwhelming majority of voting participants supported joining Russia.

By taking such a bold step, the DPRK became the first state in the world to recognize the legitimacy of both plebiscites in the four above-mentioned subjects and the legislative registration of their entry into the state structure of the Russian Federation³¹⁸.

Moscow and Pyongyang’s common understanding of the specifics of today’s international relations, challenges and threats to their own national interests, first of all, the nature of the policy of the US administration of J. Biden, aimed ultimately at eliminating both Russia and the DPRK in their current form, logically and expectedly led the two states to a higher level of cooperation.

This was reflected in the signing of the bilateral Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between Russia and DPRK on June 19, 2024, which created a legitimate legal basis for further expansion of cooperation in all areas, and quickly confirmed its effectiveness, the fact that it is not just a “piece of paper” and a really valid working document. The manifestations of a new phase of rapprochement between Moscow and Pyongyang after the signing of this treaty are numerous.

This is also Moscow’s more resolute support for Pyongyang’s actions to ensure its own security on the Korean Peninsula, expressed in clear unambiguous formulations by the leadership of the Russian Foreign Ministry. In this regard, it is enough to mention the relevant statements of Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov and his deputy Andrei Rudenko.

On September 26, 2024, Sergey Lavrov emphasized the following: “We fully take into account and rely on new realities in the current international situation in the field of global and regional security, including in the nuclear dimension. We understand the principled position of our Korean friends that the nuclear missile shield and other self-defense measures are the basis for ensuring our own independence and security. The United States, with the support of its allies, is aggressively dragging elements of the military-strategic infrastructure into the region and actively using systems related to nuclear weapons carriers there, practicing together with the Republic of Korea and Japan in increasingly provocative and destabilizing schemes of the so-called *expanded nuclear deterrence*. It has come to the point that the US-South Korean alliance is already openly called, by analogy with NATO, the “nuclear alliance”, which is clearly on the way to becoming a triple bloc with the participation of Japan, which has defiantly embarked on a course of remilitarization. This is a real

³¹⁷ DPRK has officially recognized the DNR and LNR // KCNA. July 14, 2022. URL: <http://www.kcna.kp/ru/article/q/970eb63f8c98ea8643ac5d1d65d76aa7abafa3e78868f11ddff588f5d7f6ef24f64079380e866f8e76b656cddde82b3719399f72ddca9ea05508eeb7be2d699e.kcmsf>

³¹⁸ Press statement by Cho Chol Su, head of the DPRK Foreign Ministry’s Department of International Organizations // KCNA. October 4, 2022. URL: <http://www.kcna.kp/kp/article/q/4a0d9f84e39656021be7603d93d75fe4.kcmsf>

and extremely serious threat to regional security. Under these conditions, even the term “denuclearization” in relation to the DPRK has lost all meaning. This issue is closed to us”³¹⁹.

Missile Name	Type	Range, km	Payload, kg	Status
KN-01	ASCM	110-160	500	Operational
Kumsong-3 (KN-19)	ASCM	130-250	145	Likely operational
Hwasong-13	ICBM	5 500 – 11 500	Unknown	Never Deployed
Hwasong-14	ICBM	10 400	500	Operational
Hwasong-15	ICBM	8 500 – 13 000	Unknown	Likely operational
BM-25 Musudan	IRBM	2500 – 4000	500 – 1200	In Development
Hwasong-12	IRBM	4 500	500	In Development
Taepodong-1	IRBM	2 000 – 5 000	750	Obsolete
Hwasong 7 (Nodong 1)	MRBM	1200 – 1500	1 200	Operational
Hwasong-9	MRBM	800 – 1 000	500	Operational
Pukguksong-2 (KN-15)	MRBM	1200 – 2000	Unknown	Operational
Pukguksong-1 (KN-11)	SLBM	1 200	Unknown	In Development
Pukguksong-3 (KN-26)	SLBM	1 900	Unknown	Operational
Taepodong-2 (Unha-3)	SLV	4 000 – 10 000	1 000 – 1 500	Operational
Hwasong-5	SRBM	300	985	Operational
Hwasong-6	SRBM	500	700 – 770	Operational
KN-02 (Toksa)	SRBM	120 – 170	250 – 485	Operational
KN-18 (Scud MaRV)	SRBM	450	Unknown	Likely operational
KN-23	SRBM	450	500	Unknown
KN-24	SRBM	410	400 – 500	Likely operational
KN-25	SRBM	380	Unknown	Operational

Table 3. List of DPRK missiles (as for the 2025)

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Characterizing the essence of the signed document, Andrey Rudenko highlighted the following: “The Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty between Russia and the DPRK is designed to play a stabilizing role in Northeast Asia, it will make a positive contribution to maintaining the balance of power in the region based on the principle of indivisibility of security, reducing the risk of a recurrence of war on the Korean Peninsula, including with the use of nuclear weapons, and generally lays the foundation for the construction of a new Eurasian security system”, ... “Article 4 of the

³¹⁹ North Korea recognized the results of the referendums in Donbass, Zaporozhye and Kherson // *Rambler*. October 4, 2022. URL: <https://news.rambler.ru/world/49452235-severnaya-koreya-priznala-rezultaty-referendumov-v-donbasse-zaporozhe-i-herson/> (in Russ.).

document is of particular importance, providing for the provision of mutual military assistance in accordance with Article 51 of the UN Charter and in accordance with the laws of the Russian Federation and the DPRK in the event that one of the parties is subjected to an armed attack by any state, finding itself in a state of war,” he said. “Thus, the content of the mentioned article clearly indicates that the treaty is defensive in nature, is not directed against the security of third countries, and is aimed at maintaining stability in the Northeast Asia region.”³²⁰.

Based on the legal basis of the treaty, Pyongyang has also begun to provide more resolute and diverse assistance to Russia. In recent days, the media of the West and South Korea have been writing a lot about the fact that the DPRK sent not only ammunition to Russia, but also its soldiers.

In this regard, Russian President Vladimir Putin spoke clearly and frankly. In particular, “The Head of State noted that the provision of military assistance is discussed in the fourth article of the document. “There is a fourth article. What we will do with this article is still a question. We are in contact with our North Korean friends. And when something needs to be decided, we will certainly decide, our friends from the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea have a corresponding position,” Putin said. “But I want to say that this is our sovereign decision: we will apply something, we will not, where, how, whether we need it or whether we will be engaged, for example, only in conducting some exercises, preparing, transferring some experience – this is our business.”³²¹.

This alliance agreement is inherently similar to those treaties that the United States has long concluded with many countries, including the Republic of Korea, and on the basis of which they permanently deploy their own troops and military bases in them. The Russian leadership has repeatedly explained the purpose and objectives of the said agreement with the DPRK.

Russian-South Korean Relations

At the moment of the geopolitical fracture, Seoul, like all US allies, Seoul, as expected, immediately joined the course of the *senior partner*, including the anti-Russian sanctions regime. Russia has included the ROK in the list of “unfriendly states” as a response. At the same time, Moscow noted that South Korea does not seek to become at the forefront of Western sanctions policy, that the degree of its participation in anti-Russian actions is more moderate compared to many other US allies, and Russophobia does not spread in the country.

It seems to us that the goal of the Foreign Ministries of both countries is pragmatic tasks to preserve the maximum possible in the field of our mutually beneficial cooperation. As part of this goal, Moscow’s urgent task was to try to keep Seoul from directly supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine, to which Washington began to harshly urge all its allies. Until recently, such a line was more or less maintained by the leadership of the Republic of Korea, and in response to numerous requests from Ukraine for the supply of numerous types of weapons and pressure from Washington, the response to this request was sustained by South Korea in the spirit that the Republic of Korea, for humanitarian

³²⁰ Response of the Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation S.V. Lavrov to a question from the Russia Today news agency // MFA of the Russian Federation. September 26, 2024. URL: https://mid.ru/ru/foreign_policy/news/1971804/ (in Russ.).

³²¹ Rudenko says relations with DPRK have reached a qualitatively new level // TASS. October 24, 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/22211493> (in Russ.).

reasons, is ready to provide Ukraine with only non-combat weapons and means of protection, such as helmets and bulletproof vests, but supplies of combat, especially offensive weapons are excluded.

Naturally, there is an understanding in these calculations by Seoul that if South Korea were to be careless in terms of military cooperation with Ukraine, this would provide Russia not only with a reason, but also a direct basis for revising the current restrained approach to the issue of modern arms supplies to the DPRK.

As a result, Moscow even formed an informal definition that South Korea has now become the “friendliest among unfriendly” states for Russia.

However, the realities of allied relations with the United States and the logic of behavior within the framework of this model often force Seoul to take certain steps that it may be would prefer not to take. One of such important events was the first-ever trilateral summit of the United States, Japan and South Korea held at Camp David on August 18, 2023, which resulted in a profound transformation of the trilateral association, which previously did not go beyond the amorphous term “coalition structure”, into an almost full-fledged military-political security pact. As a result, both Far Eastern allies of the White House made serious concessions to Washington, which could complicate their relations with Russia. This also applies to South Korea.

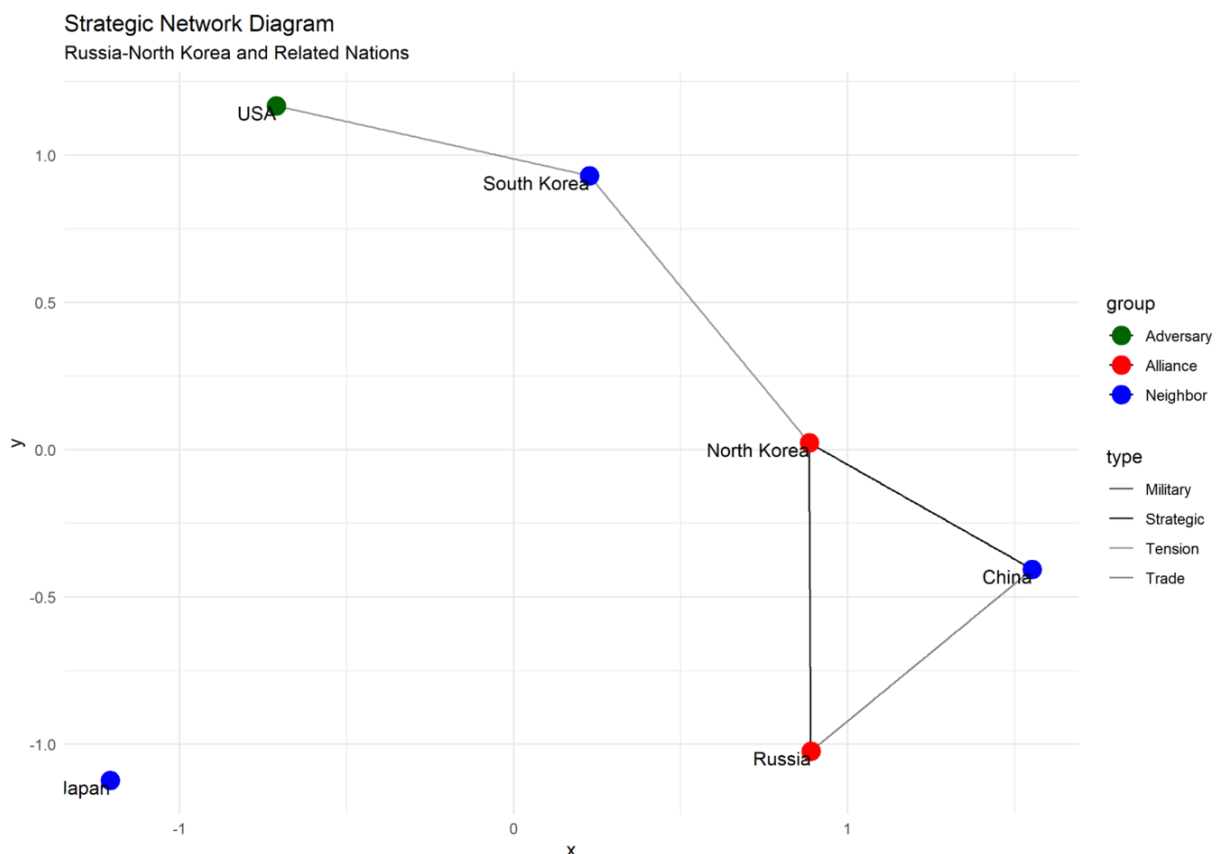


Figure 44. Strategic network diagram of Russia-North Korea and Related Nations

Source: Hassan Jubair, Mithela Mehenaz. Russia-North Korea Strategic Alliance., p.4

Moscow has repeatedly demonstrated restraint in its reaction to Seoul’s accession to anti-Russian sanctions, commitment to dialogue and maintaining positive bilateral relations with the Republic of

Korea. This approach is still fully maintained today. At the same time, Moscow proceeds from the understanding that if we believe the statements of the South Korean partners that they do not supply lethal weapons to Ukraine, then they should also take our word for it that we comply with UN Security Council resolutions.

The events of recent weeks, the progress of cooperation between the Russian Federation and the DPRK, of course, have formulated new questions for Seoul. The future of Russian-South Korean relations largely depends on what response the leadership of the Republic of Korea chooses to new challenges.

In this regard, we consider it necessary to emphasize that today a fundamentally important integral feature and component of Russian policy towards the Korean Peninsula and, specifically, the Republic of Korea is its *non-confrontational nature*, the desire to maintain in relations with Seoul that, although currently low, but an important level of interaction and cooperation, which is still maintained.

The strategic goal of this approach is to use the preserved segments of bilateral cooperation, primarily in the humanitarian field today, as a foundation for restoring a full-fledged volume of bilateral cooperation after the end of the conflict in Ukraine. It is precisely this important task that Vassily Nebenzia, Russia's Permanent Representative to the United Nations, pointed out with all frankness in his speech to the UN Security Council on October 30, 2024.

At first, he gave a vivid description of the unfair actions of the West, led by the United States. "I want to ask one very simple question: even if we imagine that all that our Western colleagues claim about military cooperation between Russia and the DPRK would suddenly turn out to be true, why are the United States and its allies trying to impose rotten logic on the whole world that they have the right to help the Zelensky regime by mobilizing the entire the military and intelligence potential of NATO, and Russia's allies do not have the right to do this? Where, ladies and gentlemen, do you get this neocolonial sense of your own exclusivity and impunity and an unfounded belief that what you can do is not allowed to others?"

But then Amb. Vasily Nebenzia directly addressed the representative of the Republic of Korea to the UN with the following words. "I think it's no secret that the Western accomplices of the Zelensky regime have been trying for more than two years to persuade the leadership of the Republic of Korea to more active military-technical cooperation with the Kiev regime, to encourage it to supply it with highly demanded lethal weapons. Here, the anti-Pyongyang "hype" to Washington, London and Brussels is just very useful, because the Kiev regime has almost completely "sucked out" their own reserves.

We hope that our South Korean colleagues will have the wisdom not to fall for this trick. In any case, I can assure you that, despite the current difficult period, we strive to preserve the prerequisites for the resumption of traditionally good-neighbourly relations between Moscow and Seoul and appreciate your restraint. Public opinion polls in your country are also optimistic, which show that

the overwhelming majority of the population does not want the Republic of Korea to be involved in the Ukrainian conflict.”³²².

In the framework of this topic, it is appropriate to note a number of assessments expressed in an interview on April 2, 2025 by the Russian Ambassador to the ROK Georgy Zinoviev: It is also important that the Republic of Korea refrained from supplying lethal weapons to Ukraine. Those Western countries that are actively pumping arms into Ukraine have spoiled relations with Russia for many years to come.

The Russian Ambassador emphasized the importance of the task of restoring direct bilateral dialogue. We are now communicating constructively enough with the Korean side both through our Embassy in Seoul and through my colleagues, the Embassy of the Republic of Korea in Moscow.

As you know, the South Korean Ambassador to Moscow, Mr. Lee Do-hoon (now the former one), may be the only one among representatives of “unfriendly states” who has not been restricted in his ability to meet both in the Russian Foreign Ministry and in other agencies officials, to travel around the country, and he has recently visited Tyumen city and Murmansk, among other places.

Unfortunately, other channels of communication, such as the work of the Intergovernmental Commission and the Interregional Cooperation Forum (ICF), which we used to hold earlier, as well as inter-parliamentary contacts now remain frozen. The restoration of a full-fledged dialog would contribute to solving the existing problems. In addition, I would like to see the direct air service between our countries resumed as soon as possible.

As for our relations with the DPRK. I know that our partners in the Republic of Korea and I have diametrically opposed views on this matter. Russia always emphasizes that our co-operation with the Democratic People’s Republic of Korea is consistent with the norms of international law and is not directed against the security of the Republic of Korea. Moreover, it contributes to strengthening peace and stability on the Korean Peninsula and does not, as we believe, contradict the interests of the Republic of Korea. I would like to draw your attention to the fact that Pyongyang is showing great restraint against the background of both the well-known domestic political developments in the ROK and the recent large-scale Freedom Shield maneuvers with the United States. We urge you to change your perspective and see our engagement with the DPRK not as a crisis and threat, but as an opportunity³²³.

With the coming to power in the Republic of Korea in June 2025 of the new President Lee Jae-myung, who relies on "progressive" democratic forces, there are additional hopes for a gradual improvement in our bilateral relations. However, his first steps in the presidency did not strengthen such hopes. Russia was not on the list of the most important countries for the Republic of Korea, to which he made phone calls immediately after the inauguration, where he then sent his special representatives.

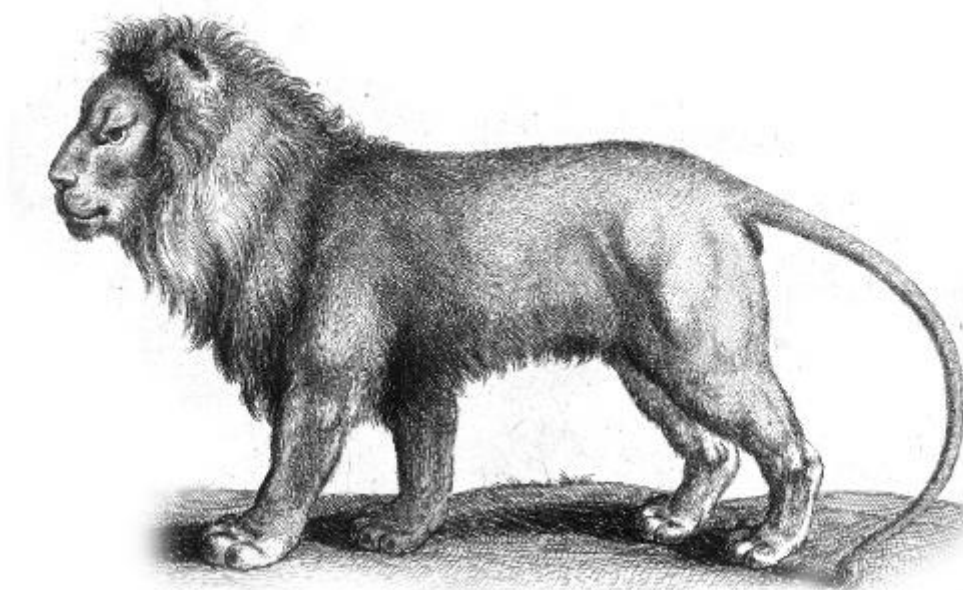
³²² Putin commented on the article of the Russian-DPRK treaty on military assistance // *TASS*. October 25, 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/22226531> (in Russ.).

³²³ Statement by Permanent Representative Vassily Nebenzia at UNSC Briefing on Ukraine // United Nations. October 30, 2024. URL: https://russiaun.ru/en/news/nebenzia_unsc_ukraine_301024

Against this background, it is encouraging news that Seoul has sent an invitation to Russia to participate in the APEC summit in Gyeongju in October 2025, and a number of Russian officials have already participated in a number of working meetings in preparation for the summit in August, 2025³²⁴. It is thought that this important platform will provide solutions to bring our bilateral cooperation onto a positive development trend.

³²⁴ South Korea invited Putin to the APEC summit in Gyeongju // TASS. August 15, 2025. URL: <https://tass.ru/politika/24790209> (*in Russ.*).

PART III.
FEATURING:
RUSSIA – AFRICA



CHAPTER 13.

“IN THE RHYTHM OF HIGH-TECH”: DEVELOPMENT OF ADVANCED TECHNOLOGIES IN AFRICA AND THE ROLE OF RUSSIA

Leonid Tsukanov

African nations' place in the international relations system is evolving. The area is increasingly seen as a quickly growing market for advanced technologies – although a couple of decades ago it was associated mainly with instability and geopolitical conflicts. Experts have been discussing the “New Africa” since the 2000s, and it is slowly *taking shape* and “declaring its rights” to a portion of the high-tech market. In light of this, it is critical to evaluate the present standing of African nations in the high-tech industry as well as the potential contribution of Russia to the region's continuous change.

Three high-tech categories are proposed to be examined in this article: “cybersecurity and emerging technologies” (with a focus on the development of cyber incident response systems, the financial technology sector, and the artificial intelligence (AI) market as the fastest growing industries), “space research” and “biotechnology”. In addition to being of the utmost interest to their African counterparts, the listed groups are also the subject of fierce competition between Russia and other superpowers, necessitating continual monitoring.

It is also needed to track the dynamics of the development of the high-tech market in Africa and record its transformations – at least in “broad strokes”.

Cybersecurity and Emerging Technologies: Quickly but Out of Sync

As the world becomes absolutely digital, African states are increasingly focusing on developing national capabilities in the areas of international information and cyber security. Due in major part to the development of mobile infrastructure, Internet penetration in Africa has dramatically increased over the past ten years. This growth in connectivity has, in turn, positioned Africa as an emerging market for ICT-actors, including cloud service providers, telcos, and equipment vendors.

In terms of digital security, Mauritius and Egypt are the leading powers in the region (who reached the stage of *absolute cyber readiness* to early 2025)³²⁵. Their high positions are explained by its systematic efforts to develop a national legal framework for digital security, as well as its focus on public-private partnerships and international cooperation. In addition, the top ten cyber powers in Africa include Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda, Morocco, Zambia, Benin and Togo³²⁶.

Overall, the vast majority of African countries have increased their information and cybersecurity capabilities in the last few years. Some of them have done so quite significantly. For example, Togo has shown *sprinting pace*, with its overall cyber readiness score increasing more than 2.5 times (from

³²⁵Global Cybersecurity Index (GCI) 2024 // ITU. URL: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/GCIv5/2401416_1b_Global-Cybersecurity-Index-E.pdf

³²⁶ Ibid.

33.18 to 88.8 points), Ethiopia (2.8 times), Eswatini (4.4 times), the DRC (10.6 times), and Equatorial Guinea (17.5 times).

Only two African states showed a weakening of their indicators: Guinea-Bissau (from 9.72 points in 2021 to 6.63 in 2025) and Nigeria (from 84.76 points in 2021 to 82.4 in 2025)³²⁷. In both cases, this was due to the authorities' reduced attention to the development of a specialized legislative framework and its adaptation to new digital challenges.

³²⁷ Ibid.

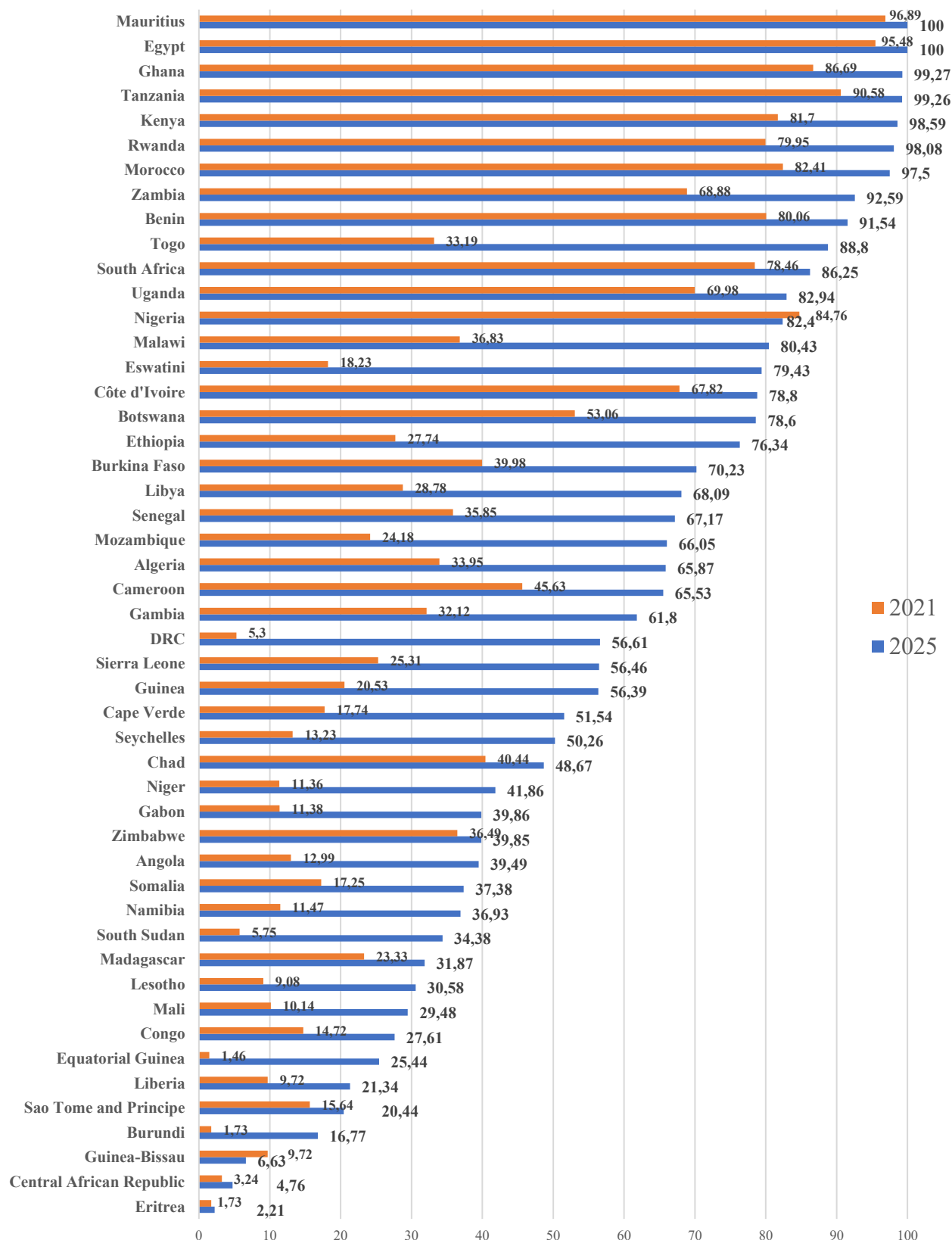


Figure 45. Positions of African states in the cyber readiness rating (maximum score – 100)

Based on: GCI-2020, GCI-2024.

https://www.itu.int/dms_pub/itu-d/opb/str/D-STR-GCI.01-2021-PDF-E.pdf

https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/GCIv5/2401416_1b_Global-Cybersecurity-Index-E.pdf

At the same time, even taking into account the noticeable technological breakthrough, the region lags behind both European and Asian competitors. Thus, according to estimates by the International Telecommunication Union (ITU), only seven African countries³²⁸ are included in the group of *Role-Modeling* players whose aggregate cyber readiness indicators have reached the maximum value or are close to it³²⁹. At the same time, about 60% of the countries in the region still occupy the “middle” position (that is, they have a well-built national cybersecurity system and are able to cope with the main challenges from the digital space, but do not anticipate the risks).

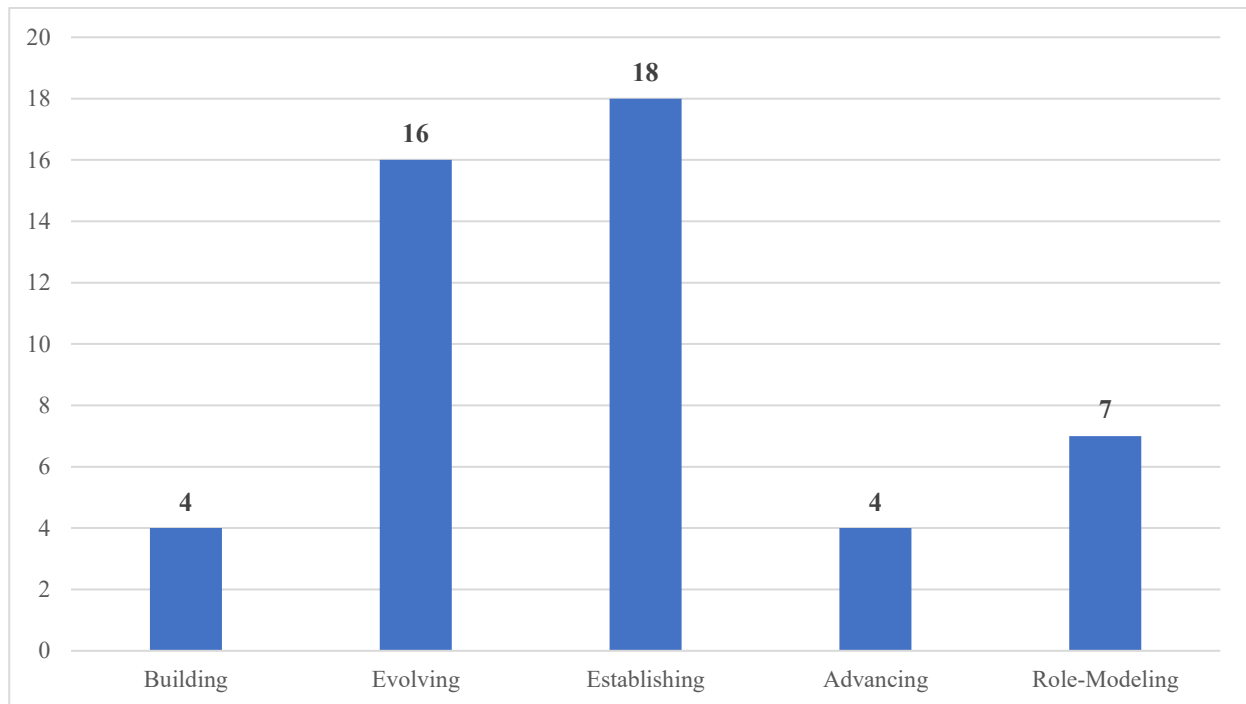


Figure 46. Number of African countries by cybersecurity capabilities level (tier-based model), as of 2025

Based on: ITU (https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/GCIv5/2401416_1b_Global-Cybersecurity-Index-E.pdf).

A common problem for most African countries in matters of developing digital projects remains the poor adaptation of the legislative framework to the rapidly changing realities of the digital world. In addition, the vast majority of regional players do not have a long-term strategy for developing competencies in the field of information states, and the powers between the responsible institutions within the states is unevenly distributed: duplication of functionality and bureaucratization of the system remains a common occurrence.

At the same time, it is inappropriate to think that the digital sector of Africa is in a stagnant state: the presence of acute problems encourages national governments to forcefully strengthen its most sensitive components. Thus, in 70% of the countries in the region, a legislative basis for the protection of personal data has been formed; another 10% of countries are actively working in this industry. In addition, every second state in Africa has created Computer Emergency Response Teams (*CERTs*) – in a number of countries, there are also private and industry monitoring groups³³⁰.

³²⁸Taking into account Egypt and Morocco, which are included in the group of Arab countries by the ITU.

³²⁹ For comparison: ITU experts classify 20 European countries and 11 countries in the Asia-Pacific region as belonging to the “Role-Modeling” group.

³³⁰ AfricaCERT. URL: <https://www.africacert.org/african-csirts/>

It is also important to mention the consolidating role of regional organizations – first and foremost, the African Union, on the basis of which modular projects and recommendations are being elaborated for the development of national competencies in the field of cybersecurity, and measures are being taken to improve the qualifications of decision-makers in the digital sector.

African countries are showing an increased interest in the FinTech industry. This area is significantly ahead of other technological sectors of the continent's economy in terms of development. As of the middle of 2025, Africa is “home” to over 500 FinTech startups, half of which were created between 2019 and 2025. The most popular areas in the region are payment processing and e-wallets, alternative lending tools, and various wealth management solutions.

The financial technology market of Africa *relies* on three countries – Nigeria, Kenya and South Africa: they have the largest number of startups. Senegal and Tanzania are also demonstrating success in developing specialized solutions. Other regional players prefer to purchase ready-made products. The largest investors in the African fintech market are American and Chinese companies.

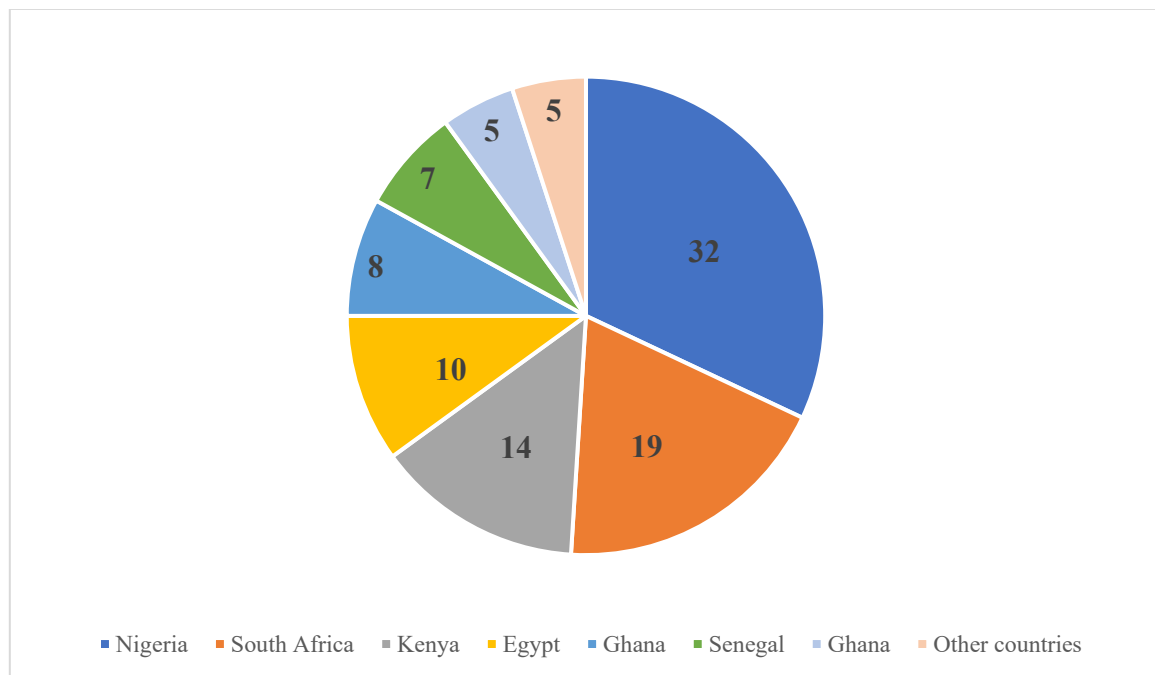


Figure 47. Share of national startups in the African FinTech-market (African companies only), as of 2025, %
Completed by the author based on open sources.

Dwell separately on the artificial intelligence sector. As recent measurements by *Google* and *Ipsos* show, African countries are more loyal to “AI expansion” (compared to representatives of EU or Asian countries – including those that surpass African players in terms of scientific and technological development), positioning them as a tool for accelerating national economies and optimizing production processes³³¹.

³³¹Our life with AI: The reality of today and the promise of tomorrow // *Google Reports*. URL: https://static.googleusercontent.com/media/publicpolicy.google/en//resources/our_life_with_ai_google_ipsos_report.pdf

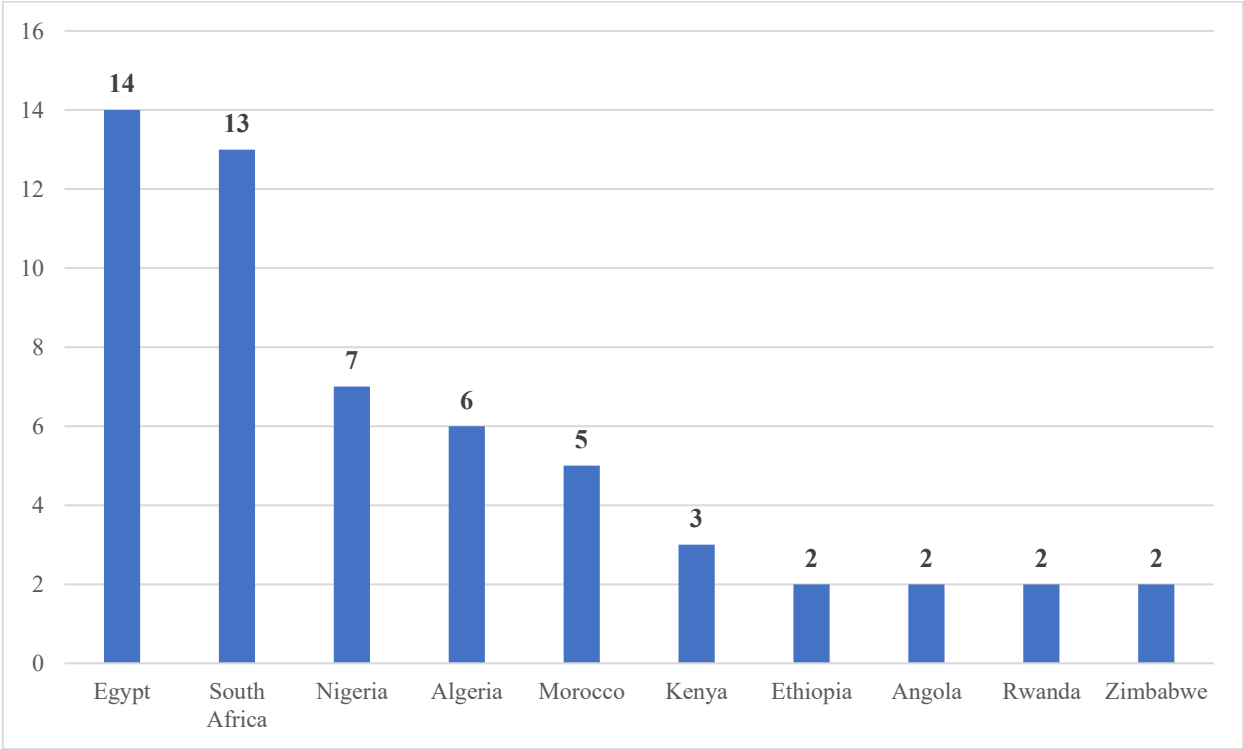
At the same time, the real level of readiness of the states of Africa to implement new technologies – in terms of the adaptation of national institutions and the regulatory framework – still leaves much to be desired. Thus, as of mid-2025, no more than 25% of the countries in the region can boast of the readiness of national legislation for the “AI revolution”, no more than 20% of the countries have specialized long-term development strategies; only a few regional players (South Africa, Nigeria, Egypt and Kenya) are ready to systematically export their own technical solutions to the global market³³².

Space Research: *Small Steps* Tactics

African countries are striving to join the exploration of outer space on an equal basis with other powers. Since the first launch of the first African satellite (*Nilesat-101*, Egypt, 1998), more than \$4.7 billion has been spent on space projects in Africa, and this amount is growing in arithmetic progression from year to year.

There are 22 national space agencies operating on the Continent, most of which are concentrated on developing satellite projects: this sector is the main focus of efforts for the countries of the region. As of mid-2025, 67 satellites have already been launched from Africa. The leaders in terms of the number of launches are Egypt and South Africa – they account for up to 40% of all launched satellites.

It should be noted that the emphasis on the development of space programs (primarily satellite) in Africa is explained by the desire to improve food and climate security, as well as to solve problems in the telecommunications sector, ensuring more stable and high-quality communications and television and radio broadcasting.



³³² Concluded on the basis of an analysis of national approaches to the development of the AI sector in African countries (including the regulatory framework, institutional system, economic landscape, etc.).

Figure 48. Number of satellites launched by African countries (TOP 10, as of 2025)

Based on: Space Hubs Africa (<https://spacehubs.africa/regions>)

African countries are seeking to pool each other's scientific and technical potential to ensure more effective development of the space sector. Including under the auspices of regional integration platforms. The foundations of Africa's "continental" space agenda were laid back in early 2016. Then, at the 26th session of the Assembly of the African Union (AU), the "African Space Policy and Strategy" was adopted – the organization's supporting document and a *key benchmark* in the development of the space sector. The document emphasizes the importance of space for achieving sustainable development, emergency management, monitoring climate change and socio-economic growth. A year later, in 2017, the African Space Agency Act was adopted, establishing the legal framework for overseeing space activities.

The apogee of the development of space cooperation on the Continent was the establishment of the African Space Agency (AfSA), whose activities officially began in November 2025, involves 55 players (54 African countries and the unrecognized Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic, SADR)³³³, with Egypt playing the leading role. Cairo not only agreed to be one of the *pillars* of the overall space project, sharing scientific and technical developments with its neighbours, but also provided a platform for the creation of the agency. It is expected that in the coming years, AfSA will become a "link" in Africa's cooperation with Europe and other international partners.

Of course, despite the rapid development of local science and the deepening of interstate cooperation, the capabilities of African countries in the space sector are still limited. In the ranking of the competitiveness of national space programs, African players are noticeably behind both European and Asian competitors. Relatively high positions are occupied by Nigeria (23rd place), Egypt (27th place) and South Africa (33rd place)³³⁴. However, even they are rated by experts as no higher than the second level (out of seven possible)³³⁵. In this sense, regional players remain dependent on superpowers, which gives rise to a discussion among African alarmists about "space colonialism"³³⁶.

However, there is still a way out of the *technological trap* that pessimists talk about. For example, one of potential development drivers of the African space industry in the near future could be the so-called "NewSpace" – a system of private space agencies operating without being tied to government projects. According to the reports of the "Space Africa" project, there are already more than 300 space startups registered in the region (which is almost ten times more than five years ago³³⁷)³³⁸. However, their distribution is still uneven: more than 40% of specialized companies are registered in South

³³³ African Space Agency. URL: <https://africanspaceagency.org/>

³³⁴ Countries with Space Programs 2025 // World Population Review. URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-space-programs>

³³⁵ This category includes countries that are developing the space industry and participating in the satellite launch program. See: Countries with Space Programs 2025 // World Population Review. URL: <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-space-programs>

³³⁶ Africa can't stay out of the space race // Institute for Security Studies. May 7, 2021. URL: <https://issafrica.org/iss-today/africa-cant-stay-out-of-the-space-race>; Decolonization in the second space age // Danish Institute for International Studies. February 24, 2025. URL: <https://www.diiis.dk/en/research/decolonisation-in-the-second-space-age>

³³⁷ NewSpace Africa Industry Report (2019) // Space in Africa. URL: <https://africanews.space/newspace-africa-industry-report/>

³³⁸ NewSpace Africa Industry Report (2024) // Space in Africa. URL: <https://spaceinafrica.com/product/newspace-africa-report-2024/>

Africa and about 25% in Egypt, another 24% is the combined figure of Mauritius and Nigeria. Kenya is also showing interest in space startups, but at the moment only a couple specialized company has been created there³³⁹. The remaining African players so far prefer to invite foreign *NewSpace* companies rather than establish their own.

Biotechnology: a *Quiet Revolution*

The prospects for the development of the biotechnology market in Africa have traditionally served as a basis for discussions both in the academic community and among decision-makers. The prevailing opinion in the region at the moment is that it is especially important for African countries “not to be late” and to occupy their niche in the biotechnology industries in a timely manner – both to ensure national security (its food and epidemiological components) and the stability of the region as a whole³⁴⁰.

South Africa is a recognized regional trendsetter in the field of biotechnology. The country leads in the number of patented solutions in the field of advanced pharmaceuticals³⁴¹, and also allocates the largest funding for the development of medical programs, which is part of efforts to comprehensively restructure the national economy³⁴². The long-term strategy for expanding the biotech sector of the Republic provides for the concentration of forces and resources on the development of not only crop production and pharmaceuticals, but also the entire biomedical and biotechnological complex, including the creation of genetically modified products³⁴³. Certain qualitative growth has been demonstrated by Rwanda, Senegal and Ghana, which have consolidated their efforts in the field of vaccine and serum development.

The agricultural sector has traditionally been the focus of efforts for most African countries. It provides employment for more than 60% of the workforce and about 15–20% of the total national GDP of most African countries³⁴⁴. And given the rapid growth of the local population (with the prospect of crossing the mark of 2,5 billion people by 2050³⁴⁵), the focus on increasing the technology and efficiency of processes in the agro-industrial complex is acquiring strategic importance.

³³⁹Ibid.

³⁴⁰ See: L'Afrique ne peut pas se permettre de rater la révolution du gène // VivAfrik. February 5, 2019. URL: <https://vivafrik.com/2019/02/05/lafrigue-ne-peut-pas-se-permettre-de-rater-la-revolution-du-gene-a24301.html> (in French).

³⁴¹ Since 2007, South Africa has consistently accounted for at least 85% of biotech solutions patented on the African continent. See: Boitumelo S. Investment performance of the South African biotechnology industry and potential financing models // University of the Witwatersrand. URL: <https://wiredspace.wits.ac.za/items/136dc910-6c4c-4997-9ddc-0b00134317b2>

³⁴² In strategic planning documents, in particular, it is noted that the transition to an innovative vector of development is being carried out in modern South Africa in order to improve the standard and quality of life of the country's population (primarily the previously discriminated black majority) and to solve social problems. See: The Bio-Economy Strategy // Science and Technology Department (South Africa). September 10, 2014. URL: https://www.gov.za/sites/default/files/gcis_document/201409/bioeconomy-strategya.pdf

³⁴³Ibid.

³⁴⁴ Africa Agriculture Status Report (2025). URL: <https://agra.org/publications/africa-agriculture-status-report-aasr/>

³⁴⁵ By 2050, a quarter of the world's people will be African – this will shape our future // *the Guardian*. January 20, 2022. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/global-development/2022/jan/20/by-2050-a-quarter-of-the-worlds-people-will-be-african-this-will-shape-our-future>

Today, African farmers (especially *smallholders* who cultivate no more than two hectares of land) face rapidly depleting soils, unstable yields, and natural threats³⁴⁶. Given ongoing climate change, exacerbated by political and economic instability in parts of Africa, food security continues to decline. New hotbeds of tension are emerging.

Genetic modification (also known as GMO) can help mitigate some of the challenges in the agricultural sector and improve the efficiency of land cultivation. It allows modifying or adding genes that provide desired characteristics, such as resistance to pests or the ability to tolerate drought. GMO methods are faster and more reliable than any other main methods of traditional breeding, where the results can take several decades. In the context of the intense competition for crop yields, typical of Africa, genome editing is gradually turning from a *taboo topic* into a completely natural production process. Especially after the COVID-19 pandemic, which disrupted traditional production chains and brought a number of countries in the region to the *brink of famine*.

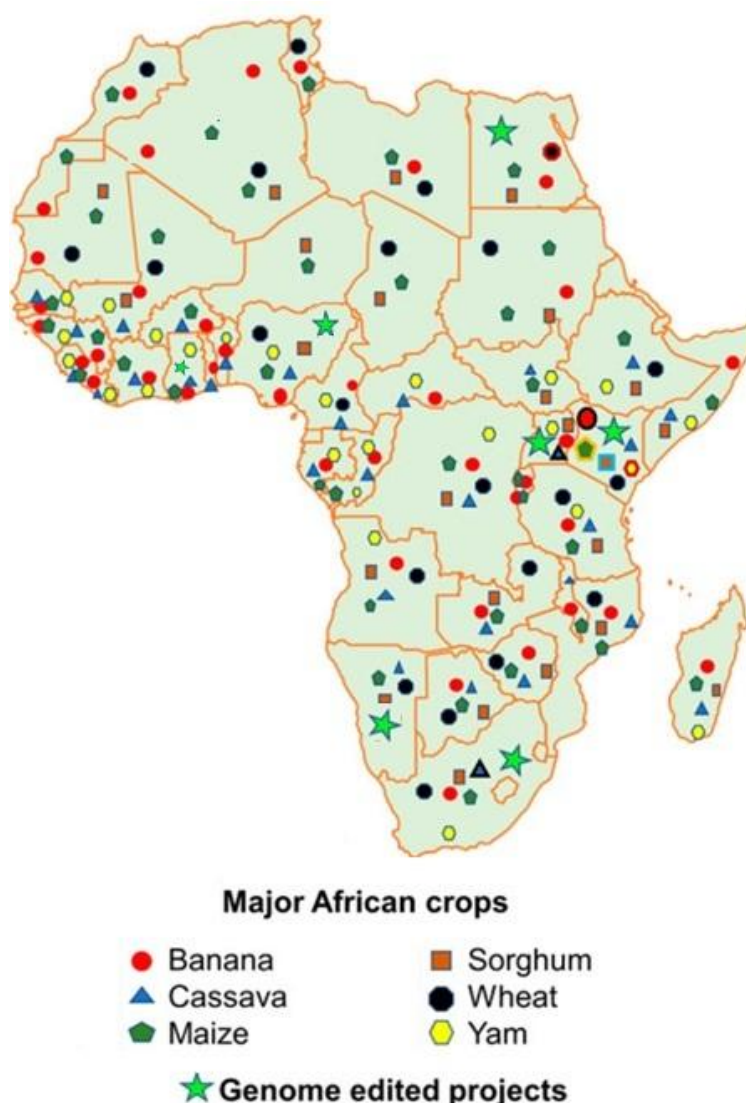
It is not surprising that some African countries that had previously criticized genetic engineering have changed their position and amended their national legislation accordingly. Nigeria was one of the first to take this step, allowing genome editing in 2022³⁴⁷. A few months later, Kenya (where the ban on the production and circulation of GMO products had been in effect for more than ten years) and Malawi took similar steps³⁴⁸. And in 2023, Ghana joined the group of *GMO-tolerant countries*³⁴⁹.

³⁴⁶Mahmoud M. Managing Threats to Food Security: Water and Agricultural Resilience in North Africa // Middle East Institute. May 27, 2025. URL: <https://www.mei.edu/publications/managing-threats-food-security-water-and-agricultural-resilience-north-africa>; Top 5 Challenges with Agriculture in Africa and How ThriveAgric is Tackling Them // ThriveAgric. February 5, 2024. URL: <https://thriveagric.com/resources/hectare/top-5-challenges-with-agriculture-in-africa-and-how-thrive-agric-is-tackling-them>

³⁴⁷CSOs commend Senate for considering bill that seeks to regulate GMOs in Nigeria // CAPPA. April 20, 2020. URL: <https://cappaafrica.org/2022/04/20/csos-commend-senate-for-considering-bill-that-seeks-to-regulate-gmos-in-nigeria/>

³⁴⁸Updates on Global Regulatory Landscape for Gene-Edited Crops // ISAA.Inc. January 24, 2024. URL: <https://www.isaaa.org/blog/entry/default.asp?BlogDate=1/24/2024>

³⁴⁹Ibid.



Map 11. Major African crops (including Genome edited projects), as of 2025

Based on: Genetic Literacy Project (<https://geneticliteracyproject.org/>), updated as of 2025

As of 2025, at least seven countries in Africa are conducting ongoing research in the field of genome editing, with *the palm of primacy* belonging to Nigeria, South Africa and Egypt. The most active *donor of* genome editing technologies for African partners is China, where the production of *modernized crops* is put on stream³⁵⁰.

At the same time, despite the noticeable qualitative transformations that have occurred in the biotech industry of Africa, the development of the market is still associated with significant risks: many investors do not show much interest in developing contacts with African biotech centers, fearing the impact of political and economic upheavals typical for the region. In addition, the biotech industry of African countries is experiencing an acute shortage of qualified personnel – a “brain drain” occurs both abroad and to African countries with a more developed medical technology market.

Different Backgrounds – Common Features

³⁵⁰China is embracing genetically modified crops. Africa, what are you waiting for? // Agricultural Economics Today. January 3, 2025. URL: <https://wandilesihlobo.com/2025/01/03/china-is-embracing-genetically-modified-crops-africa-what-are-you-waiting-for/>

As has been mentioned above several times, African countries have different starting positions in high-tech industries. This is due to both historical and political-economic reasons. In addition, each country in the region has its own unique *starting landscape*, which has laid down the specifics of the approach to the development of the high-tech sector, as well as the priorities of international cooperation in this area.

However, there is a number of factors that are common to all African countries without exception.

The first is a **focus on intensifying international cooperation**. African countries view interaction with external partners as a guarantee of achieving leadership in the technological race and strive to expand their “contact portfolio” as much as possible. Often trying to balance between competing forces (between Türkiye and France, India and China, the US and China, etc.) and receive dividends from both “camps”.

This factor also explains the inclination of African players to purchase ready-made (in some cases, partially ready-made) technological solutions instead of developing their own. This tendency is especially strong in the sectors of digital security and biotechnology, where the vast majority of African players are in a *catch-up position* and do not yet have sufficient scientific, technological and personnel reserves. Of course, some countries are making confident steps towards *technological independence*, challenging competitors at the global level (for example, South Africa in the field of biotechnology, Mauritius in the cybersecurity sector, Nigeria in the financial technology sector, etc.), but even they do not rely solely on their own developments. On the contrary, they see diversification of the “technological portfolio” as a measure necessary to strengthen national scientific and technical potential without compromising economic development³⁵¹.

Another common theme among African states is the **underlying fear of a new pandemic** similar to or worse than COVID-19. While the global pandemic has given the region’s tech market a major boost, it has also been a major *stress test* for African players, slowing economic growth and leading to the curtailment of a number of significant initiatives. Africa is trying to prepare for a new challenge of this kind in advance.

This fear is also projected onto the high-tech sector and is expressed, in particular, in the desire to integrate the maximum number of advanced technological solutions into production processes without their preliminary testing (which often leads to the use of interchangeable or mutually exclusive solutions within the same enterprise). This trend is especially noticeable in countries that have faced serious economic or socio-political risks during the pandemic (Egypt, Namibia, Morocco, Nigeria, etc.), but is also not alien to those who have ultimately passed the main threat.

Finally, all African players without exception are faced with **manifestations of neocolonialism**. Western *counterparts* are still inclined to perceive Africa as a field of struggle for influence and a sales market for new technologies; an arena of confrontation between Russia and the US, Europe and

³⁵¹ See: From digital dependence to digital sovereignty // T20 South Africa. September 5, 2025. URL: <https://t20southafrica.org/commentaries/from-digital-dependence-to-digital-sovereignty-south-africas-g20-opportunity-in-the-age-of-ai/>

Türkiye, the US and China. At best, as a junior partner. However, not as an equal player with its own interests and priorities³⁵². Asian players (India and China) are trying to broadcast an alternative approach³⁵³, but their generous offers, as a rule, hide *a double bottom*. This irritates Africans – especially the younger generation, who are striving to secure the right of the countries of the region to acquire technological sovereignty, and not its *surrogates*³⁵⁴.

A basic understanding of the above factors, which partly shape the outlook of African players on the high-tech market, is important when building contacts with the region and finding “initial points of contact” with promising partners.

Russia – Africa: Where is the *Window of Opportunity*?

Russia's approach to building relations with Africa has undergone significant changes in recent years. Since 2019, when the first “Russia-Africa” summit was held, the number of areas of interaction covered within the framework of the multilateral dialogue has gradually expanded³⁵⁵. The high-tech sector is no exception: Moscow is interested in increasing the export of its own solutions to African markets (especially in light of the ongoing foreign policy reorientation of the region's states).

The accelerated rapprochement is facilitated, among other things, by the fact that Moscow and the African powers have generally coinciding views on the global security landscape (including challenges related to the development of high-tech industries)³⁵⁶, and also largely converge in their assessments of the prospects for the transformation of the global economy. In addition, Russia supports the desire of the countries of the region to gain full technological sovereignty (without “neo-colonialist overtones”), which appeals to regional players striving for independence and equality with the *Old World*.

³⁵² Nicaise A. The Challenges of Combating Neocolonialism in Africa // *Valdai Discussion Club*. February 7, 2025. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-challenges-of-combating-neocolonialism/>

³⁵³ Thus, India (which positions itself as a power that suffered from colonialism in the past) in its dialogue with Africa is based on the “Kampala Principles” formulated by Prime Minister Modi in 2018. Their main element is Delhi’s public renunciation of “benefits in return” and its opposition to the “selfish donors” of the region (which, as a rule, mean China, the United States and European players). See: Prime Minister's address at Parliament of Uganda during his State Visit to Uganda // Ministry of External Affairs. Government of India. July 25, 2018. URL: <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/30152/Prime+Ministers+address+at+Parliament+of+Uganda+during+his+State+Visit+to+Ugand>; China, on the other hand, builds its policy based on economic cooperation – the mega-project “One Belt, One Road” and related political and philosophical concepts (for example, the “Community of Common Destiny”). See: Maslov A. “It is practically impossible to overtake China in investments in Africa” // RIAC. July 25, 2023. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/comments/obognat-kitay-po-investitsiyam-v-afrike-prakticheski-nevozmozhno/> (in Russ.).

³⁵⁴ Nicaise A. The Challenges of Combating Neocolonialism in Africa // *Valdai Discussion Club*. February 7, 2025. URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/highlights/the-challenges-of-combating-neocolonialism/>; Neocolonialism is holding Africa back from true independence // *Queen's University Journal*. January 21, 2025. URL: <https://www.queensjournal.ca/neocolonialism-is-holding-africa-back-from-true-independence/>

³⁵⁵ Russia-Africa Partnership Forum Action Plan 2023–2026 // President of Russia. July 28, 2023. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/supplement/5971>

³⁵⁶ Concluded based on an analysis of national security and cybersecurity strategies, as well as military and economic planning documents of African states.

...We reject so-called *technological colonialism*. That means that we do not make our partners dependent on Russian technical solutions. On the contrary, we are helping them create their own, sovereign national nuclear industry. This includes training personnel and establishing centers of excellence. Moreover — we're sharing experience and knowledge in developing other cutting-edge 21st-century industries, including nuclear medicine, digital systems, electric transport, and new materials. As a result, we're helping our partners make a real leap forward in development, take the economy to a new level of efficiency, and ultimately improve people's quality of life.

Vladimir Putin
President of Russia
September 25, 2025

<https://tass.com/economy/2021319>

The greatest demand for Russian experience today is observed in the digital security sector. Despite the fact that in the ITU cyber readiness rating published in the fall of 2024, Russia in *the global standings* was inferior in terms of the aggregate indicator to eight African countries (Mauritius, Egypt, Morocco, Ghana, Tanzania, Kenya, Rwanda and Zambia)³⁵⁷, its practical experience (especially in terms of improving national potential and regulatory activities) is still irreplaceable – especially in matters of repelling massive cyberattacks against critical information infrastructure and developing the social dimension of digital security³⁵⁸; domestic FinTech and E-Government solutions are of particular interest³⁵⁹.

At the same time, in the sphere of artificial intelligence and software development, Moscow is still in a catch-up position – behind the leaders of the race, China and the United States. Cooperation with African countries in this sector is mostly intermittent. On the other hand, thanks to the development of import substitution tools, Moscow is gradually reducing the gap and is looking for possible *points of expanding* partnership – both at the interstate level and through big business³⁶⁰.

Space is another potential area for a more systematic application of efforts. Moreover, Moscow has been interested in supporting African *space dreams* for several years now. The current task that

³⁵⁷Most of these countries (except Zambia) are included in the “Role-Modeling” group, while the Russian Federation and Zambia are assigned to the lower “Advancing” group. ITU experts explain the decrease in the aggregate indicator of the Russian Federation and its transfer to the “Advancing” group by a drop in technical measures and international cooperation, which is due to the strengthening of the sanctions and a decrease in the intensity of international contacts between the Russian Federation and Western countries in the cybersecurity profile. See: Global Cybersecurity Index 2024 // ITU. September 15, 2024. URL: https://www.itu.int/en/ITU-D/Cybersecurity/Documents/GCIv5/2401416_1b_Global-Cybersecurity-Index-E.pdf

³⁵⁷ Ibid.

³⁵⁸Chernyshenko: By 2030, Russian websites will be subject to cyberattacks every 2 seconds // TASS. April 16, 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/20560057> (in Russ.).

³⁵⁹See: Russia to help Africa digitalize government services // HSE Daily. URL: <https://daily.hse.ru/post/rossiya-pomozhet-afrike-v-ciphering-government-services> (in Russ.); Suef K. Digitalization as a way to overcome inequality in Africa // *Russia in Global Affairs Journal*. January 31, 2024. URL: <https://globalaffairs.ru/articles/czifrovizacziya-v-afrike/> (in Russ.).

³⁶⁰Russia and Africa Must Grow Together – in Language, Values, and AI // *Sputnik Africa*. June 12, 2025. URL: <https://en.sputniknews.africa/20250612/1074132006.html>; Sberbank is to share its AI solutions with African countries // Summit Africa. URL: <https://summitafrica.ru/en/news/sber-podelitsja-svoimi-narabotkami-v-sfere-iskusstvennogo-intellekta-so-stranami-afriki/> (in Russ.).

Moscow sets on the Continent is to more systematically involve African states in the development of scientific and manned space projects and national satellite programs, including relying on the capabilities of AfSA. The long-term goal of Russian-African cooperation should be the creation of a separate orbital module as part of the Russian Orbital Station (ROS). And here, despite the change in the leadership of *Roscosmos* in February 2025, the continuity of ideas will be preserved³⁶¹.

At the same time, in the area of space research, the question of the prospects for Russia to build a new cosmodrome on the Continent remains unresolved. Despite the fact that by the end of the year the first candidate for the implementation of these plans (Zimbabwe) appeared³⁶², the project is still in its initial stages; it will not be fully implemented before 2034.

As for the biotechnology sector, there is still increased attention to the advanced pharmaceutical sector (in terms of vaccine development and production)³⁶³. Russia positions “vaccine diplomacy” as a natural response to the unstable epidemiological situation in Africa and demonstrates its readiness to fight the most serious threats (malaria, dengue fever, etc.) *shoulder to shoulder* with Africans. It is assumed that over the next few years, the parties will work on localizing drugs and deploying production chains in African countries³⁶⁴.

Further expansion of presence in the market of solutions for the agro-industrial complex of the African countries also looks promising. As of mid-2025, every third regional power demonstrates interest in purchasing biotechnology for the needs of the agro-industrial complex. At the same time, individual players (Mali, Nigeria and Ghana) are ready not only to purchase, but also to jointly develop advanced solutions for the agricultural sector³⁶⁵, which opens an additional *window of opportunity* for Moscow.

Conclusion

The technological dimension of African countries is in the stage of active transformation. The overwhelming majority of regional states consider the high-tech sphere as a potential growth zone and express readiness to invest in its development; actively adopt the experience of foreign partners.

³⁶¹*Roscosmos* proposed to African countries the creation of national modules for ROS // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. June 30, 2023. URL: <https://ria.ru/20230630/moduli-1881562484.html> (in Russ.); Africa will strengthen Russian capabilities in space // Business newspaper “Vzglyad”. July 26, 2023. URL: <https://vz.ru/world/2023/7/26/1222786.html> (in Russ.); *Roscosmos* Chief to hold talks with heads of South African and Egyptian space agencies // African Initiative. April 26, 2025. URL: <https://afrinz.ru/2025/04/glava-roskosmosa-provedet-peregovory-s-rukovoditelyami-kosmicheskikh-agentstv-yuar-i-egipta/> (in Russ.).

³⁶² Zimbabwe hopes to build its own spaceport with Russia's help // *TASS*. December 10, 2024. URL: <https://tass.ru/kosmos/22624663> (in Russ.).

³⁶³ See: Russian scientists and doctors help Africa fight epidemic outbreaks // *Russian Gazette*. July 27, 2023. URL: <https://rg.ru/2023/07/27/priroda-cheloveka.html> (in Russ.); Russia to create vaccine production in the Republic of Congo // *TASS*. July 28, 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/18395381> (in Russ.); Implications of conflict on vaccination in the Sahel region // *BMJ Global Health*. January 30, 2025. URL: <https://gh.bmj.com/content/10/1/e016496> etc.

³⁶⁴The Ministry of Health announced Russia's readiness to establish localization and export of drugs in Africa // *TASS*. July 27, 2023. URL: <https://tass.ru/obschestvo/18382723> (in Russ.).

³⁶⁵Russian farmers named technologies that they are ready to implement in Africa // *Russian Gazette*. August 2, 2023. URL: <https://rg.ru/2023/08/02/rossijskie-agrarii-nazvali-tehnologii-kotorye-gotovy-vnedriat-v-afrike.html> (in Russ.); Africa is interested in the latest Russian technologies, especially for the agro-industrial complex // *TRIDGE*. April 1, 2025. URL: <https://www.tridge.com/news/africa-is-interested-in-the-latest-russian-tech>

At the same time, it is too early to talk about a full-fledged “high-tech transition” in the region: no more than half of the regional powers can boast of stable positions in high-tech industries, while only a few of them (South Africa, Egypt, Nigeria, Ghana, Kenya) are able to fully compete in the global market and permanently hold one or several high-tech niches.

Russia's importance and its involvement in African high-tech projects are growing – although sanctions and the “long-term absence” of stable conductors of its interests in the region (due to a combination of historical reasons) significantly limit the effectiveness of the onslaught. Moscow is still in a *catch-up position* in the race for influence on the African continent, competing with both Western and Asian players.

However, even taking into account the sanctions, Moscow has a more advantageous position in the region compared to most Western competitors (since it is less susceptible to the influence of the “colonialist discourse”), and is therefore closing the gap faster than was predicted in the late 2010s. And the focus on intensifying dialogue with mid-level entrepreneurs and the economic community of the region as a whole should contribute to further strengthening of its positions.

CHAPTER 14.

PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND AFRICA IN NUCLEAR ENERGY³⁶⁶

Sviatoslav Arov

Nuclear energy remains one of the most promising areas of cooperation between Russia and African countries. Africa accounts for only 6% of global energy³⁶⁷, while nearly 600 million people in Sub-Saharan Africa live without access to electricity³⁶⁸. Electricity demand in Africa today is 700 terawatt-hours (TWh), and it is expected to be doubled by 2040, reaching 1 600 TWh³⁶⁹.

Due to demographic factors, such as rapid population growth, Africa has even greater growth potential. In 2025, Africa's population is 1.5 billion people, and it is expected to reach 1.7 billion by 2030. Additionally, Africa is gradually industrializing, while more than 600 million people still do not have access to grid electricity. The energy deficit, which is one of the main obstacles to achieving sustainable economic growth in the region, is prompting African governments to seek solutions in the energy sector. According to the *Outlook for Nuclear Energy in Africa*, published by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in 2025, more than 20 African countries are exploring potential of nuclear energy³⁷⁰.

³⁶⁶ The author would like to express the gratitude to the Chief Specialist of the IAEA Nuclear Security Office (2011-2015), PIR Center Advisory Board member Dr. Alexey Ubeev for his valuable consultation and contribution to the development of this research.

³⁶⁷ Africa – Countries & Regions. International Energy Outlook // IAEA. URL: <https://www.iea.org/regions/africa>

³⁶⁸ Mission 300: Overview // World Bank. URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/programs/energizing-africa/overview>

³⁶⁹ Africa Energy Outlook 2019. International Energy Outlook // IAEA. URL: <https://www.iea.org/reports/africa-energy-outlook-2019>

³⁷⁰ Outlook for Nuclear Energy in Africa 2025 // International Atomic Energy Agency. URL: https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/Publications/PDF/p15896-PAT-011_web.pdf

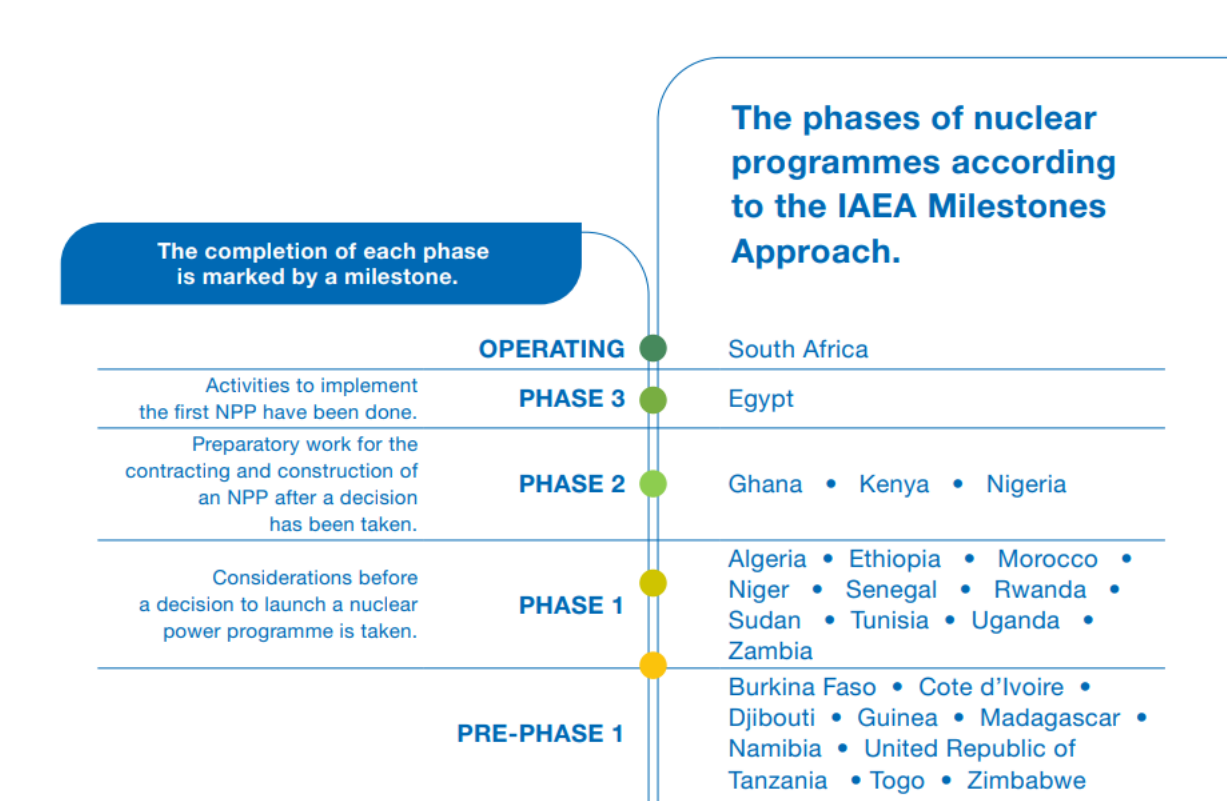


Figure 49. The phases of nuclear programmes according to the IAEA Milestones Approach

Source: AIEA, 2025 (https://www-pub.iaea.org/MTCD/Publications/PDF/p15896-PAT-011_web.pdf)

Is Building a Nuclear Power Plant a Feasible Solution for Africa?

Although African countries are expressing *political demand* for nuclear energy, the high cost and politicization of such projects are hindering their implementation. The lack of continuity in some countries and the fragility of their governments are also worth considering. These factors pose an obstacle to the consistent development of dialogue in nuclear energy.

There are few countries in Africa that have tens of billions of dollars to spend on building nuclear power plants. As some experts point out, building a nuclear power plant is an expensive project with a long return on investment³⁷¹. Furthermore, many African countries depend on loans from the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund. These loans will undoubtedly prevent an increase in budgetary burdens and will instead promote solutions based on renewable energy sources. For example, a Russian loan is financing 85% of the construction of a nuclear power plant in Egypt, which is the second highest economy in Africa (after South Africa) in terms of GDP³⁷². It is even less clear how other African countries interested in building nuclear power plants plan to finance them.

Assessing the prospects for constructing nuclear power plants in Africa, many factors must be considered: insufficient power grid infrastructure development, a shortage of qualified personnel as well as the significant influence of Western companies. Security and safety issues must be given

³⁷¹ Nuclear Renaissance: Russian Specifics and Global Context. Security Index №2 (85), Vol.14. URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Иванов-В.Б.-Каграманян-В.С.-и-др.-Ядерный-ренессанс-Российская-специфика-и-глобальный-контекст.pdf> (in Russ.).

³⁷² African countries with the highest Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in 2025 // Statista. URL: <https://www.statista.com/statistics/1120999/gdp-of-african-countries-by-country/>

particular attention, while the standard of nuclear safety in all countries must be equal to that in Russia, China, South Korea or any other country which exports its nuclear technologies. There must be no such thing as *Egyptian* or *Burkinabe* nuclear security. If an accident occurs in Burkina Faso or Egypt, it will spell the end of nuclear energy for everyone³⁷³. In this regard, it is also necessary to raise the standards of nuclear education and train specialists from Africa in Russian universities on nuclear specifics. Currently, the number of students and graduates in nuclear fields is growing; however, this does not allow us to consider taking practical steps.

Russia has achieved several successes in its cooperation with African countries in nuclear energy. South Africa was the first African country with which *Rosatom* began working: *Techsnabexport* (also known as *TENEX*) started supplying nuclear fuel to the *Koeberg* Nuclear Power Plant in 1995. From 2007 to 2009, *Rosatom's* subsidiary *Isotope* imported molybdenum-99. In 2012, *Rosatom* opened a regional office for South and Central Africa (a division of *Rosatom International Network*). However, nuclear energy development opportunities in South Africa are limited in the medium term. The most optimistic scenario is extending the operating life of the *Koeberg* NPP.

With the launch of the *Ed Dabaa* nuclear power plant in Egypt, Russia will become the first country in 40 years to build a nuclear power plant in Africa, enhancing its image in the region while allowing Egypt to become an energy hub. More importantly, Egypt's nuclear power plant is being built with cutting-edge technology. This unique experience will increase *Rosatom's* chances of building nuclear power plants in other countries. There will be a particular impact on interest in *Rosatom's* services among countries in the Middle East and North Africa.

In overview, the construction of nuclear power plants in most African countries may only be in demand in the medium or long term, provided that the industrialization and overall growth of African economies continues. For now, Russia should focus on establishing a long-term presence in Africa by training personnel, participating in the development of sectoral strategies, roadmaps, and action plans, creating the legal and regulatory framework, and establishing Centers for Nuclear Science and Technology as a possible base for further expansion.

Who Wants to Have NPPs?

Algeria, Ghana, Zambia, Kenya, Libya, Morocco, Nigeria, Sudan, and Ethiopia have all expressed interest in building nuclear power plants at various times. However, for some reasons, these plans remain more in the realm of demagoguery and politics than economics. Compared to other African countries, the governments of Egypt and South Africa have been the most consistent supporters of nuclear energy development, although it is worth noting that Pretoria's interest has recently been called into question by public opinion. For instance, in August 2024, South Africa's Department of Energy announced its decision to withdraw the tender for constructing 2,500 MW of nuclear facilities, allowing the public to participate in the discussion. Although nuclear energy remains part of South

³⁷³ Viktor Murogov: "Russia is "doomed" to develop nuclear energy" // *Security Index* №3, 2005, pp. 21-30. URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Ядерный-Контроль-№77-2005.pdf> (in Russ.).

Africa's plans to ensure energy security, public opinion is an important factor in this area's decision-making process³⁷⁴.

As of August 2025, Russia had concluded intergovernmental agreements on cooperation in the peaceful use of atomic energy with 15 African countries: Algeria, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Ghana, Egypt, Zambia, Zimbabwe, Mali, Nigeria, the Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Sudan, Uganda, Ethiopia, and South Africa. Basic agreements governing the general framework for cooperation in the peaceful use of atomic energy have been signed with all of these countries.

Additionally, agreements have been signed with Zambia, Nigeria, and Rwanda regarding cooperation in the construction of centers for nuclear science and technology. However, the agreement signed with Nigeria in 2016 has not yet entered into force. Two more agreements have been signed with Nigeria: one regarding cooperation in nuclear and radiation safety regulations for the use of atomic energy (2021, not yet in force), and one regarding cooperation in designing nuclear power plants (2012, in force).

Floating Nuclear Power Plants (FNPPs): a Reasonable Solution?

On paper, one of the most attractive solutions for reducing Africa's electricity deficit is the use of floating nuclear power plants (FNPPs). FNPPs are low-capacity nuclear power plants that offer several advantages.

First, FNPPs can be used almost anywhere in the world as long as there is access to the sea. Second, unlike traditional nuclear power plants, FNPPs can meet a specific location's electricity needs and can be easily transported at any time. Third, customers do not need to decommission nuclear power plants at the end of their life cycles. The handling of spent nuclear fuel is the responsibility of FNPP owners (service providers). Fourth, customers do not need to train a large number of personnel, create expensive infrastructure, or build nuclear power plants over long periods of time. Overall, FNPPs are cheaper than traditional large- and medium-capacity nuclear power plants in terms of total cost. However, despite the positive aspects of FNPPs, there are many uncertainties regarding their prospects, casting doubt on the possibility of their use outside the owning country, particularly in African countries.

The main factor preventing the potential use of FNPPs in the medium term is their limited availability. Currently, only one FNPP exists in the world: the *Akademik Lomonosov*, which supplies heat and electricity to remote areas of the Russian Arctic and Far East. The emergence of new FNPPs is only a matter of time. Interest in FNPPs is growing, and several countries are developing their own FNPPs. However, the prospects for scaling up FNPP production, let alone using them for commercial purposes, lie more in the realm of long-term planning, though in 2025 there have been statements by Russian officials about plans to export FNPPs by 2030³⁷⁵.

³⁷⁴ South Africa pauses nuclear procurement process // World Nuclear News. August 16, 2024. URL: <https://www.world-nuclear-news.org/articles/south-africa-pauses-nuclear-procurement-process>

³⁷⁵ Rosatom wants to deliver the first floating nuclear power plants abroad in 2030 // Interfax. May 19, 2025. URL: <https://www.interfax.ru/business/1026435> (in Russ.).

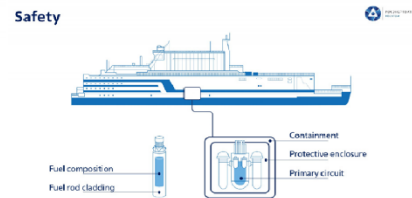
Another disadvantage of FNPPs is the high cost of the electricity they generate. The costs of using them are justified in regions with difficult climatic and geographical conditions, where FNPPs are one of the most effective means of generating electricity. However, this scenario is inapplicable to Africa, where the shortage of electricity affects the population as a whole rather than specific regions. An exception is the need to electrify specific areas of the country, such as those with concentrated production facilities or mineral extraction sites. It should also be noted that operating FNPPs requires constructing coastal infrastructure that meets all safety requirements. Additionally, it is important to consider the need for nuclear fuel reloading and regular maintenance³⁷⁶.

The most controversial issue regarding FNPPs is their international legal regulation. For example, problems could arise even with regard to the *Akademik Lomonosov*, which was built in Russia and then transported for use within its borders. To avoid these problems, the fuel was loaded onto the FNPPs in Murmansk rather than St. Petersburg, where the *Akademik Lomonosov* was constructed, when the floating power unit passed through the waters of the Baltic Sea³⁷⁷.

³⁷⁶ FNPPs: an expensive toy or an efficient station? // Neftegaz.ru. August 13, 2020. URL: <https://neftegaz.ru/news/energy/625777-vyrabatyvaemaya-na-pates-akademik-lomonosov-elektroenergiya-okazalas-znachitelno-dorozhe-sushchestvu/> (in Russ.).

³⁷⁷ Nuclear fuel is to be loaded into the reactors of a floating nuclear power plant at the base in Murmansk // RIA Novosti News Agency. July 21, 2017. URL: <https://ria.ru/20170721/1498928221.html> (in Russ.).

"AKADEMIK LOMONOSOV" FNPP: A BRIEF LOOK



Location: Pevek, Chukotka Autonomous Okrug



Maximum electrical power: 76 MW



2 KLT-40S reactor units



Can provide electricity to a city with a population of 100,000 people

2006

Construction of a floating power unit has begun at the "Sevmash" production association in Severodvinsk

2009

Construction of a floating power unit has continued at the Baltic Shipyard in St. Petersburg

2018

"Akademik Lomonosov" left the Baltic Shipyard and headed to Murmansk, where he docked at the "Atomflot" site to load nuclear fuel and conduct tests

2019

In August, "Akademik Lomonosov" departed Murmansk for Pevek, and on December 19, the FNPP delivered its first power to the Chaun-Bilibino power grid in Chukotka

2020

In June, the first heat from the FNPP was supplied to the 5th microdistrict of Pevek

Figure 50. Akademik Lomonosov FNPP: an overview

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Taking a broader view of this issue in the context of exporting FNPPs to foreign markets and considering the nuclear nonproliferation regime, experts believe that the *BOOT-R (build-own-operate-transfer-return)* model is the best option. Thus, cooperation should be based on an intergovernmental agreement in which the FNPP-supplying country builds, loads fuel, transports, installs, operates, maintains, and owns the FNPP that generates electricity in the host country. The host country's responsibilities would be limited to connecting to electrical grids and pipelines, as well as protecting the facility. It would not have access to FNPPs, their technologies, or nuclear fuel³⁷⁸.

A bilateral agreement between the supplier state and the recipient country, outlining their mutual obligations regarding all legal and organizational issues prior to exporting FNPPs, is necessary to settle any potential legal disputes. Agreements with the IAEA on nuclear nonproliferation guarantees will also be required³⁷⁹.

From a technical point of view, a floating nuclear power plant is a unique and reliable solution, but its operation is only feasible in certain cases. A number of African countries have expressed interest in acquiring FNPPs, but they will not solve even a fraction of the energy problems currently facing these countries³⁸⁰. FNPPs are a new project, however, so it is reasonable to assume that their potential applications, as well as technological improvements, will expand and make them more profitable.

Examining the Cases

Egypt

Several key factors drive interest in nuclear energy in Egypt. **First**, population growth, urbanization, and industrialization are leading to an ever-increasing demand for electricity. **Second**, the shortage of drinking water necessitates the use of desalination technologies, particularly in remote areas, which affects energy requirements³⁸¹. **Third**, nuclear energy is seen as a convenient, cost-effective, and promising energy source. Once implemented, it will supplement traditional energy resources and accelerate technological development, stimulating social and economic progress. **Fourth**, nuclear energy is the optimal solution for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. This aligns with the goals of the energy transition and is part of the national long-term strategy, “Egypt Vision 2030”³⁸².

³⁷⁸ Lysenko M., Bedenko V., Dalnoki-Veress F. Legal Regulations of Floating Nuclear Power Plants: problems and prospects. *Moscow Journal of International Law*. 2019. №3. P. 59–67.

³⁷⁹ Ibid.

³⁸⁰ Semenov E. On the prospects of floating nuclear power plants in Africa // PIR Center. February 9, 2024. URL: <https://pircenter.org/editions/o-perspektivah-playuchih-ajes-v-afrike/> (in Russ.).

³⁸¹ Lorenzini M. Why the nuclear power plant in Egypt can be considered a long-term victory for Russia // *Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists*. December 20, 2023. URL: <https://thebulletin.org/2023/12/why-egypts-new-nuclear-plant-is-a-long-term-win-for-russia/>

³⁸² The National Agenda for Sustainable Development Egypt's Updated Vision 2030 // Ministry of Planning and Economic Development (Egypt). URL: https://mped.gov.eg/Files/Egypt_Vision_2030_EnglishDigitalUse.pdf

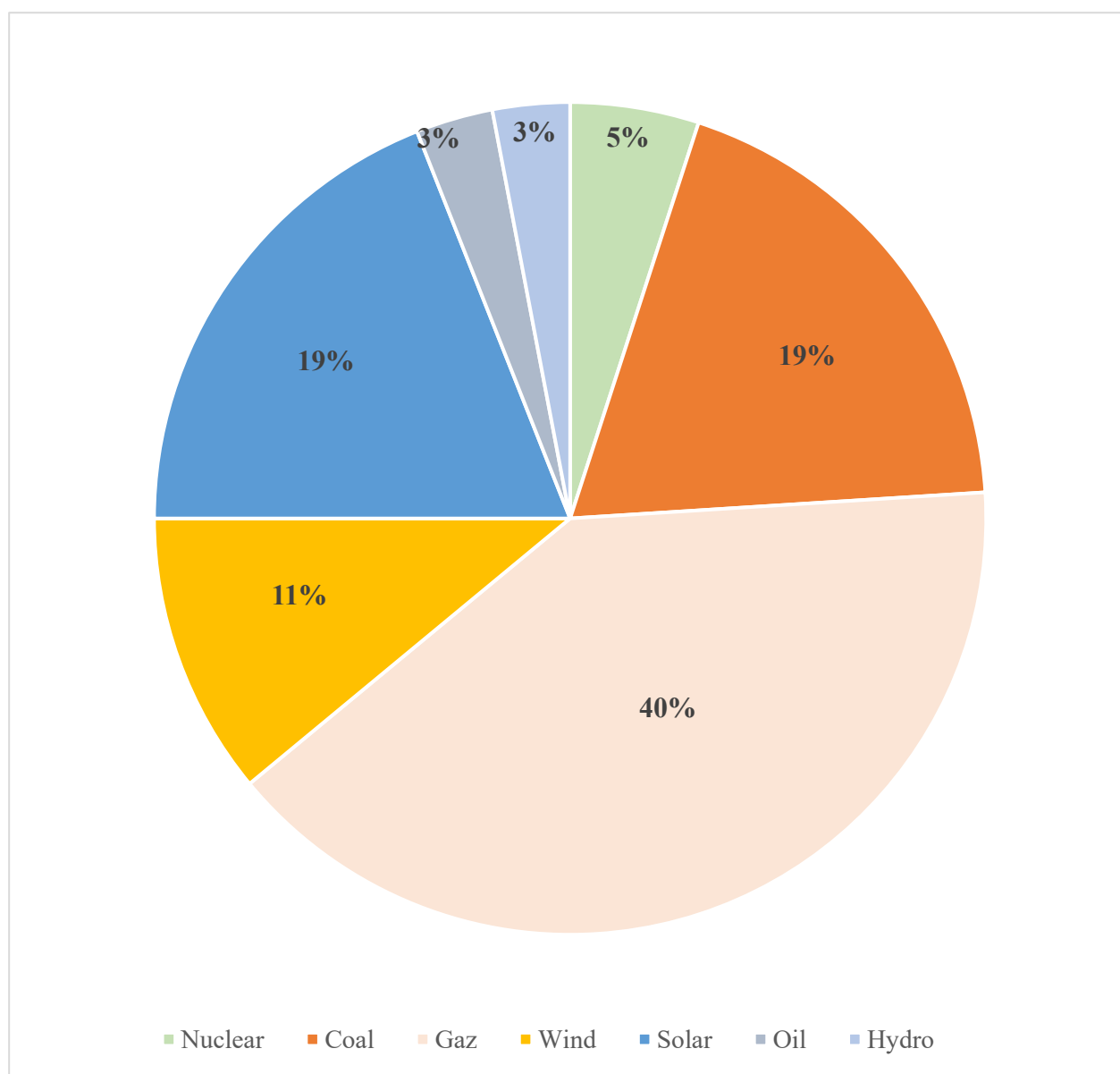


Figure 51. Fuel mix in Energy system of Egypt in 2030 (according to “Egypt Vision 2030”)

Based on: “Egypt Vision 2030” (https://mped.gov.eg/Files/Egypt_Vision_2030_EnglishDigitalUse.pdf)

Energy is one of the most intensive areas of cooperation between the Arab Republic of Egypt and the Russian Federation. In 2008, the two countries signed an intergovernmental agreement on the peaceful use of atomic energy. Then, in November 2015, Moscow and Cairo signed another intergovernmental agreement on the construction and operation of Egypt's first nuclear power plant. The plant is to consist of four power units, each with a capacity of 1,200 MW, and will use Russian technology³⁸³. Additionally, the Russian government provided export credit for this purpose. As of 2025, Egypt only has one research reactor, the ETRR-2. It has a capacity of 22 MW and was commissioned in 1992. *TVEL*, a Russian company, was the supplier of nuclear fuel for this reactor³⁸⁴. There is also an *ETR-1* research reactor designed by the USSR with a capacity of 2 MW. It was in operation from 1961 to 2010.

³⁸³ Russia signed an agreement on the construction of the first nuclear power plant in Egypt // *RBC*. November 19, 2015. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/rbcfreenews/564deeca9a79473987063238> (in Russ.).

³⁸⁴ *Rosatom* supplies fuel components for research reactor to Egypt // *TASS*. November 22, 2022. URL: <https://nauka.tass.ru/nauka/16397393> (in Russ.).

The construction of a nuclear power plant in Egypt marks a new stage in technological development for both Egypt and Russia. The plant will be equipped with *VVER-1200* reactors, which belong to the “3+” generation and meet the highest international standards for efficiency and safety³⁸⁵. The construction of the *Ed Dabaa* nuclear power plant is of fundamental importance to Egypt due to its scale. It will be the largest power plant project since the construction of the Aswan hydroelectric power plant. The *Ed Dabaa* Nuclear Power Plant will also provide a solid material and technical foundation of electricity and fresh water for the economic development of sparsely populated coastal areas along the Mediterranean Sea.

In cooperation with the Russian Federation, nuclear fuel supplies for the reactors are being implemented. Contract documents for the delivery of low-enriched nuclear fuel components to Egypt for the ETRR-2 research reactor in Inshas have already been signed, with the first deliveries under this contract made in 2020³⁸⁶.

One of the most important achievements resulting from the successful completion of the *Ed Dabaa* Nuclear Power Plant construction and launch is Egypt's strengthened leadership position among Arab and African countries. This achievement reduces the scientific and technological gap with other countries in the region through knowledge and technology transfer and localization, which contributes to national security. Egypt is already considered a leader in nuclear technology in the Middle East and Africa. The planned commissioning of a nuclear power plant by the end of this decade will only strengthen its status as a regional nuclear science hub.

South Africa

The only nuclear power plant on the continent is located in South Africa – the *Koeberg* NPP, which was commissioned in 1984 and is owned by *Eskom*, the state-owned electricity holding company. The NPP was built under the specific conditions of South Africa's energy independence and access to the technologies needed to develop nuclear weapons.

Since the mid-1970s, South Africa had been actively developing nuclear weapons, focusing its scientific research in atomic energy on this goal. These aspirations were driven by foreign policy factors, such as growing instability in neighbouring countries and mounting tensions with the West. Political and rebel movements operating in neighbouring regions were considered the main external threat³⁸⁷. In 1979, the so-called *Vela Incident*³⁸⁸ occurred when a flash was detected in the Southern Hemisphere believed to have been caused by the explosion of a low-yield nuclear device. Six nuclear bombs were produced in South Africa while it was developing nuclear weapons, as the country's top leadership later acknowledged³⁸⁹.

³⁸⁵ Safety system was delivered from Russia to the *El-Dabaa* nuclear power plant in Egypt // *RIA Novosti* News Agency. July 2, 2024. URL: <https://ria.ru/20240702/egipet-1956950962.html> (in Russ.).

³⁸⁶ *TVEL* supplies fuel components for research reactor in Egypt // *Neftegaz.RU*. February 8, 2024. URL: <https://neftegaz.ru/news/nuclear/817443-tvel-postavit-komponenty-topлива-dlya-issledovatel'skogo-reaktora-v-egipte/> (in Russ.).

³⁸⁷ The Nuclear Principality // *Atomic Expert*. URL: <https://archive.atomicexpert.com/page1252866.html>

³⁸⁸ *Vela Incident* – unidentified double flash of light detected by an American *Vela Hotel* satellite on 22 September 1979 near the South African territory of Prince Edward Islands in the Indian Ocean, roughly midway between Africa and Antarctica – *Editor's note*.

³⁸⁹ South Africa Says It Built 6 Atom Bombs // *The New York Times*. March 25, 1993. URL: <https://www.nytimes.com/1993/03/25/world/south-africa-says-it-built-6-atom-bombs.html>

Radical changes took place in and around South Africa in the late 1980s and mid-1990s, affecting the nuclear industry. South Africa reduced its presence and influence in neighbouring countries and regions. Notably, from 1988 to 1990, South Africa renounced military intervention in Angola and control over Namibia. Then, political transformations occurred within South Africa. Ultimately, these changes resulted in the loss of power by the regime that had ruled the country for the past thirty years. These reforms included a review of foreign policy, which caused South Africa to lose interest in nuclear weapons. In 1989, South Africa officially renounced and disposed of its nuclear weapons.

South Africa was the first African country with which Rosatom began cooperation in 1995 when *Techsnabexport* started supplying nuclear fuel to the *Koeberg* NPP. For most of the past decade, the construction of a nuclear power plant in South Africa remained Rosatom's key project in Africa. On September 21, 2014, Russia and South Africa signed a strategic partnership agreement on nuclear energy and industry. This agreement included preparations for constructing power units with a total capacity of over 9 GW and a cost of at least \$70 billion³⁹⁰.

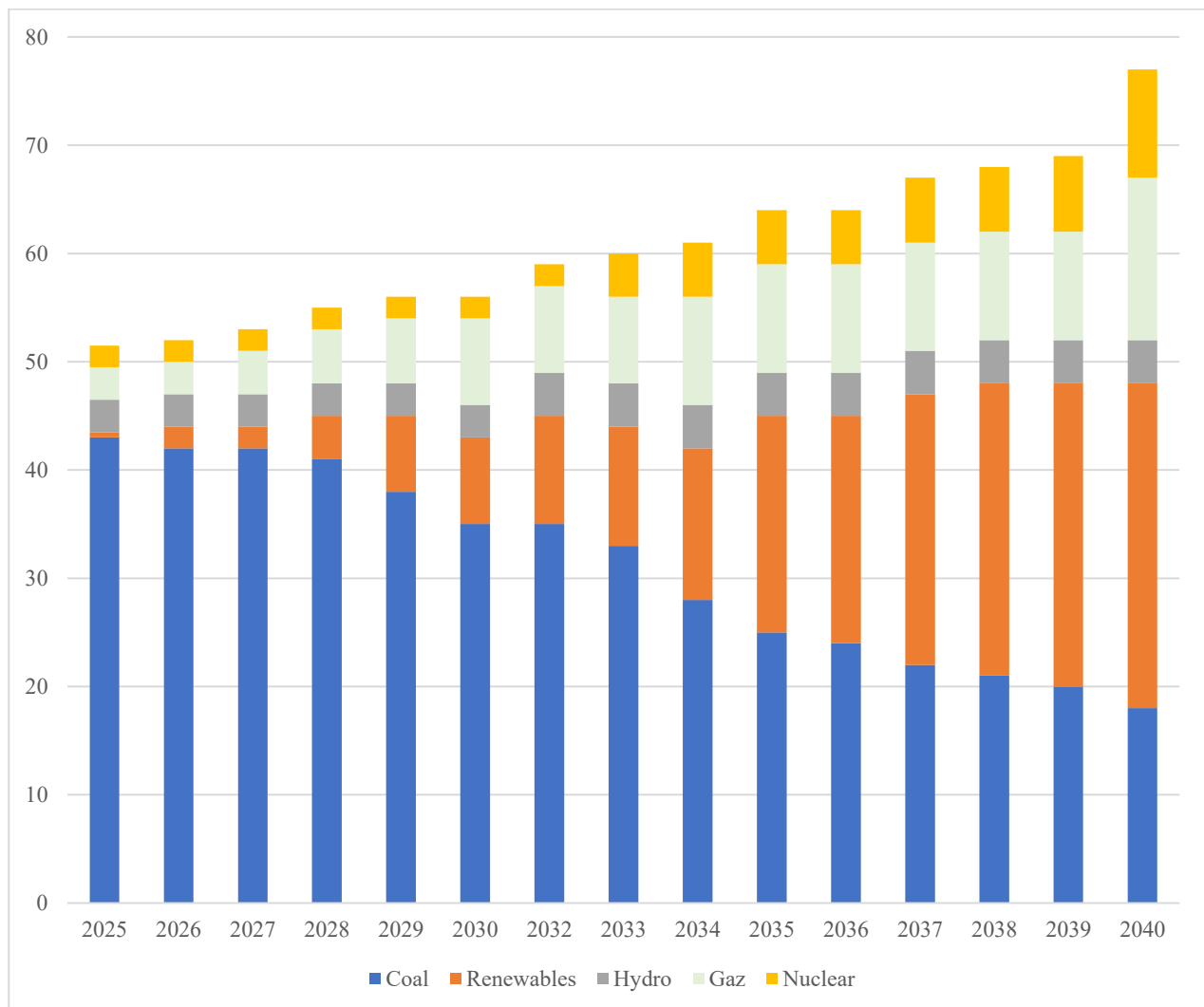


Figure 52. South Africa Power Unit Plans to Wind Down Coal (Forecast generation capacity mix for Escom to increase renewables), GW

³⁹⁰ Russia and South Africa signed an intergovernmental agreement on strategic partnership in the nuclear energy sector. // *Nuclear Energy*. September 23, 2014. URL: <https://www.atomic-energy.ru/news/2014/09/23/51669> (in Russ.).

Based on: Energy Connects (<https://www.energyconnects.com/news/renewables/2025/august/south-africa-s-eskom-seeks-solar-buyers-in-shift-away-from-coal/>)

In South Africa, the prospect of concluding a deal with Russia regarding nuclear power units has drawn sharp criticism from experts, opposition parties, and some government officials. South Africa's largest opposition party, the Democratic Alliance, publicly accused President Jacob Zuma of secretly signing an agreement with Russia to build nuclear power plants. Although Zuma officially denied the allegations, they played a significant role in shaping the image of a corrupt regime and its subsequent defeat in the internal party struggle. Political dialogue in South Africa is inclusive. Any major deal involving foreign participation requires a broad discussion of the interests of many actors, both *formal* and *informal*.

In March 2017, Pravin Gordhan, the South African finance minister and a vocal opponent of the large-scale program to build new nuclear power plant units, was dismissed. On April 6, 2017, the High Court of the Western Cape Province in South Africa ruled that the 2015 tender process for the construction of nuclear power units with a total capacity of 9.6 GW was invalid, thereby invalidating the relevant intergovernmental agreements with Russia, the United States, and South Korea. The court also ordered parliamentary hearings on the project to be held³⁹¹. The lawsuit was filed by *Earthlife Africa*, a non-governmental volunteer organization, and the non-profit Southern African Faith Communities' Environmental Institute.

The collapse of the *Rosatom*-South Africa nuclear deal has damaged the foundation of Russian-South African relations. The project had been a pillar of the bilateral agenda for nearly a decade.

Overall, it should be noted that the potential for developing nuclear energy in South Africa is limited in the medium term. The most optimistic scenario is extending the operating life of the *Koeberg* nuclear power plant. South Africa's economic conditions dictate the need for new wind farms, solar power plants, and gas-fired generation facilities. Deviating from these efforts, especially circumventing South Africa's adopted energy strategy, would be a waste of resources. However, South Africa is considering building new nuclear power plants to diversify its energy sources³⁹². Such a strategy is linked to the systematic phase-out of coal-fired power plants, which have historically met most of the country's electricity needs, and the transition to the wider use of renewable energy sources. Though, the prospects of such initiative seem very dim.

Conclusion

Energy shortages are one of the main obstacles to sustainable growth in African economies, so African governments are demonstrating a growing demand for any energy solutions. They are turning to the experience of *proven contractors*, particularly in the nuclear sector.

³⁹¹ South African court blocked agreement with Russia on construction of nuclear power plant // *RBC*. April 26, 2017. URL: <https://www.rbc.ru/business/26/04/2017/59008fb59a7947a565925081> (*in Russ.*).

³⁹² South Africa pushes ahead with new *Cape* nuclear plant // *Reuters*. August 8, 2025. URL: <https://www.reuters.com/sustainability/boards-policy-regulation/south-africa-pushes-ahead-with-new-cape-nuclear-plant-2025-08-08/>

Russia and *Rosatom* have undoubtedly achieved some success in African countries: the expansion of the legal framework for the peaceful use of nuclear energy and the construction of nuclear power plants in Egypt are the result of Russia's long-standing work in this area.

However, demand for nuclear power plant construction services in most African countries will only be in the medium to long term subject to the development of industrialization and overall growth of African economies. Should we expect large dividends from Africa? Unlikely. At the same time, this doesn't mean cooperation should be curtailed. On the contrary, the contacts and connections being established between our countries today will soon serve as a *solid foundation* for the implementation of ambitious projects.

CHAPTER 15.

THE SAHEL REGION: POLITICAL TRANSFORMATION, SECURITY DYNAMICS AND OPPORTUNITIES FOR RUSSIA³⁹³

Alexandra Zubenko

In political science across different countries, the Sahel region is defined in varying ways, and there is still no consensus on which states exactly belong to this region. The geographical designation includes all the countries of the northern Sahara, namely Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Algeria, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic (CAR), Chad, Sudan, South Sudan, and Eritrea. The political definition of the Sahel countries is tied to the so-called *G5 Sahel*, an organization created in 2014 “to coordinate” the French Operation *Barkhane* in the region, consisting of Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Chad.

In African political and media discourse, however, there is a trend toward referring to only three countries, Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso, as the Sahel region. In September 2023, these three formed the military-political alliance ‘Alliance of Sahel States’ (AES) and announced their withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS).

The *G5 Sahel* is characterized by similar security challenges, including the spread of terrorism, organized crime, the weakness of state institutions and borders, forced migration, poverty, and humanitarian crises. Economically, the countries of the region share a high level of dependence on agriculture, vulnerability to climate change, strong political and economic dependence on former colonial powers, and shared humanitarian problems. An important element of their common agenda is the need for joint solutions to issues of development and stability.

This article focuses on the *G5 Sahel* in the context of the withdrawal of French troops from these countries and the consequences for political stability in the region. It will also examine how political instability, together with the situation in neighbouring states the CAR, Libya, and Sudan affects the overall security environment, including demographics, the economy, migration, terrorism, and separatism. Finally, the article will analyze the current state of bilateral relations between the countries of the region and Russia, and identify potential areas for further cooperation.

The End of the French Security Paradigm

French intervention was initially legitimized as a response to jihadist advances in northern Mali in 2012–2013. Over time, France’s presence came to symbolize dependency and unfulfilled promises of stability. This perception grew stronger as insurgent violence spread from Mali into Burkina Faso and Niger, despite the heavy deployment of French and allied forces.

One primary issue was the operation's military-centric approach that did not integrate sufficient political, social, and economic strategies necessary to address the root causes of insurgency. French

³⁹³ The author would like to express the gratitude to the Chief Specialist of the IAEA Nuclear Security Office (2011–2015), PIR Center Advisory Board member Dr. Alexey Ubeev for his valuable consultation and contribution to the development of this research.

analysts highlight that while Operation *Barkhane* succeeded militarily, it lacked effective civil-military coordination, which is crucial for winning local support and undermining jihadist influence in communities³⁹⁴. The counterterrorism campaign was heavily dependent on airstrikes and special forces action but did not sufficiently include development projects or governance reforms to stabilize liberated areas. This shortfall allowed jihadist groups to regroup and reemerge in less-visible forms, including the formation of the *Jama'a Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin* (JNIM)³⁹⁵ coalition in 2017, which later proved highly resilient.

Russian scholars and commentators bring additional perspective to the failure by underscoring the limits of Western military interventions predicated mostly on conventional operations against terrorism. According to Russian analysts, efforts like Operation *Barkhane* underestimated the complexity of the hybrid warfare environment in the Sahel, where insurgent groups blend terrorist tactics with local conflicts, social fractures, and criminal networks. Moscow critiques the Western approach as overly focused on *kinetic operations* without addressing geopolitical and governance deficits that sustain insurgency. Both French and Russian assessments agree that Operation *Barkhane* lacked a comprehensive “end state”, whereby defeating terrorist groups militarily was insufficient without simultaneous political reconciliation and state-building efforts³⁹⁶.

