

Diplomaatia

Special edition of Lennart Meri Conference 2021

THE ENORMOUS IMPACT OF THE NATO BATTLEGROUP

Kersti Kaljulaid

EUROPE SQUEEZED BETWEEN THE US AND CHINA

Luuk van Middelaar

NEW GERMAN LEADER NEEDED

Daniela Schwarzer

NORD STREAM 2 A BATTLE TO BE CONTINUED

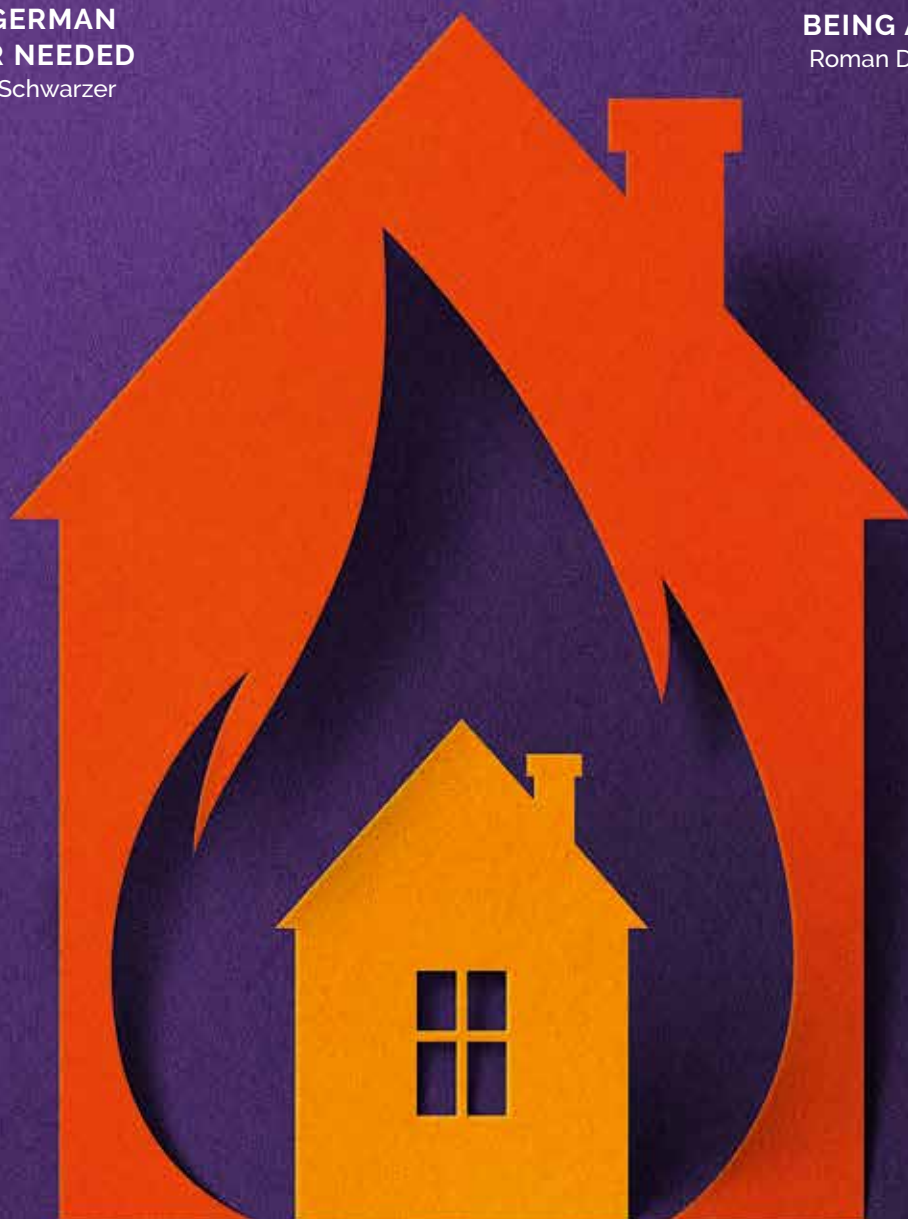
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My Neighbour's Problem Today – Mine Tomorrow

2,000 years ago, the Roman poet Horace said: “You too are in danger, when your neighbour’s house is on fire” (*nam tua res agitur, paries cum proximus ardet*). Today, when states seem to prefer to retract into their shells like turtles rather than fight global troubles, this ancient wisdom provides a fitting starting point for the 14th Lennart Meri Conference.

As we meet in Tallinn in the beginning of September 2021, the coronavirus pandemic continues to smoulder like a peat fire, breaking out in unexpected places and times. But we can already draw a number of initial conclusions from its impact. It has clearly reminded us that success in social pacts, relations between states, relations between governments and people, communication and messaging, or practical matters such as vaccine distribution, infrastructure investment or the fourth industrial revolution still begins with people and is based on trust.


With this solid foundation in place, we can build new structures to tackle the challenges and problems we face, both regionally and globally.

In the Nordic-Baltic region, we are naturally most concerned with issues that directly affect us: the pre-election situation in Russia, war-torn Ukraine, the disturbing developments in Belarus, the

changing security situation around the Baltic Sea, transatlantic relations and NATO’s strategic choices, and the identity crises of the EU and the UK. At the same time, India, Afghanistan, the Middle East, Central Asia, the Arctic, and the Western Balkans have also become our neighbours. Their problems are also our problems.

As are the principal concerns of the free world. Opposition to China and Russia is not simply an economic, military or even a technological clash. It is primarily an ideological one. Chinese president Xi Jinping and Russian president Vladimir Putin understood this a long time ago—but we are only now beginning to catch up.

The decisive factor in this ideological conflict will be our conviction that our choices are the right ones. If we do not trust ourselves or our values, we will not convince others. Preservation of the democratic order should depend only on the choices made in democratic societies.

This, then, is a suitable occasion to recall Estonian president Lennart Meri’s statement that our future is in our own hands. His observation was, of course, not new. Like most of humankind’s wisdom, it had been proven over millennia. But perhaps reflecting on it will allow us to have more trust in our own future. 

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We simply do not
have the moral right
to shut the bus door
and drive away.

**KERSTI KALJULAI**

President of Estonia and
patron of the Lennart Meri Conference
p. 13–18

”

The EU must first
develop the ambition
to be a relevant
pole itself, a power
among powers.

**LUUK VAN MIDDELAAR**

political theorist and historian
p. 4–9

COVID-19 and the Search for European Strategic Autonomy

A virus has redefined power politics. On the big stage, the European Union needs not only to prop up the multilateral order, but also to promote a multipolar order and develop into a power among powers.



LUUK VAN MIDDELAAR
political theorist and historian

For governments, it is useful to know whether a health danger is coming their way, to learn from approaches taken elsewhere and, if necessary, to offer or request help. But COVID-19 sharpens one dimension of such standard diplomatic traffic in an emergency: power politics. Unlike an earthquake or other classic natural disaster, a disease that is spread by human movement presents a great opportunity to put other players in a bad light, to weaken or manipulate them. Whose fault is it? Who is failing to get the thing under control? Who is helping? Who has a convincing story?

In the medical-political maelstrom of spring 2020, four insights, each of them revealing and at the same time perplexing, were gained by the beleaguered European public.

First, in this disaster, Europe was not going to be the world's Red Cross, but the pitiful victim. Second, in combating the pandemic the United States, the great ally that has taken the lead in all international crises since 1945, was absent, even feckless. Third, it was the distant, strange and, by most Europeans, misunderstood or underestimated China that

was able to fly in with tonnes of medical supplies. Fourth, to make the humiliation complete, the European public discovered that the dividing line between emergency aid and power politics is thin – and a benefactor can make demands.

This series of experiences threw into disarray Europe's sense of its geography and history. On the world map of emotions, sympathy and respect swapped places. The pandemic forced Europe into a post-colonial view of the People's Republic of China, a post-Atlanticist view of the United States of America, and a new definition of its own position and identity.

Face-mask Diplomacy

"Face-mask diplomacy" is the phenomenon that sums up the shifts most effectively. Italy, hit hard by the virus precisely because of the links between Lombardian industry and Chinese production centres such as Wuhan, was the first to be affected by the rescue efforts. On 12 March 2020, amid great media attention, a Chinese Red Cross plane arrived in Rome – not Milan, the centre

of the epidemic, thereby underlining the diplomatic character of the mission. Foreign minister Luigi Di Maio extolled the solidarity between the two countries.

At the same time, the Italian government ordered medical equipment worth more than 200 million euros. Yet more flights with relief supplies followed, some from regional and local governments, and on three occasions they were accompanied by medical staff. Even some large Chinese businesses and organisations, such as the Jack Ma Foundation, came to Italy's aid. Nor were the dockland industries of Genoa and Trieste forgotten by their Chinese partners.