The new governments promoted a discourse of sovereignty, portraying the end of French presence as the beginning of a new era of independence. In practice, however, this rhetoric masked persistent structural weaknesses. The removal of French troops had several major consequences. First, it left overstretched local militaries as the *main line of defense* against increasingly aggressive jihadist networks. Armed groups exploited the *security vacuum*, expanding their attacks on civilians, military bases, and urban centers. By mid-2025, the *Islamic State Sahel Province*³⁹⁷ numbered between 2,000 and 3,000 fighters, compared to an estimated 425 in 2018. Violence and terrorist attacks surged across the *tri-border* (Mali–Niger–Burkina Faso) Liptako-Gourma region, with the bulk of terrorism-related deaths worldwide occurring in the Sahel.

Attacks became more often, weaponry more sophisticated (including drones), and the violence began spilling into West African coastal states. In 2024 and 2025, despite a reported decline in overall deaths in Burkina Faso, Niger faced a 94% surge in terrorist fatalities, reversing recent gains and underscoring the region’s extreme fragility. Governments in the Sahel replaced Western partnerships with support from Russia and China, while ongoing coups weakened governance and undermined regional counterterrorism efforts.

Despite some restoration of control and a 21% decline in terrorism deaths in Burkina Faso in 2024, the Sahel remains a *global hotspot* for terrorism. Niger experienced a 94% surge in terrorism fatalities, reaching 930 deaths, the largest increase worldwide. The Sahel accounted for 51% of all terrorism-

³⁹⁴ The insurmountable failure of France's strategy in the Sahel // *Le Monde*. November 4, 2023. URL: https://www.lemonde.fr/en/international/article/2023/11/04/the-insurmountable-failure-of-france-s-strategy-in-the-sahel_6226447_4.html

³⁹⁵ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

³⁹⁶ Chikhachev A. After Sahel: The Decline of French Interventionism? Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), December 9, 2022. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/posle-sakhelya-zakat-frantsuzskogo-interventsionizma/> (*in Russ*).

³⁹⁷ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

related deaths globally in 2024. Burkina Faso remained the most affected country, terrorist activity spread beyond the Sahel, with Togo suffering its worst year on record.

Rank	Terrorist group	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	Change in %, 2022–2023	+/-
1	HAMAS	102	12	1	20	8	1549	+19 263%	▲
2	ADF* (the Allied Democratic Forces)	282	341	1422	1626	1603	1520	-5%	▼
3	Al-Shabaab*	2086	1409	1393	1040	1342	1114	-17%	▼
4	JNIM* (Jama'a Nusrat ul-Islam wa al-Muslimin)	106	238	335	560	557	1102	+98%	▲
5	ISIS in Western Sahara*	114	931	992	1004	575	1003	+74%	▲
6	ISIS*	3547	1460	1371	1240	1329	944	-29%	▼
7	Boko Haram*	1311	1385	1286	747	586	878	+50%	▲
8	<i>Ansar Allah</i>	2789	715	1773	325	420	326	-22%	▼
9	Islamic State in Iraq and the Levant *	304	930	433	49	139	288	+107%	▲
10	Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS)*	79	30	221	138	878	279	-68%	▼

Table 4. Terrorist groups with the highest number of fatalities³⁹⁸

Based on: Global Terrorism Index 2025 (Vision of Humanity) (<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>)

At the same time, it seems that some progress was achieved in mitigating separatism, one of the common security concerns in the region. After the withdrawal of the UN peacekeeping mission (MINUSMA) in Mali in 2023, the Malian army with the support from the Russian forces managed to regain control over key areas, including Kidal, a city that had long been at the heart of Tuareg separatism. The loss of Kidal severely weakened the Tuareg armed groups and dealt a blow to their political aspirations, since the city was often regarded as the symbolic capital of *Azawad*. For the Malian government in Bamako, regaining Kidal became an important milestone in reasserting state sovereignty and turning the tide in the long-running conflict.

³⁹⁸ ‘*’: hereinafter – recognized as terrorist organization and banned in Russia – *Editor’s note*.

Nevertheless, a settlement remains elusive. Despite their military setbacks, some Tuareg forces continue to operate in Mali's northern regions as well as in the border zones of Niger and Algeria, relying on support from local tribal communities. The government's military gains have also been accompanied by heightened tensions with northern populations and the risk of renewed ethnic clashes.

Weak governance, ethnic conflicts, ecological deterioration, and competition over minerals such as gold and uranium continue to drive instability in the region³⁹⁹.

Termination of Operation *Barkhan* and Its Influence on the Region

A combination of rising anti-French sentiment, successive military coups, and the failure to stem violence culminated in the removal of French troops, first from Mali, then Burkina Faso, and finally from Niger. In Mali, military officers first seized power in August 2020, blaming government weakness for failing to halt jihadist incursions and corruption. Although this initial coup predated the full French exit, it triggered a chain of events that led to deeper instability. In May 2021, the Malian junta consolidated power, sidelining civilian figures and making explicit its break with established political processes. Burkina Faso, suffering from spiraling violence and a demoralized security sector, underwent its own political shock when Lieutenant Colonel Paul-Henri Damiba ousted President Roch Kabore⁴⁰⁰ in January 2022. Less than a year later, Damiba was himself removed in September 2022 by Captain Ibrahim Traoré, after a military revolt over persistent battlefield failures and the inability to protect populations from jihadist attacks. In neighbouring Niger, a coup in July 2023 toppled President Mohamed Bazoum⁴⁰¹, ending what was widely seen as the last Western-aligned government in the region.

These coups were not isolated *acts of ambition*; rather, they drew legitimacy from widespread civilian discontent, particularly over deteriorating security. The new regimes rapidly expelled French troops, terminated cooperation agreements, banned French media channels and sought alternative partners such as Russia. Promises to transit quickly to civilian rule gave way to indefinite timetables and entrenched military authority, even as violence against civilians and clashes with insurgent groups soared to unprecedented levels.

Between 2022 and 2023, both Mali and Burkina Faso suffered from exceptionally high rates of violence, with more than two thousand civilian deaths in some periods and instability serving as an aggravating factor for the stability in the region. The humanitarian situation has deteriorated sharply, with nearly 29 million people now requiring life-saving assistance and protection in 2025⁴⁰².

Increase in violence continued the trend on mass displacement, deteriorated food insecurity, and malnutrition, particularly affecting children and vulnerable groups. Although humanitarian actors

³⁹⁹ Global Terrorism Index 2025 // The Institute for Economics & Peace, 2025. URL: <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/global-terrorism-index-2025>

⁴⁰⁰ Roch Marc Christian Kabore – a Burkinabé politician, the President of Burkina Faso (from 2015 to 2022). Upon taking office, he became the first non-interim president in 49 years without any past ties to the military – *Editor's note*.

⁴⁰¹ Mohamed Bazoum – a Nigerien politician, the 10th president of Niger (from 2021 to 2023). The first Arab president of Niger in the country's history – *Editor's note*.

⁴⁰² Sahel Dashboard – Humanitarian Overview. OCHA, March 3, 2025. URL: <https://www.unocha.org/publications/report/burkina-faso/sahel-dashboard-humanitarian-overview-3-march-2025>

have reached millions with essential aid, severe underfunding only 8% of required funds received as of early 2025 forces difficult prioritization decisions, leaving many without needed support. Besides, the number of internally displaced persons (IDPs) increased tenfold from 2018, rising from 284,000 in 2018 to nearly 3 million by the end of 2024. In Burkina Faso alone, the number of IDPs reached 2 million by the end of 2024, compared to only 29,000 in 2018 – the highest figure in the region that year⁴⁰³. Within the Central Sahel including Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger there are nearly 3.86 million IDPs, while an additional 708,000 people are registered as refugees and asylum seekers⁴⁰⁴.

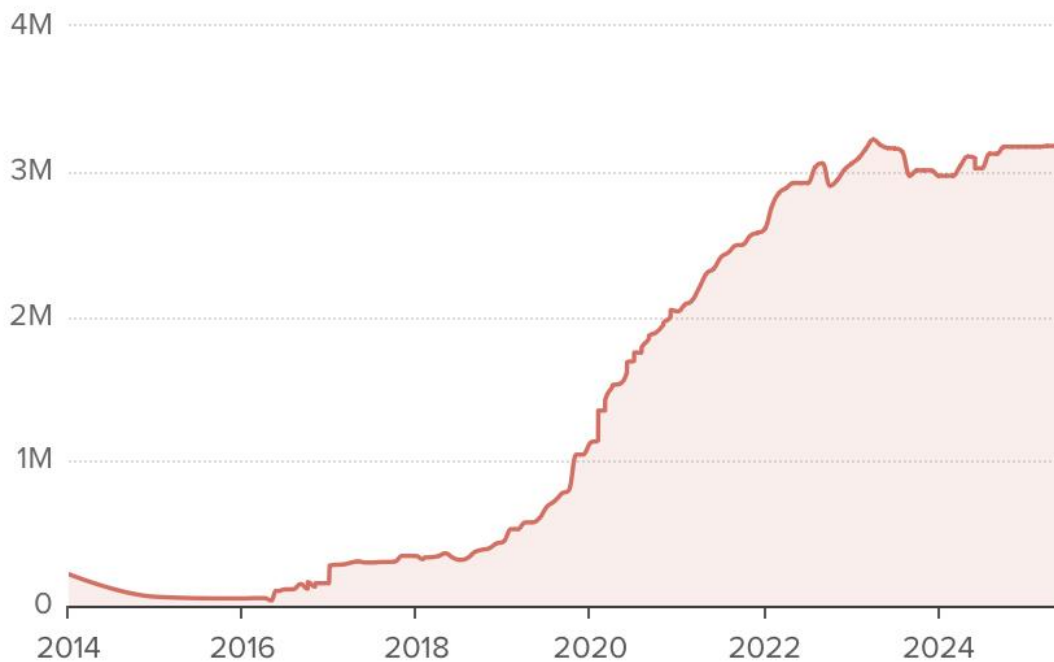
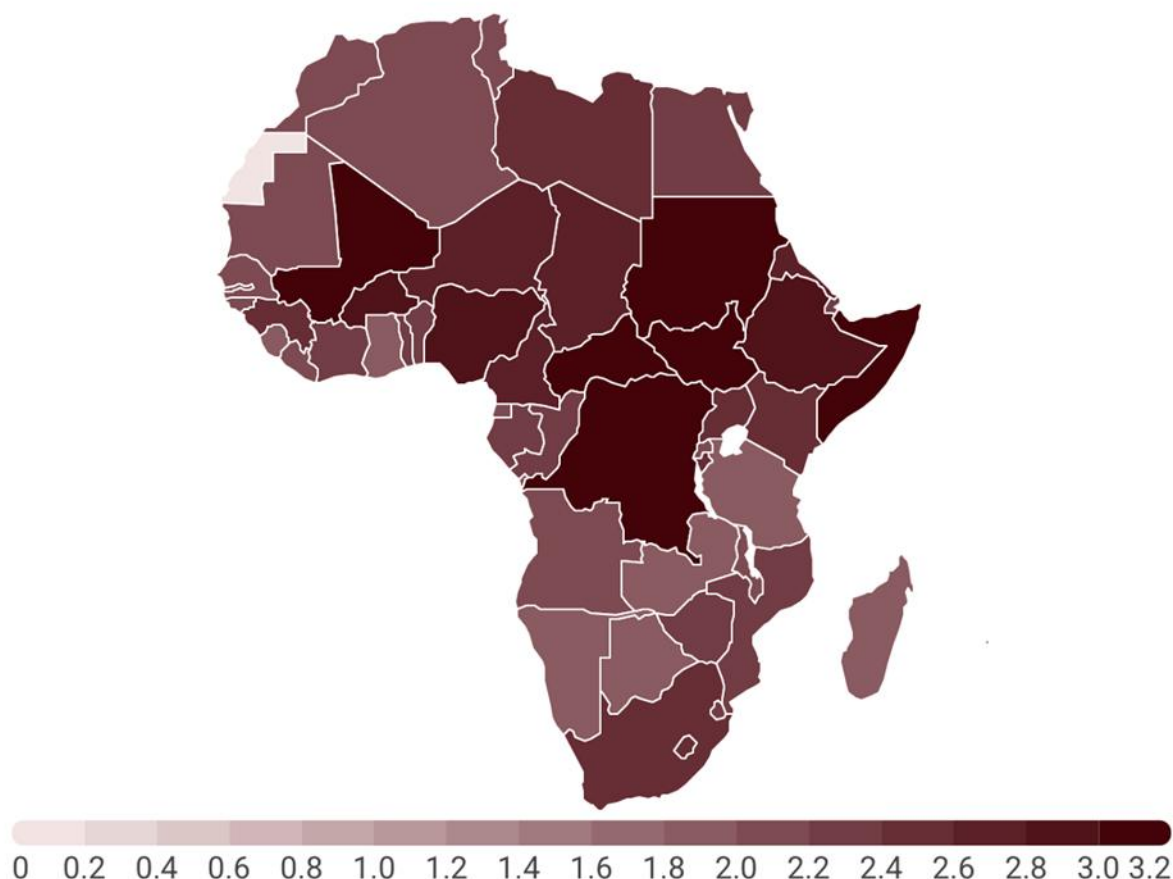


Figure 53. Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) in the Sahel region

Based on: Situation Sahel Crisis (UNHCR) (<https://data.unhcr.org/en/situations/sahelcrisis>)

⁴⁰³ Ibid.

⁴⁰⁴ UNHCR Global Report, 2024. URL: <https://www.unhcr.org/sites/default/files/2025-06/Sahel+%20GR2024%20Situation%20Summary%20v3.pdf>



Map 12. Global Terrorism Index in Africa, 2024

Compiled by the author based on the Index of Global Terrorism, 2024 (<https://www.visionofhumanity.org/maps/global-terrorism-index/#/>)

Withdrawal of Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso from ECOWAS and Emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States

Secondly, the withdrawal also strained regional institutions. ECOWAS, traditionally the guarantor of constitutional order, imposed sanctions and threatened interventions after coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger. Yet its influence waned as the new governments consolidated power and turned away from Western-backed initiatives.

The first country to sever ties with ECOWAS following a military coup was Mali. After the second coup in Mali in May 2021, relations between Bamako and ECOWAS rapidly deteriorated. Concerned about the prolonged transition process and Mali's refusal to adhere to the previously agreed election timetable, ECOWAS imposed harsh sanctions against the country in January 2022.

These sanctions included freezing Mali's state assets in regional banks, trade restrictions, blocking financial flows, and closing member states' borders with Mali. This exerted significant pressure on the military government, which faced the threat of economic isolation.



Figure 54. Cartoon by Tanzanian artist Meddy Jumanna ‘Exit from ECOWAS’.

In return, Malian authorities accused ECOWAS of acting under the influence of external powers, primarily France, and instead sought to strengthen alliances with other states, Burkina Faso and Niger, which had also experienced coups. Amid ongoing tensions, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger announced their withdrawal from ECOWAS in January 2024. The formation of the Alliance of Sahel States symbolized their determination to build independent integration mechanisms, free from Western and former regional influences.

Meanwhile, the ECOWAS sanctions encompassed both political and economic measures. The Sahel countries and several other African nations affected by coups were suspended from decision-making bodies, had their land and air borders closed with ECOWAS states, and faced personal sanctions against new governments’ members and their families, including travel bans and asset freezes. All commercial and financial operations involving sanctioned countries were suspended, state assets frozen in ECOWAS banks, and financial transactions and aid from regional institutions such as the ECOWAS Bank for Investment and Development were halted. Embargoes were imposed on food, medicines, medical equipment, petroleum products, and electricity. Furthermore, all service operations, including government services, were frozen, and hiring citizens from these countries into professional positions within ECOWAS structures was restricted.

The exit from ECOWAS sparked concern in African and international media. Many analysts noted that the break weakened not only the economic prospects of these countries but also their capacity to coordinate responses to common challenges such as terrorism, humanitarian crises, and trade

barriers⁴⁰⁵. Pro-Western African think tanks viewed the break as an opportunity to reform ECOWAS by making sanctions more transparent and fair, and by exploring new forms of regional cooperation⁴⁰⁶. They also highlighted the growing threat of external influence, particularly from Russia. However, in national media within Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, this move was portrayed as a definitive break from external domination and an assertion of national sovereignty. The AES leadership is developing plans to deepen integration: discussions include the introduction of a common currency, a new passport, and measures to expand intra-regional mobility⁴⁰⁷. This policy of an *anti-colonial course* has resonated beyond the Alliance: in Senegal, for example, leaders Bassirou Diomaye Faye and Ousmane Sonko, inspired by AES examples, won the 2024 elections, promising to reduce external influence, particularly in relation to the CFA franc.

Nonetheless, behind these successes lie serious challenges. Hubert Foy, Director of the African Center for Technology and International Security (AFRCSIS), highlighted several issues hindering the Alliance's success⁴⁰⁸:

- **Coordination problems.** After the break with ECOWAS, it has become more difficult to engage with other regional structures, slowing down initiatives and reducing the level of coordination.
- **Terrorist financing.** Groups such as JNIM and ISGS continue to receive funds through smuggling, ransom, and the shadow economy.
- **Weak arms control.** Weapons and equipment, including drones, often slip out of control. When these drones are used against civilians, the level of public trust decreases.

Thus, for now, the Alliance's successes remain limited and require stronger coordination on the part of member states.

Natural Resources Politics and Strategic Interests

The *post-French landscape* is also shaped by competition over resources. Niger's uranium deposits remain critical to both European energy security and potential new partners. Broader geological surveys suggest the presence of uranium and gold across several Sahel states, raising the stakes of strategic competition. Control over resource-rich zones intersects with security dynamics, as jihadist groups often operate near mining areas, and external actors view security cooperation as a pathway to resource access.

Artisanal and small-scale gold mining (ASGM) is pervasive across Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger. Burkina Faso has approximately 800 active artisanal mining sites employing hundreds of thousands of miners. Artisanal mining produced over 8 tons of gold in 2024 alone, using rudimentary methods, with only a fraction operating under formal permits. Industrial gold production in Burkina Faso was

⁴⁰⁵ Security and Economic Implications of the Exit of the AES Countries from ECOWAS – West Africa Network for Peacebuilding (WANEP), 2024. URL: <https://wanep.org/wanep/security-and-economic-implications-of-the-exit-of-the-aes-countries-from-ecowas/>

⁴⁰⁶ The Withdrawal of AES from ECOWAS: An opportunity for re-evaluating existing instruments for regional integration? – Amani Africa. URL: <https://amaniafrica-et.org/the-withdrawal-of-aes-from-ecowas-an-opportunity-for-re-evaluating-existing-instruments-for-regional-integration/>

⁴⁰⁷ Kohnert D. Navigating Rivalries: Prospects for Coexistence between ECOWAS and AES in West Africa. SSRN, 2024.

⁴⁰⁸ The Sahel in the Crosshairs: How Security Problems Affect Uranium Mining and the Development of Nuclear Technologies in the Region After a Series of Military Coups from 2020 to 2023. An Interview by Alexandra Zubenko with Hubert Foy // PIR Center. April 11, 2025. URL: <https://pircenter.org/editions/rus-interview-on-sahel/> (in Russ.).

about 55.7 tons in 2025, while small-scale mines produced around 8.1 tons in 2024. Despite this, a very small percentage of artisanal gold is officially exported, showing the dominance of informal and smuggling activities.⁴⁰⁹

The economic significance of informal mining is immense. OECD estimates suggest that informal sites in the Sahel produce roughly 50 tonnes of gold annually, worth approximately \$2 billion. Burkina Faso accounts for 15–20 tonnes of this output, valued at up to \$960 million per year. Despite this, official gold exports from Burkina Faso's small-scale mines accounted for barely 2% of production, highlighting the overwhelming dominance of smuggling⁴¹⁰. The lack of state control has allowed militant groups, including Al Qaeda⁴¹¹ affiliates and ISIS in the Greater Sahara to exploit artisanal mining as both a financial base and a territorial foothold. Militants tax production, provide logistical support to miners, and repurpose sites as training grounds and hideouts. In many areas, these actors supplant local authorities, enforcing their own rules and redistributing resources to strengthen recruitment. Mining sites near conflict zones are especially vulnerable: nearly half of Burkina Faso's informal mines are located within 25 km of militant attacks.

Artisanal mining also reflects the desperation of communities in one of the world's poorest regions, where Burkina Faso's per capita income is approximately \$660. For many households, gold mining is essential to securing everyday needs such as food, health expenses, and school fees. Efforts to close these mines, whether for legal, environmental, or commercial reasons are deeply unpopular and often viewed as serving the interests of elites or foreign companies. Terrorist and extremist organizations exploit these grievances, positioning themselves as protectors of local livelihoods in contrast to the state. This narrative strengthens their recruitment and embeds them into the *fabric* of the informal economy.

Following the withdrawal of French military forces and the deterioration of diplomatic relations, the situation for French mining operations in the Sahel has considerably deteriorated. In Niger, the military government revoked the operating license of the French state-owned nuclear fuel producer *Orano* at the Imouraren uranium mine, which is among the largest uranium reserves globally, effectively ending French operational control there. *Orano* had already lost operational authority over its three primary Nigerien mines Somair, Cominak, and Imouraren in 2024, amid accusations by Nigerien authorities that the company disproportionately benefited from the uranium extracted and engaged in behavior deemed irresponsible and unfair.

Despite *Orano*'s efforts to resume operations and its initiation of multiple legal and arbitration actions against the Nigerien government, the military authorities blocked access to mining sites and intensified measures to nationalize the assets. This assertive reclaiming of resource sovereignty fits into a broader trend across the Sahel, where military-led governments in Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger are tightening control over mining concessions and reducing French and Western influence in

⁴⁰⁹ Miners in Burkina Faso: Gold Production, 7 Key Mines & Trend, 2025. URL: <https://goldbuyersafrica.com/miners-in-burkina-faso/>

⁴¹⁰ Burkina Faso: the problem of gold smuggling // WCO News. URL: <https://mag.wcoomd.org/magazine/wco-news-86/burkina-faso-the-problem-of-gold-smuggling/>

⁴¹¹ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

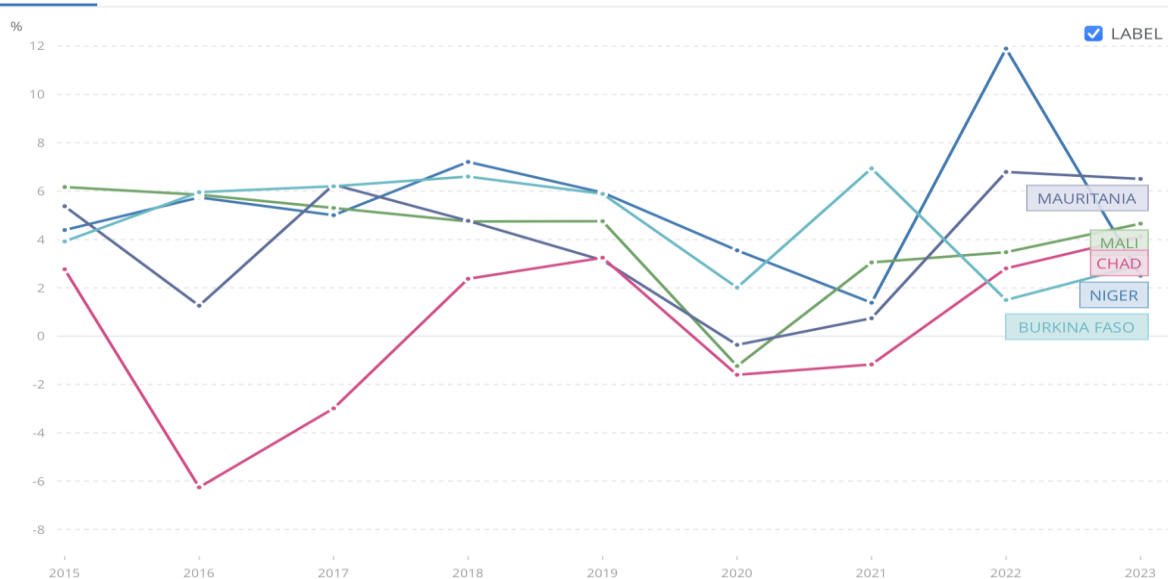
favor of alternative partners like Russia, China, Turkey⁴¹². Russia's *Nordgold* remains active in Burkina Faso, while China is expanding investments in Mali, particularly in lithium extraction.

The Sahelian governments express strong interest in further exploration and development of their resource bases. However, the main obstacle is the prevailing insecurity and instability that threaten mining operations and broader economic activities. Hence, engagement with these countries on resource exploration carries the responsibility to address complex security-related challenges such as preventing smuggling, securing neighbouring unstable regions, protecting local populations, managing scarce and clean water resources, and developing essential infrastructure. Successful entry into the Sahelian resource market thus requires comprehensive solutions that integrate addressing security gaps alongside economic and social development challenges to create a stable environment for resource extraction and partnership.

Economic Situation in the Region

Inflation in the countries of the region fluctuates from moderate levels, such as 2% in Mali, to as high as 11% in Chad. These differences are linked to varying levels of dependence on global agricultural commodity prices, access to subsidies, and the degree of fiscal stability. For most countries, high dependence on imports and vulnerability to fluctuations in fuel and food prices remain key inflation triggers. In Chad, inflationary pressures were exacerbated by disruptions in supply chains.

Political instability has further worsened the economic situation. Before the crisis, the economies of Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger showed relatively steady growth; for example, Mali's GDP grew by 5.1% in 2019. However, by 2021, growth slowed sharply to 1.2%, accompanied by significant social upheavals. Burkina Faso also suffered: after a growth rate of 6.9% in 2019, its economy slowed to 2.5% by 2022. In Niger, where an economic boom was expected in 2023 due to new oil projects, actual GDP growth was only about 2.5%, far below the projected 6.5%⁴¹³.



⁴¹² Niger faces another claim over uranium mining rights. Global Arbitration Review. December 20, 2024. URL: <https://globalarbitrationreview.com/article/niger-faces-another-claim-over-uranium-mining-rights>

⁴¹³ GDP growth (annual %) // World Bank. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG>

Figure 55. GDP growth (annual %) – Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Burkina Faso

Based on: GDP growth (annual %) – Niger, Mali, Mauritania, Chad, Burkina Faso. World Bank national accounts data, and OECD National Accounts data files (https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.MKTP.KD.ZG?end=2023&locations=NE-ML-MR-TD-BF&name_desc=false&start=2015)

Accelerating inflation became another severe consequence of political instability. In Mali, inflation reached 9.1% in 2022, caused by both internal crises and rising global food and fuel prices. In Burkina Faso, inflation exceeded 14% in 2023. Following the 2023 coup in Niger, prices for basic foodstuffs, fuel, and medicine rose nearly 12.5%. Inflation was further aggravated by supply disruptions, broken logistics chains, and blocked access to foreign currency reserves.

Amid ongoing political instability and sanctions, the investment climate deteriorated significantly. Data shows that from 2018 to 2023, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in Sahel countries generally remained negative, indicating that capital outflows exceeded new investments. In other words, foreign companies were either scaling back their presence or fully exiting, selling assets, closing projects, or winding down investment activities. Despite occasional slight increases in some cases, the region showed a steady decline in investment volumes. Niger and Mauritania experienced particularly sharp declines, with FDI reaching low points in 2022⁴¹⁴. In Burkina Faso, funding for mining projects, especially gold extraction a crucial source of foreign currency shrank substantially. Losing support from Western companies, Niger saw its major oil and gas projects frozen.

Moreover, following the suspension of aid from international donors and sanctions, the countries plunged into deep fiscal crises. Similar situations persist in Mali and Burkina Faso, where military regimes aim at minimizing external influences, especially from France and ECOWAS, which also impacts investment inflows and humanitarian aid.

Overall income levels remain extremely low. As of 2023, GDP per capita did not exceed \$900 in Burkina Faso and Mali and stood at just over \$2000 in Mauritania. This indicates very limited potential for growth in domestic consumption, further constraining economic expansion⁴¹⁵.

In summary, the macroeconomic picture of the Sahel region in 2023–2024 reflects fragility caused by a combination of structural poverty, ineffective governance, and geopolitical isolation. At the same time, a series of military coups over the last four years has diminished Western influence, particularly France's, creating new opportunities for non-Western companies, including Russian firms, especially in the mining sector. The changing political course of Burkina Faso, Niger, and Mali toward greater independence may also help Russia reduce economic and political risks associated with doing business in these states. Additionally, the region's high mining potential with relatively low production costs positions it as a prospective partner in uranium extraction and the development of non-energy applications of nuclear technology.

⁴¹⁴ World Bank Open Data. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org>

⁴¹⁵ GDP per Capita // World Bank Open Data. URL: <https://data.worldbank.org>



Figure 56. Cartoon on the Burkinabè channel *Team2Faso* website, “There’s nothing better than a blue-white-red partner”

Source: <https://team2faso.com>

Transnational Threats in the Border Territories

Instability in Libya, Sudan, and the CAR has a profound and destabilizing impact on the wider Sahel, making regional security fundamentally dependent on addressing cross-border threats. Libya’s collapse after the fall of Gaddafi transformed the country into a hub for arms trafficking, human smuggling, and militant activity, which spills directly into neighbouring Sahelian states such as Niger, Mali, and Chad. The proliferation of weapons and safe havens for extremist groups allows jihadist organizations to expand their operations across porous borders.

Similarly, the ongoing conflict in Sudan generates massive refugee flows into Chad and South Sudan, straining fragile infrastructures and fueling intercommunal tensions, while also enabling armed groups to establish new networks of support. In the CAR, weak state authority and the persistence of armed groups such as the *Coalition of Patriots for Change* (CPC)⁴¹⁶ further fragment the security landscape by creating uncontrolled spaces that facilitate illicit trade and cross-border supply channels. Taken together, these crises reinforce one another, transforming borderlands into zones of insecurity that weaken national governments across the Sahel. For this reason, tackling instability solely within Sahelian countries is insufficient: durable improvements in regional security require coordinated efforts to contain and neutralize the threats emanating from neighbouring countries with the common security problems.

Reconfiguration of External Partnerships in the Sahel

⁴¹⁶ *Coalition of Patriots for Change* (CPC) – a coalition of major rebel groups in the Central African Republic created in 2020 to disrupt the 2020–21 Central African Republic general election. In 2024, following a peace agreement with the central government, it split into several factions. The most radical (CPC-F) continued armed resistance until 2025. – Editor’s note.

Russia's relations with the Sahel countries have followed a trajectory of steady expansion since 2023, shaped by the withdrawal of traditional Western partners, regional instability, and the desire of local governments to diversify their external ties. Security cooperation remains the cornerstone of Moscow's engagement, yet economic, educational, humanitarian, and even nuclear energy dimensions are beginning to surface, giving these relations a multidimensional character. In Chad, Russia is seen as a valuable but carefully balanced partner. Ndjamena pursues a pragmatic policy, avoiding overdependence on Moscow while nonetheless acknowledging the importance of Russian expertise in defense and counterterrorism. A 2021 military cooperation agreement laid the groundwork for consultations and training. Economic opportunities are mainly tied to natural resources such as oil, uranium, bauxite, and gold, with Russian companies like *Rosneft* and *Rosgeologia* expressing keen interest.

Russia's involvement also extends to energy production, irrigation systems, medical technologies, and digital transformation. Educational cooperation is substantial, with more than 2500 Chadians already trained in Russia and a scholarship program of 300 places for 2024/25. Humanitarian exchanges and the supply of Russian fertilizers and grain are also facilitating stronger interdependence. High-level diplomacy has been active, including meetings between Vladimir Putin and President Mahamat Déby as well as the first-ever visit by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov to Chad in 2024, underscoring Moscow's broader aim of consolidating its political foothold in Central Africa.

In Niger, relations took a decisive turn with the 2023 coup and the subsequent withdrawal of French troops. Security and military cooperation have dominated bilateral ties, with Moscow offering advisory assistance for the creation of joint armed forces in cooperation with Mali and Burkina Faso through the AES. Russia announced the opening of its embassy in Niamey in 2025, a major diplomatic step⁴¹⁷. Although economic cooperation is still in its infancy, the political shift away from Paris provides significant future potential in mining, energy, and infrastructure development.

Burkina Faso has also moved closer to Russia. Following the 2022 coup, Ouagadougou emphasized independence from former colonial partners while strengthening security ties with Moscow. In May 2025, President Ibrahim Traoré met Vladimir Putin in Moscow to discuss terrorism, regional stabilization, and enhanced bilateral ties. The focus has been security aid, but trade and investments are receiving growing attention as well. The "Economic Days of Burkina Faso" held in Moscow in 2024 highlighted expanding commercial opportunities, while both sides are considering the creation of an intergovernmental commission to institutionalize cooperation. Russia has also deepened its involvement in education and public health, increasing scholarship quotas and initiating joint projects in medical research and infrastructure. A Russian delegation headed by the chief of *Rospotrebnadzor* visited Ouagadougou in 2025 to strengthen health-related cooperation, showing that humanitarian engagements are now being added to the security agenda.

Mali traditionally remains Russia's closest political and strategic partner in the Sahel. Moscow and Bamako have intensified cooperation since the French military withdrawal, formalizing their

⁴¹⁷ Russia to open embassy in Niger // *Xinhua*. April 4, 2025. URL: <https://english.news.cn/africa/20250404/3ad2188f4e0d42e2b4d3cfb3f7fe7648/c.html>

partnership through successive high-level meetings and growing military-technical collaboration. A landmark visit by President Assimi Goïta to Moscow in June 2025 produced several agreements, including the establishment of an intergovernmental commission on trade, economic, and scientific cooperation, as well as a comprehensive accord on the peaceful use of nuclear energy. Politically, Mali is central to Russia's vision of an alternative security framework in West Africa, where sovereignty and non-alignment underpin the bilateral agenda.

Mauritania, while not part of the AES, has maintained traditionally constructive relations with Russia based on mutual respect and long-standing dialogue. The dynamic of Moscow–Nouakchott ties gained new strength in the period 2023–2025. In February 2023, Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov paid the first ever visit by a Russian foreign minister to Mauritania since the establishment of relations in 1964, meeting President Mohamed Ould Cheikh El Ghazouani and other officials. This event symbolized the opening of a new phase in bilateral cooperation. In October 2024, President El Ghazouani held talks with Vladimir Putin in Moscow, during which both leaders underscored their political coordination on international questions and expressed readiness to strengthen interaction within organizations such as BRICS and the African Union. Putin noted the sustained nature of the political dialogue and the active development of the legal basis for cooperation. Educational ties are particularly advanced: more than 3500 Mauritanian specialists have received higher education in Russia, and there is growing interest among the younger generation in pursuing studies at Russian universities. Mauritania's role as a relatively stable political actor in the region and its constructive approach to multipolar diplomacy provide Moscow with a partner capable of balancing between North Africa and the Sahel, while Mauritania sees Russia as a reliable counterpart in education, diplomacy, and broader international coordination.

Taken together, Russia's engagements with Chad, Niger, Mali, Burkina Faso, and Mauritania illustrate a wider reorientation of African geopolitics in which Moscow positions itself as an alternative to postcolonial Western frameworks. Security is the *initial magnet* of Russian cooperation, particularly in Niger, Burkina Faso, and Mali, but this has increasingly been accompanied by programs in education, infrastructure, energy, humanitarian projects, and even nuclear technology. Chad and Mauritania adopt more pragmatic stances, seeking to diversify their options while benefitting from Russian expertise.

A separate and largely important track of cooperation is nuclear energy cooperation. In June-July 2025, Russia concluded formal intergovernmental agreements on peaceful nuclear energy cooperation with both Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso. Their scope includes the creation and development of national nuclear infrastructure in line with International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) standards, the design and construction of nuclear power plants and research reactors, supply and management of nuclear fuel, extensive training and professional development for local personnel, and robust legal frameworks for nuclear and radiation safety. Cooperation covers the production and use of radioisotopes for medicine, agriculture, and industry, as well as joint work in nuclear medicine, including diagnostic imaging and treatment technologies. There are no formal nuclear cooperation agreements between Russia and Mauritania or Chad. Mauritania's lack of such agreements is largely due to its heavy reliance on existing natural resources, particularly oil and gas, which shapes its energy policies and reduces the immediate need for nuclear energy development. In Chad, persistent economic and political constraints, including internal instability and limited national capacity, have

hindered progress toward formal nuclear partnerships, despite expressed interest in uranium development and nuclear medicine.

These accords build on earlier memoranda and negotiations, and signal Russia's sustained commitment to providing the Sahel with access to advanced nuclear technology, contributing to their energy resilience and independence. All in all, Russia's cooperation with Sahelian countries since 2023 is characterized by a multidimensional approach centered on key areas such as security, economic partnership, education, humanitarian aid, and nuclear energy. Security cooperation, particularly with Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, forms the backbone of Moscow's engagement, involving military training, advisory support, and the formation of joint regional forces under the AES supported by Moscow. The main avenues for cooperation remain natural resources exploration and extraction, nuclear medicine and energy, development of the logistical infrastructure, including roads, ports, airports, education, and humanitarian cooperation.

Conclusion

The security situation in the Sahel remains one of the defining challenges for the region and also a key factor shaping Russia's potential role as a partner. States such as Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger face persistent threats from extremist movements, organized criminal networks, and uncontrolled migration flows across porous borders. These challenges are compounded by fragile political systems, recurring instability, and the limited capacity of local governments to provide reliable governance and security for their citizens. In this environment, cooperation with external partners who can offer both pragmatic security assistance and broader development support becomes a vital component of national resilience. Russia, having established solid political ties and goodwill in the region, is well positioned to expand its engagement in a manner that balances security needs with socio-economic development.

A multidimensional approach to cooperation would allow Moscow to act as more than just a traditional security provider without limiting engagement to "resources in exchange for security". Russia could frame its involvement as a package of mutually reinforcing initiatives that combine military assistance, infrastructure development, education and training, healthcare expansion, and humanitarian support. Military cooperation would be one pillar of this framework, contributing to the fight against transnational terrorism, organized trafficking networks, and the violent instability spreading across borders. However, this presence should not be understood as power projection, but rather as a structured system of joint defense, integrating local forces into training, logistics, and reconnaissance.

At the same time, emphasis on infrastructure and economic resilience can substantially improve the viability of long-term security arrangements. The establishment of protected industrial zones, energy enclaves, and safe transport corridors would not only enhance the sustainability of Russian investments but also provide tangible stability dividends for local populations. Integrated projects that combine modern energy solutions with job creation, logistics, and agricultural support could gradually diminish the economic basis for recruitment into extremist groups by offering employment and basic services. Russia's experience in delivering turnkey infrastructure, coupled with its willingness to adapt agreements to local conditions, gives it a distinctive advantage in presenting itself as a reliable long-term development partner.

Equally important are the social and humanitarian dimensions of cooperation. Training local specialists, investing in healthcare and water access, and supporting educational institutions would provide credibility and public legitimacy for Russia's presence. By embedding socio-economic initiatives into its regional strategy, Moscow can gain durable goodwill from communities that have historically seen foreign partnerships either fail to deliver benefits or replicate exploitative, *neo-colonial patterns* of engagement. Moreover, coordinated efforts to control migration flows, secure borders, and address humanitarian concerns would simultaneously aid regional stability and reduce external pressures on Europe, aligning Russian involvement with broader international security priorities.

Finally, Russia's role in the Sahel will be shaped not only by tangible initiatives but also by how its engagement is presented and perceived. At present, Moscow benefits from an image untarnished by colonial history, which gives it an advantage over some Western actors. To preserve and deepen this trust, media and diplomatic efforts should highlight not only security cooperation, but also Russia's broader contributions to health systems, education, water management, and social resilience. By strengthening ties with regional media and promoting narratives of genuine partnership and respect for sovereignty, Russia can reinforce its reputation as a strategic ally helping Sahelian states escape isolation and external pressure.

In conclusion, the prospects for Russian-Sahelian cooperation lie less in resource extraction alone and more in a comprehensive partnership that ties security assistance to infrastructure, social development, and humanitarian outreach. By presenting itself as a long-term partner focused on stability, resilience, and the well-being of local societies, Russia can build a sustainable presence in the Sahel while supporting regional governments in their struggle against insecurity and underdevelopment.

PART IV. UNDER THE MICROSCOPE



CHAPTER 16.

SECURITY ACROSS THE EURASIAN SPACE: THE ARCHITECTURE THAT UNITES⁴¹⁸

Alexander Trofimov

Peace is indivisible. <...> There can be no security in one's own peace and tranquillity if the peace of neighbours – both near and far – is not ensured.

From the speech of the People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs of the USSR Maxim M. Litvinov at the Council of the League of Nations on January 17, 1935

Russia seeks to transform Eurasia into a continental common space of peace, stability, mutual trust, development and prosperity.

Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation

President of Russia Vladimir Putin, in his Address to the Federal Assembly of the Russian Federation on February 29, 2024 noted the need to work towards shaping, in the foreseeable future, a contour of equal and indivisible security in Eurasia. The head of state expressed readiness for a substantive discussion on this topic with all interested countries and associations of the continent.

Three and a half months later on June 14, Vladimir Putin speaking at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation put forward the initiative to create a Eurasian security architecture. The President ordered to establish a dialogue with potential participants of the future system, taking into account that it should be open to all states of the continent.

...It is evident that the entire system of Euro-Atlantic security is crumbling before our eyes. At present, it is practically non-existent and must be rebuilt. To achieve this, we must collaborate with interested countries, of which there are many, to develop our own strategies for ensuring security in Eurasia and then present them for broader international deliberation.

This is the task set in the Address to the Federal Assembly: to outline a vision for equal and indivisible security, mutually beneficial and equitable cooperation, and development on the Eurasian continent in the foreseeable future.

Vladimir Putin
President of the Russian Federation
Meeting with Foreign Ministry senior officials (June 14, 2024)
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74285>

⁴¹⁸ This chapter is an updated version of an article published in a policy journal *National Strategy Issues* (2025, No.2 (89), p.76-89) and translated from Russian language with permission by the publisher.

Thus, a major foreign policy initiative was announced, aimed at working out, together with partners, options for ensuring security across the Eurasian space. The Russian initiative is not a *tribute to fashion* or a situational response to the hybrid war unleashed by the West against our country. It is an element of the long-term strategy of a strong power, which has always been a significant part of the Eurasian continent, consistently and systematically followed a course towards promoting pragmatic, constructive, and mutually beneficial cooperation with all members of international community. This idea takes on a special role against the backdrop of the gradual formation of a multipolar world, as it is essentially designed to contribute to the development of this trend.

History Brief

Russia's central geographic position on the continent, where the Russian Civilization neighbours other civilizations (Chinese, Arab-Muslim, Persian, Indian, European), as well as our country's political and economic weight, and deep traditional ties with most cultures and peoples of Eurasia predetermine the necessity of its active participation in ensuring stability and security, both its own and that of neighbouring countries and peoples. This is natural. Russia *enjoys* a long experience of statehood, was involved in the intricacies of political and economic ties both in Europe and in various subregions of Asia. We inevitably influenced processes in both parts of the world. The reverse is also true: the complex course of history resulted in the acknowledgement by Russia's political leadership of its special responsibility for ensuring peace at regional and global levels.

In different eras, this responsibility manifested itself in various ways. Among the events of the 19th century, one can recall the initiative of the Russian Emperor Alexander I to create the *Holy Alliance*. This is nothing less than the idea of forming a common security space for the Russian Empire and the monarchies of Europe at that time, an attempt to coordinate the “rules of the game”, to ensure the stability of the political power of the states involved in this process. The *Concert of Europe* (1814-1815 Congress of Vienna), created after the defeat of Napoleonic France with Russia playing a leading role, which excluded the hegemony of any single country, rid Europe of destructive wars for decades.

In the second half of the 20th century the Soviet Union consistently sought to maintain a balance of power. Important mechanisms along this path were the *Warsaw Treaty Organization* (WTO) and Moscow's provision of security guarantees to its neighbours and allies who shared its understanding of the fact that one's own security cannot be effectively guaranteed at the expense of the security of others.

This course was a development of the concept of the “indivisible peace” put forward by People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs M.M. Litvinov in the 1930s. The international community of that time witnessed efforts aimed at creating an architecture of international relations that would include the USSR as a full participant and was aimed at reducing risks and ensuring fair cooperation.

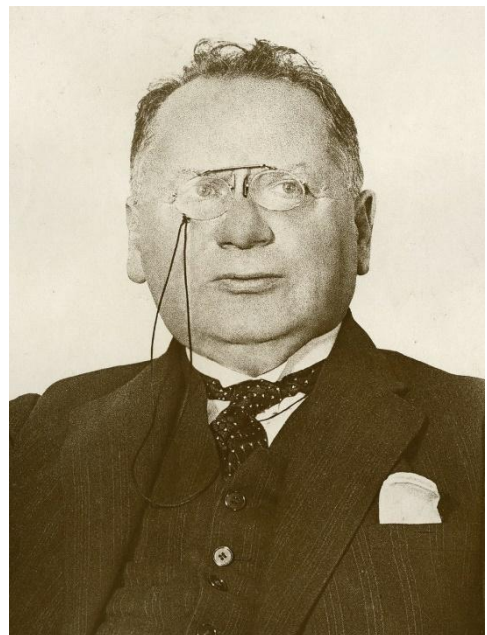


Figure 57. People's Commissar for Foreign Affairs Maxim Litvinov in 1932
Source: Open Data

It is worth mentioning that thanks to the Yalta-Potsdam system, formed with the key role of Soviet diplomacy, peace and global stability were established for many decades.

Collapse of the Euro-Atlantic Concept

After the disintegration of the USSR, Russia's attempts to become part of the process of cooperation in the field of security were linked to Euro-Atlantic schemes rooted in the politics of the late Cold War era. Our country initiated the creation of a system based on the leading role of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) as well as on various agreements with NATO and the EU. The system has laid on fundamental documents such as the Helsinki Final Act of 1975, the Charter of Paris for a New Europe of 1990, the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe (CFE) of 1990, the Founding Act on Mutual Relations, Cooperation and Security between the Russian Federation and the North Atlantic Treaty Organization of 1997, the Charter for European Security of 1999, and the Astana Commemorative Declaration "Towards a Security Community" of the OSCE Summit in 2010.

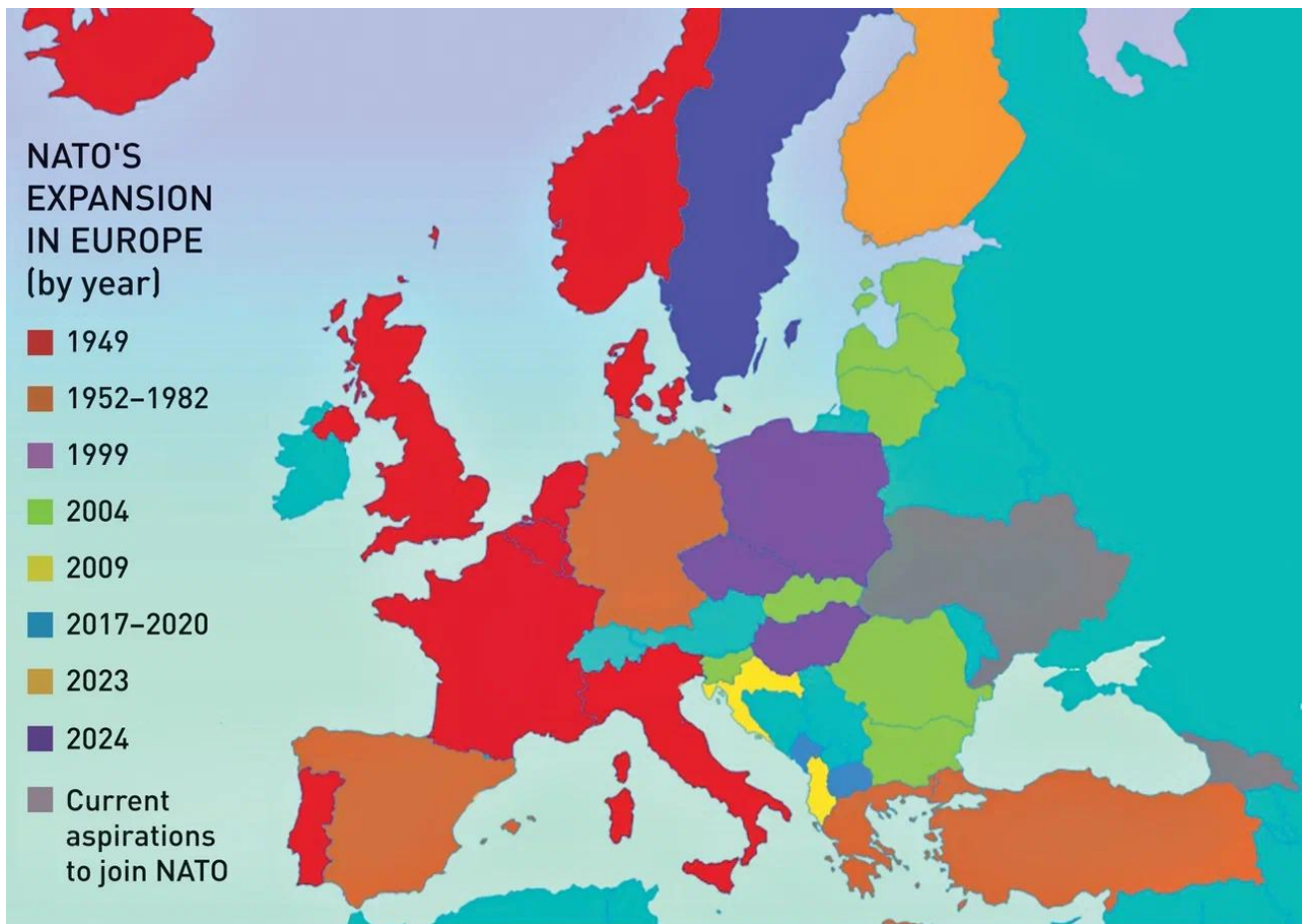
As Vladimir Putin said, "after the end of the acute military-ideological confrontation, the world community had a unique chance to build a reliable, just order in the field of security. This did not require much – just a simple ability to listen to the opinions of all interested parties, a mutual readiness to take them into account. Our country was set precisely for such constructive work"⁴¹⁹.

However, the Western countries opted for a different approach. It turned out that the US and its allies in the North Atlantic alliance did not intend to take Russia's interests into account from the very beginning. They did not plan to fulfill the political commitments undertaken within the OSCE framework – to respect the principle of equal and indivisible security in the Euro-Atlantic region.

Let me remind that this principle mandates that each state should enjoy an equal right to security in accordance with its national interests, therefore no state or group of states should gain advantage over others in exercising this right. In other words, each and every state is free to choose or change its security arrangements, including adhering to neutrality. At the same time, it is not permissible to strengthen one's security at the expense of the security of others and no state, group of states or organization can have pre-eminent responsibility for maintaining peace and stability. Consequently, the practical implementation of this principle is possible only on the basis of reciprocity, as stipulated by the Foreign Policy Concept of Russia⁴²⁰.

⁴¹⁹ Meeting with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia: The President held a meeting with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation // President of Russia. June 14, 2024. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74285> (in Russ.).

⁴²⁰ See para. 24: Concept of the Foreign Policy of the Russian Federation (approved by Decree of the President of the Russian Federation No. 229 of March 31, 2023) // MFA of the Russian Federation. March 31, 2023. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/detail-material-page/1860586/> (in Russ.).



Map 13. NATO Expansion in Europe, by year (as of 2025)

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

It was precisely the NATO and the EU countries that destroyed the military-political dimension of the OSCE. The assurances given to the Soviet leadership about the non-expansion of the alliance eastward were effectively disavowed. From 1999 to 2024, seven *waves* of expansion took place, as a result of which the size of the military bloc doubled – from 16 to 32 states. NATO members, at the instigation of the United States of America, refused to ratify the Agreement on Adaptation of the CFE Treaty, nullified the significance of the Vienna Document on Confidence- and Security-Building Measures in Europe (1999 and its updated version of 2011). The Americans themselves, through their actions, buried the Treaty on Open Skies of 1992, and also unilaterally withdrew from the Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty of 1972 and the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty of 1988.

Legally binding security guarantees were something NATO allies were prepared to provide only to those who are part of the alliance. Overall, the West believed that any possible security architecture in Europe should be *NATO-centric* and, accordingly, presuppose Washington's controlling participation in ensuring political and military stability.

The Russian side consistently pointed out the *fallacy* of the course chosen by the Western elites. It is appropriate to recall the words of President of Russia Vladimir Putin that Russia did not just criticize and warn, but offered options, constructive solutions, emphasized the importance of developing a

mechanism for European and global security that suited everyone⁴²¹. We were not just ignored, but all Russian initiatives were *brushed off the table*, such as, in particular, the draft Treaty on European Security of 2008 or the draft agreements between Russia and the US and NATO on security guarantees of 2021.

As a result, all mechanisms of Euro-Atlantic security were completely discredited due to the unwillingness of their participants to take into account the vital interests of our country, to apply the principle of indivisible security towards Russia. Maintaining the existing architecture, deployed in the Euro-Atlantic region, is not possible anymore – it has collapsed.

Growing Tension in Eurasia

Since recently, the North Atlantic alliance has claimed a leading role not only in its traditional zone of responsibility but also throughout the Eurasia, attempting to surround the entire continent with the military circle.

As stated in the documents, threats to the alliance emanate from the Asia-Pacific region, therefore NATO intends to assert its military dominance in the east of Eurasia. At the summit in Madrid in 2022, the interconnectedness of security in the Euro-Atlantic and the so-called “Indo-Pacific region”⁴²² was declared, and under this motto, the alliance is penetrating the Asia-Pacific. The Alliance’s members are looking forward to achieve their geopolitical goals there in the same way as in Europe, by introducing bloc mechanisms and expanding NATO infrastructure into the region. They try to erode the inclusive mechanisms built up over decades around the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), that has ensured stability in South East Asia for decades. China and the DPRK are experiencing increasing external pressure.

Furthermore, NATO seeks to create footholds in the South Caucasus. After the 20-year occupation of Afghanistan, the US and its allies today want to wedge themselves into the fragile process of stabilizing the situation in this country, invent pretexts for resuming their military presence in the states of Central Asia, and make attempts to militarize the North Eurasian part, to create military threats to Russia’s security from the waters of the Arctic Ocean and the airspace above it.

The situation in the Middle Eastern part of Eurasia is developing even more dramatically. The power balance in this strategically important region has been seriously undermined by Israel’s aggressive actions against its neighbours in Gaza Strip, West Bank, Lebanon, Syria, Yemen and Iran. The latter has fallen victim to the Americans’ and Europeans’ *policy of maximum pressure*. It is equally important to note that the US unilateral withdrawal from the agreements on the Iranian nuclear program, that were approved by the UN Security Council, the stubborn desire of Washington to monopolize the process of Arab-Israeli settlement, the amount of destructive steps against Syria,

⁴²¹ Meeting with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia: The President held a meeting with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation // President of Russia. June 14, 2024. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74285> (in Russ.).

⁴²² The concept of a “free and open Indo-Pacific region” was first publicly announced by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2016. The White House announced it a year later. The essence of the concept is that US policy towards the region and its very definition serve as components of Washington’s strategy aimed at “containing” Beijing – *Editor’s note*.

resulted in catastrophic consequences, putting this strategically important region on the brink of complete destabilization.

Today the overall situation in international politics is characterized by increased turbulence and uncertainty of future development. Actions of the current US administration on the world stage are significantly changing the familiar picture: there is growing tension among Western nations and a reconfiguration of forces and interests in the Euro-Atlantic. Nevertheless, the US demonstrated a focus on normalizing Russia-American relations, the confrontation along the West-Russia line remains one of the main factors determining the dynamics of the international situation. The hybrid war against our country does not stop. There are no serious reasons to talk about a reversal of the trend towards the degradation of the political and military situation, caused by the EU and NATO steps aimed at undermining the national interests of the leading Eurasian powers.

Constructive Alternative

In the emerging multipolarity era, resolving security issues in the Eurasian space is of decisive importance for mitigating external threats to Russia and for maintaining global stability. The Russian initiative to establish an architecture of indivisible Eurasian security corresponds to the logic of the regionalization of international relations, serves the tasks of building a world order based on polycentric principles, and responds to the entire array of security challenges and threats along the perimeter and on the territory of the continent.

The point is also that the risks of conversion of hotbeds of tension into a large-scale conflict are increasing and question further progressive development of all of Eurasia. It is precisely in Eurasia where today a substantial share of global economic growth is ensured, and independent non-Western centers of the multipolar world are strengthening their positions. Eurasian states have all they need to take advantage of the benefits of cohabitation in the interests of effectively addressing the tasks before them in various fields and unlocking the potential of multilateral projects with their participation. A stable architecture of equal and indivisible security should be the support and guarantee of such cooperation. It will reliably protect the countries involved from external threats, including military ones.

There is no all-inclusive multilateral organization in Eurasia which is the largest and the richest continent. However, a whole range of subregional structures operate on Eurasian soil. They play a special role in strengthening security and provide the necessary opportunities for work aimed at aligning the interests of participating states. These include, in particular, the Union State of Belarus and Russia, the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), ASEAN, the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), the Conference on Interaction and Confidence Building Measures in Asia (CICA).

...Together, our states make up nearly a third of the global economy in terms of purchasing power parity. Such a partnership could initially focus on protecting investments, streamlining procedures for the cross-border movement of goods, joint development of technical standards for next-generation technology products, and the mutual provision of access to markets for both services and capital. Of course, this partnership should be based on principles of equality and mutual interest. For Russia, this partnership will open new possibilities for increasing exports of food and energy, as well as offering services in engineering, education, healthcare, and tourism to the Asia-Pacific Region, allowing us to play the leading role in forming new technology markets, and re-orienting major global trade flows to Russia.

Vladimir Putin
President of the Russian Federation
Presidential Address to the Federal Assembly (December 3, 2015)
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/50864>

All Eurasian integration structures could potentially combine their efforts and create their own system of division of labour to save resources and harmonize economic plans and become part of a complex architecture with strong horizontal connections. Impetus to work in this direction was given by the idea put forward by President Vladimir Putin in December 2015 of a *Greater Eurasian Partnership* as the widest possible contour for strengthening and achieving liberalization of trade and investment contacts, carrying out cross-border infrastructure projects, improving the transport and logistics network, and harmonizing integration processes. In turn, this lays a solid material foundation for building an architecture of equal and indivisible Eurasian security. Thus, one of the tasks set by the head of state is to significantly intensify the dialogue process between the multilateral organizations operating in Eurasia, which is already being implemented.

Goals and Participants

Among the goals of the initiative, the key ones are the settlement of regional conflicts and their prevention in the future, the development of a system of bilateral and multilateral security guarantees, ensuring comprehensive protection of national and regional security from the destructive influence of external and internal challenges and threats.

This endeavour is based on the understanding of the need for states and multilateral structures of Eurasia to assume primary responsibility for their own security in accordance with the principle ‘Eurasian solutions to Eurasian problems’ without interference from outside. Extra-regional actors that would like to do so can provide assistance at the request of the capitals in need, supporting approaches that are agreed upon by Eurasian countries. It is precisely this line that we adhere to when settling contentious issues related to the South Caucasus, the Middle East, South Asia, Afghanistan, and the Korean Peninsula.

This, of course, should presuppose the gradual curtailment of the military presence of external players on the continent. The negative experience of armed interventions in affairs of Vietnam, Yugoslavia, Iraq, Afghanistan, Libya, Syria, and Yemen must be taken into account when building the security architecture in Eurasia. As Vladimir Putin noted, in the current situation the statement like this may

seem unrealistic, but if we create a reliable security system in the future, then there will simply be no need for the presence of extra-regional military contingents⁴²³.

It is worth recalling the historical experience of convening the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe. This topic was touched upon by Andrey A. Gromyko back in April 1966 during his meetings with Italian leaders in Rome, who supported the Soviet minister's proposal, but with an amendment – to add the words “and cooperation” to the phrase “conference on security in Europe”. In its finished form, this idea was voiced in March 1969 at a meeting of the leaders of the *Warsaw Pact* countries held in Budapest. In April 1969 Moscow's initiative was discussed at the NATO Council in Washington and was approved in general. Finland acted as an intermediary between the capitalist and socialist states. In May 1969, President Urho Kekkonen sent notes to all European capitals urging them to join the process of developing a unified system of European security. The socialist countries agreed with the idea unconditionally. As a condition for their participation in the negotiations, the capitalist countries put forward the demand to involve the US and Canada in the process, which was met⁴²⁴. However, what was achieved in past when a bipolar world existed looks like an anachronism at the current stage when multipolarity is taking shape.

Today Russia is not pushing an idea of creating an organization or political and military association. In the *heterogeneous space* of Eurasia, the architecture we are envisaging can only be integral – modular and intertwining simultaneously. It presupposes a multiplicity of formats, agreements, and other models of cooperation between interested parties in the security sphere.

Individual Eurasian states will themselves determine the specific areas of mutually beneficial partnership and reach “cross-cutting” agreements among themselves – bilateral or multilateral, create mechanisms and institutions to ensure common interests in the field of security. In other words, Russia proposes the prospect of developing a network, rather than a hierarchical system, without predetermining what it will come out in the end. Will this involve, for example, a continent-wide umbrella structure, or periodically convened meetings of high-level representatives, or a complex configuration involving states and their associations.

In any case the principle of equal and indivisible security would lay in a center of the whole endeavor. This principle has already been mentioned earlier in this article. However, it is necessary to clarify its meaning in the context of establishing a new Eurasian security architecture. It is basically a combination of two elements. The first one being a recognition that all countries have an equal right to ensure their security and to choose how (in what ways) to do it. And the second one being a commitment that no one country's security should harm, weaken or threaten the security of another country. This principle, so far, has not been universally recognized and, therefore, in practice, states that wish to follow it usually make a political commitment to doing so. In our vision, relations among parties of the security architecture in Eurasia will combine different cases of this principle's application – ranging from confidence-building measures (such as exchanging information about

⁴²³ Meeting with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia: The President held a meeting with the leadership of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation // President of Russia. June 14, 2024. URL: <http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/74285> (in Russ.).

⁴²⁴ See: Helsinki Act (CSCE) // History of Russia. URL: <https://istoriarusi.ru/cccp/xelsinskiy-akt-sbse-1975.html> (in Russ.); Gorshkova E.A. “Italian Breakthrough” in the diplomacy of A.A. Gromyko // Scientific-Analytical Herald of the Institute of Europe RAS. 2020. No. 6. P. 103-111 (in Russ.).

military exercises and inviting defense attachés to such exercises) to non-aggression pacts or classical military alliances.

As Vladimir V. Putin said, the states and regional structures of Eurasia themselves must build a complex of working institutions, mechanisms, agreements that would genuinely serve common goals of achieving of stability and development. This envisages a broad discussion on a new system of bilateral and multilateral collective security guarantees.

The architecture of Eurasian security proposed by our country can only be inclusive. We are not talking just about some kind of ‘smaller Eurasia’ that would comprise Russia and its neighbours. All states located on the continent can join the dialogue. We are ready for interaction with European countries as well. However, joint work is possible only with those of them who have renounced a *hostile course* towards other Eurasian states, and intend to follow the principle of indivisible security, following the path of pragmatic, mutually respectful cooperation, which implies finding the balance of interests on all issues. Moreover, the discussion should be about the security of all Eurasia: processes occurring in different parts of the continent are intertwined and interconnected, it is no longer possible to consider them in isolation, to divide security in Europe from security in one or another subregion of Asia.

And What’s in Practice?

In essence, the proposed architecture constitutes a form of multilateral interaction when political and legal framework might be created. Such a system is already taking shape and finding its embodiment in practical actions based on the coordination of common approaches and in accordance with the needs and available national potentials of the parties involved.

The following can be cited as examples of legal agreements: the Treaty with Belarus on security guarantees that was concluded in December 2024 (entered into force in March 2025), the Security Concept of the Union State, the Russia-DPRK Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership signed In June 2024 (entered into force in December 2024), which is up to play an important role in stabilizing the situation in Northeast Asia, the Russian-Iranian Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, signed in January 2025 (entered into force in October 2025), that solidified the aspiration of the parties for closer interaction in the interests of peace and security. It is worth recalling the Collective Security Treaty that established the CSTO.

A Statement on the principles of cooperation in ensuring security in Eurasia, adopted at the meeting of the CIS Council of Foreign Ministers in October 2024, is an example of the political arrangements. In addition to Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, and Uzbekistan joined the document. Earlier, in November 2023, in the CSTO format, the foreign ministers approved a Statement on common approaches to ensuring the security of the Eurasian space. These organizations are expanding discussions on all issues related to building a new architecture of continental security based on the principles of its indivisibility.

The *Astana Declaration* of the Council of Heads of State – SCO members, adopted in July 2024, points to the need to enhance its role in creating conditions for strengthening universal peace, security and stability, recognizes the need to improve SCO mechanisms for countering challenges and threats

to security, and emphasizes that corresponding cooperation “can serve as a basis for shaping an architecture of equal and indivisible security in Eurasia.” The similar understandings were fixed in the Tianjin Declaration of the Council of Heads of State of the SCO adopted in September 2025.

Russia-China relations of strategic cooperation and comprehensive partnership are of paramount importance for strengthening stability in Eurasia. In the joint statement of the leaders of the two powers following their meeting in Beijing on May 16, 2024, it was noted that the current geopolitical realities “highlight the demand for shaping a stable security system in the Eurasian space, fully corresponding to the principle of equal and indivisible security”⁴²⁵. An intensive bilateral dialogue is underway on this topic. Conceptually, the Russian proposal complements the Chinese initiative in the sphere of global security and aligns with its basic principles.

⁴²⁵ “Formation of a new contour of equal and indivisible security in Eurasia. The role of the Russian Federation as a guarantor of world order” // Committee of the Federation Council on International Affairs. June 4, 2024. URL: http://international.council.gov.ru/activity/activities/round_tables/157585/ (*in Russ.*).

	The Union State	Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)
Russia	Member	Member	Member	Member
Belarus	Member	Member	Member	Member
Armenia	-	Member	Member*	Dialogue partner
Azerbaijan	-	Member	Ex-Member	Dialogue partner
Kazakhstan	-	Member	Member	Member
Kyrgyzstan	-	Member	Member	Member
Uzbekistan	-	Member	Ex-Member	Member
Tajikistan	-	Member	Member	Member
Moldova	-	Member*	-	-
India	-	-	-	Member
Iran	-	-	-	Member
China	-	-	-	Member
Pakistan	-	-	-	Member
Mongolia	-		-	Observer
Afghanistan	-		-	Observer
Turkmenistan	-	Associated Partner	-	-
Serbia	-	-	Observer	-
Georgia	-	Ex-Member	Ex-Member	-
Ukraine	-	Ex-Member	-	-
Bahrain	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Egypt	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Qatar	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Cambodia	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Kuwait	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Laos	-	-	-	Dialogue partner

	The Union State	Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS)	Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO)	Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)
Myanma	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Nepal	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Saudi Arabia	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Türkiye	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
The UAE	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
Sri Lanka	-	-	-	Dialogue partner
The Maldives	-	-	-	Dialogue partner

Table 5. List of Members, Dialogue Partners and Observers of key security organizations in Eurasia (* – a state is in process of leaving the organization), as of October 2025
 Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

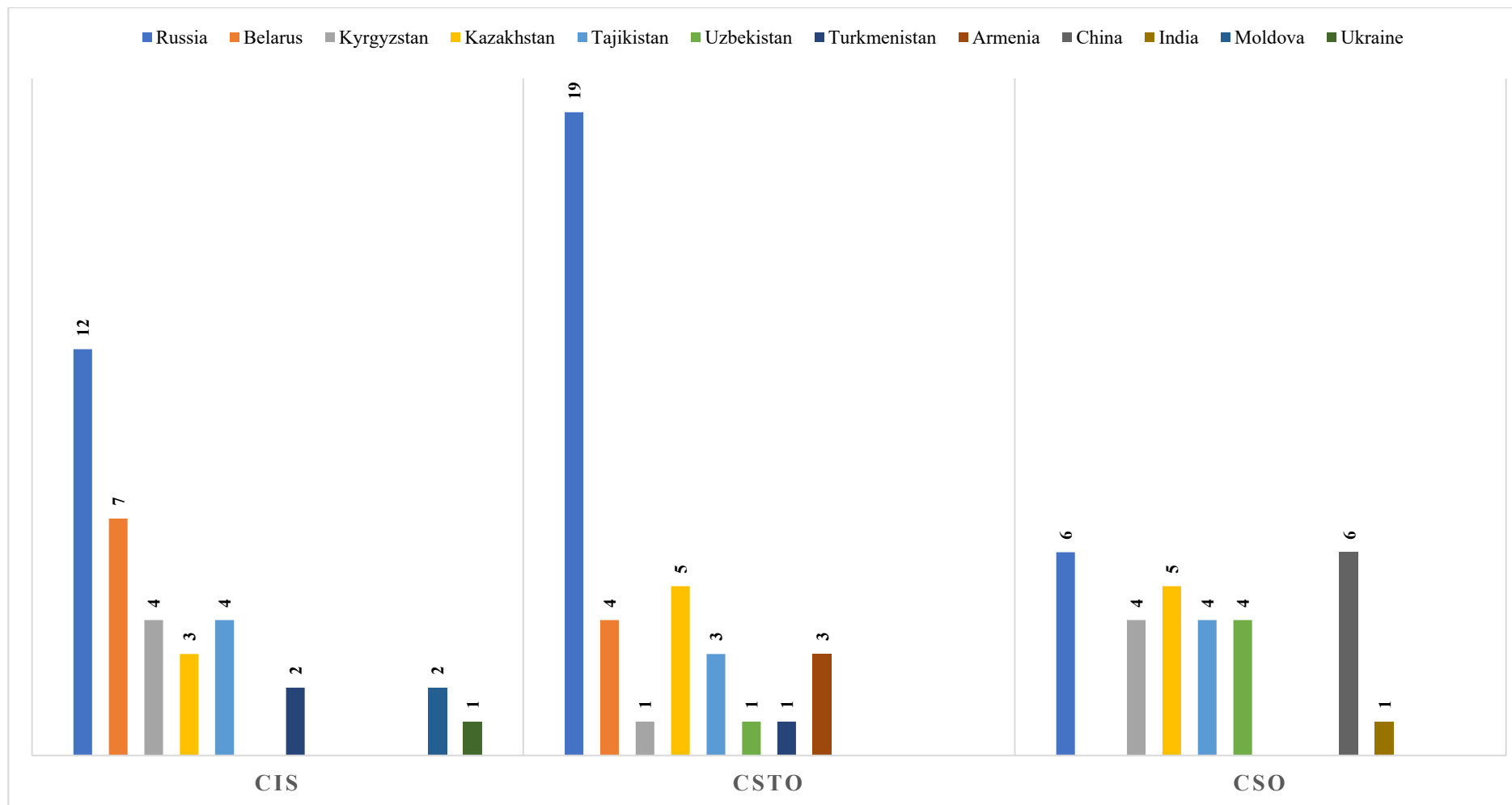


Figure 58. Number of summits and high-level meetings hosted by member states of the CIS, CSO and CSTO (as of October 2025)

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

The Joint Statement of the PRC and the Russian Federation on Further Deepening the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership of Coordination for the New Era on the Occasion of Commemorating the 80th Anniversary of the Victory in China's *War of Resistance* against Japanese Aggression, the Soviet Great Patriotic War, and the Establishment of the UN, signed by Presidents Putin and Xi on May 8th, 2025 in Moscow goes further. It stipulates that the two sides will cooperate on the *Global Security Initiative*, and the Chinese side attaches importance to the "Eurasian Security Architecture" initiative proposed by the Russian side and is willing to advance alignment of security concepts and integration of interests with the Russian side to contribute to maintaining world peace and security.

Russia and China agreed that safeguarding the international legal system based on the UN Charter is of great importance for maintaining stability in the Eurasian continent, and advocated that cooperation in security, economic, cultural, and other fields of the region should conform to the trend of multipolar development and benefit all countries in the Eurasian continent.

The two sides emphasized that ensuring a reliable and sustainable Eurasian security system must eliminate the root causes of contradictions between countries and abandon behaviors that create mutual threats. Russia and China firmly condemn any external acts of force and power aimed at undermining the process of Eurasian unity and equal cooperation.

The growing awareness of the responsibility of regional players for settling disputes in their parts of Eurasia is manifested in the activities of such structures as the "3+3" Consultative Regional Platform for the South Caucasus, the Moscow format of consultations on Afghanistan, the expanded "troika" on peaceful settlement in Afghanistan, as well as the mechanism of countries – neighbours of this country. An important role in building a stable system of peaceful coexistence and resolving security problems is played by mechanisms created within the ASEAN framework, Russia also participates in their work. There are other examples.

Since 2023, the city of Minsk that is the capital of Belarus is the venue of the annual High-Level International Conference on Eurasian Security. Three such events have taken place for the moment. The Minsk Conference is becoming an important platform for broad dialogue on issues of shaping an indivisible security space in Eurasia with the participation of officials and representatives of the expert community. Our country supports the intention of our Belarusian colleagues to hold this forum annually.

Legislators and representatives of political parties make a significant contribution to the implementation of the initiative to create a security architecture in Eurasia. *United Russia* political party initiated International public and political hearings on this subject were held on May 28-30, 2025 in Russian city Perm located near the geographical border between Europe and Asia. This event brought together more than 300 participants from over 30 Eurasian countries, including MPs, leading political parties' representatives, business leaders and experts. Participants expressed their support for Russia's commitment to establish and honest and equal dialogue on ways to solve problems related to Eurasian security. The hearings have shown high potential of parliamentary and party diplomacy, its capacity to strengthen mutual understanding among international partners.

As for the crisis on Russia's western borders, which has entered a *hot phase*, we are dealing with it in an emergency response mode by using military and military-technical means. The goals of the special military operation will be achieved. To eliminate threats to our country emanating from the west in a reliable manner, it will be necessary to think through the issue of new models of interaction in the field of security in this geographical direction (after stabilization of the situation) and their integration into the common Eurasian architecture. There is a vast field for creative development of ideas on security guarantees. Historical examples here include various bilateral and multilateral agreements of both political and military nature – from non-aggression pacts, already mentioned in this article, to agreed confidence-building measures and security guarantees.

On the Eurasian Charter

In 2023, at the first conference on Eurasian security in Minsk, Belarus put forward a proposal to develop a Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI Century. In Russia, it received support at the highest level. We believe that the preparation of this document would correspond to our initiatives in the field of security in Eurasia. The Charter could outline a vision for the framework of interstate interaction in Eurasia, reflect a strategic understanding of the uniqueness of the formation of a new system of international relations, replacing the West-centric world order. The Charter is suitable for fixing the principles and norms on which the security space in all Eurasia will be built – from Lisbon to Beijing, from Murmansk to Riyadh, New Delhi and Jakarta. Moreover, the Charter might fix the parameters of States' interaction in multipolar world based on the UN Charter principles in their entirety and interconnection.

This is complex work, during which we would like to take into account the widest possible range of approaches and positions. We will conduct it with the involvement of the maximum number of like-minded partners and without setting artificial deadlines. The process of developing the Eurasian Charter does not promise to be simple and quick, but ultimately it could be adopted with the consent of the participants at the level of heads of state.

An important step was the invitation sent by the foreign ministers of Russia and Belarus to the secretaries general of key Eurasian organizations to participate in the work on the Charter. On November 22, 2024, in the city of Brest, the Russian and Belarusian foreign ministers adopted the statement "Joint Vision of the Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI Century". The document presents considerations we share with our Belarusian colleagues regarding the possible content of the Eurasian Charter. It serves as a starting point for interaction with all our partners who show interest in the endeavour.

This idea now is a part of intergovernmental discussions in diverse formats and it is being considered by expert community. At the plenary session of the 3rd International Conference on Eurasian security held in Minsk on October 28-29, 2025, high representatives of the DPRK, Iran and Myanmar publicly expressed their support to the elaboration of Eurasian Charter of Diversity and Multipolarity in the XXI Century. We note with satisfaction the interest to the proposal being shown by other countries. The work on the Eurasian Charter will proceed with all interested partners.

Conclusion

The initiative to create a Eurasian security architecture is designed to address appropriately to a wide range of challenges and threats – from traditional military ones to issues such as energy security and transnational crime. In essence, it aims to promote stability, cooperation, and development throughout Eurasia, eliminating external and internal risks fraught with destabilization of the continent, and simultaneously contributing to the establishment of a new world order based on multipolar principles.

President Vladimir Putin stated that this process should be peaceful, non-conflictual, and fully take into account the opinions of all its participants⁴²⁶. Obviously, for the full-scale implementation of such a strategic undertaking, necessary conditions must develop in various regions of Eurasia. However, even at the current stage, we consider it important, without imposing anything on anyone, to work together with *like-minded partners*, taking into account their fundamental interests, on a vision of Eurasian architecture as a unifying factor in international relations. We are not trying to predetermine any specific elements in advance. At the same time, this architecture could potentially encompass the entire continent. It should be open to everyone.

Our goal is to create a platform for cooperation, providing each country with additional opportunities to ensure its own security and facilitate its development in accordance with its national interests and traditions. We are ready to launch an honest partnership with all those who, like Russia, are guided by the principles of equality, mutual respect and the balance of interests in international affairs.

⁴²⁶ Answers to journalists' questions following the visit to China // President of Russia. May 17, 2024. URL: www.kremlin.ru/catalog/countries/CN/events/740 (*in Russ.*).

CHAPTER 17.

QUO VADIS? HOW FAR WILL AUSTRALIA GO ON THE NUCLEAR TRACK?⁴²⁷

Yuriy Shakhov

The concept of “nuclear independence” in the Australian context is a multilayered category that doesn't imply a complete renunciation of alliance obligations, but rather indicates a state's desire to expand its autonomy in decision-making and the development of key components of its nuclear complex. In the era of the AUKUS alliance, this formulation takes on particular significance, as Australia is gaining access for the first time to naval nuclear energy technologies – an area previously closed to most powers outside the “nuclear club”.

In Australia, “nuclear independence” should be understood as the ability of national institutions and the scientific-industrial complex to ensure sustainable control over the full spectrum of nuclear processes. Of particular importance in this framework is the distinction between the energy and military components. While Australia has traditionally maintained a restrained position in the energy sector, limiting its nuclear technology to research and medical applications, in the military sphere, AUKUS has become a turning point: access to nuclear submarines allows Canberra to claim the special status of a state “technologically close to nuclear powers” (*quasi-nuclear state*).

It's important to emphasize that Australia has been a party to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) since 1973 and officially adheres to the policy that the country “does not have, and will not seek, nuclear weapons”. This is enshrined in both international documents and government policy: the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) explicitly states that Australia remains committed to the global nonproliferation regime and views the NPT as “the *cornerstone* of international security”⁴²⁸.

Therefore, all conclusions in this chapter should be viewed as an assessment of potential and capabilities, not as a prediction of a direct departure from international obligations. The focus is on building autonomy – the ability, if necessary, to deploy certain segments of nuclear infrastructure within national territory and minimize dependence on external partners.

Australia's Nuclear Ambitions: Historical Context

As early as the mid-20th century, amid the emergence of “peaceful atom” projects and the nuclear arms race between the *great powers*, Canberra considered the possibility of developing its own nuclear capability. In 1956, Defence Minister Athol Townley explicitly recommended acquiring tactical nuclear weapons to equip Australian bombers, and in 1958, Australian Atomic Energy

⁴²⁷ This chapter is based on upcoming volume of PIR Center's collective expert study on threshold nuclear states.

⁴²⁸ Khlopkov A. Australia's military nuclear program // PIR Center. August 8, 2022. URL: <https://pircenter.org/2022/08/08/voennaja-jadernaja-programma-avstralii/> (*in Russ*).

Commission Chairman Philip Baxter proposed building a reactor to produce weapons-grade plutonium in Mount Isa⁴²⁹.

The most famous example of early nuclear ambitions was the *Jervis Bay Project*, initiated by Prime Minister John Gorton in 1969⁴³⁰. The project was ultimately abandoned for economic and political reasons: high costs, public opposition, and a change in government put an end to Australia's first real attempts to acquire the technical capability to create a nuclear weapon. Nevertheless, it was precisely these ambitions that laid the institutional foundation. As early as the 1950s–1980s, scientific personnel were being trained, research facilities were being established (the HIFAR reactor, launched in 1958), and cooperation with the United States and Great Britain in the field of peaceful nuclear energy was being established. In 1987, the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO) was established, inheriting the competencies of the former Atomic Energy Commission⁴³¹.

A major milestone was the construction of the state-of-the-art OPAL research reactor (commissioned in 2007)⁴³². OPAL has become the *heart* of Australian nuclear science, providing radioisotope production, industrial materials, and fundamental research.

Australia became one of the leading uranium exporters, but deliberately chose not to develop a full fuel cycle. This decision left it as a raw materials *appendage* of the global nuclear market.

Thus, by the 21st century, Australia found itself in a contradictory position: on the one hand, the country possessed a developed research base and colossal natural resources, but on the other, it remained limited in its ability to independently develop nuclear energy and completely excluded military projects.

AUKUS's Turn: From Ally to “Nuclear Partner”

The situation changed dramatically in 2021 with the signing of the AUKUS agreement between Australia, the United States, and the United Kingdom, under which the “nuclear powers” agreed to transfer naval nuclear power technology to their ally. This decision was not only a *symbol of trust* in Canberra but also a challenge to the global nonproliferation regime: experts called AUKUS a “dangerous precedent”, as it allows the use of highly enriched uranium in military installations of a non-nuclear state.

⁴²⁹ Walsh J. Surprise Down Under: The Secret History of Australia’s Nuclear Ambitions // *The Nonproliferation Review*, 1997. Vol. 4, No. 1.

⁴³⁰ Clarke M. Thinking the unthinkable again // The Interpreter. Lowy Institute, 2024. URL: <https://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/thinking-unthinkable-again>

⁴³¹ Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). History, 2005. URL: <https://web.archive.org/web/20050614074630/http://www.ansto.gov.au/ansto/history.html>

⁴³² Australia's OPAL research reactor officially opens // AtomInfo.Ru, April 23, 2007. URL: <http://www.atominfo.ru/news/air1293.htm> (in Russ).

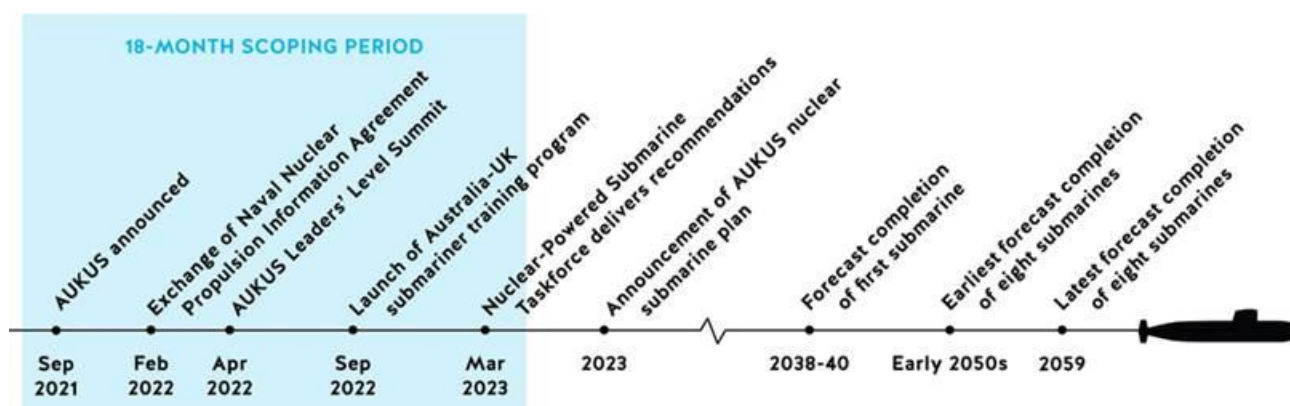


Figure 59. “AUKUS Timeline” (2021-2059)

Source: United States Studies Center (<https://www.ussc.edu.au/365-days-of-aukus-progress-challenges-and-prospects>)

For Australia, AUKUS was a key step toward achieving a new form of “nuclear status” – albeit one unrelated to weapons development. Acquiring nuclear submarines (*Virginia-class* and *SSN-AUKUS*) requires a whole chain of competencies: from training engineers and operators to creating a maintenance infrastructure and a national regulatory system. In this sense, AUKUS can be seen as an incentive to develop that very *nuclear independence*, albeit within an allied framework.

Thus, historical dynamics show that Australia has repeatedly found itself at a *crossroads* between the military and peaceful uses of nuclear energy. Today, in the era of AUKUS, this *crossroads* has become relevant again, but in a different form: it's not about the atomic bomb, but about the state's ability to independently manage its nuclear scientific and technical base, personnel, and resources, using them for both energy and naval purposes.

Further analysis requires consideration of three key elements – technical, human and scientific resources – on which Australia's potential future nuclear independence may be built.

Research Infrastructure: From HIFAR to OPAL

The history of Australian nuclear science and technology begins with the HIFAR (*High Flux Australian Reactor*), commissioned in 1958 in Lucas Heights, a suburb of Sydney. This 10-megawatt heavy-water reactor was built with technical support from the United Kingdom and was the first facility of its kind in Australia⁴³³. For nearly five decades, HIFAR served as the country's central research facility: it produced the first radioisotopes for medical use, conducted experiments in materials science and radiation physics, and trained specialists in nuclear operation⁴³⁴. However, by the beginning of the 21st century, it no longer met modern safety and efficiency requirements.

The solution was the creation of the OPAL (*Open Pool Australian Lightwater Reactor*). The contract for its design and construction was awarded to the Argentine company INVAP, which has significant experience in this field⁴³⁵. OPAL officially began operations in 2007, becoming Australia's largest

⁴³³ World Nuclear Association. Australian Research Reactors // World Nuclear Association Information Library, 2017. URL: <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/appendices/australian-research-reactors>

⁴³⁴ Engineers Australia. High Flux Australian Reactor (HIFAR) // Engineers Australia Heritage Recognition Program, 2023. URL: https://heritage.engineersaustralia.org.au/wiki/Place:High_Flux_Australian_Reactor

⁴³⁵ INVAP S.E. OPAL in Australia // INVAP Official Website. URL: <https://www.invap.com.ar/en/divisions/nuclear/opal-in-australia>

modern research facility. The 20 MW OPAL uses low-enriched uranium fuel (<20% U-235). The choice of such fuel was crucial: Canberra demonstrated its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT) and ruled out the possibility of military use of the reactor⁴³⁶. OPAL operates in 30-35-day cycles with short shutdowns for refueling, providing an average of 300 working days per year. This regime makes it one of the most productive research facilities in the world.

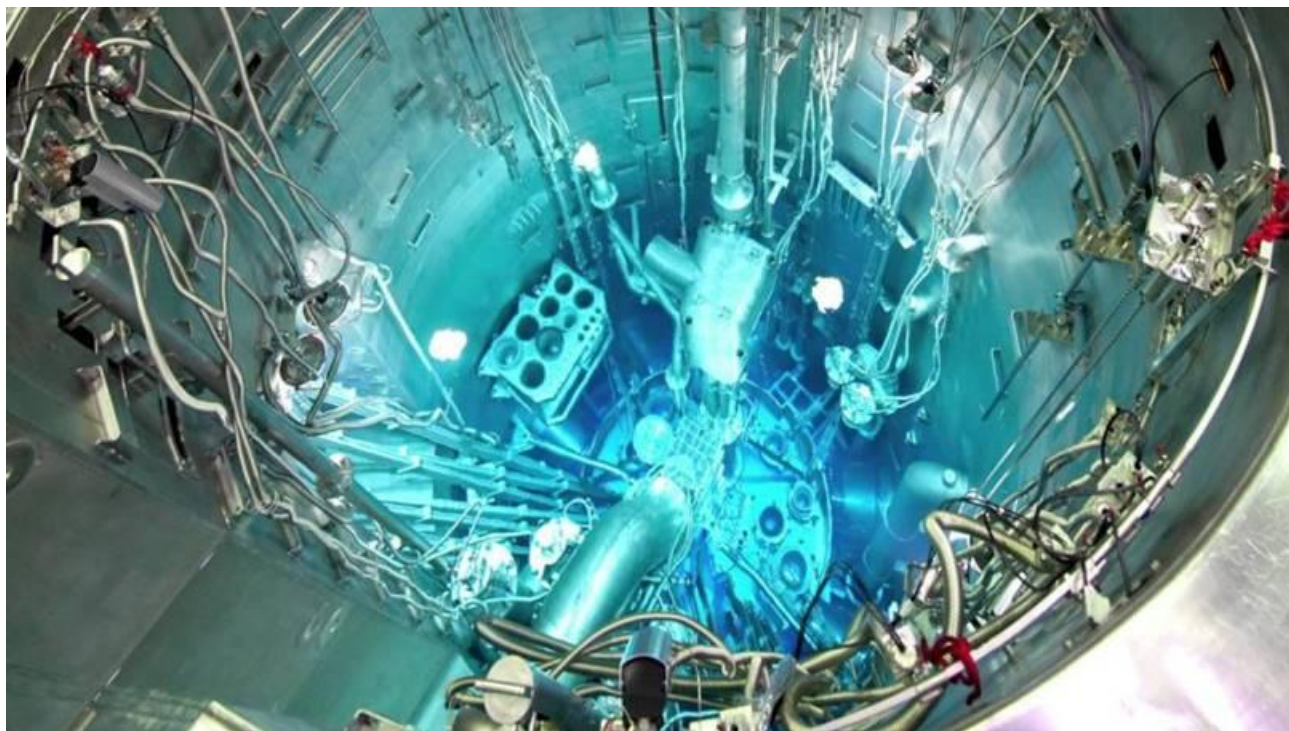


Figure 60. Open Pool Australian Lightwater Reactor (OPAL)

Source: ANSTO (<https://www.ansto.gov.au/facilities/opal-multi-purpose-reactor>)

In 2024, the reactor underwent a major upgrade: the First Reactor Protection System (FRPS) and the cold neutron source (CNS) were replaced. These upgrades extended OPAL's operational life by at least 15 years and expanded the range of research conducted⁴³⁷.

OPAL is thus not only a scientific facility but also a strategic element of Australia's infrastructure. It ensures the country's sustainable presence in nuclear science, supports expertise in reactor operation, nuclear fuel management, and radiation safety, and serves as a practical basis for fulfilling international obligations under IAEA safeguards.

Research Centers and Institutes

In addition to the OPAL research reactor, Australia has a number of research centres under the jurisdiction of the Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO).

⁴³⁶ World Nuclear Association. Australian Research Reactors // World Nuclear Association Information Library, 2017. URL: <https://world-nuclear.org/information-library/appendices/australian-research-reactors>

⁴³⁷ Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). OPAL Multipurpose Reactor // ANSTO Official Website, 2025. URL: <https://www.ansto.gov.au/facilities/opal-multi-purpose-reactor>

The *Australian Centre for Neutron Scattering* (ACNS) is a leading platform in the Asia-Pacific region for fundamental and applied research using neutron scattering. Neutron beams from the OPAL reactor enable the structure and properties of various materials to be studied at the atomic level. Australian research in neutron scattering is among the leaders in the Asia-Pacific region in terms of citation impact⁴³⁸.

Another important element of the scientific infrastructure is the *Australian Synchrotron*, located in Clayton. It is the largest scientific facility of its kind in the Southern Hemisphere. The synchrotron is an electron accelerator that generates bright X-rays, which are used to study the structure of matter. Essentially, the Australian Synchrotron serves as a *bridge* between fundamental science and applied research, providing Australia with access to world-class technologies⁴³⁹. There are no prospects for using this facility for defense purposes.

The third *brick* of the research potential of Australia is the *Centre for Accelerator Science* (CAS). The Centre provides access to accelerators used for a wide range of tasks, from studying the structure of materials to applied research in the radiation hardness of electronic components. CAS's work is particularly important in the defense and space sectors, where radiation testing of materials and electronics is required. The Centre also actively collaborates with universities and international laboratories, facilitating Australia's integration into the global scientific community.

Together, these three facilities form a nuclear science cluster that supports Australia's development of civilian science, medicine, and industry, strengthening the country's economic potential. Furthermore, should policy change, they could be mobilized for defense purposes. Research in materials and radiation resistance, for example, has direct applications in the development of new weapons.

Human Resources and Educational Potential

In recent years, Australia has made targeted investments in the development of educational programs and international cooperation in the field of specialist training.

The University of New South Wales (UNSW, Sydney) is a leading provider of nuclear engineering training. It offers a Master of Engineering Science (Nuclear Engineering) program, which includes courses in reactor physics, nuclear facility design, uranium and thorium fuel cycles, radiation safety, and nuclear materials. UNSW actively collaborates with ANSTO, providing students with the opportunity to participate in hands-on research at the OPAL reactor and other nuclear facilities⁴⁴⁰. The program focuses not only on civilian needs but also on the defense sector, which is particularly relevant in the context of AUKUS.

⁴³⁸ Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation (ANSTO). Australian Centre for Neutron Scattering // ANSTO Official Website, 2025. URL: <https://www.ansto.gov.au/facilities/australian-centre-for-neutron-scattering>

⁴³⁹ Ibid.

⁴⁴⁰ University of New South Wales (UNSW). Master of Engineering Science (Nuclear Engineering) // UNSW Sydney Official Website. URL: <https://www.unsw.edu.au/study/postgraduate/master-of-engineering-science-nuclear-engineering>

The Australian National University (ANU, Canberra) is the country's leading nuclear physics center. It houses the largest national accelerator laboratory used for research in nuclear structure, isotope analytics, and materials science. ANU trains postgraduate and doctoral students in fundamental and applied nuclear science, actively collaborating with international research centers, including the European Organization for Nuclear Research (CERN) and US national laboratories⁴⁴¹.

Since 2024, the University of Melbourne has been implementing a national program to train specialists for nuclear shipbuilding. This initiative has allocated 300 places for students studying in fields related to nuclear installations, materials science, and marine engineering. The first intake took place in 2024, and the program is scheduled to be completed in the 2030s. According to university representatives, this initiative is “unparalleled in the history of Australian education” and is part of a national priority within AUKUS⁴⁴².

The University of Sydney, the University of Adelaide, Curtin University, and the University of Queensland are developing related training programs: radiation physics, uranium mining, and nuclear waste management. These programs have practical applications in the resource sector, nuclear medicine, and environmental safety, but if national scientific potential is mobilized, their graduates could also be involved in defense projects.

It's worth noting that Australia isn't limiting itself to domestic resources, actively leveraging its allied ties to train specialists. Under the AUKUS program, naval officers undergo training in the United States at *Groton Submarine School* in Connecticut, where they learn how to operate and maintain nuclear submarines⁴⁴³. Meanwhile, engineers complete internships in the UK at *Rolls-Royce* and *BAE Systems*⁴⁴⁴.

This approach allows Australia to develop a core of specialists capable of operating and maintaining the *SSN-AUKUS* fleet in the future. These specialists will possess not only technical expertise but also an understanding of international norms, safety standards, and the safeguards system, which is especially important for a country that remains a party to the NPT.

The development of Australia's national nuclear infrastructure cannot be viewed solely through the lens of government institutions and research centers. The private sector, including companies operating in related fields, is beginning to play a significant role. These entities facilitate investment, stimulate specialist training, and become conduits for dual-use technologies that, under certain conditions, can be used not only in civilian but also in military programs.

⁴⁴¹ Australian National University (ANU). Department of Nuclear Physics and Accelerator Applications // ANU Research School of Physics. URL: <https://physics.anu.edu.au/research/npaa/>

⁴⁴² University of Melbourne welcomes student places to support nuclear-powered submarines student pathways // University of Melbourne Newsroom, 2023. URL: <https://www.unimelb.edu.au/newsroom/news/2023/november/university-of-melbourne-welcomes-student-places-to-support-nuclear-powered-submarines-student-pathways>

⁴⁴³ Australian Submarine Agency. Royal Australian Navy Sailors graduate Submarine Officer Basic Course: next step, assignment to U.S. Virginia class submarines // *Australian Submarine Agency News*. April 22, 2024. URL: <https://www.asa.gov.au/news/all-news/2024-04-22/royal-australian-navy-sailors-graduate-submarine-officer-basic-course-next-step-assignment-us-virginia-class-submarines>

⁴⁴⁴ *BAE Systems* Australia. Earning and learning with BAE Systems Australia // BAE Systems Australia Story. URL: <https://www.baesystems.com/en/story/earning-and-learning-with-bae-systems-australia>

As AUKUS is implemented and nuclear submarines are prepared for operation, private sector participation is becoming even more crucial. These companies are the ones who can accelerate the process of technology localization and lay the groundwork for Australia's future *nuclear independence*.

Uranium Resources and Fuel Cycle

According to the *World Nuclear Association*, Australia holds approximately 28% of the world's proven uranium reserves – the largest share of any country. This makes the country a key player in the global nuclear fuel market and a key supplier of uranium for energy programs in Europe and Asia. In terms of uranium exports, the country consistently ranks among the world's top three, along with Kazakhstan and Canada⁴⁴⁵.

Name of the mine	Key information
Olympic Dam (South Australia)	One of the largest multi-purpose deposits in the world, operated by <i>BHP</i> , it accounts for a significant portion of Australia's uranium exports and is also a source of strategic metals.
Beverley (South Australia)	Deposit developed using in-situ leaching (ISL).
Four Mile (South Australia)	Deposit developed using in-situ leaching (ISL).
Ranger (Northern Territory)	Historically, one of Australia's most famous mines, development of which began in the 1980s. For many years, Ranger was the largest exporter of uranium, but production ceased in 2021, and the site is currently undergoing reclamation.

Table 6. Australia's largest uranium mines

Compiled by the author based on open sources

Despite its abundant resource base, Australia is not developing a full nuclear fuel cycle. The country lacks facilities for converting uranium concentrate into gaseous compounds (UF₆), enriching uranium (increasing the proportion of the U-235 isotope), or reprocessing spent nuclear fuel (SNF).

This is due to current legislative prohibitions. At the federal level, the construction of enrichment and reprocessing facilities is expressly prohibited by the Nuclear Activities Prohibition Act, reflecting Australia's long-standing anti-nuclear stance. There is also the Nuclear Waste Storage Facility (Prohibition) Act 2000 and other regulations that further enshrine the country's anti-nuclear stance. These restrictions are explained by both nonproliferation concerns and the political sensitivity of nuclear issues for Australian society⁴⁴⁶. As a result, the country remains a “commodity exporter”:

⁴⁴⁵ Investing News. *Top Uranium Reserves by Country* // Investing News, 2025. URL: <https://investingnews.com/top-uranium-reserves-by-country/>

⁴⁴⁶ Parliamentary Library of Australia. *Nuclear activities prohibitions in Australia* // Parliament of Australia, 2024. URL: https://www.aph.gov.au/About_Parliament/Parliamentary_departments/Parliamentary_Library/Research/Quick_Guides/2023-24/NuclearActivitiesProhibitions

Australia mines uranium and ships it abroad for reprocessing and enrichment, primarily to the United States, Europe, and Asia.

Some researchers note that such dependence cements Australia's status as an *atomic appendage* – a state possessing the richest resources, but not controlling the full cycle of their use⁴⁴⁷.

To move towards greater autonomy, Australia would have to take several steps:

1. Revise legislation, lifting bans on the construction of enrichment and reprocessing facilities.
2. Create national uranium conversion and enrichment capacity, which would require billions of dollars in investment and years of planning.
3. Ensure political consensus and public support, which is a particularly challenging task given the strong anti-nuclear sentiment in the country.

However, such steps come with enormous costs and could provoke significant resistance both domestically and from the international community, which views Australia as a *pillar of nonproliferation*.

Australia's Energy Infrastructure

Australia remains one of the few developed countries without nuclear power plants. Despite possessing the world's largest uranium reserves, the country has never operated nuclear power plants for civilian purposes⁴⁴⁸. Unlike countries such as France, Japan, and South Korea, Canberra has relied on other generation sources – coal, gas, and, in recent years, renewable energy.

The absence of nuclear power plants is entrenched not only historically but also legally. Federal legislation has established strict barriers to the development of nuclear energy⁴⁴⁹, eliminating the possibility of developing nuclear power and the fuel cycle and focusing efforts solely on research reactors (HIFAR, OPAL), medical, and industrial applications.

At the same time, the question of the future of nuclear energy regularly returns to the political agenda. In 2023-2024, the opposition Liberal-National Coalition actively promoted the idea of introducing small modular reactors (SMRs)⁴⁵⁰. It was proposed to use the sites of closed or decommissioned coal-fired power plants. Such an initiative could make use of existing grid infrastructure and human

⁴⁴⁷ Clarke M, Frühling S, O'Neil A. *Australia's Nuclear Policy: Reconciling Strategic, Economic and Normative Interests* // Routledge, 2016.

⁴⁴⁸ *The Jervis Bay Project*, initiated in 1969, was considered by Australian authorities, among other things, as a potential source for producing weapons-grade plutonium. However, due to high costs and growing anti-nuclear sentiment in the country, the project was abandoned.

⁴⁴⁹ This refers primarily to the Environment Protection and Biodiversity Conservation Act (1999) and Australian Radiation Protection and Nuclear Safety Act (1998).

⁴⁵⁰ Hurst D. Peter Dutton ramps up nuclear power push and claims Labor down “renewable rabbit hole” // *The Guardian*, 2023. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/jul/07/peter-dutton-ramps-up-nuclear-power-push-and-claims-labor-down-renewable-rabbit-hole>

resources, minimizing the costs of creating new energy hubs. However, the Australian government and independent experts were skeptical of these proposals⁴⁵¹.

Despite legal and economic restrictions, Australians' attitudes toward nuclear energy are gradually changing. According to the *Lowy Institute* Poll (2023), approximately 61% of respondents supported the use of nuclear energy as a source of electricity, while 37% opposed it⁴⁵². This result indicates a significant shift in public opinion toward perceiving nuclear energy as a viable alternative to coal and gas. However, the anti-nuclear movement and environmental organizations continue to exert a strong influence on public debate.

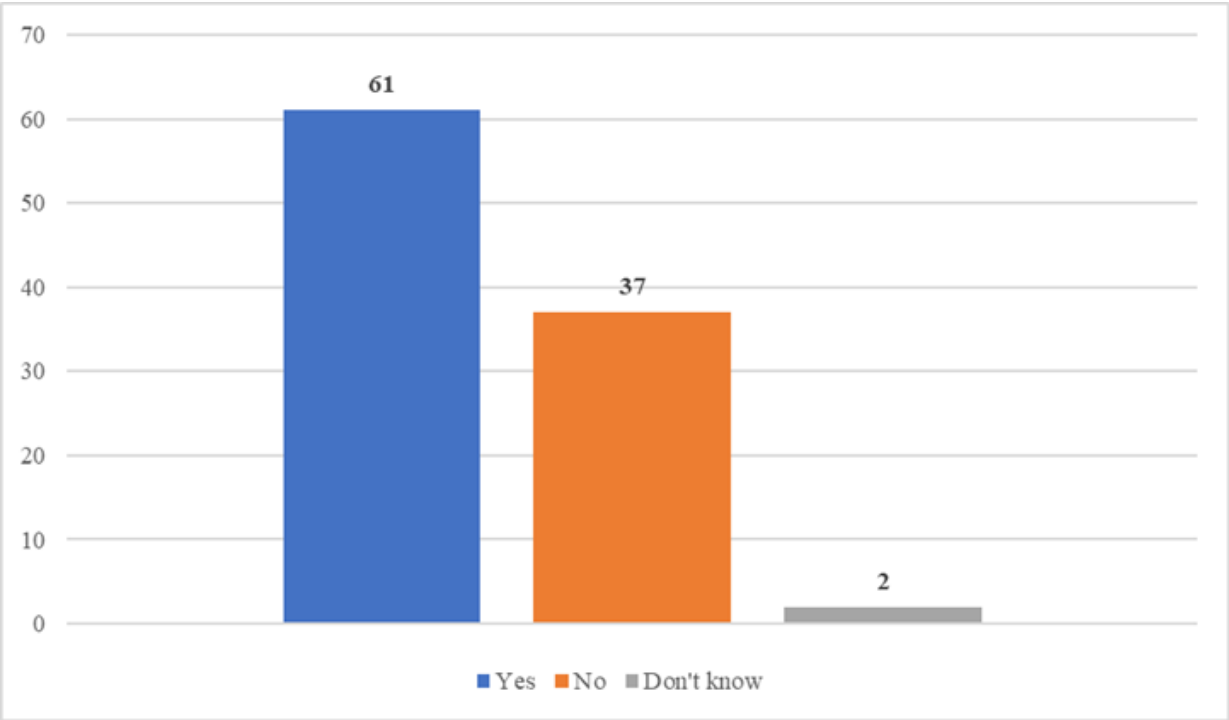


Figure 61. Do you support or oppose Australia using nuclear power to generate electricity, alongside with other sources of energy? (Lowy Institute Poll)

Based: Lowy Institute (<https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/charts/australia-using-nuclear-power-to-generate-energy>)

Military Infrastructure of Australia

Unlike the energy sector, where Australia maintains a *nuclear vacuum*, the military sector is showing a different dynamic. A key turning point was the conclusion of the AUKUS agreement between Australia, the US, and the UK in September 2021. The program will be implemented in two phases:

⁴⁵¹ Turnbull M. The Coalition's nuclear power plan offers the worst of all energy worlds: higher emissions and higher electricity costs // The Guardian, 19 June 2024. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/article/2024/jun/19/the-coalitions-nuclear-power-plan-offers-the-worst-of-all-energy-worlds-higher-emissions-and-higher-electricity-costs>

⁴⁵² Lowy Institute. Do you support or oppose Australia using nuclear power to generate electricity, alongside with other sources of energy? Lowy Institute Poll – Climate Change and Energy, 2024. URL: <https://poll.lowyinstitute.org/charts/australia-using-nuclear-power-to-generate-energy>

1. Beginning in the 2030s, Australia will receive several nuclear submarines from the United States to temporarily close a *strategic gap* in its defense capabilities⁴⁵³.

2. Construction of the *SSN-AUKUS* submarines – starting in the 2040s, based on a design by British companies *Rolls-Royce* and *BAE Systems*, the submarines will be built at Australian shipyards in Adelaide. The project calls for the construction of up to five such submarines, which will take the Australian Navy to a qualitatively new level⁴⁵⁴.

The country is preparing the necessary infrastructure to implement this program. The *HMAS Stirling* naval base in Western Australia⁴⁵⁵ is being expanded to accommodate and service nuclear submarines, new training centers are being established for personnel, and naval officers are already undergoing training in the US and UK, which, as noted above, will help form the “backbone” of the future fleet.

Of particular importance within the AUKUS framework is the development of a unique safeguards mechanism involving the IAEA, which should eliminate the risk of submarine nuclear fuel being used to create nuclear weapons. This will likely be the first time in history that the IAEA is developing a verification regime for nuclear power plants in a non-nuclear state.

Delivery Vehicles

Australia's interest in delivery systems potentially suitable for nuclear weapons dates back to the 1950s and 1970s. As early as 1956, Defence Minister Athol Townley recommended acquiring tactical nuclear weapons to equip *Canberra* bombers and *Sabre* fighters⁴⁵⁶. In subsequent years, projects to develop indigenous ballistic missiles in cooperation with the UK were considered⁴⁵⁷, as was participation in the testing program at the *Woomera* range in South Australia.

The aforementioned *Jervis Bay Project* (1969) also envisioned the possibility of using the resulting plutonium to create nuclear weapons that could be deployed on aircraft platforms. Although this scenario never materialized, it demonstrates that, even half a century ago, delivery systems were considered a key element of the country's potential “threshold status”.

Submarines. Nuclear submarines have virtually unlimited range and are capable of operating covertly in remote areas. Equipped with vertical launch tubes, they will be armed with *Tomahawk* cruise missiles and other strike systems, forming the basis of the sea-based component of strategic

⁴⁵³ Mills C. AUKUS submarine (SSN-A) programme: Research Briefing // House of Commons Library, 2024. URL: <https://securityanddefenceplus.plusalliance.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/AUKUS-Submarine-SSN-A-Programme-Research-Briefing---House-of-Commons-Library.pdf>

⁴⁵⁴ *BAE Systems*; ASC Pty Ltd. Australia selects BAE Systems and ASC to build sovereign nuclear-powered submarines // *BAE Systems News*, 2024. URL: <https://www.baesystems.com/en-us/article/australia-selects-bae-systems-and-asc-to-build-sovereign-nuclear-powered-submarines>; SSN-AUKUS class nuclear attack submarines (UK & Australia) // *Naval Technology*, 2024. URL: <https://www.naval-technology.com/projects/ssn-aukus-class-nuclear-attack-submarines-uk/>

⁴⁵⁵ Nicholson B. Subs will be bigger, better and faster // *The Australian*, 2024. URL: <https://www.theaustralian.com.au/special-reports/subs-will-be-bigger-better-and-faster/news-story/96c7ae4e053e73debe3cc24c8479642f>

⁴⁵⁶ Walsh J. Surprise Down Under: The Secret History of Australia's Nuclear Ambitions // *The Nonproliferation Review*. 1997. Vol. 4, No. 1. P. 16.

⁴⁵⁷ Broinowski R. Australian Nuclear Weapons: The Story So Far // *Nautilus Institute, Austral Policy Forum*, 2006.

deterrence⁴⁵⁸. Although Australia has no official plans to deploy nuclear warheads, the technical compatibility of these systems leaves this a possibility in the future.

Aircrafts. Australia operates 72 F-35A *Lightning II* fighters, already certified by NATO countries for the delivery of tactical nuclear bombs⁴⁵⁹. Australia does not officially utilize this capability, but the mere presence of such platforms ensures technological compatibility with allied standards. The fleet is complemented by F/A-18F *Super Hornet* multirole fighter-bombers⁴⁶⁰ and EA-18G *Growler* electronic warfare aircraft⁴⁶¹, expanding the range of long-range and electronic warfare capabilities.

Missiles. In 2023, Australia signed a contract with the United States for the delivery of over 200 *Tomahawk* cruise missiles, becoming the first country outside NATO to receive these weapons⁴⁶². In December 2024, the Navy conducted its first successful launch from the destroyer HMAS *Brisbane*, becoming the third country after the United States and Great Britain to do so⁴⁶³. As part of the Southern Cross Integrated Flight Research Experiment (SCIFiRE) program, Australia and the United States are jointly developing hypersonic missiles capable of penetrating modern air and missile defense systems⁴⁶⁴. As part of the Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise (GWEO) initiative, the country is building capacity to localize the production of precision-guided munitions, reducing dependence on imports⁴⁶⁵. Additionally, American *HIMARS* systems are being purchased, strengthening the land segment and enabling long-range strikes⁴⁶⁶. The combination of these projects forms the basis for the creation of a powerful arsenal of long-range weapons, potentially compatible with nuclear warheads.

Launch vehicles deserve special mention. The company *Gilmour Space Technologies* is developing the *Eris* series of launch vehicles, capable of launching up to 300 kg of payload into low orbit. While these projects are currently commercial in nature, the availability of rocket infrastructure and

⁴⁵⁸ Australian Government, Department of Defence. Tomahawk missile a game changer for Navy // Defence.gov.au, 2024. URL: <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2024-12-11/tomahawk-missile-game-changer-navy>

⁴⁵⁹ Royal Australian Air Force. F-35A Lightning II // Airforce.gov.au, 2025. URL: <https://www.airforce.gov.au/aircraft/f-35a-lightning-ii>

⁴⁶⁰ Royal Australian Air Force. F/A-18F Super Hornet // Airforce.gov.au, 2025. URL: <https://www.airforce.gov.au/aircraft/18f-super-hornet>

⁴⁶¹ Royal Australian Air Force. EA-18G Growler // Airforce.gov.au, 2025. URL: <https://www.airforce.gov.au/aircraft/ea-18g-growler>

⁴⁶² Remeikis A. Australia to buy Tomahawk cruise missiles in \$1.7bn spend on long-range defence capability // The Guardian, 2023. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2023/aug/21/australia-to-buy-tomahawk-cruise-missiles-in-17bn-spend-on-long-range-defence-capability>

⁴⁶³ Australian Government, Department of Defence. Tomahawk missile a game changer for Navy // Defence.gov.au, 2024. URL: <https://www.defence.gov.au/news-events/news/2024-12-11/tomahawk-missile-game-changer-navy>

⁴⁶⁴ U.S. Department of Defense. Department of Defense Announces New Allied Prototyping Initiative Effort With Australia to Continue Partnership in Developing Air Breathing Hypersonic Vehicles // Defense.gov, 2020. URL: <https://www.defense.gov/News/Releases/Release/Article/2429061/departement-of-defense-announces-new-allied-prototyping-initiative-effort-with-a/>

⁴⁶⁵ Lockheed Martin Australia. Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise (GWEO) // Lockheed Martin Australia, 2023. URL: <https://www.lockheedmartin.com/en-au/features/australian-guided-weapons-and-explosive-ordnance-enterprise.html>; Australian Government, Department of Defence. Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise (GWEO) launches consolidation and domestic production programs // Defence.gov.au, 2023. URL: <https://www.defence.gov.au/business-industry/industry-capability-programs/guided-weapons-explosive-ordnance-enterprise>

⁴⁶⁶ Defense Security Cooperation Agency. Australia – HIMARS Launchers, News Release Transmittal No. 22-28 // DSCA, 26.05.2022.

expertise opens up possibilities for future military applications⁴⁶⁷. Former Prime Minister Scott Morrison even proposed considering the space segment as strategic and as a complement to the “third pillar” of AUKUS⁴⁶⁸.

In terms of its delivery capabilities, Australia is approaching the status of a “threshold state”. Its alliance with the United States ensures access to modern weapons systems, while political commitments limit their nuclear use. In other words, even without developing its own nuclear warheads, Australia has an infrastructure fully compatible with them, and if policy changes, it is capable of quickly integrating a nuclear component into its armed forces.

Legal and Political Restrictions

Canberra remains a vocal supporter of the nonproliferation regime, actively participating in the IAEA and reaffirming its commitment to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT). An examination of legal and political constraints is necessary to understand how far Australia can go in realizing its ambitions of *nuclear independence* and where the boundaries of what is acceptable lie. Crucially, Australia has voluntarily accepted obligations that go beyond the basic requirements of the NPT, legally enshrining its status as a non-nuclear state, which limits the development of sensitive technologies, even in the energy sector.

The legal aspect has acquired particular significance in the context of the AUKUS agreement. The transfer of nuclear propulsion technology for Australia's submarines has sparked heated debate in the expert community, as it involves the supply of highly enriched nuclear fuel, which has the potential to be used for weapons purposes.

To avoid undermining the nonproliferation regime, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and the IAEA have begun developing a unique safeguards system designed to ensure the impossibility of diverting fuel from submarine reactors. Thus, the country's legal framework remains closely linked to international obligations and may soon be further institutionalized in the form of “maritime safeguards”⁴⁶⁹.

At the same time, the government is discussing the possibility of Australia joining the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Foreign Minister Penny Wong stated in 2023 that this option was being considered as part of national nonproliferation policy. However, there is no consensus within the government: supporters of the alliance with the US fear that joining the TPNW would conflict with Australia's commitments under the nuclear umbrella and AUKUS. Therefore, the

⁴⁶⁷ First Australian-made rocket crashes after 14 seconds of flight in a failed attempt to reach orbit // AP News, 2025. URL: <https://apnews.com/article/5df36f956621db85c360157400b88c09>

⁴⁶⁸ Scott Morrison. Address, Australian Space Summit // ScottMorrison.com.au, 27.05.2025. URL: <https://www.scottmorrison.com.au/speeches/aus-space-25>

⁴⁶⁹ International Atomic Energy Agency. Report by the Director General on Naval Nuclear Propulsion: Australia (GOV/INF/2024/12) // IAEA, 15 November 2024. URL: <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/24/11/govinf2024-12.pdf>

prospect of signing the treaty remains uncertain and largely depends on the balance of power within the political elite⁴⁷⁰.

Potential changes to international agreements are primarily related to AUKUS. If a safeguards mechanism for nuclear propulsion is agreed upon with the IAEA, this would set a new precedent in international law and potentially alter the balance of obligations for other countries seeking nuclear submarines. In this case, Australia would become a *testing ground* for the development of a new standard combining the right to develop military nuclear energy with the strict requirements of the nonproliferation regime.

Economic and Technological Barriers

Despite Australia's unique position for developing its own nuclear program – a rich uranium resource base, a well-developed research infrastructure, and growing public support for the idea of peaceful nuclear energy – its path to *nuclear independence* remains extremely challenging. The main obstacles are not so much technical or personnel-related, but economic and technological.

First and foremost, we're talking about the colossal financial burden that inevitably accompanies the creation of a national nuclear program. Given Australia's active investment in renewable energy, the construction of nuclear power plants seems unjustified.

Military costs are no less significant. The AUKUS nuclear submarine program is estimated to cost 368 billion AUD over 30 years, making it the most expensive defense project in Australian history⁴⁷¹. These costs include not only the procurement and construction of the submarines but also the creation of associated infrastructure – the *HMAS Stirling* base, training centers, maintenance systems, and logistics. Furthermore, operating nuclear submarines requires ongoing investments in highly qualified personnel, radiation safety, and the future disposal of spent fuel.

⁴⁷⁰ International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN). Australia hasn't joined the TPNW yet, but the government is "considering the TPNW systematically and methodically..." // ICAN, 2025. URL: <https://www.icanw.org/australia>

⁴⁷¹ AUKUS will cost Australia \$368 bn // The Guardian, 2025. URL: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2025/jun/15/aukus-will-cost-australia-368bn-what-if-there-was-a-better-cheaper-defence-strategy>



Figure 62. HMAS Stirling, Fleet Base West, Garden Island

Source: Decnet (<https://decnet.com.au/properties/garden-island-hmas-stirling-fleet-base-west/>)

The second fundamental obstacle is dependence on foreign technology. Australia, despite possessing the world's largest uranium reserves, lacks its own enrichment and reprocessing facilities. Federal legislation explicitly prohibits the construction of such facilities, forcing the country to rely entirely on technology and services from partners. In the energy sector, this makes Australia a “raw materials appendage” of the global nuclear market, and in the military sector, a “junior partner” in an alliance with the US and UK. For example, the reactor units for the *SSN-AUKUS* submarines will be manufactured by the British company *Rolls-Royce*, and the nuclear fuel will be supplied ready-to-use, with no right to reprocessing or local production.

Thus, economic and technological constraints create a kind of *capacity ceiling* for Australia. Even with the political will, the country is unlikely to achieve full nuclear autonomy in the coming decades. It will remain in an intermediate position: on the one hand, it possesses powerful raw material and scientific potential, on the other, it is strategically dependent on its allies and lacks the economic viability for large-scale national programs.

Public opinion is an additional factor. Despite the gradual softening of anti-nuclear sentiment, nuclear energy remains controversial, while solar and wind power enjoy the support of the majority of Australians. This creates the risk of political costs for parties supporting nuclear initiatives.

Dependence on Technologies and Resources of Partners

Despite Australia possessing the world's largest proven uranium reserves, as noted above – approximately 28% of global resources – it lacks a fully functional nuclear fuel cycle. All stages after uranium ore mining, including conversion, enrichment, fuel fabrication, and spent nuclear fuel (SNF)

reprocessing and storage, are absent from the country. Federal legislation explicitly prohibits the construction of such facilities.

This means that Australia effectively plays the role of a “commodity exporter”: production is conducted at the country's largest mines. All extracted ore is exported, and the country itself is entirely dependent on foreign companies and technologies for the conversion and enrichment stages. To launch a full-fledged energy or military program, Australia would have to face two scenarios: either develop its own enrichment and reprocessing facilities – which would require legislative revisions, billions in investment, and decades of construction and licensing – or remain dependent on foreign suppliers – the United States, France, Great Britain, or Japan – which would make the national nuclear program vulnerable to foreign policy considerations. Both scenarios are fraught with serious difficulties: the first due to domestic political and economic barriers, the second due to continued strategic vulnerability.

The AUKUS nuclear submarine program clearly demonstrates Australia's technological dependence. The reactors for the future AUKUS SSNs will be entirely developed and supplied by the British company *Rolls-Royce*, while some key weapons and control systems will be supplied by American contractors. Crucially, Australia will not have the right to produce or reprocess the nuclear fuel for these reactors. By agreement with its partners, it will be supplied ready-to-use, hermetically sealed in reactor units that are not designed to be opened or refuelled during the submarine's service life. Thus, Australia will be able to operate the submarines, but will not have control over their entire nuclear supply chain. This decision was made to minimize proliferation risks, but it also highlights the limitations of Australia's autonomy: even with a nuclear fleet, the country effectively remains a “client” of its allies, deprived of access to the most sensitive technologies.

The Australian defense industry is rapidly developing, but its capabilities in nuclear technology remain limited. Even projects like GWEO involve significant reliance on the US: localization only affects certain assembly stages, while critical components continue to be imported. A similar situation is observed in the SCIFiRE (Southern Cross Integrated Flight Research Experiment) program, an Australian-American project to develop hypersonic missiles. Despite the participation of Australian research centers (University of Queensland, DSTG), the leading role belongs to US companies, which control the core technologies. Australia gains experience and access to joint developments, but not to key, sensitive *know-how*.

In other words, in the military sphere, the country retains the status of a “junior partner”, receiving technology in exchange for political and military loyalty. The comparative experience of other states confirms this picture: even developed countries like Japan and South Korea, with their powerful scientific and industrial bases, remain dependent on the United States in the nuclear sphere. Canada, with its own *CANDU* reactor and advanced nuclear energy, is also fully integrated into the Western cooperation system. Australia, in this context, appears even more vulnerable: it has neither a nuclear power plant nor its own fuel cycle, and its dependence on its partners is not only technological but also institutional – enshrined in national legislation and international agreements.

Thus, economic and technological barriers combined seriously limit Australia's prospects for nuclear independence. Even with its abundant resource base and research potential, the country remains

deeply dependent on the United States and the United Kingdom. The lack of its own fuel cycle prevents the country from closing the nuclear supply chain within its territory. The AUKUS program perpetuates dependence on allies for key issues – from reactor supplies to fuel supplies. The limitations of the national military-industrial complex make the country incapable of independently reproducing critical technologies.

As a result, Australia remains a “nuclear-dependent power”: its independence is limited by its allied obligations and access to foreign technology. Only through a major legislative overhaul, multibillion-dollar investments, and political will could the country become a fully autonomous player in the nuclear sphere. However, this scenario appears unlikely in the foreseeable future.

CHAPTER 18.

THE PROSPECTS FOR COOPERATION BETWEEN MONGOLIA AND THE RUSSIAN FEDERATION IN THE ENERGY SECTOR⁴⁷²

Roman Kalinin

Mongolia occupies a strategic geopolitical position sharing borders with only two countries, Russia and China. Mongolia maintains friendly relations with neighbours across various fields while promoting “Third Neighbour” policy. It presumes creation of partnership with countries that do not share direct borders with Mongolia in order to become more independent in its political and economic sphere⁴⁷³. Being rich with natural resources such as copper, coal, rare earth elements (REE), lithium and others Mongolia attracts foreign capital from the developed economies. Thus, it is strategically important for Russia to enhance commercial and political ties with Mongolia.

The Russian concept of *Pivot to Asia 2.0* or “Siberisation of Russia” as a national idea is becoming popular in analytical sphere. According to Sergey Karaganov, the integration of Siberia from the Urals to the Far East into a single system will become the pillar of Russia’s future in a changing world⁴⁷⁴. The macro reason for this is a global shift of power from the Western to Eastern hemisphere. Strategic partnership with Mongolia as well as other countries in East Asia is becoming vital for Russian national interests during *Pivot to the East*. Energy sector is one of the areas of mutual interests for Russia and Mongolia in terms of both supply and demand as both countries have large deposits of resources but different structure of their import, export and consumption. While for Mongolia it is important to diversify its energy sector, make the transition to green energy and satisfy growing domestic energy consumption, Russia searches for new markets for its major energy companies and needs import of newly critical materials such as REEs, lithium, titanium, uranium to create the state-of-the-art industrial products. The article provides and outlook on the Mongolian energy resources, geopolitical strive for its energy project and sums up with Russian prospects in commercial and scientific cooperation with Mongolia.

Russia-Mongolia Relations: Current Status

In 2019, relations between Russia and Mongolia reached the level of a comprehensive strategic partnership⁴⁷⁵. Russian-Mongolian Intergovernmental Commission on Trade, Economic, Scientific and Technical Cooperation established in 1991 is responsible for strengthening bilateral projects. According to Russian Ministry of Economic Development, trade turnover between two countries in

⁴⁷² The author would like to express the gratitude to the Director and Founder of the PIR Center, Professor at MGIMO University of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Russia, Vladimir Orlov and Sergey Demin, Member of the PIR Center Council and Regional Director of Rosatom International Network for East Asia for their valuable consultation and contribution to the development of this research.

⁴⁷³ Rodionov V., Ayushieva I. G. The “Third Neighbour” As An Ideological Political Concept // *Vestnik Tomskogo gosudarstvennogo universiteta*. 2017. № 420. Pp. 125–130. (in Russ).

⁴⁷⁴ Karaganov S., Kozylov I. *Pivot to Asia 2.0*, or “Siberization” of Russia // *Russia in Global Affairs Journal*. 2025. Vol. 23. № 1. P. 221-229. (in Russ).

⁴⁷⁵ Interview of Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation Andrey Rudenko to the *Interfax* news agency, February 10, 2025 // MFA of the Russian Federation. URL: <https://www.mid.ru/ru/maps/mn/1995453/> (in Russ.).

2024 reached about \$2.5 bn⁴⁷⁶. Despite the positive trend in trade volume – 20% – growth, experts highlight several obstacles in mutual relations. All of them directly or indirectly affect relations in the energy sector.

Firstly, since the collapse of the Soviet Union Mongolia has lost its military and commercial attractiveness to Russia⁴⁷⁷. Since then Mongolia has drawn attention to the developed economies of the USA, South Korea, Japan and started to implement the so-called *Third neighbour policy*⁴⁷⁸ – enhancing ties with non-bordering countries.

Secondly, the positive trend in trade volume between Mongolia and Russia is marked by the imbalanced structure of exports and imports. Russia is the second Mongolia trading partner. However, the turnover in total numbers is quite small comparing to China. Currently more than 70% of Mongolia's exports and 40% of imports comes from China⁴⁷⁹. The structure of trade volume between Mongolia and Russia is not diversified. More than half of Russian exports are petroleum products as well as electricity that occupy 90% & 30% of total Mongolian import⁴⁸⁰. Meanwhile, Russia is not in the list of top Mongolia export partners.

⁴⁷⁶ Dmitry Volvach: By the end of 2024, mutual trade between Russia and Mongolia will reach \$2.5 billion // Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation URL: https://www.economy.gov.ru/material/news/dmitriy_volvach_k_koncu_2024_goda_vzaimnaya_torgovlya_mezhdu_rossiei_i_mongoliey_dostignet_25_mlrddollarov.html (in Russ.).

⁴⁷⁷ Bezrukov L., Fartyshev A, Features of Mongolian Foreign Trade: Risks for Russia // *World Economy and International Relations Journal*. 2022. Vol. 66. №3. P. 101-109.

⁴⁷⁸ Ignatov I. Mongolian foreign policy concept of the “third neighbour”: history, features and prospects // *Problems of the Far East Journal*. 2022. No. 1. P. 53–67. (in Russ.).

⁴⁷⁹ Mongolia's foreign trade surges 12.3 pct in 2024 // *Xinhua*. URL: <https://english.news.cn/20250110/d5b146d6436a4f5e9b8b8b4ee0ab9373/c.html>

⁴⁸⁰ Namzhilova V. Russia and Mongolia: Forging Stronger Trade Relations // RIAC. November 18, 2024. URL: <https://russiancouncil.ru/en/analytics-and-comments/analytics/russia-and-mongolia-forging-stronger-trade-relations/>

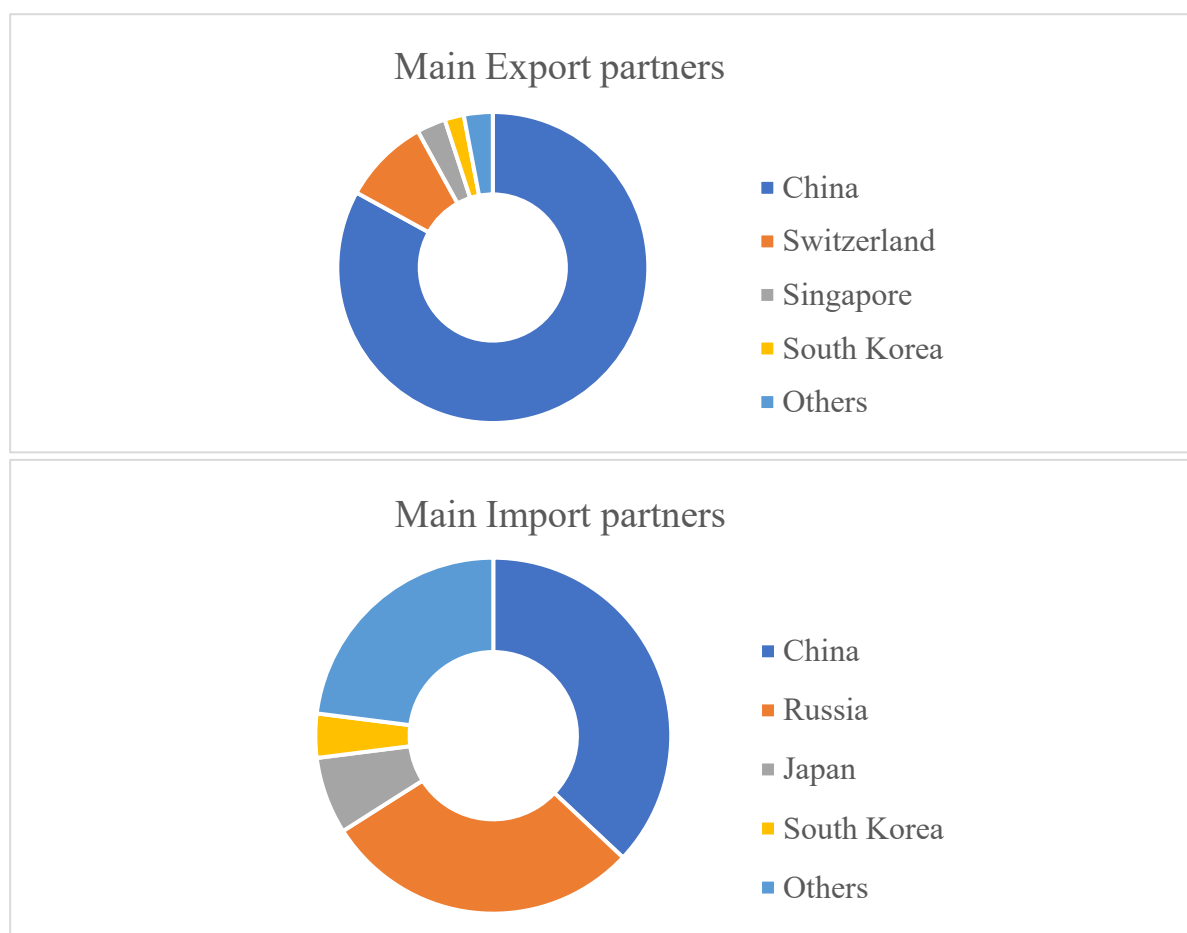


Figure 63. Main Export & Import Partners of Mongolia

Based on: World Bank (<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/79d9affd8ac2ef5571c94a364933c493-0070012024/original/Building-the-Foundations-for-Financial-Sector-Development-in-Mongolia.pdf>)

Thirdly, Russian private investments in Mongolia energy sectors are insufficient comparing to “third neighbours” from the EU, the USA and APEC countries⁴⁸¹. The presence of Russian business in Mongolia is quite limited. At present, there are few major Russian companies with the representative office in Ulaanbaatar: “Rosatom”, “Soyuz-Vostok” and a joint venture “Ulanbatorskaya Zheleznaya Doroga” (Ulaanbaatar Railway).

Energy Sector of Mongolia

Mongolia is one of the fastest developing countries in the world with 5-6,5% annual economic growth rate according to the World Bank Group⁴⁸². Mining and export of commodities have been the main drivers of Mongolia’s economic growth for the past years. Mongolia possesses vast deposits of critical mineral resources. The country ranks 7th globally in terms of copper reserves and sixth in concentrate exports. In early 2023, the National Geological Service of Mongolia reported significant copper reserves amounting to 61.4 million tons. Oyu Tolgoi project accounts for 70% of foreign investments and aims at annual production of 500 thousand tons of ore annually by 2030⁴⁸³.

⁴⁸¹ Kalinin R., Khatmullin A. Russian-Mongolian cooperation: status and prospects in the context of the struggle for resources in Eurasia // *International Affairs Journal*. 2024. No. 6. P.62-72. (in Russ).

⁴⁸² Mongolia Overview // World Bank URL: <https://www.worldbank.org/en/country/mongolia/overview>

⁴⁸³ Oyu Tolgoi To Become the World’s Fourth Largest Copper Mine // *MONTSAME News*. March 21, 2025. URL: <https://www.montsame.mn/en/read/364655>

Project Name	Location	Primary Minerals	License Status	Joint Venture Partners	Estimated Reserves (tonnes)	Annual Production Capacity (tonnes)	Current Development Stage	Key Challenges	Recent Developments
Oyu Tolgoi	South Gobi	Copper, Gold, Silver	Active	Rio Tinto, Turquoise Hill Resources, Erdenes Oyu Tolgoi	2.7 billion (ore)	500,000 (copper)	Production (Open pit), Development (Underground)	Power supply, Water management	Underground expansion, Arbitration resolution
Erdenet	Orkhon Province	Copper, Molybdenum	Active	Mongolian Government	1.2 billion (ore)	130,000 (copper)	Production	Aging infrastructure, Efficiency improvements	Modernization efforts
Tsagaan Suvarga	Dornogobi Province	Copper, Molybdenum	Development	MAK, Mongolyn Alt Corp	240 million (ore)	40,000 (planned)	Feasibility	Financing, Infrastructure development	Seeking strategic partners
Kharmagtai	South Gobi	Copper, Gold	Exploration	Xanadu Mines	600 million (inferred)	TBD	Advanced Exploration	Resource definition, Project financing	Positive drilling results, Scoping study
Bayan Khundii	Bayankhongor Province	Gold	Development	Erdene Resource Development	3.16 million (ore)	60,000 oz (gold, planned)	Feasibility	Permitting, Community relations	Definitive Feasibility Study completed

Table 7. Projects in copper mining of Mongolia

Source: Farmonaut (<https://farmonaut.com/asia/unlocking-mongolias-mineral-potential-key-developments-in-copper-gold-mining-licenses-and-joint-ventures/>)

The main source of energy in Mongolia is coal. Mongolia ranks 10th in the world in terms of coal reserves, with total proven reserves estimated at 150 billion tons by the Ministry of Mineral Resources and Energy of Mongolia. Coal and copper are the main exports commodities of the country.

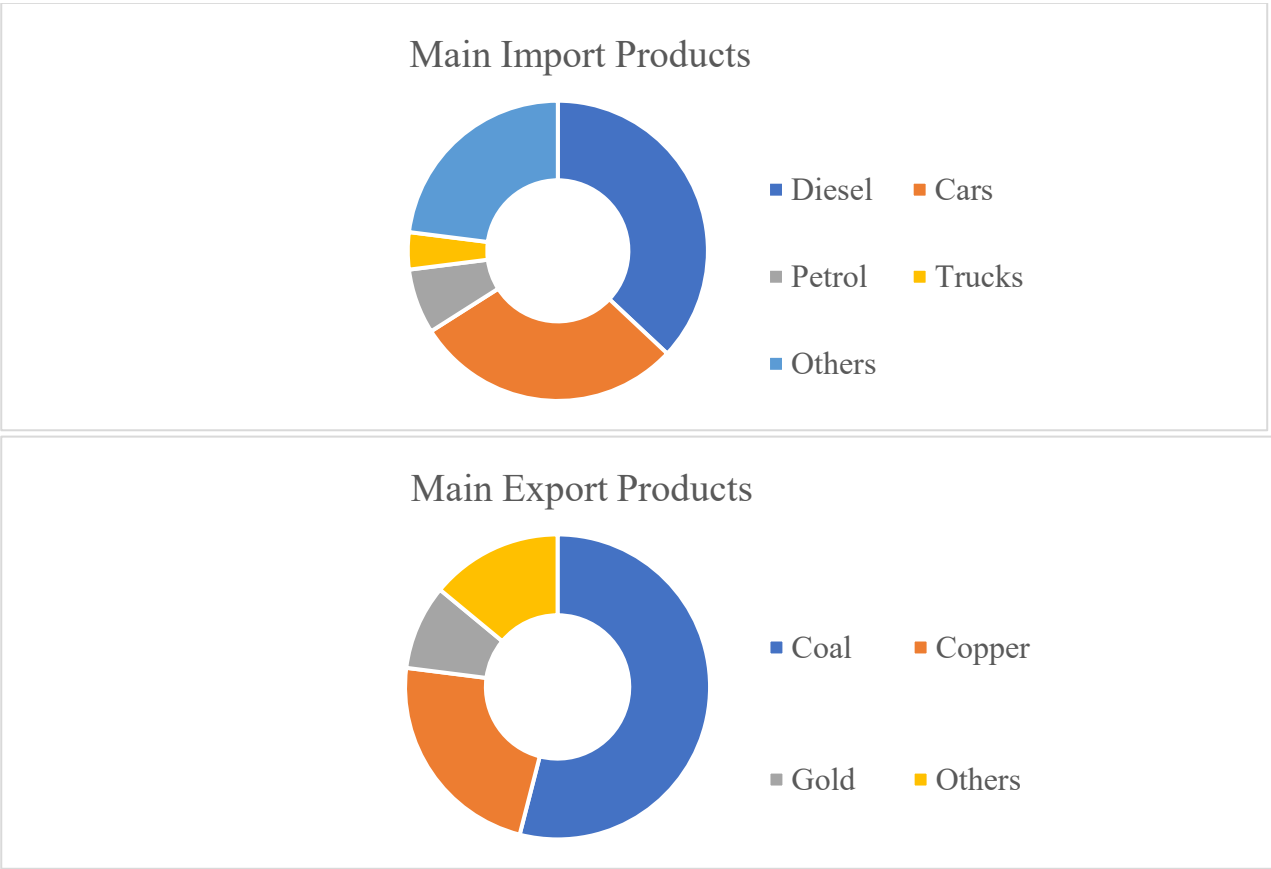


Figure 64. Main Export & Import Products of Mongolia
 Based on: World Bank (<https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/79d9affd8ac2ef5571c94a364933c493-0070012024/original/Building-the-Foundations-for-Financial-Sector-Development-in-Mongolia.pdf>)

Mongolia is also rich in newly demanded materials such as Uranium, Rare Earth Elements (REE), Lithium and Titanium. Uranium is a non-renewable resource that is crucial for the developed nuclear industry. For Russia as a major player in peaceful nuclear energy sector, research into additional raw material sources for nuclear power plants is highly relevant. Specialized studies in Mongolia have identified four uranium-bearing provinces: Mongolo-Priargunskaya, Gobi-Tamtsagskaya, Khentii-Daurskaya, North Mongolian province. Within these provinces, 13 uranium deposits have been discovered and studied, along with approximately 100 ore occurrences and over 1,400 points of uranium mineralization and radioactive anomalies. Main centers of Uranium reserves are situated in Choibalsan, North and East Gobi regions, Berkhi, Khangail and Central Mongolia. The uranium concentration in the ores of the mentioned regions and deposits reaches 1%, qualifying these ores as high-grade. Across Mongolian deposits, the average uranium content in ore can reach 0.5%, which is characteristic of medium-grade ores. In recent years, uranium deposits have been actively developed in southeastern Mongolia, including the Zoovch Ovoo deposit (with reserves of 93,291 tU) and the Dulaan Uul deposit controlled by the French company *Orano* (formerly AREVA), while a new

hydrogenic uranium deposit Ulzit has recently been discovered in the East Gobi region with ore containing up to 0.17% wt⁴⁸⁴.

Rare Earth Elements (REE), also known as rare earth metals, constitute a group of 17 metals. They are essential for the production of special metal alloys, optical devices, medical equipment, semiconductors. The US Geological Survey once put Mongolia on the 2nd place in the REE reserves with 31 million tons⁴⁸⁵. At the present stage, total Mongolia's reserves are estimated at 3.1 million tons⁴⁸⁶. The southern part of the country is the richest in REE. A large carbonatite complex is located in the south of the country, in the Mushgai Khudag region and Lugin Gol. A promising deposit with similar to Mushgai Khudag REE distribution is located in Nuurst Khotgor in Northeastern part of Mongolia. The estimated resources are 40 million tons TREO with 1.22 wt.

Currently investors are actively interested in the prospects of mining Mongolian Lithium, which is used in the production of batteries, shock-resistant ceramics, and high-strength glasses for manufacturing TV tubes. According to the recent expert estimates, identified lithium oxide deposits increased from 650 000 to 680 000 tons over the past year⁴⁸⁷. Research results on the composition of lake waters in Northwest Mongolia show elevated concentrations of lithium, bromine, uranium, and boron. For example, in mineralized waters extracted from shallow depths (up to 20 meters) at the Baavkhai Uul deposit in the south of the country, lithium content reaches 811 ppm, while the brines from the neighbouring Urga Naran deposit contain up to 918 ppm of lithium⁴⁸⁸. The main part of the salars of Western Mongolia is located on the border with the Republic of Tuva. The total reserves of lithium in the lakes Khyargas-Nuur, Uvs-Nuur, Davsan-Nuur, Baba Ganush-Nuur can reach 26,000 tons. The highest concentration of this useful resource up to 97,000 µg/l is recorded in the lakes Davsan-Nuur, Baba Ganush-Nuur. The concentration of lithium in the salars of Mongolia is lower than in Tarumovskoye Lake, Dagestan or Qinghai Lake, China. In addition, the lakes are located in extreme climatic conditions. Therefore, mining there is difficult. Nevertheless, the growing needs of industry and the range of application of the resource make Mongolia attractive for investment from Russia, given the proximity of the borders.

Mongolia has proven deposits of Titanium. Bod deposit is located in Bayan-Ölgii aimag situated just 131 km from the Tashanta station, which borders Russia. Currently, the owners are seeking investments for its industrial development.

⁴⁸⁴ Kalinin R., Khatmullin A. Mongolia as a New Center of Resource Competition: Outlook for Russian-Mongolian Cooperation in Nuclear Energy, Mineral Exploration, and Mining. // PIR-Center, 2024. (No. 41). 43 p. (*in Russ.*)

⁴⁸⁵ Mongolia's rare earth reserves draw foreign investor interest // The Central Asia-Caucasus Institute and Silk Road Studies Program Joint Center. June 8, 2011. URL: <https://www.cacianalyst.org/publications/analytical-articles/item/12300-analytical-articles-caci-analyst-2011-6-8-art-12300.html>

⁴⁸⁶ Concerns that US-Mongolia rare-earth cooperation will undercut China's industry are unwarranted // *The Global Times*. August 15, 2023 URL: <https://www.globaltimes.cn/page/202308/1296348.shtml>

⁴⁸⁷ D. Khashbat: Mongolia's lithium oxide resources increased to 680,000 tons // Mining Insight. URL: <https://en.mininginsight.mn/index.php?newsid=394>

⁴⁸⁸ Lithium and uranium in endorheic lakes of Western Mongolia / Shvartsev S., Isupov V., Vladimirov A. [et al.] // Chemistry for Sustainable Development. 2012. Vol.20, №1. p. 43-48. (*in Russ.*).

Currently Regional	Currently Global	Currently Country specific
Cesium (Cs)	Antimony (Sb)	Carbon C
Chromium (Cr)	Beryllium (Be)	Fluorine (F)
Manganese (Mn) – present	Bismuth (Bi)	Thallium (Tl)
Rubidium (Rb)	Cobalt (Co) – present	Barium (Ba)
Rhenium (Re)	Copper (Cu) – present	Molybdenum (Mo) – present
Tellurium (Te)	Gallium (Ga)	Nickel (Ni) – present
Zirconium (Zr)	Germanium (Ge)	Selenium (Se)
Scandium (Sc)	Hafnium (Hf)	Arsenic (As)
Aluminum (Al)	Indium (In)	Cerium
Bauxite	Lithium (Li) – present	Helium (He)
Barite (BaSO ₄)	Magnesium (Mg)	Neodymium
Fluorspar – present	Niobium (Nb)	Potash / Potassium (P)
Graphite (natural) – present	Strontium (Sr)	Tin (Sn)
Silicon metal (Si)	Tantalum (Ta)	Uranium (U)
Boron (B)	Titanium (Ti) – present	And others
Phosphorus (P)	Tungsten (W) – present	
Coking coal	Vanadium (V)	
Phosphate rock	Platinum group metals – present	
Rubber (natural)	Rare-earth elements – present	

Table 8. List of Critical Materials

Based on: Mongolian Critical Minerals Association (<https://mcma.mn/en/>)

Mongolia Energy Market: Opportunities and Risks for Russia

Mongolia with its huge energy resources can be considered as a perspective partner in mineral development and extraction as well as other commercial and scientific energy projects. For Russia, there are several opportunities and risks.

Opportunity one is that Russia can expand the scale of petroleum products and electricity supply with the growing energy demand in Mongolia. According to Mongolia long-term policy “Vision 2050”⁴⁸⁹ and “New policy of Revival” Mongolia aims to triple its GDP and double its energy production⁴⁹⁰. Active industrialization requires more energy, while 20% of electricity is already exported from Russia and China. Mongolia is seeing an annual growth of 6-7% in energy consumption, which is expected to reach 3,000 MW by 2035⁴⁹¹. Mongolia's ambitious plans to develop infrastructure and become a transit zone under the Belt and Road Initiative will lead to the creation of new satellite

⁴⁸⁹ Mongolia *Vision 2050*. URL: <https://vision2050.gov.mn/eng/>

⁴⁹⁰ Oyun-Erdene L: New recovery policy will triple GDP in a short period of time // *MONTSAME* News Agency. URL: <https://montsame.mn/ru/read/294206>

⁴⁹¹ The issue of nuclear power plants will be discussed during Emmanuel Macron's visit to Mongolia, says Minister of Energy // Central Asia Media. URL: <https://centralasia.media/news:1914335> (in Russ.).

cities, which will further increase energy consumption⁴⁹². That is why Russia should further increase exports of energy to Mongolia.

However, this opportunity is accompanied with the risk coming from Mongolia energy security policy. According to the Ministry of Energy of Mongolia, the energy security strategy is based on the goals of increasing the production and export of energy resources and maintaining the sustainability of its own energy⁴⁹³. In the country's development program “Vision 2050”, Mongolia plans to become independent of electricity supplies by 2030, increase the production of infrastructure. By 2040, create a national integrated energy system through the construction of power transmission lines and renewable energy sources. By 2050, implement megaprojects in the mining industry. That is, Mongolia wants to diversify exports and carry out environmental reforms⁴⁹⁴.

The second risk lies in the growing interest of non-neighbour countries in the research, exploration and extraction of Mongolia energy resources as well as diversification its energy sector by supplying renewable energy technologies. Germany, France⁴⁹⁵, The United States and South Korea⁴⁹⁶ have shown interest in cooperation with Mongolia in the sphere of critical minerals development and extraction.

In June 2023, Mongolia and the United States signed a Memorandum of Understanding, within the framework of which they plan to cooperate in the field of REE mining⁴⁹⁷. At the APEC San Francisco Summit on November 17, 2023, Mongolia-U.S.-South Korea established trilateral consultation mechanism on “critical minerals”⁴⁹⁸. Currently the USA in particular is using threat of secondary sanctions against Mongolia as a leverage to impede cooperation with Russia.

In 2024 Germany allocated 2 million Euro for sustainable energy projects of Mongolia within the framework of Strategic Partnership Declaration⁴⁹⁹.

In March 2025, South Korea and Mongolia agreed at the energy ministry level to deepen cooperation. By November 2025, it is planned to install equipment and materials for the Korea-Mongolia REE Cooperation Center funded by South Korea. The two sides will conduct joint exploration of key mineral resources through cooperation between research institutes⁵⁰⁰. In the horizon up to 2035, the United States plans to provide financial loans and technical instruments to the private sector through the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, the Export-Import Bank of the United States, and the United States Trade and Development Agency. The United States considers uranium,

⁴⁹² Altanshagai T. Mongolia's Precarious Energy Security // *The Diplomat*, 2024. 16 p.

⁴⁹³ Ministry's goals and objectives // Government of Mongolia – Ministry of Energy. URL: <https://energy.gov.mn/p/22>

⁴⁹⁴ Mongolia *Vision 2050*. URL: <https://vision2050.gov.mn/eng/>

⁴⁹⁵ Mongolia will provide France with critical mineral resources from its mines // Mining Technology. May 23, 2023 URL: <https://www.mining-technology.com/news/france-mongolia-uranium-critical-minerals/?cf-view>

⁴⁹⁶ Ulaanbaatar and Seoul to extract minerals for EVs. // Asia News. URL: <https://www.asianews.it/news-en/Ulaanbaatar-and-Seoul-to-extract-minerals-for-EVs-57780.html>

⁴⁹⁷ United States – Mongolia Memorandum of Understanding on Mineral Resources // U.S. Dept of State. URL: <https://www.state.gov/united-states-mongolia-memorandum-of-understanding-on-mineral-resources>.

⁴⁹⁸ Leaders of IPEF member states agree to launch 'critical minerals dialogue' // *Yonhap*. November 17, 2023 URL: <https://en.yna.co.kr/view/AEN20231117003700315>

⁴⁹⁹ Cooperation Documents Signed Between Mongolia and Germany // *MONTSAME* News Agency. URL: <https://montsame.mn/en/read/337213>

⁵⁰⁰ Mongolia agrees to stronger bilateral cooperation in rare metals. Korea.net URL: <https://www.korea.net/NewsFocus/Business/view?articleId=267959>

lithium, electrical steel, nickel, magnesium, platinum, aluminum, copper, titanium, and silicon to be the most important sources of raw materials for export from Mongolia in the short term. REEs such as dysprosium (used in metallurgy, to create reactor control rods, and super-powerful magnets), cobalt, gallium, and graphite are considered to be the most important for production, but risky for investment in mining.

France is a long-standing partner of Mongolia in the field of uranium development⁵⁰¹ and mining and has already decided to invest in the exploration of REE reserves. *Orano* has entered into a partnership with Mongolia to develop and extract lithium, signing a contract in October 2023 for an investment in exploration of deposits worth 400 thousand euros⁵⁰². On January 18, 2024, Mongolia signed an agreement with the French company BRGM to explore the country's uranium and lithium reserves⁵⁰³.

It is worth highlighting the intensification of Japan's activity in Mongolia. Japan's Emperor Naruhito paid an official visit to Mongolia from July 6 to July 13, 2025. This visit goes far beyond traditional Emperor diplomacy and aims at bolstering bilateral economic ties⁵⁰⁴. According to Russian expert O. Paramonov, traditionally relations between Mongolia and Japan were described as cold after World War II. For a long time, countries mostly focused on humanitarian and economic agenda. However, currently Japan tries to weaken Mongolian ties with Russia and China offering various forms of security support to the country⁵⁰⁵. Obviously, one of the aims of such policy is to get preferential access to Mongolian vast energy resources for Japanese companies.

The third risk is that Mongolia is currently dependent on China in terms of trade and technology. China controls advanced technologies for separating and refining REE. China has managed to establish a reliable supply of high-energy permanent magnets suitable for use in high-temperature systems such as electric motors used in automobiles. It would be hard to replace China but Russia could promote trilateral cooperation.

The fourth risk lies in the inner state situation in Mongolia. Attracting investment in Mongolia's mining industry is complicated by the lack of necessary infrastructure and energy capacity reserves in the country. Furthermore, Mongolian legislation requires significant development in terms of investor protection. Overall, according to the World Bank, investors suffer from several issues: changes in political course regarding foreign investments and an unstable institutional framework (the investment promotion agency has undergone five iterations over 20 years). Mechanisms for engaging the private sector and addressing investor complaints are inconsistently applied.

⁵⁰¹ Mongolia signs uranium mining investment deal with France — PM // *Financial One*. January 17, 2025. URL: <https://fomag.ru/news-streem/mongoliya-podpisala-investitsionnoe-soglashenie-o-dobyche-urana-s-frantsiy-premer> (in Russ.).

⁵⁰² Lithium-hungry France strikes Mongolian exploration deal // *Reuters*. October 12, 2023 URL: <https://www.reuters.com/markets/commodities/lithium-hungry-france-strikes-mongolian-exploration-deal-2023-10-12/>

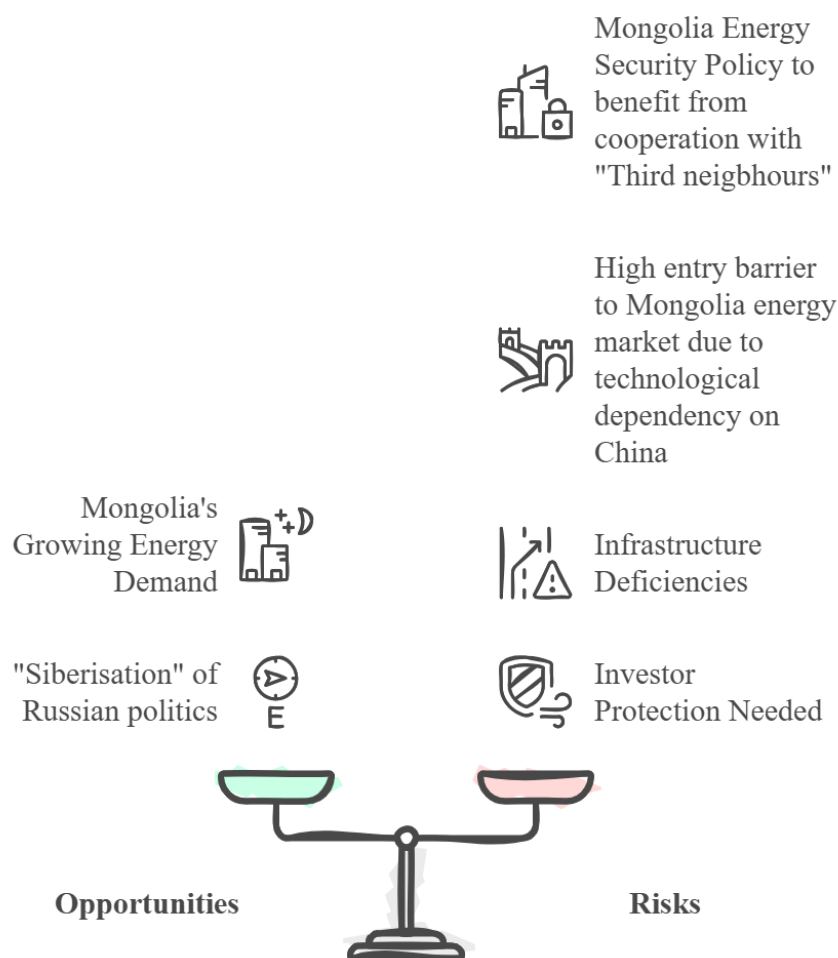
⁵⁰³ CGG and France to explore Mongolia for lithium, uranium // *Mining Magazine*. URL: <https://www.miningmagazine.com/surface-mining/news/1463899/cgg-france-explore-mongolia-lithium-uranium>

⁵⁰⁴ Japan played the emperor card in Mongolia // *Nezavisimaya Gazeta*. July 8, 2025. URL: https://www.ng.ru/world/2025-07-08/6_9289_mongolia.html. (in Russ.).

⁵⁰⁵ Paramonov O. Japan's Emperor pays a visit to the heirs of Genghis Khan // *International Affairs Journal*. URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/news/show/52230> (in Russ.).

Special licenses for REE deposits are held by private companies that refuse to cooperate with the government or use their licenses as collateral for loans. Implementation of large REE mining projects is excessively bureaucratized. To obtain a license for REE exploration and mining, a project must be submitted to the National Security Council of Mongolia and approved at a cabinet meeting, as REEs are classified as radioactive elements under the legislation⁵⁰⁶.

Opportunity two is that current geopolitical situation stimulates Russian pivot to East. And Mongolia is a critical ally in this geopolitical shift. The recent intensification of bilateral relations, highlighted by reciprocal presidential visits in 2024–2025, signifies a strategic reorientation towards deepening multidimensional cooperation between Russia and Mongolia. These high-level diplomatic engagements not only strengthened existing ties, but also laid the groundwork for expanded collaboration across various sectors while reinforcing the importance of preserving shared historical memory as a foundation for future partnership. Russia and Mongolia have overcome difficulties of previous energy projects such as joint venture “Dordon Uranium”⁵⁰⁷. The voices of politicians who believed that Russia should pay the penalty are not as strong in the current Mongolian government. There is an opportunity to implement promising projects and conduct scientific research in the energy sphere.



⁵⁰⁶ Boosting Mongolia's Private Sector and Green Competitiveness // World Bank Group URL: <https://thedocs.worldbank.org/en/doc/eca151687ba613203727a26c66acb1fa-0070012024/original/Boosting-Mongolia-s-Private-Sector-and-Green-Competitiveness.pdf>

⁵⁰⁷ Mongolia was fined for uranium // *Kommersant* Publishing House. March 4, 2015. URL: <https://www.kommersant.ru/doc/2679238> (in Russ.).

Figure 65. Balancing Opportunities and Risks for Russia

Compiled by the author

One of the promising projects is the Small Modular Nuclear Reactor (SMNR). On October 19, 2023, Rosatom Energy Projects and MonAtom signed a Memorandum of Understanding on the construction of a SMNR in Mongolia, which laid the foundation for dialogue on the project's implementation.

We expect the official intergovernmental agreement on the construction of the small modular nuclear reactor to be signed in 2025. has the potential to address Mongolia's increasing energy consumption needs while simultaneously supporting the country's sustainable development objectives. Furthermore, it will contribute to the realization of Mongolia's "Vision 2050" strategy, which focuses on fostering a green economy and promoting environmentally friendly development practices.

There are some other promising scientific projects that meet Russian interests. Firstly, it is geopolitically and economically reasonable to resume Uranium extraction in Mongolia. French *Orano* has already started extraction, Kazakh and Uzbek companies show interest in this demanded resource.

Secondly, exploration and extraction of REEs, Lithium and Titanium. The increasing industrial demand and the wide range of resource applications are making Mongolia an appealing investment destination for Russia, considering the close proximity of their shared borders. Russia has demonstrated significant interest in Mongolia's lithium reserves, with ongoing geological mapping activities aimed at assessing the potential of these deposits. The current focus is on evaluating lithium concentration levels to determine the required development capacities, which involves two key objectives: firstly, to update and build upon previous research conducted by Russian scientists, including studies from the Soviet era, and secondly, to conduct a comprehensive analysis of the economic viability of lithium extraction projects. This dual-pronged approach reflects Russia's strategic intent to thoroughly understand and potentially capitalize on Mongolia's lithium resources. Pace of such activities should be quick due to ongoing geopolitical competition.

Thirdly, traditional commodities such as coal could also be interested in terms of investment. Currently, the extraction of REEs and other valuable components from coal ash is considered promising. Lanthanoids can be obtained both as a secondary product of thermal power plants and directly at coal deposits. For example, at the Adunchuluun deposit, the uranium content in coal ash reaches 207 grams per ton (g/t), while at the Baganuur deposit, thorium content reaches up to 12.4 g/t⁵⁰⁸. Research indicates that for the profitable extraction of such components, the minimum concentration should range from several grams to several hundred grams per ton, depending on the specific element.

Fourthly, energy projects create value chain structure which promotes strategic partnership between countries. Logistic hubs, transportation routes, services thrive when countries have strong business ties. In this context it is important to enhance bilateral trade ties via agreements. On June 27, 2025 on the sidelines of the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Minsk, the EAEU signed

⁵⁰⁸ Shupov V., Shvartsov S., Vladimirov A. et al. Hydro-mineral resources of salt lakes in Western Mongolia // Interexpo Geo-Siberia. 2012. Vol. 1, No. 2. Pp. 43-47. (*in Russ.*).

agreements on free trade in goods with Mongolia. The agreement with Mongolia concerns a temporary treaty involving a restricted range of goods (367 tariff lines). Under this agreement, the majority of goods included in the scope of the agreement, accounting for 89% of Russian exports to Mongolia, will be eligible for duty-free supply⁵⁰⁹. By August 2025 the Agreement still is not ratified for several reasons. Firstly, in recent months the problem of mutual payments has become much more acute. Mongolian banks are concerned about potential secondary sanctions from the US, thus payments have to be managed manually. This issue predominantly harms private businesses in both nations, as they have no influence over Mongolian banks. Secondly, due to Mongolian concern about secondary sanctions there the resumption of direct air service between Moscow and Ulaanbaatar remains unresolved, despite evident demand. Only small private air companies operate between Irkutsk, Krasnoyarsk, Kyzyl and Ulaanbaatar.

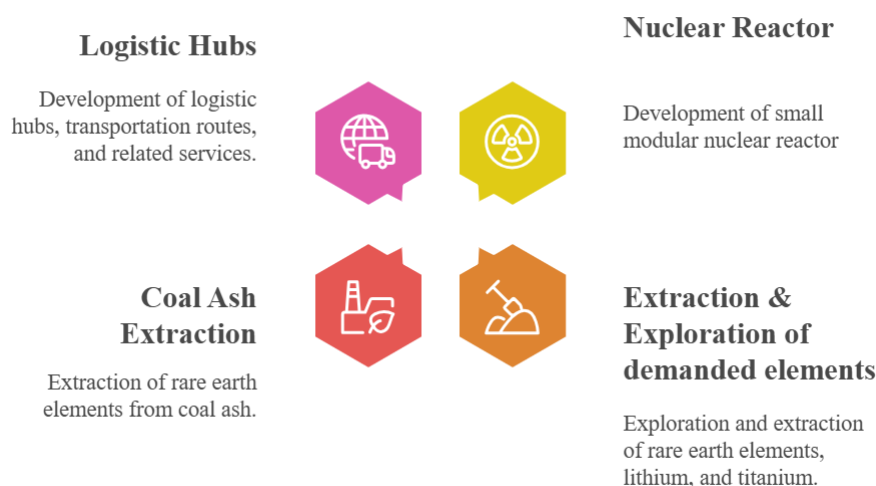


Figure 66. Possible project portfolio for Russia-Mongolia cooperation

Compiled by the author.

Conclusion

Russian geopolitical shift to the East, described as Siberisation, promotes intensification of political and commercial ties with Eastern neighbours. The brightest example is the rapprochement between Russia and DPRK. Mongolia is a strategic neighbour to Russia due its geopolitical position on the trade route from China and large amount of strategic deposits of coal, copper, uranium, REE, lithium and titanium. The cooperation between Russia and Mongolia in the energy sector is dependent on internal and external factors. Internal factors in Russia include lack of interest and knowledge about Mongolia from private investors, poor cultural ties after the collapse of the Soviet Union and unsuccessful previous record in energy initiatives. Recent intensification of bilateral contacts on the highest level should push through the positive agenda in the sphere of business development.

The inner situation in Mongolia also affects cooperation. 90% of trade volume and major technologies falls on China which makes market entry difficult and calls into question the profitability of projects. Furthermore, unlike North Korea Mongolia promotes *Third neighbour policy* which is focused on

⁵⁰⁹ Free trade agreements with the UAE and Mongolia will save Russian businesses around 20 billion rubles // Ministry of Economic Development of the Russian Federation URL: https://economy.gov.ru/material/news/soglasheniya_o_svoobodnoy_torgovle_s_oae_i_mongoliey_sekonomyat_rossiysk_omu_biznesu_poryadka_20_mlrd_rubley.html (in Russ.).

gaining Western or pro-Western experience and FDI to the country energy sector. The interest in Mongolia's energy deposits from the USA, EU, South Korea, Japan constrains the entry of Russian investments.

However, there are positive factors that promote cooperation in the energy sphere. Firstly, Mongolia's rapid growth of energy consumption combined with poor ecological situation caused by coal-fired thermal power plants requires new types of energy source. Rosatom Energy Projects and MonAtom have agreed on building SMNR. Secondly, Mongolia and Russia have similar geological conditions thus it is important to build upon previous research conducted by Russian scientists, including studies from the Soviet Union. Mongolia has proven deposits of critical REE, Lithium, Uranium and Titanium. We consider that it is geopolitically and economically reasonable to enter the competition for Mongolia's energy resources on the stage of geological surveying, cartography, resource assessment and economic viability analysis. In terms of already developed deposits we propose to resume Uranium extraction in Mongolia. Finally, enhancing bilateral trade agreements aimed at facilitating bilateral trade is critical for the future. Both countries should build upon the agreed framework between the EAEU and Mongolia, resume direct flights and set up banking payment system despite pressure of the secondary sanctions from the West.

CHAPTER 19.

WIND OF CHANGE: WORLD ORDER TRANSFORMATION THROUGH THE PRISM OF EXPERT ASSESSMENTS

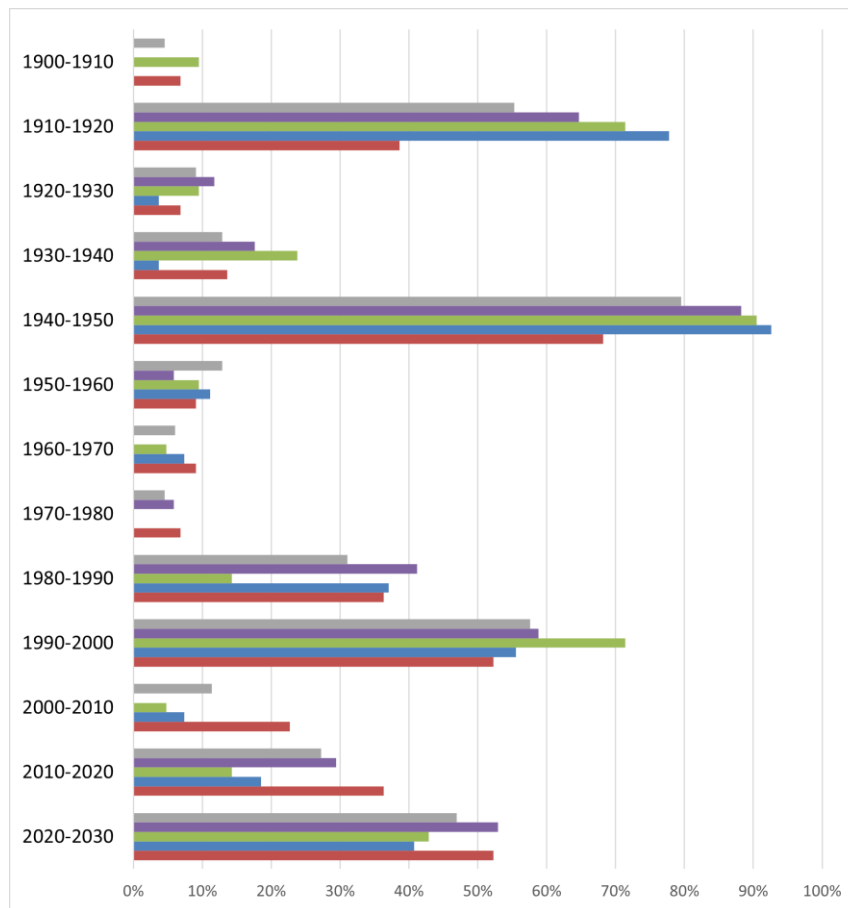
Ivan Safranchuk

Since 2021, a team of MGIMO and HSE researchers and graduate students has been conducting an annual International Hierarchy Expert Survey (IHES)⁵¹⁰, which is voluntary, anonymous, confidential, online, and in English⁵¹¹. More than 200 International Relations (IR) experts in 53 countries took part in the fourth wave of IHES, from December 2024 to March 2025. Their responses were converted into indices that can be used in research and applied analytics. This chapter relies on IHES data to categorize IR experts' thinking about the ongoing world order transformation, in particular to differentiate Western (the US and Europe) and Non-Western (Russia and Eurasia) expert views on some core elements of this transformation.

The most important point is that in the non-Western part of Eurasia, expectations of major changes in the world system during the current decade are very high, while retrospective assessments of the most significant changes in the past differ substantially from those in the West.

⁵¹⁰ Over the years, the following people helped conduct surveys and process their results: MGIMO professor Ivan Safranchuk, MGIMO graduate students Alexander Nesmashnyi, Vera Zhornist, and Bogdan Barabash, HSE graduate student Daniil Chernov, MGIMO student Evgenia Komarova, HSE students Khusravkhon Nabiev and Nikita Svistunov, and HSE research fellow Dylan Royce.

⁵¹¹ For the survey methodology and indices based on survey results, See: Nesmashnyi, Zhornist and Safranchuk, 2022; Safranchuk, Nesmashnyi and Chernov, 2025. Survey data is available on Harvard Dataverse: Chernov D., Nesmashnyi A., Zhornist V., Safranchuk I. (2025). International Hierarchy Expert Survey. URL: <https://doi.org/10.7910/DVN/PXVTEY> – Editor's note.



Experts from: ■ World ■ Russia ■ the US ■ Europe ■ Eurasia (without Russia and Europe)

Figure 67. Which decades saw the biggest shifts in international hierarchy?

Compiled by the author.

On Figure 67, there are several points worth paying attention to:

- Regarding the impact of the First and especially the Second World Wars (that is, the 1910s and 1940s) on the transformation of the world system (the international hierarchy), experts from Russia, the United States, and Europe show almost identical views. However, experts from the non-Western part of Eurasia also rank the 1940s highest, but with a considerably lower score, and they attribute far less importance to the 1910s.
- In their assessments of the present decade and the ongoing global transformations, experts from Russia and the rest of non-Western Eurasia agree, and their overall perspective differs noticeably from that of Western experts.
- In a broader historical perspective, one may say that Eurasian experts expect even more from the current decade than Russian experts do. For the former, this decade ranks second or third in importance, on par with the 1990s and behind only the 1940s. For Russians, it ranks fourth, after the 1940s, 1910s, and 1990s (in this ranking, Russians again align with Western experts).
- Over the last three decades, Eurasian experts have consistently rated these periods higher than both Western and Russian experts (with Russians catching up to the Eurasian level only in their assessments of the current decade).

A general interpretation of these observations may be that Russian and Eurasian experts both view the current decade as a turning point, a period of transformations comparable to those remembered as epochal in history and previously accompanied by decisive victories and defeats. Western experts, by contrast, assess the transformations brought by the current decade more modestly. However, the understanding of the nature of these changes presumably differs between Russian and Eurasian experts. Eurasian experts tend to see them as a continuation of the trends of the 2000s and 2010s, when many non-Western countries grew faster than the global average, and when the agenda of reforming international institutions took shape – aimed at making a more representative system of “global governance”, not only by including the largest developing states but also the so-called “middle powers”. The current moment is viewed as an accelerated, yet evolutionary continuation of a process unfolding over the past three to four decades. Russians, on the other hand, interpret the present moment in a more “revolutionary” way, as a rupture marking the end of the West’s centuries-standing dominance, which, even in recent decades, showed no intention of relinquishing its position⁵¹².

The recognition of a profound transformation of the world system is accompanied by apprehension rather than optimism. Analysis of the results from the latest IHES waves allows for the following generalization: “The current transformation of the international system is seen as comparable to those which followed the World Wars and the Cold War. Such a transformation is not expected to be quick. In such a dynamic environment, failure may happen faster than success, and some changes may be disadvantageous to most states. All together, experts are more wary than optimistic regarding change”⁵¹³.

This general observation also applies to attitudes of experts from the non-Western part of Eurasia recorded in the survey. However, one detail deserves particular attention (Figure. 68). When asked to estimate how long it would take in today’s world for a country to improve its position in the global system (that is, to significantly increase its international status), the most common answer among Eurasian experts was “10–30 years”. This option was also the most popular among other groups, except for the American experts, where the “5–10 years” option received slightly more responses – apparently reflecting their sense of unease amid global changes⁵¹⁴. Yet, Eurasian experts chose the leading answer far more decisively: it received nearly 70% of their responses, compared to only 42% among Russians and 32% among Americans. Among Eurasian experts, other options lagged far behind the top one. By contrast, 20–33% of Russian and American experts believed that change could come either faster (“5–10 years”) or, conversely, slower (“30–80 years”), with 25–28% in each of these groups favouring the latter timeframe.

⁵¹² A necessary caveat is that the very nature of the survey method allows respondents to “slide” in their answers between what *is*, what *ought to be*, and what is *desirable*.

⁵¹³ Safranchuk I., Nesmashnyi A., and Komarova E, 2025. Will It Get Worse? Expert Perception of Global Transformation // *Russia in Global Affairs Journal*, 23(4), pp. 104–112. DOI: 10.31278/1810-6374-2025-23-4-104-112.

⁵¹⁴ Let us assume that some American experts fear the rise of others even more than others hope to rise.

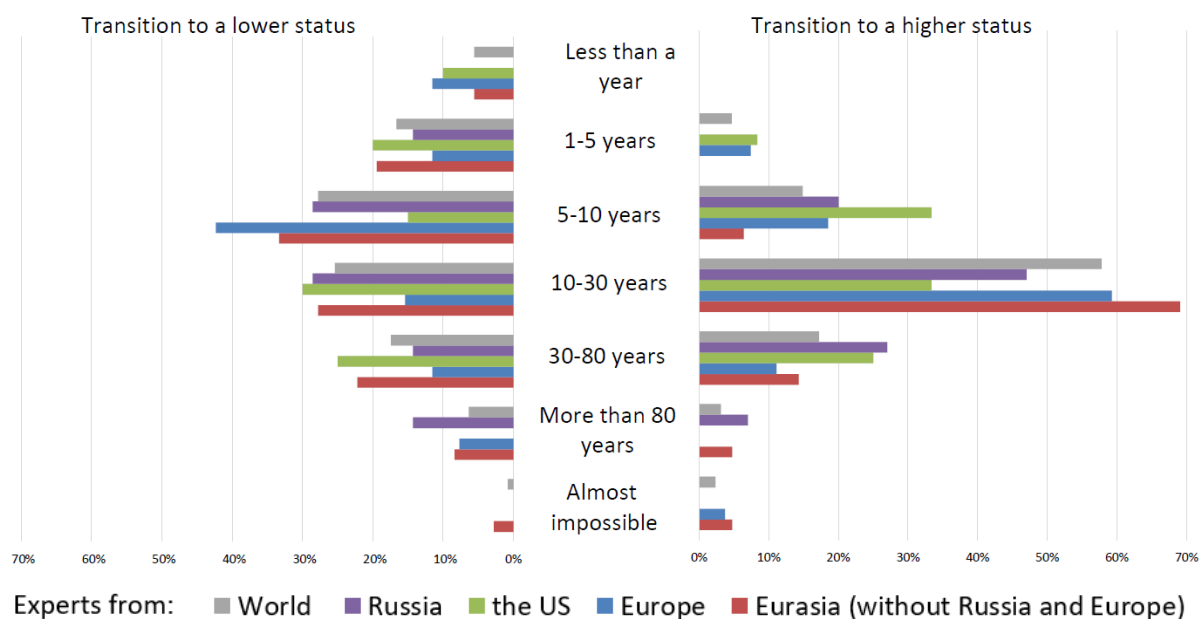


Figure 68. How long does it take for a state to transit from one status category to another?

Compiled by the author.

These data reflect how seriously the ongoing transformation of the world system is regarded in the non-Western part of Eurasia. There are no illusions that this transformation can be swift, yet there is also no willingness to wait for an improvement in one's position in a distant future.

It is noteworthy what, in the view of Eurasian experts, determines a state's position in the world system (Figure 69). The greatest importance – almost equally – was attributed to military might, the size of the economy, and asymmetry with neighbouring countries (that is, superiority over them). Ranked fourth, with some distance from the former three, was technological sovereignty. Military might, economic size, and technological sovereignty represent material dimensions of strength. Other factors – those related to domestic development, international political and economic engagement, historical experience, prestige, soft power, and so on⁵¹⁵ – were rated significantly lower by Eurasian experts⁵¹⁶.

⁵¹⁵ Respondents were asked to identify which of the listed factors are *essential* for determining a state's place in the global hierarchy: asymmetry with neighbouring countries, human development, technological sovereignty, international prestige, engagement with global institutions and transnational actors, size of the economy, historical experience in pursuing a "grand strategy," quality of state governance institutions, position in global value chains, self-perception, soft power, and military might.

⁵¹⁶ It should be noted that Eurasian experts did not dismiss any of the proposed factors: all received relatively high evaluations. However, the ones mentioned above clearly emerged as the absolute leaders.

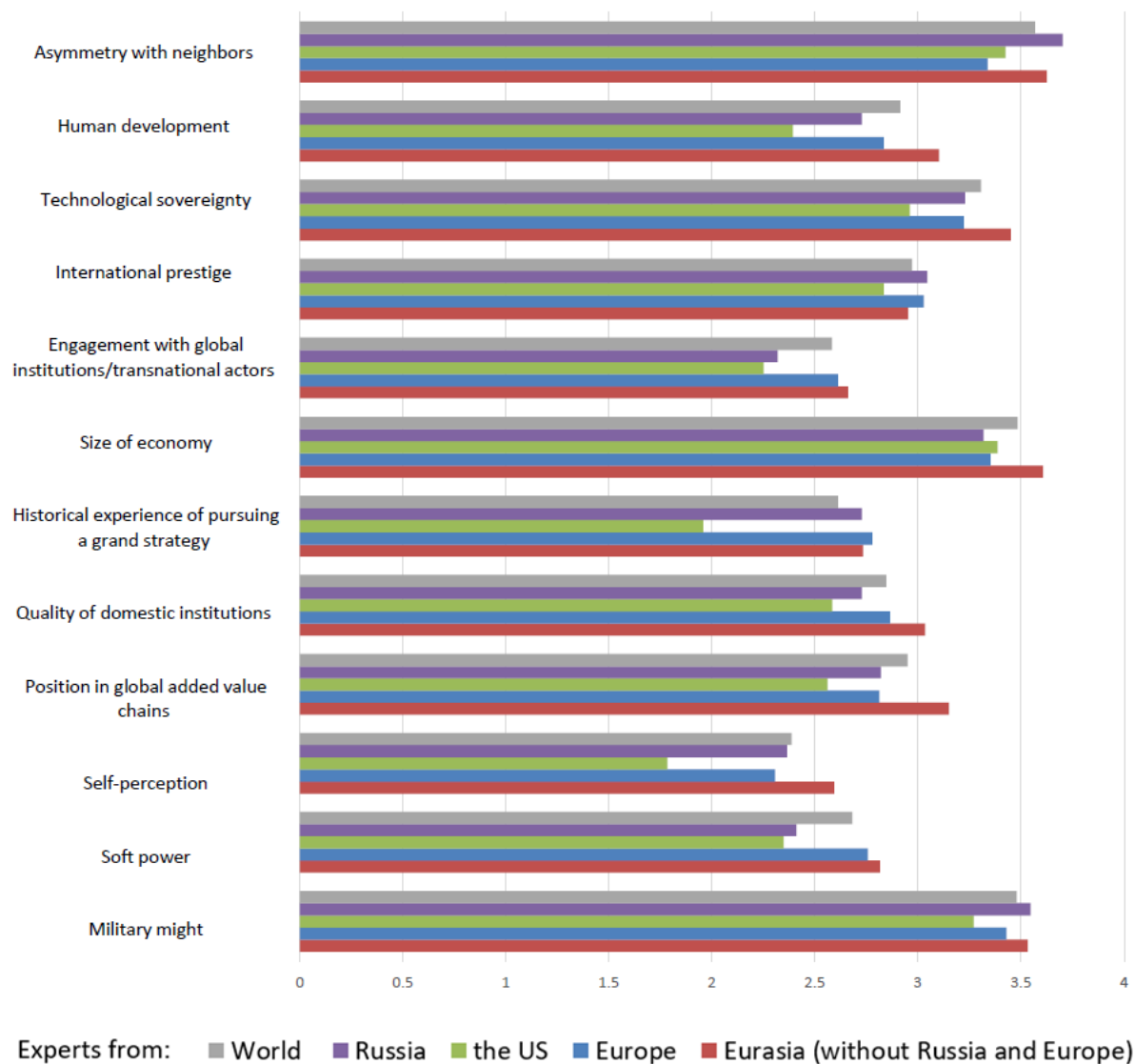


Figure 69. What criteria would you say are essential to determine the place of a state in the international hierarchy?

Compiled by the author

As mentioned earlier, one of the three main factors determining a state’s status and position in the global hierarchy, according to Eurasian experts, was “asymmetry with neighbouring countries” (that is, superiority over them). This indicates that Eurasian experts view the pursuit of regional hegemony as a natural aspiration for states. This interpretation is fully supported by a separate question about regional hegemony⁵¹⁷. Respondents considered China to be an already established regional hegemon. They also identified several other countries as having strong regional hegemonic ambitions: Russia, India, Turkey, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and Egypt.

However, the number of respondents who believed these countries *already possess* regional hegemony (“already a regional hegemon”) was much lower than the number who said they *aspire* to it (“aspires to become a regional hegemon”). This can be interpreted as an expectation that the aforementioned countries will act to consolidate or expand their regional dominance. By contrast,

⁵¹⁷ Respondents were asked to choose, for each of the 30 countries included in the survey (14 of which belong to the non-Western part of Eurasia), one of the following options: *already a regional hegemon*, *aspires to become a regional hegemon*, or *has no regional hegemonic ambitions*.

experts attributed far less pronounced hegemonic ambitions to Pakistan, Indonesia, North Korea, Japan, and South Korea – the latter being the only country for which more than half of the experts stated that it does *not aspire* to become a regional hegemon.



PART V. SECURITY

DIALOGUES &

TRIALOGUES



CHAPTER 20.

“THE GREATEST COMMON DENOMINATOR”: BRICS COOPERATION IN THE CONTEXT OF NEW GLOBAL TRANSFORMATIONS

Sergey Ryabkov talks with Yuriy Shakhov and Svyatoslav Arov

Yuriy Shakhov: How do you assess the adaptation process of the countries that joined BRICS after January 1, 2024? Do the “newcomers” *feel at home* in the group? Are they proactive or preferring to observe?

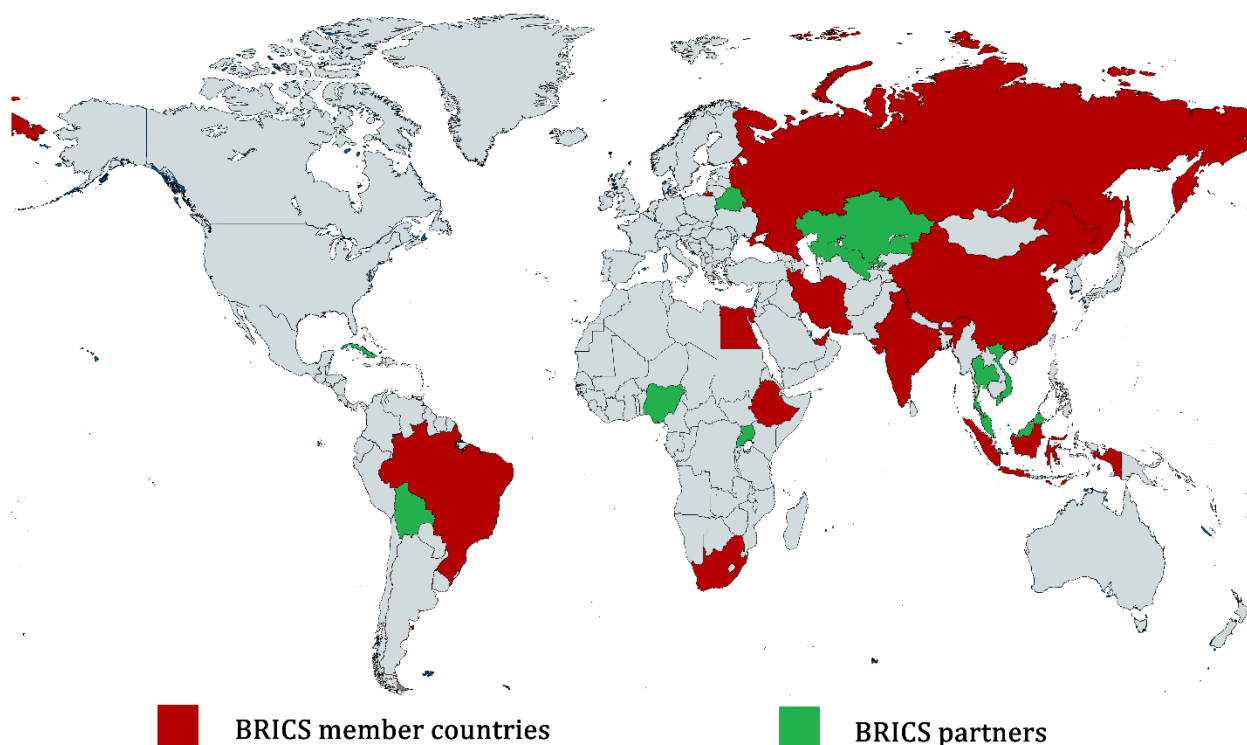
Sergey Ryabkov: Integrating *newcomers* into the established BRICS architecture and generally ensuring the smoothness of this process was one of the priorities of our 2024 BRICS Chairship. All BRICS members acknowledge that we have accomplished this task quite effectively. We have now entered, I believe, the second stage of expansion. I will not speculate here about when, who, and in what capacity will have further rapprochement with BRICS. Opportunities exist for this, including through the creation of a category of partner states. BRICS already has quite a few of these – countries that have recently achieved this status. But, of course, it is very significant that Indonesia joined BRICS as a full member this year (2025 – *editor's note*). It has promptly *embarked* on cooperation in all areas and is making a valuable and effective contribution.

I would say this: the integration of the *newcomers* has already been successfully completed, given the results they are demonstrating. I think everyone can see and notice how BRICS is functioning in its expanded form. There can be no criticism here. Practical results are reflected in the final documents. It's enough to look at the lengthy declarations of the leaders, adopted in Kazan in 2024 and in Rio de Janeiro in 2025 – it's clear what has been done and what will be done next. This action plan is, by and large, not just a statement of intent, but a *de facto roadmap* for practical work. Here, we all in BRICS have much to be proud of and room for improvement.

Yuriy Shakhov: As noted above, the number of BRICS members has more than doubled over the past few years. Has it become more difficult to find *common ground* for dialogue?

Sergey Ryabkov: You see, BRICS was initially formed as an association of states belonging to different, even civilizational, systems, representing different continents and cultures. Accordingly, each BRICS member has significant national identity, its own vision – both of its role in the grouping and of its direction and development. But more importantly, BRICS is firmly rooted in the principles of genuine equality, openness, and mutual respect. Without these, BRICS simply would not exist. And this is precisely where a very productive balance between national distinctiveness and a shared commitment to this particular model of cooperation manifests itself. From this perspective, BRICS is, of course, in many ways a pioneering international phenomenon. And that's precisely why it attracts so much attention: people in many countries are curious to understand, if you will, to try on the *BRICS garments* and see how they would look while preserving their national identity. At the summits I mentioned – in Kazan and Rio de Janeiro – decisions were adopted and developed that reflect the shared approaches of participating states to many key issues on the global and regional agendas. A commitment was reaffirmed to further strengthening political coordination to facilitate

the emergence of a new democratic, polycentric world order, where the interests of the World's Majority countries will be duly taken into account.



Map 14. Map of the BRICS countries (members and partners; as of the end of 2025)

Based on: TV BRICS (<https://tvbrics.com/states/>)

Yuriy Shakhov: Over time, the BRICS working agenda has only expanded. Is this due to unconditional unity or a narrowing of discussions to common topics where the risk of conflict is minimal?

Sergey Ryabkov: Well, let's start with the fact that disagreements do occur, and we don't hide the nuances in our approaches. But the strength of BRICS lies in the fact that decisions made by consensus ultimately have a unifying effect. This is a true *common denominator*. Some say it's the lowest common denominator, but in this case, I would say there is also the *greatest common denominator*, in terms of how the positions of different countries, when formulated collectively, acquire additional weight and, if I may, leverage in other international forums. BRICS initially operated within three baskets: politics and security, economics and finance, and humanitarian contacts. But these baskets have nothing in common, for example, with the similar three baskets in the OSCE, where the entire *toolkit* is used by the Western group for narrow, selfish interests – for destructive geopolitics, to suppress those with their own sovereign views on global affairs. In BRICS, these same baskets are filled with practical initiatives and, in a political sense, reflect common views on global processes, security challenges, and conflict situations, which BRICS *does not shy away from*.

This year's (2025 – *Editor's note*) Brazilian Chairship has continued many of the initiatives we launched and implemented in 2024. The agreements reached in Kazan, including in the trade, economic, financial, and cultural spheres, are alive and well and continue to be implemented.

Expanding the agenda is a natural process. The world isn't getting simpler, and as we accumulate experience in our own multilateral cooperation, it's only natural that BRICS is formalizing and announcing its approaches. This further helps us to act in other venues – beyond BRICS.

Yuriy Shakhov: Claims in the West that BRICS is “targeted against them” have recently become more frequent. What is the real unifying factor for its member countries? And why has the campaign to *smear* BRICS gained momentum?

Sergey Ryabkov: Our opponents' attention to BRICS is understandable. The grouping has transformed into a real force to be reckoned with. It has become an integral component of the new, changing world order. But Western *vis-à-vis* are accustomed to thinking within their own paradigm – the logic of *bloc thinking*, which boils down to the formula: “Whoever is not with us is against us”. This mindset has not only become ingrained; it has become an absolutely inescapable part of the mentality of politicians and policy-making circles in the West. Hence the suspicion, hence the desire to find ways to weaken BRICS and hinder its further development. Everyone understands this.

...I told anybody who wants to be in BRICS, That's fine, but we're going to put tariffs on your nation. Everybody dropped out. They're all dropping out of BRICS. <...> I'm very strong on the dollar, and anybody that wants to deal in dollars, they have an advantage over people that aren't... BRICS was an attack on the dollar, and I said, you want to play that game, I'm going to put tariffs on all of your products coming into the US. They said, like I said, we're dropping out of BRICS... They don't even talk about it anymore.

Donald Trump
President of the USA
October 14, 2025

<https://www.ndtv.com/world-news/brics-an-attack-on-dollar-trump-claims-us-tariffs-made-nations-leave-bloc-9457753>

BRICS is an association of states sharing a common vision. The Kremlin has no information about the countries' readiness to leave the organization.

Dmitry Peskov
Kremlin spokesman
October 15, 2025

<https://iz.ru/en/node/1973010>

Those who are moving closer to BRICS see the persistence with which *Westerners* are trying to undermine it. Nevertheless, the desire for cooperation in this format remains strong. Self-respecting countries, politicians who prioritize their national interests over pleasing *some guy in some capital*, are making a conscious choice in favor of rapprochement.

BRICS has no *hidden agenda*. This is clear not only to those directly involved in it but also to invited states. This has been particularly noticeable in recent years. Both during the South African Chairship in 2023, and during our Summit in Kazan in October 2024, essentially a year ago, and in Rio de Janeiro this past July, nearly three dozen countries from the *Global South and East* participated in each of these events. Furthermore, the heads of the executive bodies of the UN, WHO, WTO, and

multilateral development banks also participated. As you well know: if anything anti-Western were being hatched in these formats, if any schemes were being hatched, if the threads of a conspiracy were being woven to undermine Western structures, it would be known and visible. Therefore, what BRICS is accused of is merely a reflection of a policy aimed at weakening geopolitical competitors. And this will continue to happen. We will resist it.

Yuriy Shakhov: Let's look at the same situation from the perspective of BRICS. How is it responding to this new challenge? Taking steps to dispel the negative stereotypes being imposed, or is it adhering to the principle “This too shall pass⁵¹⁸”?

Sergey Ryabkov: Although BRICS is relatively new – and, by and large, its history is less than two decades old – experience has already been accumulated, and each chairship formulates well-thought-out approaches to the agenda. Each Chairship undoubtedly contributes to the further progress of BRICS. But all members also make a constructive contribution to this work in one way or another. It's enough to quote President Vladimir Putin, who said at the plenary session of the *Valdai* Discussion Club: “We are not pursuing a policy against anyone. The entire BRICS policy is aimed at ourselves, at the members of this grouping”.

...BRICS faces many challenges. We believe that one of them is more than simply creating a common platform or common principles of interaction, including, primarily, in the economy. As I have already mentioned in my remarks here, we are not pursuing a policy against anyone. The entire BRICS policy is aimed at ourselves, at the members of this group.

We are not conducting any *anti-dollar campaigns* or anti-dollar policies – absolutely not. It is just that we are not allowed to settle accounts in dollars. So what are we supposed to do? We settle accounts in national currencies. We will now do the same as many other countries, including the United States. We'll work to expand opportunities for e-commerce and e-payments.

Vladimir Putin
President of the Russian Federation
Valdai Discussion Club meeting (October 2, 2025)
<http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/78134>

Indeed, BRICS continues to *move in line* with its stated goals and with a focus on addressing practical issues. I would like to emphasize this point further. We are entering a period where the title of the summit's final documents – declarations – somewhat contradicts what BRICS actually does. After all, a declaration is something declarative, something that is stated. Yes, declarations are important: we set out positions and approaches. But the bulk of these documents, the operational sections, cover practical cooperation. And it continues to be filled with real action. This is very important, and I am confident that this will continue.

⁵¹⁸ *This too shall pass* – an adage of Persian origin about impermanence. It reflects the temporary nature, or ephemerality, of the human condition — that neither the negative nor the positive moments in life ever indefinitely last. The general sentiment of the adage is found in literature throughout history and across cultures, but the specific phrase has originated in the writings of the medieval Persian Sufi poets. It is known in the Western world primarily due to a 19th-century retelling of a Persian fable “Solomon’s Seal” by the English poet Edward FitzGerald – *Editor’s note*.

Yuriy Shakhov: The BRICS *Kazan Declaration*, adopted in 2024, specifically notes a “commitment to further advancing the institutional development of BRICS”. Does this refer only to the economic sphere, or should it be considered more broadly? How should we expect the grouping’s “institutionality” to manifest itself?

Sergey Ryabkov: Institutional development is an objectively determined process, encompassing, or at least touching, all aspects of BRICS cooperation. One area is developing interaction with the *Global Majority*. And the concrete results are undeniable. I already mentioned the decision to create a category of partner countries. It was adopted in Kazan – one of the significant achievements of the Russian Chairship. Currently, ten countries are BRICS partners: Belarus, Bolivia, Vietnam, Kazakhstan, Cuba, Malaysia, Nigeria, Thailand, Uganda, and Uzbekistan. Generally, there is a common understanding within BRICS that the doors of the group must remain open to interaction with countries of the *Global South and East* that share the BRICS values I have already mentioned. And interest in BRICS continues to grow. We observe that at the traditional “Outreach” and “BRICS+” sessions, the speakers and those invited to these events demonstrate a desire not only to better understand the opportunities BRICS offers them, but also to make an intellectual and practical contribution to this work. We welcome this. I believe BRICS will continue to serve as a driving force for positive global change. The potential here is enormous, and it is only just beginning to be realized.

Yuriy Shakhov: With the expansion of BRICS, the issue of the possible institutionalization of the group has become relevant: the emergence of fully-fledged mechanisms that would allow for more effective governance of BRICS. Should we expect such institutionalization and transformation of BRICS?

Sergey Ryabkov: I'm sure you'll agree that BRICS has transformed since its inception – even undergoing several stages of qualitative transformation. What began as an informal dialogue platform has now become a complex and multifaceted mechanism for interstate cooperation across a wide range of areas. At the same time, we've managed to avoid excessive bureaucracy and avoid any undesirable rigid attachment to an organizational structure. This, in turn, guarantees that dialogue is conducted on an equal footing, and collective responses to current challenges are developed effectively – without any “superstructure” elements.

The goal of transforming BRICS into a full-fledged international organization is not currently on the agenda. As I've already mentioned, the grouping already has a fairly well-developed mechanism for financial, trade, and economic cooperation. Interaction occurs through relevant agencies and business communities of the states. This model is proving its effectiveness at this stage and is unlikely to require adjustment. As our English-speaking colleagues say, “Don't fix what works”. This is the principle we follow.

We strive to actively engage our partners in various ministerial and expert cooperation mechanisms. We understand that their participation benefits BRICS itself and enhances its potential. In any case, all decisions within BRICS are made solely by consensus – and this is one of the key guarantees that the national interests of each state are protected and ensured. We don't need institutionalization for the sake of institutionalization. We need to increase the practical impact of the BRICS partnership. This is what we will focus on.

Yuriy Shakhov: Security issues has traditionally received special attention in BRICS. However, it appears that the potential for cooperation within the grouping in this area is far from being realized. Do you agree with this statement, and where do you see the greatest opportunities for security cooperation?

Sergey Ryabkov: I also believe that the potential hasn't been fully realized. It exists, and these issues need to be addressed further. We will do so. Our shared goal is to contribute to global efforts to strengthen international peace and security. Each BRICS member country has its own experience, its own practices, its own priorities in this area. And BRICS, as an *integrator of approaches*, is certainly capable of and will do more in this direction. But I urge everyone not to turn a *blind eye* to what BRICS has already achieved within this association.

This certainly includes promoting peace and stability, resolving regional conflicts, and paying attention to the situation in the Middle East and North Africa – without which, arguably, the situation there would be even worse, even more problematic. We have also achieved results in areas such as food and energy security, as well as adaptation to the effects of climate change. We attach significant importance to strengthening dialogues among high-level representatives of BRICS countries overseeing security issues, as well as the work of specialized working groups – on counterterrorism, information and communications technology security, combating corruption, and drug trafficking. These are all issues directly related to ensuring security. This is obvious, and BRICS is working effectively in this area. At Russia's initiative, the BRICS Counter-terrorism Strategy was adopted in 2020 – an example that sets the parameters and framework for practical work in this area, which, unfortunately, remains relevant. In the modern world, the terrorist threat has not gone away, and in some respects, its severity has even increased.

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	The UAE	Iran	Egypt	Saudi Arabia ⁵¹⁹	Indonesia	Ethiopia
Nuclear nonproliferation											
NPT	+	+	X	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
CTBT	+	O	X	O	+	+	O	O	X	+	+
TPNW	O	X	X	X	+	X	X	X	X	+	X
Partial Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (1963)	+	+	+	X	O	X	+	+	X	+	O
IAEA mechanisms											
IAEA Member State	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
IAEA Safeguards Agreement	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	+
Additional Protocol to the IAEA Safeguards Agreement	X	+	+	+	+	+	O	X	X	X	+
Export control regimes											
NSG	+	+	X	+	+	X	X	X	X	X	X
Zangger Committee	X	+	X	+	+	X	X	X	X	X	X
MTCR	+	+	+	O	+	X	X	X	X	X	X
The Australia Group	X	X	+	X	X	X	X	X	X	X	X
Nuclear safety											
Convention on Nuclear Safety	+	+	+	+	+	+	X	+	+	+	X

⁵¹⁹ Neither rejected nor accepted the invitation to join BRICS – *Editor's note*.

	Brazil	Russia	India	China	South Africa	The UAE	Iran	Egypt	Saudi Arabia ⁵¹⁹	Indonesia	Ethiopia
Convention on the Physical Protection of Nuclear Material	+	+	++	++	+	+	X	X	++	++	X
International Convention for the Suppression of Acts of Nuclear Terrorism	+	+	+	+	+	+	X	O	+	+	X
Countering WMD											
CWC	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	X	+	+	+
BTWC	+	+	+	+	+	+	+	O	+	+	+
PSI-WMD	X	X	X	X	X	+	X	X	+	X	X
FATF (WMD-Terrorism)	+	X	+	+	+	X	X	X	+	+	X

Table 9. BRICS countries' positions on nuclear nonproliferation, arms control, and nuclear safety

Based on: Arov S. International security issues in BRICS activities // PIR Center, 2024 (*in Russ.*). Updated as of October 2025 (<https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/24-07-22-BRICS-Int.-Security-RUS.pdf>)

LEGEND:

«+» – The agreement was signed and ratified.

«+*» – The agreement was signed and ratified with reservations.

«O» – The agreement was signed but not ratified.

«X» – The agreement has not been signed.

Yuriy Shakhov: What role do the digital economy and technology play within BRICS today? Are there any initiatives that, in your view, could become the grouping's *signature initiatives* in the near future?

Sergey Ryabkov: It's clear that *digital connectivity* is a crucial prerequisite for the socioeconomic development of any country. Naturally, BRICS cannot remain on the sidelines. Group's members fully recognize the importance of creating a favorable, inclusive, and secure environment for the development of the digital economy. These issues are being discussed in depth through the BRICS Business Council's working group on the digital economy and artificial intelligence, the working group on digital transformation of industry, and the BRICS Partnership on the New Industrial Revolution (*PARTNIR*). We acknowledge the significant contribution of the Brazilian Chairship to these efforts. The Chairship has organized a number of thematic events aimed at promoting the implementation of digital services in various economic sectors, including agriculture, manufacturing, transportation, healthcare, education, and finance. All of this is being carried out taking into account the specific, often different, needs of each member country.

	Type of BRICS participation	Name of the Central Bank Digital Currency (CBDC)	Technology	Status	Launch date ⁵²⁰
Brazil	Member state	Digital Brazilian Real (Drex)	DLT	Pilot	2024
Russia	Member state	Digital Rouble	DLT	Pilot	2026
China	Member state	Digital Renminbi (E-CNY)	Hybrid	Pilot	2020
India	Member state	Digital Rupee	DLT	Pilot	2024
South Africa	Member state	Digital Rand	DLT	Analysis	2026
the UAE	Member state	Digital Dirham	DLT	Pilot	2025
Ethiopia	Member state	-	-	Analysis	-
Indonesia	Member state	-	DLT	Analysis	-
Iran	Member state	Digital Iranian Rial	Blockchain	Pilot	2025
Egypt	Member state	E-Pound	Hybrid	Analysis	2030
Bolivia	Partner	Virtual Boliviano	No data	Analysis	-
Belarus	Partner	Digital Belorussian Rouble	Hybrid	Analysis	2026
Cuba	Partner	-	-	-	-
Uzbekistan	Partner	Uzbekistan CBDC	Blockchain	Analysis	-
Malaysia	Partner	E-ringgit	DLT	Analysis	2026
Kazakhstan	Partner	Digital Tenge	Blockchain	Pilot	2025
Uganda	Partner	Uganda CBDC	DLT	Analysis	2027
Thailand	Partner	Thailand CBDC	Blockchain	Analysis	2026

⁵²⁰ At least at the pilot project level – *Editor's note*.

Nigeria	Partner	eNaira	Blockchain	Fully launched ⁵²¹	2021
Vietnam	Partner	Vietnam CBDC	DLT	Analysis	2026

Table 10. Status of central bank digital currencies (CBDCs) in BRICS member and partner countries (as of 2025)

Compiled by: BRICS Expert Council Russia (updated as of October 2025).

Sources:

<https://bricscouncil.ru/ru/analytics/perspektivy-formirovaniya-edinogo-kontura-transgranichnykh-platezhey-s-ispolzovaniem-ts-vts-b-v-stranakh-briks>

<https://bricscouncil.ru/ru/analytics/razvitie-ts-vts-b-v-stranakh-prisoedinivshikhsya-k-briks-v-2024-g>

We are devoting significant attention to finalizing the Strategy for BRICS Economic Partnership for the period up to 2030. It will set objectives – that is, define the main guidelines and goals for our cooperation on issues related to the multilateral trading system, the digital economy, financial cooperation and trade, and sustainable development. Therefore, digitalization in the broad sense, including artificial intelligence, is at the forefront of cooperation within the group, and these issues are receiving increasing attention.

Yuriy Shakhov: How do you assess the prospects for joint work among BRICS countries in the field of artificial intelligence? Over the past few years, BRICS members (including *newcomers*) have repeatedly proposed joining forces. Is an “AI-BRICS” truly within reach?

Sergey Ryabkov: It's premature to talk about creating an *AI-BRICS*, but the topic of artificial intelligence is certainly on everyone's lips, and we're actively pursuing it. A major achievement was the adoption of a separate leadership declaration on global governance of artificial intelligence at the Rio de Janeiro summit. Prior to this summit, BRICS had never produced such documents. The BRICS countries believe that cooperation in this area is intended to help mitigate potential risks and build capacity, particularly in developing countries. This interaction should also help bridge the unfortunately widening digital divide, both within and between countries. It is agreed that work in this area must be conducted in accordance with national legislation and the UN Charter, be development-oriented, and be based on the principles of respect for state sovereignty, the protection of personal data, and human rights and interests.

We believe that collective efforts are needed to create a global AI governance system that would support our shared values. BRICS clearly advocates for the UN's coordinating role in these processes. However, I would hesitate to say at this stage that common BRICS standards in the field of AI are emerging – they have not yet been fully defined. However, we are actively working with our partners to harmonize our approaches and see interest in this work from all BRICS members.

Yuriy Shakhov: Not long ago, the world crossed the “small equator of the century”: the year 2050 is now chronologically closer to us than the year 2000. In this regard, we would like to ask you to briefly formulate what, in your opinion, should be the main priority in strengthening the global security system (from the BRICS perspective) in the near future?

⁵²¹ It is in circulation nominally. As of the end of 2025, *eNaira*'s share of the total currency in circulation in Nigeria was less than 0.5%. Its user base is estimated at 3-4% of the population (for comparison, the share of official cryptocurrency users is 12.5% of the population) – *Editor's note*.

Sergey Ryabkov: The *small equator of the century* is, of course, a beautiful metaphor. I wouldn't contrast the first quarter of the 21st century with the second. After all, it was at the end of the first quarter of the 21st century, in 2024, that the foundation for the work that will continue was laid in Kazan. This is a significant undertaking, and it's no coincidence that the motto of Russia's Chairship was: "Strengthening Multilateralism for Just Global Development and Security". This motto encompasses key tasks as we see them – primarily within the BRICS framework, but not only, and in a broader context. It will remain the formula by which we will measure our future work. Without multilateral principles, without their strengthening, without cooperation, it is impossible to address increasingly complex issues, overcome existing challenges, emerge from conflicts stronger, and build a world where the sovereignty and independence of states are respected and where states cooperate. Achieving this without cooperation will be very difficult. But BRICS is helping us to achieve this.

Yuriy Shakhov: What expectations does Russia have for India's BRICS Chairship in 2026 in terms of further strengthening collective approaches to ensuring international stability and security?

Sergey Ryabkov: Our Indian friends have traditionally shown great interest and devoted significant attention to working within the BRICS format. This has always been the case: India is a founding member of the grouping. Now that BRICS has expanded, it is a *ship* that the Indian *captain* will, I am confident, steer next year on a steady, firm course toward further deepening cooperation. The end of the Brazilian mandate is approaching, and, accordingly, the moment when our Indian colleagues will share their specific plans with other members of the grouping. But I am confident that, as has happened in the past, during India's Chairship of the grouping, they will add momentum and initiatives in each area. Moreover, they will do so thoughtfully, with their own national specifics, which we respect and strive to fully support.