Serbia was another stop on the new silk road of sickness and health. In mid-March, President Aleksander Vučić came to the airport in Belgrade in person to receive a shipment of face masks. "European solidarity is a fairy tale for

Ever since the 1950s the government in Beijing has had good knowledge of and strong links with many of the former communist "brother peoples" in central and eastern Europe.

children," he said on that occasion. "I believe in my brother; I believe in Xi Jinping." In Prague, President Miloš Zeman made it known in late March that China was the only country to have helped the Czech Republic. This drove home the fact that ever since the 1950s the government in Beijing has had good knowledge of and strong links with many of the former communist "brother peoples" in central and eastern Europe.

It is a different matter for countries in western and southern Europe, which, as an extension of Marshall Aid and NATO protection, have enjoyed American support ever since the Second World War.

Chinese face-mask diplomacy therefore raised eyebrows in the Netherlands. As a token of thanks for the aid that Schiphol Airport and KLM Airlines provided to China with discreet emergency flights in January and February, three Chinese airlines donated medical supplies to KLM a month later. In April, Health Minister Martin Van Rijn went to Schiphol in person to welcome a donation sent by Alibaba and Huawei. The Netherlands, never a beacon of diplomatic finesse, haughtily rejected as substandard a shipment of 600,000 masks it had purchased, an incident that the Chinese ambassador struggled to smooth over.



A billboard with Chinese President Xi Jinping looking down over a boulevard in Belgrade next to the words "Thank you brother Xi", a message paid for and created by a pro-government tabloid in Serbia. AFP/Scanpix

In the battle to look good, Europe put itself at a disadvantage. The tonnes of emergency supplies that had travelled in the opposite direction earlier in 2020, from Germany, France, Italy, the Netherlands and elsewhere, had been delivered without flag waving or drumbeats at the request of the Chinese. The country tolerates no loss of face. On 6 April, the European Commission laid out the bare facts and figures in a press release – for the record, because for the theatre it was too late.

Self-conscious China

Meanwhile, the leadership in Beijing was eager to shine its light on the full breadth of the stage. To achieve that, all means were permitted. In Paris, the Chinese ambassador hit out at French COVID-19 failures so hard that his efforts rebounded. Beijing does not yet command the subtle European codes of verbal exchange between the authorities and the public.

In Berlin, parliamentarians were shocked by a newspaper report that Chinese diplomats had urged the German government to put a positive spin on Xi's management of the crisis. The federal government told the Bundestag that it had declined to comply with the request. An alert commentator observed that not the foreign ministry, but the interior ministry was responsible for such channels of communication. "What it signals is that China has become domestic politics for Germany. This points to the new reality of our relationship with China."

The pandemic not only gave considerable scope to a self-conscious China, but it also revealed that China has a Europe policy that is not matched by any European China policy. Public unease began to take shape.

The offensive Chinese response was illuminated even more starkly by a cynical display of American inaction. In the first ten months of 2020 more citizens, in absolute terms, died of the disease in the US than in any other country. Time and again President Donald Trump played down the danger ("a kind of flu") and paid little attention to experts and advisers.

Of course, the dark side of the American dream does not come entirely as news to Europe: outbursts of racial

violence, glaring social inequality, dispiriting interventionist wars, an opioid crisis, political polarization. Yet until the coronavirus pandemic, the brighter side dominated: democratic freedom, love of innovation, dynamism, and faith in the future. An apposite piece appeared in *The Irish Times*. "Over more than two centuries, the United States has stirred a very wide range of feelings in the rest of the world: love and hatred, fear and hope, envy and contempt, awe and anger. But there is one emotion that has never been directed towards the US until now: pity."

The pandemic not only gave considerable scope to a self-conscious China, but it also revealed that China has a Europe policy that is not matched by any European China policy.

Domestic failure undermined America's claim to moral exceptionalism and global leadership. At the start of the pandemic President Trump was still behaving according to the familiar script. Referring to South Korea, he said, "They have a lot of people that are infected, we don't. All I say is, 'Be calm.' ... The world is relying on us." That was soon over, not just because in his own country the pandemic encouraged him to play America First in the worldwide battle for medicines to treat COVID-19 but also – and the two things were closely connected – because Trump subordinated every foreign policy performance to the question of coronavirus guilt and to rivalry with China.

A rhetorical duel between two geopolitical adversaries filled the world's auditoria. Pushed into a corner as the super-spreader of the virus, Beijing chided the "Leader of the Infected World" for his paltry COVID-19 response. When America's State Department declared in late May that the Chinese government was "breaking its promise to the people of Hong Kong" with a new security law, the riposte by its Chinese counterpart on Twitter was a simple "I can't breathe",

the final words of George Floyd, whose brutal death had stirred furious Black Lives Matter protests in all the states of America and beyond. American society became caught up in a double fight over bodies; in election year 2020, politics crept under the skin.

Trapped Europeans

In this geopolitical battle of narratives, the Europeans are trapped. Both great powers were demanding to write their own version of the great coronavirus story. Xi Jinping wanted gratitude for the face masks provided; that meant not probing the Wuhan market or how the virus could have been stopped sooner. Donald Trump preferred not to hear about failures at home and demanded fidelity from his vassals, in a geopolitical conflict that was presented in Washington as a new Cold War between freedom and tyranny.

A revealing incident shows how these forces made themselves felt as far away as backstage Brussels.

The EU department for combatting disinformation (set up in response to Russian propaganda activities, it has since 2019 also investigated China) wrote in April 2020 in a preliminary version of a coronavirus report that Beijing was engaged in a "global disinformation campaign" to avoid carrying the can for the outbreak. The text was leaked to the press, which led to fears that China would hit back by withholding medical supplies.

Chinese-American Squeeze

After pressure on EU diplomats in Beijing, in which the word "repercussions" was used, the passage was watered down. According to *The New York Times*, an advisor to EU chief diplomat, Josep Borrell, intervened to postpone publication of the report. Criticism from the other side of the battlefield promptly followed. America's ambassador to the Netherlands, Pete Hoekstra, eagerly tweeted about Chinese intimidation, "Real friends don't do that." In his response, in front of the European Parliament, Borrell described such fine tuning as "the daily bread of diplomacy" and said his department never succumbed to pressure.

Indeed, as Borrell observed, diplomatic work involves being, well, diplomatic. Drafts of difficult letters are often rather more cutting than the version the addressee gets to read. That does not necessarily mean you have sold your soul to the devil, merely that you have taken account of sensitivities, consequences, interests. Sticking firmly to principles in relation to the Chinese Communist Party may look valiant, but with too few face masks to protect your citizens you will soon start to feel short of breath.

So, Europe drew its first conclusions from the dislocating experiences of the spring and summer of 2020. If it wanted to escape being squeezed between the People's Republic and the United States with their geo-medical divide-and-rule politics, then the Union would have to get its own production (or distribution) of medical and pharmaceutical supplies in order. Without strategic autonomy, no narrative sovereignty.

The pandemic of 2020 caused a China shock in the EU, which heightened public awareness of the People's Republic's geopolitical power and assertiveness. This time it went far beyond informed or interested circles (which had become intensely aware since the 2008 financial crisis and a series of high-profile takeovers in the German tech sector from 2016) but was felt right at the heart of European public life. This time, after all, Europe's own medical vulnerability was in the spotlight.

In the American imagination, the People's Liberation Army is conclusively the strategic and narrative successor to the Russian Red Army.

These changed relationships were immediately expressed in the allocation of political responsibility: China became a *Chefsache*. Because of COVID-19 travel restrictions, the summit of all 27 EU government leaders with President Xi that Chancellor Angela Merkel had arranged for September 2020 in Leipzig had not gone ahead. In early October, presidents and prime ministers unanimously endorsed the aim of "strategic autonomy". A remarkable conceptual breakthrough, since the notion had for years met resistance from member countries that, in a defence context, considered it anti-Atlanticist. Now the medical vulnerability and pharmaceutical dependency revealed by the pandemic prompted calls for an escape from the Chinese-American squeeze. Suddenly an independent foreign policy emerged as a public matter.

In the great imperial duel, Europe's own metamorphosis became all the more urgent. Sticking to the text, as in rules-



In the geopolitical power battle of narratives, US President Donald Trump preferred not to hear about failures at home and demanded fidelity from his vassals. Reuters/Scanpix

based politics, is not sufficient to see off assertive opponents and major global turbulence. This lesson from the foregoing decade of crises is true *a fortiori* of the political world stage. So, with regard to both the People's Republic and the United States, the European Union would henceforth have to engage in events-politics, as a player with skin in the game, with power and a narrative. In respect of both, this was an historic turning point.