In general, we strive to support every BRICS Chairship, and we will certainly do so during India's year as well. We'll see what results we achieve by the end of next year, but I'm confident that under India's Chairship, cooperation within the grouping and with BRICS partner countries will significantly advance.

CHAPTER 21.

“BALANCE OF TWO TYPES OF CONTRADICTIONS”: COOPERATION BETWEEN RUSSIA AND CHINA IN THE ERA OF GLOBAL INSTABILITY⁵²²

Andrey Denisov talks with Julia Melnikova and Vladimir Legoyda

Julia Melnikova: Recent years in context of Russian-Chinese relations have been eventful. First and foremost, Moscow and Beijing celebrated the 75th anniversary of diplomatic relations in 2024. The Russian President visited China – as his first foreign trip since the reelection. The coordination and elaboration of Russian and Chinese positions in preparation for the BRICS summit in Kazan was also visible. What of the past events do you remember most?

Andrey Denisov: Much has happened in Russian-Chinese relations. To list them all would take a very long time. But I would note the following. First, they were very intense – in terms of both personal contacts and all kinds of exchanges, partly for objective reasons. Our activity in the West has understandably diminished. Now the focus is, of course, on the South and the East – that is, the countries of the *Global Majority*. This is entirely natural, and China is one of the *poles* of the modern world. But the development of bilateral relations, even apart from the international context, also leaves a certain *imprint* and requires more frequent communication.

For example, we'll count from the beginning of 2013 – I began my term as ambassador, Xi Jinping was first elected President of China in March 2013, and Vladimir Putin began his presidential term a year earlier. Since then, there have been several dozen meetings between our leaders, both in Russia and China, at bilateral events and, as we say, in third countries, on the *sidelines* of various international forums. All of them were rich in content, never routine or formal.

As you know, such meetings are often called *meetings on the move*. Although, in fact, they are actually sitting down. In 2024, for example, three such meetings took place, and this number includes full-fledged visits. However, there could have been as many as five. As I already mentioned, our leaders also usually hold meetings on the *sidelines* of international forums.

The APEC summit in Lima, Peru (November 15-16, 2024), and the G20 summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil (November 18-19, 2024), took place. The President of China participated in both forums, and Russia was represented by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov.

However, here's what's important: at the meeting of our ministers in Rio de Janeiro, in addition to President Xi Jinping, the Chinese delegation naturally included the Minister of Foreign Affairs, who held a separate meeting with Sergey Lavrov. Following this meeting, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign

⁵²² This interview is based on excerpts from Andrey Denisov's public speeches on Russian-Chinese relations. See: China's Foreign Policy: Confucianism or Diplomatic Pragmatism? // *Channel One*, October 16, 2025. URL: <https://www.1tv.ru/podcasts/sobralis-s-myslyami/vypuski/sobralis-s-myslyami-vneshnyaya-politika-kitaya-konfucianstvo-ili-pragmatika-diplomatii-vypusk-ot-16-10-2025> (in Russ.); China has realized its strength. Andrey Denisov sums up the year in Russian-Chinese relations (podcast) // RIAC. December 27, 2024. URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/columns/podcasts/kitay-osochnal-svoyu-silu-andrey-denisov-podvodit-itogi-goda-v-rossiysko-kitayskikh-otnosheniyakh/?sphrase_id=169387981 (in Russ.).

Affairs published a very revealing press release. These aren't just words from a press conference or answers to journalists' questions. This is an official document of the ministry.

It stated that the ministers, having met in Rio de Janeiro, discussed in detail the agreements reached by the leaders of our states at the BRICS summit in Kazan, where, as was again stated, almost *verbatim*, it was said that the leaders discussed the further deepening of the strategic partnership at the next stage of development.

Statements in documents like these, especially when presented by China, are never random. What actually happened is that the leaders of our countries, meeting over the course of a year, outlined certain *milestones* and prospects for the future. This was probably the most important thing.

...The main written outcome of the Russian-Chinese “summit” (May 8, 2025) is the “Joint Statement”. The very first pages of this lengthy document contain important provisions, some of which have not previously appeared in similar texts. Specifically, it speaks of “the *military brotherhood* and traditions of mutual assistance between the two countries, forged during the Second World War, as the solid foundation of our relations today”. It mentions the “spirit of eternal good-neighbourliness and friendship”. It emphasizes the “broad commonality of national interests in the long-term: historical perspective”. Finally, it states that Russian-Chinese relations possess “unique strategic self-sufficiency and a powerful internal driving force”.

These and other formulations reflect historical continuity and simultaneously look to the future, which in itself deserves close attention. These are not simply *solemn rhetoric*. These are commitments that the parties intend to adhere to, taking into account the highest political level of adoption. Their weight is particularly compelling against a global political backdrop that is far from stable and orderly.

Andrey Denisov

10th International Conference “Russia and China: Cooperation in a New Era”

May 30, 2025

<https://russiancouncil.ru/analytics-and-comments/analytics/mnogopolyarnost-i-razvitiye-stranov-vostoka-i-zapada/>

Of course, this isn't exactly a convergence of the two countries' positions on international affairs. They were already quite close – though they weren't entirely identical, because we are two *great powers* with our own interests, our own areas of priority. And we're not part of any alliance, so we have no alliance obligations that would commit us to unquestioningly adhere to certain statutes. We have nothing of the sort. Nevertheless, life itself is pushing us to further align our positions on the international situation. This is perhaps the most important thing.

Julia Melnikova: There's no doubt that developing strategic cooperation with China is an *axial* direction of Russian foreign policy, embodying a *Pivot to the East* that has been ongoing for over a decade. To what extent is this a systemic trend? Will changing foreign policy conditions impact the development of the Russian-Chinese partnership?

Andrey Denisov: The situation is truly challenging – for us, for China, and for the entire world. We, Russia, inevitably adapt to changes in the international situation. China's policy, however, is primarily

focused on maintaining some kind of stability. Beijing has a stake in this. China is one of the *protagonists* and key participants in globalization. Globalization, which has, to a certain extent, reached a dead end, but will probably be revived with time – because such is, perhaps, the fate of humanity: it will either, so to speak, solve problems together, or simply perish. But these are philosophical generalizations.

At this *point in history*, our discord is impossible – I'm absolutely convinced of that. This is primarily due to the difference in approach between “our people”, as they say, and those on the other side of the *counter* or the other side of the *barricade*. Because, after all, on the other side, the world is *black and white*: “Either you're with us, or you're with them”.

Mao Zedong's contribution to Marxist thought lies in his so-called “theory of two distinct types of contradictions”⁵²³. There are contradictions between us and our enemies – in common parlance, antagonistic ones. And then there are, as he put it, contradictions within the people. This means contradictions with those who simply hold different views, but are nonetheless not our adversaries. And we simply need to work with them, or at least get along with them.

Our position boils down to this approach. We're not calling for everyone to support or share our position on the Ukrainian conflict, for example. We're more counting on understanding our motives, our concerns about security and the situation of the Russian-speaking majority – I insist that this is a majority in Ukraine, not a minority. These are well-known positions. And if countries don't show what's called open support – and China, by the way, doesn't either, since it also shows understanding, it doesn't express support directly – then we believe this is a *benevolent stance* toward our country.

The Americans behave completely differently. They say that if you don't condemn “Russia's aggression”, then you're supporting it. That's all. And they told China something like this: you should stand on the “right side of history”, so that we can then gather all our forces and throw them at you.

But the Chinese have already seen this – it's impossible to hide. Therefore, there are objective factors that force us to respond to emerging challenges from a common starting point.

Vladimir Legoyda: Continuing with the topic of Russian-Chinese cooperation, the idea of a strong state is, in general, common to both us and the Chinese. But as a former Americanist, I remember we always said that Americans differentiate between the state and the people. For us, our Homeland, people, and state are practically identical concepts. How similar are we to the Chinese in this regard?

Andrey Denisov: In general, they're probably similar. A strong state is needed everywhere. If in football they say “the order beats the class”⁵²⁴, then at the level of state building this is even more

⁵²³ The idea was first expressed in the Mao Zedong's essay “On Contradiction” (1937) and based on statement that all movement and life is a result of contradiction. Mao further develops the theme in his speech “On the Correct Handling of Contradictions Among the People” (1957). This idea also forms the philosophical underpinnings of the ideology of Maoism – *Editor's note*.

⁵²⁴ A popular expression attributed to one of the founders of Soviet football, Nikolai Starostin (1902-1996). It means that a well-established system and discipline are more effective than the individual skill of isolated, disorganized individuals – *Editor's note*.

true. You can have scientific and technological achievements and a high level of education, but this won't help you survive if the state doesn't function effectively. And if it does, then everything else can be built.

If there is a difference between us and the Chinese, it was more in the realm of ideology, and now that has disappeared. For example, half a century ago, when I first came to China as a student, there was a campaign of criticism of Lin Biao⁵²⁵ and Confucius. In particular, they criticized his [Confucius's – *Editor's note*] expression, “Míng fù guó qiáng” [*Chinese*: 民富国强] – “the people are rich, the state is strong”. I asked, which is correct? The correct translation is the opposite: “Míng qiáng guó fù” [*Chinese*: 民强国富] – “the people are strong” (primarily ideologically), “the state is rich”. The question arises: for whom, exactly, is it rich? But there was no answer to this question; it was never posed in principle. It was believed that it didn't matter who the people were, as long as the state was rich. That is, the priority of the state over the individual was probably as high as it was in our country in those years. And then, gradually, it somehow shifted.

But we are *in the middle* between East and West. For example, China has never had large landed estates, and therefore no hereditary aristocracy. The Chinese language does have words like “baron”, “count”, and so on, but these are court, not property titles. They are not landlords. In China, the state has always been the core of social organization. The emperor, ruling by *mandate of Heaven*, appointed viceroys whose job it was to keep the population subservient and pay taxes. This is precisely why the attitude toward the state and toward officials in China is still significantly more respectful than even ours, let alone in bourgeois democracies.

China has *showbiz stars*, astronauts, more billionaires than the US, and bloggers with an audience of 200 million. But the main criterion of social status is proximity to the state. A government official still ranks above all of these.

In China, irrigated agriculture was the foundation of the economy. To establish it, *armies of labor* were needed, just as in Egypt during the construction of the pyramids. This could only be accomplished through state efforts. In Europe, things were different. We, of course, adopted some things from Europe and ended up somewhere in the middle. But still, like China, we need a strong state. That's without a doubt.

Julia Melnikova: Let's discuss the UN, which is currently going through difficult times. Given the extreme uncertainty we're experiencing, there's a feeling that if reform of the entire UN system were to begin, we could face chaos in international security and communications for all nation states. How does China view the UN's current role? How important is this issue for it? And do Russia and China share similar positions on UN reform?

Andrey Denisov: I'd start by noting that the UN is truly a vast, complex system. There are so-called special agencies, more than a dozen of them, each comprising various divisions and mechanisms that

⁵²⁵ Lin Biao (1907-1971) – was a Chinese political figure and Marshal of the People's Republic of China, considered Mao Zedong's right-hand man and successor until his death in a mysterious plane crash over Mongolia. He was posthumously declared a traitor and expelled from the Communist Party of China. – *Editor's note*.

carry out their own specific activities. There are peacekeeping operations whose budgets exceed the regular budget of the UN itself. In short, there's a lot going on within those two letters in English (UN), or three letters in Russian (OOH), or three characters in Chinese (联合国)... It's worth remembering, first of all, the English proverb: *if it ain't broke, don't fix it*.

The system truly needs reform, but it hasn't broken down. It's perfectly clear that the UN continues to play an important role as an organization with universal legal personality, which cannot be replaced. And, in my opinion, even the most ardent critics of the UN or the most radical advocates of its reform cannot help but think that while it's easy to destroy, creating something new isn't just difficult, it's probably downright impossible in today's world.

When people talk about UN reform, they often think primarily of the Security Council (UNSC): expanding, maintaining, or eliminating the *veto power*, the categories of permanent and non-permanent members, and so on. It's as if the entire world has truly converged on this focus. In reality, as we see, the system is complex and expensive. And perhaps we should begin not with this, but with the effectiveness of the considerable resources invested in UN operations.

Regarding China: China is a permanent member of the UNSC, values its permanent membership very highly, and tries to use it whenever possible to advance its *general line* in foreign affairs. Furthermore, China is very cautious about various options for expanding the Security Council, especially in the permanent membership category. I can't say that our positions here are entirely aligned. And, again, that's normal. We are, after all, large countries, and we have specific interests and our own views.

...As the first founding member to have signed the UN Charter and a permanent member of the UNSC, China has always firmly upheld the authority of the United Nations and supported the central role of the United Nations in international affairs. <...> China always calls for *win-win cooperation*, opposes *zero-sum game*, and advocates making the pie of cooperation bigger together for the benefit of more countries and people. <...> In a world fraught with changes and turbulence, countries expect the United Nations to effectively play a leading role in addressing global challenges and the Security Council to shoulder the important responsibility of maintaining international peace and security under the UN Charter. The Security Council reform is an organic part of a comprehensive reform of the United Nations.

China supports the two Co-chairs to promote steady progress in the reform of the Security Council in the right direction from the long-term development of the United Nations and the common interests of all member states, increasing the representation and voice of developing countries, giving more small and medium-sized countries the opportunity to participate in decision-making, and enabling all member states to benefit from the reform.

Wang Yi
Foreign Minister of the PRC
February 28, 2024

https://www.fmprc.gov.cn/eng/wjb/wjbz/hd/202403/t20240318_11261742.html

Incidentally, we don't always vote the same way in the UNSC. I don't recall, for example, us voting “for” and China voting “against”, but there have been times when we voted “for” and China abstained,

or vice versa: China voted “for”, and for some reason we abstained. The reason, incidentally, is always well-founded and is always communicated to our partners.

In short, China, fundamentally committed to stabilizing the international system as a whole, is pursuing this line at the UN as well. We shouldn't expect any *revolutionary calls* from China in this regard.

Julia Melnikova: In parallel with its role at the UN, China is also actively developing its own foreign policy doctrine. The idea of a “Community of Common Destiny”⁵²⁶, global initiatives in security, development, and civilization... In your view, how does this system complement or perhaps differ from the Russian idea of a multipolar world? And who is the target audience for China's foreign policy conceptualization?

Andrey Denisov: Let's talk about the *target audience* right away. Chinese foreign policy doctrines and initiatives are, as the Pope's encyclicals say, *Urbi et orbi* – that is, addressed to the entire world. But they are probably primarily addressed to that same *Global Majority*, because Beijing expects understanding and a favorable attitude toward these initiatives. Incidentally, they are of a general nature. And, in principle, there is no element of conflict. If this is a global development initiative, then it is about the right to development for all, regardless of political systems, external influences, and so on. If it is about global security, then it is for all, not selectively.

There is a *Global Civilization Initiative*⁵²⁷ that essentially presupposes both of the above. That is, global civilization is shaped by a wide variety of countries and peoples, and it develops historically, and there is no need to artificially interfere with this process for some *far-fetched* or ideologically driven reasons.

There are some more concrete proposals, like the well-known “One Belt, One Road” megaproject. This is more of a material concept, as we'll call it. None of them, in my view, have any potential for conflict, and none of them isolate anyone from what they call their essence. Essentially, all of these Chinese initiatives are, in one way or another, inviting.

Beijing has realized its strength. You see, over the past few decades, China has been building its, well, literally, *muscles* faster than it has been able to rewire its consciousness to match those *muscles*.

⁵²⁶ Also known as “Community of Common Destiny for Mankind”, “Community with a Shared Future for Mankind” and “Human Community with a Shared Future”. The slogan was first used by Hu Jintao and has been frequently cited by Xi Jinping to describe a stated foreign-policy goal of the PRC. First of all, the aim of creating a “new framework” of international relations which would promote and improve global governance – *Editor's note*.

⁵²⁷ This is a diplomatic initiative of the PRC, proposed in 2023. Its goals include strengthening mutual understanding among peoples, promoting the development of civilization, promoting equality and mutual learning among civilizations through dialogue, and countering the concept of the superiority of one civilization over others – *Editor's note*.

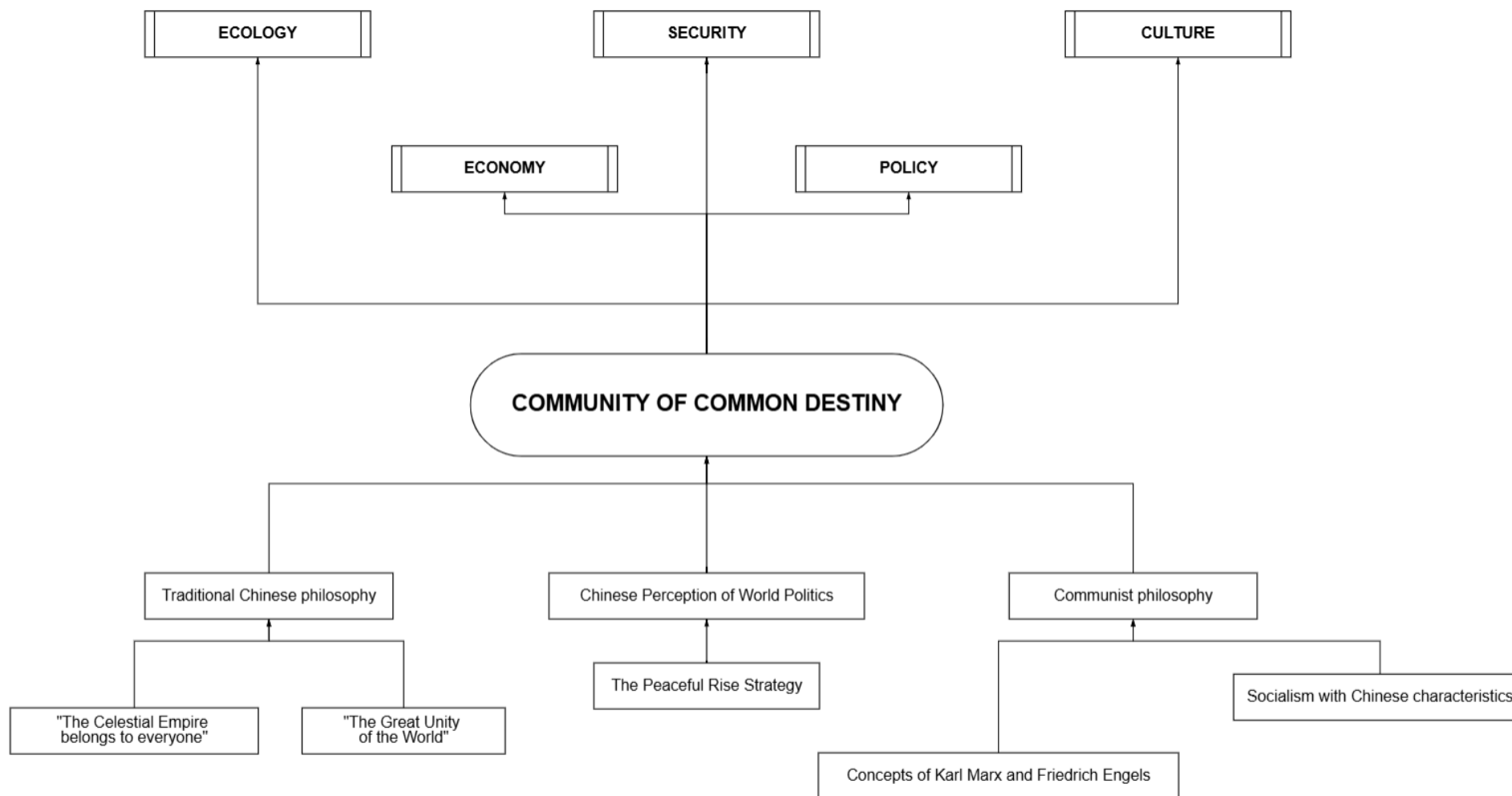


Figure 70. The ideological basis and main *baskets* of the “Community of Common Destiny”

Compiled by PIR Center.

Adapted from the data: Semenov A., Tsvyk A. The concept of the “Community of Common Destiny” in China's foreign policy strategy // World Economy and International Relations. 2019. Vol.63. №8. P.72-81. (in Russ.).

Source: https://www.imemo.ru/index.php?page_id=1248&file=https://www.imemo.ru/files/File/magazines/meimo/08_2019/10-Semenov.pdf

About five or six years ago, China overtook the US in GDP, calculated using purchasing power parity. We understand that this is a *misleading indicator*, and we shouldn't rely on it. If we use the traditional calculation method, that is, using the exchange rate, then for the US, either way, because it uses the dollar, yes, so purchasing power parity and the exchange rate are the same indicator. Not so for China. Based on the exchange rate, it still lags behind, but it's already somewhere on par with the US, and these two countries are significantly ahead of all other countries in the world. That is, those in third, fourth, and fifth place are a significant distance behind the two global leaders, which is why China has become more active.

This was even evident in the Ukrainian Crisis: China put forward its own initiative, its own regulatory plan, which, in terms of approaches – perhaps not the specific content, but the approaches there – are precisely about ensuring security for all participants, that's the main thing, and that's what, in principle, seems so promising to us.

Recently, China joined forces with Brazil and formed a joint settlement plan, which is being offered primarily to the global majority because it is being met with understanding. One hundred and fifty countries are, to varying degrees, receptive to such Chinese initiatives regarding the Middle East and its crises. I say “renewed numbers” because the Syrian crisis⁵²⁸ has been added to the Palestinian-Israeli, Israeli-Lebanese, and Israeli-Iranian conflicts, effectively eclipsing all others.

China has made relevant statements regarding the Syrian crisis, and perhaps in the past, Beijing perhaps delayed publicly expressing political opinions a bit. Now the situation has changed. China feels it is an active participant, not just entitled but obligated to engage in resolving international conflicts.

We, at the very least, don't object to this, because we don't have to agree with China's approach in every way – we don't coordinate it – but the underlying thinking is quite close to our hearts. We understand China's motives in putting forward its initiatives.

⁵²⁸ This refers to the collapse of the Bashar al-Assad regime and the transfer of power into the hands of the armed opposition led by Ahmed al-Sharaa in December 2024. For more information on the development of the key crises in the Middle East, see Chapter 11 of this Yearbook. – *Editor's note*.

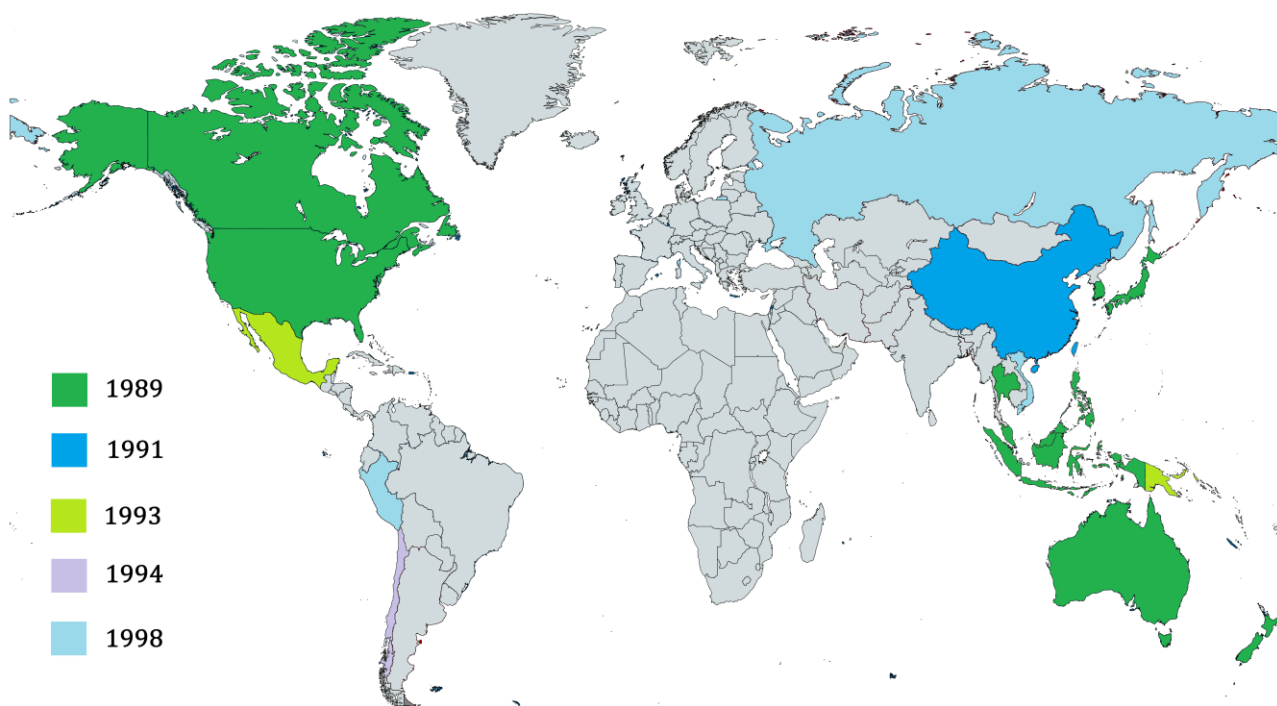
CHAPTER 22.

“OPENNESS, DYNAMISM, VIABILITY”: APEC IN A CHANGING WORLD ORDER

Marat Berdyev talks with Yuriy Shakhov

Yuriy Shakhov: APEC has traditionally positioned itself as a platform of the “three E” – Economic growth, Energy security and Ecology. What priorities is Russia advancing in each of these areas in the upcoming cycle of meetings?

Marat Berdyev: APEC is a significant and highly relevant forum for comprehensive discussions of economic cooperation issues in the Asia-Pacific region (APR). Its establishment in 1989 was prompted by the region’s transformation into the *locomotive* of the global economy. Moreover, it became clear that today’s international problems cannot be resolved without the involvement of the Global Majority. The West not only lacks the capacity to cope with them alone, but it also frequently becomes the very source of crises or the author of policy *prescriptions* that exacerbate them.



Map 15. APEC Member States

Compiled by PIR Center based on APEC website (<https://www.apec.org/about-us/about-apec>)

The Asian financial crisis of 1998 was primarily the result of deregulatory standards and practices imposed by Western-oriented institutions – most notably the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the World Bank – on the countries of Southeast Asia. The consequences included the collapse of local capital markets, currency instability, and a sharp decline in business activity. A notable South Korean film, *Default* (2018), depicts this episode.

In the euphoria that followed the end of the Cold War, APEC adopted an ambitious goal: by 2020, to liberalize trade and investment and to establish a comprehensive free trade area (FTA) in the region. This scenario was not realized within the declared parameters. To a large extent, it was thwarted by the confrontational and protectionist stance of APEC's Western-centric members, who viewed such measures as a response to the natural process of multipolarity, in which they no longer held a monopoly on technological and economic leadership.

Nevertheless, the overall trajectory of APEC's aspirations has remained intact. Its new strategic document, the 2020 *APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040*, reaffirms the goal of transforming the Asia-Pacific into an "open, dynamic, resilient, and peaceful community."

This aligns well with Russia's interests and strategic plans. In 2015, President Vladimir Putin advanced the initiative of establishing a *Greater Eurasian Partnership* (GEP), aimed at removing barriers to economic cooperation among all states and associations across the continent, which would also include the Asia-Pacific region. Within APEC, we actively promote GEP elements, including the harmonization of existing regimes, expansion of the FTA network, and the strengthening of transport and logistics connectivity.

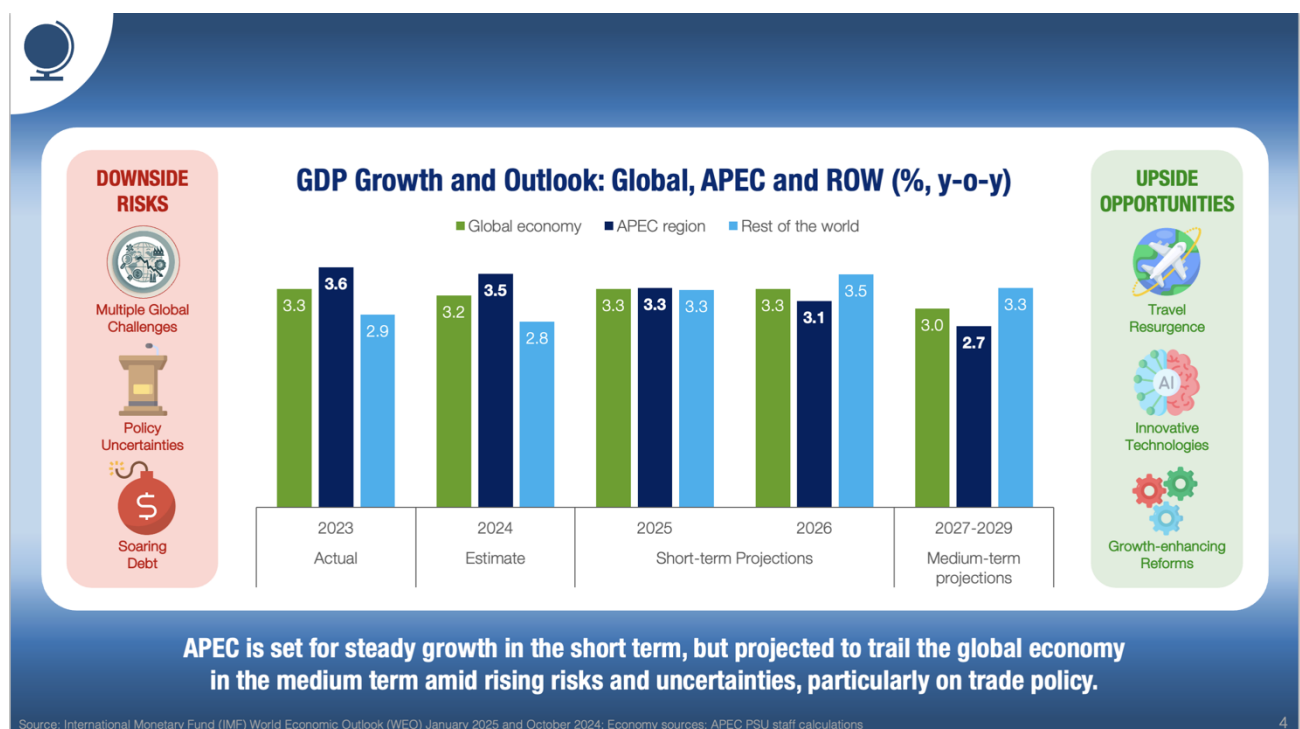


Figure 71. GDP Growth and Outlook: Global, APEC and ROW

Source: APEC website (https://www.apec.org/docs/default-source/publications/2025/3/225_psu_arta_march-2025.pdf?sfvrsn=6db33ae2_1)

Yuriy Shakhov: What consequences for security in the APR might arise from the continued intensification of the US-China rivalry? How does this affect the APEC agenda?

Marat Berdyev: Of course, APEC does not exist in vacuum. It cannot fully insulate itself from confrontational dynamics provoked by the West. Today, as neoliberal elites unleash conflicts, trade

wars, and hybrid wars, engage in direct interference in the domestic affairs of sovereign states, and weaponize the economy, it is naturally difficult to speak of normal cooperation within the forum.

You can clearly see how rapidly the global military-political environment is deteriorating, and the same tensions are rising within APEC. The *dividing line* does not run solely between the United States and China; regional tensions are being stoked along multiple vectors, and not always primarily by Washington. Australia and Canada, for instance, often act independently, accustomed to regarding themselves as “trend-setters” in the APEC arena. They persist in anti-Russian rhetoric and in making aggressive statements against other *Global Majority* countries, which they continue, by habit, to lecture and pressure.

This destructive course runs counter to the realities of multipolarity and provokes resistance within APEC. The majority of its members are focused on constructive dialogue and joint efforts. They clearly understand that a poor peace is better than a good quarrel. As I already noted, a clear collective benchmark has been set: by 2040, to build an “open, dynamic, resilient, and peaceful community” in the Asia-Pacific. Our partners within the forum share the importance of this goal and actively prevent disagreements from prevailing. This creates promising conditions for APEC to move forward, despite challenges. We are doing our utmost to support this constructive spirit, including by promoting within APEC the relevant toolkit of the Greater Eurasian Partnership.

In these circumstances, geopolitics in APEC, especially in the West’s Ukraine-centric interpretation, is steadily losing its relevance as a subject of discussion.

Yuriy Shakhov: Given the growing militarization of the region, is it possible to expand APEC’s dialogue to include security-related issues, such as cyber threats, piracy, or the security of supply chains? These topics have long been a stumbling block for member economies.

Marat Berdyev: Security is a multidimensional concept. It is not limited to military and political aspects; it also encompasses economic, social, and environmental dimensions. This approach is reflected in Russia’s National Security Strategy, approved by President Vladimir Putin in 2021. That document includes sections on ensuring security in the economic, informational, and environmental domains. Key components also include energy and food security, which require reliable sources, adequate volumes, and reasonable prices. We attach great importance to achieving economic and technological sovereignty, as well as to building an information and digital environment that takes into account the priorities and characteristics of each state.

At the same time, it is necessary to clearly delineate which elements of this broad spectrum fall within APEC’s strictly economic mandate, possess regional specificity, and can be more effectively addressed within APEC than within universal institutions, above all, the United Nations. At Russia’s initiative, the UN framework has already produced tangible results, including the consensus-based adoption by the General Assembly of the Convention against Cybercrime, as well as practical cooperation in counterterrorism, combating organized crime, and fighting corruption. At the apex of this architecture stands the UN Security Council, with its unique prerogatives in maintaining peace, security, and strategic stability.

Against this backdrop, APEC must be aware of its unique position within the system of international institutions and operate within its economic mandate. The focus should be on how to facilitate the implementation of already-achieved global agreements at the regional level, and on fine-tuning economic linkages to eliminate violence, coercion, abuse, and pressure. It is vital to dismantle politicized measures of unfair competition, including pseudo-sanctions, blockades, embargoes, *tariff wars*, and other trade and investment barriers used as instruments of suppression against strategic competitors. All these are manifestations of a rudimentary neocolonial mindset on the part of former hegemonic powers.

As far back as the 1970s, the Global Majority was already raising the question of a new international economic order. Achieving this objective requires a thorough reform of specialized global institutions – a necessity recognized by the Group of Twenty (G20), in which I have participated since its first summit in 2008, and reaffirmed annually since then. Key items on the agenda include the redistribution of IMF and World Bank quotas in favor of BRICS and other dynamic states of the Global South and East, the revitalization of the WTO, and, most importantly, the creation of an independent set of mechanisms and instruments enabling international economic operations beyond Western control, including payments, insurance, logistics, and trading systems.

Yuriy Shakhov: How would you characterize Russia’s current position in APEC? To what extent is this platform being actively used to promote Russian interests in the region? What remains the main stumbling block?

Marat Berdyev: Russia holds a solid position in APEC. Within this format, we are regarded as constructive participants. This is understandable: Russia has entered the top four global economies, displacing former *giants* such as Germany and Japan. Our share of the global economy has already exceeded 3%, while our GDP growth in 2024 reached more than 4%. It is essential to note that these impressive results were achieved despite unprecedented sanctions pressure from the “collective West”.

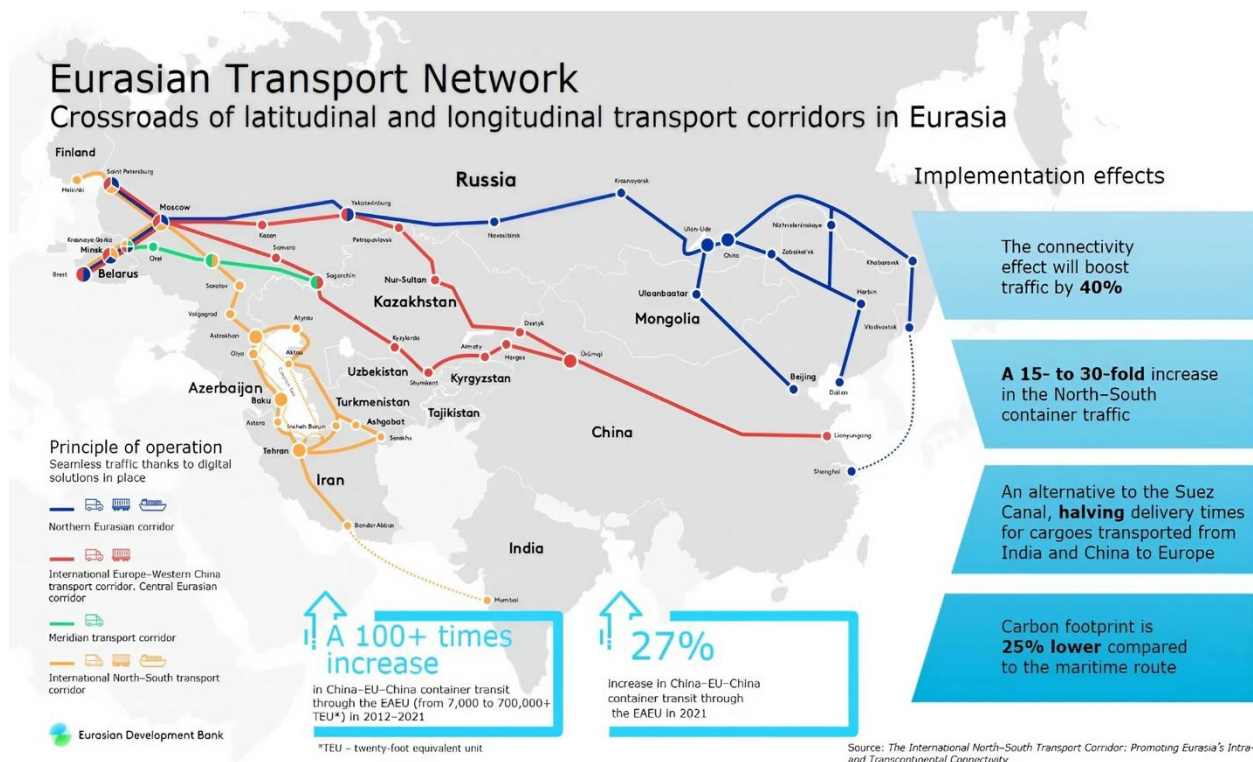
Moreover, Russia advances not only in terms of scale but also in quality, steadily climbing the ladder of technology, competencies, and overall improvement of the business climate. The outdated label of a mere “gas station” economy no longer applies to Russia. The structure of our economy is rapidly changing, with increasingly visible contributions from advanced sectors that add intellectual value, such as the digital economy, manufacturing industries, and creative sectors.

Russia is expanding its economic presence in the Asia-Pacific, with over 70% of our trade already directed toward the region. The ruble and the national currencies of our friendly partners cover more than 90% of the corresponding settlements.

Within the framework of the *Greater Eurasian Partnership* (GEP), we are pursuing a course that links the EAEU, SCO, China’s *Belt and Road Initiative* (BRI), and ASEAN, thereby opening new opportunities for accelerated growth and sustainable development in the Asia-Pacific. Many APEC members are experiencing firsthand the drawbacks of Western monopolies in managing business processes and supply chains, where access to settlements can be cut off overnight, sovereign assets

can be confiscated, or trade can be suffocated by tariffs and duties under any pretext – whether political or economic.

At BRICS summit in Kazan (October, 2024), we put forward specific proposals to break this *vicious circle*. These included the creation of independent and resilient mechanisms in payments and settlements, insurance, stock exchange operations, as well as improved access to investment and commercial lending. A new development in logistics has been the emergence of transcontinental routes across Russia, including North-South, East-West, and the *Trans-Arctic Transport Corridor*.



Map 16. Eurasian Transport Network

Source: *Asia Plus* News Agency (<https://asiaplustj.info/en/news/tajikistan/economic/20240701/transport-connectivity-and-access-to-markets-are-among-the-most-significant-challenges-for-eurasia>)

We are ready to share our accumulated potential with interested partners, offering them all the benefits of cooperation with Russia. This elicits a positive and receptive response from the majority of countries in the Asia-Pacific region. Looking ahead, we see broad horizons and the prospect of significant achievements, which we intend to implement for the benefit of the entire region and with a focus on strengthening its material prosperity.

Yuriy Shakhov: One of the flagship projects of the Russian Foreign Ministry is the concept of the Greater Eurasian Partnership. Which practical mechanisms for aligning the GEP with the APEC agenda do you consider most promising?

Marat Berdyev: The development of the *Greater Eurasian Partnership* is among our key long-term objectives. This strategic priority is enshrined in Russia's Foreign Policy Concept. The GEP is designed to remove barriers to trade, investment, and broader economic ties, while ensuring a synergistic effect from integrating the various initiatives and projects currently being pursued across

Eurasia. Within the GEP framework, the centripetal forces in Asia are directed toward creating an open and non-discriminatory space of comprehensive economic cooperation. These efforts will enable us to fully leverage the unique historical, geographical, and financial advantages of our continent.

APEC has substantial potential to promote the GEP initiative. The *Greater Eurasia* project could provide an additional stimulus for growth among our Asia-Pacific partners. It envisages reliable channels for the supply of energy resources to the region’s rapidly expanding markets, the creation of “seamless” transport and logistics connections, and effective payment and settlement systems. We regard the GEP as an instrument for contributing to the implementation of *APEC’s Putrajaya Vision 2040*. Work on this agenda is carried out systematically, both within the APEC framework and through bilateral channels.



Figure 72. APEC Putrajaya Vision 2040

Source: CGTN (<https://news.cgtn.com/news/2021-11-12/APEC-launches-Putrajaya-Vision-2040-implementation-plan-158wKFhApAQ/index.html>)

Yuriy Shakhov: In 2025, it will be ten years since the idea of the GEP was first announced. What lessons have been learned over this decade, and which indicators would you propose for assessing the effectiveness of the partnership by 2030?

Marat Berdyev: You are absolutely right: the GEP is marking its first milestone anniversary in 2025, ten years since its inception. Notably, this initiative has withstood the *test of time*, a rarity in today's diplomacy. Often, we see superficial projects being promoted, such as the so-called multilateral forums initiated by French President Emmanuel Macron or the "Summit for Democracy" of former U.S. President Joseph Biden – initiatives that have long since faded without leaving much of a lasting impact.

The GEP, by contrast, is driven by real-life necessity, not "laboratory invention." It embodies a simple and universally understandable meaning: cooperation, solidarity, and interconnectedness as the foundations of shared prosperity, well-being, and peace.

We envision the final stage of the GEP as the creation of a broad integration contour across the entire Eurasian continent. This would be a space where borders do not hinder the movement of people and goods, and where cooperation among states and integration groupings, on a mutually beneficial basis, serves common goals and interests, raising material welfare and strengthening technological and industrial capacities.

Today, the GEP figures in discussions at a wide range of Eurasian forums. Its relevance as an integration tool has been recorded in the EAEU's strategic document, the "Eurasian Economic Path", with a planning horizon to 2030 and beyond to 2045. Practical progress is being made in linking the GEP, EAEU, and China's Belt and Road Initiative, with a focus on aligning transport routes and logistics systems.

This year (2025 – *Editor's note*), we updated our approaches to implement the GEP further, refining its specific objectives and tasks. We proceed from the understanding that the framework of the common economic space will rest on regulatory harmonization, a network of free trade agreements, and an extensive system of transport links.

We see the EAEU, SCO, and ASEAN as the principal pillars of the GEP. The project, however, remains open to all interested states, including EU members, on an individual basis if necessary. This would, of course, require them to abandon zero-sum games and adopt more cooperative attitudes. Russia has already concluded free trade agreements with Serbia, Vietnam, and Iran, as well as an economic cooperation agreement with China. Negotiations are nearing completion on an FTA with Mongolia and the UAE, while talks with other states are also underway.

Russia also offers convenient and cost-effective transit opportunities, which are particularly valuable for landlocked countries. We are actively developing major transport corridors, including the North-South, East-West, and Northern Sea Route (NSR). For example, the NSR reduces delivery times by 40% compared to the Suez Canal, while also being more environmentally efficient in terms of fuel consumption.

As for indicators of the GEP's effectiveness, although they are not easy to summarize in a single figure, several stand out. First, the GEP is based on relations of equality and non-discrimination, where no sudden tariff increases are imposed, no political pressure is applied, and no external prescriptions for development are enforced. Second, it provides a strong framework for strengthening South-South cooperation, which has shown significant momentum. According to WTO data, trade within this perimeter has grown from 10% to 25% of global trade volume over the past thirty years. We also see a rising share of settlements in national currencies across Eurasia, increased capital mobilization through local markets, and a growing role for financial institutions such as the Eurasian Development Bank (EDB), the New Development Bank (NDB), and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) – banks where Western shareholders do not dominate.

Our ultimate goal is to overcome centrifugal tendencies in the global economy, to transform Eurasia into its central axis, and to shape the continent into a unified, expansive market. Even at an early stage, this market could encompass 2.2 billion people, and under favorable conditions, it could ultimately expand to around 5.7 billion.

Yuriy Shakhov: Food security has once again become a critical issue for global stability. What opportunities does Russia see for multilateral projects within APEC that could combine Russian agricultural resources with the technological solutions of its partners?

Marat Berdyev: Issues of food security and the eradication of hunger are of extreme relevance today. They are enshrined in Sustainable Development Goal 2, which essentially crowns the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, where overcoming poverty and hunger is *placed at the forefront*. Unfortunately, the international community has little to show in this regard. At present, food shortages affect 735 million people worldwide – more than the population of the European Union. Hunger has also begun to spread to so-called developed countries, where entire social groups now find access to food increasingly unaffordable.

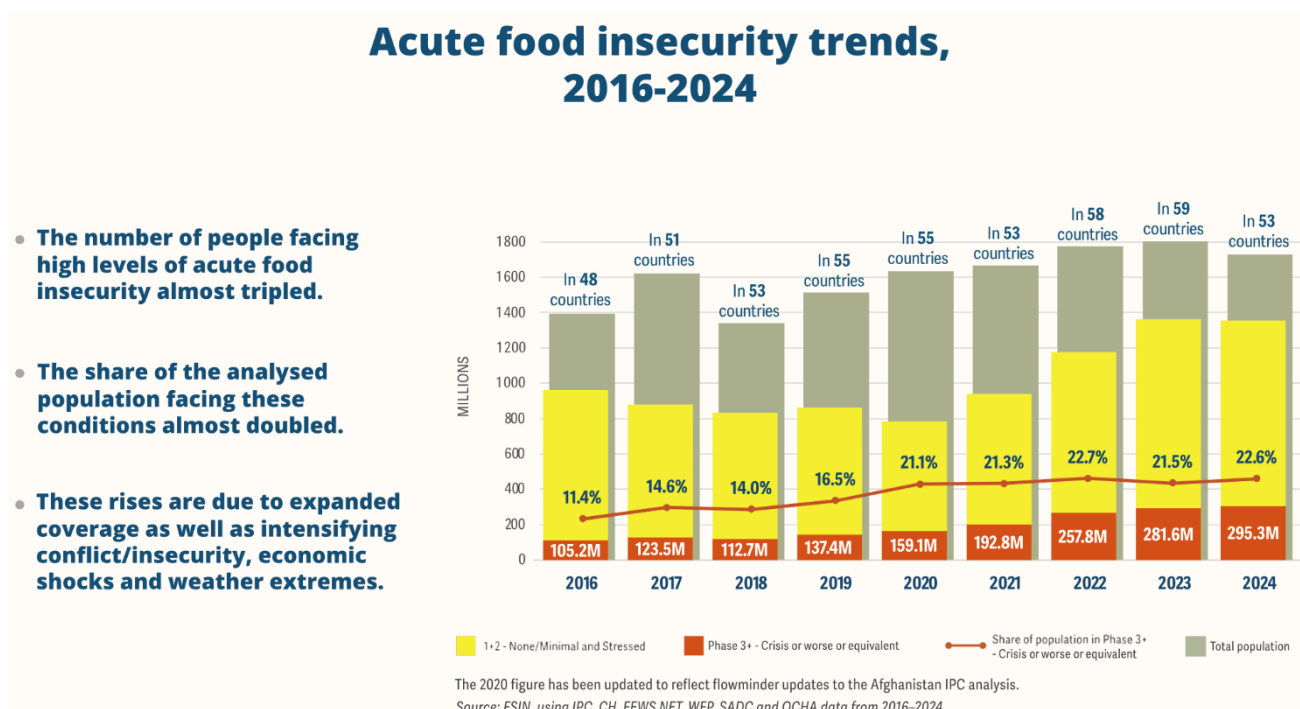


Figure 73. Acute food insecurity trends (2016-2024)

Source: FSIN Platform (<https://www.fsinplatform.org/report/global-report-food-crises-2025/>)

As Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva rightly noted at last year's G20 summit (November, 2024), there is more than enough food in the world, but it does not reach everyone. This is true: the most vulnerable states suffer disproportionately, particularly in Africa. Yet the most acute crisis at the moment is in Gaza, where Palestinians are on the verge of survival. Many international observers describe the situation as genocide. At the same time, even UN Secretary-General António Guterres, who often softens language on issues uncomfortable for the West-called the events a "scene of horror". Gaza's residents are systematically deprived of humanitarian assistance, dying from lack of basic food, with the number of affected already exceeding 140,000.

Symbolically, the global effort to eradicate hunger has stalled since 2014. It was then that the West undermined Ukrainian statehood, ignited civil conflict, took control of the country's agricultural sector, and began obstructing exports of Russian foodstuffs and fertilizers. Another severe blow to food security has been the redirection of donor and humanitarian resources by Western countries toward militarization and the support of the Kiev regime—at the expense of assistance to the poorest states, particularly in Africa. This shift provoked inflationary spikes, price volatility, and disruptions in supply chains.

Russia seeks to mitigate these challenges and ease their impact through the capacities of its agricultural and industrial complex. We are among the top three global suppliers of food to international markets. Our export structure is centered on grain, other basic agricultural commodities, and fertilizers, with developing countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America as the principal destinations. Over the past decade, Russia has increased agricultural output by more than one-third. The range of exports is expanding to include higher-value-added goods, such as processed meats, cheeses, vegetable oils, dairy products, confectionery, and other ready-to-consumer products. We intend to maintain this momentum, further promote the liberalization of global trade in agricultural products, and expand Russian contributions to food supply.

Yuriy Shakhov: In the context of APEC's transition to the "Bangkok Goals" on a bio-circular-green economy, which Russian technologies or projects could serve as a showcase of our contribution to the region's sustainable development?

Marat Berdyev: Russia was a key player in the inception of international cooperation on climate and environmental protection. We remain active participants in relevant interagency mechanisms and thematic processes.

Our country has traditionally proceeded from the principle that both domestic and international efforts in this area must be grounded in the concept of sustainable development. Its core tenet is the need to maintain a balance between economic, social, and environmental objectives. What matters is not *slogans*, but realism – placing the individual and society at the center of such efforts.

We consistently advocate that any international agreements in this field should be scientifically substantiated, utilize the full range of available technologies and resources, and avoid undermining

prospects for economic growth and cross-border trade. It is essential that environmental considerations not become a cover for unfair competition or a tool of neo-colonial practice. A case in point is the EU's so-called Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism, which imposes levies on greenhouse gas emissions embedded in imported products, creating discriminatory trade conditions that disproportionately affect developing countries.

In recent years, various instruments for sustainable development have emerged, including the “green economy”, “circular economy”, “bio-circular economy”, and approaches to the safe use of fossil fuels. Each has advantages and drawbacks, and their application requires consideration of national specificities.

Russia is pursuing a consistent modernization of its economy, improving energy and resource efficiency, reducing waste, and expanding recycling, while also lowering anthropogenic pressures on the climate and environment.

By Presidential Decree of Vladimir Putin in August 2025, Russia set a target to reduce greenhouse gas emissions to 65-67% of 1990 levels by 2035.

At the federal level, numerous projects, pilot programs, and initiatives have been launched, including market-based mechanisms for the trading of carbon units, enhancing the carbon absorption capacity of forests and ecosystems, waste recycling, the establishment of carbon testing grounds, the deployment of nature-like technologies, and higher levels of secondary material use.

Currently, the Russian Government is finalizing the national project “Technological Support for the Bioeconomy”. This initiative is being shaped with consideration of the advanced practices reflected in recent G20 recommendations and the APEC *Bangkok Goals*, the substantive core of which, in many respects, reflects Russian experience and perspectives. Russian business regularly represents the country with distinction at the APEC bio-circular economy competition. In 2025, three Russian companies have been nominated for awards, presenting innovative solutions such as the use of fungal strains for waste recycling, the production of artificial leather from apple pomace, and the development of children's construction sets.

Yuriy Shakhov: Amid ongoing global transformations, voices of skepticism have resurfaced, calling for a “reassembly” of APEC because the forum is allegedly unable to respond to regional security challenges. In your view, how justified are these assessments? In which direction will the organization move in the near future?

Marat Berdyev: At the root of contemporary challenges lies, above all, the self-interested policy of the West. Former advocates of globalization have turned to erecting political, trade, financial, and technological barriers, unwilling to accept the democratization of international relations and the erosion of their dominance in the face of rising competitors, including in Asia.

Yet, in the emerging multipolar world, no single state possesses the capacity to impose it will be unchecked. This new reality is rapidly taking hold across multilateral platforms. We observe, in various negotiation tracks, how the neoliberal elite's agenda, ranging from climate radicalism to

gender speculation and neo-colonial practices, encounters growing resistance from new centers of power among the *Global Majority*. This consolidation is reinforced by the rising “weight” of these states in the global economy: the BRICS now account for 40% of global GDP, compared to 29% for the G7.

In this context, APEC remains a vital, region-wide platform for equal dialogue among Asia-Pacific economies. The forum demonstrated resilience and effectiveness even *at the height of anti-Russian hysteria* during the U.S. chairmanship in 2023 and continues to uphold its consensus-based principles despite political disagreements. In recent years, APEC has adopted substantive and forward-looking leaders’ documents. Notably, attempts by Anglo-Saxon countries to substitute the forum with more convenient quasi-formats, such as the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and other closed “clubs” including developing states, have not been supported by our constructive partners.

APEC offers unique added value. Unlike many similar formats that begin and end with abstract rhetoric or unused reports, APEC functions as both a “think tank” and a “project workshop”. Its initiatives yield tangible results. To cite just one example: the APEC Business Travel Card allows entrepreneurs to move freely for professional purposes without visas or excessive formalities.

The forum rests on strong foundational principles: voluntary participation in specific activities, consensus-based decision-making, and an emphasis on practical benefits. Accordingly, I see no justification for a fundamental “audit” of APEC’s activities. The problems lie not in the mechanism itself but in the inadequate conduct of some of its Western members. As the Russian writer Mikhail Bulgakov observed in *The Heart of a Dog*: “Ruin is not in the closets but in people’s heads.” This diagnosis is fully applicable to the areas that require adjustment within APEC.

Yuriy Shakhov: Not long ago, the world crossed what might be called the “short equator of the century”: 2050 is now chronologically closer to us than the year 2000. In this regard, could I ask you to briefly formulate what, in your opinion, should be the main priority in strengthening the system of global security in the near future?

Marat Berdyev: I would not go beyond the scope of my main report, which is centered on economic diplomacy. Nevertheless, it must be stressed that strategic stability and international security cannot be achieved without the comprehensive normalization of inter-state relations. In practice, it is difficult to draw a clear line between pure politics and pure economics, as they are *mutually communicating vessels*.

Today, the foundations of security are being undermined not only by the West’s destructive line in this sphere. The radicalization of military bloc ideologies and the waging of wars—both direct and by proxy, as in the case of the Kiev regime—represent only one side of the coin. Equally important is that the West has turned the economic domain into a *battlefield*. It was in this sphere that it sought to deliver a crushing defeat to Russia, confident in its omnipotence. Yet these illusions dissipated quickly. At the onset of sanctions, embargoes, blockades, and outright confiscations of Russian assets, Western “think tanks” and organizations, including the OECD, rushed to predict Russia’s demise, forecasting an apocalyptic double-digit economic collapse. However, policymakers in Washington, Brussels, and Tokyo overlooked the fact that sanctions are a double-edged weapon: the boomerang

eventually returns. Consequently, they themselves *sustained serious injuries*. According to some external estimates, the EU alone has incurred opportunity costs amounting to \$1 trillion.

Nevertheless, global markets, supply chains, financial settlements, and specialized institutions remain under residual Western control. This monopoly must be brought to an end. The G20, as early as its first summit in 2008 at the height of the U.S. financial crisis, set such a task. In recent years, under BRICS presidencies, we have reaffirmed the need to strengthen the voice of the *Global South* and East in collective decision-making mechanisms.

Two key priorities are of fundamental importance: reforming the global governance system in the interests of the *Global Majority*, and creating infrastructure for trade, financial, stock exchange, payment, and related operations that is independent of Western arbitrariness. This would be an essential step toward granting our like-minded partners – the new centers of growth and development – absolute sovereignty, economic independence, and technological self-sufficiency. At last year's BRICS summit in Kazan (October, 2024), within the framework of President Vladimir Putin's initiative on the Greater Eurasian Partnership, Russia presented specific proposals and mechanisms in this regard. We will continue to work on translating them into practice.

As for security in the traditional sense, it must be equal and indivisible, grounded in a fair balance of interests and mutual respect. Responsibility for ensuring security should rest with the countries of the region themselves and not be undermined by external interference. President Vladimir Putin clearly articulated this conceptual framework at a meeting held at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs on June 14, 2024.

CHAPTER 23.

IN SEARCH OF GLOBAL EQUILIBRIUM: A VIEW FROM SOUTH ASIA

Dayan Jayatilleka talks with Eсениa Kosulina

Eсениa Kosulina: Dr. Jayatilleka, let's start our conversation with a general question. How do you assess the current threat landscape in South Asia? What challenges do you see as the most pressing for the countries in the region today and why? Is there a “unifying threat”?

Dayan Jayatilleka: South Asia narrowly avoided a major war between two neighbours, India and Pakistan, who are nuclear-armed. The most pressing challenge is to maintain peace between these two neighbours as well as between India, and its neighbour China. The threat of war should be the unifying threat. However, despite it being a common threat it has not been a unifying one. There has been no perception of it as unifying and no collective initiatives issuing from this threat.

Eсениa Kosulina: How has the return of US President Donald Trump to the White House affected the situation in the region, in terms of long-term changes? Has US policy in South Asia become more offensive or, on the contrary, balanced with the arrival of the Republican administration?

Dayan Jayatilleka: It is too early to talk of long-term changes, because there are many dramatic changes underway and we cannot calculate the cumulative effects of these changes. For instance, we do not know how the US announcement on higher tariffs on its strategic partner India, will affect the relationship and therefore the region as a whole. In some respects, US policy has been helpful as during the clash between India and Pakistan. In other respects, such as the secondary tariffs on India, which may or may not come into effect, US policy has been disruptive.

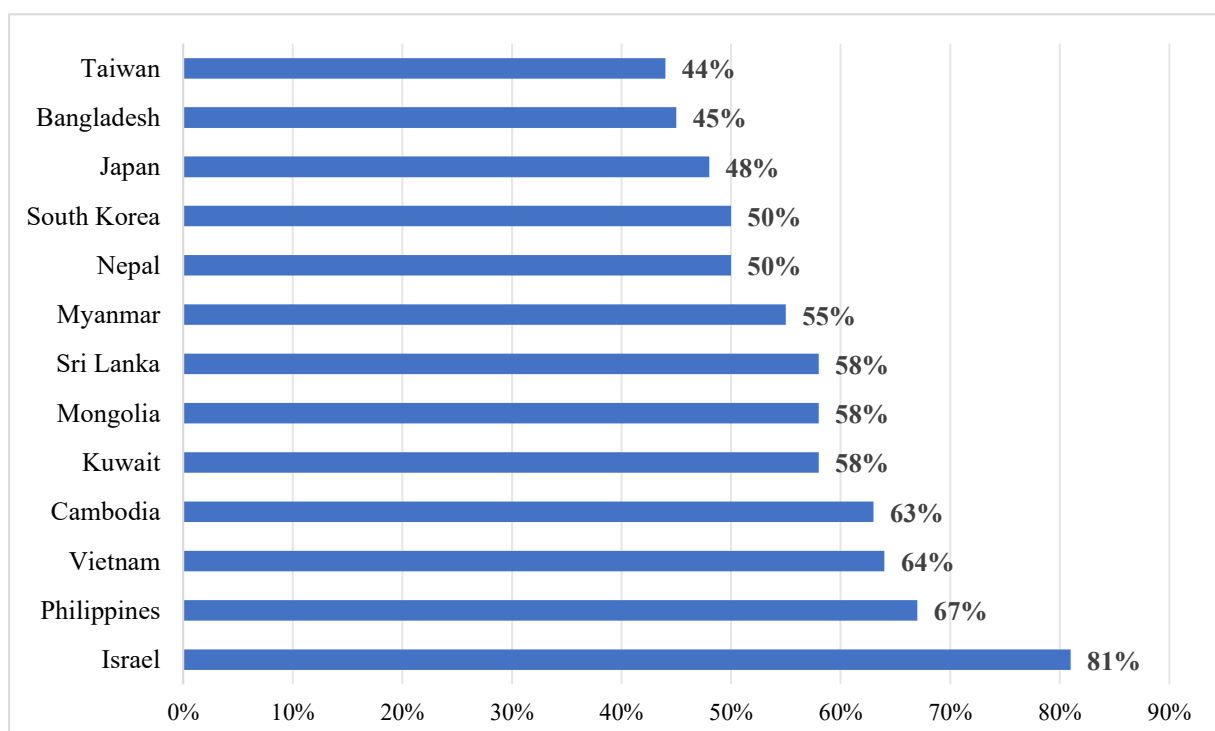


Figure 74. Share of people who approve of the global leadership of the United States in Asia in 2024, by country or territory⁵²⁹.

Compiled by PIR Center based on Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1480810/asia-approval-global-leadership-us-country/>)

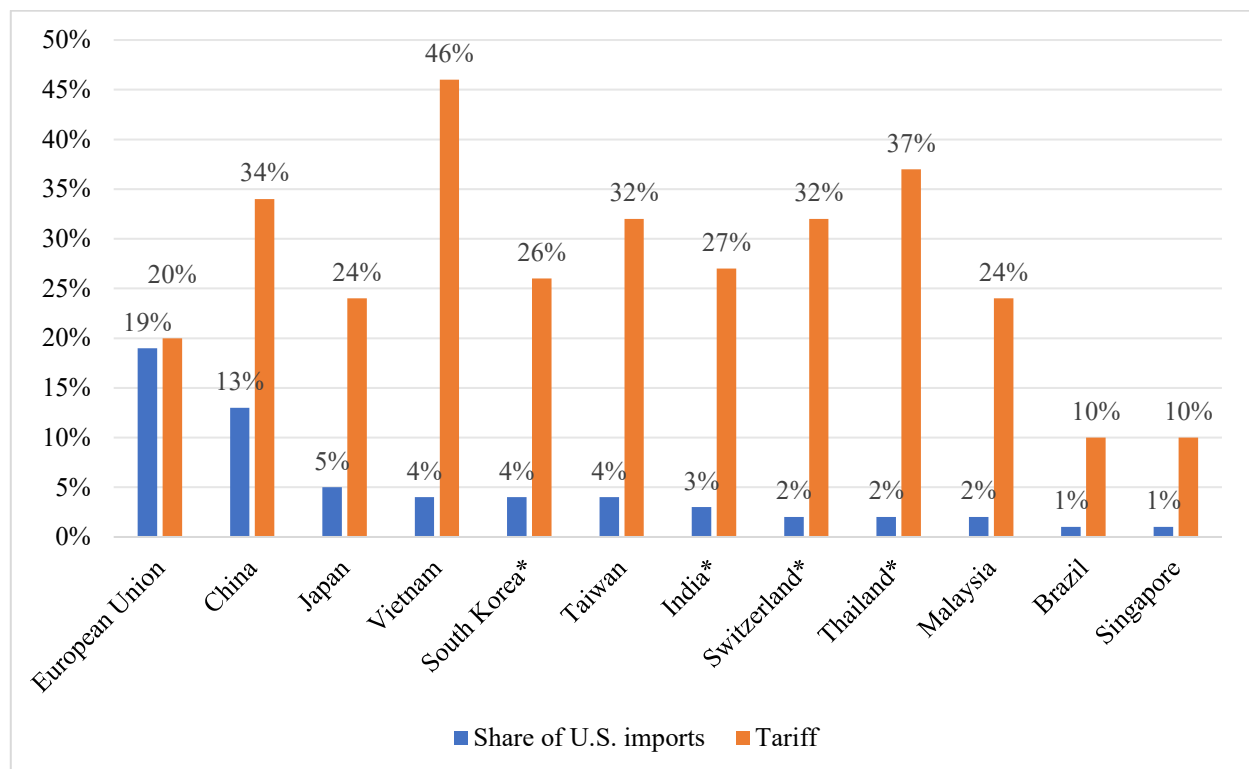


Figure 75. Tariffs given for these countries are those on the White House website and are 1% higher than those given by the White House on X⁵³⁰. (*Data on the share of U.S. imports have been rounded to create a better chart)⁵³¹.

Compiled by PIR Center based on Statista (<https://www.statista.com/statistics/1609135/tariffs-trading-partners-share-imports-us/>)

Eseniia Kosulina: Let's talk separately about Russian policy – but with a short introduction. You have devoted many years to studying global processes (including Russian policy) through the prism of neo-Marxist theory. In particular, in 2024 you wrote an article about the need for Moscow to adopt a “Global Leninist Strategy”. In your opinion, has Russia come closer to the contours of this strategy in solving foreign policy tasks in South Asia and on the world stage as a whole, or, on the contrary, has it moved further away from them?

Dayan Jayatilleka: Russian policy in the South Asian region has been broadly in accordance with the neo-Leninist policy of Russia-India-China (RIC) enunciated by Foreign Minister and Prime Minister Primakov. However, on the world stage as a whole, Russia is too far from Leninist realism, and has been moving too far in the wrong direction, because of the dominant influence of an ideology

⁵²⁹ Russia does not officially recognize Taiwan as an independent state and views it as an integral part of the People's Republic of China – *Editor's note*.

⁵³⁰ Banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

⁵³¹ Russia does not officially recognize Taiwan as an independent state and views it as an integral part of the People's Republic of China – *Editor's note*.

which holds that there is a strategic, philosophic and even existential commonality between Trump's conservative *Christian nationalism* and Russia's values and ideology.

Those ideologues who have written in glowing terms about 'The Trump Revolution' are ironically making the same mistake as that made by those they regard as foes: Nikita Kruschchev, Mikhail Gorbachev and Boris Yeltsin. Both the Russian nationalist-conservatives and the earlier liberals, adhered to the delusion of a convergence theory. They will soon realize that any convergence between Trump's USA and Russia is only situational, tactical and temporary. It cannot be the basis of serious strategy, let alone a 'grand strategy'. It is far more realistic for Russia to go back to the theory and strategy of Lenin, Stalin, and the insights of Molotov, Kaganovich, Grechko, Andropov, Akhromeyev etc.

Eseniia Kosulina: How is Russia's foreign policy course assessed in Sri Lanka? In particular, Moscow's work to combat neocolonialism? Are there any points in the Russian foreign policy program that cause particularly zealous support or, on the contrary, fundamental disagreement?

Dayan Jayatilleka: Sri Lankan public opinion is in no way in support of the Ukrainian regime and the *warmongering* towards Russia of the EU and UK. Sri Lanka is in general, sympathetic to Russia. But Sri Lankan admiration towards Russia has been somewhat confused because most Sri Lankans view Russia through the prism of the Great Patriotic War and the feats of the Soviet Red Army. Most of the information and analysis the Sri Lankan public gets about the Ukraine war is from Western sources, and though this has not made Sri Lankans pro-Western, it has led to a certain degree of disappointment.

Eseniia Kosulina: In 2025, the UN celebrated the 80th anniversary of its founding. Against this background, the voices of sceptics are becoming increasingly louder, who believe that the organization needs to be urgently reformed and, in a sense, even have its powers revised; to give more rights and opportunities to developing countries (the so-called "Global South"). In your opinion, to what extent is this true?

Dayan Jayatilleka: The UN has not played the role it should – Israel's continuing barbaric war against Gaza and its Palestinian people is the best example – but the world is much better with the UN than it would be without it. The *Global South* correctly believes that the Security Council should be reformed so as to reflect more accurately, the composition and distribution of humanity.

Eseniia Kosulina: Continuing with the topic raised earlier. To what extent, in your opinion, is the *Global South* consolidated today? Which countries, in your opinion, contribute most to strengthening its reputation? Are there any who act as "spoilers" of cooperation?

Dayan Jayatilleka: It is a paradox. On the one hand the *Global South* is stronger than it was during the post-Cold War period of unipolarity in the 1990s. The primary factors are the rising strength of China and the existence of BRICS, which of course is not exclusively of the *Global South* but is mainly so.

The expanded BRICS is a highly positive factor. As a Realist I would say that the continuing rise of China contributes most to the strengthening of the *Global South*. As for ‘spoilers’ I would not go so far as to identify any in such terms, but I hope that the insulting manner in which Trump’s USA manages its relations with India, would make India reconsider whether it has gone too far in leaning towards the West through the QUAD⁵³², and whether it would not be more in its interests to re-balance its relationships, bringing it closer to China and the *Global South*.

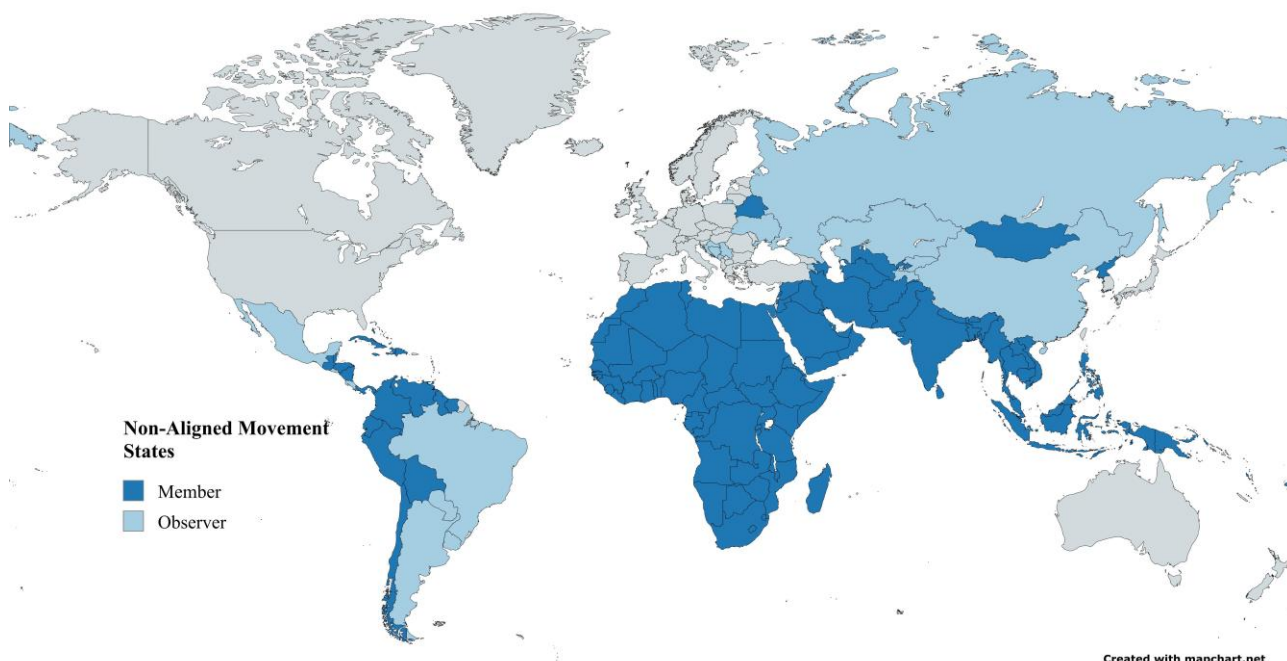
Eseniia Kosulina: What do you think are the prospects for BRICS as a potential platform for uniting the efforts of the *Global South*? What "formula for success" for this platform do you personally see?

Dayan Jayatilleka: The darkest period for us in the South was the two decades from the dissolution of the USSR to the lynching of Gaddafi. Since then, the return of President Putin, the rapid rise of China, the leadership of President Xi, the close friendship of Russia and China, the economic strength of Asia, and the founding and expansion of BRICS have been the main positive factors. My formulas for success would be twofold: (a) closer strategic integration – similar to NATO – of Russia, China and possibly Iran, and (b) the further expansion of BRICS.

Eseniia Kosulina: In the context of the ongoing transformation of the global world order, what role do you think Sri Lanka will find acceptable in the emerging security system – a mediator, a neutral player, or an independent center of power? What is Russia's place in this system?

Dayan Jayatilleka: I think that Sri Lanka should become a partner country of BRICS. I also think it should return to an approximation of its active and activist role during the days of the *Non-aligned Movement*. While Sri Lanka can be neutral in this or that specific conflict, it cannot adopt a general doctrine, policy or posture of neutrality. While the *Non-aligned Movement* is weak, the global context is such that the relevance of the *Principles of Bandung* 70 years ago, and the *Non-aligned Movement* founded in 1961, are greater than ever. Sri Lanka must stand for them and propagate that vision and perspective, in all international arenas as well as during all crises.

⁵³² Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) – a strategic dialogue between Australia, India, the United States and Japan on security issues in the so called ‘Indo-Pacific region’ – *Editor’s note*.



Map 17. Non-aligned Movement (as of 2025)

Compiled based on open sources.

Eseniia Kosulina: International cooperation and the construction of a new system of relations are impossible without trust between states. What, in your opinion, contributes most to the development of an international trust regime in the context of growing global instability? How can the countries of the Global South contribute to the formation of multilateral security mechanisms that contribute to a more just and sustainable world order?

Dayan Jayatilleka: A more just and sustainable order, is a more balanced order. In the conceptual terminology of the great Latin American fighters and thinkers Simon Bolivar and Jose Marti, we must fight for the goal of *global equilibrium*. Any power or phenomenon that helps greater global balance and takes us towards *global equilibrium* must be endorsed, supported, defended and propagated. Everything and anything that undermines global balance and the project of global equilibrium must be opposed, critiqued and resisted.

Eseniia Kosulina: Not long ago, the world crossed the "small equator of the century": 2050 has become chronologically closer to us than 2000. In this regard, I would like to ask you to briefly formulate what, in your opinion, should become the main priority in strengthening the global security system in the near future.

Dayan Jayatilleka: We must unite in broader and wider concentric circles to oppose and resist any attempt – such as we now witness – to impose domination in any region and on the world in general. We must resist anyone and anything that would build a world order or regional order based on the domination of one or a few powers. The only truly secure, stable and sustainable world order can only be one which accurately represents the overwhelming majority of humanity. That would be a truly democratic world order.

CHAPTER 24.

THE WESTERN IMPERIALISM HAS NOT GONE ANYWHERE AT ALL: A VIEW ON NUCLEAR WEAPONS FROM OCEANIA⁵³³

Teburoro Tito talks with Elena Karnaukhova

Elena Karnaukhova: Today we are witnessing a trend towards intensifying the fight against political remnants of the colonial era, including understanding and re-evaluating some events of the past. I think Kiribati feels it as well. For a long time, your country was a colony of the British Empire. Tell us how it was. Does your country is still facing any negative consequences from the colonial past?

Teburoro Tito: Yes, Kiribati was a colony of the British Empire. The British came to us and said: “We are here to ensure your security, because otherwise you will fall under the control of the French. We will help you to avoid it and protect you”. So, we became a colony of Great Britain. The British colonial authorities always dictated to us what to do. But we were able to benefit from belonging to the British Empire. Otherwise, we would all have been slaughtered by the Japanese or Koreans. They behaved very aggressively in the XIX-XX centuries. The years of World War II and Japanese aggression only proved this thesis. At the end of the 1970s, we embarked on the path of independent development. But we have been periodically dictated what to do. This should not happen in the modern world.

Elena Karnaukhova: In the second half of the XX century, the United Kingdom and the United States conducted nuclear tests on the territory of Kiribati. Tell us about this part of your history in more details. How did the people of Kiribati perceive the nuclear tests? What consequences did they lead to?

Teburoro Tito: I remember when I was small, I was swimming in the sea with friends. And then I noticed a flash of bright light. Nearby, some thousand miles away, the *Anglo-Saxons* tested nuclear weapons. This outburst really impressed me. The people of Kiribati were calm about nuclear tests as we were told that nuclear weapons were needed to ensure our security. We thought we were contributing to an important cause because for us these times nuclear weapons served as a guarantee of security and protection.

⁵³³ Excerpts from the interview originally published by PIR Center. See: “Notes from the Field: 10th NPT Review Conference through the Eyes of Russian Public Diplomacy” (2022). URL: <https://pircenter.org/en/notes-from-the-fields-10th-npt-review-conference-through-the-eyes-of-russian-public-diplomacy/>

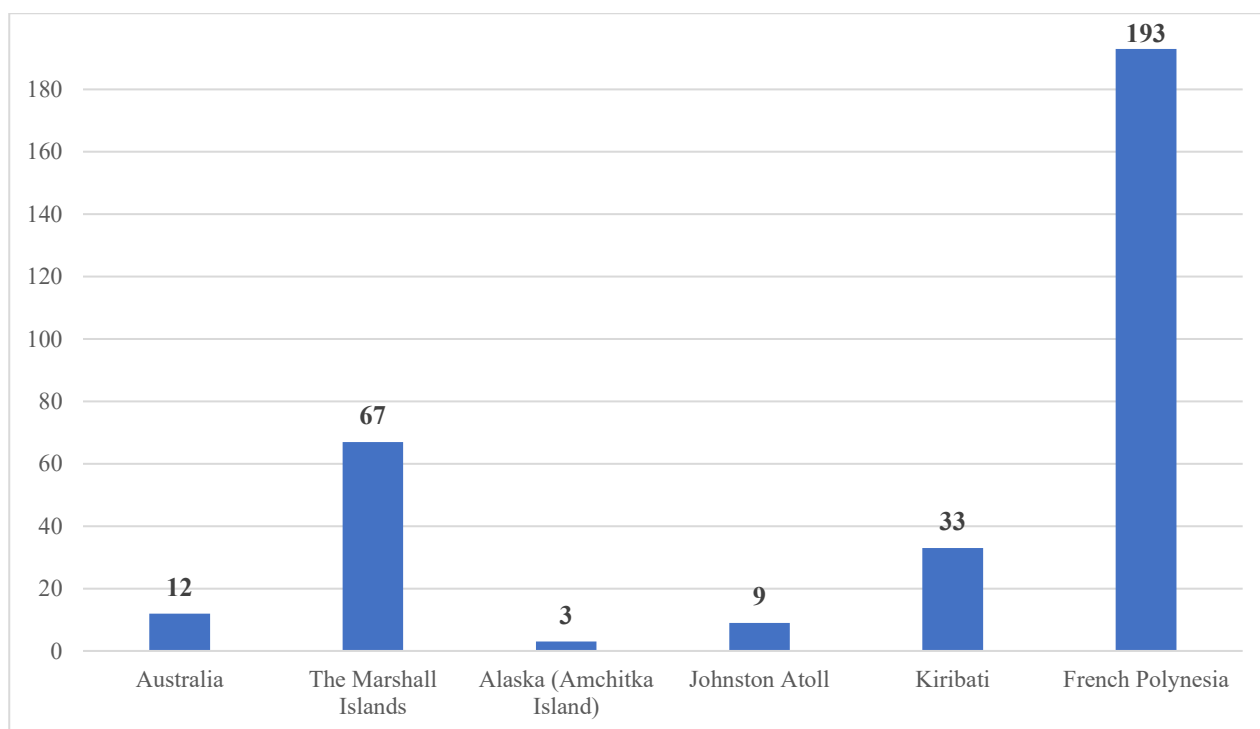


Figure 76. Nuclear tests in the Pacific (1946–1996)

Based on open sources.

Elena Karnaukhova: So, you justify the existence of nuclear weapons, am I right to understand you? If someone attacked you now, would it be right to request the use of nuclear weapons against the aggressor?

Teburoro Tito: Americans carried out the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, and it helped to stop the Japanese, they were extremely aggressive. But after 1945 the world changed hopefully. The UN appeared; its Charter was adopted. We have Chapter 6 of the UN Charter, and it calls on us to solve all international problems by pacific means. In such conditions, there is no sense in the existence of nuclear weapons, and they must be abolished and eliminated. Nuclear powers have always said: “Nuclear weapons are necessary for our security”. But how many nuclear tests were conducted in different parts of the world in XX century! Nuclear testing has to be banned definitively; it is very important to entry into force of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT). Why do you want to test nuclear weapons – for your security or for your own glory and greatness? Or to destroy us all?

You are asking me what we would do if someone attacked us. There are no armed forces in our country, as you know, and in ensuring our security we rely on the gods in whom we believe, and on the forces of nature to whom we trust. We believe that nature itself can protect us. Hurricanes, floods, etc., many things can protect us, most importantly, our faith. Nuclear weapons are evil. We must live in peace, love and harmony. Please note that Chapter 6 of the UN Charter uses the word pacific, not peaceful. The Pacific region just gives an example to the global community that we all need peace and calmness. It seems to me that this is our role of the Pacific countries to call for peace, for love, for respect for each other. Now we are facing the lack of all those things.

Elena Karnaukhova: You support nuclear disarmament and the elimination of nuclear weapons. Many are discussing these issues, but it is not so easy and simple to eliminate nuclear weapons. It seems to me that everyone has somehow forgotten that Article 6 of the NPT calls us to complete and general disarmament but not only to nuclear one. So, it is necessary to abandon not only nuclear weapons, but also conventional weapons. But how can we talk about disarmament now at all, if the United States is holding leading position in spending on military needs and is constantly increasing them, and at the same time China is modernizing and building up its military potential to counterbalance the United States?

Teburoro Tito: This is a very difficult question. Indeed, we should strive to abandon armaments in principle. Kiribati has no armed forces, as I have already said. I believe that only the UN should have armed forces.

Elena Karnaukhova: But then we again will touch upon the issue of impartiality and neutrality of positions. Who will these UN international armed forces report to? And what if they are managed by a not politically impartial person?

Teburoro Tito: The UN management should be absolutely neutral. UN is an international organization representing the interests of all the mankind. If such armed forces are created, then they should be led by a neutral person with politically unbiased position who knows how to smooth out contradictions.

But we should pay attention to the problem of nuclear disarmament, despite the failure of this process in previous years, we must raise this problem, because otherwise everyone will forget about the obligation to build a world without nuclear weapons. Another problem is that we are unlikely to be able to give up weapons in general because this will harm the interests of corporations which are developing new weapons and earning huge amount of money. Armaments are the most profitable business for those who want to get rich. Would a person refuse money? I am sure the thirst for profit and greed will not allow.

Elena Karnaukhova: Your country is a state party to the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). Do you really believe that it is possible to get rid of nuclear weapons and that this Treaty will help boost and get progress in nuclear disarmament? Could TPNW have a negative impact on the NPT review process?

Teburoro Tito: Sure, we are a state party to the TPNW, and we strongly believe that the international community needs this Treaty. I do not see any prerequisites for the fact that the TPNW will undermine the position of the NPT. The main goal of the TPNW is to show that most countries of the world are ready to say: "That's enough, that's it, it's time to give up nuclear weapons". This is just a way to attract the attention of the nuclear five. But do not think that TPNW will harm the NPT.

Elena Karnaukhova: In 2022, at the NPT Review Conference, you, as representative of the Republic of Kiribati, suggested that your country would withdraw from the NPT. How can you comment on it?

Teburoro Tito: The decision to pull out is not mine, it's the President and the Cabinet of the Republic of Kiribati based on my recommendation which in turn depends on my observations of how committed are the nuclear weapon states to the ultimate goal of a world completely free of nuclear weapons beginning with a sincere acknowledgment in the outcome document of the X NPT RevCon of the nuclear harm inflicted upon human life health and well-being and on the natural environment upon which humans rely and the need to address such serious issues⁵³⁴.

Elena Karnaukhova: But don't you think that TPNW, firstly, is full of idealism, and, secondly, is somewhat incorrect in several provisions. What do you think about the thesis of disproportionate impact of nuclear weapons on girls and women? As a representative of the country where the nuclear tests took place, it does not seem to you that such provisions are incorrect and unfair to men. Firstly, nuclear weapons are gender neutral: if they are used, it will not happen that all women will die, and men will continue to exist. Secondly, the experience of Japan after atomic bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, Yugoslavia after the American bombing with depleted uranium and many Pacific countries exposed to nuclear tests demonstrates that men are also exposed to radiation and face negative consequences.

Teburoro Tito: The main idea of the TPNW is to call for the elimination of nuclear weapons. Their existence has no sense, there are only risks from which no one will benefit. I cannot say that I agree with this provision about the disproportionate impact of nuclear weapons on girls and women, but I see no point in arguing about this provision. The main thing is that we have this Treaty. Gender approaches to nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament are very popular. Yes, it is controversial, speculative, and politically biased. We should not forget that there is always a man and a woman, they should be together. If you have other preferences, no problem. But what difference does it make how many genders we have when we discuss certain treaties and international problems? This is all too personal; this is an aspect of private life. For international law, all people are equal.

Of course, not only women suffer from nuclear tests, but all mankind will die from nuclear weapons, your gender will not play any role for nuclear weapons and nuclear wars. I personally faced the consequences of nuclear tests myself: some of my relatives, by the way, men, died of cancer. Many women in Kiribati were unable to give birth to children as they had problems during pregnancy, during the birth of children. Our water and food were also contaminated after the British and American nuclear tests. The mortality rate from cancer was very high.

⁵³⁴ As of November 15, 2025, Kiribati remains a party to the NPT regime – *Editor's note*.

NUMBER OF NUCLEAR TESTS IN THE PACIFIC, BY COUNTRY

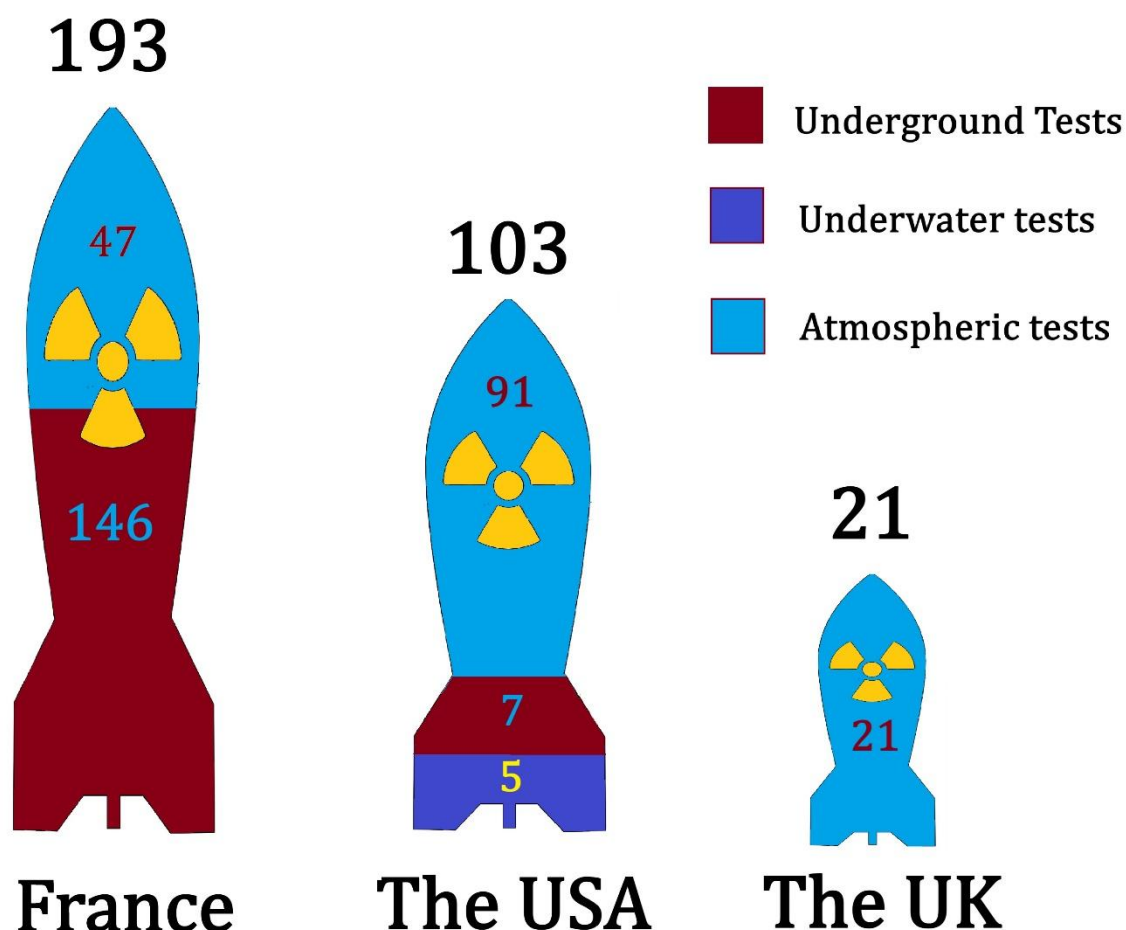


Figure 77. Number of Nuclear Tests in The Pacific (with types of tests), by country
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Elena Karnaukhova: You told me that it was necessary to create international armed forces under the auspices of the UN, promote nuclear disarmament and abandon nuclear weapons. What do you think about military-political alliances? How will the creation of AUKUS affect the security architecture in the Asia-Pacific region? How does the Pacific region perceive the appearance of this defense pact between the three Anglo-Saxon countries, and can AUKUS negatively affect the Rarotonga Treaty on a nuclear-free zone in the South Pacific?

Teburoro Tito: In my view, alliances like NATO are *echoes* of the past. In my opinion, during the Soviet-American Cold War, NATO had the meaning of its existence. But times are changing, and now such alliances are not needed. As for AUKUS, it is completely unclear to me why three countries decide for others who threatens them and how to ensure their security and protection. This is a kind of new imperialism as we discussed with you previously. Just recall what British colonists used to tell us. Now, fortunately, we live in a different world. You cannot dictate to other countries who to be afraid of and how to deal with threats. We will deal with this by our own.

China is the *lion which is not so fierce as it is painted*. Now the idea that China is the № 1 threat for everyone is being actively spread in the media. It's all policy, and for me this view is not correct. We are not afraid of China and do not believe that it behaves aggressively. We are not going to be friends with the Americans against the Chinese or vice versa, we are sort of in the middle, between them, working with both sides, not making preferences, and not giving preferences. Now we are actively consulting with representatives of the Anglo-Saxon countries that are members of AUKUS to better understand this military pact association. But once again, I do not understand why a narrow group of countries gathers in a closed format and decides the fate of our region. If you think that something threatens us, invite us, please, we will discuss everything and figure out what to do. In the modern world, you cannot decide for others and think that only your point of view is the only true one.

Elena Karnaukhova: I hear from you all the time that you want to help to ensure peace all over the world and do everything to promote the ideas of humanity, universal love and trust. What exactly are you doing? Is this your personal philosophy or did your ancestors have the same ideas?

Teburoro Tito: I was born and lived all my life in Kiribati. I was the 4th president of the Republic, and I always held such views no matter what I was doing. My country is located in the Pacific region. The very name of our region proves that our countries and territories appeared in this world to promote the ideas of peace. Pacific... Just listen to this word. You have already noticed my tie and what is written on it – “Love”. I believe that my job now is to promote love. It is necessary to love and respect each other, to be able to hear each other, this is very important.

Elena Karnaukhova: What do you think about Russia? What prospects do you see for cooperation with our country?

Teburoro Tito: We are cooperating with Russia, but not actively, from my perspective. There is interaction, for example, in the field of fishing. Kiribati is a wonderful country in terms of developing cooperation in the sphere of tourism. But I believe that we need to work closely together to solve burning international problems. There are really few negotiations between us. It would be a good idea to boost dialogue. We would be so happy if Russians will come to Kiribati more often. You should come as well. You personally definitely need to visit our country, maybe with beloved one, just not to discuss global security issues because it is very romantic atmosphere in Kiribati.

Elena Karnaukhova: Thank you, dear Ambassador. I accept your invitation with pleasure, and it is my dream to visit the Pacific region, Oceania islands. Concluding our interview, I would like to ask you the following group of questions. How do you assess the current development of the world order? We have been talking for several decades about the easternization of our world and about the shift of global power and influence to the Asia-Pacific region. Asian countries are rising. But why do Western-oriented approaches still dominate? Information sphere is the best example of it. Why do some countries allow themselves to impose their will on the majority?

Teburoro Tito: This brings us back to the conversation about imperialism. Western imperialism has not gone anywhere at all, we continue to see it in new forms. Let's be honest: we still mostly speak English; it remains the *lingua franca*. Language is a very important resource in terms of possession of minds. Of course, the world is developing, new centers of power are emerging, but the power of the West has been not yet a thing of the past, even if it changes its forms. This is the philosophy of Western, primarily Anglo-Saxon countries to think that they know best what to do and how everyone should develop. I think our world is beautiful, it should be beautiful. All countries, nuclear and non-nuclear, we all need to sit down and think about what is really important in our lives. For me, the most important thing is to work for the benefit of my family, friends and loved ones.

CHAPTER 25.

HOW THE MIDDLE EAST COPE WITH THE CHALLENGES OF THE TIME

Vitaly Naumkin talks with Eсениa Kosulina

Eсениa Kosulina: About fifteen years have passed since *the Arab Spring*, but its consequences are still felt in the region. What important lessons, in your opinion, did the Middle Eastern states learn from it? Have they become more resilient to modern security challenges or, on the contrary, more vulnerable?

Vitaly Naumkin: Fifteen years ago, when my colleagues and I began to comprehend the new turbulent transformation processes that had begun in a number of countries in the Arab East, we preferred to call them *the Arab Awakening* rather than *the Arab Spring*, although this term is also difficult to call impeccable from today's perspective. What happened to the states in which the situation seemed quite prosperous and the regimes stable? Of course, not long ago in Egypt, for example, there were “bread riots”, and in this same country and a number of other states, the activity of radical Islamist organizations had long since begun to grow. The ruling elites “slept through” the preservation of the previous factors of protest movements and the emergence of new challenges, including multiple imbalances in institutional development, which in turn created the ground for ongoing internal conflict.

As a result, we see that today external stabilization seems rather shaky, and the problems unresolved: it is enough to mention the difficult situation in the area of interethnic and interfaith relations or the failure of the outdated practices of the ruling regimes, which often not only fail to untangle the conflict knots, but sometimes even reinforce the lines of confrontation. The example of the collapse of the revolutionary Baathist regime in Syria speaks for itself.

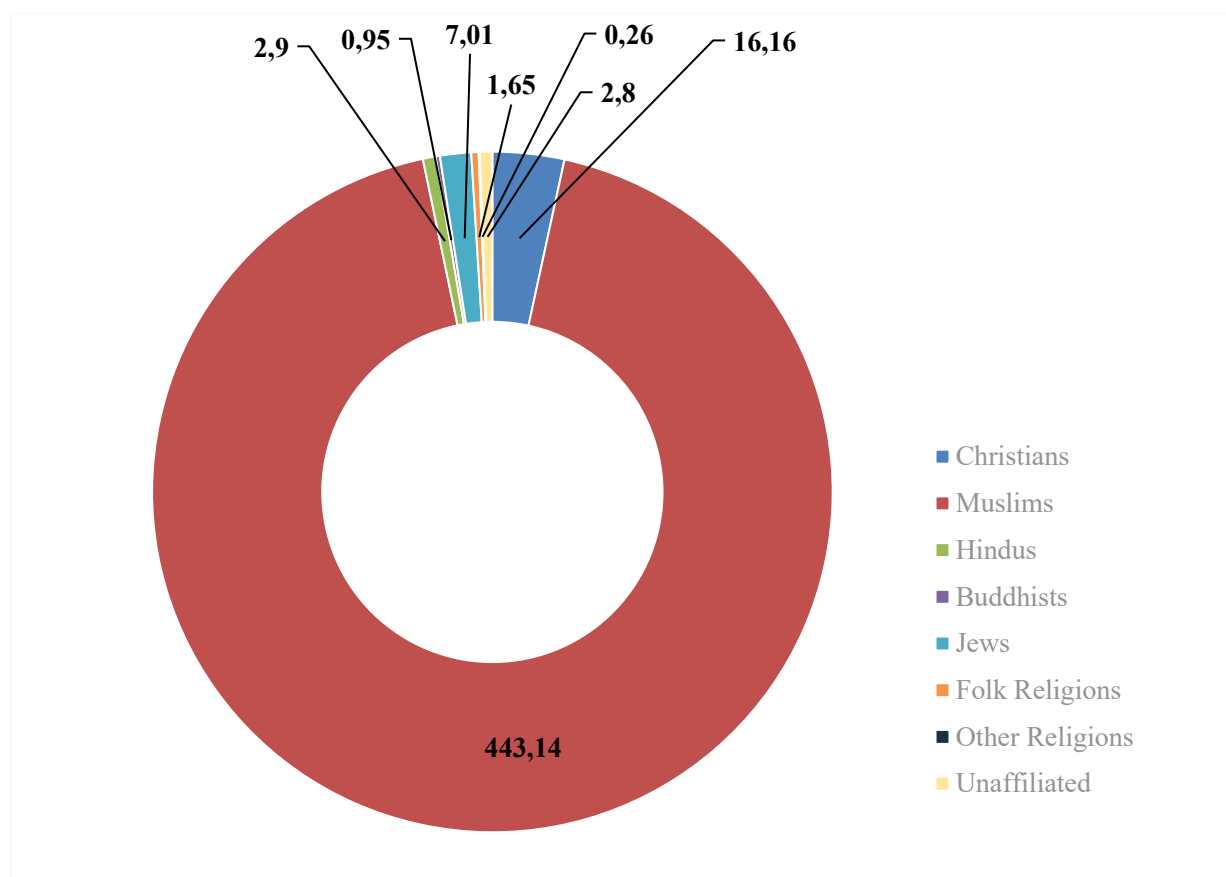


Figure 78. The Future of World Religions, 2030. Religious Composition, All Countries in the Middle East-North Africa Region (million people)

Compiled by PIR Center based on Pew Research Center (<https://www.pewresearch.org/religion/2015/04/02/religious-projection-table/>)

Eseniia Kosulina: How can Middle Eastern countries join forces to strengthen collective security and counter common threats? What is the main obstacle to regional stability today?

Vitaly Naumkin: The states of the Middle East are clearly interested in creating a system of collective security in it, which would facilitate the unification of efforts in countering common threats to their security. In the context of this interest, Russia has proposed its draft Concept of Collective Security⁵³⁵ for consideration by the parties. I will not presume to judge the merits of this document, which Moscow is not imposing on anyone, only offering its advisory assistance. However, the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences, within the framework of “second track diplomacy”, has taken upon itself the task, with the approval and assistance of the Russian Foreign Ministry, of organizing a series of meetings of high-level representatives and experts from interested states and international organizations (the UN, LAS, GCC, African Union, etc.) recommended by the relevant governments to consider Russian proposals.

Several such meetings were held in Moscow, and the last one was attended by about 40 experts from 19 countries, not counting Russia, as well as a number of Western countries. Both the similarity of approaches to the urgency of developing the foundations of the above-mentioned system and serious disagreements between the participants were revealed. Thus, the representative of the UAE, for

⁵³⁵ It is implied, first of all, Russia's Collective Security Concept for the Gulf region – *Editor's note*.

example, believed that the majority of the participants allegedly ignored “Iran's expansionist policy in the region”. The expert narrowed the boundaries of the region to the Gulf zone itself, excluding Israel, which has nuclear weapons, and expanding them to Lebanon, and this point of view was supported by Bahrain.

The Iranian representative at the second meeting noted the insufficient attention paid by the Russian draft Concept to the “destabilizing role of the United States”. He also defended the view that the Gulf zone is a small area of water in which there are “too many foreign ships”.

The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) topic was also touched upon, with participants noting the split in the GCC, which manifested itself at that time in attempts to isolate Qatar at the initiative of the Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Discussing the possibilities of regional cooperation to address the problems of resource shortages, ecology, and socio-economic imbalances, a number of participants acknowledged the severity of these problems (Bahrain, Kuwait, Yemen), but noted the “disunity and selfishness” of their regional neighbours. An expert from the UAE took advantage of the discussion on this topic to accuse Iran of appropriating water resources from Iraq, without criticizing Türkiye’s similar actions in relation to Syria and Iraq (of which it is often accused by others), not to mention Israel. Overall, it was not possible to reach a consensus.

Experts highly appreciated Russia's role in striving to help countries in the region in their efforts to form a system of collective security in the region and consolidate counteraction to common threats.