The rise of China clearly upsets American-European relations. For Washington it represents a geopolitical challenge that puts everything else in the shade. Already

under president Barack Obama, the US started its "pivot to Asia", an orientation towards the Pacific. The European theatre is being relegated to the side-stage of world politics, perhaps for the first time in centuries. Under President Trump, the deterioration in the relationship between the US and China accelerated, with trade wars and pressure on allies to isolate China, for instance on technology, from early in his term. As sketched above, during the 2020 pandemic, this rivalry permeated all the way to the main podium of global public life, with a furious narrative battle, a geo-medical vac-

**In Washington,
the narrative of
a new Cold War is
developing, in which
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between Good
and Evil.**

cine race and a tug of war in the WHO. At home it was the American Secretary of Defense who dotted the "i"s. Shortly before the 2020 presidential election, he decreed that from 2021 onwards, military academies must devote half their lessons to China. In the American imagination, the People's Liberation Army is conclusively the strategic and narrative successor to the Russian Red Army.

Confronted with the Trumpian China legacy, in 2021, the new President Joe Biden opted for both continuity and rupture. He could not avoid further pursuing a confrontational course with Xi Jinping (it would make him look meek), but he is breaking with the policy of inconveniencing and weakening allies and international organisations. Instead, he is positioning the US once again as the self-conscious leader of the free world. All the same, it will be harder for Biden than for his post-war predecessors – all those from Truman to Clinton who built the global *Pax Americana* – to make self-interest and global interests credibly coincide, because of both the reluctance of his voters and the relative decline of America's power.

Seen like this, rupture and continuity have the same origin. Because of the mounting geopolitical conflict with China, Biden is playing the familiar card of American imperialism: "Our power is your freedom". The US realizes that against this challenger it cannot win on its own. In early 2019 Biden's current secretary of state Antony Blinken was already making a start, with a plea for a "league of democracies" (a proposal he made along with neoconservative Robert Kagan). Biden announced a "Summit of Democracies" to be held during his first year in



President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen. The EU must develop the ambition to be a power among powers. Only then will Europe be taken seriously by the US and China as a fellow player on the world stage, Luuk van Middelaar finds. EPA/Scanpix

office. In Washington, the narrative of a new Cold War is developing, in which the power struggle with Beijing is amplified into a battle between Good and Evil. The European democracies, naturally, are on the side of the Good.

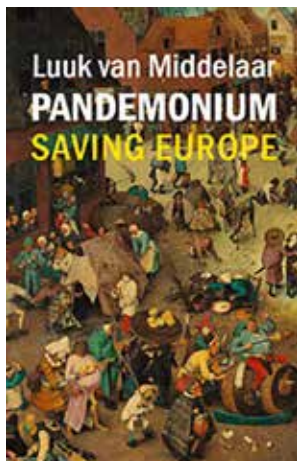
This is in stark contrast to China's approach to Europe. Whereas Xi Jinping always talks of the relationship with the US as being between great powers, with Europe he stresses the bond between "great civilizations". He claims that China is the oldest still extant civilization, representing "the East", whereas the origins of Western civilization lie in Europe. Because of that historical responsibility, Xi believes, China and Europe must work together to build a world in which all states, irrespective of their political-economic systems, have equal standing.

Times of Pluralism

The initial reflex of governments and EU institutions after the 2020 American presidential election was to reach out a hand to Joe Biden in relief, almost before he had stretched out a hand to them. Yet a number of crucial differences between this and the previous Cold War should give us pause.

The degree of global economic interdependence is new, which has changed the stakes of the geopolitical conflict. The US and the Soviet Union engaged in an ideological and territorial battle, with famous flashpoints, including Berlin, Cuba and Vietnam. Economic links between the capitalist West and the Eastern Bloc were minimal, however, and as a consequence it cost Western Europe little to restrict trade and transactions with the communist bloc. How different the situation is now. The rapid global spread of the coronavirus has revealed how immensely branched and interwoven worldwide supply chains have become. To disentangle them in a process

Europe must free itself from the role of a prompt that invisibly declaims universal values or the agreements of rules-politics.



PANDEMONIUM: SAVING EUROPE

This analysis is adapted from excerpts from Luuk van Middelaar's forthcoming book: *Pandemonium: Saving Europe*, Agenda Publishing, October 2021.

The last decade has seen the EU beset by crisis: the eurozone storm, the refugee tragedy and the Brexit debacle. The pandemic presented yet another threat to its existence. Luuk van Middelaar's incisive analysis of Europe's resilience demonstrates just how far the EU has come in its development from a regulatory body to a political entity and how it has been shaped by the politics of crisis. If the EU is to thrive and to protect its citizens, it must learn now to be a geopolitical actor and anticipate the action rather than simply react to it.

of decoupling, as American hardliners advocate, would be economically disastrous for Europe – leaving aside the question of whether it is possible at all.

Furthermore, America's disconcerting COVID-19 response reveals how weakened and divided the country is, and indeed how self-conscious and resolute the onward march of China. At its height, the Soviet Union achieved 60 per cent of American prosperity, whereas now China might well catch up with the US in the foreseeable future, not just economically but technologically and militarily. Whereas immediately after the Second World War the US accounted for around half of the world's prosperity, it currently accounts for just one seventh. The days of global supremacy are now out of reach

The Biden presidency is a historic gift – not to be wasted by pretending that everything in EU-US relations can go back to normal.

to both China and the US. This creates a need for forms of power balance and coexistence – and hence thinking in terms of pluralism.

EU on the World Stage

The European Union derives part of its self-confidence and sense of mission from the notion of a universal, neutral and power-free international podium. With the pandemic and the resulting politicisation of the WHO and UN by Beijing and Washington, that promise has been shattered. The EU therefore needs not only to prop up the multilateral order (impossible without the bedrock of American power) but also to promote a multipolar order. This means the EU must first develop the ambition to be a relevant pole itself, a power among powers. Only then will Europe be taken seriously by the US and China as a fellow player on the world stage.

Such a geopolitical aspiration requires – this much is made clear by the American example and the Chinese counterexample – a strategic capacity to prioritize, buttressed by a public will to operate as a unified Europe, to act, to claim a certain space. To that end Europe must free itself from the role of a prompt that invisibly declaims universal values or the agreements of rules-politics. A player on the stage accepts being absorbed into the stream of events and into a battle for soil, technology, access, influence and prestige – and must speak the language of fellow players: the language of power.

In this respect, the Biden presidency is a historic gift – not to be wasted by pretending that everything in EU-US relations can go back to normal (as some European politicians irresponsibly suggested), but to be seen as a most welcome interlude and breathing space, for Europe to prepare for events to come. **D**

**CONSTANZE STELZENMÜLLER**

Fritz Stern chair at the Brookings Institution

America Is Back, but Europe and Especially Germany Need To Do Much More for European Security

It took President Joe Biden nearly five months before he made his first trip abroad in June, to Europe; he had more important things to do. Arguably, that is still the case today.

As of August, the death toll of the COVID-19 pandemic stood at more than 615,000 in the U.S., nearly as high as that of the Civil War. Given the rapid spread of the Delta variant, it may take many months before the full extent of the damage done by the pandemic to America's economy and society is revealed. But America's political polarization appears ever more entrenched. The "Big Lie" (that Biden is not legitimately elected) is believed by large majorities of Republican voters. Pandemic, mask, and vaccine denialism persist, with lethal consequences for the nation. The Republican party continues to radicalize, embracing hard right ideologues and conspiracy theorists.

Re-building America

The degree to which the previous president controls the narrative of what my Brookings colleague Jonathan Rauch has called the "epistemic secession"—the breaking away of Red and Blue America into their own hermetically sealed belief systems—was on display at the excruciating opening hearing of the January 6

commission. Only two Republicans, Congresswoman Liz Cheney and Congressman Adam Kinzinger, had the courage to condemn that day's assault on the Capitol and the integrity of the election. Yet the Republican leadership insisted on the Trumpian line that the investigation is a partisan witch hunt.

Barack Obama once said that the U.S. should focus on "nation-building at home." What he meant was that the U.S. should avoid long military missions in faraway lands. Today, Biden's team—and no doubt he himself—is keenly aware that nation-building at home is the essential challenge of his tenure. Re-building America will determine not just the success of his presidency, but perhaps the survival of American democracy.

Of course an American president cannot ignore the world. China surveils its own population, abuses its Muslim minority in Xinjiang, cracks down on the democratic opposition in Hong Kong, threatens the democratic government in Taiwan, and tries to cajole or bully European governments into political alignment with its goals. Russia parades a hundred thousand troops at Ukraine's border, jockey for influence in the Middle East, and increasingly represses its own civil society. Chinese and Russian hacking and hybrid operations in the

West are escalating. In Afghanistan, the Taliban have regained power.

Hence Biden's trip to Europe. First the G7 summit in London, then the EU and NATO meetings in Brussels, and finally the meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Geneva. The message: America is back, and it needs to close ranks with its European allies for a systemic competition between the democracies and the authoritarian great powers—Russia and China. The pictures were perfect, the tone of Biden's meetings with Europeans was cordial, the communiqués promised a dense agenda of cooperation. The encounter with Putin, in contrast, was cool and businesslike; the goal, President Biden said, was "stability and predictability." So far, so good.

Nord Stream 2

Six weeks later, the Biden administration (having already waived sanctions on the controversial Nord Stream 2 pipeline in May) signed a bilateral deal with Germany to permit completion of the project, which circumvents the transit route through Ukraine to deliver gas directly through the Baltic Sea to Germany. Is the Biden administration sacrificing solidarity with eastern Europe in order to secure Germany's support in its rivalry with China?

The criticism of the U.S.-German deal is certainly deserved. It undermines Ukraine's security, it divides Europe, and it even divides Democrats in Washington.

Yet the unpleasant truth is: there were no other options. Stopping NS2 would have incurred a lawsuit for damages against the German government for an estimated 10 billion euros. Sanctioning it might well have been the final blow to an already badly damaged U.S.-German relationship; Europe's anchor economy is key to American purposes in Europe. And—as Elisabeth Braw has pointed out—the U.S. habit of unilateral sanctions risks boomeranging. It is already inspiring China to follow suit; ultimately, this could undermine the global dollar economy.

However, there is also a more pragmatic way to look at it. The U.S.-German agreement makes Berlin the political warden of Ukraine. Whatever happens next, will be Germany's responsibility. The burden of proof that the deal will not damage Ukraine, or central and eastern

Re-building America will determine not just the success of his presidency, but perhaps the survival of American democracy.

Europe, is on Germany. In other words: should the Kremlin contemplate further destabilizing actions, it would not just be taking on Kyiv – it would be taking on Berlin. In the larger regional context of civil societies in Ukraine, Belarus, and Moldova firmly choosing to align themselves with Europe, as well as Putin's growing unpopularity in Russia, the view from the Kremlin looks a lot less good.

Indeed, there is a much larger, urgent problem to be addressed, and the fight over NS2 is both a part of it and a distraction from it: the lack of a U.S.-European effort to develop a joint approach with regards to Russia. The Biden administration's minimalist focus on arms

control and “stable and predictable” relations, or Germany's attempts to balance sanctions and engagement are far from enough; a much more robust and activist strategy to make the region more resilient is needed. But how can other Europeans push for such a shift?

Simple. As the European Council on Foreign Relations' Jeremy Shapiro has noted, the Biden administration needs the EU's immense trade and regulatory powers in managing the rivalry with China; but those powers dissipate when European unity and security are undermined. That gives Germany's neighbors leverage in arguing for a stronger and more cohesive approach. But all Europeans—Germany included—are well advised to bolster such a demand for attention with proof that they too are willing to do more for the region's security. Relieving the U.S. of some of the burden of European defense means giving the Biden administration more leeway to protect democracy at home. In fact, that is something we cannot afford not to do. D



U.S. President Joe Biden at the EU-U.S. summit in Brussels in June 2021. Relieving the U.S. of some of the burden of European defense means giving the Biden administration more leeway to protect democracy at home, Constanze Stelzenmüller argues.

AP/Scanpix

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The Battle Is Not Entirely Lost: Ukraine after the US-German Nord Stream 2 Deal

Nord Stream 2 bypasses Ukraine, reducing the value of Ukraine's gas transit system to Europe, increasing the probability of military threats from Russia, decreasing the reliability of gas supply to Ukraine and hurting the Ukrainian economy.

After the US compromised with Germany on NS2, these threats became more real. The US-German memorandum is pathetically called "On Support for Ukraine, European Energy Security, and our Climate Goals." But how much support for Ukraine does it actually contain?

"Germany commits to utilize all available leverage to facilitate an extension of up to 10 years to Ukraine's gas transit agreement with Russia, including appointing a special envoy to support those negotiations, to begin as soon as possible and no later than September." In what way can Germany guarantee the transit? And what will be the volumes of that post-2024 gas transit? Earlier, German officials were talking about 15 billion cubic metres (bcm) of annual transit, which is lower than the break-even point of 30-35 bcm.

Both countries, according to the document, "will endeavour to promote and support investments of at least \$1 bln" to promote energy transition and "Germany will provide an initial donation to the fund of at least \$175 million and will work toward extending its commitments in the coming budget years." Considering the Green Deal and Ukraine's neighbouring the EU, the country must follow the Green Deal initiatives. But the amount of

\$1 bln is not only incomparably smaller than this transition will cost, but also smaller than the country's current annual transit revenue. It can hardly be called "Support for Ukraine".

The document says that "Germany will intensify its efforts within the Normandy Format to facilitate the implementation of the Minsk agreements." This is potentially a very dangerous sentence. Why does the statement include the Minsk agreements topic? In doing so, it could effectively tie energy security issues, of which NS2 was part, to the success of the peace process around Ukraine's conflict with Russia in Donbas. There is another question raised by from this sentence: does it mean that Germany wasn't facilitating the Minsk agreements enough and if so – why?

In general, these declarations in the memorandum omit Ukraine from the process of negotiations. And Ukraine must work on protecting its interests.

On the one hand, these efforts must include further countering the pipeline and cooperation with Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania may be fruitful

to this end. On the other hand, Ukraine should take steps to be prepared should NS2 be put into operation.

As bad as the German-US agreement may be, Ukraine should not make a big deal out of it. The battle for NS2 construction is likely lost. But that does not mean the whole issue is resolved. The next battle for Ukraine and its allies is for the pipeline to actually begin work, giving Ukraine more possibilities to lobby against it and win more time.

In the meantime, Kyiv should think of how to redesign its gas transit and distribution system, make it more efficient, improve its capacities and build new infrastructure to adapt to new global and regional trends. Though there are no public assessments of such costs, they will likely be at least \$5 bln.

Ukraine should embrace the EU's carbon strategy and reorient its energy transit potential towards closer cooperation with western partners. To fulfil national demand, if this is to be a challenge in the post-NS2 environment, Ukraine should also boost its domestic gas production.

Finally, security and defence threats which could potentially grow after NS2 starts to work, could be hindered with a more robust and effective defence strategy, requiring even more cooperation with other countries. This should be one of the demands Ukraine puts forward as a means of compensation for green-lighting NS2.

In any case, the story of the NS2 is not finished yet. 

Ukraine should embrace the EU's carbon strategy and reorient its energy transit potential towards closer cooperation with western partners.

Kersti Kaljulaid: The Impact of the NATO Battlegroup Has Been Enormous

According to President Kersti Kaljulaid, establishing a NATO battlegroup was ingenious. And she often reminds her colleagues that their strategic patience should at least match that of their political ancestors, that is, 50 years.



INDREK KANNIK
director of the International Centre
for Defence and Security

You were elected President of Estonia a few weeks before Donald Trump moved into the White House. How much did Trump's shadow affect your term of office?

Every nation's choices are their own. Estonia has to work with every administration. I am not talking about just the US, but also Germany, France, Finland and Latvia. We have to be able to work with everyone, and to look for a direction or a path that will align us in the best possible way. With the Trump administration, for example, the Three Seas Initiative was something they supported very strongly. It became clear quite quickly that they were interested in promoting the US economy, which also had a significant impact on their foreign policy and everything else.

The Three Seas Initiative enabled us to establish a work-related collaboration that helped to get small and practical things done. I actually felt relatively comfortable with that administration: we managed it well.

In general, it probably cannot be said that the Trump administration took any steps in security matters that were detrimental to Estonia or our region?

All in all, our region continued to receive the same good value-based US foreign policy. From Vice President Mike Pence's visit and the Three Seas Initiative to meeting Trump at the White House, where he said very clearly, "We shall never let you down".

However, elsewhere where the problems were more acute, the preferred solution to the problem was often to cut the Gordian knot. We were simply lucky that nothing was happening in our region at the time that warranted such a response, and that they did not have time to resort to such measures in Ukraine. Let us consider, for example, the Middle East or the Korean Peninsula.

Meanwhile, it has become clear to me at the UN that the task of medium-sized and small countries is to always maintain international law and balance. The larger countries occasionally make unusual

attempts to end long-standing stalemates in the world. Sometimes, they are successful. This clearly shows the difference between the role of smaller countries and larger countries in the international arena.

In that sense, it cannot be said that Donald Trump actually withdrew the US from its global position, because he did try to find solutions to the Israeli-Palestinian issue, for example.

Or regarding Israel and the Arab world. He achieved a remarkable breakthrough with the so-called Abraham Accords.

Exactly. That is an example of how things can get done when you try something completely different. That is feasible for large countries, and the US tries to play its part responsibly.

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It has become clear to me at the UN that the task of medium-sized and small countries is to always maintain international law and balance.

Coming back to Estonian security, there was no NATO battlegroup here at the beginning of your term. How much have the allied forces contributed to Estonia's confidence? In 2014–2015, Estonians were very worried, with some even talking about selling real estate, there was a slight panic.

I remember that too, the expatriate Estonian community was also worried. I was still living in Luxembourg when the crisis in Ukraine broke out, and certainly the war in Ukraine moved something in us. Although I kept thinking that NATO has a 100% track record: no NATO member has been attacked.