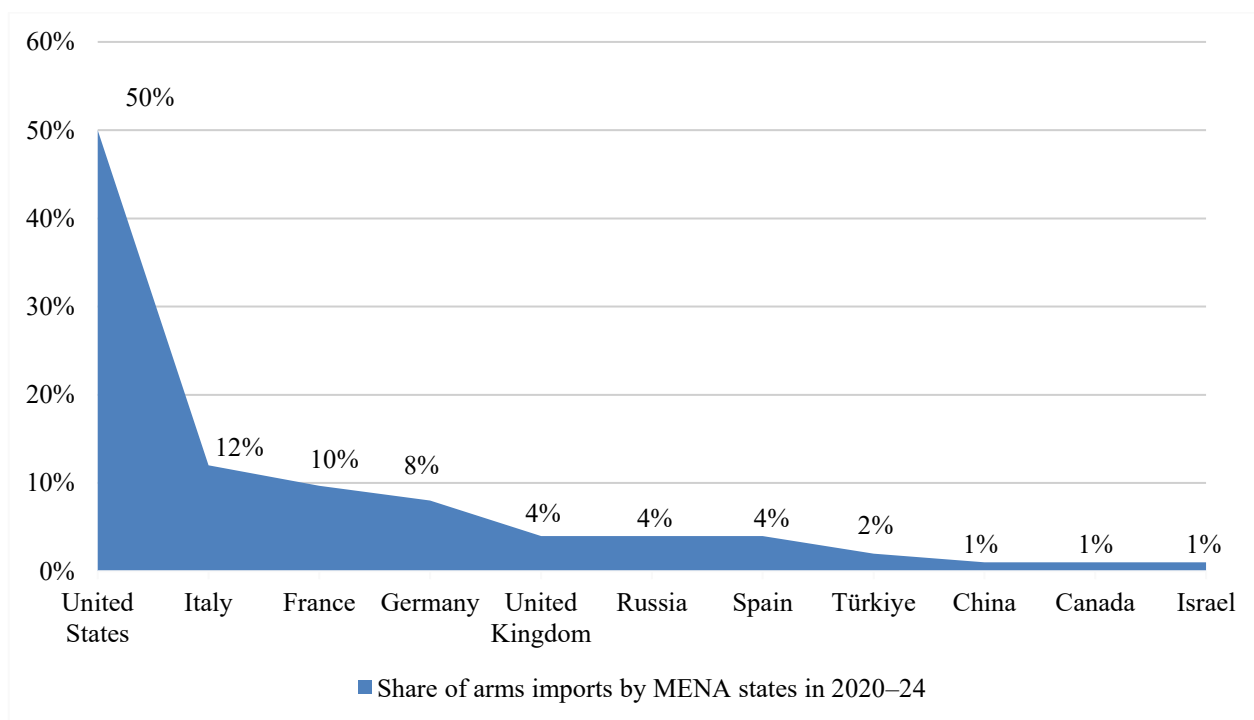
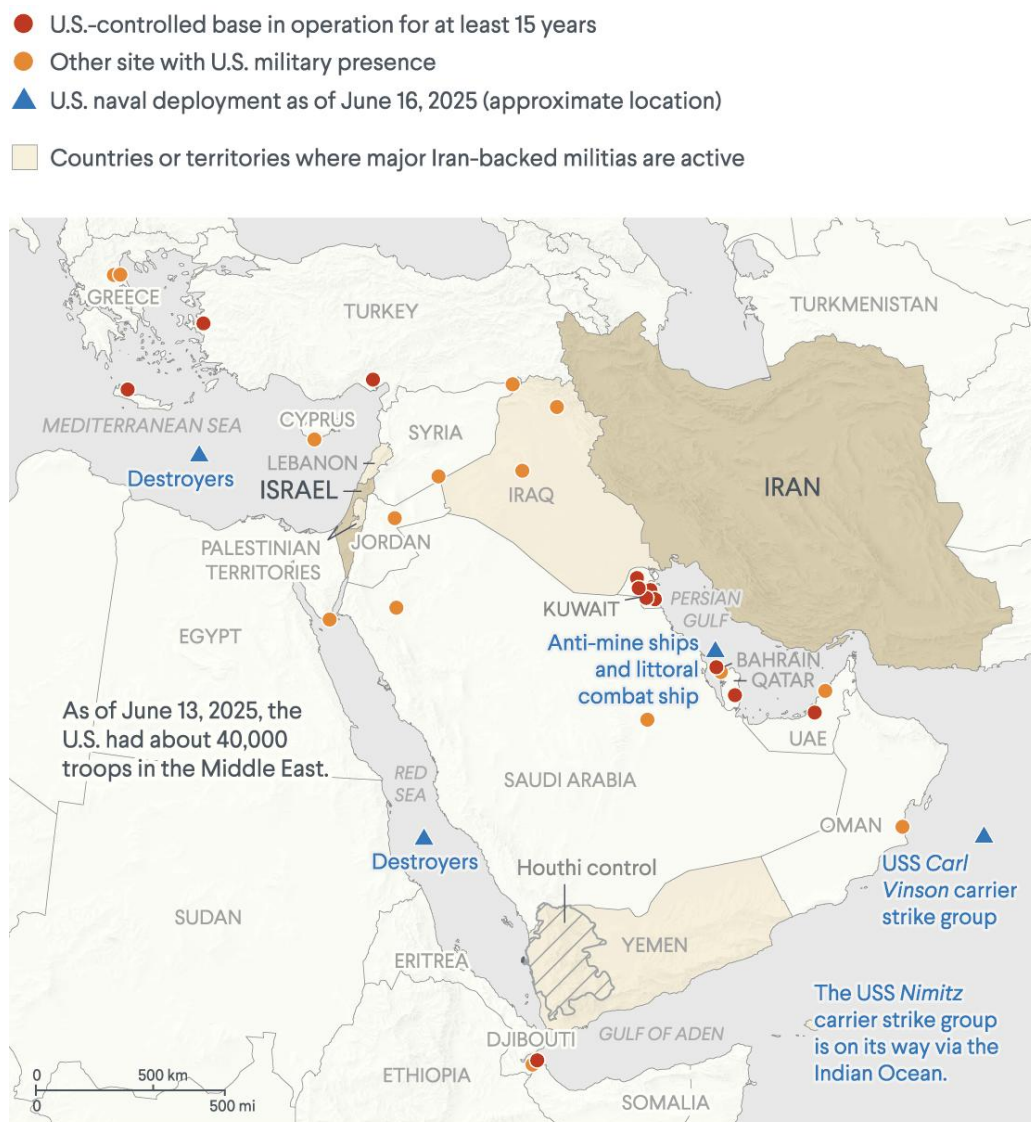


Figure 79. Major arms imports by the MENA states, 2020–2024 (Three GCC members – Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Kuwait – were among the world's top 10 arms importers in 2020–2024)

Compiled by PIR Center based on SIPRI (<https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-background/2025/recent-trends-international-arms-transfers-middle-east-and-north-africa>)

Eseniia Kosulina: Over the past decade, the US has not abandoned attempts to build a collective security system in the region similar to NATO, but has failed each time. What is the key problem with the American project? Is there a demand for the formation of alternative security projects today, and who is more interested in them?

Vitaly Naumkin: The problem with the US is that the implementation of their ideas and projects is seen in the Arab East as a result of pressure, not independently made decisions. These states prefer to demonstrate their independence by putting an end to all *vestiges of colonialism*.



Map 18. US Forces in the Middle East: Mapping the Military Presence (as of July 2025)

Source: Council on Foreign Relations (<https://www.cfr.org/article/us-forces-middle-east-mapping-military-presence>)

Eseniia Kosulina: How do you assess the current role of the League of Arab States in preventing and resolving conflicts in the Middle East? Does the concept of *Arab Unity* continue to serve as a link between the Arab countries of the region or is it time to reform the organization?

Vitaly Naumkin: Unfortunately, the role of the LAS is clearly insufficient. Contradictions between member states often hinder the adoption of consolidated decisions, which requires first resolving conflicts and at least mitigating contradictions, often secondary and inspired by the opponents of the Arabs.

Eseniia Kosulina: How balanced are the interests of the League of Arab States and the Gulf Cooperation Council? Do you think that the Gulf monarchies are trying to distance themselves from the rest of the Arab world and create their own security system? What is the danger of such trends?

Vitaly Naumkin: No, I don't think so. The LAS and the GCC differ not only in the scale of their activities, but also in their main content. In the GCC, the key areas of cooperation in recent years have become security (both in terms of countering external threats and in terms of countering attempts to destabilize the domestic political situation) and economic cooperation and integration – ultimately, this is an integration grouping. It is no coincidence that the question of its transformation from a Council into a Union has long been discussed in the GCC countries.

At the same time, the LAS is not and has never been an integration grouping; it is aimed at shaping the regional space of Arab countries. Accordingly, it has never reached the point of creating a unified security system (although such ideas have been discussed at various times). So the integration of the GCC, including in security matters, seems to me to be quite normal and does not contradict the activities of the LAS.

Eseniia Kosulina: Let's continue the topic of regional organizations. The escalation of the conflict between Iran and Israel in June 2025 once again provoked a discussion about the need to gradually create a nuclear-free zone in the Middle East. Is there a chance to implement this project? How can regional organizations help speed up this process?

Vitaly Naumkin: This idea has long been on the agenda, and Russia remains its consistent supporter. At the same time, the chances of its implementation in the entire Middle East today seem not very high – primarily due to the numerous *security dilemmas* in the region. More realistic was the discussion of a nuclear-free zone in the Persian Gulf region, but now the escalation you mentioned is also throwing this discussion back. In the event of a return to it, the key issue will be the issue of security guarantees for individual states.

Eseniia Kosulina: In your opinion, what is the main lesson that regional states should learn from the current round of the Palestinian-Israeli conflict?

Vitaly Naumkin: To put it briefly: problems must be solved. The unresolved Palestinian problem, the neglect of it, first created the illusion of its secondary importance, and then the opportunity to neglect it by taking unilateral steps. The result was *the tragedy of October 7*. The response to the tragedy was further neglect and attempts at a unilateral solution. The result was a humanitarian tragedy in the Gaza Strip, actions close to genocidal practices, which will inevitably entail further radicalization. Another result was a decrease in support for Israel in the world, the growth of anti-Semitism and Islamophobia, and the political dead end into which Israel has driven itself.

Eseniia Kosulina: To what extent does the Russian approach to ensuring security in the Middle East correspond to the interests and needs of the countries in the region? In what areas is dialogue particularly effective today?

Vitaly Naumkin: Of course, it seems to me that it does. In essence, what is the quintessence of the Russian approach? That regional security should be comprehensive (that is, including all possible aspects of security), inclusive (that is, taking into account the interests of all regional players) and provided by the countries of the region themselves, because only this will be able to ensure their sovereignty and independence. Gradually, all three of these characteristics are finding increasing understanding among regional elites. Today, there is no longer such rejection of Iran as before, an increasing number of countries understand that neither the United States nor anyone else can ensure their security, and the very notion of security is becoming increasingly complex. Of course, there is the problem of small states for which reliance on external guarantees is both traditional and natural. However, in recent years, they have also seen an increasing desire for multi-vectorism, which could balance the unilateral American influence. It is enough to look at Qatar or the UAE in this regard.

Eseniia Kosulina: What role do you think science diplomacy plays in reducing tensions in the Middle East? Does it help opposing sides look at pressing issues from new angles?

Vitaly Naumkin: In essence, scientific diplomacy can only play a supporting role, strengthening classical diplomacy. In the Middle East, where international relations and foreign policy in general are often not very institutionalized, where wide networks of personal contacts traditionally play a huge role, traditional mediation mechanisms exist, and at the same time many conflicts are developing, a very broad field of activity for those engaged in scientific diplomacy.

Our institute – the Institute of Oriental Studies of the Russian Academy of Sciences – has always been quite active in this regard. We can recall the Dartmouth Conference, four rounds of inter-Palestinian consultations, three rounds of international expert meetings on security issues in the Gulf, the *Valdai Club Middle East Dialogue*, the “Russia – Middle East” Forum and our other regular events. In some cases they had a direct effect, in others – not, but even then, in my opinion, they played and continue to play an important role in creating dialogue formats, creating space for diplomacy.

Eseniia Kosulina: Not long ago the world crossed the “small equator of the century”: the year 2050 has become chronologically closer to us than the year 2000. In this regard, I ask you to briefly formulate what, in your opinion, should become the main priority in strengthening the global security system in the near future.

Vitaly Naumkin: This is preventing a nuclear catastrophe, strengthening food and environmental security, modernizing international institutions, and increasing their effectiveness.

PART VI. BACK TO THE FUTURE



CHAPTER 26.

LONG TIME NO FIND. IRAN AND ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM (2024)⁵³⁶

Adlan Margoev

How long would it take Iran to build a nuclear weapon? The history of this issue and the news coverage dates back to the early 1990s. In 1992, *the Washington Post* wrote an article titled “Nuclear Warheads for Iran”. The similar topic can be found in *Los Angeles Times*. The first piece was about Iran’s alleged attempts to buy several nuclear warheads from Kazakhstan. The second one from the same year speculated about some missing nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan potentially appearing in Iran. In 1995, the first intelligence estimates come to media that Iran may be able to build an atomic bomb in 5 years. If one traces back all the claims by Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu (1996-1999; 2009-2021; 2022-present) about Iran’s potential to build a nuclear weapon, they will see that almost every several years starting from 1992 he has been warning the public that Iran would soon develop a nuclear weapon. One of the US officials John Bolton⁵³⁷ went further in 2015 when he suggested that Iran itself should be bombed.

⁵³⁶ Originally published: Margoev A. Long Time No Find. Iran And Its Nuclear Program // *Nuclear Nonproliferation and Arms Control*. Digital Papers / Eds. Vladimir Orlov and Elena Karnaukhova. *PIR Library Series № 36*. PIR Center, 2024. URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/24-04-25-Nuclear-Nonproliferation-and-Arms-Control.-Digital-Papers.pdf>

⁵³⁷ John Bolton – American (Republican) politician, 25th United States ambassador to the United Nations (2005-2006), the 26th United States national security advisor (2018-2019) – *Editor’s note*.

PAPER 9.

LONG TIME NO FIND. IRAN AND ITS NUCLEAR PROGRAM

Adlan Margoev

HOW LONG TO BUILD A WEAPON?

How long would it take Iran to build a nuclear weapon? The history of this issue and the news coverage dates back to the early 1990s. In 1992, the Washington Post wrote an article titled Nuclear Warheads for Iran. The similar topic can be found in Los Angeles Times. The first piece was about Iran's alleged attempts to buy several nuclear warheads from Kazakhstan. The second one from the same year speculated about some missing nuclear weapons in Kazakhstan potentially appearing in Iran. In 1995, the first intelligence estimates come to media that Iran may be able to build an atomic bomb in 5 years. If one traces back all the claims by Prime Minister of Israel Benjamin Netanyahu (1996-1999; 2009-2021; 2022-present) about Iran's potential to build a nuclear weapon, they will see that almost every several years starting from 1992 he has been warning the public that Iran would soon develop a nuclear weapon. One of the US officials John Bolton went further in 2015 when he suggested that Iran itself should be bombed.



Western Media coverage of the possible Iranian nuclear ambitions

Source: open data

Nuclear Nonproliferation and Arms Control. Digital Papers / Eds. Vladimir Orlov and Elena Karnaukhova. PIR Library Series № 36. PIR Center, 2024.

Source: PIR Center (<https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/06/24-04-25-Nuclear-Nonproliferation-and-Arms-Control.-Digital-Papers.pdf>)

When would Iran be ready to produce a nuclear weapon? Even the US intelligence community was confused with its own assessments. In 2005, its experts estimated with high confidence that Iran was determined to develop a nuclear weapon despite the international obligations. But in 2007, they understood that Iran was not prepared to do so. If we turn to the 2007 US National Intelligence Estimate *Iran: Nuclear Intentions and Capabilities*, we will see how different the assessment of Iran's nuclear program became in 2007, and that means even some of the strongest intelligence communities in the world are not exempt from making mistakes.

2005 IC Estimate	2007 National Intelligence Estimate
Assess with high confidence that Iran currently is determined to develop nuclear weapons despite its international obligations and	Judge with high confidence that in fall 2003, Tehran halted its nuclear weapons program. Judge with high confidence that the halt lasted at least several years. (DOE and the NIC have

international pressure, but we do not assess that Iran is immovable.	moderate confidence that the halt to those activities represents a halt to Iran's entire nuclear weapons program.) Assess with moderate confidence Tehran had not restarted its nuclear weapons program as of mid-2007, but we do not know whether it currently intends to develop nuclear weapons. Judge with high confidence that the halt was directed primarily in response to increasing international scrutiny and pressure resulting from exposure of Iran's previously undeclared nuclear work. Assess with moderate-to-high confidence that Tehran at a minimum is keeping open the option to develop nuclear weapons.

Table 11. Key differences between the US National Intelligence Estimate about Iranian nuclear program issued in 2005 and in 2007

Source: Arms Control Wonk (<https://www.armscontrolwonk.com/archive/202469/2005-iran-nie-details/>)

Those who do not have access to confidential information can rely on the data from official organizations like the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). According to the final assessment of the possible military dimensions of Iran's nuclear program that was delivered by the IAEA in December 2015, there was a range of activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device in Iran prior to 2003, but these activities did not advance beyond the feasibility in scientific studies, as well as gaining some of the technical competencies and capabilities, and the Agency did not have by December 2015 any relevant information about the development of a nuclear explosive device after 2009⁵³⁸.

There is an analytical frame that is often used in media and some of the official documents, especially in the US, that is called *the breakout time*. Basically, breakout time refers to the ability to take nuclear material and enrich it to a point when they would have enough material to produce the first nuclear explosive device. The calculation is based on the measurement called separative work unit (SWU), that is the amount of effort that nuclear scientists have to make in order to enrich a certain amount of nuclear material to a certain level with the aim to produce the first nuclear explosive device.

⁵³⁸ Final Assessment on Past and Present Outstanding Issues regarding Iran's Nuclear Programme GOV/2015/68 // IAEA. December 2, 2015. URL: <https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/documents/gov-2015-68.pdf>

“The Agency’s overall assessment is that a range of activities relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device were conducted in Iran prior to the end of 2003 as a coordinated effort, and some activities took place after 2003. The Agency also assesses that these activities did not advance beyond feasibility and scientific studies, and the acquisition of certain relevant technical competences and capabilities. The Agency has no credible indications of activities in Iran relevant to the development of a nuclear explosive device after 2009”.

**Final Assessment on Past and Present Outstanding Issues
regarding Iran’s Nuclear Programme.
Report by the Director General.
IAEA
December 2, 2015**

Figure 80. Final Assessment on Past and Present Outstanding Issues regarding Iran’s Nuclear Programme. Report by the Director General. IAEA. December 2, 2015

Source: IAEA (<https://www.iaea.org/sites/default/files/gov-2015-68.pdf>)

It would take Iran 96 SWUs to enrich 33 kg of uranium enriched to 60 percent, which they currently have, and up to 20 kg enriched to the 90 percent level. Then if they want to build the second nuclear explosive device from the same pool of 60 percent enriched uranium, they need to spend another 96 SWUs to enrich additional 33 kg of 60 percent uranium and bring it to 90 percent. You can see from the table that Iran could produce at least five nuclear explosive devices from the material that it had as of September 2023.

For Iran’s _____ nuclear weapon	It could draw from its stockpile of _____	It would draw _____ from this stockpile	To make _____ enriched to 90%	It would require _____ of effort	For a total effort of _____
First	121.6 kg up to 60% U-235 (~54%)	33.6 kg	20 kg	96 SWU	96 SWU
Second		33.6 kg	20 kg	96 SWU	192 SWU
Third		33.6 kg	20 kg	96 SWU	288 SWU
Fourth		20.8 kg	12.4 kg	59 SWU	467 SWU
Fifth	535.8 kg up to 20% U-235 (~18%)	39.8 kg	7.6 kg	120 SWU	782 SWU
		104.7 kg	20 kg	315 SWU	

Table 12. Iran’s Nuclear Timetable: The Weapon Potential (as of September 21, 2023)

Source: Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control (<https://www.wisconsinproject.org/irans-nuclear-timetable-the-weapon-potential/>)

What lacks here in this assessment is that it is not only about enriching nuclear material to provide enough material for a nuclear explosive device. It is also about the design and the construction of the nuclear explosive device and integration of that first nuclear explosive device and the consequent ones into a ballistic missile delivery system that would make it a nuclear weapon. Those types of calculations are not easily made. It is not about the math. It depends on many different factors.

“Although the **production of fissile material** is arguably the most resource intensive and difficult step toward building nuclear weapons, there are several additional technical hurdles, including

- **designing and constructing an explosive device** and
- **integrating it into a delivery system** (most likely a ballistic missile) so it would reliably detonate.

Moreover, these technical criteria constitute an important but incomplete lens through which breakout must be viewed. Real-world timelines must also take into account a broad range of legal and political factors inside and outside Iran. The success or failure of a breakout attempt would depend on

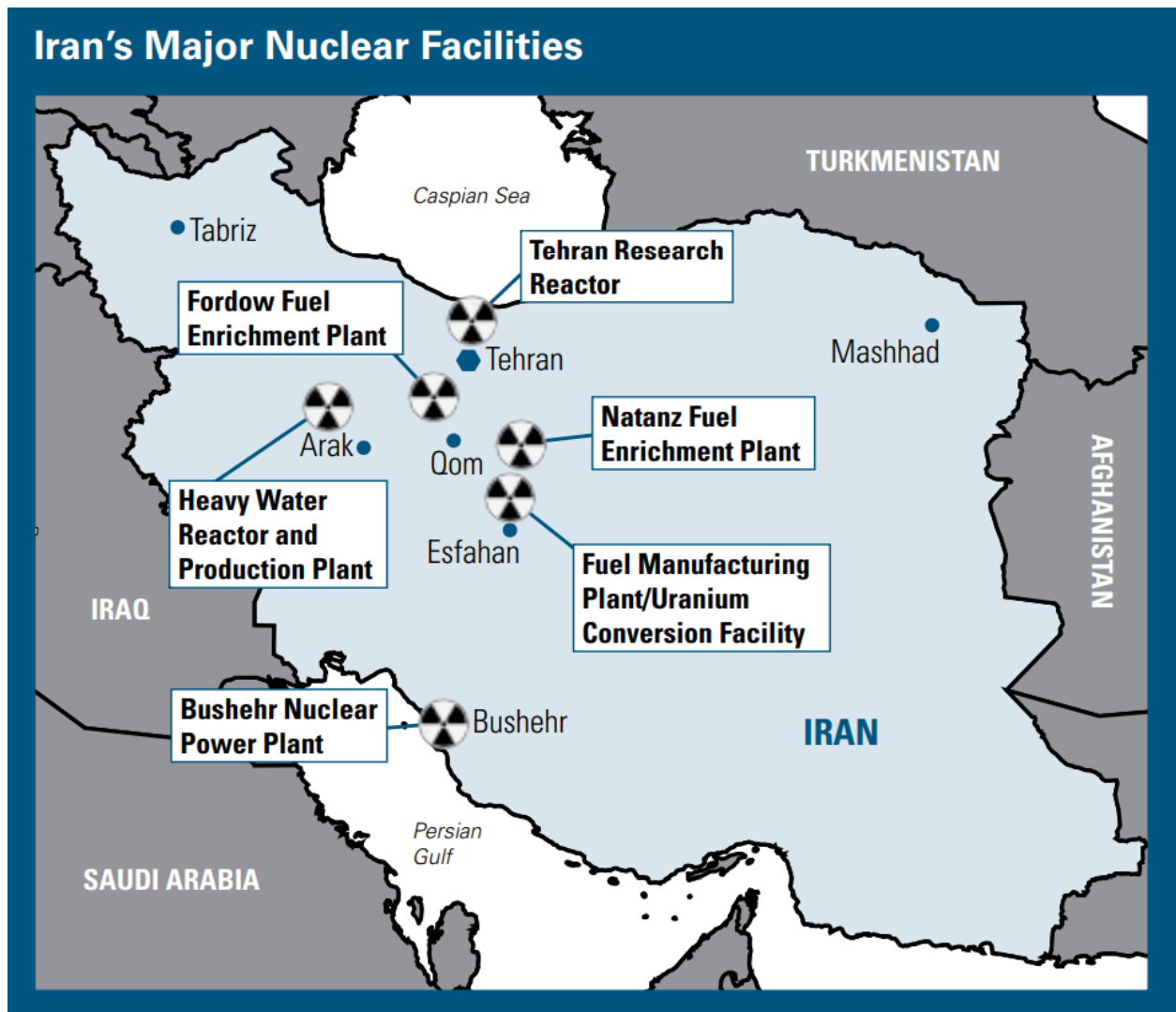
- the **quality** and scope of the international **inspection regime**,
- the ability of the **international community** to **respond effectively** to disrupt the breakout, and
- the **number of weapons** Iran would judge to be a credible deterrent”.

Solving the Iranian Nuclear Puzzle
An Arms Control Association Briefing Book
June 2014

Figure 81. *Solving the Iranian Nuclear Puzzle*

Source: An Arms Control Association Briefing Book

(https://www.armscontrol.org/files/ACA_Iran_Briefing_Book_2013.pdf)



Map 19. Iran's Major Nuclear Facilities (as of June 2014). *Solving the Iranian Nuclear Puzzle*

Source: An Arms Control Association Briefing Book

(https://www.armscontrol.org/files/ACA_Iran_Briefing_Book_2013.pdf)

Regarding nuclear infrastructure, Iranians have a variety of facilities ranging from uranium milling sites and fuel production sites to research and power reactors, but they do not have a full closed nuclear fuel cycle. That means there is no refabrication of irradiated fuel for plutonium extraction. So, if the Arak heavy water reactor is not operated based on its original design, the plutonium path is not an optimal solution for Iranians should they consider developing a nuclear weapon.

Why Iran Seeks an Advanced Nuclear Program

Why does Iran seek an advanced nuclear program? Is it all about the political system in Iran since 1979? Not at all.

The story goes back to the 1950s, when Iran was considered one of the US allies in the Middle East. After the delivery of the *Atoms for Peace* speech, American President Dwight Eisenhower (1953-1961) decided to engage Iran in the spread of peaceful nuclear technology. It was the United States that agreed around 1958 to deliver the first research reactor to the University of Tehran. But the key

nuclear developments in Iran took place after 1974, around the time when the Indian *peaceful nuclear explosion* test took place.



Mohammad Reza Pahlavi, Shah of Iran (1941-1979)

Source: open data



Akbar Etemad, President of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (1974-1978).

Father of Iran's current nuclear program

Source: open data

Figure 82. Mohammad Reza Pahlavi and Akbar Etemad

Source: open data

The memoirs of people involved in the court politics and some of the interviews of Mohammad Reza Shah demonstrate that in 1950-1970s the Iranians thought of developing an advanced nuclear program. In case the regional situation deteriorated and posed a threat to Iran's national security, the Shah reserved the option to go nuclear. However, there was no condition back then to motivate the Iranians to choose the military path.

After the 1979 Revolution, most of the contracts between Iran and its international partners, vendors from the United States, Germany, France, and other countries, were canceled either by those partners or by Iran itself. In fact, Ruhollah Khomeini, the First Supreme Leader of Iran (1979-1989), was against nuclear technology and wasteful contracts that Iran made with those countries.

But in 1980, Saddam Hussein started a war with Iran in which he used chemical weapons on the battleground. Iran received almost no support from the international community to fight back, and some of the Iranian officials decided that it would be better to revitalize the nuclear industry in case they would have to develop a nuclear weapon as an ultimate guarantor of national security. Nuclear weapons were not considered as the primary option, but Iran was interested in developing a certain level of technology that would, in case of a dire security situation in the region, help Iran to defend itself from the adversaries in the Middle East.

If we summarize some of the reflections on this issue under both the Shah and the Supreme Leader, we will see several parallels in Iran's motivation for developing a nuclear industry. The first one is an ultimate defense in case Iran has to develop a nuclear weapon. Second, regardless of the military or peaceful way of developing technology, being an advanced country in terms of technology, nuclear

industry, and knowledge economy was considered as a matter of prestige both before 1979 and afterwards. And, third, there is a motivation of Iran to develop a nuclear industry for the energy and non-energy applications. Iran is still suffering from the lack of electricity in certain regions, and despite being an oil- and gas-rich country, it sees value in building more power generation infrastructure in the country. Non-power applications of nuclear energy, such as in medicine, drive forward science and engineering in Iran. So, Iran's advanced nuclear program is about security, prestige, and scientific progress, regardless of the political system.

A Short-lived Success of the Iran *Nuclear Deal*

In 2015, after more than 13 years of negotiations, the parties managed to reach an agreement, called the Iran nuclear deal, or the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA). But its success happened to be short-lived.

Prior to this agreement, Iran had around 19.000 centrifuges, of which 13.000 centrifuges were dismantled and stored under the IAEA supervision under the deal. Iran was also prohibited from using many advanced centrifuges that it had already developed for research purposes. The Fordo enrichment facility was to be converted to a radioisotope production and research facility with the participation of the Russian nuclear industry representatives. So, for 15 years enrichment could take place only at Natanz. The cap for the stockpile of enriched uranium was set at 300 kg of uranium enriched to 3.67 percent. This secured a year-long *breakout time* for Iran, meaning for as long as the JCPOA was in full force, if Iran decided to develop a nuclear weapon, it would need at least one year to enrich enough nuclear material for its first nuclear device. Never since the collapse of the JCPOA has such a long *break-out time* been restored. In exchange for that, the United States and the European Union agreed to lift sanctions against Iran's nuclear program, oil industry, etc. Non-nuclear sanctions were kept intact.

Enrichment	• For 10 years operating centrifuges reduced to 5,060 IR-1 machines, total machines is 6,104 IR-1s • Excess centrifuges (over 13,000) dismantled and stored under IAEA monitoring • For 15 years level of uranium enrichment capped at 3.67 percent uranium-235 • For 15 years enrichment only at Natanz • For 10 years no production of additional IR-1 centrifuges • Between years 11-13 Iran can replace IR-1s with the equivalent capacity of IR-6 and IR-8 machines and limits lasting to years 14-15	Monitoring and Verification	• By 15 October 2015 Iran fully implements PMD “roadmap” agreed with IAEA • For 10 years approval of the purchase of dual-use materials by the Joint Commission working group • For 25 years continuous monitoring of Iran’s uranium mines and mills • For 20 years continuous monitoring of Iran’s centrifuge production facilities • For 15 years Joint Commission oversight of IAEA access requests to inspect undeclared sites • Permanent prohibition of certain weaponization-related activities • Implementation and eventual ratification of an additional protocol to Iran’s safeguards agreement • Permanent implementation of modified Code 3.1 of the Subsidiary Arrangements to its Safeguards Agreement
Uranium Stockpile	• For 15 years the stockpile is kept under 300 kilograms of 3.67 percent enriched uranium in total (all forms) • Excess enriched uranium sold, shipped abroad for storage, or diluted to natural uranium levels • Uranium oxide and scrap material enriched up to 20 percent fabricated into fuel for Tehran Research Reactor, blended down, or shipped out	Joint Commission	• For 25 years Joint Commission (composed of P5+1, EU and Iran for a total of 8 voting members) will hold quarterly meetings, or by request, to oversee the deal • Dispute resolution mechanism within 35 days; 15-day dispute resolution mechanism within the Joint Commission, with optional 15-day ministerial review and/or arbitration opinion from a 3-member panel, followed by 5-day review of the arbitration opinion. If there is no resolution and the complaining party sees the action as “significant non-performance,” the unresolved issue can be treated as grounds to cease

			performing commitments in whole or part, complaining party will notify UN Security Council Any party can go to the UN Security Council to put sanctions back in place if there is noncompliance by vetoing a resolution calling for the continuance of sanctions
Fordow	- Converted to research facility for stable isotope production with Russian cooperation 1,044 IR-1 centrifuges in six cascades will remain here, 328 for production, the remaining 700 are idle - For 15 years no introduction of uranium at the facility	UN Sanctions	- UNSC resolution 2231 endorsing JCPOA outlines termination of all previous resolutions targeting Iran's nuclear program — 1696 (2006), 1737 (2006), 1747 (2007), 1803 (2008), 1835 (2008), 1929 (2010) —on implementation day. - For 10 years sanctions are subject to snapback by veto of a resolution calling for the continuation of suspension - After 10 years UN will cease to be seized of Iran's nuclear file - For 5 years the heavy arms embargo will remain in place - For 8 years the ballistic missile restrictions will remain in place
Advanced Centrifuge Research and Development	- For 8.5 years Iran may conduct research with uranium on a single IR-4, IR-5, IR-6 and IR-8 centrifuge at Natanz - After 8.5 years test up to 30 IR-6s and 30 IR-8s - After 8 years manufacture up to 200 IR-6s and 200 IR-8s centrifuges without rotors	U.S. Sanctions	- Cease the application of economic sanctions against Iran's oil and banking sector allowing Iranian banks and companies to reconnect with international systems - Will remove designation of certain entities and individuals - Allows for licensed non-U.S. entities that are owned or controlled by a U.S. person to engage in activities with Iran permitted under JCPOA

	For 10 years Joint Commission review and approval of changes to the research and development plan		- Allows for the sale of commercial passenger aircraft to Iran - Allows for license for importing Iranian-origin carpets and foodstuffs into United States - United States takes appropriate measures to address laws at state or local level preventing full implementation of JCPOA – United States will actively encourage officials to adhere to JCPOA policy - For 8 years after Adoption date, or sooner if IAEA concludes that all nuclear activity in Iran remains peaceful, U.S. will seek legislative action to terminate/modify nuclear related sanctions - U.S. sanctions on Iran targeting human rights, terrorism and missile activities remain - United States can impose additional sanctions for non-nuclear issues (terrorism, human rights, etc.)
Arak Reactor	- Remove and disable the original core of the Arak reactor - Replace the core of the Arak reactor to reduce weapons-grade plutonium output, certified by the Joint Commission - For 15 years no reprocessing of spent nuclear fuel with an intention to never reprocess - Permanent commitment to ship out spent nuclear fuel	EU Sanctions	- Terminate all provisions of the EU Regulation related to Iran's nuclear program - Includes: financial and banking transactions; transactions in Iranian Rial; provision of U.S. banknotes to Iranian government; access to SWIFT; insurance services; efforts to reduce Iran's crude oil and petrochemical product sales; investment; transactions with Iran's energy and shipping sector; trade in gold and other precious metals; trade with Iran's automotive sector - Removes individuals and entities designated under sanctions

	• For 15 years no heavy-water reactors in Iran • For 15 years no accumulation of heavy water in Iran • Construction of hot cells or shielded glove boxes of certain specifications subject to approval of the Joint Commission		• EU refrains from re-introducing sanctions terminated under JCPOA (Iran views any re-introduction as grounds to cease performing its commitments) • Refrain from policy intended to adversely affect normalization of economic relations with Iran • For 8 years after adoption day or at the finding of the IAEA broader conclusion EU's arms embargo and restrictions on transfer of ballistic missiles remain

Table 13. Key Requirements and Actions Mandated by the JCPOA

Source: Arms Control Association (<https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/JCPOA-at-a-glance>)

The JCPOA negotiation led to success thanks to at least four factors.

First, a lot depended on the coherence of domestic political cycles in Iran and in the United States as the key opponents in this process. When the first clandestine nuclear facilities were revealed around 2002 in Iran, President of Iran was Mohammad Khatami (1997-2005), who was considered to be a reformist politician, ready to engage with the world and with the United States as well. But the US President George W. Bush (2001-2009) was not ready to respond to any diplomatic gesture by the Iranians. Then President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad (2005-2013) came to power in Iran, and despite the fact that US President Barack Obama (2008-2017) was ready to engage in diplomacy with Iran, it was Iran's turn to reject diplomatic efforts. Only around 2013, under the second administration of President Obama and the first administration of Iranian President Hassan Rouhani (2013-2021), the two sides managed to handle the domestic politics and secure the agreement. And according to the memoirs of some Iranian politicians, handling this domestic environment, in many cases, was more difficult for them than working at the same table with their opponents. So, when the domestic political cycles matched in Iran and in the US, the deal became possible.

Second is the compartmentalization of Iran's nuclear dossier from all of the other issues that spoiled the relations between Iran and the West. When the negotiators prioritized the *nuclear dossier* as the most pressing issue on the agenda, the success became possible. Otherwise, piling up everything in one negotiation process would be counterproductive; it would be impossible to reach a package solution to the issues that caused disagreements between Iran and the West.

Third, the step-by-step and reciprocity approach suggested by the Russian Federation around 2011 played a positive role. The negotiators could not handle all the issues at the same time, including due to mutual lack of trust. The only viable solution was to move forward by small reciprocal steps and see if the other side is delivering on its promises. That set the right pace for the negotiations after 2013 that led to the 2015 success.

Four, it was not only sanctions that motivated Iran in 2013 to come to the negotiation table with the sincere expectations of moving forward together. The Obama administration, for the first time in more than a decade, offered a real incentive to the Iranians. Apart from removing sanctions, they recognized Iran's right to enrich uranium and develop other aspects of its indigenous nuclear industry. Of note, in 2005 the previous successful round of talks between Iran and the E3 – France, Great Britain, and Germany – failed in large part because of US unwillingness to recognize Iran's right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy under the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT).

“ President Trump is terminating United States participation in the JCPOA, as it failed to protect America’s national security interests. The JCPOA enriched the Iranian regime and enabled its malign behavior, while at best delaying its ability to pursue nuclear weapons and allowing it to preserve nuclear research and development. The President has directed his Administration to immediately begin the process of re-imposing sanctions related to the JCPOA. The re-imposed sanctions will target critical sectors of Iran’s economy, such as its energy, petrochemical, and financial sectors. Those doing business in Iran will be provided a period of time to allow them to wind down operations in or business involving Iran. Those who fail to wind down such activities with Iran by the end of the period will risk severe consequences. United States withdrawal from the JCPOA will pressure the Iranian regime to alter its course of malign activities and ensure that Iranian bad acts are no longer rewarded. As a result, both Iran and its regional proxies will be put on notice. As importantly, this step will help ensure global funds stop flowing towards illicit terrorist and nuclear activities”.

President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation
in an Unacceptable Iran Deal
May 8, 2018

Figure 83. President Donald J. Trump is Ending United States Participation in an *Unacceptable Iran Deal* (May 8, 2018)

Source: Trump / the White House (<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/briefings-statements/president-donald-j-trump-ending-united-states-participation-unacceptable-iran-deal/>)

However, the deal happened to be unsustainable because of at least two reasons. First, due to the above-mentioned mismatch in domestic political cycles. Unfortunately for President Rouhani and all the JCPOA negotiators, the second presidency of Hassan Rouhani overlapped with the first and so far the only presidential term of Donald Trump (2017-2021) who left the agreement despite the United Nations Security Council (UN SC) Resolution № 2231 in support of the deal. The Iranians were deprived of the benefits under the JCPOA. The second reason for its unsustainable nature was the lack of balanced verification and enforcement mechanisms.

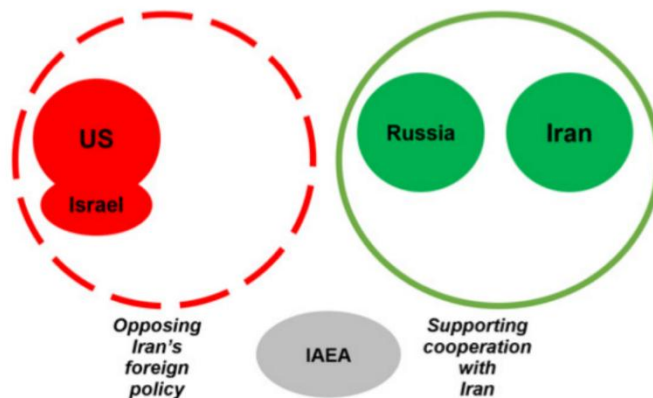
The strongest monitoring and inspections regime was created for Iran to check every single aspect of its nuclear program, but there was no verification mechanism for sanctions removal because it never existed. It was hard to measure how sincerely one would remove sanctions, whether the removal would work, whether there was enough outreach to banks and companies for them to safely resume business with the Iranians. Signing executive orders and removing sanctions on paper was not enough; it required a lot of effort in practice, something nobody could measure with the same success as an inspector of the IAEA at any nuclear facility in Iran. The enforcement mechanism had its fallacy as well: if Iran decided to leave the JCPOA, other parties to the JCPOA would treat Iran as if it violated the agreement. The *snapback* mechanism could automatically return all sanctions that were imposed on Iran under the auspices of the United Nations since 2006. Meanwhile, the United States faced no pressure for simply leaving the agreement that it had been working on tirelessly with the other participants of the deal. Violation could be considered worse than not abiding by the agreement

at all. Hence, for future agreements with Iran, the latter would require a more balanced mechanism of verification and enforcement.

Why the Six Countries and Iran Negotiated

One can see at least six stages in which negotiations over Iran's nuclear program evolved over the past 30 years.

1992-2002. The United States and some of its allies, for example, Israel have been the most prominent advocate of containing Iran's nuclear program. They both opposed Iran's nuclear program development and regional policy. As it was previously mentioned, since the early 1990s Benjamin Netanyahu has been constantly warning about the pace of development of Iran's nuclear program. Thanks to the lobbying in the US Congress, Israel had a very prominent role in the US domestic debate on Iran as well.

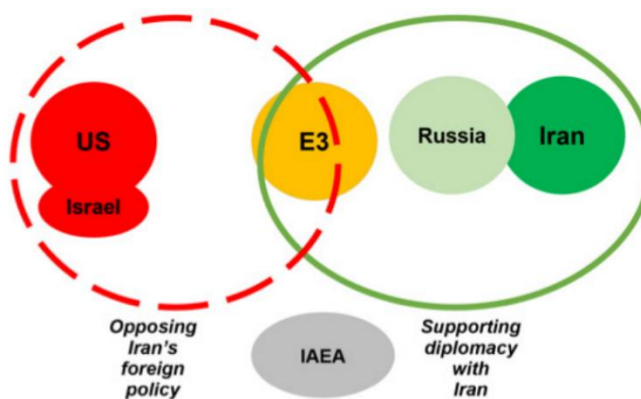


Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (1992-2002)

By the end of the 1990s, Russia remained the only partner of Iran in the nuclear industry thanks to the construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant. The agreement on that was signed in 1995. There was no diplomatic process on Iran's nuclear program in 1990s, but this issue was among the top three that Russian and the United States discussed throughout the 1990s. The IAEA was involved in the discussions as well as an impartial technical body, and it traced many of the aspects of Iran's nuclear program development.

Figure 84. Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (1992-2002)
Compiled by the author

2003-2005. The situation changed after 2002 when the first clandestine nuclear facilities were revealed in Iran, and the multilateral negotiation started. The European states – France, Germany, and Great Britain, or E3 – were the first to volunteer as negotiators with Iran. They signed two successful declarations, the 2004 *Tehran Declaration* and the 2005 *Paris Declaration* that secured progress in the talks.



Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2003-2005)

However, in 2005, under heavy influence of the United States, the Europeans made a final

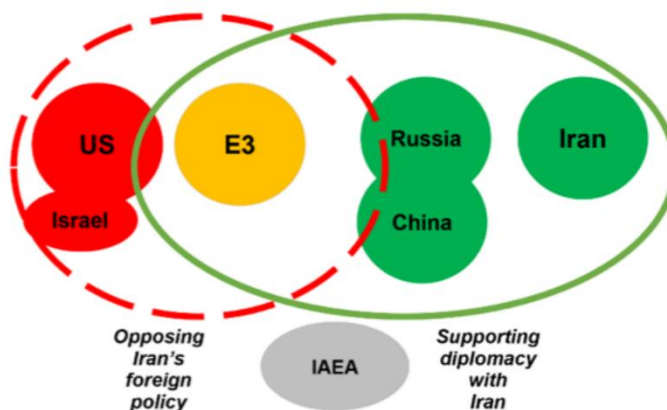
Figure 85. Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2003-2005)
Compiled by the author

offer to Iran with a provision that prohibited uranium enrichment in Iran for ten years after signing the document. Iran rejected the offer since it was imbalanced in nature.

At that time the *E3* happened to be in between two circles. They sincerely supported nuclear diplomacy with Iran, but at the same time they shared concerns with the United States, Israel, and some other allies and partners in the Middle East regarding Iran's regional policy. For the time of the talks and since then, Iran's nuclear program was effectively monitored by the IAEA for the negotiators to understand the technical realities on the ground. Of course, there were many questions about Iran's past activities, some of which remain to be clarified today, but from the nonproliferation standpoint their relevance for today's nuclear activities in Iran and the current level of the program remains limited, if not marginal.

Russia did not play a role in talks between the *E3* and Iran, but it did support diplomacy with Iran at the IAEA. The US under the Bush administration preferred to stay away from the diplomatic process led by the European countries. So, the IAEA was a venue for some of the heated political debates that are going on today as well.

2006-2012. The situation further deteriorated when the administrations of George Bush and Mahmud Ahmadinejad severely disagreed with one another. Under mounting US pressure, Iran's President made bold statements and strongly defied the West, which drove the *E3* closer to the United States. The *E3* lost their agency at a point when they suggested that Iran suspend the enrichment for ten years. Iran's confidence in the Europeans as the key mediators in this process faded away, and the failed talks led to the transfer of the Iranian nuclear dossier from the IAEA to the UN SC. All the permanent members of the UN SC had to engage, including the United States, Russia, and China, because they had to agree on every single aspect of the future sanctions regime on Iran.



Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2006-2012)

Figure 86. Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2006-2012)

Compiled by the author

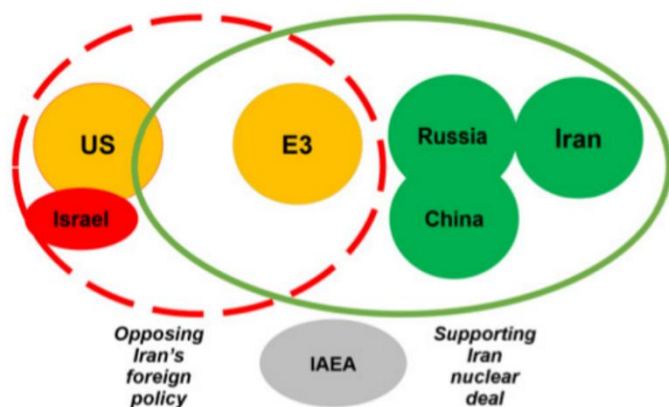
That period of negotiations is called either *E3/EU+3* (EU as a coordinator of this process), or *P5+1*, meaning the five permanent members of the UN SC, and Germany that was part of this process since 2003. Iran was unwilling to abide by the initial UN SC resolution that required Iran to pause its nuclear activities and open up the venue for diplomacy. Having refused to surrender, as it perceived the situation, Iran faced four UN SC resolutions imposing universal legally binding sanctions.

Russia and China appeared in a delicate position between the US and Iran: they had enough empathy towards the Iranians but at the same time, they had to defend the status of both the NPT and the UN SC. When Tehran defied the UN SC, Moscow and Beijing had to agree on further international sanctions against the Iranian nuclear program. But at every instance, the two countries tried to water

down the language in a way that would leave some space for future diplomatic efforts with the Iranians. If it had no constructive impact on Iran's position, they moved forward.

In 2010, the last UN SC resolution introduced the harshest sanctions on the Iranian economy. In 2012, the European Union introduced the heaviest European sanctions coordinated with the United States. That period saw a lot more unhelpful events, including cyberattacks against Iran's key enrichment facility, the assassination of its nuclear scientists, which seemingly led to an impasse. Until 2012, no meaningful diplomacy could be envisioned on Iran's nuclear program. But the Obama administration made a secret attempt to negotiate with Iran. The consultations took place in Oman and opened up the opportunity for the rest of the negotiators to engage back in the talks.

2013-2016. Based on the step-by-step and reciprocity approach, the parties first concluded the Joint Plan of Action (JPA) in 2013, and on July 14, 2015, reached the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action. The IAEA held a separate track of negotiations with Iran: the successes on the diplomatic track and on the technical track of negotiations reinforced one another.

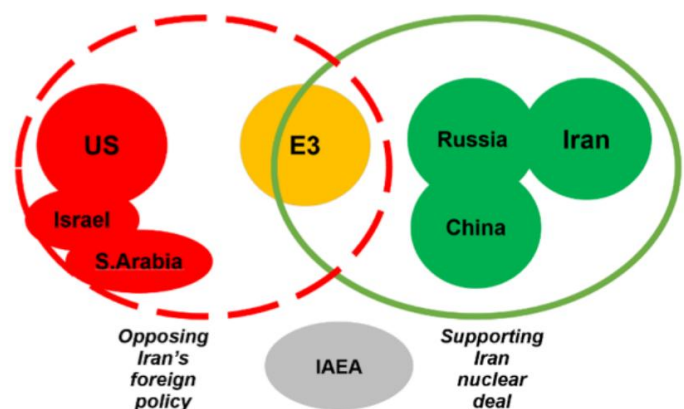


Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2013-2016)

Figure 87. Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2013-2016)
Compiled by the author

The United States and E3 are colored yellow in the chart because, despite supporting diplomatic efforts on Iran's nuclear program, they shared concerns about Iran's regional policy and its missile program. These concerns were among the reasons why the deal unraveled in the next period.

2017-2021. When Donald Trump became President of the United States in 2017, his administration rejected the compartmentalization approach. At first point, the Europeans opposed those developments and defended the deal they had struggled to secure for over a decade. All of a sudden, the Europeans happened to be on the same page with Russia and China with respect to the Iran nuclear deal, but they could not act independently. The E3/EU proved incapable of acting without the support of the United States, which demonstrated their irrelevance to the Iranians.



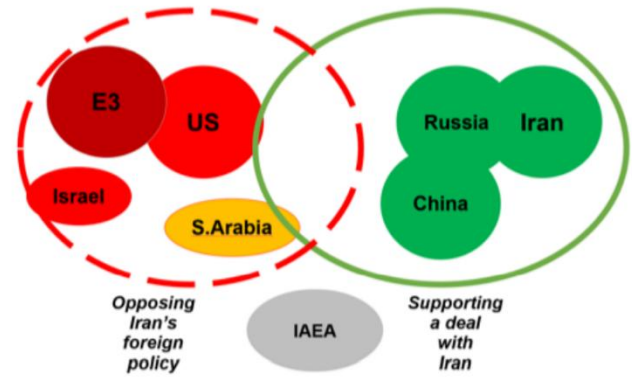
Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2017-2021)

Figure 88. Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2017-2021)
Compiled by the author

Meanwhile, the Russian and the Chinese relationships with Iran got stronger. Conversely, Saudi Arabia had cut diplomatic relations with Iran because of domestic political disagreements and joined

the ranks of the JCPOA opponents. Under President Joe Biden, talks on the revival of the JCPOA resumed and almost resulted in an agreement in August 2022, but issues extraneous to the talks spoiled the opportunity. The IAEA as a technical body could not solve the political problems. Instead, those disagreements spilled over the technical discussions at the IAEA over Iran's past nuclear activities.

2022-2023. In fall 2022, two developments precluded the revival of the JCPOA and made the United States and the E3 refuse to continue the talks. First, Iran's government suppressed domestic protests that became violent and turned into an anti-regime movement in Iran. Second, Iran was believed to supply drones to Russia, whether before or after February 24, that were used on the battlefield in Ukraine. The logic of compartmentalization did not work for the JCPOA.



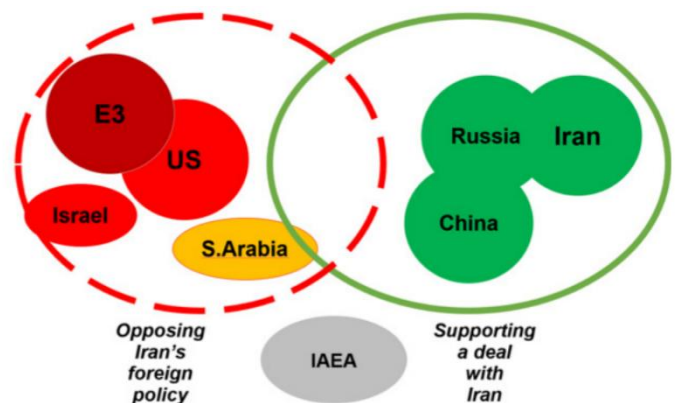
Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2022-2023)

However, after the public statements by the US and European officials that the JCPOA was no longer on agenda, the United States continued non-public talks with the Iranians on the exchange of five detainees on each side. Switzerland, Qatar, Oman, Iraq, and some other countries were involved until the two agreed on a solution in the summer of 2023. The agreement was called an understanding and was not put on paper. Otherwise, it would have to be approved by the US Congress under the Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act (INARA Act) that was adopted in the Obama times. Apart from the prisoners exchange, South Korean banks released six billion dollars to Iran. The money was transferred to a bank in Qatar, where Iran could have access to the money with the approval of the United States and no violation of its sanctions.

The understanding was no substitute for the JCPOA. It was an understanding that the US and Iran could make small reciprocal steps to overcome the *deadlock*. But in October 2023, the Israeli-Palestinian conflict erupted with a new wave of violence: Iran and the United States supported the opposite parties, which postponed any progress on the revival of the JCPOA.

Dangerous Absence of a Deal

Figure 89. Nuclear diplomacy with Iran (2022-2023)
Compiled by the author



State of affairs as of October 2023

Figure 90. Nuclear diplomacy with Iran: a Dangerous Absence of a Deal
Compiled by the author

The JCPOA is currently in force only in legal terms, but no party is fully abiding by the agreement. The situation is often called no deal, no crisis, but amid multiple conflicts and crises in the region it can hardly last for too long.

As for the other actors, Russia currently is developing a close cooperation with Iran. China is the trading partner number one for Iran. Saudi Arabia is marked in yellow because it restored the diplomatic relationship with Iran.

The new round of escalation between Israel and Palestine creates a dangerous situation in which Iran is interested in supporting Palestinians, and Israel is waging its own military operation in Gaza. And potentially, those hostilities could spread around other countries of the region as well.

This leads to a greater risk of military confrontation between Israel and Iran, as well as the proxy forces that are considered either pro-Iranian or at least receiving some support from Iran. The risky part in terms of Iran's nuclear program is that if a direct conflict between Israel and Iran erupts in the region and would directly affect the security of the two states, then there is a greater risk that Iran would accelerate the development of its nuclear program.

At least nine questions can be posed to consider negative scenarios around Iran's nuclear program⁵³⁹.

What impact could a direct military conflict between Iran and its adversaries like Israel have on the security in the region and beyond, as well as on intertwining character of international economy with the Hormuz Strait being the communication line for those who are exporting or importing oil and gas resources? Any conflict in the region, like a new tanker war, like the seizure of those tankers, the closure of the Strait, would cause destabilization not only in terms of the regional security but also international economy, and would disrupt the oil prices.

If Iran feels compelled to leave the NPT, would the P5 countries react unanimously? We know that in some cases like the DPRK, India, Pakistan or Israel the nuclear-weapon states had different reactions to the development of nuclear weapons. Russia and China have more empathy towards Iran and positive bilateral relations. The United States, France and UK have the opposite attitude on Iran. Would that affect their ability to come to a joint reaction or to a joint decision in support of the NPT? What would happen and how would that affect the situation?

Should Iran take a step further and develop a nuclear weapon, what will happen to Iranian fatwas prohibiting weapons of mass destruction (WMD)? Would the fatwa be revisited only in terms of the prohibition of nuclear weapons or that would affect the policies on chemical and biological weapons as well?

Should Iran develop a nuclear weapon, what is the risk that it could use those weapons against its adversaries in a direct military confrontation rather than just use it as a deterrence?

How clear could Iran's nuclear doctrine be and how long would it take Iran to develop its nuclear policy? The DPRK developed its nuclear weapons in the mid-2000s and only recently elaborated on

⁵³⁹ Find more: Margoiev A., Tokarev A., Ravandi-Fadai L. M. False Choice Between Pro-Russian and Non-Nuclear Iran: Why Russia Needs Nuclear-Free Iran // *Vostok-Oriens*. 2024. №5. P. 70-82.

its nuclear doctrine. Where would Iran find a balance between the ambiguity and clarity of its doctrine?

How secure might potential Iranian nuclear weapons be? Will any unauthorized access be possible? What are the protocols for securing nuclear command and control and communication systems? Would those be vulnerable to cyber efforts like the 2010 Stuxnet virus developed by the American and Israeli intelligence forces against the Iranian nuclear facilities? Would cyber weapons pose a risk to Iran's potential national command, control, communication and intelligence center (NC3I)?

Will Iran's government or its scientists be prone to nuclear proliferation in case the country possesses nuclear weapons?

Should Iran develop a nuclear weapon, will it cause a chain reaction in the region and lead to further proliferation? Saudi Arabian highest-ranking officials made several statements that in case Iran pursues a nuclear weapon, Saudi Arabia would follow suit.

What will happen in case of a political regime change in Iran?

International community might have to find answers to these questions if it fails to address the current diplomatic challenges around Iran's nuclear program. Those who are in charge of Iran's nuclear dossier need to be reminded what they are responsible for, what they can do in order to prevent further regional escalation, and how to prevent negative scenarios that would push Iran to seek greater security through nuclear deterrence.

CHAPTER 27.

SERGEY KISLYAK: “RESETTING U.S. – RUSSIAN RELATIONS ALSO MEANS KILLING OLD VIRUSES THAT HAVE BEEN POISONING OUR DIALOGUE” (2009)⁵⁴⁰

Sergey Kislyak, Russian Ambassador to the United States, visited Monterey, California, this nonproliferation capital of the United States, to speak to the students and professors of the Monterey Institute of International Studies and the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. The discussion was held by William Potter, CNS Director. With his permission, we publish below the transcripts of the debate in Monterey.



Routledge
Taylor & Francis Group

SERGEY KISLYAK: “RESETTING U.S.–RUSSIAN RELATIONS ALSO MEANS KILLING OLD VIRUSES THAT HAVE BEEN POISONING OUR DIALOGUE”

Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation to the United States of America Sergey Kislyak is a good friend of the PIR Center and one of the contributors to our journal. Normally we have had conversations with him in Russia, including the time when he was Deputy Foreign Minister. However, this time Editor-in-Chief of the Security Index journal Vladimir Orlov and Sergey Kislyak met in California, in Monterey. The Russian Ambassador visited this nonproliferation capital of the United States to speak to the students and professors of the Monterey Institute of International Studies and the James Martin Center for Nonproliferation Studies. The discussion was held by William Potter, CNS Director and PIR Center's Executive Board member, in July 2009. Before the discussion Sergey Kislyak mentioned to Vladimir Orlov and William Potter the willingness to strengthen cooperation between the PIR Center and the U.S. academic institutions, above all the CNS.

With the permission of William Potter, we publish below the transcripts of the debate in Monterey.

POTTER: Washington and Moscow speak about the policy of reset. But what were the major current obstacles in U.S.–Russian relations?

KISLYAK: Let us first go back in time and look at the situation in bilateral Russian–U.S. relations of just 12 months ago. August 2008. It was, if you remember, a time when we had a very difficult relationship because of the South Ossetia and Georgian invasion there. We had to step in and to enforce peace there. And I would say that in my humble opinion this was the lowest point in our relations after the Cold War, since the United States was following its own perception of what Russia was doing there rather than the real facts on the ground.

The United States was advancing the idea of isolating Russia. A number of fora where we and the United States had worked together were frozen. G-8 delayed a number of meetings; the NATO–Russia Council was frozen because of the decision of Washington to do so. This is a sad fact for me personally, as the very first reality check proved that the U.S.A. wasn't interested and able to talk to us. We turned to the Security Council, to other institutions, but they were simply paralyzed.

And it was a very telling moment for us—it proved that the current institutions and relations should be modernized, in order to address serious issues of security, including security in Europe.

What we need is the place where people can sit together and discuss the issues, and not necessarily automatically adopt the Russian position. We should discuss the roots of the problems and this would help us to go forward. At such meetings we could provide more real information to our partners.

POTTER: And what was the nature of reset?

KISLYAK: When President Obama was elected, he brought a new tone to our relations. Then there was a famous speech by Vice-President Biden in Munich. So we feel that the main message that the current administration wants to send to us [is] willingness to engage constructively. We

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Security Index Journal. №1 (90), Volume 16, 2010

Source: PIR Center (<https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Security-Index-%E2%84%961-90-2010.pdf>)

POTTER: Washington and Moscow speak about the *policy of reset*. But what were the major current obstacles in U.S.–Russian relations?

⁵⁴⁰ Originally published: Sergey Kislyak: “Resetting U.S. – Russian relations also means killing old viruses that have been poisoning our dialogue” // *Security Index Journal*, №1 (90), 2010. p.15-20. URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Security-Index-%E2%84%961-90-2010.pdf>

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POTTER: And what was the nature of reset?

KISLYAK: When President Obama was elected, he brought a new tone to our relations. Then there was a famous speech by Vice-President Biden in Munich. So, we feel that the main message that the current administration wants to send to us [is] willingness to engage constructively. We took this approach with respect and the meeting of the two presidents in London in April [2009] was very good and substantial. And it was followed by the summit in Moscow [in July 2009].

I would add to this that the term “reset” came from, as I understand, the computer world. And all of us who are faithful computer users know that when you want to reset your computer you would want to take away the old viruses otherwise you would end up with the same problems. And I think that the Moscow meeting was exactly the time to take away those viruses and to start building some new relations. We try to build cooperation in the areas where our leaders coincide.

POTTER: President Obama has indicated that he seeks strong, peaceful, and prosperous Russia. On the other hand, in late July 2009, Vice-President Biden appeared to communicate a somewhat different message in his interview with the *Wall Street Journal*, in which he seemed to imply that Russia’s withering economy – his phrase – would lead Moscow to accommodate the West on a variety of national security issues. How do most Russians interpret these mixed signals?

KISLYAK: I think, first and foremost, we have a policy that has been taken by President Obama. He currently speaks to Moscow in a very benign fashion on how he sees Russian–American relations and what he wants to develop. We take him seriously and we take it as a reflection of U.S. policy. We certainly hear many nuances in assessment of Russia and the prospects of Russian relations. I

understand that. The good news doesn't sell more, so you're focusing on the bad news. Certainly, the world is such that that we can always find news that would be unpleasant to deal with anyway.

We can understand that the change of attitudes toward Russia in the United States isn't going to occur overnight. The same is true the other way around, the attitude of the Russians toward the United States. So, it's not going to be an easy process. But we need to work on issues that unite us, to work as partners, and working on these things is the best way to have a normal relationship. You know there are the subjects we all face. Terrorism is one of them, economic instability, poverty, climate change, and many others. It's a long list. And then there are things that divide us and require solution. Expansion of NATO, ballistic missile defense deployment near our borders <...>. But war on terror and other complicated issues are much more important for the long-term interests of the United States and Russia. And that gives us a good chance to work on these issues. In fact, our joint willingness to work on these cases will help define what is possible in our relationships and what is not.

I think that a pretty unique area where we have been working together with the United States and Europe, during even the most difficult times of the Cold War, is nonproliferation. The ups and downs in our political relations did not affect our work in this area. I think that is living proof that there are important security issues where the long-term core interests of the United States and Russia coincide. We had to learn to cooperate – it doesn't mean that we didn't have differences on how to best achieve the goals that we shared. But, at the same time, we have never interrupted the channels of communication on this issue. Even during the crises that we have lived through. It's something that needs to be built upon in the future.

POTTER: Let us now move to the issues of nuclear arms control, namely the START I replacement talks. The START I Treaty is set to expire on December 5, 2009. I would be very interested in your assessment, first about the prospects for reaching an agreement by December 5.

KISLYAK: It is a formidable task because START deals with the core of security issues between the United States and Russia. When the current agreement expires, it means that on December 6 we will have no limits, no rules in the field of strategic arms. And all strategic arms, not only strategic defensive arms. Because the United States chose to withdraw from the ABM Treaty – one of these two previous agreements that laid the foundation of predictability was withdrawn from unilaterally by the United States in the early years of the President Bush administration. Now the only thing that is left is START. It has proved to be workable and is largely considered to be a success by both sides. If we lose that kind of strength on December 6, each side will be able to do whatever they want in the development of area of strategic capabilities.

So, we feel that START has been a very important instrument of stability and predictability in this area. It's not easy to negotiate. Each and every small issue for the negotiators is a big issue for the General Staff of the Russian Federation or the Joint Chiefs of Staff. So, part of the issue is to discuss what is sensible and important, and this is the additional task of the negotiators.

At the same time, it is not a treaty that will be started from scratch. All of the things that were developed in term of procedures to destroy, in terms of inspections for the purposes of START, have

been tested already. And in some respect, we have developed a culture of working together to implement START.

You [United States] have a significant infrastructure that has been working on the implementation of this agreement with Russia, we have the same in Russia. And they work much better than I expected 10 years ago. That's also an important touch point for the negotiators. Because some things that maybe they couldn't do then, now they can do easier. Sometimes it shouldn't be reinvented. They can borrow experiences or borrow negotiations from the old treaty and bring them forward in the new one. However, the biggest challenge is to decide our role and where we need to go. And here we are not yet clear on that and that may be a challenge for us. Besides, we need to establish the limits on the warheads and the limits on the delivery systems.

Your goal strategically is quite a lot different than ours. We have different asymmetries, but both sides want to achieve an equal sense of security. I'm not saying parity, I'm saying equal sense of security.

POTTER: Now let's turn to the topic of tactical, or non-strategic, nuclear weapons (TNW). The Obama administration appears to be far more receptive to the argument that tactical nuclear weapons should be withdrawn from Europe. And tactical nuclear weapons should be the focus of future U.S. – Russia negotiated arms control. Do you believe such initiatives hold much promise, and if not, why not? And also, under what circumstances Russia might consider reducing and eventually eliminating the entire arsenal of its TNW?

KISLYAK: First of all, as to where the American administration moves, I think, you would be better served by asking my colleagues in the State Department. So far, the nuclear component of U.S. forces is still in Europe. And we have proposed relocating all the nuclear weapons to the national territories, i.e. to the states that do possess them. Russia doesn't have any nuclear weapons outside of the territory of Russia.

As to negotiations on tactical [nuclear] weapons, it's a too precise question to be able to respond to right now as to what we specifically wish to negotiate. First of all, I would say in generic terms, our presidents have raised the idea of nuclear arms reductions. They understand that to achieve that kind of goal it will require all other things to be also implemented. We need to be sure that while the big nuclear powers reduce these weapons, the other countries join in. You need to be sure that while you are eliminating nuclear weapons, the other countries today aren't going to introduce nuclear weapons in new parts of the world. And it is initially important to show that we are all compliant with this process. Then we can go and work on these issues. So tactical weapons will be somewhere in this process by definition.

For the purposes of START, we do not discuss it because that doesn't help. In the future we will not exclude that, but we need to be very cognizant of the real problems of Russia. We have a situation here that is still not very predictable to us. Recent events in Kosovo or in South Ossetia just proved that wars in Europe are still possible.

We see that there is an alliance that is by its nature is a military bloc, which operates beyond its original location. And they proved that they can employ military force. Certainly, we are talking about imbalances in Europe. The sense of security for all of us in Europe needs to be established. Unless it is achieved, some nuclear weapons are still considered to be a significant deterrent as of now.

POTTER: Do you mean that the issue of TNW should correspond with the progress on the CFE Treaty?

KISLYAK: We need to be also working on regional imbalances. But so far, we have not been able to get the Adapted CFE treaty enforced. It's very important to us because currently – and probably not everybody knows this—we live in the Cold War type of regional environment and the old treaty still regulates the policy in conventional weapons between two major alliances.

But the *Warsaw Pact* exists no longer. So, we have started insisting on negotiating things that would take care of the new situation in the absence of alliances. A new situation would give more assurance about security not only to the members of the alliance, but to all countries in the region.

So, we have negotiated the treaty, and we don't have it in force; because it was ratified only by Russia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Ukraine. Not a single remaining country has ratified it. The problem is that currently we do not have an active treaty. We don't have a predictable and reliable framework to control the conventional sphere in the long term in Europe. And it leaves a lot of question marks as to what is going to happen if relations change.

What I'm suggesting is that the CFE treaty is important in its own right. But, by creating a predictable environment in conventional weapons security, we make it easier to think about our next steps.

POTTER: Now as we turn to regional issues what is your assessment of the current status of Iran's nuclear program?

KISLYAK: The program itself is very interesting. They started this program after years and years of American government trying to convince the previous regime in Iran that they need to have at least 20 GW installed for power in Iran. And that the United States would help Iran to develop that kind of nuclear program that would include also an enrichment facility, provided that the facility would be built by outsiders.

Then the regime changed as well as the attitude of the United States – from that moment on the position was that Iran had enough oil and gas to ensure all its needs in energy consumption, and they didn't have any need for nuclear power.

The Iranians, however, still had the intention to continue the program – after all they had the basic infrastructure created by the Germans. And they turned to us. We thought that the country complied with the nonproliferation treaty and had a legitimate power generation nuclear energy program.

At the same time, during the years of war with Iraq, they started a program that was seeking enriched uranium. They did in a way that wasn't transparent to the international community, that wasn't

transparent to the IAEA. So politically it wasn't the best way to develop that type of sensitive program. Then, at some point in time, there was a subtle change in the program for enrichment. And from that moment on we had very difficult negotiations, discussions, and resolutions in the IAEA, the Security Council, on this issue.

POTTER: How would you comment on such change?

KISLYAK: The problem is that Iran is developing [a] nuclear enrichment capability that by tradition is useful for peaceful purposes and, if they decide to do so, for military purposes as well. Today they have a capability that gives them an opportunity to enrich much more, which they do. And the enrichment is the 2–4 percent that is required for nuclear reactors. As we understand it, and I think it's shared by everybody, each and every gram of this enriched uranium has been accounted for by the IAEA. And this program so far hasn't led to nuclear weapons. And I would assume that as long as the agency is there in Iran it will not be used for nuclear weapons-grade material.

Where the problem can arise is that if there is a diversion, which currently nobody, neither you nor I, has any proof of. Thus, it is a matter of the lack of certainty about the nature of this program, and its perception and the lack of understanding that all they have put on the table is all they have.

And sometimes people are questioning the intentions of the Iranian government about the use of these enrichment capabilities. Currently it's done legally and within the limits of the nonproliferation treaty (NPT). And there are a number of NPT non-nuclear-weapon members who run the same kind of programs – Japan or Brazil, some European and Asian nations.

So, it is not very unique that they have an enrichment capability. The difference being that, economy-wise, it's not very easy to justify the possession of that kind of program in the absence of a well-developed nuclear electricity generating program. So far, they do not run a single power station. Only because Bushehr is going to be the first one in operation and, for Bushehr, Russia has supplied fuel for the first phase and will be supplying it until the last phase. So, there is uranium.

So, all the discussion about the nuclear weaponization of Iran is based on the capability that physically they are creating and on the implication of the intentions in the future, which have developed into almost a stereotype that either they have built nuclear weapons or are building nuclear weapons. It's not reality.

But there are a lot of uncertainties about the nature of the program that haven't been declared by the IAEA. The agency has been entrusted by all of us to do the verification job with the Iranians. Their compliance with these requirements, by the way, was less than 100%, and there are still elements that need to be addressed before the IAEA or the Security Council can say that all the concerns are met. And it's going to be difficult.

POTTER: What would you like to see Iran and the international community do to resolve the ongoing crisis?

KISLYAK: I think the first solution can be political. That means you need to engage diplomacy and negotiations. We have a mechanism about engaging with the Iranians on this issue – that is, the Group of Six. Moreover, we see some changes in the American position under the new administration and the willingness to negotiate.

The proposal of The Six is a good basis, because it provides for a wide spectrum of arrangements with Iran. Not only in that it provides for a legitimate and moral preparation for developing nuclear energy programs in Iran as a part of cooperation, but it also includes a number of other items, like access to peaceful technologies for other industries.

So, we are convinced that if Iran chooses to seek negotiations by picking up the proposal and developing into an agreement with all of us, they tend to benefit much more from this than from any nuclear enrichment program which they might choose to develop during the years ahead.

POTTER: The final question is more general. Americans know very little about Russian history, or even contemporary Russia. How do you propose to promote and provide a better education for Americans about Russians?

KISLYAK: I think that the differences we have, they are not as great as one might think. The problem is the lack of knowledge and the problem is PR. It is wrong to perceive Russia as an extension of the Soviet Union. As if whatever Russia does, rightly or wrongly, is a resurrection of the Cold War competition with the United States. We are certainly competing with you, in many respects, but we are not going to create anything, at least in our own relations, that would remind us of the confrontations of the Cold War. We have changed much more than the Americans have understood. But we have had trouble in explaining it in the United States.

And I would say that one of the basic elements that is less known here is that currently there is no basis whatsoever for the resumption of the Cold War. For one thing, Russia is as much a market economy as the United States, the difference being that we are only 18 years old and America is 200 years plus. Being young, it means that we are going through the same mistakes and the same problems that the United States had as a country 100 years ago. But at the same time, we are growing reliably and, I would say, much faster than anybody else.

So psychologically and ideologically, there are no big divides. Russians and Americans are very similar. Ideologically, I think the United States government is much more ideologically charged than we have been. So, we are building an economy for the Russian people, we need a stable and predictable environment around our countries. Stable, predictable, and reassuring that we cannot have bad relations with other countries.

CHAPTER 28.

THE OUTLOOK FOR UAV RESEARCH AND DEVELOPMENT (2013)⁵⁴¹

Evgeny Buzhinsky

Unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) are currently regarded as one of the key instruments for bolstering the fighting ability of combat units and formations in various armed services. The vast majority of experts believe that in future wars and military conflicts of the twenty-first century all militarily advanced countries will base their strategies on the use of UAVs, which tend to be relatively cheap. The cost of losing manned aircraft, along with their pilots, is becoming too high. An advanced manned plane can have a price tag of up to 5060 million dollars. Training a highly professional pilot costs another 10 million. Meanwhile, many of the tasks currently performed by manned aircraft can be done very successfully by reconnaissance or combat UAVs, which cost a lot less. For example, America's *Predator* drone costs only about 4.5 million dollars.

It must be recognized, however, that advocates of manned aircraft also have several strong arguments which suggest that UAVs are not going completely to replace the traditional planes and helicopters. If the UAV operator loses control of the aircraft, the consequences could be very serious, whereas a manned airplane has more flexibility. In addition, UAVs are vulnerable to electronic jamming, and to a direct attack on the communications satellite. Unlike UAVs, pilots can react to threats and undertake evasive maneuvers. The American UAVs working in Iraq, Afghanistan, Yemen, or Somali are fairly safe because they are not facing any serious threats in those places. But when UAVs were used over Bosnia and Serbia many were lost to the Serbian air defenses, which operated Soviet and Russian-made AA missiles and artillery⁵⁴². UAVs also have another major flaw: if communication between the aircraft and its operator is lost, the current automation and software systems cannot guarantee successful autonomous operation in every situation. That flaw came to light when the Iranians seized the American RQ-170 *Sentinel* drone.

Back in 2003 the U.S. Army conducted a comparative study of the capabilities of UAVs and the RAH-66 *Comanche*, a future army reconnaissance helicopter. The study found that the UAVs could successfully perform only 67 percent of reconnaissance tasks in the combat theater; 50 percent of the tasks which involve guarding and protecting the troops; and 25 percent of the tasks which require destroying a target. As a result, the Americans reached the conclusion that UAVs cannot completely replace army aviation attack helicopters; they can only be viewed as complementary⁵⁴³.

⁵⁴¹ Originally published: Evgeny Buzhinsky. The Outlook for UAV Research and Development // *Security Index Journal*, №3 (104). 2013, p. 59-65. URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/11/Security-Index-%E2%84%963-104-2013.pdf>

⁵⁴² The USA: The Future Belongs to Unmanned Aviation // NewsLand. URL: <http://newsland.com/news/detail/id/803512> (archived).

⁵⁴³ The Fashion for Drones Over the Battlefield – One's Own and The Enemy's // RUVSA. URL: <http://ruvsa.com/reports/moda/> (archived).



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Yet another problem the Americans are facing—though it has nothing to do with the UAVs themselves—is the deficit of qualified UAV pilots. The United States can build more UAVs, but there are simply not enough pilots to operate all of them. Each Predator drone, for example, requires two operators, who work eight-hour shifts. According to U.S. Air Force representatives, they are facing a 50 percent deficit of trained personnel. In other words, the United States could have twice as many drones over Iraq and Afghanistan as it does now, if only it had more operators.

Nevertheless, UAVs are certainly here to stay. Economically advanced nations are leading the trend of replacing manned aircraft with UAVs, but that trend is gradually spreading to other countries as well. U.S. drones in Iraq and Afghanistan have clocked up more than a million flight hours over the past decade:

In several countries, the reconnaissance fleet already consists solely of UAVs. The range of drones that can be used for these purposes is potentially very broad, from micro- and mini-UAVs to hypersonic



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Former U.S. defense secretary Robert Gates may well have been right when he said back in 2009 that the new F-35 fighter could turn out to be the last manned American attack aircraft.

Role of Unmanned Aircraft in Present Conditions

In order to understand the role of UAVs, one must first understand the model of combat operations in the twenty-first century. The world's most advanced armies use UAVs as an integral part of a comprehensive centralized reconnaissance system. Simply discovering the targets is no longer enough. Their coordinates must be determined with sufficient precision to enable the use of modern weapons systems. This is why reconnaissance systems are evolving into reconnaissance-and-attack systems. The ongoing R&D process also involves the development of comprehensive automated reconnaissance, communication, and target designation systems.

The main uses which UAVs are currently being put to include optical-electronic, radar, and combined reconnaissance (monitoring); delivering cargos; relaying communication signals; and attacking targets. In particular, UAVs have proved much more suitable than manned aircraft for such tasks as comprehensive reconnaissance, optical-electronic reconnaissance, signal relay, mine detection, target designation, and pipeline and railway diagnostics. In addition, UAVs can illuminate the target with lasers for laser-guided artillery projectiles; help assess the damage; search and destroy individual targets, etc.

One of the biggest advantages offered by UAVs is that they do not require special airfields with expensive infrastructure. Also, the loss of a UAV does not mean losing the pilot, which is almost inevitably the case with traditional aircraft. Finally, lengthy and complex UAV missions are not affected by such a serious factor as pilot fatigue.

To summarize, there are several important advantages offered by UAVs compared with manned aircraft. The loss of a UAV never leads to the loss of its crew, which is especially important during limited and local conflicts; UAVs can achieve the same objectives at a fraction of the cost of traditional aircraft; they are less easy to spot; they are more maneuverable, and they have better survivability:

At the same time, for all the advantages of using UAV to support ground troops, they have certain limitations. If all the sides of the conflict were to start using large numbers of UAVs, this could partially or even completely disorganize air traffic control over the combat theater. The complexities

⁵⁴⁴ UAVs from the MQ-9 *Reaper* to the WJ-600 *Herald* a New Era // RUVSA. URL: <http://ruvsa.com/reports/mq9/> (archived).

of coordinating UAV missions between the different armed services and agencies will be further compounded if the enemy also begins to use its own UAVs, which will turn into a kind of flying mines. If we also take into account the adversary's measures against UAV control systems, including attempts to take control of those systems, either covertly or openly, the consequences could be unpredictable⁵⁴⁵.

The countries which have achieved the most advanced UAV capability include the United States, Israel, France, Germany, Britain, and China. More than 250 UAV systems are currently being developed in 32 countries. As of mid-2012, the armed forces of the world's most advanced countries included about 3,200 weapons complexes equipped with 10,200 tactical, operational and strategic UAVs. Under the Pentagon's plans for the next three decades, the number of UAVs in service with the U.S. armed forces is expected to quadruple to 28,000. Currently, the most popular UAVs are as follows:

- in the 25km range tactical category: the U.S.-made *Dragon Eye* and RQ-11 *Raven*, and Israel's *Bird Eye* and *Sky Lark*;
- in the 100km range tactical category: the U.S.-made *Scan Eagle*, MQ-8B *Fire Scout*, and Israel's *I-VIEW*;
- in the 500km range operational category: the American RQ-1 *Predator* and Israel's *Heron-TP* and *Searcher*;
- in the strategic category: the RQ-4 *Global Hawk* (USA).

The world's most mass-produced UAV is the *Predator*. It can achieve a speed of 120km/h at an altitude of 3 km to 8 km, and stay aloft for 24 hours at a time. It can transmit high-resolution imagery in real time. The *Predator* can be equipped with *Hellfire* missiles to destroy individual targets, including buildings, fortifications, cars, and groups of people.

Russian UAVs

In recent years the Russian leadership has come to regard UAV research and development as an important priority. It must be recognized that Russia has lost its world leadership in unmanned aviation over the past 20 years. In the 1960s to 1980s the Soviet Union had some of the world's most advanced UAVs. In the period between 1976 and 1989 it had produced 950 Tu-143 unmanned aircraft, which still remains an unbeaten world record. But Soviet interest in UAVs began to wane in the late 1980s, when the Stroy R&D program was all but frozen. Nevertheless, the Russian industry has retained some capability in this area, and the financing being allocated by the government to defense procurement, as well as growing civilian uses of UAVs, can generate sufficient demand in the coming years. In addition, Russia has already put in place the necessary organizational, planning, and regulatory framework to facilitate UAV research and development. That framework includes the Inter-agency Concept of Developing Future UAV Systems by 2025.

According to existing documents, the demand of the Russian armed forces for UAVs is estimated at 2,000 long-range (over 500km), medium-range (up to 500km), shorter-range (up to 100km), and

⁵⁴⁵ UAVs from the MQ-9 *Reaper* to the WJ-600 *Herald* a New Era // RUVSA. URL: <http://ruvsa.com/reports/mq9/> (archived).

short-range (up to 25km) UAVs. Meeting that demand will require more than 300 billion rubles to be spent by 2025.

At present, the Russian armed forces operate the following UAVs: *Strekoza* and *Grusha* in the short range; *Tipchak*, *Orlan-10*, *Eleron-10*, and *Stroy-PD* in the shorter range. In many ways, these systems are not just equal but actually superior to foreign competition. Part of the reason for that, incidentally, is that Russian engineers are very good at finding simple and effective solutions to complex technical and organizational problems.

The main difficulties the Russian UAV developers are currently facing mostly have to do with the fact that many of the necessary parts and components are not produced in Russia. This includes compact optical-electronic reconnaissance sensors, high-performance electronic components, high-capacity autonomous power sources, and piston engines in the 100-200hp range. The best way to address that problem would be for the government to develop and approve national programs in those areas.

In the past few years, the Russian armed forces have also begun to buy imported UAVs. To be fair, there has been less talk of buying foreign-made drones in bulk since the change of leadership at the Ministry of Defense (MoD) in November 2012. What is more, the new MoD leadership has designated the development of Russia's own UAVs as an important priority and set up a special ministry division in charge of innovative R&D.

In fact, foreign-made UAVs, which have been designed for a certain range of climates, sometimes cannot be reliably operated in the Russian climate. For example, Israeli UAVs, which are very popular with international customers thanks to their good electronics and software, have acquitted themselves very well in southern latitudes. But they are unlikely to work so well in the cold Russian climate. Another important consideration is that foreign suppliers equip the systems destined for Russia only with optical observation systems. They are reluctant to sell us their radars, radio-electronic reconnaissance, and electronic jamming systems used on military drones. Optical systems alone tend to be of little use in Russia's northern latitudes, where clouds, rain, and snow are the rule rather than an exception. This is why UAVs equipped only with optical reconnaissance systems would be a lot less useful in Russia than they are in the Persian Gulf.

Meanwhile, the Russian developers of non-military drones have their own factors to consider. Many applications, such as Earth imaging, monitoring borders and communications, and signal registration, can be performed by UAVs at a fraction of the cost of traditional aircraft or satellite systems. The development of non-military systems is also being facilitated by the miniaturization and falling prices of electronics.

Nevertheless, three key obstacles still remain in this area. The technical problem is that potential customers are interested not in UAVs as such – even if these drones have excellent specifications – but complete systems which can perform certain functions without requiring complicated and expensive maintenance. The second problem is structural, though it is related to the first. Most of the commercial customers would prefer to buy services (for example, flight hours) from a specialized company rather than buy and operate the drones themselves.

Clearly, the first and the second obstacle can both be overcome as large industrial companies that have the necessary resources and expertise expand into civilian drones. The third problem facing commercial drones is a lot more difficult. It boils down to the absence of the necessary laws and regulations to obtain certification for civilian UAVs and integrate them into the existing air traffic control systems. This particular problem has not been fully resolved anywhere in the world, although significant efforts are being made to identify possible solutions. There are two alternative concepts for integrating UAVs into air traffic control systems. The first is to agree that drones should comply with all the requirements for traditional aircraft, including, for example, identification and collision-avoidance systems. The second is to allocate special zones for UAV flights. Many experts believe that the first concept will eventually prevail, making life more difficult for UAV makers. In any event, unhindered development of civilian (as well as military) drones will require certain changes to be made to the Air Code of the Russian Federation, as well as all the rules and regulations governing the use of Russian airspace.

Meanwhile, many uniformed and law-enforcement agencies, and not just the MoD, are already buying large numbers of drones, without waiting for the necessary laws and regulations to be put in place. These agencies include the Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation (including its special task forces and the border service) and the Emergencies Ministry; both of them need drones to perform some critically important tasks. The procurement policy of nonmilitary customers is different from the MoD's policy. These customers tend to prefer cheap and reliable systems that are easy to operate.

Outlook for Unmanned Aviation

In the future, new UAV models are expected to have lower radar, optical, and infrared visibility; greater range and autonomy; improved payload capacity, and more compact size for miniature drones.

Developers are focusing their efforts on several UAV categories. The most important of them is attack drones:

The priorities here include developing a reliable system of target identification in autonomous flight mode; developing a jamming-resilient system of communications between manned aircraft and drones; and creating an onboard information processing system. This type of drones will mainly be used for conducting aerial reconnaissance operations and delivering air strikes against stationary objects, especially air defense systems. At some later point these drones can be improved to give them the ability to take out mobile targets on the ground⁵⁴⁶.

The Americans have been using their *Predator* drones in the Middle East for more than a decade. These UAVs have killed hundreds of Al-Qaeda⁵⁴⁷ and Taliban fighters. The *Predator's* range and payload, however, are very limited, so the drone is only suitable for counterinsurgency warfare.

⁵⁴⁶ Blinkov Y. Prospects for the Development of Unmanned Aviation in the Leading NATO Countries // *Foreign Military Review Journal*. №12, 2012. P. 54-58 (in Russ.).

⁵⁴⁷ hereafter – terrorist organization, banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

The MQ-9 *Reaper*, which has recently entered into service, is a much more capable system. The most advanced drone currently being developed is the *X-47B*, which incorporates stealth technologies and will not be far behind traditional combat aircraft in terms of its performance characteristics.

This UAV has several important distinctions. First, it can operate in a fully autonomous mode, without the assistance of a human operator. It relies on its own artificial intelligence to adjust its route and build new flight trajectories. The human operator only needs to designate the target, and the drone then chooses its own route to it using satellite navigation. Second, since the drone is carrier-based, there is no need to seek other countries' permission to use their airfields. Third, the drone has low radar visibility, similarly to the F-35C carrier-based fifth-generation fighter. As a result, it can operate in areas heavily protected by the adversary's air defenses.

Work on the *X-47B* project began in May 2010, when the U.S. Navy resumed the development of a stealth reconnaissance and attack system. By the end of 2018 the system will be capable of working in coordination with manned carrier-based aircraft as part of an aircraft carrier squadron. Carriers such as the USS *Nimitz* or the USS *Gerald R. Ford* will be equipped with four to six drones of this type, which will be able to operate autonomously and stay aloft for 11-14 hours without refueling. The drones will also be able to refuel in mid-air. They are being designed to work in areas heavily protected by the adversary's air defenses, which means that they will have low radar visibility, similar to the carrier-based version of the F-35S fifth-generation fighter.

Finally, the United States is also developing the *T-RAM* attack micro-UAV, a non-reusable craft which will carry a 40mm grenade.

The U.S. attack drones program is being closely watched by the leading European aerospace companies. No one in Europe wants the United States to acquire too great an edge in the latest technologies that will shape future warfare. The Europeans also regard UAVs as a good replacement for their traditional combat aircraft; the European fleets of such aircraft continue to shrink, while losses of aircraft and pilots are becoming increasingly unacceptable. For counterinsurgency operations and small classical wars (such as the one in Libya) drones could prove the most suitable weapon, and it is very unlikely that Europe will ever wage a full-scale war on its own. Germany is currently developing its own tactical attack UAV called *Barracuda*; the drone is expected to become the European equivalent of the *Predator*. The French are also developing an attack drone. On December 1, 2012 they tested a demonstrator prototype of the *nEUROn*, a European stealth attack UAV, at the Istres testing range. The drone is being positioned as Europe's primary attack UAV, and is roughly similar to the *X-47B* in terms of its capability. Some experts say, however, that the project may never reach mass production because it is too complex and expensive.

In addition to the *nEUROn* program, France's Dassault Aviation and Britain's BAE Systems are looking into the possibility of developing a future Anglo-French attack UAV, as well as a medium-altitude drone capable of staying aloft for long periods of time:

Naturally, China has also joined the UAV race. It is already far ahead of Europe in that regard, and gaining rapidly on the United States and Israel. In addition to reconnaissance UAVs, the Chinese are also developing attack drones, possibly in an effort to compensate for the remaining gap between

China and the leading military powers in traditional aircraft capability. The Chinese *WJ-600* attack drone is truly unique in many respects; even the United States and Israel do not have anything similar.

The UAV is designed to gather intelligence, wage radio-electronic warfare, and attack targets on the ground. It can carry at least two air-to-surface missiles. Another Chinese drone, which is much smaller than the *WJ-600*, is the *Ilong* (the *Pterodactyl*). Judging from its outward appearance, the craft is an exact copy of the *Predator*, although the Americans have not granted a production license for the *Predator* even to their closest allies, let alone China. The Chinese also have the *CH-3*, a smaller attack drone with an impressive payload capability of 640 kg. As for reconnaissance UAVs, China unveiled a strategic drone similar to the *Global Hawk* back in 2009. Four years previously the Chinese also demonstrated the *Anjian* UAV at an air show in Zhuhai. The drone was described as a supersonic (or even hypersonic) unmanned fighter⁵⁴⁸.

It must be said that China is perfectly aware of the need to integrate its reconnaissance UAVs with offensive weapons systems:

In particular, the *WS-2* multiple launch rocket system (which has the longest range in the world) includes drones which provide the batteries with reconnaissance data. There have also been reports that a future Chinese main battle tank will be equipped with its “personal” drone. It would be a veritable breakthrough in UAV technology if a proper unmanned fighter aircraft were to be developed; such a weapon would largely devalue all the manned fifth-generation fighters⁵⁴⁹.

The Russian armed forces’ requirement for attack drones in the period until 2025 is estimated at about 50 units. In 2011 the *Vega* Radio Technology Concern, which has been designated as Russia’s main developer of UAVs, demonstrated a prototype of a medium-range reconnaissance and attack UAV developed by the Luch design bureau, a *Vega* division based in Rybinsk. The most important part in the development of UAV systems is processing the information gathered by the drone and supplying it to the end user rather than building the robotic carrier itself. This is why *Vega* regards training specialist operators who perform all these tasks as an important priority. Also, in 2011 the MoD signed a contract for the development and manufacture of reconnaissance and attack drones with the *Sokol* design bureau (based in Kazan) and *Tranzas* (St Petersburg). First tests of the new UAVs are expected in 2014. Sukhoi, a leading Russian designer of fighter jets, is also involved in the development of a future heavy attack UAV. NPK *Irkut* (one of the manufacturers of *Sukhoi* jets) is developing a prototype which should be ready in 2015.

Another important priority in the development of UAVs is:

...to develop new-generation unmanned reconnaissance and attack systems capable of defeating the adversary’s air defenses. The preferred solution here is to have large numbers of stealth reconnaissance drones which can stay aloft for days at a time, conduct reconnaissance missions in all weather conditions, and relay communication signals. The communication channels used for these UAVs must have sufficient bandwidth to transmit high-definition imagery and guide high-precision

⁵⁴⁸ UAVs from the MQ-9 *Reaper* to the WJ-600 *Herald* a New Era // RUVSA. URL: <http://ruvsa.com/reports/mq9/> (archived).

⁵⁴⁹ Ibid.

ammunition carried by the attack drones. The future high-altitude UAVs should also be able to stay aloft for more than 24 hours. Using drones at altitudes of over 1215km offers a number of advantages, including the ability to monitor large areas and maintain communication via direct line of sight. Besides, there is no contrail at such altitudes, which makes the drone more difficult to spot. Finally, there is less of a chance of accidents (since the drones remain above weather fronts), collisions (most other aircraft fly far below), and destruction of the craft by the adversary's air defenses⁵⁵⁰.

The United States has the most advanced R&D programs in this area. One of the next-generation multirole UAVs currently being developed there is the MQ-X, which will replace the MQ-1 *Predator* and the MQ-9 *Reaper*.

Another interesting new area of drone R&D is UAVs designed to search and destroy other UAVs. Unmanned aerial vehicles are currently being developed in many countries all round the world. This is why back in the mid-2000s the Pentagon's DARPA agency launched the *Peregrine UAV Killer* project. The team working on the project is aiming to produce a small, cheap, and resilient craft capable of destroying all types of the adversary's UAVs:

Yet, another promising area is ultra-light flying robots. Such UAVs are all but invulnerable in mid-flight because a small airplane flying at an altitude of just a few hundred meters is almost impossible to destroy. It can be destroyed by a bullet fired from a pistol, but actually hitting it is next to impossible even using a sniper rifle. The smallest of the existing UAVs is a 33cm U.S. drone called *WASP*. It weighs only 200 grams, and can be launched into the air manually, just like a toy plane. The drone is equipped with two tiny video cameras which can transmit imagery to the operator in real time. The craft is controlled by an on-board computer using a GPS signal. It is propelled by an electric motor fed by a small battery, which is recharged in mid-flight using solar panels⁵⁵¹.

Israel is also developing similar UAVs. The Israeli armed forces are already using the *Skylark* drone, which is launched into the air manually. Despite its small size, the drone can monitor a territory of up to 10km² and stay aloft for up to 90 minutes. The imagery it transmits is good enough to discern individual people from an altitude of several hundred meters. Russian developers are also conducting projects in this area.

Meanwhile, American UAV programs also include the development of an unmanned helicopter. The project is led by *Boeing*, which decided to use the existing design of the AH-6J *Little Bird* helicopter as a starting point rather than designing a new drone from scratch. A similar project to refit an existing helicopter into an unmanned craft is the UH-1 *Huey*, which will be equipped with the Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System (APKWS).

In Russia, the *Vertolety Rossii* (Russian Helicopters) holding company is working on a defense procurement contract to develop several helicopter-type UAVs in different range categories.

⁵⁵⁰ Blinkov Y. Prospects for the Development of Unmanned Aviation in the Leading NATO Countries // *Foreign Military Review Journal*. №12, 2012. P. 54-58 (in Russ.).

⁵⁵¹ UAVs – Weapons of the Future // Lenta.ru. URL: <http://www.lenta.ru/news/army/103042/UAVs> (in Russ; archived).

The capabilities and features of unmanned aerial vehicles in the longer term are unclear. Obviously, the current trends – i.e. miniaturization of the drones and their weaponry, intellectualization, and the development of the theory and practice of group action – will continue into the foreseeable future. It is important that there are no fundamental physical barriers on that path.

The first important point is that the size of a manned craft is ultimately determined by the size of the pilot. An unmanned vehicle can be made as small as technology allows. At some point, the size of such vehicles could reach the nanometer range.

The second point is that the effectiveness of a weapon system benefits more from greater precision than from greater firepower. If a target can be hit with an accuracy of several centimeters, large amounts of explosives could become unnecessary. Of course, there will still be protected targets, such as underground bunkers, and they will require special ammunition to take them out. But some of the targets could be destroyed by using the kinetic energy of the projectile, or disabled by impact on their vulnerable critical parts.

Third, there are no obvious limits to the intellectual capacity of unmanned systems, since there are no fundamental limits to the productivity of ICT-systems. Sustainable progress is being made in such crucial areas as image recognition and learning systems.

Fourth, in recent years researchers have been working hard on the theory and practice of military network super-systems as a means of creating distributed intelligence. To summarize, air defense systems will sooner or later have to face aggressive, well-armed, and resilient groups of drones. Thanks to their collective distributed intelligence, these groups will act as parts of a single whole. They will be able to analyze the situation to the same standard of accuracy as humans, only faster. Human operators may be part of their control systems, adding an element of creativity and unpredictability. It is also obvious that cost efficiency will be an important requirement for all future UAVs, so developers will gradually abandon unnecessarily stringent requirements relating to the drones' payload capacity and the length of time they can stay in the air.

PART VII. FORECASTING GLOBAL SECURITY



CHAPTER 29.

TIMES WE DO NOT CHOOSE: LEADING POWERS, INTENSE RIVALRIES AND GLOBAL SECURITY LANDSCAPE

Igor Istomin

The last decade witnessed major shifts in international politics that undermined preceding expectations regarding global security landscape. The scope of these changes questions our ability to predict major strategic trends. It reinforces skepticism regarding predictability in international politics⁵⁵². Nevertheless, closer examination of this record provides valuable lessons, incentivizing better forecasting in this field. Through careful exploration of the past, one can learn that future is never just a repetition of the present.

After the Cold War, scholars and pundits professed the demise of great power politics and interstate conflicts. Despite recurring quarrels on various issues between national capitals, academic debates and official security documents treated major wars as largely obsolete due to the *rise of globalization*⁵⁵³. Instead, they cautioned against the risks caused by transnational spillovers from areas with weak and limited statehood⁵⁵⁴. They brought to the forefront threats arising from terrorist activity, migration flows and proliferation of radical ideologies. Concerns regarding the roots of these dangers drew attention to the economic and social hardships in the least fortunate countries. They resulted in securitization of poverty, hunger and deprivation as underlining causes of transnational threats⁵⁵⁵.

Climate change emerged as another source of insecurity that diverted international agenda away from military threats. Its positioning as a global challenge incentivized adoption of the discourse of shared responsibility. Nevertheless, states immediately engaged in intense haggling over *burden-sharing* when faced with the calls to address it. Moreover, efforts in climate change mitigation and adaptation were used as sources of competitive advantage in international politics.

None of these issues disappeared by the mid-2020s and in some areas the situation only deteriorated throughout the first quarter of the 21st century. However, their role in international security debates significantly diminished. Concerns over interstate competition and prospects of major wars reemerged. Their shadow subdued other challenges even for those states that remain on the sidelines of the rising tension.

These transitions alert against treating security as a stable category, demonstrating its evolving meanings due to the shifts in perceptions of relevant international actors⁵⁵⁶. They also caution against extrapolation of current trends. Things that seemed unthinkable at one point become imminent

⁵⁵² Bernstein S. et al. God gave physics the easy problems: Adapting social science to an unpredictable world // *European Journal of International Relations*. 2000. Vol. 6. № 1. p. 43-76; Tetlock P. E. *Expert Political Judgment: How Good Is It? How Can We Know?* Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005.

⁵⁵³ See, for example, Mueller J. *Retreat from doomsday: The obsolescence of major war*. N.Y.: Basic Books, 1989; Pinker S. *The better angels of our nature: The decline of violence in history and its causes*. N.Y.: Penguin, 2011; Goldstein J. S. *Winning the war on war: The decline of armed conflict worldwide*. N.Y.: Penguin, 2012.

⁵⁵⁴ Patrick S. *Weak links: fragile states, global threats, and international security*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011.

⁵⁵⁵ Paris R. *Human security: paradigm shift or hot air?* // *International security*. 2001. Vol. 26. № 2. P. 87-102.

⁵⁵⁶ Buzan B., Weaver O., de Wilde J. *Security: A New Framework for Analysis*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 1998.

relatively shortly in historical terms. Overall, observed failures in forecasting security agendas draw attention to the importance of structural context in which states identify threats for themselves and seek remedies against them.

This chapter strives to examine potential developments in international security landscape by the early 2030s building upon long-term historical patterns in this area and predominant explanations of interstate relations. It claims that intense rivalries between leading powers are likely to continue in mid-term, increasing probability of major wars. However, such confrontations will hardly reach the magnitude of general collision similar to the First or the Second World War. The sequence of wars in the mid-19th serves as a more probable analogy for comparison.

The next two sections establish theoretical and historical foundations for forecasting international security. The first of those explain patterns of transition between periods of relative interstate calm and intense rivalries between leading powers. The second, explores specific reasons that trigger major wars as the most consequential form of confrontation. Then, I examine the state of international politics in the mid-2020s, establishing a clear reference for forecasting. The following section outlines general scenarios for the evolution of global security landscape by early 2030s. The chapter concludes with discussion of specific contingencies threatening the prospects of a major war within the established timeframe.

Patterns of Change in Security Landscape

Oscillation between relative calm in interstate relations and intense rivalries, similar to the one we observed in the last three and a half decades, is not atypical throughout history. It fosters recurring cycles in international politics, which provide a *rough clue* for forecasting changes and continuities in security landscape, even if it does not allow specific predictions regarding individual events. Their repetition is due to the fact that each of the two phases establishes prerequisites for the other.

Periods of forceful confrontation usually correspond to drastic changes in material capabilities among leading powers. These shifts are painful for previously dominant states that face decline in their international standing. They often seek to arrest this worrisome trend by undermining the rise of potential competitors. Such attempts provoke rebuttal from the latter, launching spirals of escalation. This dynamic creates a precondition for major wars that involve two or more leading powers and reshape international orders⁵⁵⁷.

However, competition between leading powers is enormously exhaustive. It weakens not only the vanquished, but also the vanquisher⁵⁵⁸. Their mutual attrition paves the way for extended rapprochement. As states face threats not only from foreign foes, but also from domestic fractures and social discontent, they tame their international designs and settle differences, in order to address challenges from within. Due to the popular pressures internal development can elevate to the status of the highest security priority. This shift of attention reinforces general peace in international system.

⁵⁵⁷ Gilpin R. War and change in world politics. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981; Copeland D. C. The origins of major war. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

⁵⁵⁸ Angell N. The great illusion; a study of the relation of military power in nations to their economic and social advantage. N.Y., London: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1910.

In cases of less exhaustive states the demise in interstate competition fosters excessive security establishments to seek justification for their preservation. It often incentivizes inflation of threats through raising concerns regarding distant and non-existential challenges and leads to increasing voluntarism in foreign policies. Expanding ambitions of these powers aggravate others, preparing grounds for acute disagreements. As aspirations of states broaden, the chances that they will run into interests of their *peers* increase.

Such disputes reemerge at the forefront as the exhaustion from preceding struggle between leading powers subsides. Those states that spent periods of relative calm to put their house in order emerge reinforced. Meanwhile, leading powers that waste permissive conditions of general peace on pursuing excessive ambitions decline. Previously noted redistribution of material capabilities emerges from this dynamic. Similarly, as intense rivalries establish preconditions for *détentes*, long peace supplies fuel for subsequent struggles.

This dynamic is likely to continue into the future as long as states persist as the main form of political organization of human beings and their policies continue to be motivated by distributive concerns. Under these circumstances even anxiety over common threats falls into shadow of insecurity caused by interstate jealousy. Illustratively, COVID pandemics, allegedly endangering humanity as a species in 2020, did not foster general rapprochement across national boundaries rather provided fuel for mutual suspicions and accusations.

Henceforth, it was naive to treat relief from great power rivalries after the demise of the bipolar confrontation as the “end of history” and prologue for *perpetual peace*. Instead, it followed the established historical pattern. The one that manifested itself, for example, when Napoleonic wars set the stage for the tranquility of the *European concert*. The latter prepared hostilities among leading powers from 1850s to early 1870s, which in its turn produced renewed equilibrium that survived until the First World War. Its destructiveness allowed the twenty-year *interbellum* followed by another global collision.

The one exception from these cycles was the Cold War, which started immediately after the most destructive military conflict in human history. Exhaustion from the Second World War did not prevent transition of the Soviet Union and the US from allies under anti-Hitler coalition into bitter opponents. However, memories from recent past played important role in discouraging direct clash between them. Leadership on both sides stayed immensely cautious, due to vivid personal recollections regarding the preceding conflict.

Their success in managing competition also proceeded from mutual insulation of the two superpowers, which limited the list of items to fight for. Unlike many other leading powers throughout preceding historical periods, they did not have extensive border, nor engaged in high volumes of trade. Thanks to the clear-cut division of Europe, which was the most valued prize for both, the Soviet Union and the United States restricted their struggle largely to areas where they had limited stakes. This diminished the chances for escalation of their confrontation into a major hot war.

However, relative peacefulness of that period elevates the dangers in the subsequent cycle of intense rivalries. The one that we are today. Assessment of the patterns of security competition between leading powers through the lenses of the Cold War provides a misleading sense of comfort. The temptation of drawing direct analogies should be weighed against the record of other historical periods, which did not happen to be so lucky in averting major wars.

Causes Behind Major Wars

The record of preceding centuries proves that intense rivalries often lead to major wars. The record of the Cold War demonstrates that confrontation between leading powers even if it sets preconditions does not make such wars imminent. Henceforth, the question of what does trigger such collisions is extremely important due to their gravity in international politics. It also needs to be accompanied by examination of reasons why certain states manage to stay out of these hostilities.

Historical textbooks somewhat disturb our view on international politics as they allocate such a large word count on armed conflicts. Meanwhile, they statistically speaking comprise rare events⁵⁵⁹. In other words, the number of armed conflicts that happen is small relative to the universe of potential cases in which they could have happened. In most instances states manage to settle their differences without direct resort to force, even if this eventuality always menaces over their calculations.

In its turn, major wars amount to only a small portion of all militarized interstate disputes. They constitute collisions that involve two or more leading powers in a direct armed struggle. Given their tremendous capabilities, these states face enormous devastation in a war with each other⁵⁶⁰. Therefore, occasional accidents or individual idiosyncrasies are insufficient to trigger them. Leading powers engage in major wars only under narrow circumstances. Students of international politics suggest three types of scenarios that can lead to them.

Some observers associate war initiation with opportunistic optimism, when states believe that winning is cheap and easy⁵⁶¹. This presumption is intuitively appealing, and it is valid for asymmetric wars between states significantly disparate in their capabilities. Even in these instances there is a large room for miscalculation. Meanwhile, the outcome of a war between peers is uncertain by definition, while fighting is tremendously demanding in finance, blood and political capital. Henceforth, major wars rarely proceed from optimistic delusions regarding certain triumphs.