At the time, a member of a Nordic government said that the Baltic Sea as a “sea of war” could have a detrimental effect on the economic environment and investments – that is how great the concern was. The situation is much better today, of course, and the NATO battlegroup definitely had an impact on that.

However, this is only one aspect of the NATO battlegroup. The deployment of allied forces in the Baltic countries and Poland was, in fact, a brilliant move in a



President Kersti Kaljulaid and Indrek Kannik, director of the International Centre for Defence and Security talking in the garden of Presidential Palace in Tallinn, Estonia. Office of the President

situation where defence spending was low in Europe. A total of 19 countries joined NATO battlegroups, to delve into the problems in this region.

I can see, for example, that in southern Europe, there is now a much better understanding of what is happening in this corner of the world. I also set myself the goal of establishing closer ties with Spain, Italy, Greece and Portugal: I visited these countries, I talked with and met with people from these countries. Our diplomacy must take advantage of the fact that these countries now have a presence in north-eastern Europe, and we must also actively explain to them the current situation in our region. It has actually worked quite well, and journalists from southern Europe no longer ask, "Is Narva next?"

In other words, the impact of the NATO battlegroup has been enormous. NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and others put together a brilliant thing with minimal resources.

However, the security situation in this region is still not ideal, as we saw in spring when Russia was threatening Ukraine.

That is unfortunately true. NATO's umbrella is not something you can keep opening and folding. NATO's umbrella means that the higher the risks and the higher the threat assessment, the more actively we manage these risks. That is what a higher deterrence threshold means.

But the big picture is still not very good. Other heads of state have been persuaded to be vigilant due to the fact that the size of the Russian forces just beyond the borders of our region in peacetime and under normal circumstances now exceeds the level present during the last but one Zapad exercise. Everyone's ears prick up when they hear that there is a military exercise right on our doorstep every day. That makes other heads of state take things seriously and, of course, the war in Ukraine raised a lot of awareness throughout southern Europe.

And regarding the two per cent defence expenditure (i.e. for NATO), the awareness of the heads of state, and their will to make changes, has increased a lot. However, real changes take time, and



KERSTI KALJULAI

President Kersti Kaljulaid is a supporter of a nonrestrictive legal space for the ongoing digitalization of economies and governments. She is an active promoter of sustainability and halting climate change. She advocates for publicly speaking up against violence and for giving a voice to those affected by it.

In 2016 Kersti Kaljulaid was elected President of the Republic of Estonia. Previously she served from 2004 to 2016 as a Member of the European Court of Auditors. Kersti Kaljulaid was the CFO and CEO of the Iru Power Plant of state-owned energy company Eesti Energia and prior to that Prime Minister Mart Laar's Economic Advisor.

Involvement in Organisations

- Since 2018 co-chair of UN High-Level Steering Group "Every Woman Every Child"
- 2016–2019 Leading Estonian campaign to UN Security Council
- 2012–2016 Chair of the Council of University of Tartu
- 2001–2004 Member of the Supervisory Board of the Estonian Genome Centre

Kersti Kaljulaid is also a member of World Bank's Advisory Panel for the World Development Report 2021 and member of the European Council on Foreign Relations Council. President Kaljulaid is Patron of the Lennart Meri Conference.

Source: Office of the President

inflation in the defence sector went up very quickly after talk about the two per cent.

What we could focus on is the defence cooperation in the EU. The Council of the EU convenes and discusses the development of the defence capabilities of the member states. For the fifth year in a row, we are sitting in Brussels and stating that the Baltic countries, including Estonia, spend more than two per cent of their GDP, but still do not have a medium-range air defence system. Does it make sense to get together again in the sixth year to simply acknowledge the same facts, or instead, to create a mechanism to redistribute these costs? If we were ready to move on with this, EU support for NATO could be very high indeed. If we are not prepared to move on with this, there is really no point in talking about EU defence co-operation seriously.

Do you think there is a readiness to move on?

Things like that can take 10 years, maybe even 15.

However, there is something that the EU is better at than NATO, and that is redistribution. If the EU wants to contribute to something, it can use money from the Cohesion Fund.

I have tried to explain to the Americans that the EU could be useful from this perspective. Otherwise, there was a fair bit of edginess in the air when the EU started talking about strategic autonomy and the like. It is very important to alleviate and control these tensions at all times.

In general, Estonia is quite sceptical about strategic autonomy in the EU, because it is hard to believe that it can actually be done.

But let us offer possible solutions for making it work. After all, it does not mean that the EU would be working alone and without an ally like the US. It could mean that the EU would be able to organise, for example, an operation in Libya without having to call on NATO and the Americans immediately. At his first Munich Security Conference, EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said that if you want to be a key player in foreign policy in your region, you need capabilities. Capabilities are simply a must.

We have to make it known that talk is cheap, and instead offer things for the basket that suit us: military mobility, the implementation of a redistribution mechanism. Estonia should not position itself between the ambitions of the Americans and the French, but instead try to find areas where these ambitions do not collide and are mutually beneficial.

Now focusing on our causes of concern, Russia and China. During your term of office, the role of China has also received attention in our region. In the United States, it has been clear for some time that things have been getting worse, but in Europe, it has only become apparent particularly in the past five years.

In my opinion, it is very easy to explain to the western allies how dangerous Russia is by comparing it with China. China's economic strength is growing. They have not reached their economic peak yet, because they also have a problem with their population, external debt has risen sharply and the pace of their economic growth is starting to slow down. However, it is certainly not a declining economy. China has plenty of time to wait, to take over economies and increase its influence.

But with Russia, it is the exact opposite. Russia's problems are a shrinking population, a poor economy, and the ability to sustain its defence spending only at the expense of education and health care. For Moscow, this is a closing window of opportunity, and they know it. That is why Russia does small, cheap, asymmetrical things: Salisbury, Georgia, Ukraine, communication bubbles, interference in the democratic processes of other countries. These incursions are not very expensive and Russia can afford them, to maintain its position as a great power for as long as possible.

On a larger scale, Russia is becoming a regional risk in Europe. Regardless of what Barack Obama, Donald Trump or Joe Biden have said, Europe has to be more involved in its regional risk management, so that our great ally will have more resources, time and free hands to deal with this new, large and growing non-democratic power that has not yet made its intentions clear.

Do you think sanctions against Russia work?

I once asked a politician who was very patriotic towards Estonia if they could remember in what year they had talked about a possible visa waiver with Russia. The politician guessed 2007, but it was actually in 2011. Only a few months after the war in Georgia, normal communications were restored.

I can picture it very well: the Kremlin decision-makers are having a meeting before the Crimean operation, and the more diplomatic ones of them say that it will become a long-term mess, and maybe they should not go ahead with it. But others say not to worry, nothing will happen, for example in Georgia, everything was just fine only a few years later. This time, it might take three, four or five years – but it does not matter, we can handle it.

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The size of the Russian forces just beyond the borders of our region in peacetime and under normal circumstances now exceeds the level present during the last but one Zapad exercise.

So to a great extent, it was us who taught it to the Russians after the aggression against Georgia, and that is exactly what I have been saying to my Western colleagues. That is why things went as they did in Ukraine, and that is why it is crucial to continue sanctions against Ukraine. Not because we can return Crimea to Ukraine in five years, but to keep communicating so that the Russians will not feel as if they are escaping with impunity.

We can draw parallels here with the predecessors of today's politicians. Our political ancestors had 50 years of strategic patience. To my colleagues, I keep saying that their patience simply cannot be less than that of our political ancestors.

In 2019, you went to Moscow.

In Estonia, your visit did not arouse sharp criticism, but there were questions nevertheless.

I think people were mostly worried that maybe we would be treated badly in some way.

That visit actually had an important purpose which was not located in Moscow. Namely, I had noticed how other heads of state visit Moscow and ask the Baltic states beforehand if there is any message we would like them to pass on, or anything they could say on our behalf. In my opinion, this was neither right nor adequate. Estonia is a country that can speak for itself. The goal was to become an active participant in the discussion and it worked.

Today, Estonia is one of the countries that discusses the issue of Russia with other countries, and determines future courses of action. We are no longer the country that is being told, “We are having a discussion here by ourselves, do you have anything to add?”. We are now an active participant in the discussion.

Coming back to allied relations. We were also able to establish normal relations with the Donald Trump administration. The relationship between western Europe and Trump was highly problematic at times. This danger is probably no longer as acute?

I think that regarding trade relations, the competition between the two major economic zones will remain. Neither the Trans-Pacific Partnership nor the Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership got very far under President Obama, nor are they moving quickly now. Value-based agreements are definitely better now.

In spring 2019, when the names of the US presidential candidates were already circulating, Jonatan Vseiovi, the Estonian Ambassador to Washington at the time, kindly arranged for me to meet with potential candidates, including Joe Biden. It was supposed to be a 40-minute meeting, but in the end, we sat down for two hours, discussing world affairs.