Similarly, these conflicts cannot be explained by domestic reasons emphasized by proponents of the diversionary theory of war⁵⁶². This explanation claims that elites facing stiff internal dissent engage in militarized disputes to prolong their rule. It appeals to *rally around the flag* effect which envisages that struggle against external enemies solidifies popular support of national governments. Nevertheless, this explanation neglects that in such a scheme political leaders relinquish control over

⁵⁵⁹ Braumoeller B. F. Only the dead: the persistence of war in the modern age. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2019.

⁵⁶⁰ Mearsheimer J. J. War and international politics // International Security. 2025. Vol. 49. № 4. P. 7-36.

⁵⁶¹ Van Evera S. Causes of war: Power and the roots of conflict. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1999.

⁵⁶² Russett B. Economic decline, electoral pressure, and the initiation of interstate conflict // Prisoners of war. ed. C. Gochman and A. N. Sabrosky. Lexington, MA: D.C. Heath, 1990. P. 123-140; Hagan J. D. Diversionary theory of war in foreign policy analysis // Oxford Research Encyclopedia of Politics. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2017.

their fates to generals. In other words, it presumes that to stay in power, they are eager to effectively give it up.

Historical record demonstrates that general public is often more hardline in times of an acute crisis, whereas political leaders remain cautious. Although short victorious wars boost popularity of governments, collisions between leading powers rarely follow such script. Instead, they frequently pave way for political revolutions. Elected governments routinely face defeat in the ensuing polls after military victories⁵⁶³. Thus, initiating a war against another leading power for addressing difficulties at home is both an overkill and an unjustifiable gamble.

This leads to the ultimate explanation of rationales behind major wars. It focuses on pessimistic anxiety about deteriorating strategic environment and frantic efforts to prevent further worsening of one's international standing⁵⁶⁴. In other words, this explanation relies on presumption that fear rather than greed is the primary motivation in confrontation among peers. This explanation claims that states that initiate a conflict do not expect imminent success, but anticipate that avoiding it would benefit their opponents.

Preventive argument becomes especially tempting if states believe that some form of collision is anyway inevitable. This conviction strengthens as tensions build up through prolonged periods of brinkmanship. Under increasing desperation states tend to fear losses from inaction more than losses from the collision. Initiating a war in this context comprises an attempt to take fate in one's own hands rather than passively observing daunting dynamics.

Preventive logic seems counterintuitive as it envisages that states launch hostilities even when they do not expect to win a war. However, it fits findings in cognitive psychology portraying humans as largely conservative and risk-averse, but also extremely concerned regarding preservation of their previous possessions and standings⁵⁶⁵. It also outcompetes opportunistic and diversionary explanations in matching historical record packed with hasty instances of war initiation.

For example, in 1812 Napoleon invaded Russia despite unresolved guerrilla in Spain. If he had not believed that the *window of opportunities* was closing, it would have been more reasonable for him to finish off the rebellion before taking on a new opponent. However, he believed that France was running out of clock before Tsar Alexander I acquires preeminent military force through aligning with Britain. Similarly, Germany launched an all-European war in 1914, although it acknowledged deficiencies in its infamous *Schlieffen plan*, as it feared that in a next couple of years Russo-French alliance would become overwhelmingly strong⁵⁶⁶.

These examples draw attention to one additional factor which is sometimes omitted from debates on war-initiation and that is alliances. History knows multiple instances of major wars between just two

⁵⁶³ The fall of Winston Churchill and British conservatives after the surrender of Nazi Germany in 1945 serves as an illustrative example.

⁵⁶⁴ Copeland D. C. The origins of major war. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2001.

⁵⁶⁵ Kahneman D., Tversky A. Prospect Theory: An Analysis of Decision under Risk // *Econometrica*. 1979. Vol. 47. No. 2. P. 263-292.

⁵⁶⁶ Fischer F. World Policy, World Power and German War Aims // *The Origins of the First World War: Great Power Rivalry and German War Aims*. London: Macmillan Education UK, 1984. P. 128-188.

leading powers. For example, neither Austro-Prussian war of 1866, nor Franco-Prussia war of 1870 escalated to the struggle between all European monarchs. However, the conflicts started in 1914 and 1937/1939⁵⁶⁷ expanded into the general collisions of global scale. This brings to the attention variability in geographic scope of conflicts that requires explanation.

The same destructiveness of major wars that undermines opportunistic logic of their initiation creates powerful incentives to stay out from the fight for states that do not have immediate bets in the dispute that fostered hostilities in the first place. They can even hope to benefit from exhaustion of those leading powers engaged in struggles while they continue to focus on internal development. This strategy is well known in international relations literature as buck-passing⁵⁶⁸.

If one of the sides in a major war acquires an upper hand, it often incentivizes those sitting on the fence to join it to acquire a share in the potential spoils. By its nature, this *bandwagoning* usually does not produce significant effect on the outcome of the conflict and it is usually confined to smaller states. In a most astonishing example of such opportunistic wickedness Saxony and Württemberg switched sides right in the middle of the Battle of the Nations in 1813, abandoning Napoleon for the winning coalition led by Russia.

However, security interests of states in many instances become interrelated. Given, insufficiency of their own capabilities to resist overwhelming threats they come into alignment with other like-minded powers. Under these circumstances, exhaustion of a formal or informal ally leaves states relying on it severely exposed in protecting their own interests. This concern can stimulate them to enter the war to reverse its course, even if they do not have substantial stake in it⁵⁶⁹.

Moreover, it can also tempt weaker states to provoke a conflict against a stronger foe so as to ensure entanglement of allied leading power on their side. As the latter cannot except their defeat for practical or reputational reasons, it faces a stark choice to join the fighting it did not intend to happen in the first place or to suffer a strategic loss in a conflict it did not take part in. Therefore, not only expansion of wars beyond their initial scope, but even their initiation partly depends upon the interconnectedness of security commitments in international politics at a given time.

Henceforth, in assessing probabilities of collisions among leading powers in the forthcoming years it becomes more important to examine their anxieties rather than ambitions. It also means that major wars can happen when neither side has clear edge nor feel prepared for them. This could make their policies seem irrational for observers, that compare outcomes of these clashes with a status quo ante. Meanwhile, states in taking decisions consider not so much their actual positions but expectations about possible futures. The correctness of their calculations can only be assessed against counterfactuals that did not materialize.

The World We Live in

⁵⁶⁷ Although, the German invasion of Poland is commonly treated as the beginning of the Second World War, Japanese attack on China preceded it by two years. Meanwhile, Soviet official rhetoric after dismemberment of Czechoslovakia in 1938 included references that the inter-imperialist war has already started.

⁵⁶⁸ Mearsheimer J. J. The tragedy of great power politics. N.Y.: WW Norton & Company, 2003.

⁵⁶⁹ Snyder G. H. Alliance politics. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2007.

Before examining possible scenarios, one needs to diagnose the current state of international politics, considering key variables that predefine patterns of competition and alignment in the world. The change in global security agenda over the last decade followed significant structural shifts. They fostered intense interstate rivalries but also imposed limitations on their extent.

The dominant trend that has defined transformation of a global security landscape in the last decade has been redistribution of material capabilities from the Western states to the rising powers. It remains a long-term process, which proceeds gradually and unevenly. Therefore, the West and especially the US retain significant leverage on the world stage. This is especially evident in military expenditures, as Washington continues to spend more than the next nine largest powers combinedly. However, the shift in capabilities is consistent through time and proceeds in parallel across various domains.

	2009	2014	2019	2024
G7	52.0%	45.3%	45.1%	44.3%
incl.:				
France	4.4%	3.6%	3.1%	2.8%
Germany	5.7%	4.9%	4.5%	4.2%
Japan	8.7%	6.1%	5.8%	3.6%
United Kingdom	4.0%	3.8%	3.2%	3.3%
United States	23.8%	21.9%	24.3%	26.2%
BRICS*	15.5%	21.9%	24.1%	25.8%*
incl.:				
China	8.5%	13.3%	16.5%	16.8%
India	2.2%	2.5%	3.2%	3.5%
Russia	2.0%	2.6%	1.9%	2.0%

Table 14. Share of selected states in global GDP (*Due to the enlargement of BRICS data for 2024 incorporates shares of new members – Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE)

Compiled by the author based on: World Bank Database (<https://data.worldbank.org/>)

As a result of the ongoing redistribution, four main players stand out as the leading powers given a combination of their capabilities and eagerness to pursue proactive strategies of global scale. These are Russia, China, India and the US. The EU has material prerequisites to join this club but lacks internal coherence to do so. Its external activities largely serve internal struggle between supranational authorities and national elites for political control over the integration entity.

Meanwhile, multiple other non-Western states become increasingly capable of projecting their interests beyond tight regional boundaries. The list includes countries, such as Brazil, Indonesia, Iran, Saudi Arabia, South Africa, Turkey and the UAE. Their renewed strength enables them to acquire greater influence on global stage through introduction of creative strategies and use of multilateral fora.

Back in 2007 at Munich Security Conference Russian President Vladimir Putin envisaged that rising centers of wealth would inevitably claim greater role in international politics⁵⁷⁰. By mid-2020s his prediction materialized. In line with the patterns discussed in previous sections, the West becomes increasingly desperate in attempts to arrest a shift towards multipolarity. It uses whole arsenal of measures including diplomatic stigmatization, economic coercion, military brinkmanship and proxy wars. Its assertive policies aggravated tensions with several non-Western powers, in particular, Russia and China.

	2009	2014	2019	2024
G7	64.9%	55.9%	54.0%	49.3%
incl.:				
France	2.8%	2.6%	2.6%	2.4%
Germany	2.4%	2.3%	2.6%	3.2%
Japan	1.9%	2.0%	2.0%	2.2%
United Kingdom	3.8%	3.4%	3.1%	2.9%
United States	51.1%	43.2%	41.2%	36.2%
BRICS*	13.1%	17.7%	19.8%	21.9%*
incl.:				
China	6.5%	9.6%	11.7%	11.9%
India	2.8%	3.0%	3.6%	3.1%
Russia	2.5%	3.6%	3.1%	5.6%

Table 15. Share of selected states in global military expenditures. (*Due to the enlargement of BRICS data for 2024 incorporates shares of new members – Egypt, Ethiopia, and Iran; the numbers of the UAE are unavailable for that year)

Compiled by the author based on: SIPRI military expenditures database (<https://milex.sipri.org/sipri>)

⁵⁷⁰ Putin V. Speech and the Following Discussion at the Munich Conference on Security Policy // President of Russia. February 10, 2007. URL: <http://en.kremlin.ru/events/president/transcripts/24034>

Nevertheless, the two categories are not politically homogenous nor monolithic. The West experiences heated haggling over burden sharing. The US and its allies, especially in Europe, demonstrate increasing divergence in threat perception. Meanwhile, rising powers, due to their growing foreign policy ambitions, inevitably enter disputes not only with the West, but also with each other. Border differences between China and India is the case in point. Therefore, states do not split into clearly demarcated polarizing blocks rather they retain flexibility in their alignments.

Two additional factors affect the global security landscape apart from redistribution of capabilities. These are the high levels of economic interdependence between states and domestic dissatisfaction within them. They modify patterns of competition and cooperation on international arena by influencing the scope of national interests and ability of leading powers to compete. However, their impact remains largely misunderstood by mainstream followers of outdated theories.

The advancement of globalization brought states in dense interconnection. Although the share of trade relative to GDP stopped growing from the late 2000s and even experienced temporal declines during Global Recession and COVID pandemics, it remains significant by historical measures (see, Figure 91). Moreover, one should consider the quality and not only quantity of interdependence, as transnational supply chains retain dominance in global production.

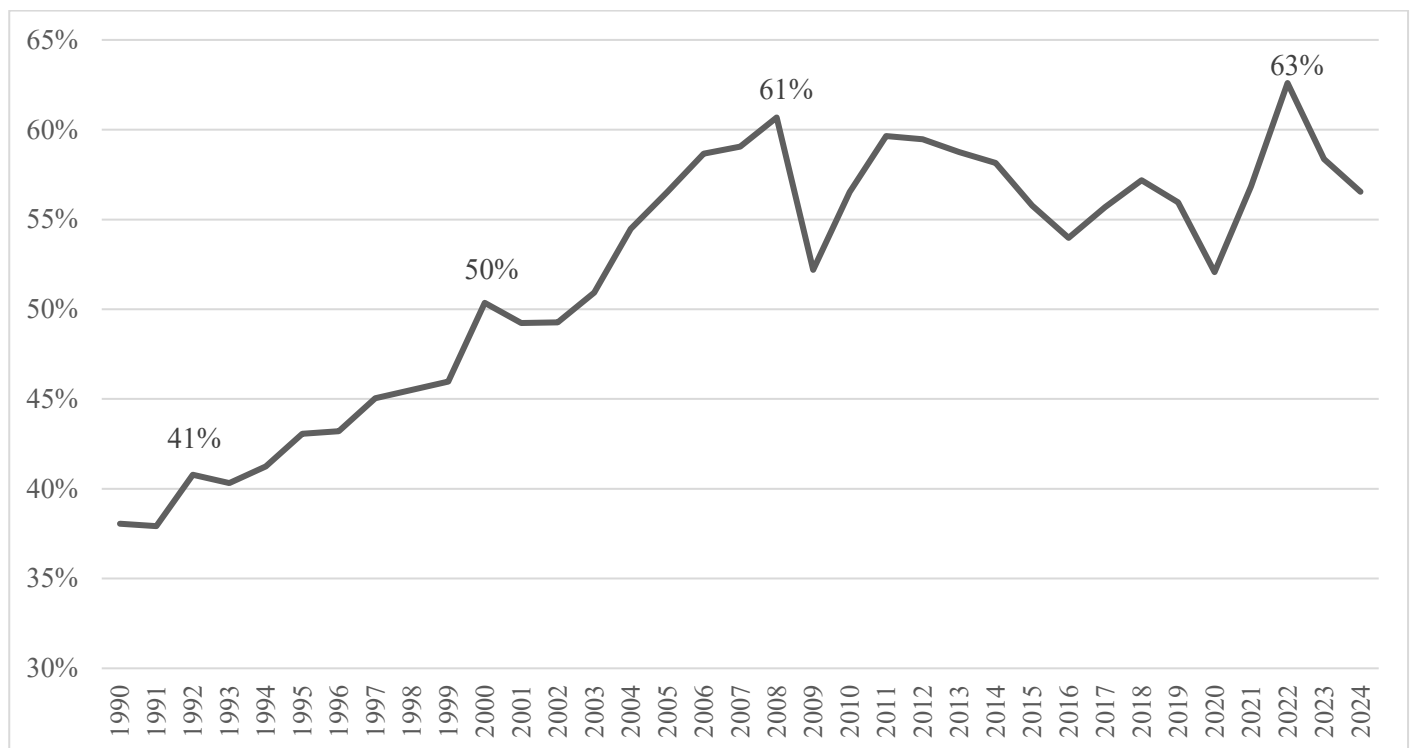


Figure 91. Share of trade relative to global GDP

Compiled by the author based on: World Bank Database (<https://data.worldbank.org/>)

For more than a century liberal theorists and ideologues alike professed that commercial interdependence tames political rivalries between states as it elevates the price of confrontation for them⁵⁷¹. However, these claims fail to recognize that it also increases reliance of states on common

⁵⁷¹ Angell N. The great illusion; a study of the relation of military power in nations to their economic and social advantage. N.Y., London: G. P. Putnam's sons, 1910.

regulation of economic exchanges. As the latter are never politically neutral and benefit some more than others, disagreements over these rules produce sources for friction. As a result, anxiety over access to foreign markets and suppliers add up to hostilities.

Moreover, interdependence produces non-linear consequences for economic coercion. While it augments the price of disruption in trade and investment, it also puts in place robust networks of connections via third parties that help bypass punitive measures introduced by some states against the others. The futility of economic coercion induces states to transition to other forms of pressure, including military ones. Therefore, commercial interdependence discourages escalation of tensions over trivial matters but stiffens struggle over the core ones.

Apart from increasingly competitive international environment, states also face significant challenges from within. Symptomatically, the number of internal armed conflicts (both internationalized and purely domestic) in the last 25 years dwarfed in comparison the number of collisions between states. The gap between them surged in the mid-2010s, reaching record levels by 2023–2024. Although external meddling sometimes plays a role in internal destabilization, the rise of the latter discloses the fragility of states from within.

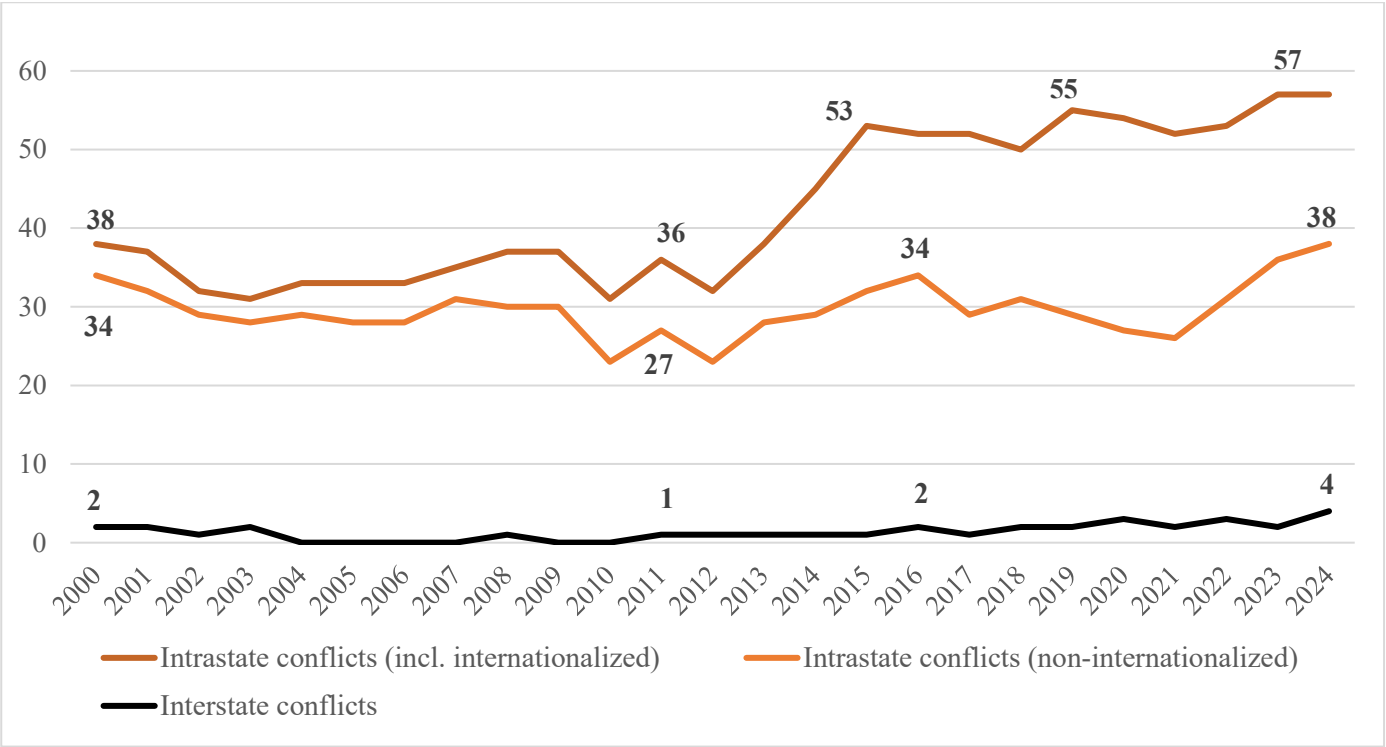


Figure 92. Number of armed conflicts by category per year
 Compiled by the author based on: UCDP/PRIO Armed Conflict Dataset
<https://ucdp.uu.se/downloads/index.html#armedconflict>

One of the previous sections examined limitations on attempts to divert attention from social grievance through assertive foreign policy. Internal fractures incentivize states to focus on domestic stability at the expense of their ability to compete internationally⁵⁷². Although it does not prevent

⁵⁷² Schweller R. L. Unanswered threats: Political constraints on the balance of power. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2010.

them from engaging in confrontation completely, it puts limits on the resources available for them, for example, restraining the extent of military establishments. Domestic concerns also precaution states from logrolling into solid coalitions which provide extensive guarantees of mutual assistance.

In sum, international politics appears to be increasingly contentious due to the growing differences within an increasing pool of states. They even instrumentalize non-state actors and transnational flows in their rivalries, despite previous claims that the latter threaten to degrade sovereign authorities and the leverage of leading powers. However, the very multiplicity of the sources of insecurity slackens the division of states in consolidated alliances and therefore partly ameliorates the intensity of confrontation.

Quo Vadis: Scenarios for Global Development

Patterns identified in previous sections along with the diagnosis of the current situation provide foundations for tentative conclusions regarding possible developments in international security environment by early 2030s. Given probabilistic nature of regularities in politics, it is preferable to organize them into alternative scenarios to account for remaining uncertainties.

The ongoing trends create clear prerequisites for further rise of international rivalries, including the very confrontation between leading powers, which previously led to major wars. However, no tendency continues endlessly rather reaching a breaking point at a certain historical moment. Therefore, the first question of the day which will shape the scope of potential scenarios is to explore to what extent the preceding developments will continue, or will we transition to a different phase in a cycle of rivalries and rapprochements.

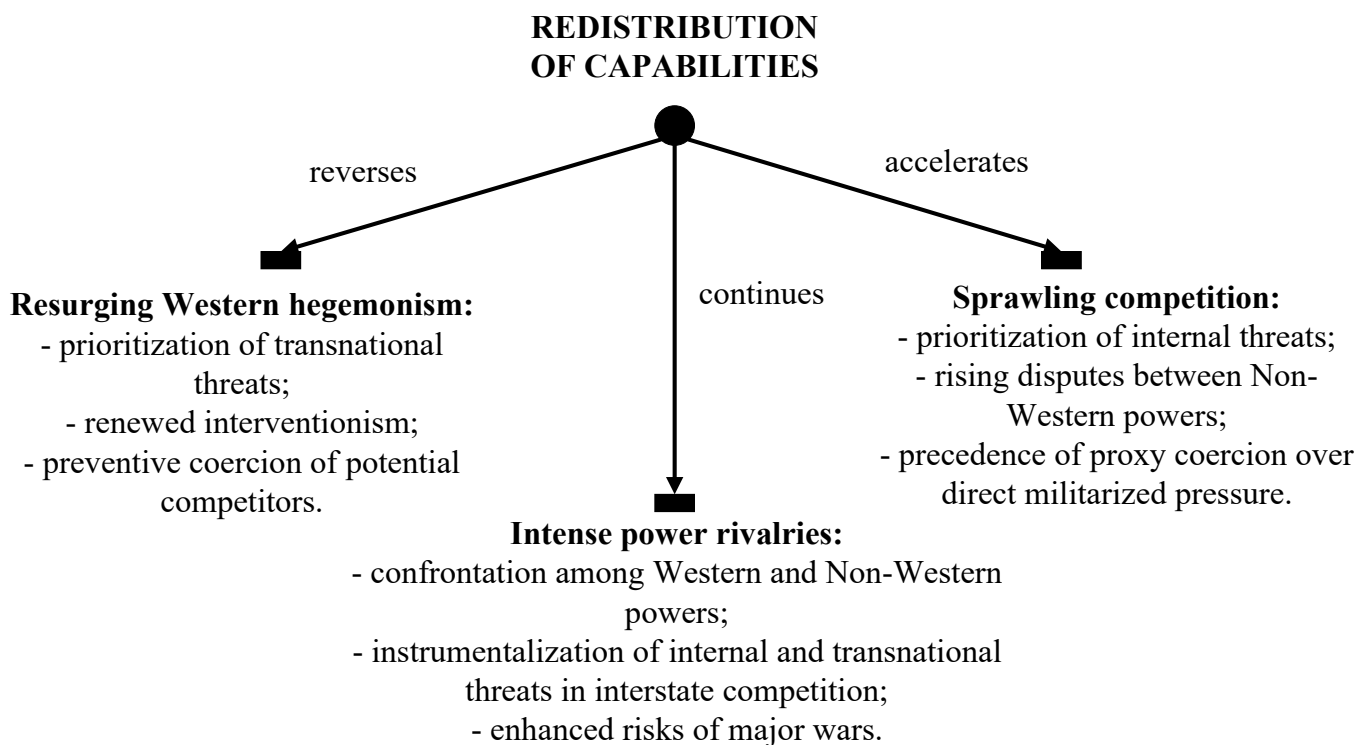


Figure 93. Basic scenarios for global security
Compiled by the author.

As intense rivalries are largely a product of redistribution of capabilities, arrest of the latter would reduce strains in international politics. Some Western authors entertain this scenario, claiming that it would lead to reestablishment of the US predominant position in international politics⁵⁷³. One should note that none of the American leaders, including Donald Trump, abandoned this goal. Building upon the record of previous decades even if it reduces the chances of a major war, this resurgence will foster the return of Western interventionism and harassment of dissenting states (similar to the one from 1990s to early 2010s).

Moreover, the US can emerge from the reversal of the power transition more revengeful and uncompromising than before. Washington would draw from history a lesson that it was too complicit and not enough ruthless after the collapse of the Soviet Union allowing peer competitors to resurface. It would be tempting for Washington to contrast Russia and China after the Cold War with Germany and Japan eliminated for good from the ranks of leading powers after the Second World War through prolonged occupation and intrusive external controls.

However, this instinct will compete with the task of policing areas of fragile statehood. The spillover of transnational threats would once again rise on the Western agenda due to the increased sensitivity to losses. Slowing in redistribution of capabilities would mean decrease in economic growth across non-Western world, which would make it more susceptible to extremist ideologies and terrorism. Lack of progress in fighting against deprivation would stimulate further rise in migration flows.

Due to the important role of the Chinese rise in redistribution of capabilities through previous years, its recent deceleration serves as a prescript towards this scenario. Economic growth in China slowed from around 10% fifteen years ago to roughly 5%. The rapid ageing of the Chinese population puts a hefty *demographic cap* on its potential revival. Notwithstanding these difficulties, Beijing's rise will likely continue way into the 2030s due to the acquired inertia. Moreover, other non-Western states, primarily India, would be eager to replace Beijing as locomotives of power transition.

On the other hand, the US faces its own challenges, including eroding industrial base, accumulating debt and fierce internal political struggles, which provoke speculations regarding forthcoming American collapse. Washington's allies, such as the EU, Japan and UK are in an even more precarious position. They play less of a role in maintaining global standing of the West, with the US remaining its ultimate champion. Therefore, acceleration of the American decline would have a paramount effect on a global balance.

For the first time in the last 500 years, it would produce a world in which all leading powers are non-Western. The main source of insecurity in this scenario would be renewed competition between them. As overarching concerns over American hegemonism obscure their dormant disagreements, the latter would remerge once the former subside. In other words, definitive US decline would not prevent further redistribution of power within the non-West, which in its turn would keep relations tenuous.

⁵⁷³ Beckley M. China's century? Why America's edge will endure // *International security*. 2011. Vol. 36. No. 3. P. 41-78; Brooks S. G., Wohlforth W. C. The myth of multipolarity: American power's staying power // *Foreign Affairs*. 2023. Vol. 102.

At least in mid-term perspective, rivalries in this scenario will likely remain less hostile than the current ones with the destabilization fostered by anxiety of Western powers. Non-Western powers will first focus on exploiting opportunities of American retrenchment. Moreover, their recent record of economic rise will leave them more satisfied and optimistic relative to the US and its allies that experience long-term decline. Finally, they boast an advantage of being less obsessed with ideological proselytism unlike the West, which cannot view its liberal model as anything but universal.

However, the chances that the US will repeat the fate of the Soviet Union by the 2030s are limited. The American economy retains strong competitive advantages in cutting technological fields, its population continues to grow, and its currency preserves central position in world finance. Despite political fractures, Washington pursues rather coherent policy on global arena. Therefore, the baseline scenario envisages that the American might will degrade but not disappear.

Therefore, redistribution of capabilities from the West to the rest is likely to continue incrementally even if progressively. This dynamic will provide strong preconditions for prolongation and aggravation of rivalries, providing fruitful grounds for interstate conflicts, including major wars. Short of those, it will envisage instrumentalization of all sources of leverage to acquire an edge in confrontation between leading powers.

As the previous section demonstrated economic interdependence and domestic dissatisfaction serve as the two key modifiers on interstate confrontation. Therefore, developments in these two areas can either reinforce or tame global insecurity in the forthcoming years, especially under conditions of continued or accelerated redistribution of capabilities among leading powers.

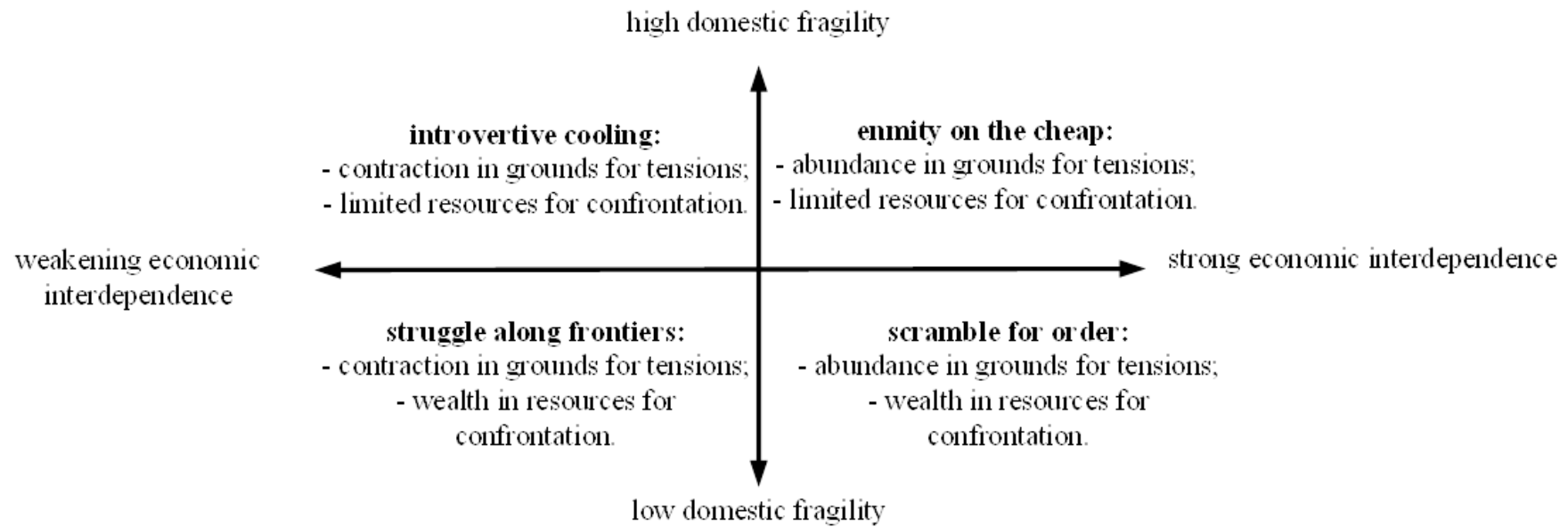


Figure 94. Effects of interdependence and internal politics on interstate relations
Compiled by the author.

Weakening economic interdependence would have a moderating effect on confrontation between leading powers by reducing their dependence on global markets. It seems likely development in the context of growing rivalries as states turn towards protectionism and import substitution. However, they can appear incapable of significantly reducing the ties of globalization due to the complexity of the modern forms of production and finance. Then, they would live with acute concerns regarding the rules in global economy, which would predetermine their wealth. The latter alternative is more probable in the timeframe till 2030s.

As for the prospects of internal fractures, they can further deteriorate given disruptive consequences of growth in technological innovations. Advancement in AI, automation and robotics foster social upheavals that consume substantial portion of national resources and attention of governments. Continuation of these tendencies would weaken power base of states to compete on international arena. Nevertheless, if such technological innovations bring an age of unprecedented wealth as some optimists suggest, it will provide additional resources for states to fight for their ambitions. So far this level of plentifulness seems remote.

As a result, the combination of two intervening variables produces four potential outcomes. The most probable one is *enmity on the cheap* where strong economic interdependence provides major grounds for confrontation between states but concerns over domestic fragility restrict their capacity. This outcome will nudge leading powers to apply creative ways to undermine opponents, including through meddling in their affairs or using proxies, but restrict exposure to military collisions. However, it does not fully preclude armed conflicts over core interests, especially, in instances of miscalculations.

Somewhat less likely is *scramble for order* outcome in which decrease in internal fragility enables states to compete more severely over the shape of common regulations and global markets. This is the most dangerous prospect in terms of potential grounds for major wars. It even provides incentives for logrolling of hostilities into a general clash, encompassing all or most of leading powers, similar to the First and Second World Wars.

The third most likely outcome is *introvertive cooling* when decrease in economic interdependence diminishes the need to fight over global matters, while heated internal fractures demand states to focus on their domestic business. These dynamics create the strongest headwinds against confrontation even in the context of major redistribution of capabilities. Therefore, it envisages somewhat less perilous circumstances than the other three combinations. This outcome introduces the most fertile preconditions for general peace under deglobalization.

Finally, the combination of weakening economic interdependence along with greater stability at home would provide grounds for prioritization of rivalries over local matters even if there is less risk of collision over global regulations or trade flows. In this outcome confrontation would most resemble historical patterns of hostilities over territories and boundaries, therefore it bears the name of *struggle along frontiers*. It is the least probable in the medium term.

Although high levels of domestic fragility will likely preserve certain pushback against intensification of interstate struggles in a foreseeable future, it is not clear to what extent it will be able to compensate the aggravating effects of redistribution of capabilities along with the remaining controversies over global regulations of economic interdependence. Therefore, it is important to examine specific contingencies in which leading powers will risk escalation into major wars by the 2030s.

Risks and Limitations of Future Escalation

Although intensification of rivalries between leading powers constitutes a baseline scenario going forward, confrontation can take multiple forms, rise to a different degree and acquire various geographic scopes. Cyberoperations, stigmatization of opponents via media, competing for deference from third parties and even interference in internal affairs has become routine instruments of interstate competition by the mid-2020s. There is no doubt they will remain in use in the forthcoming years amid rising tensions, but there is little evidence that any of them will provide decisive advantage against a committed opponent.

Economic coercion through sanctions, technological restrictions or *trade wars* features as the main tool used by leading powers to inflict damage on each other. Despite associated losses in wealth, it also has marginal effect on political calculations of states. As leading powers are enormously resilient entities, they sustain substantial harm when their core interests are at stake. The record of the Cold War testifies that intense rivalries can prolong for decades without resolution. Similarly, existing disagreements will likely continue unless leading powers pursue ultimate escalation to the armed struggle.

Therefore, the prospects of their military collisions arise as the most dreadful even if not the most probable risk for international security. Based on the existing composition of leading powers, there are three main hotspots in the world with serious risks of triggering a major war. These contingencies emerge from tensions between:

- China and India;
- China and the US;
- Russia and the West.

The first one most closely resembles the classical instances of intense rivalries, as it features two ambitious powers with a lengthy border and unresolved territorial disputes. They also compete over political influence in Asia and more generally across the *Global South*. Moreover, China and India heavily invest in their military might, which establishes preconditions for an acute arms race. Due to their geographic proximity, their relations will likely remain uneasy even in the case of deglobalization, exemplifying the *struggle along frontiers* model.

Although there is little prospect that the two states overcome their differences by 2030s, they are also unlikely to slide into a military collision. India in every likelihood will continue catching up against China but will still face a long road ahead. Despite its symbolic value, their disputed area in Himalayas remains remote from major political and economic centers of either power. Meanwhile,

Beijing faces more immediate threats from Washington. Overall, neither China, nor India will be in such a desperate condition envisaged by the preventive logic for initiating a major war.

Confrontation between China and the US despite significant geographic distance between the two is potentially more tenuous than between China and India. Washington views Beijing as its main competitor on global arena, which fosters severe hostility even in the absence of mutual territorial claims. As described in the previous section, sudden collapse of either power is unlikely. Therefore, they are destined to brinkmanship, especially if the prerequisites for the ‘scramble for order’ model materialize.

Disputes over Taiwan or South China Sea can produce a miscalculation in Washington over extent of Chinese commitments. This scenario comprises ingredients for spiraling into armed hostilities. Certain American analysts even played with an idea of provoking Beijing into conflict in this area in order to isolate it diplomatically and undermine its economy. However, high stakes in case of a direct military standoff between the two nuclear powers should make their decision-makers excessively cautious and chances of sleepwalking into a war slim.

A deep-seated optimism in Washington regarding its ability to outcompete potential opponents despite claims of American decline serves as an important guardrail against escalation of China–US rivalry into a direct military collision. The victories in the First and Second World War, collapse of the Soviet Union after the Cold War and prevailing in industrial contest with Japan in the 1980s reinforce US ideological faith in superiority of its political and economic model. This belief, however delusive, reduces chances that the US will grow so reckless to initiate a major war, even if China continues to catch up.

Confrontation between Russia and the West differs from the previous two hotspots due to the collective nature of one of the sides in a rivalry. Its roots go back to the end of the Second World War which left Europe polarized into two blocs. Termination of the Cold War did not eliminate regional bipolarity. The West preserved NATO as a focal point of its political consolidation, denying Moscow a voice in deliberations on European security. Alliance expansion in the subsequent decades exaggerated a threat to Russia, bringing the sides to the indirect military collision in Ukraine.

This rivalry produces the highest risks of escalation to a major war in the mid-term future, given the anxiety of the West caused by its inability to inflict strategic defeat on Russia. The tenets of alliance politics further aggravate this confrontation. As the EU, its Member States and the UK remain highly dependent on the US, they acquire incentives to elevate hostilities entangling Washington in an armed struggle. The rapidness of their decline does not leave room for the same strategic optimism as in the US. As a result, they can become sufficiently reckless to provoke a militarized collision between leading powers.

The preceding list does not include disputes in several tumultuous regions, such as Africa, Latin American and, in particular, Middle East. These parts of the world will likely continue to suffer from domestic instability, economic deprivation and armed conflicts. Clashes in the Middle East will remain especially frequent in mid-term future and will continue to draw attention of extra-regional

players. However, tensions between Israel and Iran, Iran and Saudi Arabia, or Israel and Arab neighbours do not threaten core interests of leading powers, therefore, they bear low probability of triggering a major war.

The probability of escalation of conflicts beyond the three contingencies outlined above diminishes due to the flexibility of alignments that is likely to endure until the 2030s. It will restrict interconnectedness of security commitments, which is a precondition for logrolling private disputes into a general collision. For the same reason, those wars that can arise from rivalries between leading powers will also in every likelihood remain isolated from each other. Therefore, the most probable scenarios of escalation will resemble more the hostilities of the 1850s to 1870s than global struggles of the 20th century.

This geographic limitation can serve as source of relief for global audiences if not for the states that will be caught in potential clashes. However, it also diminishes the chances for promotion of inclusive security regimes that will cover all leading powers. Differentiation of threats will necessarily foster fragmentation of solutions. In departure from the preceding century, not only alliances, but also arms control arrangements and conflict settlement mechanisms will need to become regionalized to be enforceable. It is unclear how far this tendency will proceed in the mid-term, due to the institutional inertia.

Conclusion

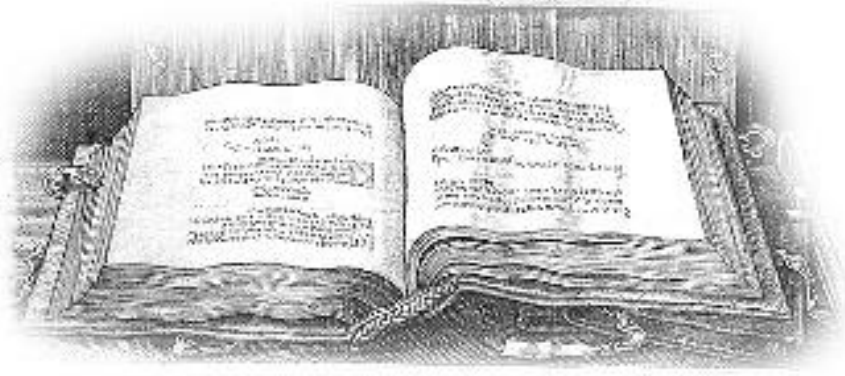
In the next several years international politics will tend to become more dangerous than at any point in the last eight decades. This inference reflects the combination of conditions beyond control of any specific individual or state. However, as Karl Marx wrote: “men make their own history” even if “they do not make it just as they please; they do not make it under circumstances chosen by themselves”⁵⁷⁴. Decision makers have discretion under most unfavourable provisions to choose between alternatives. Therefore, preceding analysis suggests plausible scenarios rather than definitive findings.

In this regard, some observers hope that the increased destructiveness in the means of violence, namely the presence of nuclear weapons, will dissuade states from risking a global catastrophe. This proposition is shaky and hard to justify considering the previous human history. It often relies on an arrogant presumption that the current generation is wiser than our ancestors. Ironically, this conviction often goes hand in hand with wailings that current political leaders are no match to the strategic geniuses of the past, which would imply that today we are actually in a worse position than before.

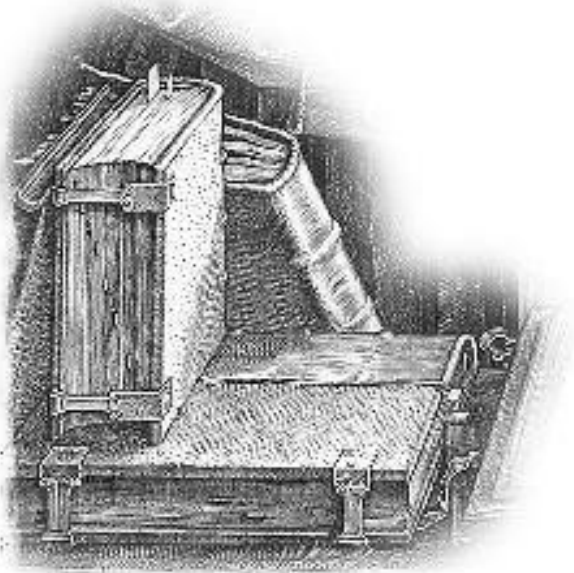
Expectations that the most dangerous scenarios will just wither away by some spontaneous forces of history are imprudent and cavalier. Attempts to avoid serious debate on their likelihood would be harmful. The risks of wars are always in the background of international politics. Today they are on the rise, so the diagnoses presented in this chapter can serve as the foundation for managing them

⁵⁷⁴ Marx K. The Eighteenth Brumaire of Louis Bonaparte.

more efficiently and creatively. The one thing that makes this work somewhat simpler is that it is not for the first time that international politics produces intense rivalries between leading powers. We have a long record to learn from.



PART VIII. FROM RUSSIA WITH BOOKS



SEA POWERS 2025: MAPPING THE FUTURE OF MARITIME DOMINANCE

Yuriy Shakhov

THE IMEMO SEA POWERS' RANKINGS 2025

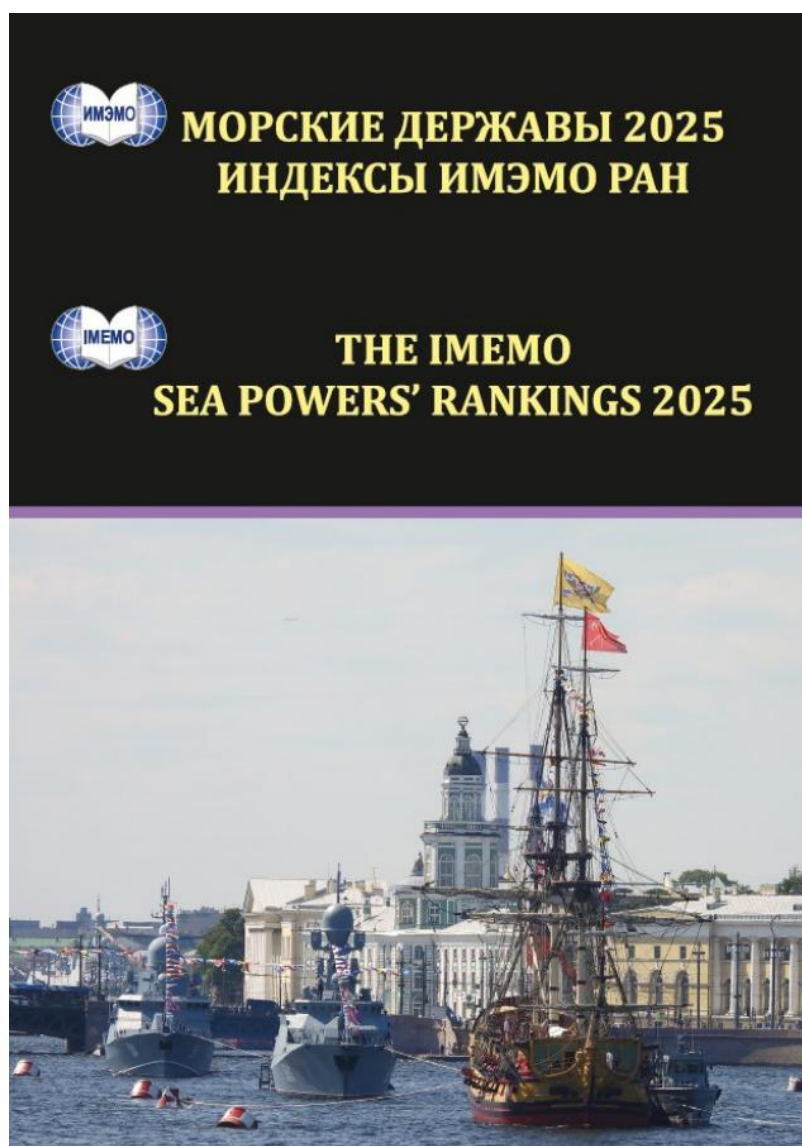
Alexander Polivach, Pavel Gudev

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The scientific report *Sea Powers' Rankings 2025*, authored by Alexander Polivach and Pavel Gudev and published by the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS), represents a unique project in the

field of international analysis. This paper is not merely a reference book on naval or maritime economic statistics, but a systematic study that offers an original approach to comparing the maritime potential of states amid the rapidly growing competition for resources, control over sea lines of communication, and the resilience of maritime economies.

The authors are experts with profound academic and practical backgrounds. Dr. Alexander Polivach, Senior Research Fellow at IMEMO RAS, is well known as one of the developers of the concept of quantitative measurement of maritime might, while Dr. Pavel Gudev, Senior Research Fellow and Head of the Group on U.S. and Canadian Policy in the World Ocean at the Center for North American Studies of IMEMO RAS, is a leading researcher in maritime geopolitics and security. Their joint work relies on the research and expert base of IMEMO, which lends the report both scientific rigor and applied relevance.

The book is structured as a comprehensive analytical report consisting of six chapters. The first chapter introduces the key indicator – the Index of Maritime Might (IMM-25), composed of three components: the Index of Maritime Resources (IMR), the Index of Maritime Instruments (IMI), and the Index of Maritime Activities (IMA). This tripartite structure captures not only the potential resource base of a state, but also its ability to protect and utilize this base – militarily, economically, infrastructurally, and technologically. The weight of each component in the overall index is clearly defined: IMR accounts for 10%, while IMI and IMA each account for 45%. This proportion underscores the authors' idea that the mere possession of vast resources does not make a country a sea power: fleet, infrastructure, shipbuilding, logistics, port systems, and merchant shipping are indispensable.

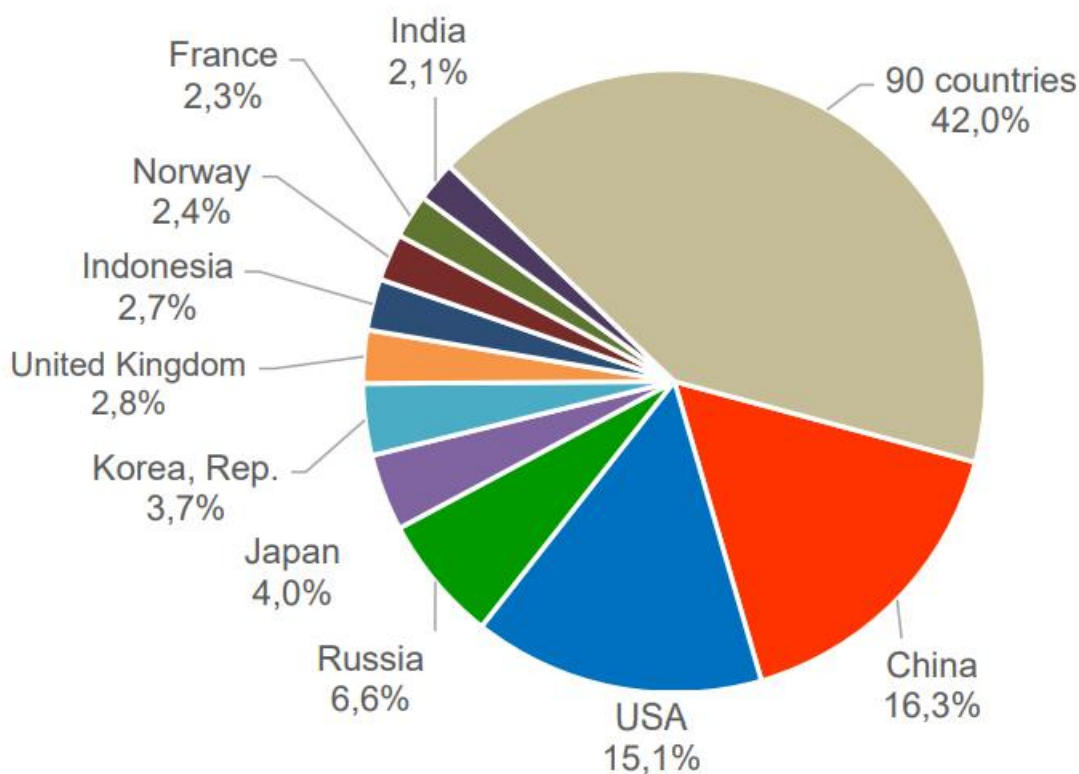


Figure 95. Distribution of the maritime power. Shares of countries in the Index of Maritime Might (IMM-2025), in %

Source: THE IMEMO SEA POWERS' RANKINGS 2025, p.11 (<https://www.imemo.ru/publications/info/morskierzhavi-2025-indeksi-imemo-ran>).

The second and third chapters examine IMR and IMI, respectively. IMR covers controlled waters, exclusive economic zones, and proven offshore oil and gas reserves. Particularly noteworthy in 2025 was the settlement of the UK-Mauritius dispute, which affected the distribution of points in this index. IMI includes 18 categories, ranging from fleet size and naval personnel to submarines, air support, expeditionary capabilities, and military shipbuilding. Central themes include the slowdown in China's naval shipbuilding and the growth of the U.S. naval index.

Chapter four explores in detail the Index of Navy (IoN) as the core of IMI. This is the most militarized component, where the United States has long maintained uncontested leadership: its navy is twice as powerful as China's. Russia, though ranked third, shows sharp decline – both in absolute terms and in the trajectory of fleet development. This chapter also contains a forecast extending to 2048, a particularly valuable feature for long-term analysis of naval balance and, to some extent, strategic planning.

Chapter five is devoted to IMA, the Index of Maritime Activities, where China firmly holds the lead, surpassing the United States by a factor of 5.5 and South Korea by a factor of 4. IMA assesses merchant fleets, port infrastructure, fisheries, marine energy, aquaculture, civil shipbuilding, sailing, and other domains. Here both successes (France and Indonesia) and structural challenges (sharp decline in Japan and the United Kingdom) are visible.

Chapter six addresses methodology. The book clearly explains how the indices are calculated, how the point system operates, and how multi-parameter categories (number and tonnage of vessels) are processed. It also explains how margins of error are treated and how revised versions (v.2, v.3) are produced to reflect updated statistics. This makes the work not only scientifically grounded but also accessible to non-specialist readers, which is rare in such interdisciplinary studies.

Among the key strengths of the book is its comprehensiveness: the authors cover virtually all aspects of maritime power – military, economic, infrastructural, and institutional. This allows maritime might to be seen not as an isolated military category, but as a multilayered phenomenon shaped by the interplay of defense capabilities, trade and logistics chains, energy infrastructure, and scientific and technological development. Another significant advantage is methodological transparency: the index system is fully disclosed, based exclusively on open sources, and regularly updated, including revised versions (v.2, v.3). This enables the data to be used in other research and expert assessments.

Equally important, the research paper does not merely present a static snapshot of maritime power distribution but provides insight into its transformation over time. This makes it possible to trace patterns of growth, stagnation, or decline for particular states, to identify long-term trends, and to anticipate potential shifts. The analysis is also highly geopolitically sensitive, incorporating contemporary events such as Houthi attacks in the Red Sea, the expansion of offshore wind power in

Europe, statistical revisions in aquaculture, and sanctions pressure on Russia. This turns It into more than a scientific report: it becomes a tool for understanding current international processes.

The paper carries substantial academic and applied value: it will be useful to scholars in international relations and security studies as well as practitioners – diplomats, military analysts, policy advisers, specialists in maritime logistics and energy. It is a rare example of research that combines scientific rigor with practical analytical utility.

At the same time, the publication is not without shortcomings.

First, despite the wealth of statistics and tables, the visual component remains restrained: there is a lack of interactive or color graphics, maps, and infographics that could ease comparative analysis. Second, although there are select forecasts – for example, on the US and Chinese navies up to 2048 – scenario analysis and projections for most other countries are absent, which diminishes the report's forecasting potential. Finally, relatively little attention is given to qualitative dimensions of maritime policy – such as diplomatic strategies, legal disputes in maritime law, environmental concerns, and governance of marine resources. Addressing these aspects could further enrich the study and strengthen its interdisciplinarity.

Overall, “Sea Powers’ Rankings 2025” is a truly fundamental work that not only summarizes the maritime dynamics of recent years but also lays the foundation for future research. Its value lies in shaping a new measure of power – one that is defined not merely by the number of aircraft carriers and destroyers, but by resilience, multifunctionality, and the diversity of maritime presence. At a time when the struggle for control of the seas has once again become global and the ideas of Alfred Thayer Mahan⁵⁷⁵ remain relevant, such an analytical instrument is particularly in demand.

The work of Dr. Polivach and Dr. Gudev is more than research. It is a contribution to the formation of a modern understanding of what it means to be a sea power in the dynamic and turbulent 21st century.

⁵⁷⁵ *Alfred Thayer Mahan* (1840-1914) is an American naval historian, rear admiral, and one of the founders of geopolitics. A.T. Mahan examines the influence of sea power on the course of history in Europe and America, formulates the patterns of war at sea, and substantiates the theory of "sea power." According to this theory, achieving supremacy at sea was recognized as the fundamental law of war and the goal of ensuring victory over the enemy and the conquest of world domination – *Editor's note*.

BRICS UNDER MICROSCOPE: HOW SHARED VALUES SHAPE FUTURE OF INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION

Eseniia Kosulina

Evolution of the BRICS Platform of Shared Values

Oleg Barabanov

The Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club, 2025.

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URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/a/reports/evolution-of-the-brics-platform-of-shared-values/>



Dr. Oleg Barabanov's Report "Evolution of the BRICS Platform of Shared Values", made for *Valdai* Discussion Club and published on April 8, 2025, is an in-depth and thorough analysis of the evolution of the BRICS common values platform, demonstrating a confident understanding of the complex geopolitical situation and the BRICS' ability to adapt to changing global realities.

The author is a program director of the *Valdai* Discussion Club, he is coordinating the professional programs on *Global Commons*, *Global Alternatives*; Academic Director of the European Studies Institute at MGIMO University; Professor of the Russian Academy of Sciences, known for his research in the field of international relations, successfully reveals the complex aspects of interaction between the members of this association, including Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa.

The paper is structured logically and consistently, which makes it accessible to a wide audience, including both specialists in the field of international relations and interested readers. Visual infographics about the principles of BRICS partnership, shared goals of BRICS, the description of zones of conflicts and emergencies in a specific paragraph in BRICS declarations, vision of future and BRICS tasks, voting at the UN General Assembly in 2014-2021 are given, which simplifies the perception and completeness of information about the association. Dr. Barabanov begins with the historical context of the creation of BRICS, emphasizing the importance of forming a platform of common values for strengthening cooperation between the participating countries. He highlights the key stages of the group's development, including important summits and declarations that helped shape a unified agenda.

The professor divides the article into two logical sections, each of which is devoted to a specific aspect of the BRICS countries' interaction. The first section examines the earliest summits and declarations, the core values that unite countries, such as multilateralism, sustainable development and the pursuit of justice in international affairs. The second section analyzes how these values have adapted to the changing global conditions and internal challenges of the participating countries.

The article examines in detail the first informal summit of the BRICS leaders in 2008 and the first full-fledged summit in Yekaterinburg in 2009. The author emphasizes that although the 2009 declaration was not revolutionary, it nevertheless emphasized the importance of protecting the interests of developing countries. This demonstrates the desire of the BRICS countries to assert their positions as representatives of the *Global South* and promote their interests in the international arena. An interesting point is the contrast between the main declaration of the summit and the joint statement on global food security. While the main declaration was formulated in neutral terms, the joint statement expressed a more radical and critical position towards developed countries. This difference in the tone of the documents may indicate internal disagreements and different approaches to international politics within the group.

In addition, Dr. Barabanov raises an interesting question about the cyclical emphasis in the BRICS declarations. Each participating country, assuming the chairmanship, forms a draft declaration with an emphasis on its priorities, which eventually leads to a change in the semantic content of the documents. This creates a certain dynamic and evolution of priorities, which can be analyzed through the prism of temporary changes.

The text illustrates the complexities of multilateral cooperation within BRICS, highlighting how geopolitical dynamics and internal priorities shape the group's declarations and actions. The emphasis on mutual respect and shared aspirations reflects an understanding that cooperation must be built on strong foundational principles.

The differences in focus between various summits (e.g., Brazil's emphasis on democracy versus China's focus on security and development) suggest that member countries may prioritize different aspects of their partnership based on their national interests and regional contexts.

Furthermore, Dr. Barabanov uses a variety of sources and examples to support his arguments. He provides data on joint initiatives of the BRICS countries in such areas as economics and security. Special attention is paid to initiatives aimed at creating new financial mechanisms and infrastructure development, which underlines the importance of BRICS as an alternative center of power in the global order.

One of the strong points of the article is a critical approach to assessing the successes and failures of the BRICS. The author does not avoid discussing internal disagreements between the members of the group, such as differences in political systems and economic interests. This gives the peer-reviewed work objectivity and depth of analysis. Dr. Barabanov also examines the influence of external factors on the dynamics of interaction within the group, including geopolitical tensions and economic crises.

The research paper clearly identifies the main goals and principles formulated at the BRIC summits, such as increasing aid to developing countries, debt relief, easier market access, technology transfer, differentiated responsibilities in climate issues, and strengthening the voice of developing countries in the International Monetary Fund (IMF).

The author also correctly places the BRICS summits in the context of the global financial crisis and the transformation of the G20, emphasizing that the BRICS has become an alternative platform for dialogue. In addition to the description, he expresses his own assessment (“not revolutionary or destructive”, “not much different from the G20 declarations”), which makes the analysis more objective and interesting.

In the context of increasing multipolarity and the revision of existing world orders, the study of the value component of such a significant player as BRICS is extremely timely. The article responds to the processes of expansion of the BRICS and the complication of its internal dialogue.

Dr. Barabanov does not limit himself to a superficial enumeration of the declared values. He conducts a detailed analysis of how these values were formed and transformed, and what practical consequences their evolution has for the internal cohesion of the group and its foreign policy. The professor's observations on how the various BRICS members interpret and prioritize common values are particularly valuable, which is the key to understanding potential challenges and opportunities.

The author skillfully fits the modern evolution of the platform of common values into the broader historical context of the BRICS development. This gives the reader an opportunity to understand how the need for a deeper unity of values crystallized from the initial economic considerations.

Analyzing current trends, the author makes reasonable predictions about the further development of the BRICS common values platform. This makes the article not only descriptive, but also instructive for understanding the future development trajectories of the association. Dr. Barabanov honestly points out the existing challenges and contradictions within the framework of the platform of common values. Of particular interest are his discussions about the balance between national interests and the pursuit of a common vision, as well as the potential impact of the expansion of BRICS on the unification of values.

The mention of the voting of the BRICS countries at the UN General Assembly in the period from 2014 to 2021 enriches the article and raises important questions about the internal political consolidation and foreign policy positions of these countries.

The author argues that the voting of countries in international organizations such as the United Nations can serve as an indicator of internal consolidation. The examples of voting by NATO and EU countries illustrate how common positions can strengthen political cohesion.

The text analyzes in detail how the BRICS countries voted on various anti-Russian resolutions related to the situation in Ukraine and human rights in Crimea. It is important to note that although Russia has always voted against these resolutions, other countries in the group have shown diversity in their positions.

The different voting approaches among the BRICS countries (for example, China votes against most resolutions, while Brazil prefers to abstain) emphasize the lack of a unified position within the group. This may cast doubt on the idea that BRICS represents a single bloc in the international arena.

The professor points out that the voting results do not always reflect the real willingness of countries to cooperate with Russia. This highlights the complexity of international politics and the need to take into account multiple factors influencing decision-making.

The diversity in votes may indicate potential tensions within the group. How will this affect the future of BRICS as a platform for collaboration? Perhaps it is worth asking whether the group can maintain unity in the presence of such differences.

Although the article contains examples, a more detailed examination of specific initiatives and projects aimed at strengthening common values (for example, educational programs, cultural exchanges, joint statements on global issues) could further strengthen the analytical component. It would be interesting to see a brief comparative analysis of the BRICS common values platform with similar associations (for example, the EU, ASEAN) in order to emphasize the uniqueness and specificity of the BRICS approach. Mentioning NATO and the EU as examples of consolidation may be useful, but it is also important to keep in mind that these groups have different historical contexts and goals. The comparison should be careful and take into account the unique circumstances of BRICS.

In conclusion, it is important to emphasize that Dr. Oleg Barabanov's article "Evolution of the BRICS Platform of Shared Values" is a significant contribution to understanding the BRICS phenomenon. The author successfully demonstrates that the dynamic development of this association is based not only on economic and political cooperation, but also on a constantly evolving platform of shared values. Insightful analysis, historical depth and clear presentation make this article a must-read for anyone interested in international politics, geopolitics and developing countries. Dr. Barabanov's work not only helps to understand the past and present of BRICS, but also provides valuable guidance for predicting its future. The research demonstrates the development of BRICS as a multilateral

platform where countries strive to find common ground on important international issues, despite internal differences and global challenges. The discussion of topics such as poverty eradication, World Bank support and territorial integrity indicates the desire of the participating countries to strengthen their positions in the international arena and promote their interests through cooperation.

INTERNATIONAL SECURITY INDEX: THE RUSSIAN VIEW, INSIGHTFUL, AND CONFIDENT⁵⁷⁶

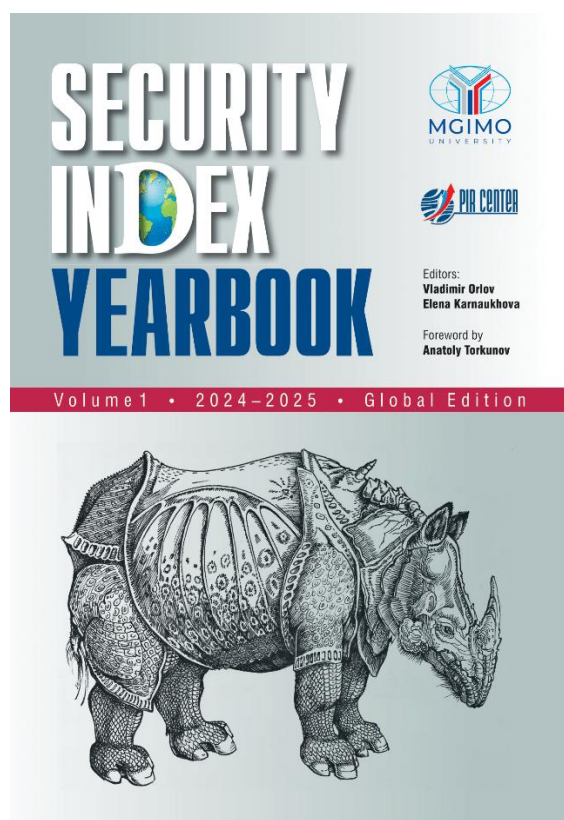
Evgeny Buzhinsky

SECURITY INDEX YEARBOOK. VOL. 1: 2024-2025. GLOBAL EDITION

Dr. Vladimir Orlov and Elena Karnaukhova (Editors). Foreword by Dr. Anatoly Torkunov.
MGIMO University & PIR Center. Moscow: *Aspect Press Ltd.*, 2024

(published in English)

URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/Security-Index-Yearbook-2024-2025-by-PIRMGIMO-Vol.1.pdf>



The rapidly changing international security environment is one of the key factors characterizing the current state of international relations. The emergence of new challenges and threats is one of the key elements for further revision of the security architecture. The standard understanding of security and strategic stability is gradually being revised in favor of developing a differentiated approach to defining security as a comprehensive system that includes not only arms control and nuclear nonproliferation, but also such key trends as the militarization of outer space, cyber diplomacy, the factor of international terrorism, as well as other pressing issues on the international agenda.

⁵⁷⁶ Originally published: *International Affairs Journal*, №4. 2025 URL: <https://interaffairs.ru/jauthor/material/3198>

There is no doubt that the unipolar approach in the context of the development and revision of the global security architecture is losing its relevance and the multipolar model of the changing environment of international relations is a much more priority goal for the countries of the *Global South*. This trend is additionally reinforced by the growing role of BRICS in the global dimension.

The *Security Index Yearbook* (2024-2025) is a new joint product of the PIR Center and MGIMO University. It includes the most relevant aspects and topics of the development of systemic global security, touches upon the issues of the development of the institution of multipolarity in the context of understanding the current system of international security through the prism of Russian *foreign policy thought*. The authors of the Yearbook (and this is more than two dozen leading Russian experts) rightly highlight the following trends in the development of global security at the present stage:

- the collapse of the previously existing system of arms control and strategic stability, which led to the decision on the possibility of deploying medium- and shorter-range missiles on the territory of NATO member countries after the denunciation of the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty (INF);
- the Ukrainian crisis as a fundamental aspect of the intensification of instability of the global security system;
- the build-up of new types of strategic offensive weapons, including hypersonic weapons and new types of conventional weapons, including the development of non-nuclear strategic weapons;
- the factor of international terrorism is a key aspect of the destabilization of the modern security architecture, taking into account the emergence of cyberspace as a potential zone of activity for radical terrorist groups;
- attempts by a number of countries to carry out a comprehensive militarization of outer space in circumvention of the norms of international space law.

The Yearbook comprehensively diagnoses key crises in the global security system related to the reconceptualization of the strategic order. Dr. Andrey Kortunov, Scientific Director of the Russian International Affairs Council⁵⁷⁷, noted in one of the chapters of the Yearbook that the Ukrainian crisis that has arisen has further aggravated the crisis of the predominantly European security system. An obvious signal of the intensification of tensions is the statement by Russian President Vladimir Putin in his address to the Federal Assembly in 2023 on the suspension of Russia's participation in the START-3 Treaty.

The author rightly notes that the resulting collapse of strategic stability in Europe against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis has influenced the change in approaches to defining European identity. Moreover, a clear advantage of the work is the conclusion that at present, in the conditions of the existence of a de facto unipolar model of international relations, there is a tendency towards the

⁵⁷⁷ As of the time of this writing – *Editor's note*.

disintegration of European unity and community, which plays a key role in the political development of Western European countries.

The differentiation of European powers based on their belonging to the “old” and “new” Europe that has been taking place since 2003 has become even more acute and has affected the political instability within NATO. Thus, it can be said that the conclusion about the need for a gradual transition to a multipolar model as a tool for increasing strategic stability and regional security is fully justified.

The Yearbook examines in detail the retrospective and current state of Russia's strategic relations with key actors in international relations in order to promote the key goal of maintaining peace and security. The authors rightly note the decline of Russia's constructive relations with the countries of the *Global North* on issues of developing strategic stability, given the “hegemonic” nature of the strategic behavior of the United States and its allies at the present stage.

The authors of the Yearbook highlight the following promising areas for the development of strategic relations:

- development of Russian-Chinese strategic relations as a key factor in confronting and containing the ambitions of Western countries seeking a complete victory in the Russian-Ukrainian *proxy war* and inflicting a strategic defeat on Russia. China's role in resolving the Ukrainian crisis is interdependent with efforts to recreate an effective system for managing the risks of nuclear escalation, as recorded in China's Position on the Settlement of the Ukrainian Crisis of February 24, 2023⁵⁷⁸;
- development of Russian-Iranian strategic dialogue in order to promote the interests of both parties in maintaining cooperation in the field of peaceful nuclear energy. The development of peaceful nuclear infrastructure of the Islamic Republic of Iran is a key aspect of the strategic interests of Moscow and Tehran in the context of countering Western pressure. The formation of the *strategic axis “Moscow – Tehran”* is an important factor in creating an effective environment for cooperation and developing common positions on the most important priority areas of development of the nuclear industry (including the supply of nuclear fuel cycles, fuel, as well as components for the development of nuclear power plants);
- the rethinking by African countries of the optimal foreign policy course in the context of developing a strategic dialogue has recently transformed into a conscious understanding of the need for Russian-African cooperation to strengthen multipolarity, taking into account the national interests of all entities as sovereign actors;
- against the backdrop of the Ukrainian crisis, Latin American countries are pursuing a more pragmatic foreign policy course, taking into account the priority of strategic relations with Russia, including within the framework of Brazil's revised course on developing strategic stability within BRICS.

⁵⁷⁸ Also known as “China's Peace Plan” – *Editor's note*.

The development of strategic dialogue in the context of developing new principles of global security is a new requirement for adaptation to the new “normality” in international relations. The high role of rethinking the current security architecture is determined by the new priority directions of the foreign policy of the Russian Federation at the present stage. The definition of the Ukrainian crisis as a geostrategic culmination leading to a change in steps to stabilize global security is a justified step for the foreign policy turn of key African countries towards Russia.

The development of artificial intelligence (AI) is a key aspect of the transformation of the security environment. Cybersecurity has become the main factor in ensuring the sustainability of a complex of strategic and information infrastructure facilities, including technological capabilities for undermining security at the present stage. The development of information technologies is actively used by many subjects of international relations to create security clusters taking into account the transformation of conventional weapons systems, as well as to form effective systems for monitoring the military-political activity of a number of global security actors, including tracking modern types of weapons. In this regard, issues of conflict potential in the field of global security are being rethought and raised in the context of identifying new threats that shape the modern international agenda for risk management and preventing crises of strategic stability.

The development of new factors of destabilization of global security is associated with the evolution of armed conflicts and the use of new forms of threats, including the introduction of information technologies and the development of hybrid wars.

The Yearbook rightly characterizes the current security situation as a chaotic environment, which is not characterized by the use of global governance instruments. It presents the most relevant scenarios for the further development of the international political situation in the area of strategic stability, including scenarios of hybridization of the international security regime, intensification of the US-Chinese rivalry in the context of a new arms race, accompanied by elements of chaos in the global security system and geoeconomic confrontation between the key poles of the international system.

It is worth noting that new challenges and threats characteristic of the current stage of global security development form a kind of cascade in which security elements are divided into different clusters that are not homogeneous. This precise definition of modern trends in global security most fully reflects the transformation of the geopolitical environment, which has acquired a chaotic character over the 30 years of the unipolar model.

One of the significant advantages of the Yearbook is the use of infographics and accompanying materials that clearly demonstrate the relationship between key security factors and trends, as well as their role in relation to the issues under consideration. It can be stated that today the Yearbook is one of the key collective studies aimed not only at identifying the main challenges and threats to the current state of global security, but also at their multi-vector analysis in the context of Russia's foreign policy and strategic perspective. The inclusion of exclusive interviews with Deputy Minister of

Foreign Affairs of Russia Sergei Ryabkov, Deputy Head of *Rossotrudnichestvo*⁵⁷⁹ Dr. Dmitry Polikanov, Director of the Institute of Africa of the Russian Academy of Sciences Dr. Irina Abramova in the Yearbook seems successful.

The Yearbook examines in detail the characteristics of the unipolar regime and the possible transition to a multipolar approach in solving the most pressing problems of global security, and proposes new ways of responding to both traditional and new threats and challenges.

The high quality of the Yearbook is ensured by the composition of the authors' collective, selected by the editor-in-chief Dr. Vladimir Orlov, and the high standard set by the International Editorial Board of the yearbook. It is worth mentioning especially. The Editorial Board is headed by Academician of the Russian Academy of Sciences Dr. Anatoly Torkunov. It includes prominent experts from various countries. It is enough to name the former Minister of Foreign Affairs of Egypt Dr. Nabil Fahmi, the former Ambassador of India to Russia Dr. Venkatesh Varma, and the prominent expert on nuclear issues Dr. Tariq Rauf.

For the unbiased foreign reader (and it is to him that the new edition is primarily addressed), this Yearbook should certainly be put on the shelf, if not pushing aside such classic but flawed “Western” perspective annual publications as, for example, the *SIPRI Yearbook*, then noticeably pushing them aside. But it will also find a worthy place on the bookshelf of Russian specialists and practitioners in the field of international security.

As they say, we are waiting for the continuation.

⁵⁷⁹ Also known as “Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Compatriots Living Abroad, and International Humanitarian Cooperation” – *Editor’s note*.

OPEN SOURCES – CLOSED DATA: INTELLIGENCE MANUAL IN THE AGE OF THE “DIGITAL FOOTPRINT”

Leonid Tsukanov

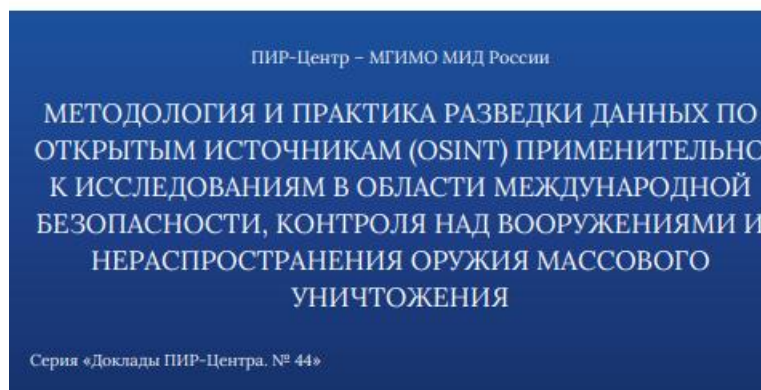
METHODOLOGY AND PRACTICE OF OPEN-SOURCE INTELLIGENCE (OSINT) FOR INTERNATIONAL SECURITY, ARMS CONTROL, AND WMD NONPROLIFERATION STUDIES

Sergey Semenov

PIR Center, 2025

(published in Russian)

URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/25-03-03-REP-SEM-on-OSINT.pdf>



*“Intelligence has no right to boast.
Even hinting at success means putting someone at risk”.*
Gen. Leonid Shebarshin, Soviet intelligence officer,
Head of the First Chief Directorate of the KGB (1989–1991)

For a number of reasons, the topic of open-source intelligence (OSINT) as it applies to international relations has not yet gained widespread popularity in Russia (especially compared to Western countries). Although enthusiastic academics and independent researchers have been trying to streamline the training of specialists in the field for at least several years now, leading universities across the country are vying for the right to form the first cohorts of *OSINT infantry*.

At the same time, despite the general excitement surrounding the topic, the area of arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament (ACNPD) remains, as it were, “outside the box” – in this area, foreign experts *rule the roost*.

The reason is the industry's complexity. Hunting for “nuclear secrets” requires not only skillful source management but also an understanding of how the industry itself operates. A certain knowledge of physics, chemistry, geography, rocket science, and strength of materials is essential. One must be able to identify deliberate overstatements (or, conversely, understatements) of the performance characteristics of promising products. Knowledge of jurisprudence (including specific areas such as *fiqh*⁵⁸⁰) will also be useful for identifying potential *loopholes* in national legislation; and knowledge of mass communications is essential for effectively analyzing information campaigns and the actual dynamics of public opinion.

The list goes on and on – a good OSINT specialist in the field of open-source intelligence must literally know and be able to do everything. And sometimes even a little more. It's no surprise that many who want to pursue open-source intelligence choose the *path of least resistance* and move into related fields (for example, competitive analysis of foreign companies).

However, difficult doesn't mean impossible. And work to establish a scientific and practical foundation in this field is already underway. The *starting point* for this process can be seen in the Report “Methodology and Practice of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) for International Security, Arms Control, and WMD Nonproliferation Studies” by PIR Center research fellow Sergei Semenov. This is the first comprehensive work in Russia specifically tailored to the needs of ACNDP researchers.

The relevance of the stated topic is beyond question. In a context where even *neutral* countries (and, at first glance, not particularly interested in the military nuclear project) are cautiously trying to *probe* public opinion on the hypothetical acquisition of a nuclear arsenal, and are also conducting controversial work “away from prying eyes”, it's important to anticipate the moves of *vis-à-vis* in a timely manner. To spot signs of change and grasp what's on the surface, but hasn't yet been chewed over by analysts and journalists.

As one of the guarantors of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), it's crucial for Russia to remain on the agenda and develop its own OSINT specialists, focused on the ACNDP sector. And it's not just about the commitment to the principle of “blood is thicker than

⁵⁸⁰ *Fiqh* (Islamic jurisprudence) – is a comprehensive field of Islamic sciences that deals with the understanding and implementation of Islamic laws derived from the Qur'an and Sunnah. It is a critical aspect of Islamic thought, as it governs both individual and communal life – *Editor's note*.

water”⁵⁸¹. Relying solely on the work of foreign colleagues (no matter how high-quality and comprehensive it may seem) runs the risk of falling into an *information trap* and failing to recognize the inculcation of certain negative attitudes. This is especially true given that the activities of Moscow's allies in the nuclear field have angered Western analysts, who are sometimes inclined to *exaggerate matters* to suit political expediency.

However, the above is just the *tip of the iceberg*. Let's move on to the overview of the Report. Despite its relatively short length (57 pages), it covers the main stages of open-source work and provides an overview of tools and useful resources. Thanks to this, even someone with no previous experience with OSINT can gain a basic understanding.

Another strength of the Report is its systematic approach. The author begins with a basic introduction to the topic (a review of relevant literature and basic internet search mechanics) and gradually moves to more complex tools and search combinations. The work places a primary emphasis on the analysis of satellite imagery – an important (but not the only) source of primary data on changes in the global WMD proliferation prevention system.

However, it's worth remembering that OSINT isn't “shadow boxing” but rather a *no-holds-barred street race* where *gentleman's rules* rarely apply. It's no coincidence that the author dedicated a separate section to the basics of “digital hygiene” and internet security. This is all to convey the simple truth: “For every intelligence agent, there's a counterintelligence agent”. And for every open data hunter, there's someone who wants to disrupt their work. At best, this can lead to a *false trail* (and thus reduce the final value of their work); at worst, it can discredit or “expose” them to their counterparts, which can create problems for both those performing the monitoring and potential clients of the assessment. Anticipating so-called *counter-OSINT* in time and taking preventative measures is half the battle.

Of course, beyond its clear strengths, the paper also has obvious areas for improvement. For example, the author could have easily expanded the section on social profiling (beyond a quick overview of the main search features on foreign social networks). Moreover, every project (even a nuclear one) is, first and foremost, about people. And an in-depth analysis of their *digital footprint* can sometimes reveal details that haven't been captured by satellites or investigative journalists.

A striking example of this is the Israeli operations “Narnia” and “Red Wedding” (June 2025), aimed at eliminating key figures (scientists and managers) associated with the nuclear project. Open-source analysis played no less a role than the work of agents on the ground. First and foremost, it allowed for an understanding of the daily habits of Iranian nuclear workers, their *social circles*, and their weaknesses⁵⁸². Despite the dubious nature of Israel's goals, their *OSINT infantry* accomplished the mission: Iran's nuclear program (or rather, its human resources) suffered some damage.

⁵⁸¹ In Russian it's sounds like “своя рубашка ближе к телу” and has the same meaning: family [in this particular context – Motherland] relationships and loyalties are the strongest and most important ones – *Editor's note*.

⁵⁸² Also, in addition to collecting data directly on the “targets,” Israeli OSINT specialists separately “worked” on their entourage, including assistants, security guards, and graduate students from the universities where they were registered.

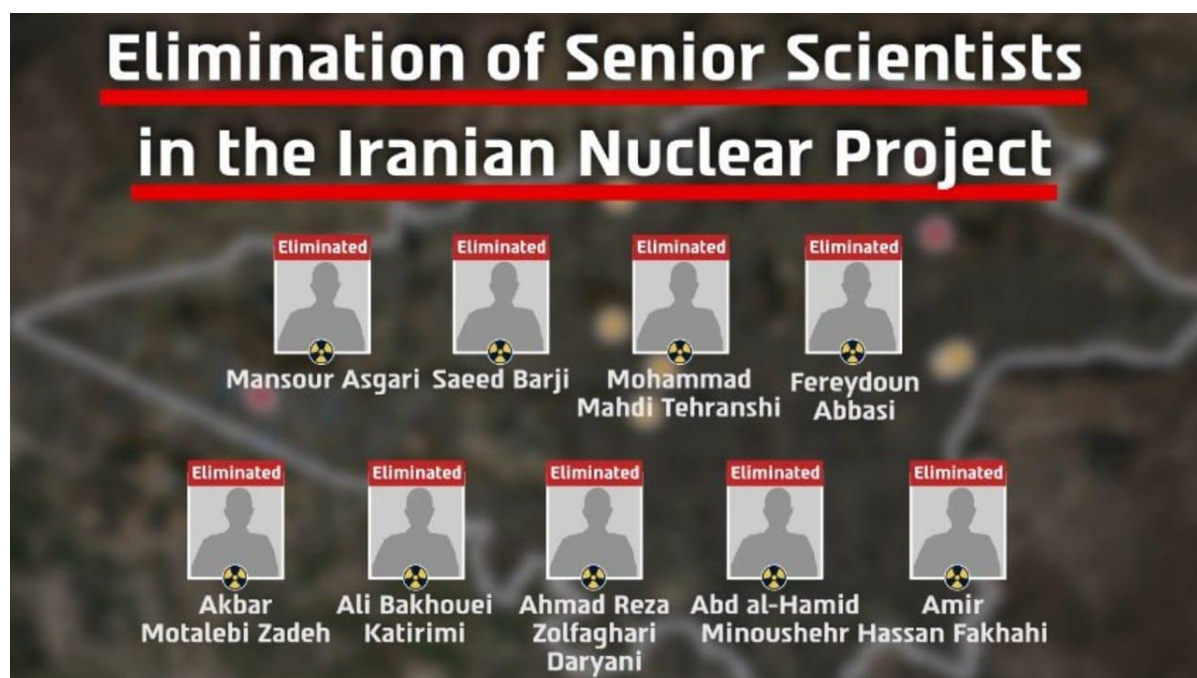


Figure 96. Elimination of Senior Scientists in the Iranian Nuclear Project

Source: *the Jerusalem Post* (<https://www.jpost.com/middle-east/iran-news/article-858406>)

Another potential area of growth is the exploration of AI tools and their application to solving problems in the field of ACNDP. Given the rapid development of digital technologies, AI can simultaneously become both an assistant and a *hindrance* in research.

It should also be noted that, despite the author's desire to provide a comprehensive overview of the available mechanics, the work remains somewhat vague: it lacks so-called “practical cases” that would illustrate this or that information retrieval technique – especially since there are many striking examples in global practice (in addition to the previously mentioned operations “Red Wedding” and “Narnia”).

However, the aforementioned *quibbles* do not detract from the work's overall value. The Report “Methodology and Practice of Open-Source Intelligence (OSINT) for International Security, Arms Control, and WMD Nonproliferation Studies” is an important source of knowledge in the field of OSINT (and, in fact, the only Russian-language work in this field dedicated to arms control). It serves as a valuable resource for introductory training for specialists in the field. It also has the potential to develop into a larger research project (becoming a textbook or monograph).

At the same time, working with the manual already at this stage will require a certain amount of perseverance from the student (and, more importantly, basic competencies in the ACNDP sector); motivation; and flexible thinking.

CHINA AT THE PEAK OF DEVELOPMENT: THE ERA OF XI JINPING

Vladimir Nezhdanov

CHINA IN THE ERA OF XI JINPING

Ivan Zuenko

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The publication of Dr. Ivan Zuenko's book “China in the Era of Xi Jinping” can be welcomed in every way, since, despite the statements about the emergence of Russian-Chinese cooperation at a strategic level and the definition of bilateral relations as “exceeding the level of a union”, there are very few works in Russian that allow one to become comprehensively and qualitatively acquainted with the specifics of the state of socio-political development of the People's Republic of China (PRC).

However, the situation is beginning to change. Recently, remarkable works have begun to be published devoted to the study of the period of development of the PRC, which is already called the "Xi Jinping era" and is associated with the socio-political, ideological, economic, cultural and other changes that have occurred in China since the coming to power of the Secretary General of the Communist Party of China (CPC) (since 2012) and Chairman of the PRC (since 2013) Xi Jinping.

The author of the book, Ivan Zuenko, is a prominent Russian sinologist, associate professor of the Oriental Studies Department at MGIMO University and senior research fellow at the Institute of International Studies at MGIMO University. Dr. Zuenko has over 15 years of experience studying China's foreign and domestic policies; he is the author of over 70 scientific papers; and runs a large Telegram channel dedicated to modern China⁵⁸³.

Dr. Zuenko's book was one of the first publications to offer a systemic analysis of the development of modern China, paying attention to both the personality of the first person of the state, Xi Jinping, and the process of his coming to power (pp. 17-67), as well as issues of the fight against corruption (pp. 70-79), environmental problems (pp. 80-89), the campaign for social equality in China (pp. 90-99), urbanization issues (pp. 100-108), changes in demographic policy (pp. 109-118), the processes of “Sinicization” of culture and religion (pp. 119-131), infrastructure development (pp. 142-154) and digitalization (pp. 155-168). Attention is paid to the problems of censorship and social control (pp. 169-180), the change in the “language” of Chinese diplomacy (pp. 181-189), the development of the armed forces (pp. 190-200), as well as changes in the field of cinematography (pp. 201-214) and sports (pp. 215-224). An attempt is made to acquaint readers with all aspects of the contemporary Chinese socio-political agenda, emphasizing the significant changes in the PRC that have occurred in the decade or so since Xi Jinping came to power.

The basis of the material for the book is a multitude of “notes, journal and scientific articles, posts on social networks and Telegram channels”, as well as “diary entries”, which the author of the book wrote during 2012-2023 (p.5). The author’s guideline was the format of popular science literature; at the same time, the text does not contain personal or subjective impressions; the author of the work sought to create a kind of “guide” to the study of modern China (pp. 6-7).

The chronological framework of the work, although focused on the socio-political development of the PRC after 2012, also covers the history of the country's development during the times of Mao Zedong, Deng Xiaoping, Jiang Zemin and Hu Jintao, with a special emphasis on the 1980s, 1990s and 2000s as the time that formed the basis for the changes that took place in China in the 2010s and 2020s.

In the chapters of the work, or as the author himself calls them “essays”, Dr. Zuenko draws attention to the fact that the changes that have occurred in China in the last ten years or so have been inextricably linked with the experience of the past, and the demand for these changes began to take shape back in the 1990s – 2000s. Thus, the current period of China's development is integrated into the general political history of the country, which allows us to perceive it not just as a set of facts, but to see these socio-political processes in dynamics.

The decade-plus of Xi Jinping's rule, designated by the expression “new era”, is defined as the time of China's flourishing. The author notes that for more than thirty years after the start of the reform and openness policy, the PRC was gaining strength and wealth, while in the 2010s – 2020s the country

⁵⁸³ China. 80s and beyond. URL: <https://t.me/china80s> (in Russ.).

finally reached its “design capacity”. In this regard, the author makes a fundamental conclusion: today's China is the peak of the country's development (pp. 12-13).

The book is divided into three parts, telling about the personality of Xi Jinping; about changes in the PRC in various spheres of socio-political and economic life; as well as about current problems facing China in the long term up to the middle of the 21st century.

Dr. Zuenko pays tribute to the Chinese historical and political tradition, focusing on the personality of Xi Jinping in the context of current socio-political changes (p.11; pp. 17-68). It should be noted that the author has successfully managed to conduct a comprehensive biographical study of Xi Jinping's personality. The author presents the path of Xi Jinping's personal development, his origins (pp. 19-20), the period of “labor education” in the village of Liangjiahe (p. 23), obtaining a university education, the beginning of his political career in the 1980s and its subsequent takeoff (pp. 25-39); an analysis of his personality during his immediate stay in power is conducted (pp. 42-67).

It is important that there is no desire to show the “ideal” life of Xi Jinping; attention is drawn to the facts of erasing certain periods of his life from his official biography (p. 21) or to the fact that the current Secretary General of the CPC was accepted into the *Komsomol* only on the seventh attempt, and into the party – on the tenth attempt (p. 24).

The author provides a detailed analysis of the development of Xi Jinping's political career, emphasizing his caution and political insight, which ultimately allowed him to ascend to the Chinese *political Olympus* in the early 2010s.

Xi Jinping, having come to power, received a difficult political legacy: systemic problems related to the further development of the country had been accumulating for years; painful issues requiring expenditure of *political capital*; no one wanted to deflate the economic “bubble”, which led to a drop in efficiency; there was a crisis of ideology, the highest level of corruption and moral decay of the party elite. All this was accompanied by a growing demand from the population for social justice (pp. 36-39).

Although the actions of Xi Jinping and his team to correct the situation are often perceived from the outside as a well-structured and meticulously planned strategy, the author believes that at the beginning of his rule, Xi Jinping hardly had a clear plan of action. A hypothesis is proposed: the PRC chairman used the methodology of economic reforms of the 1980s – he acted situationally: having solved the most pressing problems, he moved on to others that were “highlighted” by previous actions (p. 42).

Situational actions were based on a strict ideological foundation: Xi Jinping began the fight against corruption and called for moderation and modesty in everyday life, setting an example himself (p.43). Ideological innovations acquired importance, the basis of which was the concept of the “Chinese Dream of the Great Revival of the Chinese Nation”, which acted as a kind of “motto of governance” (p. 46).

The need to resolve the numerous problems of the political legacy of their predecessors led to the fact that, as Dr. Zuenko rightly demonstrates, changes in the socio-political life of the country were reflected in almost all spheres of Chinese everyday life.

The fight against corruption, which took on a total character under the slogan “beat tigers and flies”, created conditions for the consolidation of power and opened the way for overcoming inter-factional contradictions in the CPC and the moral recovery of the party apparatus (pp. 70-79).

Environmental issues, traditionally the second most important problem, were also on the agenda: attempts were made to promote the concept of an “ecological civilization”. The pinnacle of environmental ideas was the promise to achieve *carbon neutrality* in a short time frame (by 2060) (pp. 80-89).

China's New Leaders

The CCP's leadership after the 20th Party Congress

Nov 8, 2022

中共二十大后的主要领导人

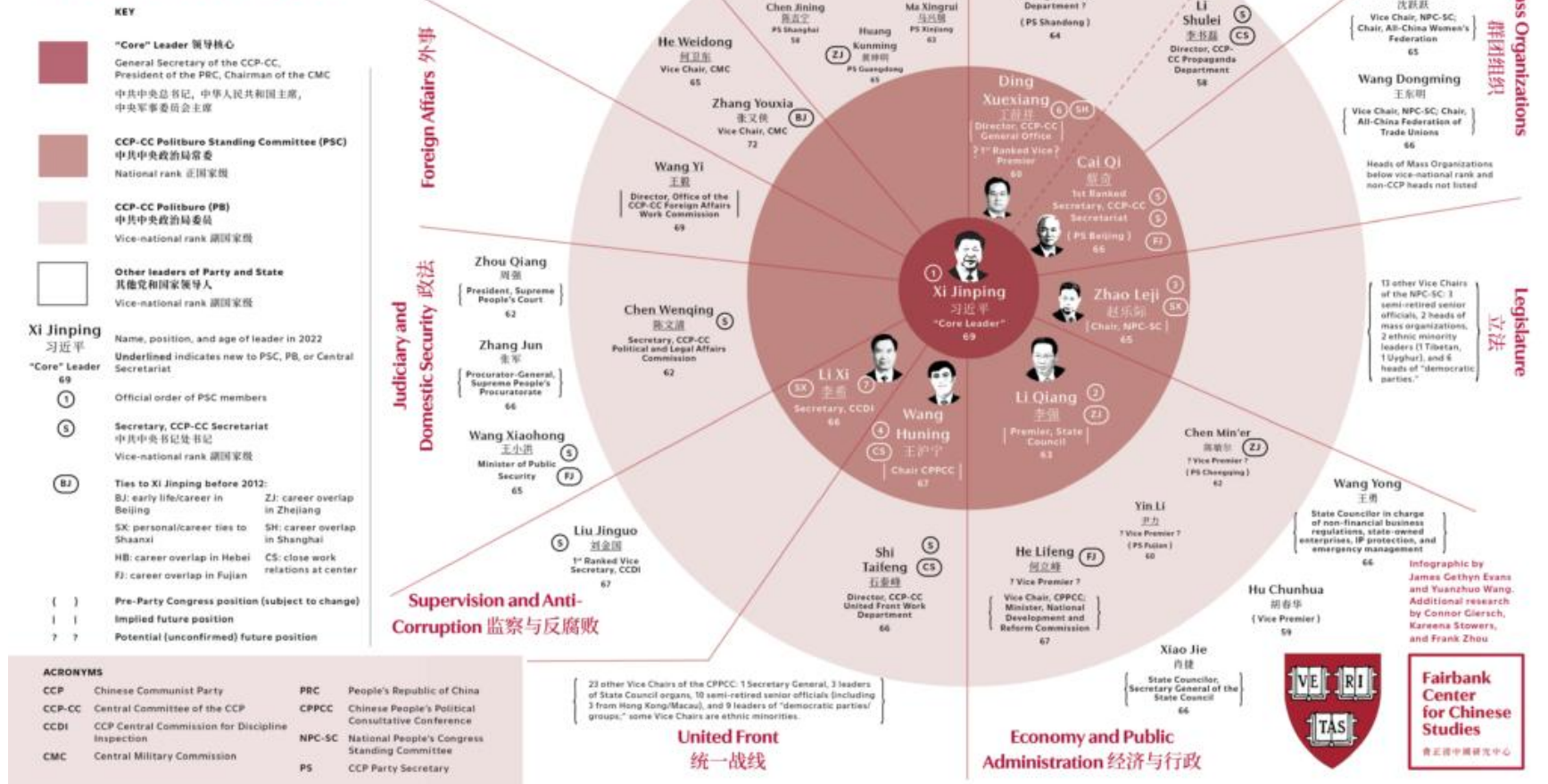


Figure 97. China's New Leaders after the 20th Party Congress (2022)

Source: Fairbank Center for Chinese Studies (<https://fairbank.fas.harvard.edu/research/blog/infographic-chinas-new-leaders-after-the-20th-party-congress/>)

The third key task was the struggle for social equality, expressed in the desire to overcome the distortions of social inequality that emerged as a result of the first decades of the reform and openness policy. In essence, to build a relationship between economic growth and balanced social development (pp. 90-99).

Interestingly, the solution to the above problems has had an impact on many areas of Chinese life. In terms of urbanization, with Xi Jinping coming to power, it became possible to talk about the PRC as a “city state”, since it was only in 2011 that the urban population exceeded the rural one (p. 100). Changes affected demographic policy: China ceased to be the most densely populated country in the world, giving way to India, and the rapid aging of the population put forward the requirement for each family to have not one, but three children (pp. 109-118).

Attention is paid to innovations in Chinese foreign policy: Chinese diplomacy has acquired a new “language” aimed at defending the country's positions in international affairs (pp. 181-189); by 2027, the goal of “transforming the Chinese military into a world-class armed force” will be realized (p.199).

Concluding the book, Dr. Zuenko draws attention to the challenges that China faced by the mid-2020s. Among them are complex competition with the United States (pp. 226-239), social contradictions highlighted by the coronavirus pandemic (pp. 240-252), as well as the problem of integrating Hong Kong and Macau into China and resolving the Taiwan issue (pp. 253-266). Despite the fact that these challenges are of different nature, the author emphasizes that they all risk introducing “Black Swans” into Chinese socio-political life, provoking unexpected negative events.

The book concludes with two “guides”. The first is a detailed chronology of the main events during Xi Jinping’s rule, covering 2012–2023. The second is a diagram of the highest organs of power and governance in China, making the book easy to read even for those who are not professionally involved in Chinese political issues.

The study and analysis of the current state of the socio-political and economic system of the PRC is of particular importance in view of the fact that the further strengthening of China's international positions, as well as the continuation of the rivalry between China and the United States, coupled with the deepening partnership between Moscow and Beijing, require from the expert and political community of Russia a current, deep and clear understanding of the current conceptual foundations of the domestic and foreign policy of the PRC, which is undergoing significant changes at the peak of its development.

TECTONIC SHIFTS: RUSSIAN NAVIGATION OF THE EMERGING WORLD ORDER

Nikita Degtyarev

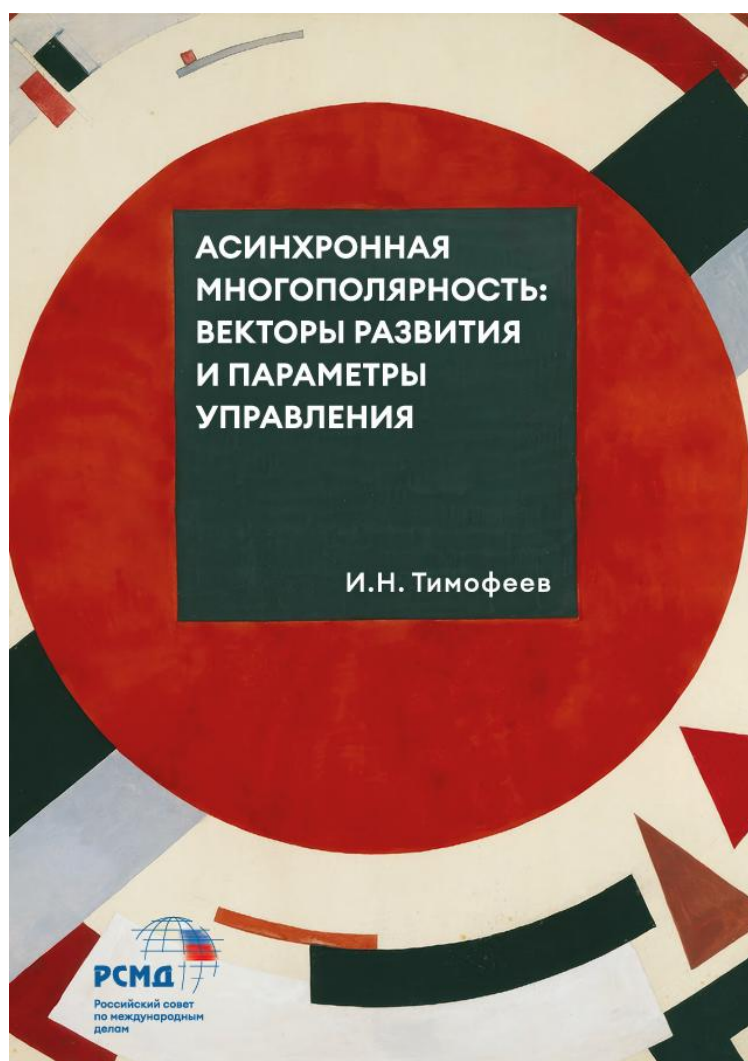
Asynchronous Multipolarity: Control Parameters and Development Vectors

Ivan Timofeev; edited by: Igor Ivanov

Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), 2025.

(published both in Russian and in English)

URL: https://russiancouncil.ru/library/library_rsmd/asinkhronnaya-mnogopolyarnost-vektory-razvitiya-i-parametry-upravleniya-sbornik-statey/



The world is undergoing a radical transformation of international order. While its causes, starting points, and scale may be debated, the fact of change is undeniable. It affects both domestic and international levels, reshaping all aspects of our lives: social, political, and financial. The monograph “Asynchronous Multipolarity: Development Vectors and Control Parameters” by Dr. Ivan Timofeev, Director General of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC), brings together his articles from 2022 to the beginning of 2025, a period many Russian experts view as the start of radical changes in the international system. The author examines the issues of the formation of a new world order, the dynamics of Russia's interaction with the *outside world*, and the phenomenon of sanctions

as an instrument of coercion. Avoiding over-theorization, he offers a practical analytical view of processes that define the future of international relations and are the subject of active expert discussions.

Summary of the Monograph

The monograph consists of 5 sections: New Realities of the World Order; Russia and the countries of the Global Majority; Russia, the West and the Rest of the World in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis; Sanctions against Russia; Russia on the Threshold of the New.

The first section introduces the current state of the international system. Timofeev argues that Fukuyama's "End of History"⁵⁸⁴ is over; History now follows its usual course, with periodic disruptions from conflicts between centers of power. Balance-of-power diplomacy is back, and the Russia-West confrontation will drag on for decades, regardless of the outcome in Ukraine. Multilateral diplomacy failures cannot be blamed solely on the West; other countries also pursue self-interest at the expense of the collective good. Russian policy is security – and realism-oriented, avoiding ideology to maintain goal-oriented rational behavior instead of value-rational behavior. Here, the author also introduces the "asynchronous multipolarity": a world that became multipolar in military dimension, with the West still retaining financial and technological dominance.

The Ukraine conflict raised nuclear escalation risks and aggravated long-standing arms control issues, but a new *Cold War-style* arms race is unlikely. The competition will be qualitative. In the current conflict, Russia maintains certain military and scientific advantages, but its industrial and human potential is vulnerable. Addressing this will require a concentration of resources, mobilization of forces, modernization of institutions (including combating corruption) and industry, avoiding *Stalinist approaches*. And although US-Russia relations show cautious improvement, the process is slow, fragile, and easily interrupted. So, no hopes on Donald Trump.

The second section, "Russia and the countries of the Global Majority", focuses on Russia's turn to the Global South amid sanctions and conflict with the West. This will be a long journey: engagement with the *Global Majority* cannot instantly solve Russia's problems. Key Russia's goals include building independent power centers, modernizing via cooperation with non-Western countries, securing borders with NATO countries, and building an economy less dependent on Western institutions. A full break with the West is impossible, including due to cultural and human ties. Deeper non-Western engagement demands patience, openness to learning from them, and new skills. Russia will remain at the intersection of both worlds.

The author argues that international tensions are only starting, as the showdown between the two key rivals, the US and China, is still ahead. Outcomes of Russia-West and US-China dynamics, as well as the ability to manage competition and rivalry, will define the future world order.

⁵⁸⁴ Fukuyama argues that the spread of Western-style liberal democracy throughout the world marks the end point of humanity's sociocultural evolution and the formation of a final form of government. In Fukuyama's view, however, the end of history does not mean the end of eventful history, but the end of a century of ideological confrontations, global revolutions, and wars, and with them the end of art and philosophy – *Editor's note*.

Meanwhile, BRICS and other partners help Russia avoid isolation. Dr. Ivan Timofeev emphasizes the need for independent financial mechanisms but points to barriers: weak BRICS institutionalization, low prioritization of the alternative financial model by other countries, controversies, and low trust. Gradual development of new financial systems through bilateral and multilateral projects offers a more realistic path, which can be scaled within BRICS and the region later.