Joe Biden is one of those politicians who makes policies to make the world a better place. To improve American life, to improve the lives of people all over the world. Politicians tend to be

self-centred, but Biden feels a sense of obligation regarding his presidency, for his people and the world. He does not get up in the morning and say, “Great, I’m the President. Oh goody!”, but rather, “I’m the President. What can I do to improve my country and other countries?”

His starting position was significantly better compared to previous presidents, as he was already familiar with the nuances of international politics when he took office.

Absolutely. I have great faith in us having an “old-school” relationship. I like politicians who do not act in the interests of self-promotion and who are not frivolous, but instead have a sense of vocation and duty. Joe Biden is definitely one of those politicians.

On the global scale, Estonia has had a strong position regarding cyber

issues for almost 15 years. Is Estonia in danger of losing its role of a digital giant?

Something massive and visible, such as the shutting down of online voting one day, would certainly give a relatively final blow to Estonia’s reputation as a digital giant.

But today, the sales volume of our digital companies is driven by Estonia’s reputation, I am absolutely convinced about that. There are courageous companies like Nortal who take out loans so that they can conquer the whole world with the help of this reputation. Or Cybernetica which is involved in developing the healthcare system in Yokohama. There are plenty more examples like that, and more keep coming.

That is the so-called Estonian Nokia. Fortunately, it is not just one company, but an entire sector, and it does not require a lot of manpower. Entering a foreign market always involves visiting

the country and hiring locals: if you are building an e-government for others, you need to understand the culture, the laws and the language.

This is also one of my selling points to colleagues abroad: the Estonian e-government is not like Microsoft who will come and say, “Here is my product, now adjust your requirements.” On the contrary: we have everything tailored for others, and we do not operate without you, but give impetus to the development of the sector of start-ups and smart companies in your country as well. Estonian companies are small; they need partners. We are not like China who can say it will build a railway and bring its own workforce to do it – that would not do much for the local economy.

Cooperation with Estonia is pleasant, useful and safe. It seems to me that in global competition, it is also important who actually controls the connections.



This spring, President Kersti Kaljulaid visited the largest annual military exercise of the Estonian Defence Forces, Spring Storm, which brings together various units of the forces. This year, a total of almost 7,000 servicemen from Estonia, the United States, Latvia, Poland, Italy, France, Denmark and the United Kingdom participated in the exercise. Estonian Defence Forces

What about Estonia's cyber security and cyber defence capabilities, do they work?

In 2016, a discussion was held in the National Defence Council on what needs to be done to improve the security of e-Estonia. At that time, the investment deficit was EUR 100 million, and the situation has not improved much since then.

Estonia's big issue is that we have done a lot with EU funds, but as we know, EU funds are only meant for creating new things, not for repairing old things, i.e. maintenance with EU funds is not allowed. It is like a coral: more is growing on top, but the base should be dealt with separately. I believe that the government will focus more on this in the coming years.

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Cooperation with Estonia is pleasant, useful and safe. It seems to me that in global competition, it is also important who actually controls the connections.

One of the topics important to you has also been the application of international law in cyberspace. Are you pleased with the developments in this field over the last five years?

Extremely. First, at my initiative, we managed to bring together people from different ministries in Estonia to declare how our own cyber legislation and international law apply in cyber conflicts. Some countries had already made such a declaration, and the people of the NATO Cyber Defence Centre asked why Estonia had not. We finally got around to it and now it is done. It is very important.

Second, I am very pleased that one of Estonia's election promises when applying for the temporary membership of the UN Security Council was to bring cyber issues to the table. I remember someone at a human rights conference in Tallinn saying to me that small countries can perhaps stretch the Security Council's

agenda only a little bit here and there, and not to be disappointed with that. I sputtered in response that small countries have no time for small goals. Estonia has so few resources that if we decide to do something, it must have a significant impact. And one of our promises was to bring cyber issues to the UN Security Council – and we did it!

How? Not by using traditional methods, of course, but the Estonian way: we took advantage of Russia's cyberattack against Georgia in late 2019 and brought it up in the Security Council under any other business. Of course, the British and the Americans were supportive, but we could not do anything more at that time. Immediately afterwards, we held an unofficial discussion, because the permanent members did not agree to having an official discussion.

Eastern Partnership countries are undeniably important to Estonia from the perspective of security policy.

To be cynical, as long as they are not under complete Russian control, the Russians have less energy for us. The other aspect is supporting Eastern Partnership countries in building their own countries: the rule of law, the development of democracy, and fighting against corruption. How do we find a good balance between these aspects? One the one hand, we must definitely support the Eastern Partners, but on the other hand, we must draw a line somewhere when corruption is rampant or journalists and minority activists are ruthlessly beaten up on the streets.

I am less cynical. We simply do not have the moral right to shut the bus door and drive away. Yes, the Eastern Partners made some choices in the 1990s that did not allow them to take advantage of the window of opportunity at that time, but it does not mean that we should not be trying to help.

I have always tried to go to Georgia and Ukraine, to participate in events and to tell them that they need the rule of law not only to join the EU, but also to create a better state for themselves. This way, they can wake up one morning to find that the window is open. And if they have made sufficient progress in terms of the Copenhagen criteria, even at the

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The member states have agreed on the Green Deal and it is coming. It is no longer just an agreement in the EU, but one of many similar agreements that now cover 60% of the world.


eleventh hour, they will get in. But if they only start moving when the window is open again, they will miss out. That was the experience for Estonia that we can share.

That is what I keep saying at conferences in Ukraine and Georgia, and to the Balkan countries as well, of course.

The European Green Deal: do you think green topics have finally been adopted in Estonia or do a large number of people think that while something has to be done, we should do as little as possible, and simply wait and see if it passes?

I am very worried. I am worried about the cynics, because I can see how the main issue of local elections in Ida-Virumaa today seems to be whether the Green Deal is coming or not. It is extremely cynical, because we might wonder: if it is not coming, then what? Estonia will then leave the European Union. It is a very dangerous game that is being played there today.

Why? The member states have agreed on the Green Deal and it is coming. It is no longer just an agreement in the EU, but one of many similar agreements that now cover 60% of the world.

Given that 70–80% of the Estonian economy is related to exports, we cannot count on further economic success without the Green Deal. After 2050, nobody will want products, services and goods from a country that is relying on a brown economy. Nobody would want things from Estonia anymore, and Estonian companies would no longer hold a monopoly anywhere. It would be extremely easy to give it up. 

**EDWARD LUCAS**

senior fellow at the Center for European
Policy Analysis (CEPA)

Close to the Wind

In my 2015 report, “The Coming Storm” (2015) I highlighted the strategic incoherence of the Baltic Sea region. I noted that though the five Nordic countries, three Baltic countries, and Poland had a GDP greater than Russia’s, and had defence budgets that on paper could easily match Russia’s aggressive capabilities, their “generally weak defence spending and poor coordination” made them highly vulnerable to a “multi-pronged and sustained military, propaganda and espionage offensive from Russia.” I warned that not only regional security, but NATO’s credibility was, therefore, at stake.

Much has changed since then. The war in Ukraine, the refugee crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the Trump administration’s “America First” approach presented new challenges to EU and NATO. Russia has strengthened its quantitative and qualitative military advantage in the Western Military District, with new equipment, increased readiness, better exercises, and logistics. Absent credible reinforcement plans, this places a great emphasis on the credibility

of Western deterrence, chiefly provided by the US.

Russia has also honed and developed its sub-threshold warfare capabilities, lately known as “hybrid” or “active measures” by those who remember similar Soviet-era tactics.

Development

On the plus side, every country in the region has raised its defence spending. NATO’s role in the region has transformed, with the enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) in the Baltic states and Poland creating a significant land-based contribution to national defence efforts in these countries. Baltic Air Policing deployments have increased. NATO has two divisional and one corps headquarters in the region. The US presence in the Baltic region has increased. Finland and Sweden have sharply strengthened their security cooperation and bilateral and trilateral ties with the United States. A US Army Green Beret team is stationed full-time in Sweden. Poland, NATO’s eastern flank hub and military heavyweight, is now closely working with the Baltic countries, particularly Lithuania.

Trust across the four main fault lines in the region – big/small, rich/poor, NATO/non-NATO, and EU/non-EU – has grown. It is hard to identify a period in recent history when national efforts and regional security ties were stronger.

Yet strategies, capabilities, and threats in the Baltic Sea region are mismatched.

The most important weapons systems – such as Air and Missile Defence – are unaffordable for the countries that most need them. Land, maritime, and air strategies are unequally developed and scarcely integrated. The approach in many countries is backward-looking: getting ready to fight the last war, not the next one. Strategic thinking about the region is piecemeal: few of those involved in regional security can articulate a clear picture of a desired end state for regional security, or how that might be achieved. Every element of the region’s defence is based on compromise and improvisation, with a dose of wishful thinking often added for good measure. In many cases, the answer to the hardest questions is an assumption, stated or unstated, that the US will fill the gap.

This and other assumptions about the region’s defence, in terms of political decision-making, logistical capabilities, and military plans, are not properly tested in exercises. All the region’s defence arrangements are, therefore, gravely vulnerable to surprise shocks, such as a strategic distraction.

The result is dangerous complacency. The security of the Atlantic alliance and all its member states is only as strong as that of its weakest and most peripheral members. Put bluntly, defence shortcomings in the Baltic Sea region risk a crisis in the credibility of deterrence, with potentially catastrophic consequences for NATO, its members, and partner countries.

**Trust across the
four main fault lines
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and EU/non-EU –
has grown.**

Main Shortcomings

- 1) Sub-threshold threats are potentially a more serious threat than full-scale kinetic conflict. Comprehensive or “total” defence plans require more resources and better, more comprehensive implementation. International coordination remains nascent.
- 2) NATO remains the linchpin of regional security. Finland and Sweden’s status as non-members of the alliance is not the biggest problem. Far more important are:
 - An unclear and untested command and control system.
 - A lack of a common threat assessment.
 - A growing imbalance in mass and readiness.
 - A lack of high-tempo exercises at the appropriate scale, including short-notice readiness exercises to shock and sharpen the system.
- 3) Given the imbalance between Russian and Allied capabilities, credible, well-rehearsed reinforcement plans are vital. But these are lacking. The “Notice to Move” and “Notice to Effect” times of NATO’s higher readiness forces need reexamination.
- 4) Military mobility is potentially a force multiplier. Friction corrodes readiness. Despite the EU’s Permanent Structured Cooperation efforts, the ability to move personnel and equipment around the region in a “military Schengen” is still weak. Infrastructure, legal and political obstacles are self-imposed handicaps on the vital “speed of assembly.”
- 5) Outdated or absent air and maritime strategies are another serious gap in regional security.
- 6) So too is the lack of long-range precision strikes (with the exception of Poland and Finland’s JASSM missiles).
- 7) Intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance capabilities and effective intelligence sharing are still insufficient. The countries of the region need an “unblinking eye” that encompasses air, sea, land, and cyber domains, and that analyzes and acts on what it sees.
- 8) The US carries too much of the burden of deterrence and reinforcement in the region. This is unsustainable in the long term. So far, other countries – the United Kingdom, France, and (particularly) Germany – are not in a position to compensate for the diminishing US role.
- 9) National defence spending is rising but it could be more effectively targeted. Fragmented acquisition programmes, domestic political considerations and bureaucratic friction mean that the region’s huge collective defence budget often fails to deliver the results it could and should.
- 10) Deterrence is not clearly articulated and relies too heavily on the US (and to some extent British) nuclear guarantee and on the multinational land-based, “tripwire” eFP forces in the Baltic states. This is a bluff. It risks being called. ^D

Edward Lucas is the co-author, with retired Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, formerly the commanding general of US. Army Europe, of a forthcoming CEPA report on Baltic Sea regional security.



Mistral short-range air defence missile system. Estonian Defence Forces

**JAMES ROGERS**

co-founder and director of research
at the Council on Geostrategy

“Global Britain” Is Becoming Reality and It Has a Strong Eastern and Northern European Dimension

Much of the hullabaloo about the future of the United Kingdom's (UK) international orientation resulting from the Brexit referendum has now subsided. Since late 2019, Britain has had a stable government with a large parliamentary majority, which has signalled that it takes defence – and the security of its allies and partners – more seriously than its predecessors (or any conceivable alternative political formation of recent years). The new government signalled its strategic intentions in late 2020 when it announced a £16.5 billion increase in defence spending between 2021-2024, on top of an additional commitment to increase by £7.7 billion over the same period. This will maintain the UK as the world's fourth largest defence spender.

In March 2021, Government went further still by publishing the Integrated Review – ‘Global Britain in a competitive age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’ – the blueprint for ‘Global Britain’.

Europe Still Priority

This matters given the discourse that rose in the aftermath of the 2016 Brexit referendum questioning Britain's continued international relevance. The argument went: how can a small island country compete with continental behemoths if it is outside of the European Union (EU)? The Integrated Review provides the answer. It stresses the structural enablers that gave Britain great power in the first

place – namely science and technology. It commits the UK to boost its research and development spending, invest in cutting-edge education, and build new infrastructure.

**The defence of
Europe no longer starts
at the Narva River or the
eastern Balkans, but instead
in the Black Sea region,
the Middle East and south
and southeast Asia.**

Another argument, commonly heard, is that ‘Global Britain’ represents a ‘tilt’ away from Europe towards the Indo-Pacific or even space. However, this is the wrong way of looking at the issue. Due to the rise of the Indo-Pacific and the increasing importance of space, the defence of Europe no longer starts at the Narva River (to say nothing of the Rhine or the Vistula) or the eastern Balkans, but instead in the Black Sea region, the Middle East and south and southeast Asia. With Russia's revisionism (described in the Integrated Review as ‘the most acute direct threat’), China's Belt and Road Initiative and forays into eastern Europe, combined with America's so-called ‘rebalance’ towards the western Pacific, it no longer makes sense to think of the Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific as discrete geopolitical

theatres. The age of the Atlantic-Pacific has dawned. This is what the Integrated Review implicitly recognises.

Europe, then, has not been deprioritised in British geostrategy; rather, the UK's focus has switched to specific parts of the continent, particularly the geopolitical arc stretching from the Arctic to the eastern Mediterranean, which Britain has been prioritising for some years. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2014, the UK surged in support of NATO's enhanced Forward Presence, deploying more forces to more allies than any other ally – including the US – with approximately 750 standing guard in Estonia and 150 posted to Poland. The Joint Expeditionary Force has also gone from strength to strength: in April 2021, Iceland joined the formation, bringing its membership to 10 northern European countries.

Leading Role in the Black Sea Area

Meanwhile, in the Black Sea region, the UK has taken a leading role, particularly in support of Ukraine – the ‘gatehouse’ into Europe from the east. Since Operational Orbital was launched in 2015, British troops have trained tens of thousands of Ukrainian personnel, while UK loans worth £1.25 billion are helping rebuild the Ukrainian Navy. The British naval presence in the Black Sea has grown, with a persistent presence established, marked most recently by the deployment of HMS Defender to uphold freedom of

navigation and remind the Kremlin that the annexation of Crimea is not a done deal.

But what of the British Army's ability to reinforce NATO allies? Has it not been sacrificed by the Integrated Review for naval strength and technological modernisation? Granted, although the British Army has been scaled back, it should never be forgotten that NATO is first and foremost a maritime alliance: without the unfettered ability to convey North American and British military power across the Atlantic and English Channel into central and eastern Europe, the alliance would be hamstrung in the event of an emergency. Given the location of the British Isles, alongside British overseas territories in Gibraltar and Cyprus, the UK has to prioritise naval power.

Moreover, in keeping with its maritime perspective, the UK cannot meet Russia symmetrically – with terrestrial mass. It can only do so with superior technology and effective strategy. For this reason the Integrated Review places renewed emphasis on increasing the lethality and speed of the British Armed Forces' ability to strike potential enemies, including

How effective Britain will be depends on the extent to which these wealthier European allies honour their spending commitments, irrespective of the financial fallout from COVID-19.

improved fire support and better cyber and space-based defence systems. It also hones Britain's military strategy, committing the country to a more active form of deterrence. The Integrated Review foresees the forward deployment of greater numbers of British military personnel to more areas over the coming decades, to exert presence and deter revisionism. This is why it places renewed emphasis on increasing the UK nuclear stockpile and signalling that its nuclear forces cover all NATO allies, as well as itself. This is why the Integrated Review explicitly describes UK deployments to Estonia and Poland as 'tripwires'; it could

also include UK deployments in Germany, as well as, periodically, Lithuania and Romania, through NATO's air policing missions.

In sum, Global Britain is no longer a vision. It is becoming a reality – and it has a strong eastern and northern European dimension. But while the British commitment to NATO is steadfast, the UK does not expect to become Europe's defence guarantor, even if the US focuses more on east Asia. By exceeding NATO's two spending agreements of 2014 – to invest two percent of Gross Domestic Product on defence, and 20 percent of that on new equipment – the UK has thrown down the gauntlet to other large and wealthy allies, Germany primarily, but also Italy, Spain and the Netherlands. How effective Britain will be depends on the extent to which these wealthier European allies honour their spending commitments, irrespective of the financial fallout from COVID-19. It also depends on the willingness of the committed spenders – the Baltic states, Poland, Romania and France – to put pressure on those European allies who do not pull their weight. ^D



Georgians wearing national costumes dance in front of the British destroyer, HMS Defender, upon its arrival at the port of Batumi in June 2021. "The British naval presence in the Black Sea has grown to uphold freedom of navigation and remind the Kremlin that the annexation of Crimea is not a done deal," James Rogers writes. AP / British Embassy in Georgia / Scanpix

Zigzags in Russia's Strategic Intentions

Dealing with a Russia of multiple voices is a challenging task since each incident might quite easily become political and cause further damage to bilateral relations. Yet it also creates opportunities.