After sketching the global context, the author turns to Russia's core concern – security. In section “Russia, the West and the Rest of the World in the Context of the Ukrainian Crisis”, Dr. Ivan Timofeev first provides a quick analysis of who benefits from the conflict in Ukraine. While Ukraine and Russia bear the heaviest losses, others may gain. The EU loses Russian energy but finds stimulus for the union's consolidation. The US profits from NATO's revival and demand for arms and energy, though distracted from Asia. China becomes Russia's main partner; the bond is asymmetrical, but Moscow has no alternatives. The crisis creates both risks and chances for countries. However, the gains can be easily erased by escalation, up to a direct Russia–NATO *clash*.

For Moscow, security, not ideology, is key, with Ukraine the central challenge. The Special Military Operation (SMO) became a bifurcation: it entrenched confrontation with the West with no return to the “2021 reality” and strengthened the Chinese partnership. An extreme scenario is possible, which is Russia's limited nuclear use against Ukraine if long-range missiles cause severe⁵⁸⁵ losses and damage to Russia. Whatever the overall conflict outcome, Ukraine remains the most vulnerable and suffering element in the equation.

Intermediate conclusion: Russia has shown it can comprehensively defend its interests by military, diplomatic, and economic means, accept major costs, and remain a resilient international player with an army of contractors and volunteers that allow large operations without mass mobilization.

Discussing the Russia-West confrontation, one cannot ignore sanctions against Russia, unprecedented in scale, speed, and coordination since February 2022. A section of the monograph “Sanctions against Russia” stresses they failed to achieve their core aim: altering Moscow's course on Ukraine. The Kremlin retained its determination to continue military actions, though the economic toll was heavy: restricted access to finance and technology, disrupted trade, and higher business costs. The crisis was eased by domestic measures and prior infrastructure, but the transition to a new development model will be long and painful.

Sanctions accelerated Russia's pivot from the West towards China and other “friendly” states. Ultimately, sanctions proved ineffective in forcing political change in a major power. They seriously constrained the economy and defense industry but did not cripple Moscow's capacity for strategic action, supported by third-country neutrality. At the same time, sanctions may reshape the global economy by undermining the dollar-centered system. The author notes that little research addresses sanctions lifting or easing, while China's case suggests possible scenarios.

Today's sanctions policy evolves amid the breakdown of the world order, demanding fundamental theoretical reflection and fresh analytical frameworks.

⁵⁸⁵ The definition of “severe” remains unknown.

The final chapter discusses ideas emerging after the start of the special military operation: the “Russian rebel” against the West, the concept of state-civilization, and Eurasian security architecture. The author frames the conflict in Ukraine as Russia’s quest for recognition, sovereignty, and protection of its interests, emphasizing the absence of economic motives. The main domestic challenge for Russia is not military victory but formulating a development strategy that preserves a market economy and an open, mobile society; mere opposition to the West and mimicry of Soviet practices would only worsen existing problems.

The idea of a “state-civilization” offers a theoretical basis for a foreign policy alternative to the liberal, socialist, or conservative paradigms. While it has advantages, the author notes serious limitations and contradictions, leaving realism as the practical guide for now until the new idea is seriously developed.

With the Euro-Atlantic security system destroyed, a new Eurasian framework based on equality, indivisibility, and multidimensional security is needed. Economic security will be crucial but insufficient to guarantee broader security. Many questions remain about the Eurasian security concept, and the author expects a long process of its gradual development. Russia just proposes building a new security architecture together based on cooperation and respect for diverse interests, setting a starting point, demonstrating an alternative through trust and collaboration rather than coercion and domination.

Conclusion

The strength of the monograph is the author’s ability to ground even some theoretical and abstract issues in practical reality. Dr. Ivan Timofeev carefully and thoughtfully examines various problems, avoiding both overconfidence and alarmism. Special attention is given to Russia: the author openly acknowledges existing challenges, analyzes them calmly without yielding too much to political trends, and critically reacts to some state’s ideas, like, for instance, the state-civilization promoted by Russian leadership.

The assessment of external actors is similarly balanced: he avoids oversimplification, does not reduce all problems to the US/West, and does not see automatic salvation through aligning with the *Global South*. His approach prompts reflection, showing that researchers and experts should be a bit humbler in their evaluations, recommendations, and forecasts.

The continued relevance of the collected articles, written over several years, highlights the author’s professionalism. Some points triggered internal debate and additional questions, as a good book should. At times, certain issues felt underexplored, but, understandably, one book cannot cover everything.

A couple of moments hinted at the author’s wishful thinking, such as optimistic expectations for universal benefits from alternative payment systems for BRICS and other countries or hopes that China could emerge as a fully alternative center in the global system.

Dr. Ivan Timofeev brings together many key events that shape Russia and are shaped by it, aiming to provide an objective assessment of what is happening. This monograph serves as a foundation for exploring where Russia (and, perhaps, the world) might head next.

The book is valuable for international readers studying Russia professionally or academically. It compiles the main elements of the Russian perspective on international relations and Russia's role in them through an expert-academic lens. It is also useful for domestic experts as a benchmark for comparing their own worldview with that of a prominent scholar. Dr. Timofeev demonstrates that much intellectual work lies ahead for international affairs professionals, and this monograph inspires such work.

I would like to conclude the review with the quote from the monograph: “We are not *angels* and therefore cannot teach others from above. But we can think about a better future and create it together, not instead of everyone else.”⁵⁸⁶.

⁵⁸⁶ Original (*in Russ.*): «Мы не ангелы, а потому и не можем свысока учить других. Но нам доступно думать о лучшем будущем и создавать его вместе, а не вместо остальных».

ON THE START. ON AFRICA. ON LIFE: MEMOIRS OF A DIPLOMAT

Yuriy Nazarkin

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PIR Center recently published this book as part of a series of memoirs by great figures who stood behind the nuclear nonproliferation and disarmament movements around the world. This is a good thing, because people pass away (God's blessings upon Nazarkin!), and living testimonies *of events long past are gone*. The Internet, of course, “never forgets”, but as life shows, it also manages to lose a lot.

⁵⁸⁷Originally published at *Polikanov Speaks* Telegram Chanel. URL: <https://t.me/polikanovgovorit/1954> (in Russ.).

It's an easy read, although in places it seems like some sections within the chapters aren't quite in logical order. But then again, these are memoirs – they just came to mind and ended up on paper.

Like any retired ambassador of the Soviet era, Nazarkin is a wonderful storyteller. I remember how, in my first year at MGIMO University, we listened to the tales of such veterans in a course that, for some reason, was called “Fundamentals of Diplomatic Service”. Or perhaps those were the “fundamentals” – understanding what the diplomatic service consists of, hearing from real-life witnesses about its peculiarities (including the unflattering ones), and making an informed decision about whether to join it.

In these stories, Yuriy Nazarkin displays a great deal of freedom and light humor, sometimes bordering on sarcasm. And you realize it was a completely different corporate culture – similar to the TV series “Optimists”, with creativity and debate, sometimes bordering on dissidence. Although they were also careful to *keep their mouths shut*, as their obsession with secrecy was no less intense. The book contains numerous examples of absurd secrecy – in particular, the publication of the START I Treaty, which was eventually translated into Russian and posted by the UN, but from English, as Soviet colleagues kept the Russian text secret. It's also fascinating to read about some practices and approaches that have survived to this day, almost from the 1930s, although, despite the healthy conservatism of foreign policy agencies (as well as throughout the world), they should have been changed long ago.

In light of current events⁵⁸⁸, the informal meetings between the heads of the Soviet and American delegations at the height of the Cold War – *cafe get-togethers*, walks through the Swiss mountains, and other delights of normal human interaction, where positions were resolved – seem striking. Just like in Valery Fokin's⁵⁸⁹ play “An Honest Woman”. Today, such a thing is unthinkable – you'll immediately become the *target* of criticism on social media and the object of scandal, not to mention *ostracism* from the fellow citizens on both sides. But during the superpower era, when the press was kept *on a tight leash*, this was a fairly common practice.

And they resolved major issues, although rounds of discussions lasted for years. Ironically, even then, political positions were determined in a wide variety of departments, including the Politburo, but diplomacy played a significant role in the work processes; it contributed to the development of ideas, even if it wasn't always heard by other ministries associated with the military.

Yet, watching nuclear arms control and missile defense agreements crumble one after another, and the frenzy of “let's hit them” and “might makes right” sweeping the world, one wonders: was it all worth it? For years, they've been arguing over how to count these carriers and warheads, even though they're enough to destroy the world ten times over. Nazarkin himself admits, with a certain philosophical sensibility, that the questions, against the backdrop of the endless, eternal blue sky, seemed petty and trivial. But without them, who knows how the early 1980s would have ended, and at least humanity would have lived for 40 years without nuclear war. Although the plan for “universal

⁵⁸⁸ As of July, 2024 – *Editor's note*.

⁵⁸⁹ *Valery Fokin* – Soviet and Russian theatrical and film director, actor and pedagogue. Artistic Director (2003-2024) and President (since 2024) of the *Alexandrinsky Theatre* (St. Petersburg); President (since 2011) of the *Meyerhold Centre* (Moscow) – *Editor's note*.

nuclear disarmament by the year 2000” still seems tempting to many today, especially given the real problems *plaguing* the planet. And these require real negotiations, with solid preparation and solid training (i.e., those who possess the tools and mechanisms honed over the years at the Conference on Disarmament). Or perhaps, on the contrary, we should *turn the chessboard* upside down and break all the patterns, letting our opponents understand that institutionalization is a weakness? Although, as Vyacheslav Volodin⁵⁹⁰ says, “the system beats the class”.

There's not much about Africa, but it's also interesting – the very beginning of decolonization and the establishment of diplomatic relations with the USSR. But all this is through the eyes of a young *scoundrel* who landed a job at the newly opened embassy and looked at the events with sobriety and irony, not with the hardened self-importance of a man frustrated by the system.

So you read and wonder – is it possible to describe with such ease, yet with such emphasis on meaning, the processes, encounters with unique people, and simply the events I participated in? Will it sound as momentous? And you realize that it can't – they still have a long way to go to match the mastery of Nazarkin and his fellow great Soviet ambassadors and deputy ministers.

We are becoming smaller, what can we do?

⁵⁹⁰ Vyacheslav Volodin – Russian politician, the 10th Chairman of the State Duma since 2016 – *Editor's note*.

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION (SCO) AND THE NEW ARCHITECTURE OF GLOBAL INFORMATION SECURITY: HOW THE ORGANIZATION SHAPES THE RULES OF THE GAME IN THE INFORMATION SPACE

Sergey Sebekin

THE SHANGHAI COOPERATION ORGANIZATION: POLICY ON DIGITALIZATION AND INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SECURITY

Under the general editorship of Vladislav Sherstyuk⁵⁹¹

National Association of International Information Security (NAIIS), Moscow, 2025

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A major reconsideration of global development models and a search for alternatives to *Western-centric* approaches to global governance are hallmarks of the period of transition that the world is currently experiencing. At the same time, the impact of information and communications technologies on these global processes is increasing rapidly due to the emergence of strategic competition. Digital technologies are frequently seen as a way to achieve global dominance.

⁵⁹¹ Scientific director of the National Association of International Information Security (NAIIS) – *Editor's note*.

In this regard, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an association capable of becoming another *center of power* for the formation of a new, equitable, and inclusive world order, offering effective alternative options for global development based on the principles of inclusiveness and transparency, and reflecting the interests of the global majority and countries of the *Global South*. This also applies to policies and approaches to such important processes influencing global development as digitalization policy, global ICT governance, and international information security (IIS).

The National Association of International Information Security (NAIIS) prepared the analytical collection “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Policy on Digitalization and International Information Security”, which is a fundamental analytical work that provides a thorough, methodical, and in-depth study of one of the most urgent and rapidly evolving areas of the modern world order: the process of global digitalization and guaranteeing the safe use of new technologies.

This analytical collection focuses on the activities of the SCO, an organization that plays a key role in the development of a multipolar world order and serves as a powerful driver of global development transformation. Particular attention is paid to analyzing the experience of SCO member states in developing information and communications technologies (ICT), implementing innovations, including artificial intelligence technologies, and ensuring information security and *digital sovereignty*.

The relevance of the topic analyzed by NAIIS experts is undeniable. The described transformation of the global governance system and the process of building an inclusive world order are proceeding painfully and are accompanied by intense strategic competition, during which digital technologies themselves are being used for information and psychological warfare and systemic cyberattacks on the ICT infrastructure of target actors. For example, the United States has been developing a strategy of constant engagement and preventive cyberdefense for several years now. This strategy involves the constant implementation of preemptive cyber operations, short of armed conflict, in real time against potential adversaries and as close as possible to the source of the suspected aggression, with the aim of challenging their superiority, imposing additional strategic costs on them, and simultaneously reaffirming the United States' *strategic superiority* in cyberspace. Thus, in the context of the rapid digitalization of all spheres of life, and the growing interconnectedness and interdependence of states in the information space, issues of ensuring security in this area are becoming of paramount importance.

It is crucial to note that this collection was created in the context of significant geopolitical transformations, when traditional security models are undergoing significant rethinking, which is particularly relevant in the area of international information security. The SCO offers a fundamentally new, open, inclusive, and democratic model of interstate cooperation, an alternative to Western approaches, based on the principles of equal opportunities and non-aligned cooperation, making its experience particularly valuable for study. The collection convincingly demonstrates how approaches to digitalization policy and international information security, embracing inclusivity, openness, mutual trust and benefit, consultation, respect for civilizational diversity and choice of path, and a

commitment to joint development, have become a universal theoretical basis for equal interaction among all members of the Organization.

Thus, this paper covers a wide range of issues, from the development of the legal and institutional foundations for SCO cooperation in the field of international information security to an examination of member states' national policies in the areas of digitalization and information security. This makes it an indispensable resource for specialists interested in international information security, the digital economy, and the development of information and communication technologies in the Eurasian region.

Particular attention should be paid to the theoretical soundness and methodological integrity of the study. The high scientific standard of this collection is ensured by a systematic approach to source analysis and a rigorous methodology. The study is based on extensive open data, which ensures its objectivity and verifiability.

The collection's structure appears logical and fully achieves the research's stated goal. The material is presented in a logical and consistent manner, beginning with a general overview of the SCO as a new model of interstate cooperation and ending with a detailed analysis of individual countries' policies. This allows the reader to gradually delve into the subject matter, from general conceptual propositions to specific examples and practices.

Particularly noteworthy is the use of statistical data and indicators, such as internet penetration, Global Innovation Index ranking, e-government development, and the ITU *Global Cybersecurity Index* for each SCO member state. These data, presented in clear tabular form, significantly enhance the research's evidence-based and analytical depth, allowing for a clear assessment of the current status and development trends in each country. The authors also focus on the legal framework governing digitalization and information security in SCO countries, demonstrating a comprehensive approach to analyzing the issue. An examination of national strategies, laws, and concepts allows for an understanding of the depth and diversity of efforts undertaken by states to ensure digital sovereignty and security.

The scientific, systematic, and fundamental nature of the works included in the collection is based on the use of a fairly representative methodology, which allowed for a high-quality, comprehensive analysis of various aspects of the organization's digitalization policy and cooperation on digital technology development. This demonstrates the application of systems analysis, which views the Shanghai Cooperation Organization itself as a complex, multi-faceted system, each element of which – member countries, various institutions, and operational mechanisms – is interconnected and influences the overall dynamics of the organization's development.

A comparative approach allowed us to compare national policies and achievements in digitalization and information security among SCO member states, identifying common trends and unique characteristics of the processes under consideration. It also appears that some aspects of a historical approach were applied, which involves analyzing the SCO's evolution into a multifaceted organization with diverse goals, objectives, and a developed system of operational mechanisms and institutions. The study examined a wide range of documents, including official statements,

declarations, charters, cooperation programs, and national legislation, enabling a qualitative analysis of the issue and the development of a systemic picture of the SCO's current digitalization and international information security policies. This approach enabled the authors to not only describe the current state of the field but also identify its future development trends, potential challenges, and opportunities for further cooperation.

It is necessary to highlight certain key provisions of the collection under consideration, which determine its significant contribution to the academic and practical spheres.

I. The SCO is seen as a new center of power in global politics and a potential leader in the process of building a multipolar, open and inclusive world order.

II. The concept of the so-called *Shanghai Spirit* is presented as the basis for cooperation within the SCO, the principles of which (mutual trust and benefit, equality, mutual consultations, respect for civilizational diversity, and the desire for joint development) are innovative for Eurasia.

III. The SCO's development of a “new security model” is substantiated – an open and inclusive democratic system focused on jointly countering challenges, without the creation of a military-political bloc.

IV. The role of the SCO in ensuring global security is emphasized. The SCO's significant potential in ensuring various aspects of global security is demonstrated, including the nuclear balance, space and information security, the security of global energy and consumer markets, and global food security.

V. The SCO member states' experience in ICT development, innovation (including artificial intelligence technologies), and *digital sovereignty* is analyzed. The organization's interest in internationalizing internet governance is noted (given that over 40% of all internet users reside within the SCO region).

VI. Mechanisms for cooperation in the field of IIS: The current mechanisms and potential instruments for cooperation between the SCO member states in the field of IIS are examined, including the Statement of the Heads of State on IIS (2006) and the Cooperation Programme for the Development of Digital Literacy (2022).

VII. A detailed overview of the national policies of each SCO member state (Iran, Pakistan, China, Kyrgyzstan, Belarus, India, Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, and the Russian Federation) in the field of digitalization and ensuring international information security, including their strategic documents and legislation, is presented.

VIII. Basic approaches to ensuring the security of artificial intelligence technologies in the SCO space are highlighted, focusing on threat analysis and combating deepfakes and disinformation.

IX. A chronology of the main SCO documents that have influenced the development of cooperation in the field of ICT and international information security is provided, as well as a list of bilateral agreements concluded by the Russian Federation in this area.

The analytical collection “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Policy on Digitalization and International Information Security” has a clear and pronounced applied nature, and its practical significance lies in its applied nature and the possibility of using the obtained results for the formation and adjustment of state policy, the development of public-private partnerships and the implementation of specialized activities in the field of ensuring international information security.

For government agencies, the collection's materials provide valuable analytical data and examples of best practices that can be used in developing national strategies and programs for digitalization and information security. A detailed description of legislative initiatives and regulatory mechanisms in SCO countries provides an excellent basis for comparative legal studies and the adoption of successful practices.

For private sector representatives, the collection has the potential to better understand the regulatory environment and development trends of the digital economy in SCO countries, facilitating informed investment decisions and expanding cooperation across the Eurasian region. Information on national funds for the development of artificial intelligence technologies, investments in centers of excellence, and AI infrastructure may be useful for high-tech companies.

For the academic and expert-analytical communities, this research has the potential to serve as a fundamental foundation for further research in the areas of international information security, cybersecurity, digitalization, and international cooperation. The collection provides a wealth of empirical material and an analytical framework for developing new theories and models.

The SCO's experience in building a “new security model”, collaborating in ICT and ensuring international information security, discussed in this paper, may be also useful for international organizations. This experience can be scaled up and applied in other regional and global contexts. The 2006 Statement of the Heads of State of the SCO on International Information Security, for example, reaffirmed the role of ICT in shaping the digital environment and its importance as a system-forming factor in the functioning of society.

Overall, the collection promotes digital literacy among the population and the development of essential knowledge and skills in digital technologies, which is critical for successful adaptation to new economic conditions and improving the safe use of ICT.

At the same time, despite the systematic, in-depth, and comprehensive analysis of the SCO's digitalization and IIS policies, it is important to provide some recommendations for improvement in several areas.

First, to further detail cases of successful cooperation in digitalization and ICT security, it would be useful to include more detailed examples of successful joint projects or initiatives in the field of digitalization and IIS. Although the collection describes general areas and programs of cooperation,

a more extensive examination of specific cases would allow even “inexperienced” readers to gain a more complete understanding of the practical implementation of the stated principles and mechanisms.

Secondly, to achieve a more balanced understanding of the issue at hand, a more in-depth analysis of the key challenges and threats faced by SCO member states in implementing their digitalization and international information security policies could be pursued. This analysis could include, for example, a more in-depth examination of interstate coordination issues, resource constraints in some countries, or the difficulties associated with regulating rapidly evolving technologies.

Thirdly, in the section on artificial intelligence, it would be possible to expand the section on the development of new and promising technologies (for example, quantum computing, blockchain, metaverses) and the potential impact of their development on the sphere of international information security in the context of the SCO.

Fourth, in addition to the tables presented in the work (Tables on pp. 8-9, and p. 46), in order to better visualize the dynamics of ICT and cybersecurity development in the SCO countries and illustrate the interrelations between various aspects of interaction, it seemed possible to supplement the collection with more infographics and multi-format diagrams. This would make the material even more accessible and illustrative.

Fifth, it would be interesting to consider how the SCO interacts with other international platforms and initiatives in the field of digitalization and information security, and what contribution it makes to global governance in this area.

Sixth, the inclusion of a glossary of key terms, especially given the specificity and multifaceted nature of concepts in the field of ICT and ICT, would make the collection even more user-friendly for a wider audience.

Despite some recommendations, the collection “The Shanghai Cooperation Organization: Policy on Digitalization and International Information Security” is a comprehensive, in-depth, and fundamental analytical study, executed at a high theoretical and methodological level. The paper undertaken to create this collection not only demonstrates the deep expertise of the authors and the authoritative editorial board but also highlights the growing role of the SCO as a key actor in shaping a just and secure digital future in the Eurasian and global space. This collection represents a valuable source of information, analytical findings, and strategic recommendations on the SCO's role in shaping global policy on digitalization and international information security. The study is fundamentally applied and practice-oriented, and has the potential to become a reference for a wide range of individuals involved in foreign policy decision-making, relevant agencies, research centers, and even representatives of the private sector – and anyone working on issues of international information security, digitalization, and geopolitics. The material can also be used as a reference for developing subsequent policies and strategies for digitalization and international information security within the SCO.

MULTI-VECTORIALITY AND TRADITIONS: HOW GULF MONARCHIES ARE CHANGING THEMSELVES, EACH OTHER, AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Leonid Tsukanov

ARABIAN MONARCHIES OF THE GULF IN THE 21ST CENTURY: REGIONAL AND GLOBAL ASPECTS OF FOREIGN POLICY

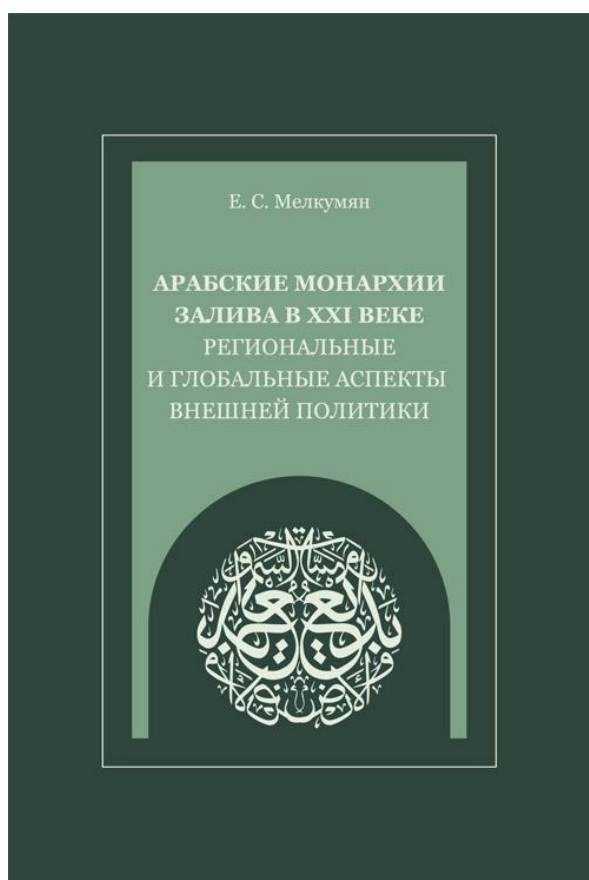
Elena Melkumyan

Institute of Oriental Studies RAS, 2023.

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(published in Russian)

URL: <https://book.ivran.ru/book?id=5430&from=1061>



The monograph “Arabian Monarchies of the Gulf in the 21st Century: Regional and Global Aspects of Foreign Policy” by Dr. Elena Melkumyan, as the title implies, focuses on the changes that have taken place in the Gulf monarchies over the current century. The examination focuses on new trends in building bilateral and multilateral contacts as well as the development paradigms of the regional states.

The book consists of four parts (sections), each of which focuses on a separate aspect of the development of the Arabian monarchies, allowing for the formation of a holistic picture of the situation in the Gulf region and adjacent subregions.

The first section (“**Paradigms of Development in the Gulf Monarchies**”) provides a thorough introduction. In it, Dr. Melkumyan demonstrates the historical, cultural, and economic diversity of the Gulf states (presenting each monarchy as a unique player with its own national identity, long-term goals, and distinct perspective on regional issues).

At the same time, despite their diversity, these monarchies share common views and aspirations. Among these, for example, is the shared desire to wean themselves off *oil* (and in some cases, *gas*) *needle* and transform their economies into modern ones, infused with digital technologies and cutting-edge solutions. Some states of the Gulf (Saudi Arabia, the UAE) have made more progress in this area than their neighbours, while others (for example, Kuwait) are only just picking up the pace.

But, one way or another, each *ruling house* has already determined what it wants to see for its country in the near future. The “image of the future” outlined by the Gulf monarchies in their long-term political and economic reform strategies, “Vision”⁵⁹², is formed by ambitious goals in energy, healthcare, finance, and digitalization.

The second section (“**New Trends in the Gulf Cooperation Council's Activities**”) is entirely devoted to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). In addition to an extensive historical overview explaining the historical, political, and economic context in which the Council was formed and how its position and scope of objectives have evolved over time, the book examines in detail its institutional structure, the Arabian monarchies' path to recognizing the importance of expanding and developing this integration platform, and the key constraints that hindered its accelerated development.

The *Qatar diplomatic crisis*, which lasted from 2017 to 2021 and became one of the most significant challenges facing the GCC since its inception, has also received a lot of attention. Doha and other Gulf states have not completely forgotten the crisis, even though the Arabian monarchies first managed to come to an amicable agreement. It is undoubtedly helpful to remind ourselves of the lessons learned from the Crisis at a time when some Middle Eastern groups are once again trying to paint Qatar as the primary *source of unrest* and terrorism funding.

In analyzing the GCC's development, Dr. Melkumyan doesn't dwell on the past. On the contrary, she thoroughly demonstrates that the Council is dynamic and continues to evolve. The Arabian monarchies are seeking new approaches to deepening cooperation in the military, economic, and scientific-technical spheres, striving to transform the GCC into a *magnet* for foreign capital and, more importantly, a *fulcrum* for the Gulf monarchies in building a new security architecture in the Middle East.

In the third section (“**Policy in the Middle East: Relying on Pragmatism**”), the author conducts a kind of *audit* of the regional situation – focusing attention on the dynamics of relations between the Gulf monarchies and Iran and Israel (including the first manifestations of new approaches to interaction with these countries), and the evolution of attitudes toward the Syrian and Yemeni conflicts.

⁵⁹² Also, in some countries, their own “Vision” programs have been adopted at the level of individual entities (for example, *Dubai Vision 2030* in the UAE).

Although the monograph presents the course of the conflicts in rather general terms (partly because the topic is covered in separate monographs by researchers at the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS⁵⁹³), it does contain valuable insights. For example, in describing the Syrian crisis, the author *equivocates* and points out that some Arabian monarchies were mentally prepared for the fall of Bashar al-Assad's regime as early as 2023 and had a *contingency plan* in place.

Another important point that Dr. Melkumyan makes is the connection between intra-GCC relations and positive developments in key regional conflicts. Despite the region's characteristic *mutual suspicion*, Arabian monarchies are increasingly less inclined to seek out states to play the role of “bogyman” (which has been primarily Iran over the past decade), preferring to focus on jointly countering more abstract threats (terrorism, hacking, etc.). Joint counteraction to these threats could also serve as an additional *bridge* in dialogue with the outside world.

The final section, “**Changing Approaches to Interacting with Global Powers**”, focuses on the interactions of the Gulf monarchies with the three superpowers – the United States, Russia, and China.

Given that all of the Gulf monarchies are Washington's regional allies (and Qatar and Bahrain are *major non-NATO allies*), and that US military installations are located on their soil (such as *Al Udeid* Air Base in Qatar, *Eskan Village* Air Base and *Jenkins* Rear Air Base in Saudi Arabia, and air bases in Masirah and Thumrait in Oman, among others), cooperation with the US is most thoroughly investigated. However, Dr. Melkumyan makes it apparent that the Gulf *ruling houses* are not Washington's “obedient satellites: (as was formerly popular to call them in the media) and that the Gulf region is not a US *playground*. The Arabian monarchies, on the other hand, aim for a multi-vector strategy and pursue relationships with all superpowers, not only the USA.

Russia serves as a prime example in this regard, as its relations with the Gulf monarchies have long been described as “jerky and chaotic”. Moscow has been able to forge strong relationships with the majority of the monarchies and carve out a position in the markets of the area by adhering to the *Arabian multi-vector policy* (including those that the GCC countries are focused on while restructuring their national economies⁵⁹⁴).

China is something of a *dark horse* in this race. Its influence in the Gulf region is, at first glance, limited to the “One Belt, One Road” megaproject. Dr. Melkumyan consistently dispels this belief, pointing to the growing military cooperation between Beijing and the Arabian monarchies, as well as the intensifying competition between the US and China for the right to play a leading role in the Gulf security sector. And while Washington still holds the military lead, Beijing is rapidly closing the gap.

⁵⁹³ You can find more detailed information about the catalogue of publications of the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS via the link: <https://book.ivran.ru/> (*in Russ.*) – Editor's note.

⁵⁹⁴ Read more here: On Both Sides of the Persian Gulf: The Growth of the Region's High-Tech Industry and Russia's Interests // PIR Center, 2024. URL: <https://pircenter.org/editions/38-2024-po-obe-storony-persidskogo-zaliva-razvitiye-vysokotekhnologichnogo-biznesa-v-regione-i-interesy-rossii/> (*in Russ.*) and From the Gulf to Sub-Saharan Africa: Digital Technology Development and Russia's Interests // PIR Center, 2025. URL: <https://pircenter.org/wp-content/uploads/2025/03/25-03-03-REP-TSU-on-AFR-GULF.pdf> (*in Russ.*) – Editor's note.

Although the monograph's *storyline* may at first seem somewhat disjointed (the author sometimes jumps ahead a bit, sometimes backtracks several decades when exploring certain themes), this is the only correct strategy for presenting such a complex topic. The roots of many of the decisions made by Arabian monarchies today lie “in yesterday”. And in some cases, even in “the day before yesterday”.

Of course, given the rapidly changing situation (not only in the Gulf region, but also in the Middle East and globally), some aspects seem, from today's perspective, only partially explored. For example, the monograph only sketches the humanitarian activities of the Arabian monarchies in *broad strokes*, without a detailed analysis of the strategies of key players. Their initial steps into artificial intelligence and other high-tech fields are also described in general terms.

However, such *omissions* are not a flaw in the work. Quite the contrary, they encourage readers to independently seek answers to their questions in external sources and shape their own understanding of the balance of power in a given area. Furthermore, this monograph remains an excellent *starting point* for further research and exploration of specific issues only briefly mentioned in the work. Overall, Dr. Melkumyan has created a good *foundation* for a comprehensive introduction to the topic, both for “amateurs” (those just discovering the Gulf region) and for sophisticated readers seeking new facets of the development of the Arabian monarchies.

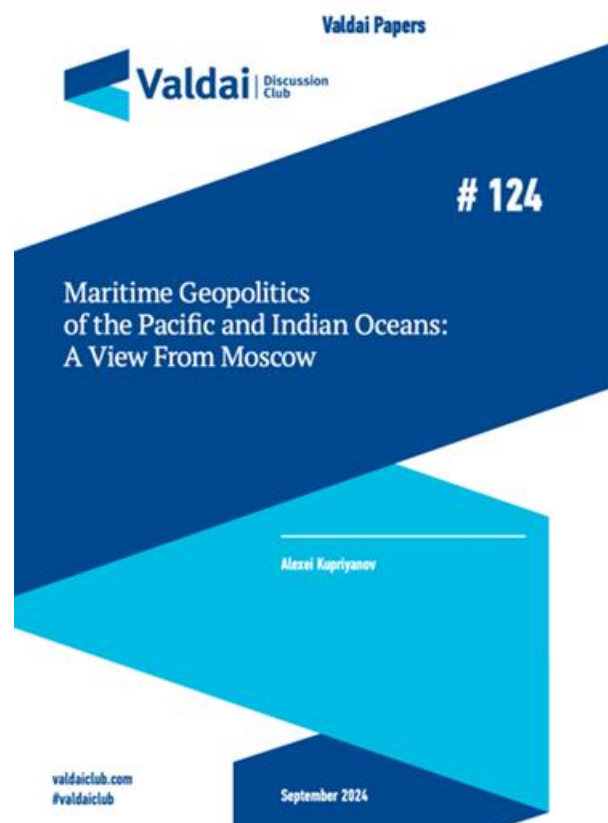
SHIPPING IN THE NEW GEOPOLITICAL TURMOIL: A MARITIME CHALLENGE FOR MOSCOW IN THE ASIA-PACIFIC

Artem Astvatsaturov

Maritime Geopolitics of the Pacific and Indian Oceans: A View from Moscow. Alexei Kupriyanov. The Foundation for Development and Support of the Valdai Discussion Club, 2024. ISBN: 978-5-907845-16-9

(published in English)

URL: <https://valdaiclub.com/files/45452/>.



In 2022, numerous geopolitical shifts precipitated the Russian foreign policy to pivot to the Asia-Pacific region, since the reprioritization of political strategies became a bright and insightful signal of the new rechanging environment of international policy. Accordingly, the progressive *pivot to Asia*, attempted by Moscow, became a symbol of fruitful cooperation, thereby bringing numerous positive outcomes in the economy and national security. Furthermore, Russian foreign trade with the Asia-Pacific grew from 26 % of all foreign trade in 2013 to 33.3% in 2021. Additionally, Russia-India trade increased sixfold in a matter of two years since 2022.

An efficient maritime activity in the region serves as the golden remedy for maintenance of strong leadership, based on equal partnership with all countries in the Asia-Pacific. It stands to reason that this new format of interaction between Moscow and the region's countries could enable to reshape geostrategic environment efficiently in the foreseeable future. Undoubtedly, turning to Asia is a

window of opportunity for the Russian foreign policy, but maritime activity of other key players within the Asia-Pacific could undergo dramatic changes in the regional security environment.

Amid the latest development in the Indo-Pacific, rivalry in the region between major powers is a significant challenge for the Kremlin to determine the most efficient course of action, which is crucial to face with new threats and orders. Dr. Alexei Kupriyanov, Head of Center of the Indo-Pacific Region at the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations (IMEMO), fairly draws parallels between historic background of Russia's activity in the region and current situation of maritime activity of major powers in the Asia-Pacific in the *Valdai Paper*, entitled "Maritime Geopolitics of the Pacific and Indian Oceans: A View from Moscow".

This comprehensive research assists the competitiveness of the region by providing an enormous number of details related to historic background of a determination of the Asia-Pacific as the epicenter of standoff between Moscow and Washington in the *Cold War era*. This approach enables readers to understand the roots of the geostrategic significance of the region, thus combining both economic and military aspects of the geopolitical transformation of the Asia-Pacific. Accordingly, not only does author analyze both military and political activity of key players in the region, but Dr. Alexei Kupriyanov also draws attention to predominantly economic factors in the region, fostering a deep understanding of contemporary complicated situation of differentiation between interested actors' strategies.

The supreme role of the maritime geopolitical strategies, addressed in this research, remains one of the strongest points of this work, since it is significant to evaluate military activities of key players in the region by juxtaposition of rapidly changing military balance with classical maritime paradigms in geopolitics.

Nevertheless, it would be better to reflect on the transformation of the classical naval theories by providing a comprehensive analysis of a transformation of the geopolitical environment in the different stages of recorded history. Author focuses on *Mahan's strategy*⁵⁹⁵ to explain specific peculiarities of the geopolitical coordinates in the region, but there are exclusive concepts of both Chinese and Turkish schools of maritime geopolitics, transformed a representation of maritime strategies in the contemporary era of international relations. Hence, a lack of a theoretical base could impinge on comprehensive view towards current political and economic situation in the region.

Dr. Alexei Kupriyanov thoroughly compares the maritime power balance of major powers and interested actors in the region, encompassing activity of China, Russia, the US, the UK, France, Germany, Italy, India, Japan, and Australia in the Asia-Pacific. The author rightly raises an issue of the military and economic potential of the Asia-Pacific as a geopolitical asset that facilitates the prospects for establishing a dominant position for viable players in the region.

⁵⁹⁵ Alfred Thayer Mahan (1840-1914) is an American naval historian, rear admiral, and one of the founders of geopolitics. Mahan examines the influence of sea power on the course of history in Europe and America, formulates the patterns of war at sea, and substantiates the theory of "sea power". According to this theory, achieving supremacy at sea was recognized as the fundamental law of war and the goal of ensuring victory over the enemy and the conquest of world domination. – *Editor's note*.

Additionally, author tends to qualify major powers' spheres of geopolitical influence by providing vital information of the expansion of economic possibilities in the region, attempted by both regional and global powers. For instance, research reveals the issue of making geopolitical influence as a result of efficiently implemented civilian maritime initiatives and programs.

Dr. Alexei Kupriyanov highlights potential pathways for Russia to maintain *maritime supremacy* by integration of economic, political, and military strategies. Author's recommendations for the revival of Russia's geopolitical supremacy in the region are accompanied by proposals to step up economic and political cooperation with regional alliances to reinforce the security conjuncture, which are pivotal for forging a vital partnership with the region's countries. Russian scholar not only offers recommendations for tailoring a comprehensive applied approach and delving into a search for a new format of cooperation with the region's countries within the framework of alliance activity, but also advocates shaping new business opportunities. This, in turn, would attract new foreign investments in the Asia-Pacific.

Apparently, these recommendations serve catalyze an ultimate reconceptualization of Russia's strategy in the Asia-Pacific to reconsider the strategic behavior of Moscow by a new geopolitical reality and numerous tendencies related to the security and economic transformation of the region. The current *Valdai Paper* is a significant contribution to the field of regional security and contemporary economic architecture. The author analyzes the historical background of geopolitical transformation of the region and various aspects of achieving maritime supremacy by different interested actors in the Asia-Pacific during the Cold War and *post-Cold War* eras. This work is recommended for specialists in international security as well as a broader audience interested in both regional security and Asia-Pacific studies.

**PART IX. TO THE
EDITOR: LETTERS FROM
OUR READERS**



RUSSIA'S SECURITY VISION EXPLAINED

Bruno Russi,
Colonel (ret.), Former Swiss Defence Attaché,
Independent analyst

Sir,

Particularly in times of crises or heightened tensions misjudgements as to interests, positions, processes, intentions of critical international players can lead to policy failures with unpredictable consequences. In case of the Russian Federation a lack of Russian language-skills in many non-Russian administrations make it more difficult to access authoritative analyses, but also lacking cultural knowledge, and emotion-based narratives can aggravate the problem further. It is thus all the more important for sound policy advice and policy choices, that decision-makers, diplomats, military, and political analysts have a reliable analytical foundation, rooted in trustworthy, knowledgeable, and experienced expert sources.

In this sense, the *Security Index* Yearbook of PIR Center is an indispensable trove. It contains a rare and at the same time extensive selection of authoritative analyses from experts in political, military, government, academic, diplomatic, as well as journalistic fields. It is not only convincing in covering global issues from nuclear weapons, strategic nuclear arms control, cyber space, and international terrorism to lethal autonomous weapons-systems and new conventional weapons-systems but also in presenting Russia's interests and positions concerning regional security i.e. the strategic partnership with China, Russia's interests in the Near and Middle East, in Africa, Latin America and the role Russia plays between the West and *Greater Eurasia* and not least in Ukraine. The relationship with the United States is dealt with under a number of aspects ranging from "paradigms" in the relationship, domestic considerations, mutual perceptions to nuclear arms control.

But the editors do not content themselves with analyses of current burning global and regional issues and Russian approaches to them, but are also looking into cooperative formats like BRICS, SCO, CSTO, or the UN. Particularly useful is the look at the near-term future from a Russian perspective. A *desideratum* for the next edition, however, would be a chapter on the OSCE. What future is there for the organisation, in which the Russian Federation is a full member? What is the potential and what role can the OSCE play in future? What role can and will Russia play in the organisation?

Considering all these factors, the *Security Index* Yearbook of PIR Center is an important contribution to building security and predictability, by clarifying positions, processes, interests, and intentions of the Russian Federation in a broad range of issues. The fact that PIR Center produced a "Global Edition" in English, makes it readily accessible to security analysts, decision-makers, diplomats, and military around the world.

Bern, October 2025

THE VIEWS ON BOTH KOREAS

*Greg Dong Suk Yoo,
Ph.D. Candidate at MGIMO*

Sir,

The *Security Index* Yearbook 2024-2025 provides a comprehensive Russian perspective on the security dynamics of the Korean Peninsula. The views on both Koreas, analyzed by various experts across different chapters, are logical and sound, though they may appear somewhat unfamiliar to South Korean readers. For this reason, it is important for Korean experts to study this yearbook, as it reflects a distinctly Russian interpretation of global phenomena, a perspective that contrasts with the Western narratives more easily accessible in South Korea.

One important lesson from the Yearbook is that South Korea should strive toward balanced and constructive relations with all neighbouring countries, rather than privileging one partner and ostracizing others. This is particularly relevant in the current era of great-power competition, where over-reliance on a single ally can reduce Seoul's strategic flexibility.

The Yearbook analyzes the creation of the Nuclear Consultative Group (NCG) which gives Seoul a greater role in the decision-making process with Washington. Even though the NCG represent an effort to reinforce U.S. extended deterrence, many South Koreans remain dissatisfied. For the South Korean public, the NCG is viewed as a modest step, insufficient against the DPRK's advancing nuclear and missile capabilities. However, it can also be seen as South Korea's effort to strengthen its security posture *vis-à-vis* North Korea, while remaining within the framework of the global nonproliferation regime.

Regarding South Korea's potential for developing nuclear weapons, although dissatisfaction and pro-nuclear sentiment are high, South Korea has not yet demonstrated genuine determination to pursue nuclear weapons independently. Only a profound geopolitical shift in the international environment, in my view, could serve as the real catalyst for South Korea to cross the nuclear threshold.

On the DPRK issue, the Yearbook also highlights the stalemate in negotiations between Washington and Pyongyang. I believe Russia can play a constructive role in this matter. President Trump has recently expressed his willingness to meet Kim Jong Un. In the context of deepening Russia–DPRK ties and worsening inter-Korean relations, Moscow could position itself as an effective mediator between the United States and North Korea. Such a role could revive prospects for peace on the Peninsula and restore momentum to the many trilateral economic projects between Russia, the ROK, and the DPRK that were once envisioned but never realized.

In conclusion, the Yearbook is a valuable contribution. I cannot wait for the updated version next year.

Seoul, August 2025

GLOBAL SECURITY: WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

*Hubert K. Foy,
Senior Research Scientist with the Project on Nuclear Security and Nonproliferation; Director at
African Center for Science and International Security (AFRICISIS)*

Sir,

The *Security Index* Yearbook 2024-2025, published by PIR Center and MGIMO University, delves into global and regional security issues from a Russian perspective. It covers nuclear nonproliferation, strategic stability, and new threats, offering clear insights into Russia's approach. Packed with expert analysis, this is a practical resource for policymakers, researchers, and anyone curious about global security challenges and how different countries address them.

Accra, June 2025

DETERRENCE AND DIALOGUE

A brief review on Chapter “Beyond the Conflict in Ukraine: Towards a New Security Architecture” by Dr. Andrey Kortunov⁵⁹⁶

*Alexandra Matas,
Director, International Security Dialogue Department, GCSP*

Sir,

In his article, Andrey Kortunov offers a sober assessment of the current security situation in Europe. I share his view that deterrence remains the dominant feature of this environment, and it is likely to shape European security for years to come.

In the short term, the priority must be to prevent military incidents and to avoid any further escalation of the conflict in Ukraine into a direct NATO-Russia confrontation. To achieve this, reliable channels of communication between Russia and Europe are essential.

Looking further ahead, it will be important to think about a future European security order that includes Russia and rests on cooperative foundations. One practical way forward could be to compartmentalize issues of shared concern and interest – such as climate change, migration, or terrorism – from the broader geopolitical rivalry. This would allow both sides to engage constructively where their interests overlap and, over time, to begin the slow but necessary process of rebuilding trust.

At the same time, any such European security order will need to be understood in the context of a multipolar world. As Dr. Kortunov points out, the influence of major global players, especially China, will inevitably shape Europe’s security landscape. For this reason, European arrangements can no longer be designed as a closed Euro-Atlantic system; they must take into account the wider international balance of power that defines today’s multipolar reality.

Geneva, October 2025

⁵⁹⁶ See: Kortunov A. Beyond the Conflict in Ukraine: Towards a New Security Architecture” // *Security Index Yearbook*. Vol.1. URL: <https://pircenter.org/en/editions/security-index-yearbook-chapter-15-russia-and-latin-america-new-perspectives-and-modalities-of-cooperation/>

RUSSIA IN SECURITY DISCOURSE: FRAMING A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

Bruno Rukavina,

PhD Candidate

Faculty of Political Science, University of Zagreb

Sir,

The *Security Index* Yearbook 2024–2025, edited by Vladimir Orlov and Elena Karnaukhova and jointly published by PIR Center and MGIMO University, is a timely and ambitious volume that seeks to place Russian perspectives into the *global debate* on security and international relations. Produced in the context of unprecedented polarization between Russia and the West, the Yearbook functions simultaneously as a research-based handbook and as a tool for diplomacy. Its stated aim is to provide access to Russian analyses of contemporary global and regional security challenges to foreign experts, policymakers, and think tanks.

The structure of the Yearbook reflects has dual purpose. Thematic sections examine the future of nuclear arms control, the fragility of the nonproliferation regime, developments in lethal autonomous weapons, cyber diplomacy, and outer space governance. Other chapters turn to terrorism, new conventional weapons, and the role of technological innovation in reshaping security dilemmas. A second major focus is regional: Russia's relations with China, Iran, the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America are analyzed in detail, alongside reflections on the collapse of Europe's post-Cold War security architecture. By including dialogues with Russian diplomats and revisiting earlier publications, the editors underscore continuity in Moscow's strategic thinking.

Several overarching themes emerge across the contributions. The most prominent is the claim that the world is undergoing a systemic transition from U.S.-led unipolarity to multipolarity. The war in Ukraine is presented as both a catalyst and a reflection of this shift. Russian experts emphasize the rise of what they call the "Global Majority" – states in Asia, Africa, Latin America, and the Middle East that resist Western sanctions and prefer to pursue independent policies. This notion highlights Moscow's effort to situate itself as a partner of the non-Western world rather than a marginalized actor in the Western system.

Strategic stability and nuclear politics form a second key theme. The looming expiration of the *New START* Treaty in 2026, debates over nuclear modernization, and concerns about potential new nuclear states illustrate the fragility of existing regimes. Russian contributors argue that the erosion of arms control frameworks undermines predictability and increases the risk of miscalculation. At the same time, nuclear energy is framed as both a development opportunity and a political instrument, with the Zaporozhye Nuclear Power Plant serving as a case study of how civilian technology can become securitized in conflict.

Equally important are the chapters dealing with technological frontiers. Autonomous weapons, cyber rivalry, and the militarization of space are examined as emerging domains where international law *lags behind reality*. Russia's "cyber diplomacy," increasingly oriented toward Asia and BRICS partners, is presented as a strategic adaptation to Western attempt to isolate Russia. Similarly, space

governance is depicted as a test case of whether major powers can prevent militarization in an area essential for long-term sustainability. These analyses underscore the view that security in the twenty-first century will be defined as much by technology as by geopolitics.

The Yearbook's relevance lies in its function as both scholarship and positioning. While the analyses are clearly shaped by Russia's strategic worldview, they provide valuable insight into how Russian experts interpret the shifting world order, the failures of Western-led institutions, and the opportunities presented by new partnerships. Its narrative – of a declining West, a rising Global Majority, and Russia as a “security exporter” – may be ambitious, yet it is precisely this alternative framing that makes the volume an essential source of many useful alternative arguments and theses. In an era of fractured dialogue, the Security Index Yearbook offers a rare window into Russian academic discourse and its aspirations for shaping the emerging multipolar system.

Zagreb, October 2025

BALANCED EXPERTISE

*Dastan Tokoldoshev
Independent Expert*

Sir,

One could endlessly discuss and debate the increasingly complex international relations landscape. As well as the multilayered and intricate structure and form the sphere of international security is assuming, especially in the context of the gradually widening *split* between Western states and Russia. However, one can state with absolute certainty that for a better understanding and a *smooth immersion* in the subtleties and nuances of this sphere, it is essential to turn to scholarly works that are maximally adapted for a general readership and capable of both enriching the knowledge of existing and experienced researchers and enlightening even those relatively unversed in global politics in accessible language.

PIR Center's recently released *Security Index* Yearbook perfectly addresses this challenge. It includes a wealth of research papers, essays, and interviews from experts and scholars on a wide range of aspects of international security: from historical context and theoretical foundations to analysis of current events and forecasting the most likely trends in Russia's approach to implementing strategic initiatives in the international arena.

The authors' approach to compiling the Yearbook is distinguished by a commitment to providing easy-to-read and study material: the book itself is conveniently divided into thematic sections, each of which reflects a particular expert's thought in its own way, and each individual chapter demonstrates a unique style of thought presentation and structure that does not *overwhelm* the reader.

Security Index Yearbook has high value as a scientific work, in which the ideas and opinions of the authors' collective cover a wide range of important topics reflected in the current political situation and modern processes of international relations. Particularly noteworthy is the authors' emphasis on balancing PIR Center's traditional focus on nuclear security and nonproliferation with issues of building and strengthening diplomatic and other contacts between Russia and the states currently forming the alliance known as *the Global South*.

Bishkek, September 2025

INSIDE RUSSIA'S SECURITY MINDSET

*Abubakar Abdi Osman
Chairman, Kesni Youth Empowerment Initiative
Participant of the 1st Russian-African Forum
of Young International Relations Professionals
on Security and Development.*

Sir,

Security Index Yearbook, released by MGIMO University and PIR Center, is a fascinating and insightful publication that provides a comprehensive analysis of global security issues from a Russian perspective.

As I delved into the book's pages, I was *struck by the depth and breadth* of expertise brought together by the authors. The chapters on counterterrorism, Russia's global perspective, the Ukraine crisis, outer space security, nuclear proliferation, and Russian-African relations were particularly captivating. These topics are critical to understanding the complex and evolving global security landscape, and the authors' analyses provided valuable insights into Russia's stance on these issues.

One of the aspects that impressed me most was the book's ability to bring together some of Russia's brightest minds, offering a diverse range of expertise and opinions. The authors' arguments were well-reasoned, and their use of evidence and data added depth and credibility to their analyses. I found myself re-reading certain sections, especially those on counterterrorism, the Ukraine crisis, and Russian-African relations, multiple times to fully *absorb* the authors' arguments.

The book's clarity and accessibility made it easy to follow, even for readers without a background in international relations or security studies. I was so impressed with the book that I shared it with my students and friends, who were equally amazed by its depth and insight.

The Russian *Security Index* Yearbook is, without a doubt, one of the most influential books I have ever read. Its comprehensive analysis of global security issues and its unique perspective on Russia's role in the world make it an essential read for anyone interested in international relations, security studies, or Russian affairs.

In conclusion, the *Security Index* Yearbook is a **must-read** for anyone seeking to understand the complex and evolving global security landscape. Its comprehensive analysis, diverse range of expertise, and unique perspective on Russia's role in the world make it an invaluable resource for scholars, policymakers, and anyone interested in international relations.

Mogadishu, September 2025

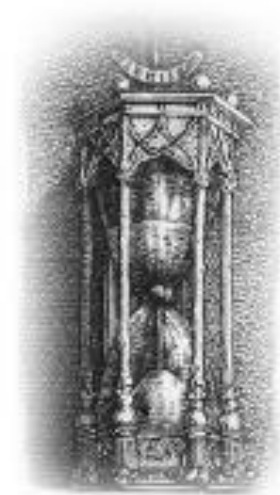
A *CRIB* FOR FRENCH CIVIL SERVANTS

Philippe Grinenberger
Chairman of the Association of French-Speaking Students in Moscow

Sir,

The *Security Index* Yearbook is unique in its format and value of information. Thanks to the quality of its analyses, the Yearbook enables public and private sector professionals to improve their knowledge of global security. *Security Index* Yearbook is an excellent source of information for French civil servants since it provides a different point of view from what is officially said in France.

Paris, August 2025



PART X. IN THE SPOTLIGHT. TOP INTERNATIONAL SECURITY EVENTS CHRONOLOGY: YEARS 2024 AND 2025⁵⁹⁷

⁵⁹⁷ The information provided in the Chronology is based on a wide range of different open sources including Russian and foreign media, news agencies, post and press releases as well as official documents, communiques and declarations – *Editor's note.*

TOP INTERNATIONAL SECURITY EVENTS CHRONOLOGY: YEAR 2024

January 1, 2024 –Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE officially joined BRICS.

January 2, 2024 – Türkiye announced it would not allow two minehunter ships donated by Britain to Ukraine to pass through its waters en route to the Black Sea. Ankara cited Article 19 of the Montreux Convention regarding the passage of warships during wartime, effectively preventing the escalation of naval presence in the Black Sea basin.

January 3, 2024 – Two explosions killed nearly 100 people in Kerman, Iran, during a memorial ceremony for General Qasem Soleimani. ISIS⁵⁹⁸ claimed responsibility for the attack.

January 5, 2024 – North Korean coastal artillery fired hundreds of rounds near the South Korean islands of Yeonpyeong and Baengnyeong, forcing civilian evacuations. Seoul responded with live-fire drills.

January 7, 2024 – the UK government has announced a £300 million funded programme to manufacture fuel for next-generation nuclear reactors. The initiative aims to make the UK the first country in Western Europe to produce high-assay low-enriched uranium fuel.

January 9, 2024 – The President of Ecuador declared a state of “Internal Armed Conflict” and ordered the military to neutralize 22 transnational organized crime gangs. The decree followed a wave of violence and the storming of a TV station.

January 11, 2024 – The Iranian Navy seized the US-linked oil tanker *St. Nikolas* in the Gulf of Oman.

January 12, 2024 – The USA and the UK launched a series of air and missile strikes against Houthi targets in Yemen (Operation *Prosperity Guardian*). This was the first major military response to the Houthi blockade of the Red Sea and their attacks on commercial shipping.

January 12, 2024 – The military junta of Myanmar and an alliance of ethnic armed groups agreed to a ceasefire in Shan State following mediation by Chinese officials. The deal highlighted Beijing's growing role as a primary security broker in Southeast Asia and halted renewed fighting near the Chinese border.

January 14, 2024 – North Korea successfully test-fired a solid-fuel intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM) loaded with a hypersonic maneuverable controlled warhead.

January 16, 2024 – Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) launched ballistic missiles at what it called “spy headquarters and terrorist targets” in Iraqi Kurdistan (Iraq), Syria, and Pakistan.

⁵⁹⁸ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor’s note*.

This led to a brief but sharp military exchange with Pakistan (which retaliated on January 18). It was the first time IRGC officially approved use of Kheibar Shekan ballistic missiles to destroy the targets.

January 22, 2024 – NATO launched military exercise *Steadfast Defender 2024*, involving approximately 90,000 troops. The drills were designed to simulate a conflict with a “near-peer adversary” (implicitly Russia) and test the alliance's ability to reinforce Europe's eastern flank quickly.

January 26, 2024 – The International Court of Justice (ICJ) delivered an interim ruling ordering Israel to take all measures to prevent acts of genocide in Gaza.

January 28, 2024 – The governments of Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso announced their immediate withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). These nations have increasingly severed ties with France and the West while strengthening security cooperation with Russia.

February 1, 2024 – During a visit to Hormozgan Province, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi issued an order to start the construction of the nuclear power plant in Sirik (estimated electricity generation capacity of the NPP is about 5,000 megawatts).

February 2, 2024 – The US military launched airstrikes against over 85 targets linked to Iran’s IRGC and affiliated militias in Iraq and Syria. The strikes were a response to a drone attack on a US base in Jordan (*Tower 22*) that killed three American troops in late January.

February 3, 2024 – the Russian Navy launched its fifth *Borei-A* Class nuclear missile submarine *Knyaz Pozharsky* (also known as *Project 955A*), equipped with 16 *Bulava* submarine-launched ballistic missiles.

February 8, 2024 – Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz has sent a congratulatory message to Iran’s President Ebrahim Raisi on the 45th anniversary of the 1979 Iranian revolution. It is the first such congratulatory message from the Saudi king to the Iranian leadership since the two Gulf neighbors agreed to restore diplomatic ties in 2023.

February 8, 2024 – Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping held a phone conversation, reaffirming their opposition to US interference in other nations’ affairs and pledging to deepen strategic cooperation.

February 8, 2024 – *Westinghouse* has signed an agreement with Community Nuclear Power Limited for the construction of four *AP300* small modular reactors in the North Teesside region of northeast England. It would be the UK's first privately-financed SMR fleet.

February 13, 2024 – the USA and Bulgaria have signed an intergovernmental agreement to cooperate on the development of the European country's civil nuclear programme, including the plan for new units at the *Kozloduy* NPP.

February 14, 2024 – US House Intelligence Committee Chairman Mike Turner publicly warned of a “serious national security threat”, later identified by officials as a developmental Russian space-based anti-satellite nuclear capability. Moscow dismissed the claims, but the event sparked a global debate on the militarization of space.

February 16, 2024 – During visits to Berlin and Paris, President of Ukraine Vladimir Zelensky signed long-term bilateral security agreements with Germany and France. These pacts institutionalized Western military and financial support for Kiev for the next decade, regardless of NATO membership status.

February 16, 2024 – The annual *Munich Security Conference* began in Germany, dominated by calls for increased military aid to Ukraine and European defense spending.

February 17, 2024 – Russian forces took full control of the fortified city of Avdeevka in the Donetsk People’s Republic (Russia).

February 24, 2024 – ECOWAS announced the lifting of strict economic sanctions on Niger, Mali, and Burkina Faso.

February 24, 2024 – Two years have passed since Russia started its Special Military Operation in Ukraine.

February 26, 2024 – The Hungarian parliament voted to ratify Sweden’s bid to join NATO, which was the final obstacle to the alliance's expansion.

February 28, 2024 – A Congress of Deputies of Transnistria (Pridnestrovian Moldavian Republic) adopted a resolution appealing to Russia for “protection” against an economic blockade by the Moldovan government.

March 1, 2024 – The leaked recording of four German officers, including the head of Germany’s Air Force, Ingo Gerhartz, discussing the deployment of the German *Taurus* missiles in Ukraine, was published and caused a serious scandal in Europe.

March 1, 2024 – President Vladimir Putin stated that Russia had no intention to deploy nuclear weapons in space.

March 2, 2024 – The political situation in Haiti deteriorated after the criminal gangs *G9* and *G-Pip* fighting for political power in the country attacked two prisons in Port-au-Prince and Croix-de-Bouc and released the detainees.

March 2, 2024 – Pakistan's National Assembly elected Shehbaz Sharif as prime minister.

March 6, 2024 – President Vladimir Putin held negotiations with the IAEA Director-General Rafael Grossi in the Kremlin to discuss the issue of the attacked Zaporozhskaya NPP.

March 6, 2024 – The Ukrainian troops were reported to have been deployed in Sudan in 2023 to participate in the civil war there and support the Sudan’s Transitional Sovereign Council in exchange for arms supplies.

March 7, 2024 – The Protocol to the North Atlantic Treaty on the Accession of the Kingdom of Sweden entered into force and Sweden officially became a member of NATO.

March 11, 2024 – Jens Stoltenberg claimed that NATO had no intention to increase the number of allied countries with deployed nuclear weapons after the Sweden entrance.

March 12, 2024 – The main part of the international naval exercises *Maritime Security Belt* conducted by Russia, China and Iran started in the Northern part of the Indian Ocean.

March 12, 2024 – The Prime Minister of Armenia Nicol Pashinyan stated that Armenia will withdraw from the CSTO if the organization does not address the issues raised by Armenia.

March 15, 2024 – The Netherlands picked France's Naval Group as a supplier of four attack submarines in a project worth €5.65 billion.

March 16, 2024 – Niger revoked the military cooperation agreement with the United States.

March 17, 2024 – The US Air Force conducted successful test of *AGM-183* hypersonic missile from the U.S. *Andersen* Air Force Base on Guam in the Pacific Ocean.

March 18, 2024 – The US Representative to the United Nations Linda Thomas-Greenfield announced that the United States is willing to engage in bilateral arms control discussions with Russia and China.

March 18, 2024 – The Prime Minister of Armenia Nicol Pashinyan announced the beginning of the process of demarcation and delimitation of the border between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

March 22, 2024 – ISIS–K⁵⁹⁹ conducted a coordinated dreadful terrorist attack at the *Crocus City Hall* in Moscow. The attack killed 150 people and injured more than 600.

March 28, 2024 – *Naval Group* (France) and *PT PAL* (Indonesia) signed a contract for 2 locally built *Scorpène* Evolved Full LiB submarines for Indonesia.

April 1, 2024 – Israel launched a missile attack on the diplomatic quarter in Damascus where Iranian diplomatic institutions were targeted with a commander of *al-Quds* force and senior Iranian military official Mohammad Reza Zahedi being killed.

April 2, 2024 – North Korea tested *Hwasong-16B*, a multistage, solid-fueled rocket engine for a presumably “new-type intermediate-range hypersonic missile”.

⁵⁹⁹ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor’s note*.

April 5, 2024 – Belarus President Alexander Lukashenko approved bringing in a bill on suspending the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty into the House of Representatives of the National Assembly.

April 7, 2024 – Gen. Charles Flynn, the US Army Pacific commander in an interview with *Yonhap* News Agency stated that the USA will deploy ground-based launchers capable of firing *SM-6* and *Tomahawk* missiles in the Indo-Pacific region to address “rising security threats”, amid escalating tensions in the region.

April 12, 2024 – The US accelerated the deployment of a strike group of fighter jets and navy warships to the Middle East, as the region braced for possible attacks by Iran and its allies.

April 13, 2024 – Iran seized the MSC *Aries* commercial ship with links to Israel as it passed through the Strait of Hormuz.

April 14, 2024 – Iran launched a full-scale attack on Israel with 350 different means, namely drones, cruise, and ballistic missiles in response to the Israeli attack on the diplomatic quarter in Damascus (Operation *True Promise*).

April 15, 2024 – Massive protests broke out in Tbilisi over the introduction of a “foreign agents” bill, which was met with dissatisfaction by the opposition.

April 17, 2024 – The Russian peacekeepers began withdrawing from Karabakh ahead of schedule in accordance with the agreed decision of the presidents of Russia and Azerbaijan.

April 24, 2024 – Reports indicated that the United States covertly supplied Ukraine with *ATACMS* missiles as part of a March 2024 military assistance shipment.

May 1, 2024 – India successfully tested a Supersonic Missile-Assisted Torpedo Release (*SMART*) system from Dr. APJ Abdul Kalam Island off the coast of Odisha.

May 7, 2024 – After ceasefire talks with HAMAS failed, Israel proceeded with a military operation and gained control over the Palestinian side of the Rafah border crossing.

May 7, 2024 – OPCW could not allege for sure whether chemical weapons were used during the Ukraine conflict due to lack of data obtained.

May 7, 2024 – Belarus announced unscheduled exercises with tactical nuclear weapons.

May 8, 2024 – The US Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin confirmed the Biden administration halted a shipment of high-payload munitions to Israel over its Rafah operation.

May 9–16, 2024 – U.S. forces took part in the *Swift Response* Drills held in Moldova.

May 15, 2024 – Slovak Prime Minister Robert Fico was wounded in a shooting.

May 19, 2024 – The Armed Forces of the DRC prevented a coup attempt.

May 19, 2024 – Iranian President Ibrahim Raisi died in a helicopter crash. In addition to Raisi, the crash also killed Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian, the governor of East Azerbaijan Province, and the Imam of Tabriz.

May 22, 2024 – Ireland, Norway, and Spain officially recognized Palestine as an independent state.

May 24, 2024 – The Agreement between the Russian Federation and Japan on Cooperation in Assisting the Elimination of Nuclear Weapons was terminated.

May 27, 2024 – Ukraine and Spain signed 10-year bilateral political agreement on security and defense in Madrid.

June 5, 2024 – NATO started naval exercise *Baltops-2024* in the Baltic Sea. More than 20 nations participate; increased operational activity near Russian borders.

June 13-15, 2024 – G7 Summit in Italy took place. Leaders approve a mechanism to channel profits from frozen Russian sovereign assets into financial support for Ukraine.

June 15-16, 2024 – Ukraine *Peace Summit* in Switzerland, organized by Swiss President Viola Amerd, took place. A large group of *Global South* states declined to sign the final communiqué of the Summit.

June 19, 2024 – Russia and North Korea sign a “Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Agreement”. The pact includes a clause on mutual military assistance in the event of aggression.

June 26, 2024 – Attempted military coup in Bolivia. A faction of the military briefly occupies government buildings; the mutiny is suppressed.

July 3, 2024 – Vladimir Putin met with Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the SCO summit in Astana. The leaders discussed deepening strategic partnership and jointly responding to common security threats.

July 9-11, 2024 – Washington NATO Summit (75th Anniversary). The Alliance reaffirms Ukraine’s accelerated path toward membership and expands military assistance programs.

July 10, 2024 – NATO member states agreed to establish an Integrated Cyber Defence Centre. The Centre became a part of NATO military commanders’ informing system on possible threats and vulnerabilities in cyberspace, including privately-owned civilian critical infrastructures necessary to support military activities.

July 14-16, 2024 – Houthi attacks on southern Saudi Arabia and Red Sea shipping lanes. The US and the UK respond with strikes on Houthi positions in Yemen.

July 28, 2024 – Masoud Pezeshkian, representing the *reformist coalition*, became the President of Iran.

August 10-12, 2024 – Large-scale cyberattacks on energy systems in Germany, Czechia, and Poland. EU officials cite evidence of coordinated external involvement.

August 14-16, 2024 – Internal conflict in Niger. Clashes erupt between the ruling junta and elements loyal to the former government; the junta accuses France of interference.

September 11, 2024 – The first *head-to-head* debate of the 2024 US presidential election campaign took place between Donald Trump and Kamala Harris. The debate highlighted the candidates' divergent approaches to Russia. While Kamala Harris implicitly reiterated the necessity of strong support for Ukraine, Trump emphasized his ability to negotiate with Vladimir Putin, claiming he could bring the conflict between Russia and Ukraine to an end.

September 15, 2024 – An assassination attempt was made on Donald Trump at the *Trump International Golf Club* in West Palm Beach, the State of Florida, the US. The incident triggered a massive wave of public sympathy, which solidified Trump's support base and potentially swayed floating voters.

September 17-18, 2024 – In an Israeli cyberattack dubbed *Operation Grim Beeper* thousands of pagers intended for use by Hezbollah members simultaneously exploded across Lebanon and Syria. This incident was described as Hezbollah's biggest security breach since the start of the Israel-Hezbollah conflict in 2023. It led to a surge in violence across the region.

September 22-23, 2024 – the *Summit of the Future* was held at the UN Headquarters in New York. The primary goal was to address critical gaps in global governance and reaffirm commitment to the UN Charter and the Sustainable Development Goals. The central outcome was the adoption of the Pact for the Future, a non-binding but politically significant document intended to guide multilateral cooperation in various key areas. Russia voted against the document because the amendment concerning the non-interference of the UN in the internal affairs of states was omitted from it.

September 23, 2024 – The Israel defense forces (IDF) started a limited-scale ground operation against Hezbollah in Lebanon (Operation *Northern Arrows*).

September 25, 2024 – President Vladimir Putin has publicly chaired a meeting of the Security Council on nuclear deterrence. During the meeting several updates to Russia's nuclear doctrine, regarding the conditions for the use of nuclear weapons, were announced.

September 27, 2024 – In a targeted airstrike the Israeli military eliminated the leader of Hezbollah Hassan Nasrallah. The strike, which hit a secure Hezbollah stronghold in southern Beirut, marked one of the most significant escalations in the region. Other Hezbollah leaders immediately declared a total and open war against Israel, vowing severe retaliation.

September 29, 2024 – Legislative elections were held in Austria to elect the lower house of country’s bicameral parliament. The far-right *Freedom Party of Austria* emerged victorious, marking the first time a far-right party won the most seats in a legislative election in Austria after World War II. The *Freedom Party of Austria* is known for its criticism of Western sanctions against Russia and its advocacy for strict migration policies. Its victory reflected a broader surge in support for right-wing parties across Europe.

October 1, 2024 – Iran launched Operation *True Promise II* against Israel, firing nearly 200 ballistic missiles at targets across Israel. The attack, described as the largest in the ongoing conflict between the two nations, was claimed by Tehran as a direct retaliation for Israel’s assassinations of Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh and Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah.

October 1, 2024 – Mark Rutte, the former Prime Minister of the Netherlands, assumed the position of NATO Secretary General, succeeding Jens Stoltenberg. This appointment signaled NATO’s unwavering continuation of support for Ukraine and intensification of its anti-Russian course, shattering any illusions about the possibility of normalizing dialogue in the foreseeable future.

October 1, 2024 – Shigeru Ishiba became the president of the *Liberal Democratic Party* and the Prime Minister of Japan. His policy agenda, centered on the push for an “Asian NATO” and constitutional revision, signaled a clear intent to transform Japan into a full-spectrum military power, moving beyond its post-war defense-oriented posture. Regarding territorial disputes with Russia, Shigeru Ishiba reaffirmed Japan’s commitment to resolving the territorial dispute and signing a peace treaty with Russia, while simultaneously expressing support for the sanctions regime against it.

October 2, 2024 – The Israeli Ministry of Foreign Affairs declared UN Secretary-General António Guterres persona non grata due to his unwillingness to unequivocally condemn Iran after its massive missile attack on Israeli territory and to recognize HAMAS as a terrorist organization.

October 4, 2024 – Chinese Coast Guard and Russian Border Service vessels have conducted a joint patrol in the Arctic Ocean for the first time.

October 9, 2024 – A group of Iranian parliamentarians called on the Supreme National Security Council of the Islamic Republic to authorize the creation of nuclear weapons due to the threats from Israel. Iran’s defense doctrine, following a fatwa by Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, considers the development of nuclear weapons to be contrary to the principles of Islam.

October 14, 2024 – China conducted one of its largest military exercises, codenamed *Joint Sword – 2024B* in the Taiwan Strait. This was a direct response to the statements by Taiwan’s leader affirming the island’s readiness to defend its national sovereignty.

October 15, 2024 – The Democratic People’s Republic of Korea (DPRK) destroyed all road and railway connections with South Korea. The North Korean government justified this decision by citing a corresponding amendment to its Constitution, which designates the Republic of Korea as a hostile state, alongside the removal of the clause concerning the pursuit of peaceful reunification of the two

states. Relations between the countries had previously deteriorated after South Korean drones, which were distributing propaganda leaflets, were detected in the airspace over Pyongyang.

October 20, 2024 – Presidential elections and a referendum on the country's membership in the EU took place in Moldova. The incumbent president Maia Sandu and Alexandr Stoianoglo have advanced to the second round, while the proposal to enshrine the strategic course for European Union accession in the country's constitution received support by a minimal margin of votes.

October 22-24, 2024 – The BRICS summit took place in Kazan. It demonstrated Russia's enduring capacity to remain a central actor in global politics despite extensive Western sanctions. The Kazan declaration expressed Russia's support for peace initiative by China and Brazil on ending the Ukrainian conflict as well as a call for an immediate ceasefire in the Middle East and the admission of Palestine to the UN as a full member. In the final document (the Kazan Declaration), summit participants also emphasized the inclusiveness of the Sustainable Development Goals, the role of new BRICS members, the development of the financial and technological sectors, and the strengthening of cooperation within the BRICS+ framework, outlining a vision for the future of the association in a multipolar world.

October 24, 2024 – The Russian State Duma ratified the Treaty on a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). The Treaty envisages mutual military assistance.

October 26, 2024 – Parliamentary elections were held in Georgia. *The Georgian Dream Party* managed to secure victory, a result that opposition parties decried as marred, thus, triggering a powerful wave of protests across the country.

November 1, 2024 – Poland announced the start of a line construction of defensive fortifications on the border with the Russian Federation as part of the *Eastern Shield* program.

November 4, 2024 – The DPRK tested an intercontinental ballistic missile (*Hwasong-19*) that reached an altitude of 7,687 kilometres.

November 13, 2024 – South Korea, the US, and Japan conducted the trilateral *Freedom Edge* exercises, during which actions in cyberspace, air defense and anti-submarine warfare were practiced.

November 14, 2024 – Bolivia has received an invitation to become a BRICS partner state.

November 16, 2024 – The US Navy has begun deploying *Boeing P-8A Poseidon* maritime reconnaissance aircraft to *RAF Lossiemouth* in north-east Scotland, the first time since the Cold War that the US Navy has deployed them amid growing concerns in London and Washington about Russia's activities in the North Atlantic and Arctic.

November 19, 2024 – Russia's President Vladimir Putin has approved the foundations of the state policy in the field of nuclear deterrence.

November 19, 2024 – The 11th session of the commission was held in Pyongyang. It was co-chaired by Russian Natural Resources Minister Alexander Kozlov and DPRK External Economic Relations Minister Yun Jong Ho.

November 21, 2024 – President Vladimir Putin said Russia had struck Ukraine with a new hypersonic medium-range ballistic missile *Oreshnik* (designated by NATO as new version of SS-X-31) in response to Kiev's use of US and British missiles against Russia.

November 21, 2024 – The Economic Congress of the VI International Municipal Forum of the BRICS Countries opened in St. Petersburg.

November 25, 2024 – An extensive Russian delegation, which also included Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk, held four meetings with Afghanistan's Vice Prime Minister Mohammad Abdul Kabir, Deputy Prime Minister Abdul Ghani Baradar, Defense Minister Mohammad Yaqoob, and Interior Minister Sirajuddin Haqqani.

November 26-27, 2024 – The 'World of Opportunities: Russia–ASEAN' International Business Forum took place in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Special attention was given to economic and financial partnerships, along with transportation, technology, innovation, cybersecurity, science and education, medicine, and tourism.

November 27, 2024 – President Yun Seok-yel met with a special envoy of the Ukrainian government and announced that the two countries will seek ways to effectively respond to security threats caused by military cooperation between North Korea and Russia.

December 3, 2024 – In a move to strengthen the country's maritime strength, the Indian Navy is set to introduce indigenously designed nuclear attack submarines (SSNs) by 2036. Admiral Dinesh Tripathi, the Navy Chief, announced this development during a press briefing ahead of Navy Day, marking a pivotal moment in India's defense strategy.

December 4, 2024 – The Treaty on Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the Russian Federation and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea officially came into force.

December 6, 2024 – The leaders of the countries of the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) have agreed on formation of common markets for gas, oil and petroleum products, Russia's President Vladimir Putin said at an extended meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council.

December 8, 2024 – The armed opposition in Syria has completed its *March on Damascus* Operation. President Bashar al-Assad has resigned. Armed opposition's leader Ahmed al-Sharaa became the de facto leader of Syria as the General Commander and head of the New Syrian Administration.

December 17, 2024 – The South Korean authorities have imposed unilateral sanctions against 11 individuals and 15 organizations from Russia, as well as against high-ranking members of the DPRK army for alleged "illegal military cooperation" between the countries.

December 19-22, 2024 – *The Vietnam Defense Expo 2024*. Russia's exposition held under the auspices of *Rosoboronexport* occupied an area of over 700 square meters and featured more than 400 samples of military, civilian and dual-use products developed and manufactured by leading Russian enterprises, including those belonging to the *Rostec* State Corporation.

December 26, 2024 – Based upon accumulated discussion primarily through the Extended Deterrence Dialogue (EDD), the Governments of Japan and the United States have formulated the *Guidelines for Extended Deterrence*. This document reinforces the Alliance's existing consultation and communication procedures related to extended deterrence. The Guidelines also address strategic messaging to maximize deterrence and enhance measures for US extended deterrence, bolstered by Japan's defense capabilities.

December 28, 2024 – The President signed Federal Law on Denunciation by the Russian Federation of the Framework Agreement on a Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Program in the Russian Federation and the Protocol on Claims, Litigation and Exemption from Financial Liability to the Framework Agreement on a Multilateral Nuclear Environmental Program in the Russian Federation.

TOP INTERNATIONAL SECURITY EVENTS CHRONOLOGY: YEAR 2025

January 5, 2025 – Ukraine’s armed forces attacked the Training Center of the Zaporozhskaya NPP.

January 7, 2025 – North Korea's state news agency KCNA announced that DPRK had successfully tested a new medium-range hypersonic ballistic missile.

January 13, 2025 – Ukraine’s armed forces attacked *TurkStream* Gas Pipeline.

January 17, 2025 – Russia’s President Vladimir Putin and the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran Masoud Pezeshkian signed the Treaty on Comprehensive Partnership between Moscow and Tehran.

January 22, 2025 – Ukraine’s armed forces attacked Energodar, using four UAVs.

January 27, 2025 – The United National Security Council debated the growing escalation in the Sub-Sahara Africa amid rapid activization of the terrorist groupings in the region.

January 29, 2025 – Rebels from the *M23 Movement* (DRC) seized the airport of east Congo’s largest city Goma, potentially cutting off the main route for aid.

February 5, 2025 – During the top-level negotiations between Russia and the Republic of Belarus, which had taken place in the Kremlin, Russia’s President Vladimir Putin said both Moscow and Minsk would recognize nuclear weapons as the instrument of deterrence.

February 10, 2025 – Kim Jong Un said he would bolster North Korea’s nuclear weapons program.

February 12, 2025 – Russia’s President Vladimir Putin and the US President Donald Trump held a telcon on the Ukraine crisis

February 13, 2025 – Ukraine’s armed forces disrupted the rotation of the IAEA at the Zaporozhskaya NPP

February 18, 2025 – the US–Russia talks, devoted to the topics of the contemporary condition of relations between Moscow and Washington, as well as pathways for rapprochement between two states, took place in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

February 24, 2025 – Three years passed since Russia had started its Special Military Operation in Ukraine.

February 28, 2025 – North Korean leader Kim Jong Un stated that nuclear attack capability remained the most perfect deterrence and defense capacity, maintaining the stability in the Korean Peninsula.

March 2, 2025 – The leaders of the leading European states held a summit in London to determine their strategy in the context of the most acute conflict within the Western community since World War II.

March 4, 2025 – Russia, in response to a request from the administration of US President Donald Trump, agreed to mediate negotiations with Iran on the nuclear deal (JCPOA).

March 4, 2025 – President of Belarus Alexander Lukashenko has signed the law “On ratification of the Treaty between the Republic of Belarus and the Russian Federation on security Guarantees within the framework of the Union State”.

March 5, 2025 – French President Emmanuel Macron said that France, together with its allies, should “begin a strategic discussion on protecting allies on the European continent with the help of deterrence forces”. This statement launched a new round of discussions about the creation of a European deterrence forces.

March 6, 2025 – Donald Trump expressed his intention to begin negotiations with Russia and China on nuclear disarmament at a press conference in the *Oval Office*.

March 18, 2025 – The Presidents of Russia and the United States, Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump, had their second telephone conversation. It was dedicated to the settlement in Ukraine and took place a week after the American and Ukrainian delegations agreed to implement a 30-day ceasefire in Jeddah.

March 18, 2025 – The UK government has confirmed that a strategy is in place to upgrade infrastructure to accommodate the Royal Navy’s new Dreadnought-class nuclear submarines.

March 23-25, 2025 – The United States held talks with Russia and Ukraine in Riyadh. As a result, Moscow and Washington announced their readiness to ensure the implementation of the “Black Sea Initiative”.

April 3, 2025 – NATO Supreme Allied Commander Europe, General Christopher Cavoli, stated at a hearing of the US Senate Armed Services Committee that European countries have requested the deployment of a long-range hypersonic missile launch system on their territory. During the public portion of the hearing, he did not specify who made the request.

April 11, 2025 – President Trump’s special envoy Steve Witkoff arrived in Russia on Friday to try to make progress on cease-fire talks over the war in Ukraine, meeting with President Vladimir V. Putin in St. Petersburg.

April 11, 2025 – President Emmanuel Macron of France held meetings with top American officials (Secretary of State Marco Rubio and Steve Witkoff, President Trump’s envoy) that were designed to preserve at least the appearance of a united front in the Russian special operation in Ukraine.

April 12, 2025 – The first round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States on lifting sanctions and the nuclear issue was held in Oman.

April 15-16, 2025 – The meeting on security issues in the Black Sea was held at the headquarters of the Turkish Navy command “in the light of a potential cease-fire between the Russian Federation and Ukraine”. There is no representative of the Russian Federation among them.

April 18, 2025 – Russia has denounced the 2007 *Barents Sea Agreement* with Norway, Finland, and Sweden. The Agreement envisaged the creation of an International Barents Secretariat to develop cooperation in the sea and the Euro-Arctic region.

April 18, 2025 – U.S. President Donald Trump's top envoys met with European powers and Ukraine in Paris to push efforts to end Russia's war in Ukraine, and Secretary of State Marco Rubio said a U.S. peace framework received an “encouraging reception”. Rubio also held a parallel phone conversation with his Russian counterpart Sergey Lavrov, in which the State Department said he again conveyed Trump's desire to end the war.

April 19, 2025 – The second round of indirect talks between Iran and the United States was held in Rome. The parties managed to move on to the next stage in these negotiations in order to reach a fair, permanent agreement that would guarantee Iran's release from nuclear weapons and the complete lifting of sanctions, while preserving Tehran's right to develop peaceful nuclear energy.

April 26, 2025 – The third round of indirect negotiations between the United States and Iran on the nuclear program was held in Oman.

April 28 – May 9, 2025 – The third session of the Preparatory Committee for the 2026 NPT Review Conference was held in New York (the USA).

April 30, 2025 – Alexey Likhachev, the head of *Rosatom*, said that if a political decision is made by the country's leadership, the state corporation is ready to discuss the presence of American colleagues at the Zaporozhskaya NPP.

May 7, 2025 – India announced *Sindoor* Operation, which targeted “terrorist installations” in Pakistan, and launched missile strikes on nine terrorist-linked installations, according to the country's Defense Ministry. Pakistan responded with artillery shelling of Indian territory. The Pakistani military also claimed to have destroyed five Indian fighter jets.

May 8, 2025 – The United States expects to receive samples of the new *B61-13* nuclear bomb by the end of May. Previously, work on its creation was planned to be completed in the spring of 2026. It is planned to equip modern fighter jets and a B-21 Raider with a bomb.

May 9, 2025 – Chinese President Xi Jinping attends celebrations marking the 80th anniversary of the victory in the Soviet Union's Great Patriotic War in Moscow, Russia. Leaders from more than 20 countries and international organizations were invited to the events.

May 10, 2025 – Islamabad announced a large-scale operation *Banyan ul-Marsoos* against India.

May 10, 2025 – Donald Trump announced that India and Pakistan, brokered by Washington, had agreed to a complete and immediate ceasefire. The ceasefire was violated by both sides several times, but this did not lead to a major escalation.

May 11, 2025 – 30 years ago, in May 1995, the NPT Review Conference decided to extend the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT Treaty) indefinitely.

May 13-16, 2025 – Donald Trump has made his first foreign tour since the beginning of his presidential term. In a few days, he visited three countries — Saudi Arabia, Qatar and the UAE. One of the main outcomes of Donald Trump's foreign visit was the signing of a series of “deals of the century” with the Arabian monarchies.

May 19, 2025 – A two-hour telephone conversation between Presidents Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump took place, which raised hopes that Russian-American relations had finally passed their low point and were beginning an accelerating upward movement.

May 20, 2025 – US President Donald Trump presented the draft of the new *Golden Dome* missile defense system at a press conference at the White House.

May 27-29, 2025 – The 13th International Meeting of High Representatives for Security Issues kicks off in the Russian capital of Moscow. More than 150 countries have been invited to take part in the forum, including from the Global South and East, the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The leaders of more than 20 international organizations have received invites as well.

May 30, 2025 – 10th Conference “Russia and China: cooperation in a new era” in Beijing.

May 31, 2025 – Russia and NATO countries will simultaneously hold military exercises in the Baltic Sea on June 3.

May 31, 2025 – German Foreign Minister Johann Vadehuhl said that Germany had become “a little more honest” about Russia. According to him, Germany no longer aims to defeat Russia in the military conflict in Ukraine.

May 31, 2025 – Russia has requested a meeting of the UN Security Council on the topic of European attempts to obstruct the peace process around Ukraine.

June 12-13, 2025 – Israel launched a large-scale “lightning” operation, *Rising Lion*, striking Iran’s nuclear, military, and infrastructure targets. Nighttime raids hit Natanz, Esfahan, and Fordow enrichment plants, destroying advanced centrifuges and radar systems.

June 13, 2025 – Iran retaliated with a massive missile-and-drone assault against Israel, targeting Tel Aviv, Jerusalem, and several military bases. Around 150 ballistic missiles and over 100 UAVs were launched.

June 14, 2025 – Israeli forces struck western and northwestern Iranian cities, killing several senior nuclear scientists and specialists connected to the country's enrichment program.

June 15-16, 2025 – Iran fired new waves of missiles toward Tel Aviv and Haifa, damaging civilian infrastructure and causing casualties. The attacks deepened fears of a regional escalation.

June 18, 2025 – Heavy airstrikes were reported over Tehran; plumes of smoke rose across the capital. Israeli forces claimed precision hits on air-defense nodes and command centers.

June 19, 2025 – The White House announced that a U.S. decision on possible intervention in the Israel-Iran conflict would be made within two weeks, signaling Washington's concern over rapid escalation.

June 24, 2025 – A U.S.-brokered ceasefire came into effect between Israel and Iran. Tehran was the first to halt its attacks; Israel paused airstrikes about twelve hours later.

June 25, 2025 – Preliminary assessments revealed heavy damage to Iran's nuclear infrastructure, including the Fordow enrichment facility. Analysts estimated the strikes had set back Iran's program by several years.

July 1, 2025 – *Al-Qaeda-linked Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM)*⁶⁰⁰ carried out coordinated attacks and kidnappings, pushing violence toward areas near the Senegal frontier. Analysts later assessed a broader mid-year surge in *JNIM* tempo across Mali and the wider Sahel.

July 6-7, 2025 – The XVII BRICS Summit produced a leaders' declaration emphasizing multipolar governance, tech, AI coordination, and closer Global South economic-security cooperation.

July, 9 – Reportedly, there was a joint FSB/MoD operation against Ukrainian *Sapsan* ballistic missile design and production facilities involving long-range strikes. Facilities has been hit in Dnepropetrovsk and Sumy regions, destruction of air defense assets included. Germany bankrolled the *Sapsan* project.

July 10, 2025 – The United Kingdom and France signed *Lancaster House 2.0*, updating their defence pact. It expands nuclear coordination, joint weapons programs, and cooperation in cyber, space, and AI.

July 16, 2025 – Israeli airstrikes hit Damascus, targeting Syria's Ministry of Defence and General Staff HQ. At least three were killed and dozens wounded, marking an escalation after the June conflict with Iran.

⁶⁰⁰ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor's note*.

July 29, 2025 – Pakistan launched Operation *Sarbakaf* in Bajaur to clear Taliban and *IS-Khorasan*⁶⁰¹ militants. Airstrikes and ground assaults killed dozens; civilians were displaced amid renewed border instability.

August 1-8, 2025 – U.S. AFRICOM conducted a series of airstrikes supporting Somali National Army operations against Al-Shabaab near Bariire (Lower Shabelle province). The campaign aimed to secure a strategic corridor in southwestern Somalia.

August 8, 2025 – Somali forces, backed by the African Union Mission, liberated the town of Bariire from Al-Shabaab, killing over 120 militants and seizing large weapons and explosives stockpiles.

August 14, 2025 – Authorities in Mali thwarted an attempted military coup. Two generals and a French national were arrested, accused of conspiring with foreign intelligence. The government denounced “external interference.”

August 21, 2025 – Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy announced the successful testing of the Ukrainian *Flamingo* cruise missile (range up to 3,000 km). Based on its appearance and stated characteristics, experts identified the Flamingo as the *FP-5* cruise missile developed by the *Milnion Group* (the UK).

August 25 – September 3, 2025 – *Super Garuda Shield 2025* multinational drills, led by the U.S. and Indonesia, brought together 13 nations with naval, air, ground, and cyber elements. Significance: Showed deepening Indo-Pacific defense cooperation and efforts to balance China’s influence.

August 28, 2025 – Israel launched airstrikes on the Yemeni capital Sana’a, destroying the Houthi leadership headquarters and killing several top officials, including the movement’s prime minister and defense minister – part of a broader “decapitation” strategy.

August 31 – September 1, 2025 – SCO Summit in Tianjin gathered member states to discuss security, technology, and regional projects. Significance: Russia used the forum to reinforce its Asian presence and align with China and Central Asian partners.

September 1, 2025 – SCO Heads of State Council approved the *Tianjin Declaration*. The document emphasizes that the principles of non-interference in internal affairs and non-use of force are the foundation for the sustainable development of international relations.

September 5, 2025 – International news agencies reported increased construction activity at the Dimona nuclear facility in Israel. Experts estimate this could be a new heavy-water reactor or a facility for the initial stages of nuclear weapons assembly.

September 9, 2025 – Israel, as part of a joint operation between the Shin Bet and the IDF, launched an airstrike on the Qatari capital, Doha. The attack targeted key figures in the Palestinian HAMAS Politburo (the movement's top political leadership). The operation failed, with most of the targets unharmed.

⁶⁰¹ hereinafter – terrorist organization banned in Russia – *Editor’s note*.

September 10, 2025 – during a meeting in Cairo (Egypt), IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi and Iranian Foreign Minister Abbas Araghchi finalized and signed an agreement on the modalities of the Agency's inspection activities in the aftermath of the Israeli and US aggression.

September 15, 2025 – the Pentagon announced plans to keep *Minuteman III* intercontinental ballistic missiles on active duty until 2050 due to the stalling of the LGM-35A *Sentinel* program.

September 17, 2025 – The French Ministry of Defense, represented by the Defense Procurement Agency (*Direction générale de l'armement*, DGA), signed a contract with ArianeGroup for the development and production of the fourth version of the M51 submarine-launched intercontinental ballistic missile. The new M51.4 missile will have an increased range, greater accuracy, and improved capabilities to penetrate enemy missile defense systems.

September 17, 2025 – Polish authorities, represented by President Karol Nawrocki, declared their readiness to participate in NATO nuclear initiatives (including the hypothetical deployment of the Alliance's nuclear weapons on its territory) and to expand cooperation with nuclear powers in the field of security.

September 17, 2025 – Saudi Arabia and Pakistan signed the Strategic Mutual Defense Agreement, laying the foundation for a new military alliance and enshrining the principle of joint defense. Islamabad's influence in the Middle East increased.

September 19, 2025 – Iran's Supreme National Security Council announced a second severance of ties with the IAEA in response to increased international pressure.

September 22, 2025 – President Vladimir Putin stated that Russia wants to try to maintain the status quo established by the *New START* Treaty and is prepared to adhere to its central restrictions for one year after the *New START* Treaty expires in February 2026.

September 28, 2025 – US Vice President J.D. Vance announced that US officials are discussing the possibility of supplying NATO with *Tomahawk* missiles for Kiev. However, a final decision on the matter has not yet been made. Russia considers the supply of missiles to Ukraine an escalatory step and promises an asymmetric response if they are used.

September 29, 2025 – France, Germany, and the United Kingdom (*E3*) completed the activation of the “snapback” mechanism, which provides for the restoration of UN Security Council sanctions against Iran for its refusal to conclude a new nuclear deal. Russia and China believe the procedure was carried out irregularly and have not recognized the sanctions' restoration.

September 30, 2025 – US President Donald Trump officially unveiled the “Peace Plan” for resolving the situation in the Gaza Strip. The three-stage plan calls for the withdrawal of forces from the line of contact, the return of hostages, the disarmament of HAMAS, and a *complete reset* of Palestinian institutions.

October 3, 2025 – the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership Treaty between Russia and Iran entered into force.

October 10, 2025 – the ceasefire between Israel and Palestinian HAMAS, stipulated by the first stage of Donald Trump's “peace plan”, came into effect.

October 10, 2025 – the DPRK unveiled its new *Hwasong-20* mobile ICBM during a parade marking the 80th anniversary of the WPK.

October 11-12, 2025 – rapid, but large-scale clashes involving heavy artillery and airstrikes occurred along the border between Afghanistan and Pakistan (along the *Durand Line*). The two sides quickly reached a ceasefire agreement but continued to exchange threatening statements. Sporadic clashes along some sections of the border continued until October 17.

October 13-14, 2025 – a “Peace Summit” was held in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, where, with the participation of key mediators (the United States, Türkiye, and Arab states), an agreement was reached to end hostilities between Israel and the Palestinian HAMAS. The interests of the conflicting parties were represented by the United States and Qatar, respectively.

October 14, 2025 – Britain completely lifted the 33-year arms embargo on Armenia and Azerbaijan, imposed in 1992 due to the conflict in Nagorno-Karabakh.

October 14, 2025 – Türkiye successfully tested its indigenous *SOM-J* cruise missile. Developed by TÜBİTAK SAGE and ROKETSAN, the *SOM-J* missile is compatible with Turkish F-16 fighter jets, *KAAN* fighter jets, and drones.

October 15, 2025 – the leader of the Syrian transitional government, Ahmad al-Sharaa, made his first official visit to Moscow and held talks with Vladimir Putin. The discussion focused on further developing cooperation between Moscow and Damascus.

October 16, 2025 – Vladimir Putin and Donald Trump held a telephone conversation on current international security issues. The leaders agreed to hold a high-level meeting between Russia and the United States “in the near future”.

October 16, 2025 – Donald Trump announced that Budapest, Hungary, would be the venue for his meeting with the Russian leader. The event was subsequently postponed indefinitely.

October 16, 2025 – Yemen's Houthi rebels (*Ansar Allah*) summarized their participation in operations in support of Palestine. Over two years, they carried out 758 attacks using 1,835 different weapons, including ballistic and anti-ship cruise missiles, as well as kamikaze UAVs and surface drones. Houthi forces also conducted 346 naval operations in the Red Sea, the Arabian Sea, and the Indian Ocean. Yemeni forces struck 228 vessels linked to Israel or violating the ban on entering Israeli ports.

October 18, 2025 – UN Security Council Resolution 2231 (the legal basis of the JCPOA) ceased to exist due to expiration.

October 18, 2025 – Donald Trump held a closed-door meeting with Kiev regime leader Volodymyr Zelenskyy. The meeting ended without significant breakthroughs in the settlement.

October 20-23, 2025 – the Fourth Plenary Session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC) was held in China. The Plenary Session defined China's strategic development priorities for the next five years, with a greater emphasis on security. A key sign of change was the purge of the military leadership shortly before the Plenary Session, with several high-ranking generals dismissed due to a loss of trust.

October 22, 2025 – Russia conducted a strategic nuclear forces training exercise under the leadership of the Supreme Commander-in-Chief. Their land, sea, and air components were involved.

October 22, 2025 – According to several experts, Iran began rebuilding the *Taleghan 2* facility, located in a protected area in Parchin Province. The facility was previously associated with the *Amad* nuclear project and is known for conducting nuclear tests. Tehran has not officially commented on the information.

October 23, 2025 – EU countries imposed the 19th round of economic sanctions against Russia. The US and UK also imposed additional restrictions.

October 23, 2025 – According to the Wall Street Journal, the US lifted a key restriction on Ukraine's use of allied-supplied long-range missiles, allowing Kiev to launch strikes deep into Russia. Washington has not officially commented on the media reports.

October 24, 2025 – Donald Trump announced the launch of a campaign against Latin American drug cartels. Trump also named the Venezuelan government as one of the drug traffickers' "accomplices" and threatened a swift ground operation in that country.

October 25, 2025 – the signing process for the Convention against Cybercrime began at the UN. More than 70 UN member states signed the document within the first 48 hours.

October 26, 2025 – Vladimir Putin announced that testing of the *Burevestnik* nuclear-armed cruise missile, unique in the world, had been completed. The President instructed Chief Valery Gerasimov to determine the class of the *Burevestnik* missile and prepare the infrastructure for its deployment.

October 27, 2025 – Vladimir Putin signed a decree denouncing the agreement with the United States on plutonium disposal.

October 27, 2025 – during British Prime Minister Keir Starmer's visit to Türkiye, an agreement was signed to supply Ankara with twenty *Eurofighter* multirole fighter jets over the next ten years. The modification will be adapted to carry Turkish-made munitions.

October 27, 2025 – the rebel Rapid Support Forces (Sudan) recaptured the city of El Fasher in Darfur from government forces after 18 months of fighting. The loss of El Fasher increased the likelihood of Darfur's secession.

October 28, 2025 – Belarusian officials announced that work to create conditions for the deployment of the *Oreshnik* system in Belarus was nearing completion. The system is expected to be operational in December 2025.

October 28, 2025 – Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service announced that the General Staff of the French Armed Forces is preparing to deploy a contingent of up to 2,000 soldiers and officers to Ukraine to support the Kiev regime. French legionnaires are already stationed in areas of Poland bordering Ukraine and are undergoing intensive combat training.

October 29, 2025 – Vladimir Putin announced that Russia had successfully tested the *Poseidon* nuclear submarine, which is significantly more powerful than the *Sarmat* missile.

October 30, 2025 – Donald Trump ordered the Pentagon to begin nuclear weapons testing on an equal footing with other countries' testing programs.

October 30, 2025 – Donald Trump announced that he had granted South Korea permission to build a nuclear submarine. The project will be built at the *Hanwha Shipyard* in Philadelphia, symbolically lifting a 30-year ban.

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PhD in Political Science, professor of the Department of World literature and culture, MGIMO University. Co-founder, editor-in-chief of *Foma* Journal, Chairman of the Department for Church's Society and Mass Media Relations (Russian Orthodox Church) and Acting Head of the Press Service of the Patriarch of Moscow and all Rus'.

Andrey MALOV

PhD in Political Science. PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2018). At present – Chief researcher at the Institute of International Studies at MGIMO University, Moscow. Graduated from Maurice Thorez Moscow State Institute of Foreign Languages. Worked at the Committee of the Soviet Youth Organizations responsible for emerging leaders programs. In 1991-1993, he was a researcher and lecturer at the Institute for Economic Strategies at the Russian Academy of Sciences. In 1991 – a Visiting Professor in Western International University, Arizona, USA. From 1993 to 2018, he served at the Russian Foreign Ministry. Seconded in the OSCE missions in Nagorno-Karabakh (1994-1996) and Bosnia and Herzegovina (1996-1998). Worked on arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament issues at the Russian Foreign Ministry since 1998. For example, he held the position of the Head of Multilateral Disarmament Division. He participated in the negotiations on multilateral disarmament as an official member of the Russian delegations. Headed the Russian delegations on lethal autonomous weapon systems (LAWS) issues within the Group of Governmental Experts (GGE) (unofficial and official formats) in the framework of United Nations Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons (CCW) in Geneva (2013-2018).

Mikhail MARGELOV

PhD in Political Science. PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2002). Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC) Board of Trustees Member and Vice President. Member of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP). Head of UNESCO Department on *Asian and African Studies: Modern Methods of Studying and Teaching* at the Institute of Asian and African Studies of Moscow State University. He led a group of political observers at the Russian news agency *Vesti*. He was the Chairman of the European Democrat Group in the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe. On April 25, 2005, he resigned as Vice-Chairman of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe from Russia. From 2008 to 2011, he was the Special Representative of the Russian President for Sudan. Also, he was the Special Representative of the President of the Russian Federation for cooperation with African countries. From 2000 to 2014, he was the Representative in the Federation Council of the Russian Federal Assembly from the administration of the Pskov region.

Julia MELNIKOVA

PhD in Political Science. Head of the *Asia and Eurasia* Program at the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC).

Vitaly NAUMKIN

Doctor of History. PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2014). Professor, Full Member of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). President at the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS. In 1968-

1970, he served as an officer in the Soviet Army, taught at the Military Institute of Foreign Languages of the Ministry of Defense. In 1972, he began teaching medieval history of the Arab world, Islamic studies, and modern political development of Arab countries at the Institute of Asian and African Countries of Lomonosov Moscow State University. In 1972-1977, he worked at the Graduate School of Social Sciences in the People's Democratic Republic of Yemen. He is the Editor-in-Chief of the *Vostok/ORIENS* journal, Member of the Scientific Council under the Foreign Minister of Russian Federation, Member of the Scientific Council under the Security Council of the Russian Federation. He heads the Department of Regional Studies of the School of World Politics at Lomonosov Moscow State University and Center of South Arabian Studies, Higher School of Economics. Member of the *Dialogue Club International* (since 2016).

Vladimir NEZHDANOV

Master of International Relations. Senior Lecturer in the Department of International Relations, Foreign Regional Studies, and Tourism at Tyumen State University, Senior Lecturer at the General Academic Department of the Russian Presidential Academy of National Economy and Public Administration, and Expert at the Institute of Advanced International Problems of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Also an expert at the Russian International Affairs Council and PIR Center. He regularly comments on current political issues of Russian-Chinese cooperation for *RIA Novosti* News Agency, *Sputnik China*, *Sputnik* Radio, and the *Soloviev Live* TV channel.

Vladimir ORLOV

PhD in Political Science. Editor-in-Chief of *Security Index* Yearbook. Founder (1994) and Director of PIR Center, Member of its Executive Board. Founder (1993) and President of the *Dialogue Club International*. Professor of MGIMO University, Academic Director of MA Program *International Security* (developed by MGIMO University and PIR Center). Earlier – Academic Director of the Dual Degree MA Program *Global Security, Nuclear Policy, and WMD Nonproliferation* (developed by MGIMO University, PIR Center and Middlebury Institute of International Studies at Monterey, USA). In 1994, launched the first Russian journal on nonproliferation issues, namely *Ядерный Контроль/Nuclear Control*. In 2007, the journal was developed into *Индекс Безопасности/Security Index*, with both Russian and global (English-language) editions. From 2004 to 2008, he was a Professor at the Geneva Centre for Security Policy (GCSP). Starting from 2008, he has been working on the concept of BRIC, later BRICS, and its development, particularly on its peace and security basket. Since 2010, as a member of the Russian official delegation, he has participated at the review conferences of the Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (2010, 2015, 2022). In 2015-2018, he also served as a member of the United Nations Secretary General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters. Author (or co-author) of more than a dozen books and monographs and more than 300 research papers, articles, and essays, including *Nuclear Nonproliferation* textbook. He is developing his Telegram Channel *Sobesednik-na-Piru* (@Собеседник-на-Пире)

Dmitry POLIKANOV

PhD in Political Science. Deputy Head of the Federal Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Compatriots Living Abroad and International Humanitarian Cooperation (*Rossotrudnichestvo*). He holds the title of Associate Professor from the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS) and the title of Full Professor of the World Distributed University of the European

Informatization Academy. From 1998 to 2014, he occupied different positions at PIR Center, for example, in 2008-2014, he was Vice-President of PIR Center. Author of over 100 publications on conflict management, peacekeeping, arms control, international relations, and foreign policy (in Russian and foreign languages). He is an author of the Telegram Channel *Polikanov Speaks* (@Поликанов говорит).

Tariq RAUF

PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2013). Former Head of Verification and Security Policy Coordination, Office reporting to Director General, International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA). Former Alternate Head of the IAEA Delegation to review conferences of the Parties to the Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT review conferences). In 1987-2000, he was an expert advisor on nonproliferation to Canadian delegations at the NPT review conferences. He was a member of the Group of Eminent Persons for Substantive Advancement of Nuclear Disarmament, established by the Minister of Foreign Affairs of Japan. He held the positions of Advisor-Consultant to the Executive Secretary of the Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban Treaty Organization (CTBTO), Senior Advisor to the Chairman of the Preparatory Committee for the NPT Review Conference (2014) and Chairman of the Main Committee I of the NPT Review Conference (2015). Also, he was the Head of the Department of Nuclear Safety and Security of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Deputy Head of the IAEA delegation to the NPT review conferences, the IAEA representative for Relations with the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the representative of the United Nations Security Council 1540 Committee, United Nations Counter-Terrorism Implementation Task Force. He was also the IAEA Coordinator for concerning multilateral approaches to the nuclear fuel cycle, the Low Enriched Uranium Reserve in Angarsk, the Low Enriched Uranium Bank in Kazakhstan, as well as guarantees regarding the supply of nuclear fuel. He was responsible for organizing the IAEA Forum for the study of the experience that can be applied to the establishment of Weapons of Mass Destruction-Free Zone in the Middle East (MENWFZ).

Sergey RYABKOV

Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation. He is responsible for bilateral relations between Russia and the countries of North and South America, issues of nonproliferation and arms control, including conventional weapons in Europe and Iran's nuclear program, as well as Russia's participation in the BRICS association (he is Russia's BRICS Sherpa). Graduated in 1982 from the Moscow State Institute of International Relations of the USSR Ministry of Foreign Affairs (now MGIMO University). After graduation held various diplomatic positions in the central office of the Foreign Ministry of the USSR/ Russia and abroad. From 1995 to 1999, he was the Head of the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) Desk at the Department of European Cooperation of the Russian Foreign Ministry. From 1999 to 2001 – Senior Counselor, from 2002 to 2005 – Minister Counselor-Envoy Extraordinary and Minister Plenipotentiary at the Russian Embassy in the USA (Washington DC). From 2005 to 2008, he was the Director of the Department of European Cooperation of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Since August 15, 2008, he has been the Deputy Foreign Minister of the Russian Federation. Holds the diplomatic rank of Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. Member of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP) and the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC).

Maxim RYZHENKOV

Minister of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Belarus (since June 2024). Graduated from the Faculty of Law of the Belarusian State University with a degree in International Law (1994) and the Academy of Public Administration under the aegis of the President of the Republic of Belarus with a degree in State and Local Administration (2003).

Ivan SAFRANCHUK

PhD in Political Science. PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2015). Currently professor and leading Research Fellow. Dr. Safranchuk has been affiliated with the MGIMO University since 2003. In 1997-2001, he was a Research Fellow and the Director of the *Nuclear Arms Control* Program at PIR Center. From 2001 to 2006, he held the position of the Director of the Russian Office of the International Center for Defense Information, which was later renamed the World Security Institute, Washington DC, USA. In 2006-2008, he was an Advisor to the World Security Institute and the international project *Global Zero*. In 2011-2014, he was Deputy Head of the Institute of Contemporary International Studies of the Diplomatic Academy of the Russian Foreign Ministry. Author of more than 50 scientific and methodological papers in Russian and more than 20 scientific papers in foreign languages published in Russia, USA, Great Britain, Germany, Italy, China, Norway, and Sweden. He is a Member of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP) and *Valdai* Discussion Club. Professor of the Academy of Military Sciences.

Sergey SEBEKIN

PhD in History. Senior Researcher at the *School of International Relations* (Saint Petersburg State University). Associate Professor at the Department of Political Science, History and Regional Studies of Irkutsk State University. Member of the International Research Group on Threats for International Psychological Security by Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence (Research MUAI). Expert of the Institute of Current International Issues of the Diplomatic Academy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation. Expert of the Russian International Affairs Council. He is the author of more than 50 scientific articles, analytical notes and reports on various issues of international cybersecurity and malicious use of AI.

Sergey SEMENOV

Research fellow at PIR Center and a lecturer at MGIMO University. He is an alumnus of MGIMO University. In 2019-2021, he led the *Nuclear Nonproliferation and Russia* Program at PIR Center, focusing on review process of Treaty on the Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons and Russia-US dialogue on strategic stability. Authored and co-edited two monographs: *Russia-US Nuclear Nonproliferation Dialogue: Lessons Learned and Road Ahead*; *A New Nuclear Nine? Assessing the Threat of Nuclear Proliferation in the World*.

Yuriy SHAKHOV

Editor, *Information, Publications & Digital Communications* Program, PIR Center. Graduated from the Faculty of International Relations at Saint Petersburg State University. Second-year master's student of the International Security Program (MGIMO University & PIR Center). Actively participated in both academic and research initiatives including the Research Schools of the Student Scientific Society of the Faculty of International Relations at Saint Petersburg State University, the Congress of International Relations Researchers, winter conferences, and the 1st Russian-African Forum of Young International Relations Professionals on International Security and Development.

Member of Student Society of MGIMO University and the *International Security Club* of MGIMO University.

Dmitry STEFANOVICH

Research Fellow at the Center for International Security at the Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS), member of the Council for Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP), PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2022), expert of the Russian International Affairs Councils (RIAC) and *Valdai* Discussion Club. Graduated (with honors) from the NRNU MEPhI with a specialist degree in International Relations and the International Science and Technology Cooperation specialization. In 2019 he was a Visiting Research Fellow at the Institute for Peace Research and Security Policy at the University of Hamburg (IFSH), Arms Control and Emerging Technologies program. In 2022-2023 he was a member of the of the first P5 Young Professionals Network team. Since 2023 has been a member of the *N5 Expert Level Track* group. He is an author of numerous publications for academic journals, think tanks and media. His research interests include strategic weapons, long-range precision weapons, hypersonic weapons, space weaponization, disruptive technologies and their impact on international security and strategic stability, arms control, regional security.

Elena SUPONINA

PhD in Philosophy and Religion. Russian Political Analyst. PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2024). As an independent and well-known expert, Dr. Elena Suponina cooperates with a number of institutions and think tanks, such as PIR Center and the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). From 2011 for more than ten years, Dr. Elena Suponina worked as an advisor to the director of the Russian Institute for Strategic Studies (belonging to the administration of the President of Russia). She worked there as well as the Co-Founder and the Director of the *Middle East and Asia Center*. Dr. Elena Suponina for 15 years was a member of the analytic media group belonging to the Kremlin and the Foreign Ministry, accompanying the Russian President and several Russian Foreign Ministers on official foreign visits and providing expertise and analysis. She has received International and Russian awards as the winner of competitions and for the best publications in the following areas: *International Policy*, *Islam in Russia*, *Russian-Iraq cooperation*, and *International cooperation in oil and gas*. She was also given an *Award for Courage* as a political analyst from the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry and its president, ex-prime-minister Evgeny Primakov. As a doctor of science and political analyst, she published over a hundred research papers and thousands of newspaper and magazine articles. She provides analytics for various Russian and foreign outlets, TV channels, and radio stations.

Teburoro TITO

Kiribati politician and diplomat. The third president of Kiribati (from 1994 to 2003). Permanent Representative of Kiribati to the United Nations (from 2017).

Anatoly TORKUNOV

Rector of MGIMO University. Member of the Presidium of the Russian Academy of Sciences, Member of the Board of the Russia Foreign Ministry, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary. In 1983-1986, he was in the diplomatic service in Washington. In 1986, he was elected Dean of the Faculty of International Relations at MGIMO. In 1989, he was appointed the First Vice-Rector. Since

1992 Acad. Torkunov has served as Rector of MGIMO University. Acad. Torkunov holds MA and two doctoral degrees in History and Political Science. He is the author and co-author of more than 200 widely recognized scientific works, including a dozen of monographs. He has received state awards of many countries including Russia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Belarus, Hungary, Japan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Mongolia, the Republic of Korea, Uzbekistan, Vietnam. He is a Member and Head of Section of the Academic Council of the Security Council of the Russian Federation, Member of the Presidential Commission for Science and Education, President of the Russian International Studies Association (RISA), Chairman of Moscow Region Civic Chamber, Co-President of the Russian Historical Society, Member of the Board of Trustees of Alexandrinsky Theatre, Member of the Writers' Union of Russia.

Dmitry TRENIN

PhD in History. PIR Center Advisory Board member (from 2002 to 2022). PIR Center Executive Board member (since 2022). Head of the Institute for World Military Economy and Strategy at the Higher School of Economics (HSE University). Leading Researcher at the Sector for Nonproliferation and Arms Limitation of the Center for International Security, Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations of the Russian Academy of Sciences (IMEMO RAS). Member of the Council on Foreign and Defense Policy (SVOP) and Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). In 1972-1993, he served in the Soviet and Russian army. In 1978-1983, he was a Liaison Officer in the external relations branch of the Group of Soviet Forces in Germany (Potsdam). From 1985 to 1991, he was a staff member of the Soviet delegation at the Geneva talks on nuclear and space weapons. In 1993, he was a Senior Research Fellow at the NATO Defense College. In 1993-1997, he was a Senior Research Fellow at the Institute of Europe of the Russian Academy of Sciences (RAS). In 1993-1994, he was a Visiting Professor at Free University of Brussels.

Alexander TROFIMOV

Ambassador-at-Large at the Russian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (since September 2025). Graduated from Plekhanov Russian University of Economics in 1999. Started his career in 1999. Held various positions at the MFA Central Office as well as in Russian diplomatic missions abroad. In 2022-2025 – Deputy Director of the Foreign Policy Planning Department at the MFA of Russia. Has the rank of 2nd class Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary Envoy.

Leonid TSUKANOV

PhD in Political Science. PIR Center Consultant. Journalist writing on foreign affairs. He is a contributor and columnist to Russian and international leading media outlets, including *Izvestia*, *Forbes*, *Regnum* and others. Expert of the Russian International Affairs Council (RIAC). He is a nominee for the Nasser Bin Hamad International Youth Creativity Award on the track “Science” (Bahrain, 2021), quarterfinalist of the *Innovators in Global Affairs* Award on the track “International Cooperation” (Network 2020, 2021), laureate of the Gennady Evstafiev Award for young professionals in the field of international security and nuclear nonproliferation (PIR Center, 2022), laureate of the Nationwide Contest for Young Foreign-Affairs Journalists among young professionals (RIAC, 2023). He founded his own Telegram Channel *Lavrenty of Arabia* (@Лаврентий Арабуицкий).

Venkatesh VARMA

PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2023). Distinguished Fellow at *Vivekananda International Foundation*. Visiting Instructor at Kautilya School of Public Policy. From 1988 to 2021, he was a Member of the Indian Foreign Service. During his diplomatic career, he worked in the Ministry of External Affairs, in the Office of External Affairs Minister and in the Prime Minister's Office. In 2017-2018, he served as the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of India to the Kingdom of Spain. In 2018-2021, he was the Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Republic of India to the Russian Federation. Has vast experience in India's security and defense policies, including its nuclear, missile, and space programs. He has more than 12 years of experience in the field of multilateral nonproliferation and disarmament – nuclear, chemical, biological and conventional weapons. In 2011, he became the first Recipient of the *S.K. Singh Award for Excellence* in the Indian Foreign Service for his contribution to the negotiations of the Civil Nuclear Initiative. Member of the UN Secretary General's Advisory Board on Disarmament Matters (since 2024).

Alexander VORONTSOV

PhD in History. PIR Center Advisory Board member (since 2013). The Head of the Department for Korean and Mongolian Studies at the Institute of Oriental Studies RAS. Russian Military Science Academy Professor. Honorary Professor of Osaka University of Economy and Law. Repeatedly takes part at the “track 1.5” and “track 2” conferences dealing with the security situation in the Korean Peninsula and East Asia. He was visiting professor at the Hanguk University of Foreign Studies in Seoul from 1998 to 2000; at the Ritsumeikan University in Kyoto, Japan, in 2009, 2012 and 2020; at the Akita International University, Japan, in 2015. Also, he was a member of the faculty of Yonsei University International Summer School in Seoul in 2010, and a visiting fellow at the Center for Northeast Asian Policy Studies (*Brookings Institution*) in Washington, D.C., in 2005-2006. Graduated from Asia Pacific-Center for Security Studies Executive Courses in Honolulu in 2005. Dr. Vorontsov served as second secretary in the Russian Federation's Embassy in Pyongyang from 2000 to 2002. He was the member of the Russian part of the Russia-DPRK, Russia-ROK Intergovernmental Commission dealing with trade-economic and scientific-technical cooperation and associate professor at MGIMO University from 2012 to 2022.

Alexandra ZUBENKO

PIR Center Consultant. An early-career specialist in arms control and nonproliferation. She holds an MA from the International Dual Degree Program in Global Security, Nuclear Policy, and WMD Nonproliferation, developed by MGIMO University, PIR Center, and the Middlebury Institute. Alexandra is a *Marie Skłodowska-Curie IAEA* Fellow (2023-2025) and interned with the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs in 2025. She has worked as a Senior Research Assistant at IMEMO RAS and held various research and coordination roles at PIR Center. Alexandra is also a member of the *Young Deep Cuts* Commission.

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS FOR CHAPTER 1

RUSSIA'S FOREIGN AND SECURITY PRIORITIES IN THE ERA OF WORLD TURBULENCE

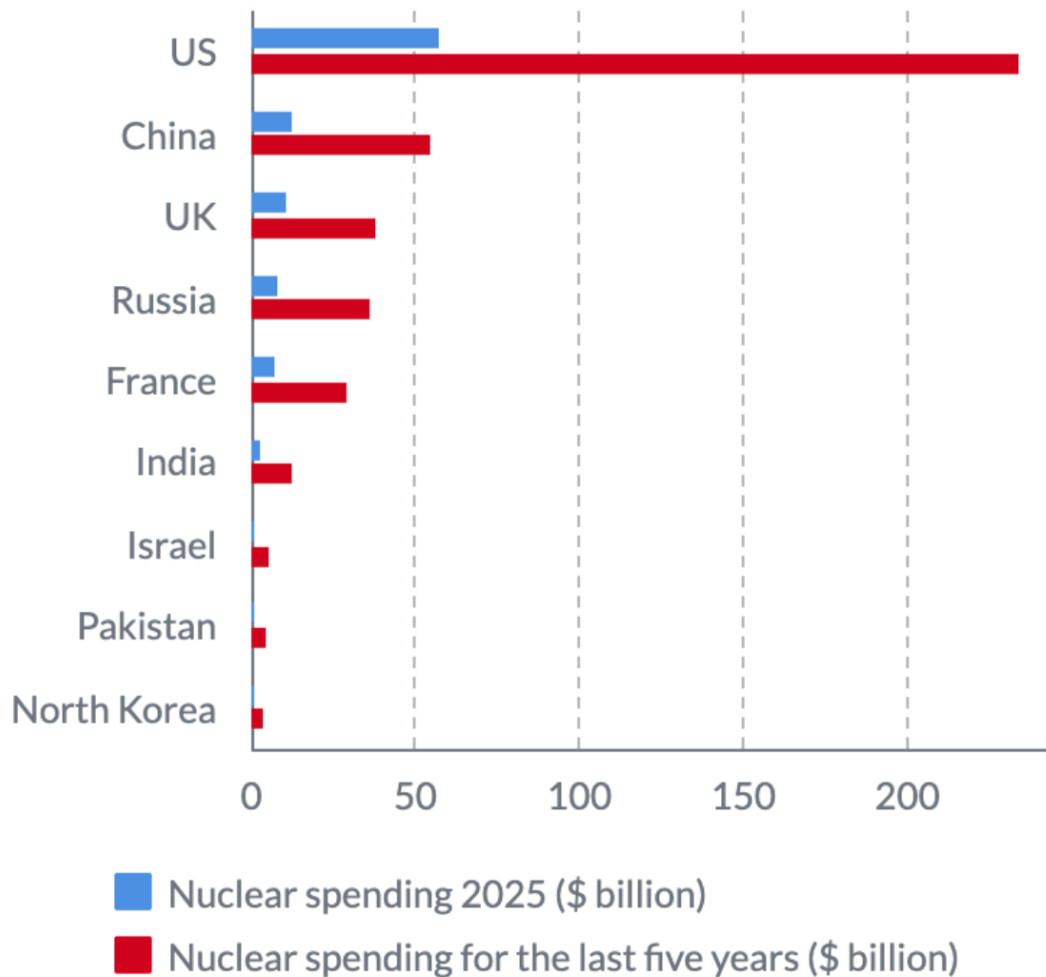


Figure 98. Nuclear spending by countries (\$ bln) for 2025 and 2020-2025 period

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

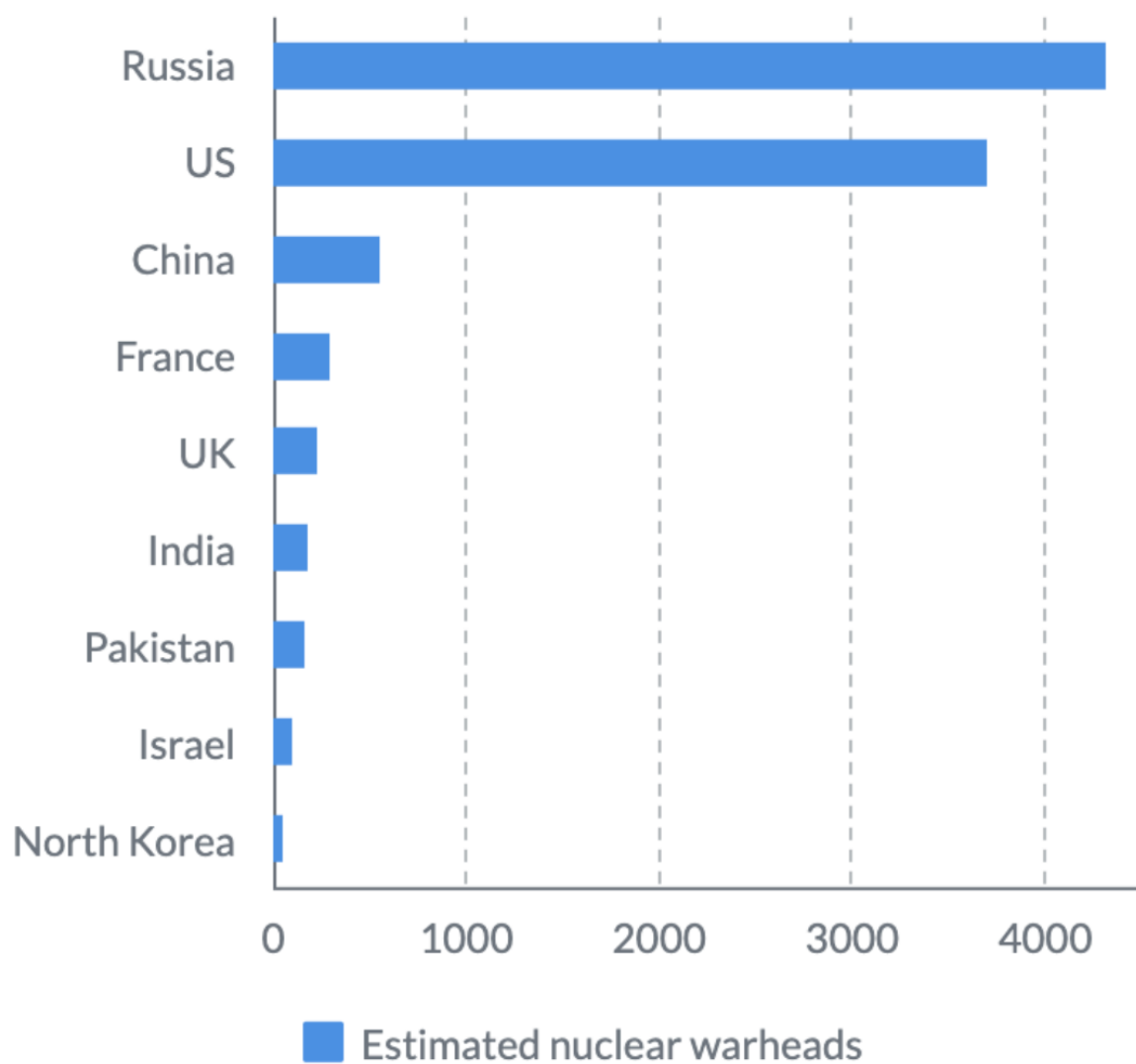


Figure 99. Estimated nuclear warheads (by country, as of 2025)

Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS FOR CHAPTER 2

NUCLEAR WEAPONS: WHAT FUTURE FOR ARMS CONTROL?

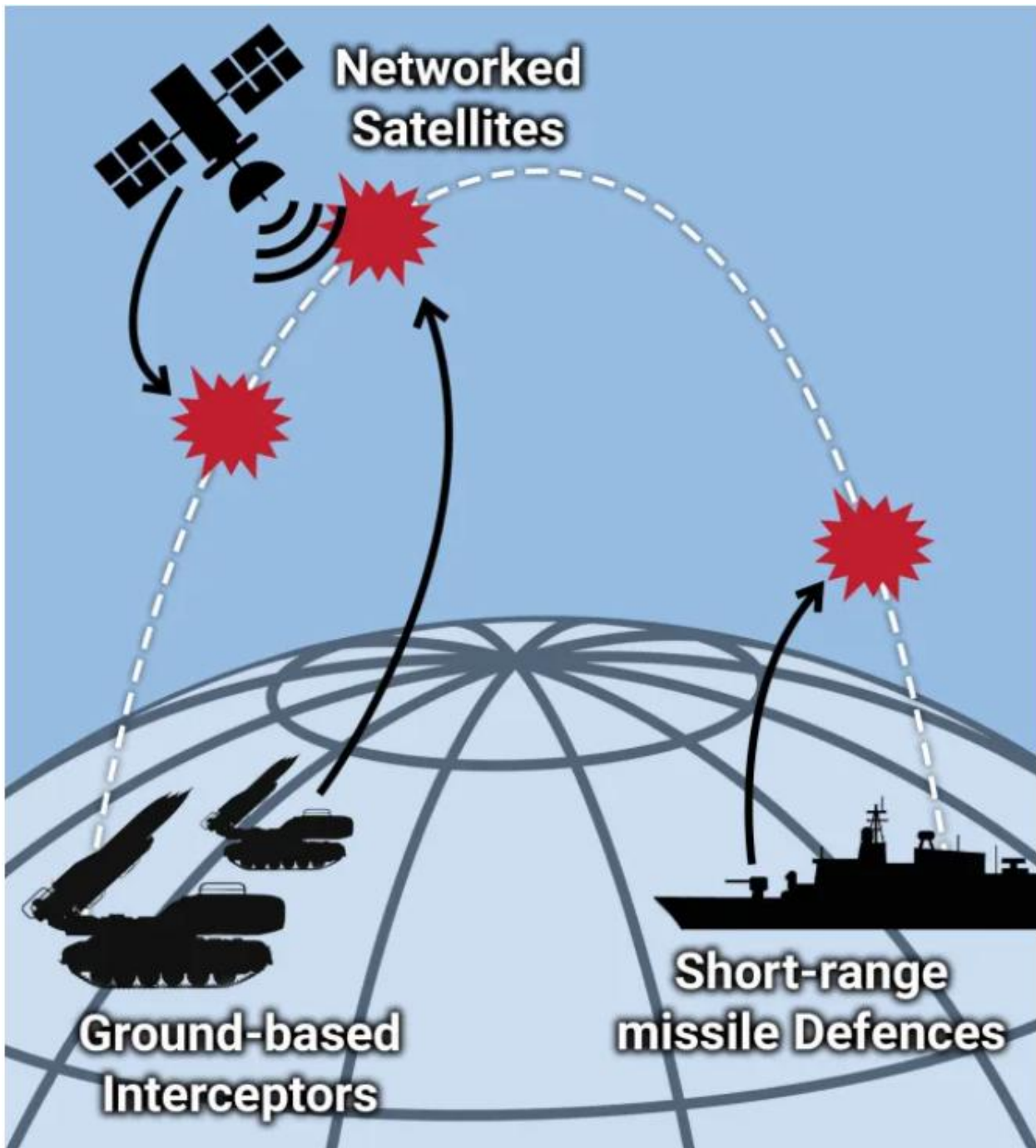


Figure 100. How the *Golden Dome* could work

Source: Metro (<https://metro.co.uk/2025/04/18/donald-trumps-golden-dome-missile-shield-built-elon-musk-work-22933538/>)

	Deployed warheads	Stored warheads	Military stockpile		Retired warheads		Total inventory	
	2025	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025	2024	2025
United States	1 770	1 930	3 708	3 700	1 620	1 477	5 328	5 177
Russia	1 718	2 591	4 380	4 309	1 200	1 150	5 580	5 459
United Kingdom	120	105	225	225	–	–	225	225
France	280	10	290	290	–	–	290	290
China	24	576	500	600	–	–	500	600
India	–	180	172	180	–	–	172	180
Pakistan	–	170	170	170	–	–	170	170
North Korea	–	50	50	50	–	–	50	50
Israel	–	90	90	90	–	–	90	90
Total	3 912	5 702	9 585	9 614	2 820	2 627	12 405	12 241

Table 16. World nuclear forces (as of January 2025)

Source: SIPRI (<https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/nuclear-risks-grow-new-arms-race-looms-new-sipri-yearbook-out-now>)

Basing	Type	the USA	Russia	the UK	France	China	Israel	India	Pakistan	DPRK
Land	Intercontinental ballistic missile	+	+	X	X	+	?	+	X	+
	Intermediate-range ballistic missile	X	X	X	X	+	+	+	X	+
	Medium-range ballistic missile	X	X	X	X	X	+	+	+	+
	Tactical ballistic missile	X	+	X	X	X	X	+	+	+
	Ground-launched cruise missile	X	+	X	X	X	X	X	X	+
Sea	Submarine-launched ballistic missile	+	+	+	+	+	X	+	X	?
	Submarine-launched cruise missile	+*	+	X	X	X	+	X	+	?
	Unmanned underwater vehicle	X	+	X	X	?	X	X	X	?
Air	Air-launched ballistic missile	X	+	X	X	+	X	X	X	X
	Air-launched cruise missile	+	+	X	X	X	X	X	+	X
	Bombs	+	+	X	+	+	+	+	+	X

Table 17. Global nuclear weapons delivery systems, (as of October, 2025)

Based on open sources.

Legend: «+» – in service; «X» – not in service; «?» – no evidence; «+*» – under construction (*SLCM-N*).

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS FOR CHAPTER 3
NONPROLIFERATION *HOCKEY LEAGUE*: WHAT'S HAPPENING IN THE
NPT REVIEW PROCESS?

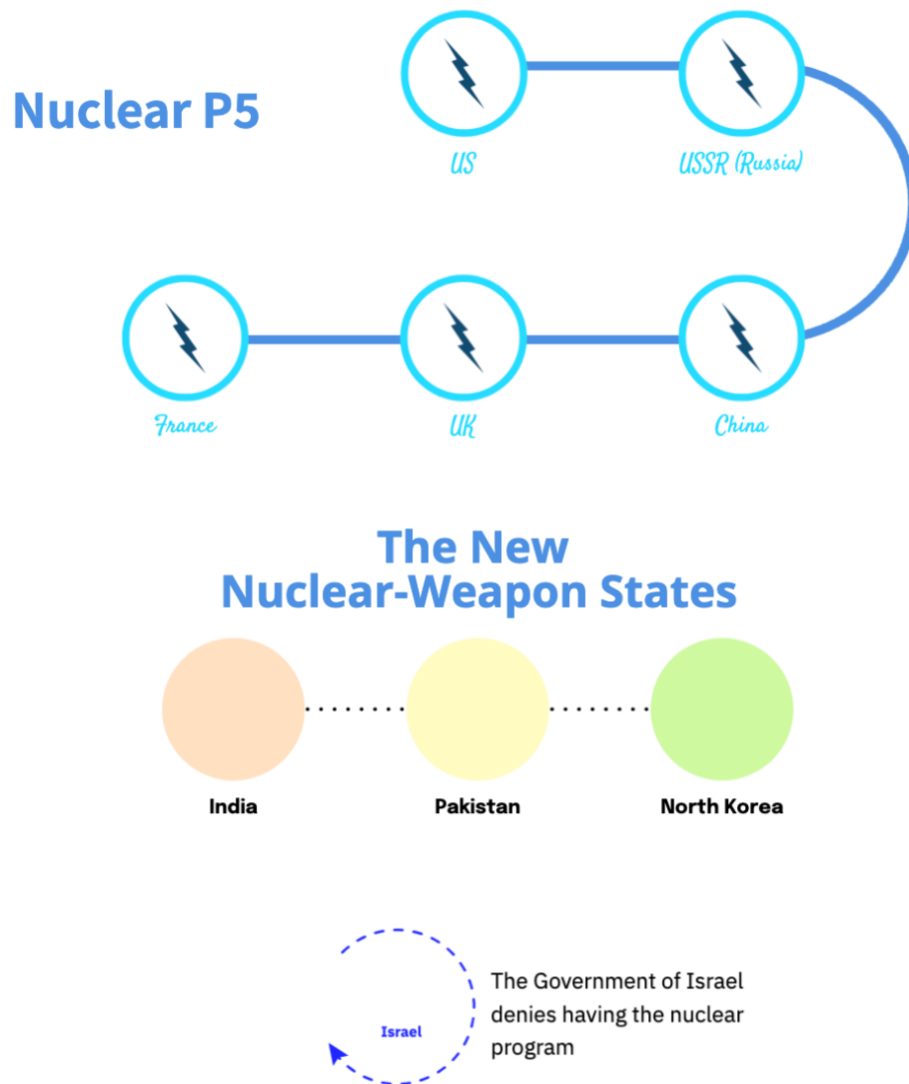


Figure 101. Nuclear *P5* and the New Nuclear-Weapon States
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS FOR CHAPTER 5

OUTER SPACE: ARENA FOR AN ARMS RACE OR A PLATFORM FOR INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION?

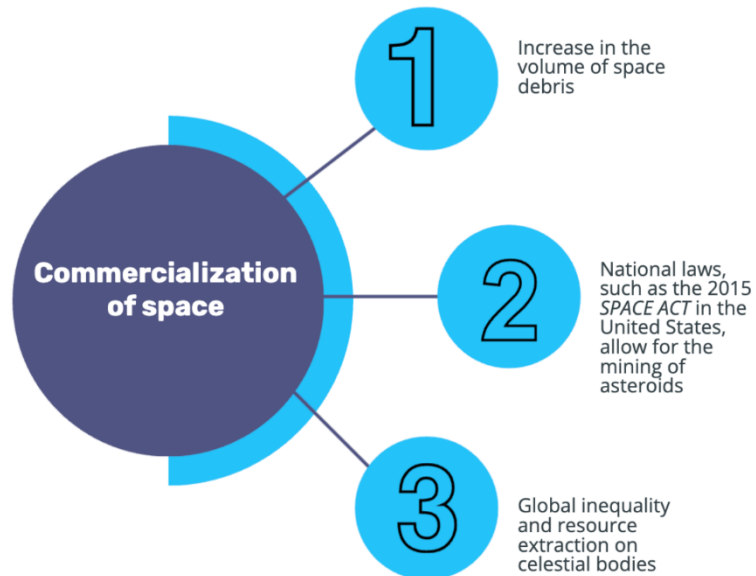


Figure 102. Commercialization of Space: an overview
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

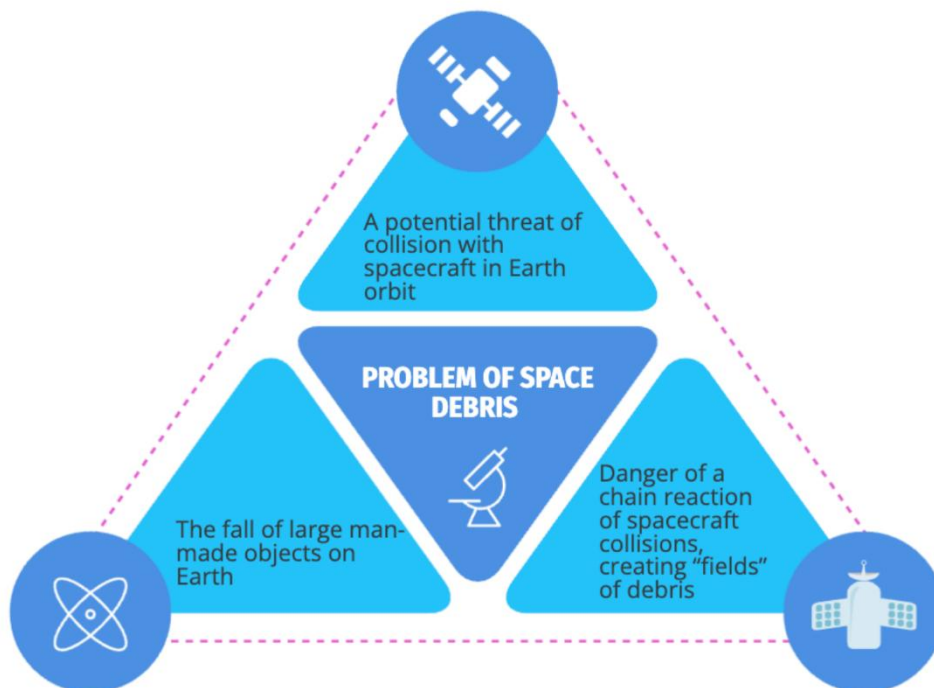


Figure 103. The Problem of Space Debris
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

How to prevent an arms race in space?

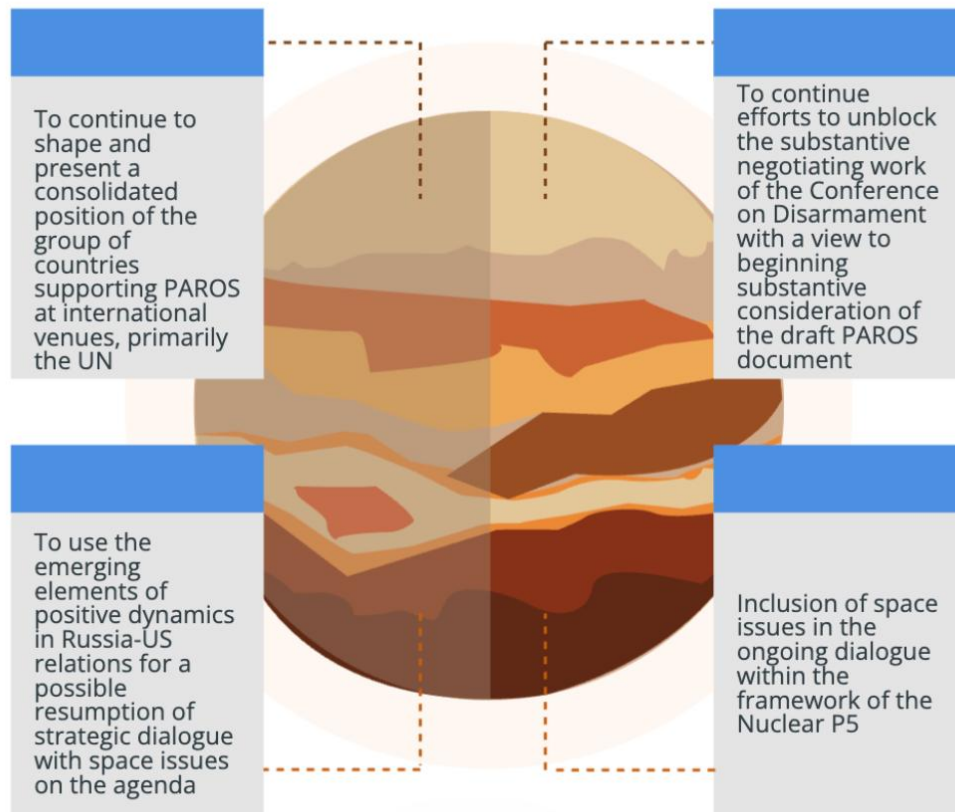


Figure 104. How to Prevent an Arms Race in Space

Compiled by PIR Center based on *Security Index* Yearbook Chapter (by A. Malov).

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS FOR CHAPTER 6

INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SECURITY AND RUSSIA'S NATIONAL INTERESTS

For almost 30 years, Russia has been the initiator of key diplomatic mechanisms and processes in the field of international information security:

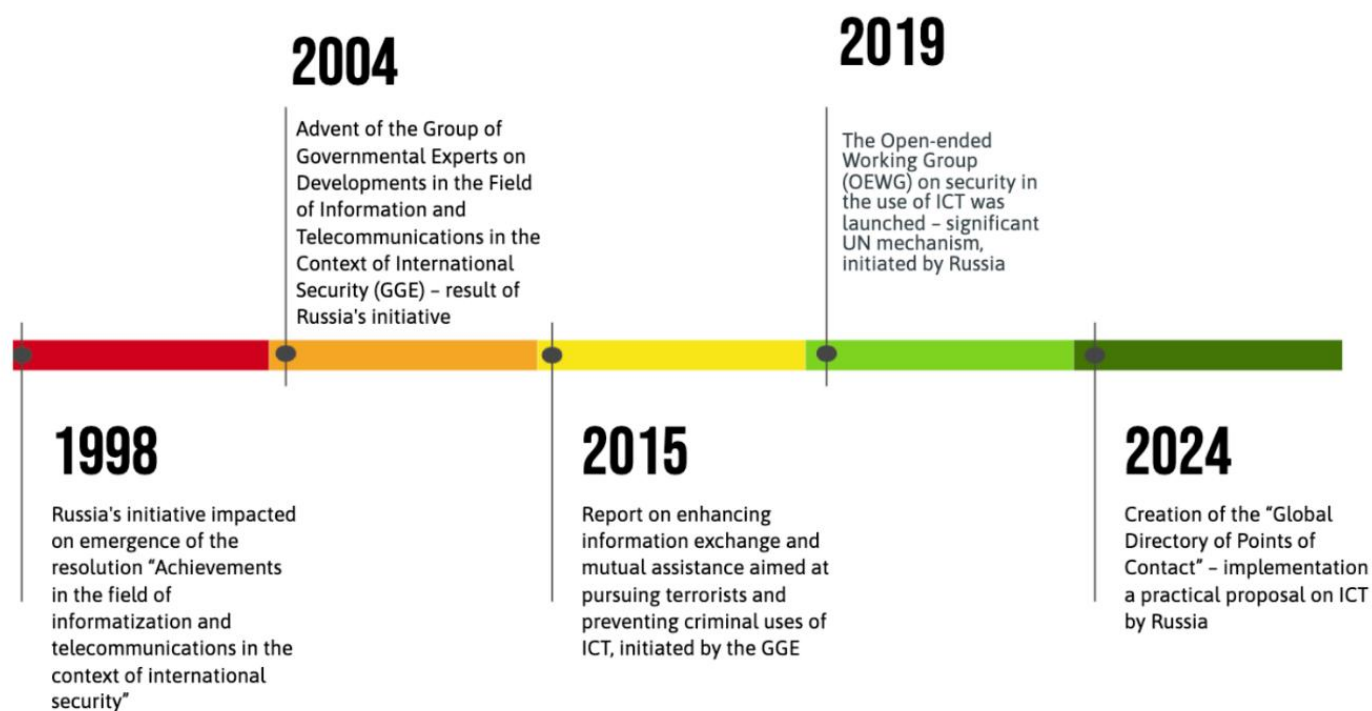


Figure 105. The keystones of Russian diplomacy approach in the field of ICT
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

Information Security Spending 2025

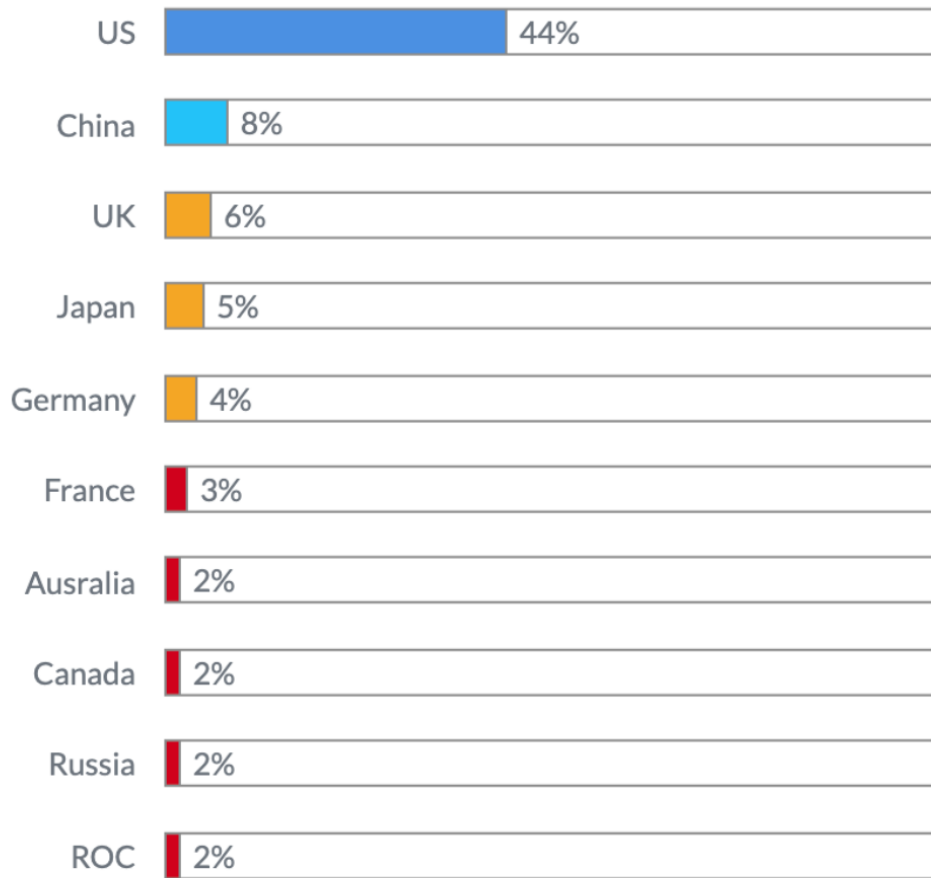


Figure 106. Information Security Spending (% by country). As of 2025
Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

RUSSIA'S PROPOSAL OF THE MOST SIGNIFICANT PROVISIONS OF THE UN CONVENTION ON THE INTERNATIONAL INFORMATION SECURITY

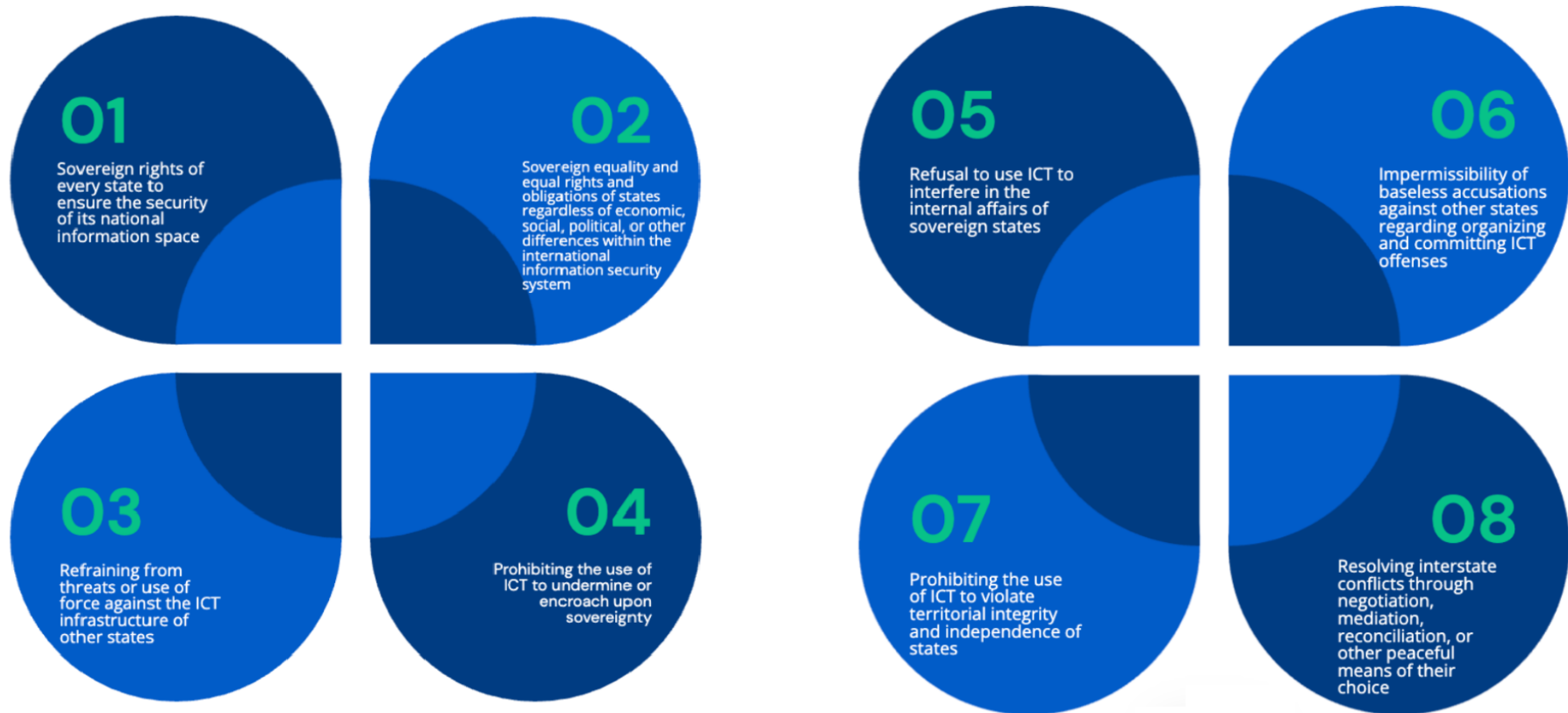


Figure 107. Russia's Proposal of the Most Significant Provisions on the UN Convention on the International Informational Security
Compiled by PIR Center based on the publications of the MFA of the Russian Federation (<https://mid.ru/en/>)

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS FOR CHAPTER 7
HACKING THE FUTURE: HOW ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE AND NEW TECHNOLOGIES RESHAPE INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

MILITARY AI CONCERNS



Figure 108. Military AI Concerns
Adapted from the data: Williams J. Military AI: Operational dangers and the regulatory void // Diplo. July 9, 2025 (<https://www.diplomacy.edu/blog/why-military-ai-needs-urgent-regulation/>)

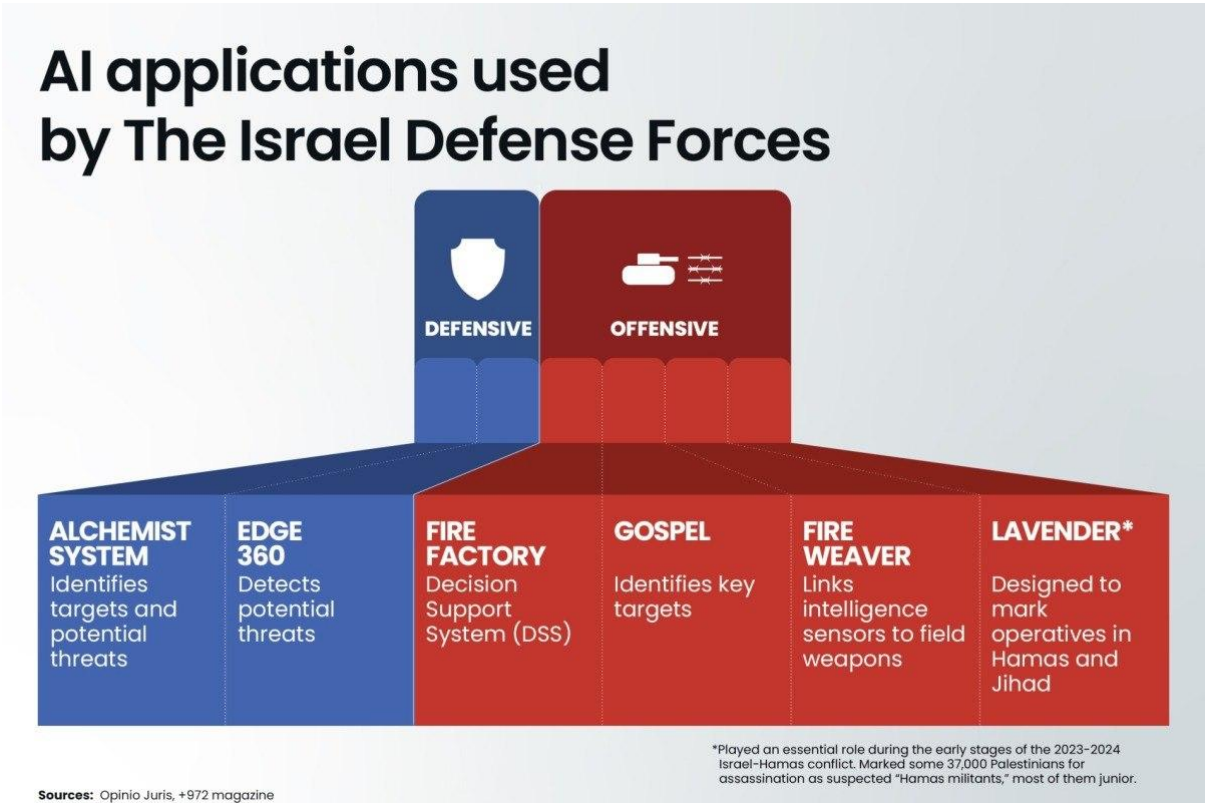
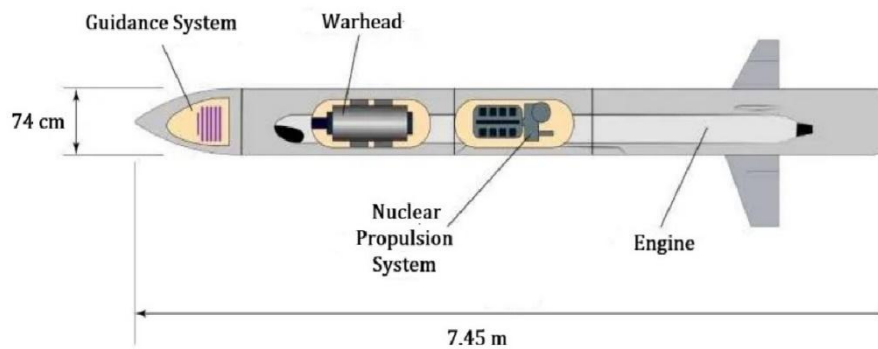


Figure 109. AI applications used by Israel Defense Forces
Source: *Al Malalla* Newspaper (<https://en.majalla.com/node/322540/infographics/artificial-intelligence-israels-latest-lethal-weapon>)

ADDITIONAL INFOGRAPHICS FOR CHAPTER 9

THE SECOND TRUMP ADMINISTRATION AND THE RUSSIA-US RELATIONS

Nuclear-powered "Burevestnik" cruise missile

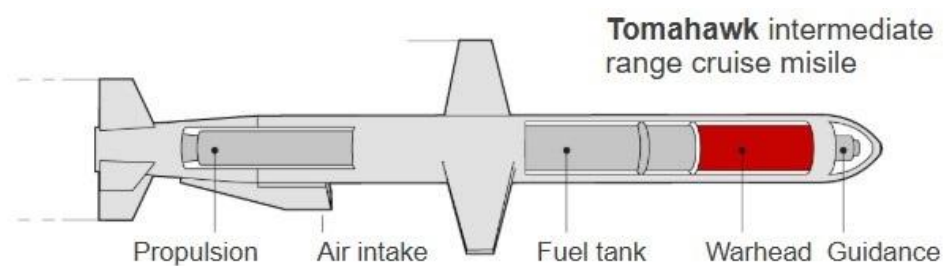


NATO reporting name:	SSC-X-9 Skyfall	Flight path:	Unpredictable
Length:	7,45 m	Cruising speed:	190-200 m/s
Type:	Nuclear-powered cruise missile	Maximum speed:	250-270 m/s
Engine:	Nuclear turbojet	Effective firing range:	Unlimited

Figure 110. Nuclear-powered *Burevestnik* cruise missile: an overview.

Compiled by PIR Center based on *RBC* and *Izvestia* Newspapers

(<https://www.rbc.ru/politics/26/10/2025/68fe01229a7947415e345c40>; <https://iz.ru/1979333/2025-10-26/samaia-moshchnaia-raketa-bez-analogov-v-mire-cto-izvestno-o-burevestnike>)



Tomahawk model Block IV: **1,600 km range** Tomahawk model Block I: **2,500 km**



Figure 111. Range of Tomahawk missiles

Source: *Reuters* (<https://www.reuters.com/business/aerospace-defense/what-are-tomahawk-missiles-why-does-ukraine-want-them-2025-09-29/>)

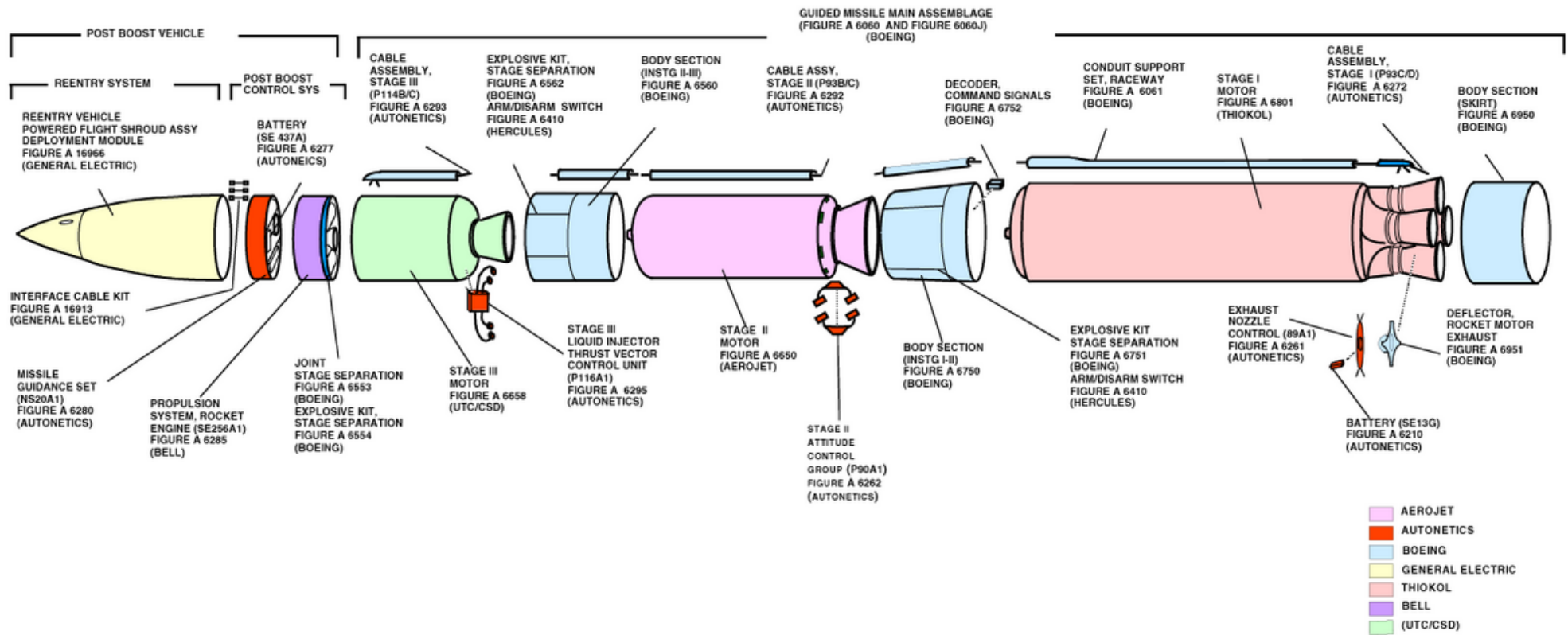


Figure 112. Construction of *Minuteman III* ICBM

Source: Atomic Energy 2.0 (<https://www.atomic-energy.ru/news/2017/08/03/78180>)

COUNTRY	AIRBASE
BELGIUM	KLEINE BROGEL
GERMANY	BUCHEL
ITALY	AVIANO GHEDI
NETHERLANDS	VOLKEL

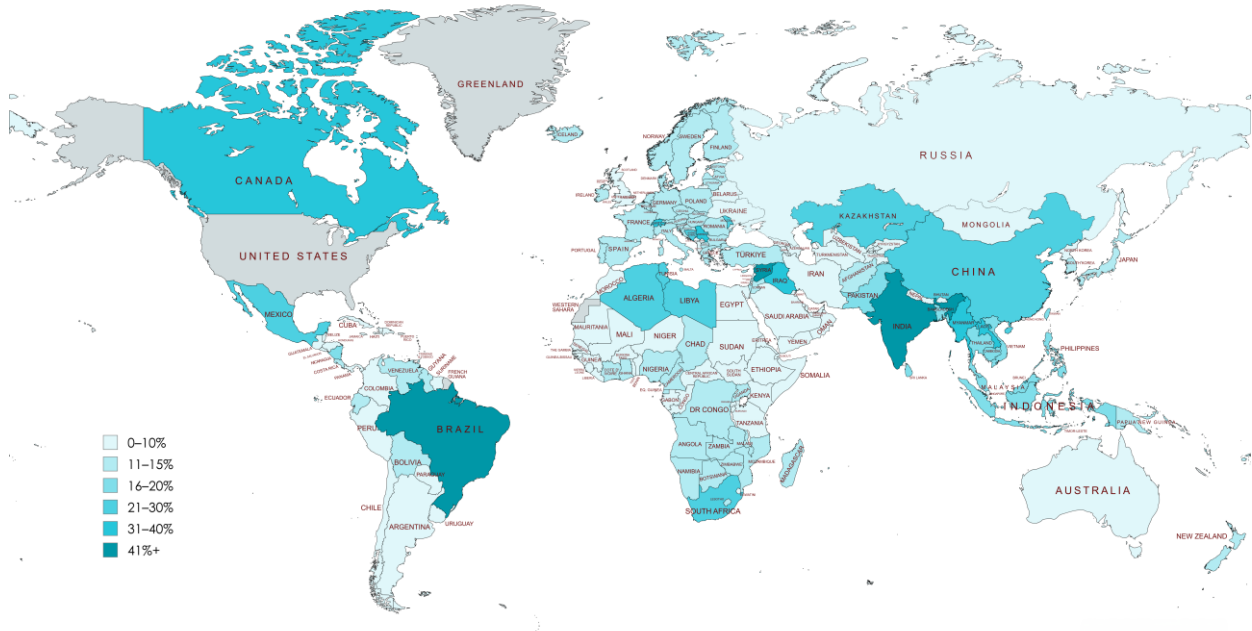


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Compiled by PIR Center based on *The New York Times*

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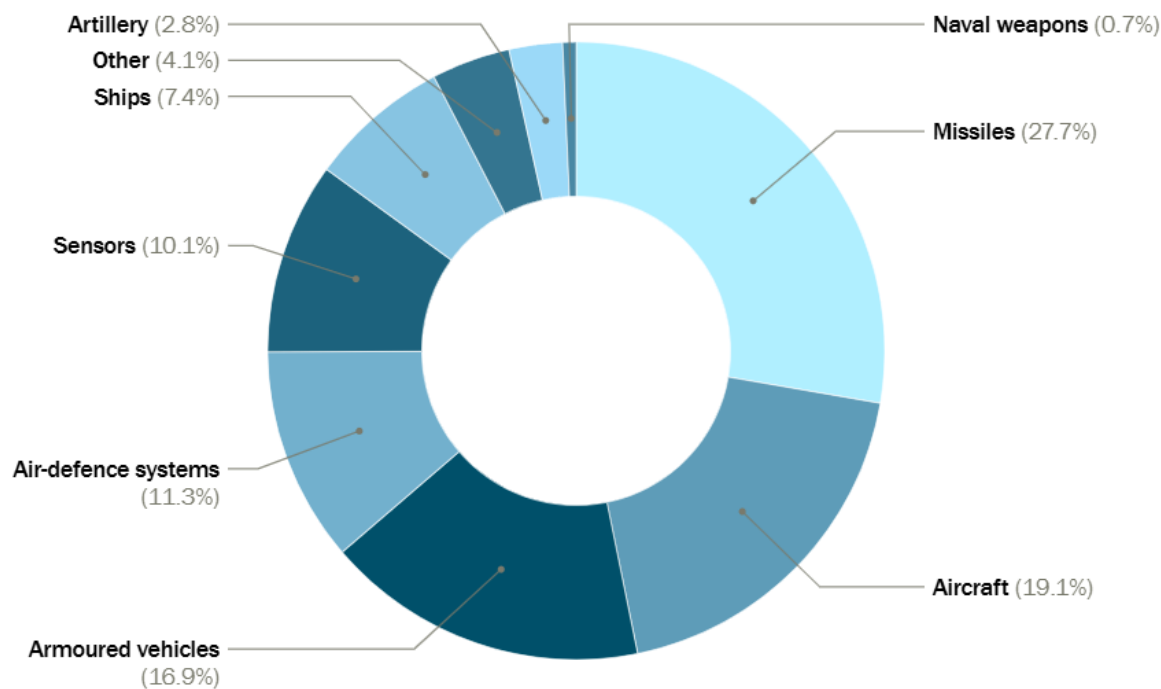


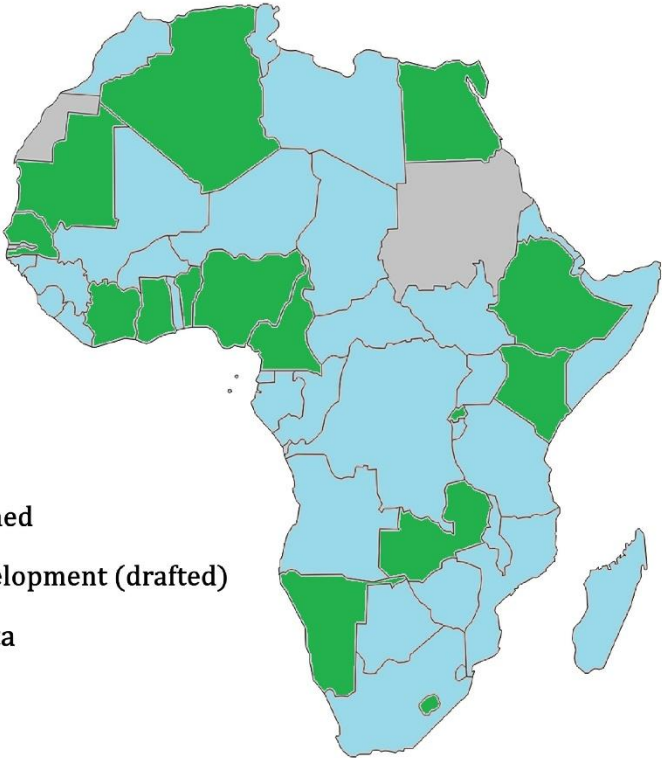
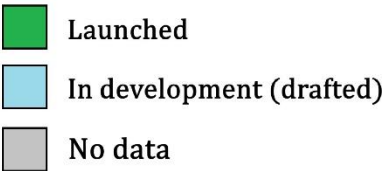
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Source: SIPRI (<https://www.sipri.org/commentary/topical-backgrounder/2025/recent-trends-international-arms-transfers-middle-east-and-north-africa>)

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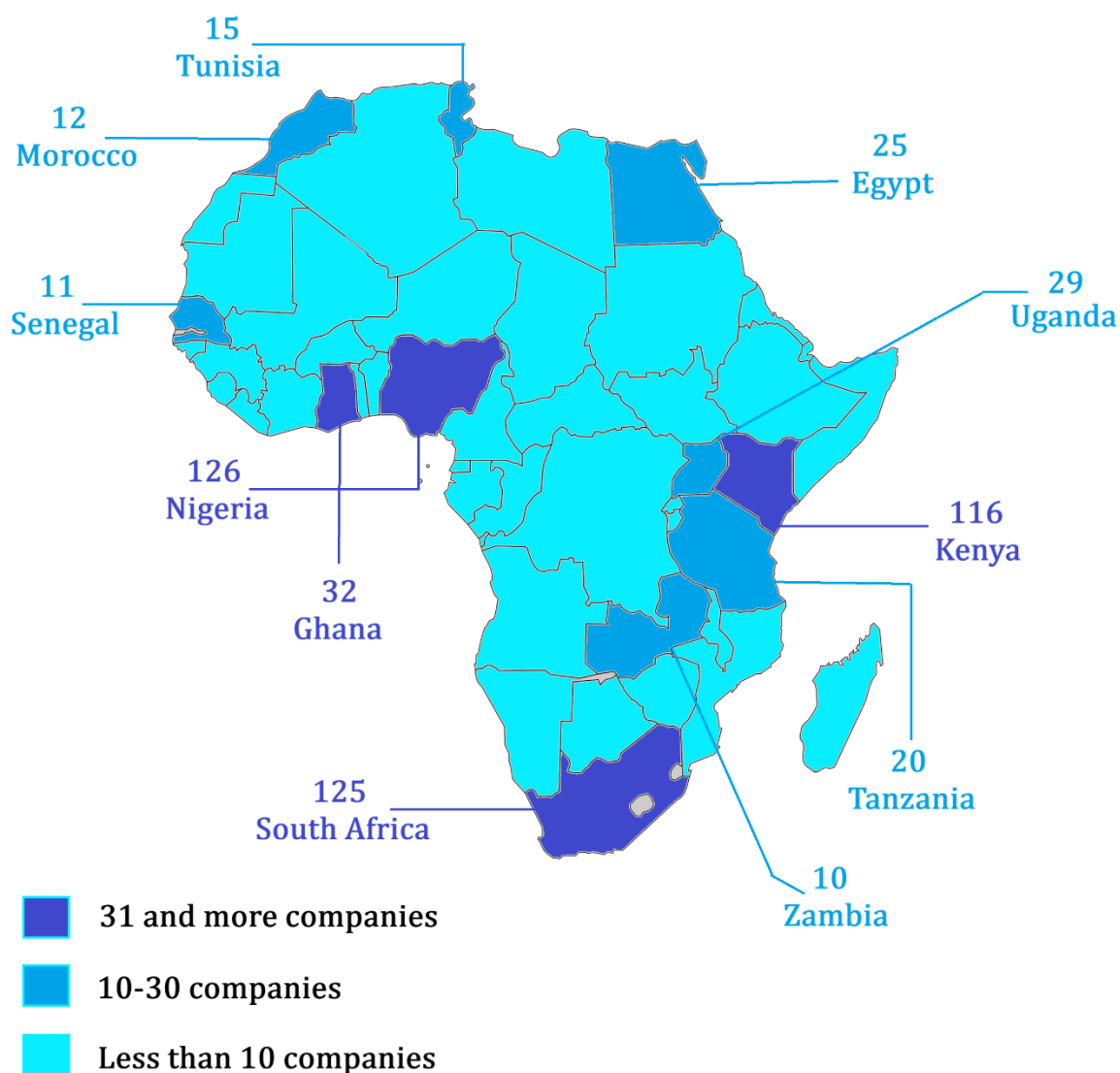
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- #1 South Africa
- #2 Tunisia
- #3 Egypt
- #4 Kenya
- #5 Mauritius
- #6 Rwanda
- #7 Ghana
- #8 Algeria
- #9 Morocco
- #10 Seychelles



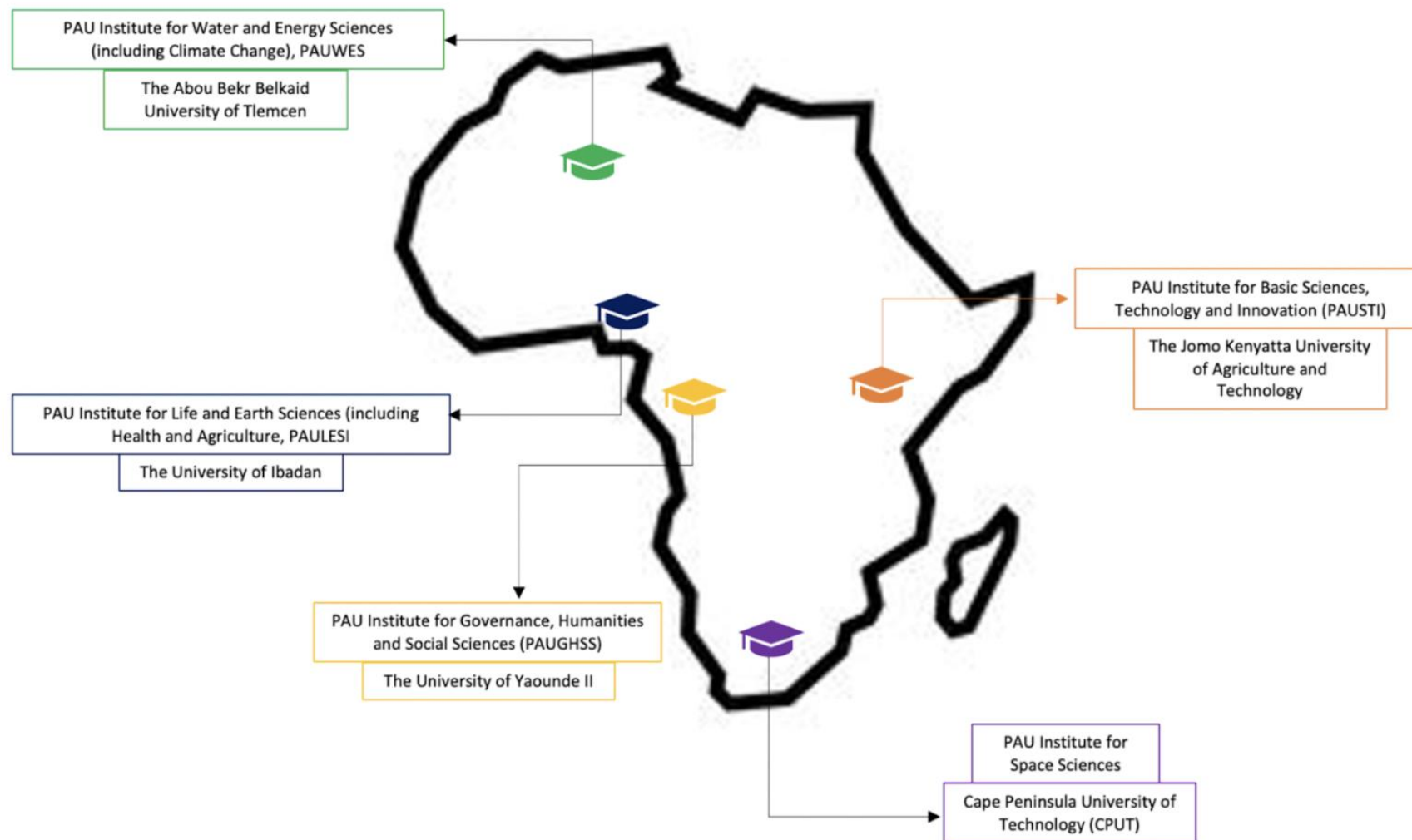
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Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.



Map 24. Pan African University on Space Sciences

Source: Space Africa (<https://spaceinafrica.com/2023/10/25/updates-on-the-african-space-agency/>)

Country	Space Agency Operational Level	Operates Satellites	Can conduct launches	Can send probes	Conducts Human Spaceflights	Operates Space Station	Has landed Human on the Moon
the USA	7	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes
China	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
Russia	6	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	Yes	No
India	4	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Pakistan	4	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Japan	4	Yes	Yes	Yes	No	No	No
Brazil	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Iran	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
the UK	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
France	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Italy	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
South Korea	3	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Argentina	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Canada	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Ukraine	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Poland	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Australia	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
the UAE	3	Yes	No	Yes	No	No	No
Sweden	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Israel	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
New Zealand	3	Yes	Yes	No	No	No	No
Indonesia	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Nigeria	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Bangladesh	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Ethiopia	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Mexico	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Egypt	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Philippines	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Vietnam	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Türkiye	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Germany	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Country	Space Agency Operational Level	Operates Satellites	Can conduct launches	Can send probes	Conducts Human Spaceflights	Operates Space Station	Has landed Human on the Moon
Thailand	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
South Africa	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Kenya	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Colombia	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Spain	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Algeria	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Angola	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Morocco	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Malaysia	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Ghana	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Peru	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Saudi Arabia	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Venezuela	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
North Korea	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Kazakhstan	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Chile	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Romania	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Netherlands	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Rwanda	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Tunisia	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Azerbaijan	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Greece	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Hungary	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Austria	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Switzerland	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Turkmenistan	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Paraguay	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Bulgaria	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Denmark	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Singapore	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Norway	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No

Country	Space Agency Operational Level	Operates Satellites	Can conduct launches	Can send probes	Conducts Human Spaceflights	Operates Space Station	Has landed Human on the Moon
Mongolia	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Lithuania	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Bahrain	2	Yes	No	No	No	No	No
Uzbekistan	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
Syria	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
Bolivia	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
Belgium	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
Portugal	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
Belarus	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
El Salvador	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
Costa Rica	1	No	No	No	No	No	No
Luxembourg	1	No	No	No	No	No	No

Table 18. Space Capabilities by country (including Space Agency Operational Levels), as of 2025

Based on: World Population Review (<https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/countries-with-space-programs>)

NOTE: Operational Level indicates an agency's maximum capability:

Countries focused on ground-based space activities are level 1.

Countries that can also operate satellites are level 2.

Countries that can also conduct launches are level 3.

Countries that can also send probes further into space or other celestial bodies are level 4.

Countries that can also send humans into space are level 5.

Countries that can also operate a space station are level 6.

Countries that have landed humans on the moon are level 7. As of 2025, the United States (NASA) was the only level 7 country.

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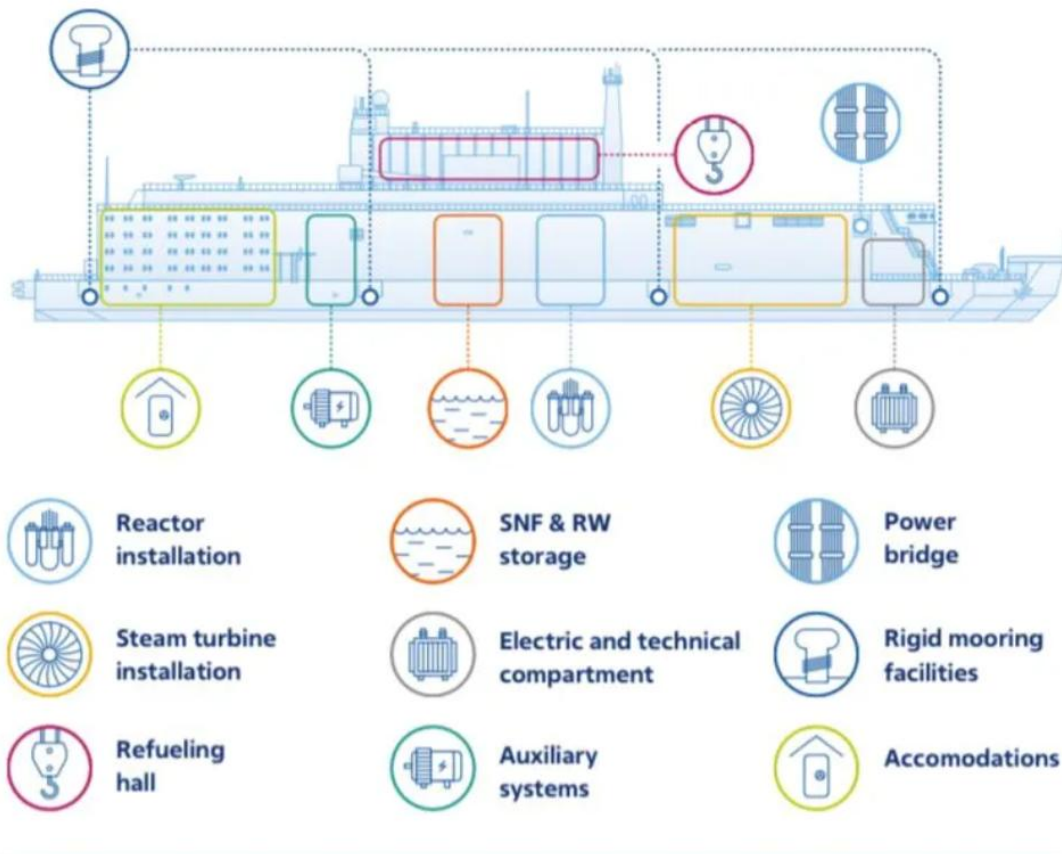


Figure 114. Systems of *Akademik Lomonosov* FNPP

Source: Kompas News Agency (<https://www.kompas.id/artikel/pltn-terapung-akademik-lomonosov-upaya-mandiri-energi-di-wilayah-terpencil-2>)

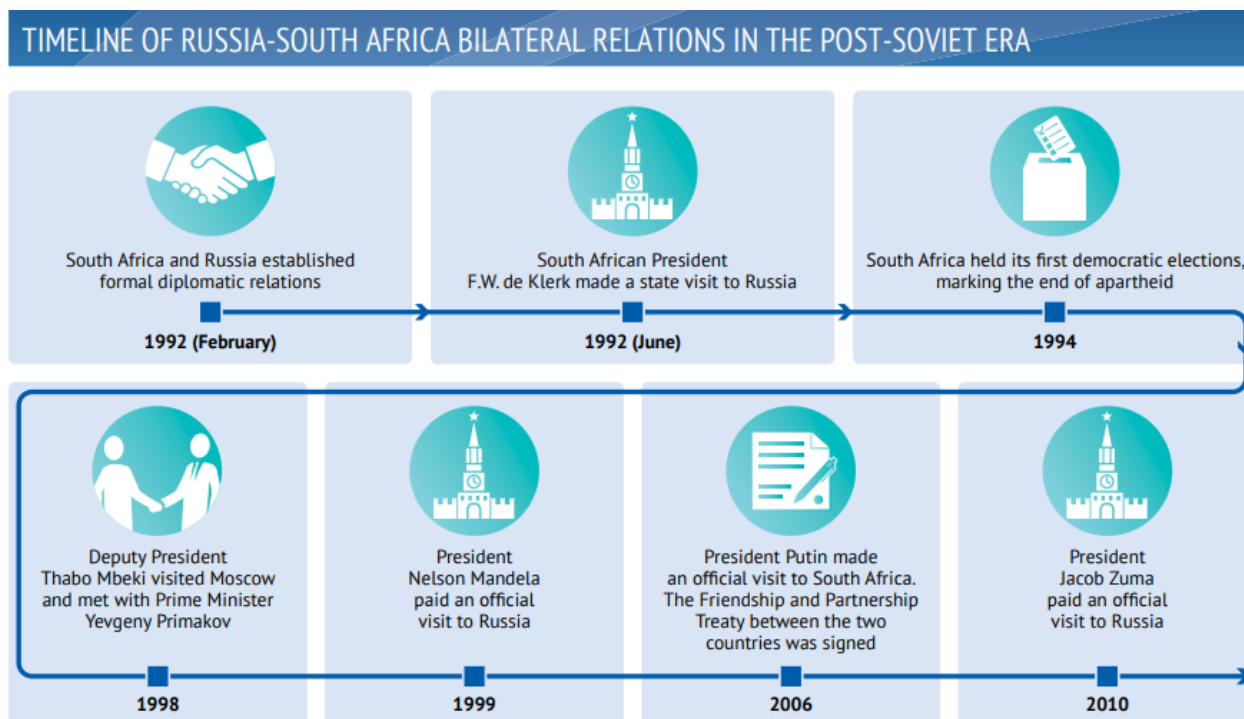


Figure 115. Timeline of Russia – South Africa Bilateral Relations in the Post-Soviet Era (key events from 1992 to 2010)

Source: *Valdai Club International* (<https://valdaiclub.com/files/49147/>)

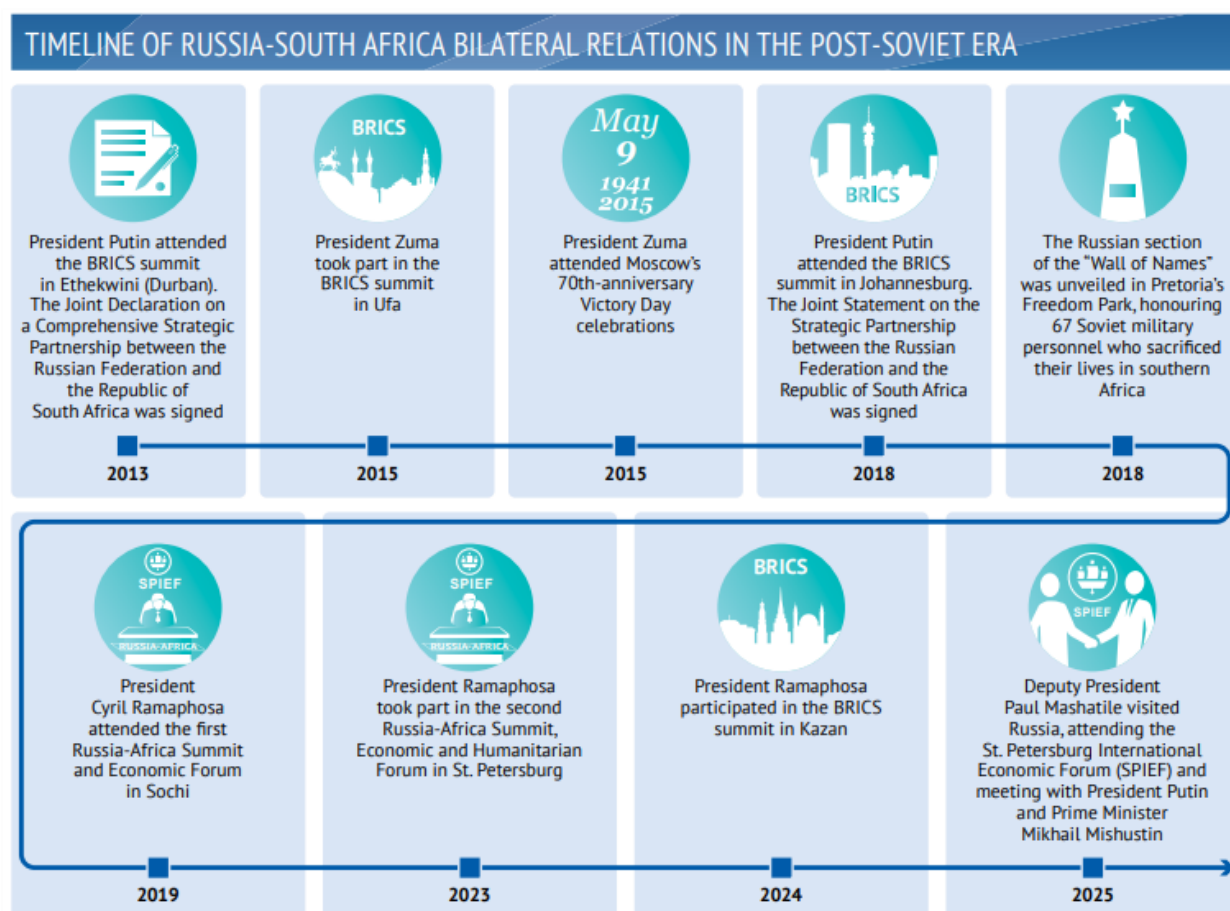


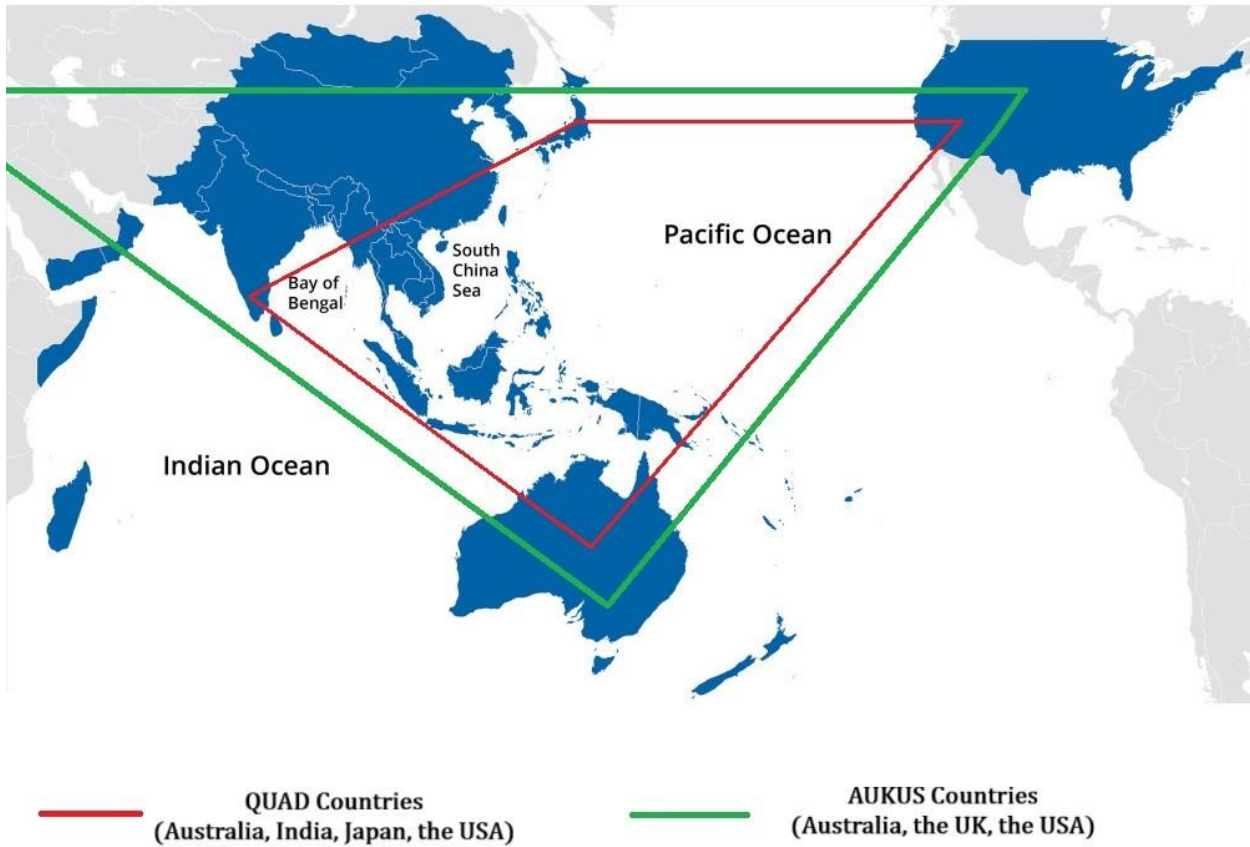
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Source: *Valdai Club International* (<https://valdaiclub.com/files/49147/>)

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Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources.

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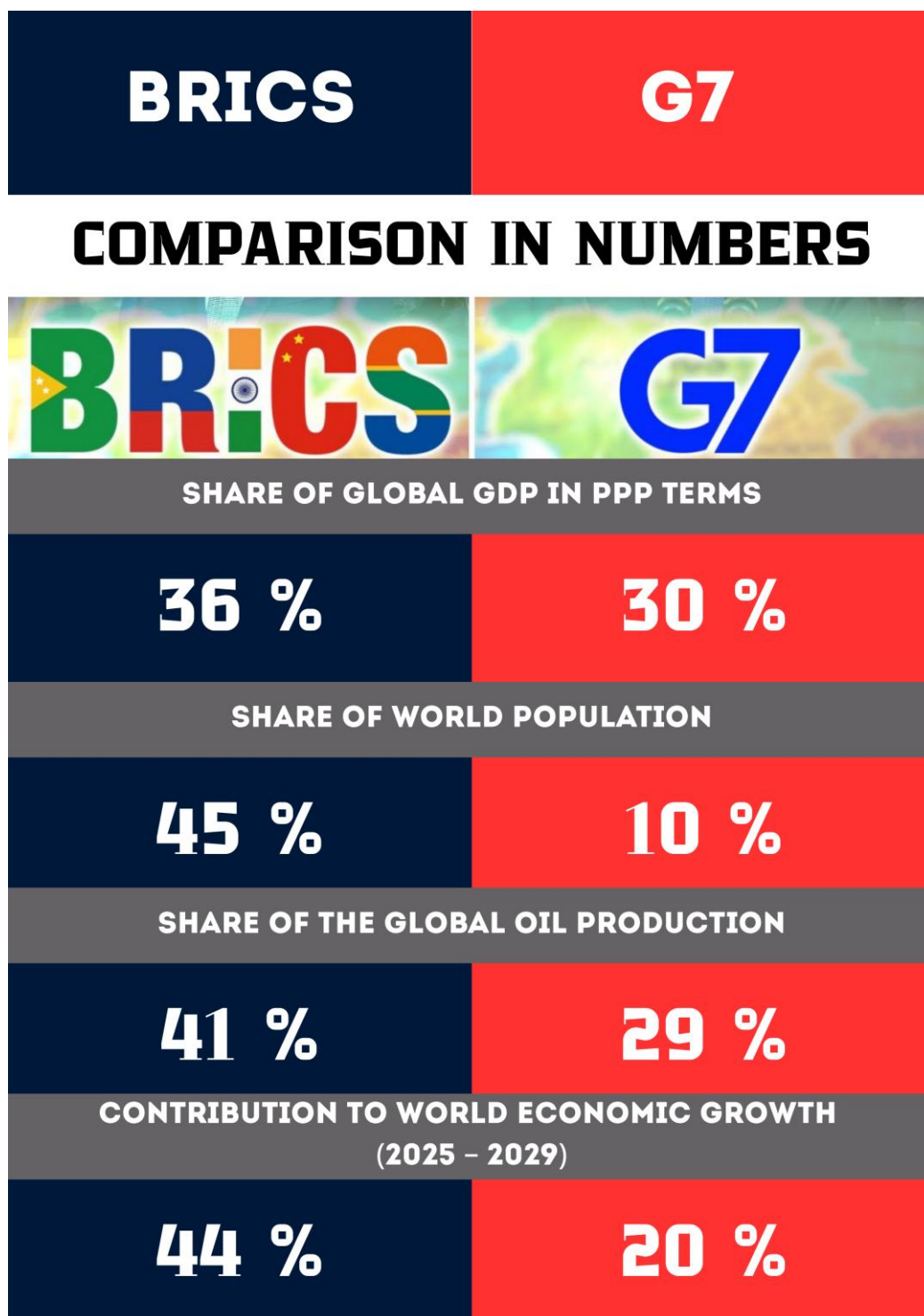


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Compiled by PIR Center based on open sources

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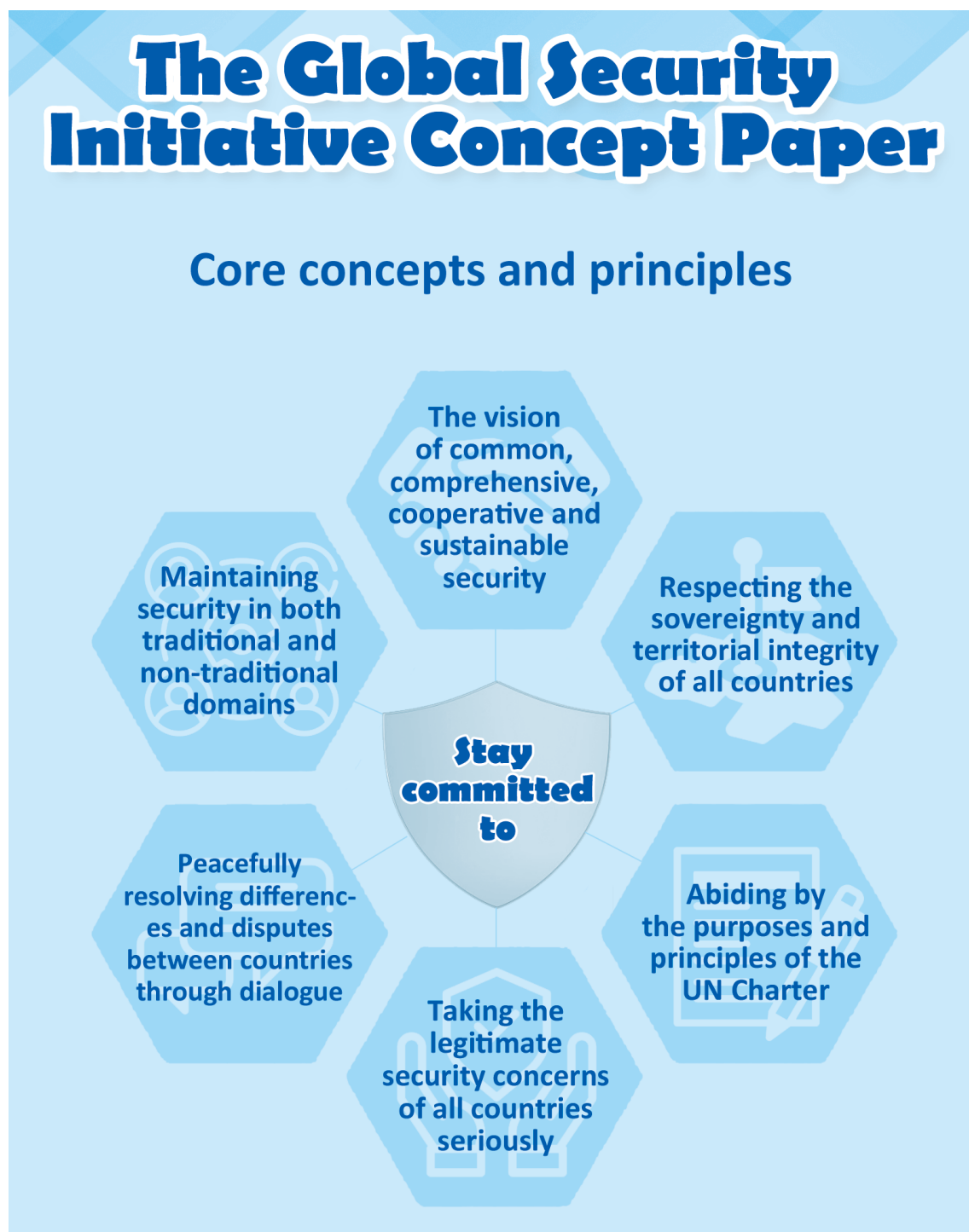


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ABM (Treaty) – Anti-Ballistic Missile Treaty

ACNPD – arms control, nonproliferation, and disarmament

ACNS – Australian Centre for Neutron Scattering

ADF – the Allied Democratic Forces (*banned in Russia*)

AES – Alliance of Sahel States

AFRCISIS – the African Center for Technology and International Security

AFRICOM –Africa Command (the USA)

AfSA – African Space Agency

AI – Artificial Intelligence

AIIB – the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank

ANSTO – Australian Nuclear Science and Technology Organisation

ANU – Australian National University

APEC – Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation

APKWS – Advanced Precision Kill Weapon System

APR – Asia-Pacific region

ASCM – Anti-ship cruise missile

ASEAN – Association of South-East Asian Nations

ASGM – Artisanal and small-scale gold mining

AU – the African Union

AUKUS – Acronym for Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States

AWS – Amazon Web Services

BOOT-R (Model) – Build-Own-Operate-Transfer-Return Model

BRI – *Belt and Road Initiative*

BRICS – Acronym for Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa

CAR – the Central African Republic

CAS – Centre for Accelerator Science

CCW – Certain Conventional Weapons

CEO – Chief executive officer

CERN – European Organization for Nuclear Research

CERT – Computer Emergency Response Teams

CFE (Treaty) – Conventional Armed Forces in Europe

CIA – Central Intelligence Agency

CICA – Conference on Interaction and Confidence-Building Measures in Asia

CIS – Commonwealth of Independent States

CNDP – *Congrès national pour la défense du peuple* – National Congress for the Defense of the People

CNS – Center for Nonproliferation Studies / Cold Neutron Source

COMPASS – Collection and Monitoring Platform for Advanced Situational Scenarios

COPUOS – Committee on the Peaceful Uses of Outer Space

CPC – *Coalition of Patriots for Change* (the Central African Republic) / the Communist Party of China (China)

CSCE – Conference for Security and Cooperation in Europe

CSTO – Collective Security Treaty Organization

CTBT – Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty

DARPA – Defense Advanced Research Projects Agency

DFAT – Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (Australia)

DILEMA – Designing International Law and Ethics into Military Artificial Intelligence

DOE – Department of Energy

DPR – Donetsk People’s Republic / Deputy Permanent Representative

DPRK – Democratic People’s Republic of Korea

DRC – the Democratic Republic of the Congo

E3 – Acronym for France, Germany and the United Kingdom

EAEU – Eurasian Economic Union

ECOWAS – Economic Community of West African States

EDB – the Eurasian Development Bank

EDD – Extended Deterrence Dialogue

EEU – Eurasian Economic Union

EU – the European Union

FDI – Foreign Direct Investment

FMES – Fondation méditerranéenne d’études stratégiques

FNPP – floating nuclear power plants

FRPS – First Reactor Protection System

FSB – Federal Security Service of the Russian Federation

FTA – free trade area

GCC – Gulf Cooperation Council

GCI – Global Cybersecurity Index

GCSP – Geneva Centre for Security Policy

GDP – Gross Domestic Product

GDPR – General Data Protection Regulation

GECF – Gas Exporting Countries Forum

GEP – *Greater Eurasian Partnership*

GGE – Group of Governmental Experts

GMO – Genetically modified organism

GSSAP – Geosynchronous Space Situational Awareness Program

GW – Gigawatt

GWEO – Guided Weapons and Explosive Ordnance Enterprise

HAMAS – Islamic Resistance Movement (Ḥarakah al-Muqāwamah al-ʿIslāmiyyah)

HIFAR – High Flux Australian Reactor

HOPE – Hormuz Peace Endeavor

HQ – Headquarters

IAEA – International Atomic Energy Agency

ICANN – Internet Corporation for Assigned Names and Numbers

ICBM – Intercontinental Ballistic Missile

ICF – Interregional Cooperation Forum

ICIS – Institute of Contemporary International Studies

ICJ – International Court of Justice

ICTs – Information and Communication Technologies

IDF – Israel defense forces

IDP – Internally Displaced Persons

IHES – International Hierarchy Expert Survey

IHL – international humanitarian law

IIS – International Information Security

IMA – Index of Maritime Activities

IMEMO – Primakov National Research Institute of World Economy and International Relations

IMF – International Monetary Fund

IMI – Index of Maritime Instruments

IMM – Index of Maritime Might

IMR – Index of Maritime Resources

INARA (Act) – Iran Nuclear Agreement Review Act

INF (Treaty) – Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty

IoN – Index of Navy

IoT – Internet of things

IPRAW – International Panel on the Regulation of Autonomous Weapons Systems

IR – International Relations

IRBM – Intermediate-range ballistic missile

IRGC – Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps

ISGS – Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (*banned in Russia*)

ISIS – Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (*banned in Russia*)

ISL – in-situ leaching

ISLS – International Scientific Lunar Station

ISS – International Space Station

ITU – International Telecommunication Union

JCPOA – Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action

JINR – Joint Institute for Nuclear Research

JNIM – Jama’at Nusrat al-Islam wal Muslimin (*banned in Russia*)

KCNA – the Korean Central News Agency

KGB – Committee for State Security

KPA – Korean People’s Army

LAS – League of Arab States

LAWS – Lethal Autonomous Weapons Systems

LPR –Lugansk People’s Republic

M23 (Movement) – *March 23* Movement

MFA – Ministry of Foreign Affairs

MINUSMA – United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali

MoD – Ministry of Defense

MRBM – Medium-range ballistic missile

MUAI – Malicious Use of Artificial Intelligence

MW – Megawatt

NAIIS – National Association for International Information Security

NASA – National Aeronautics and Space Administration

NATO – North Atlantic Treaty Organization

NC3I – national command, control, communication and intelligence center

NCG – Nuclear Consultative Group

NCS – National Cybersecurity Strategy

NDB – the New Development Bank

New START (Treaty) – Treaty between the United States of America and the Russian Federation on Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms

NIC – National Intelligence Council

NLP – Natural Language Processing

NPP – Nuclear Power Plant

NPT – Non-Proliferation Treaty

NRNU MEPhI – National Research Nuclear University, the Moscow Engineering Physics Institute

NSR – Northern Sea Route

NSS – National Security Strategy

NWO – the Netherlands Research Council

OCHA – United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs

ODIHR – Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights

OECD – Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development

OFAC – Office of Foreign Assets Control

OHCHR – Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights

OIC – Organization of Islamic Cooperation

OPAL – Open Pool Australian Lightwater Reactor

OPCW – Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons

OPEC – Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries

OPEC+ – coalition of 10 world's leading non-OPEC oil exporters, including Russia

OSCE – Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe

OSINT – Open-Source Intelligence

PAROS – Resolution 77/40 *Prevention of an Arms Race in Outer Space*

PPWT – Treaty on the Prevention of Placement of Weapons in Outer Space, the Threat of Use of Force against Outer Space Objects

PRC – People's Republic of China

PrepCom – Preparatory Committee for Review Conference of Parties to Treaty on Nonproliferation of Nuclear Weapons

QUAD – Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (a coalition of the US, Japan, Australia, and India)

R&D (Program) – Research and Development

RAISE – Roundtable for AI, Security and Ethics (UNIDIR)

RAS – Russian Academy of Sciences

RDIF – Russian Direct Investment Fund

REAIM – Responsible Artificial Intelligence in the Military Domain

REE – rare earth elements

RF – the Russian Federation

RIAC – Russian International Affairs Council

RIC – Russia, India, and China

ROK – Republic of Korea

ROS – Russian Orbital Station

SADR – Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic

SCIFiRE – the Southern Cross Integrated Flight Research Experiment

SCO – Shanghai Cooperation Organization

SDI – Strategic Defense Initiative

SIPRI – Stockholm International Peace Research Institute

SLBM – Submarine-Launched Ballistic Missile

SLV – Satellite Launch Vehicle

SMNR – Small Modular Nuclear Reactor

SMO – Special Military Operation

SMRs – Small Modular Reactors

SNF – spent nuclear fuel

SRBM – Short-range ballistic missile

SSA – Sub-Saharan Africa

SSN – Submersible Ship, Nuclear-powered

START I (Treaty) – bilateral treaty between the United States and the Soviet Union on the reduction and the limitation of strategic offensive arms

START-3 (Treaty) – nuclear arms reduction treaty between the United States and the Russian Federation with the formal name of Measures for the Further Reduction and Limitation of Strategic Offensive Arms.

SWU – separative work unit

TNW – tactical nuclear weapons

TPNW – Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons

TWh – terawatt-hours

UAE – the United Arab Emirates

UAVs – Unmanned aerial vehicle

UK – the United Kingdom

UN – United Nations

UN OEWG – UN Open-ended Working Group

UNFCCC – United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change

UNHCR – The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees

UNIDIR – United Nations Institute for Disarmament Research

UNODA – United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs

UNOOSA – United Nations Office for Outer Space Affairs

UNSC – United Nations Security Council

UNSW – University of New South Wales

USA (also U.S.) – the United States of America

USSR – the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics

WMD – Weapons of Mass Destruction

WPK – Workers' Party of Korea

WTO – the Warsaw Treaty Organization / World Trade Organization

WWI – the First World War

WWII – the Second World War

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In the midst of escalating worldwide tensions and Russian responses to them, this handbook is a singular compilation of analytical resources on the most pressing topics of the regional and global agendas.

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