ANDREY MAKARYCHEV

professor of regional political studies
at the University of Tartu

The new edition of the Russian National Security Strategy published in July 2021 was supposed to reinforce the international perception of Russia as a politically unified country that has reached consensus on a broad set of issues related to national identity and interests, as opposed to the undecisive and disintegrated West. However, no other recent document released by the Kremlin has been the object of such conflicting and diametrically opposed interpretations.

Some commentators saw in the Strategy a confirmation of Russia's preparation for a lengthy military confrontation with the West, while others called the Strategy an anti-imperial manifesto in the sense of Russia's penchant for concentration on domestic issues, as opposed to foreign policy expansionism. Seen from one prism, the Strategy is explicitly political and even ideological due to its apparent emphasis on Russia's irreducible dissimilarity from the West, while, according to another opinion, the document implicitly presumes an austerity policy for the population, and, in this sense, mainly serves the interests of Russian oligarchic capitalism. In the words of an analyst, the new Strategy is "the dangerous mix of profound insecurity and nihilistic cynicism."

This plurality of assessments and expectations betrays something reaching far beyond the text of the Strategy – it reveals the inherent duplicity of Russian foreign policy in a more general sense. Russia led by a "weak strong man" claims to speak with one single voice both domestically and internationally, but what we see in reality is a plurality of voices coming from Moscow. It does not look incidental that the promulgation of the new National Security Strategy was followed by several comments from Russian experts who – even though indirectly – tried to bring back to the political agenda the alleged "Westernization" of the Russian elite, the indispensability of the West for efficient economic modernisation and the old story of the

Russia led by a "weak strong man" claims to speak with one single voice both domestically and internationally, but what we see in reality is a plurality of voices coming from Moscow.

mutual cultural attraction of Russia and Europe. This language ostensibly contravenes the hyper-securitized and explicitly anti-Western rhetoric of the Kremlin officialdom without directly challenging Putin's foreign policy discourse.

Russia's Policy towards Estonia

This heteroglossia often translates into multiple inconsistencies which ultimately expose the incoherence of Russia's international standing. Some of the controversies may be discerned in Russia's policy towards Estonia.

At the end of April 2021, TV Channel 'Rossiya 1' reported that the Kremlin was considering including Estonia, along with the two other Baltic states, on the list of "unfriendly countries", a new – and so far largely symbolic – diplomatic tool of the Kremlin. However, the list – as published in May 2021 – was comprised of only two countries; the United States and Czechia. The Russian Foreign Ministry did not rule out that the list might be extended, but specific criteria for inclusion seem to be intentionally blurred and imprecise – from disagreements with Moscow's interpretation of the Second World War to the expulsion of Russian diplomats.

Russia's attitude towards the World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples held in Tartu in June 2021 was even more controversial. On the one hand, the Russian Finno-Ugric Association had issued a notification of its refusal to participate in the Congress due to its so-called politicization and alleged interference in Russian domestic affairs. The deputy head of the Federal Agency on Nationalities corroborated this isolationist position. None of the Russian regional units of the Association sent official delegates to Tartu, and Russian border authorities were reported

to have impeded some individual participants from Russia travelling to Estonia. In line with the logic of the boycott, in early June 2021, a few days prior to the Tartu Congress, Russia hosted its own Festival of local Finno-Ugric people in Izhevsk thus demonstrating its self-detachment from the international Finno-Ugric movement. This position seems to be detrimental to Russian soft power and politically self-defeating due to the fact that among the founding members of the Finno-Ugric world are Finland and Hungary, two countries known for their political loyalty to Russia.

In a typical postmodern way, Russia tries to be both "in" and "out", to mark its presence on the whole spectrum of policy options.

On the other hand, Russian Minister of Culture Olga Liubimova officially addressed the Congress in Tartu and underscored Russia's commitment to the Finno-Ugric movement and interest in international cooperation in this realm. Since the next World Congress is scheduled to be held in Russia, this only enhances the sense of ambiguity regarding Russia's strategic intentions. It is highly unlikely that someone in the Kremlin has a clear vision in this specific policy area.

No less ambiguous is Russian policy towards the Sputnik V vaccine in Estonia. On the one hand, the Russian ambassador has urged the Estonian government to allow its usage in Estonia beyond the policies of the European Medicines Agency, referring to "multiple appeals" from local Russian speakers who, in his words, prefer the Sputnik V to "Western vaccines". These attempts were part of the worldwide campaign to promote the Russian vaccine all across the globe, including in EU member states. Yet on the other hand, the Russian consul in Estonia ultimately recommended Estonian Russophones to get their jabs with any vaccine available in the country. The ambiguity was exacerbated by an incident

with a Russian diplomat who used his connections in the local hospital in Narva to receive his out-of-turn vaccine in Estonia (which apparently was not Sputnik V).

Besides, Russia did little to practically implement the widely propagated idea of vaccine tourism for those citizens and residents of foreign countries who would like to get their Sputnik V jabs in Russia. Russian media has reported about the possibility for Estonian residents to get the Russian vaccine in close vicinity to the border, yet so far very few Estonian Russian-speakers have taken advantage of this option due to the red tape requirements in Russia.

There is also some degree of uncertainty regarding Russian interest in resuming air travel with Estonia. Aeroflot restored regular flights between Moscow and Tallinn on April 25, 2021, only to discontinue them on May 2. Some Estonian commentators directly related the cancellation of flights to the growing political tensions between the two countries. If this explanation is not ungrounded, then it might be illustrative of Moscow's vacillation between adherence to a depoliticized agenda of bilateral communication and the de-facto predominance of political approaches over technical arguments.

Playing with Uncertainty

There might be at least two different explanations of these zigzags in Russian policies. One suggests that Russia intentionally plays with uncertainty, leaving as many options open as possible – either as a pressure tool against other countries (for example, keeping open the perspective of including Estonia on the list of "unfriendly countries"), or for the sake of phasing out hostilities in case they reach an unacceptably high level. This logic explains why Russian diplomats and foreign policy makers are so fond of using endlessly broad concepts open to multiple interpretations, such as "politicization" of cultural projects, "unfriendly countries", or "Russophobia". Intentionally leaving them ill-defined and context-dependent, Russian policy establishments are free to use them as manipulative arguments at the Kremlin's discretion.

In a typical postmodern way, Russia tries to be both "in" and "out", to mark

Russia intentionally plays with uncertainty, leaving as many options open as possible – either as a pressure tool against other countries or for the sake of phasing out hostilities.



Production of the Sputnik V COVID-19 vaccine in St. Petersburg. "Russia did little to practically implement the widely propagated idea of vaccine tourism for those citizens and residents of foreign countries who would like to get their Sputnik V jabs in Russia," Andrey Makarychev finds. TASS/Scanpix

its presence on the whole spectrum of policy options. In Sergey Karaganov's words, Russia wants to both "punish" and "forgive" those who challenge its foreign policy. It is both boycotting, yet not discarding, the World Finno-Ugric event; it both supports the predilection of local Russophones towards Sputnik V and advises them to get immunity with other vaccines; it both expresses loyalty to cultural exchanges and prevents the Estonian National Museum exhibition from returning home on time. By the same token, these controversies betray the inconsistency of Russia's policies: if Moscow wishes to depoliticize relations with Estonia, how could it be that the air transportation between the two countries, as well as a museum exhibition, were – even if implicitly and indirectly – affected by the logic of political confrontation?

Yet there is another explanation: Russian foreign policy is far from being coordinated by one single centre, and in fact

represents a loosely connected series of steps and moves, each grounded in its own logic. It could well be that the Ministry of Culture was not behind the decision to boycott the Finno-Ugric Congress, and Russian embassies in the Baltic states were not among the initiators of the whole idea of "unfriendly countries". And the timing of the violation of Estonian airspace by Russian military jets might be out of reach of the Russian Foreign Ministry.

Crisis of Russia's Self-Perception

Regardless of the interpretation, what we are witnessing right now is primarily a crisis of Russia's self-perception in the world, and only in the second place a crisis in Russia's relations with the trans-Atlantic West. It is not as much about Russia's conflict with the EU and its member states, but about Russia's detachment from the entire liberal international society and its legal foundations.

The variability of Russian narratives means that the Russian coverage of international events might range from the technical to the intentionally hyper-politicized. The detention of the Estonian consul in St. Petersburg in July 2021 is a case in point. While most Russian media comments remained relatively neutral and embedded in a "business-as-usual" narrative, there was still ample space for voices talking about a "loud scandal" and accusing the Estonian government of playing the role of a proxy for more powerful Euro-Atlantic powers.

Dealing with a Russia of multiple voices is a challenging task since each incident might quite easily become political and cause further damage to bilateral relations. Yet in the meantime, the diversity of interpretations of international events coming from Russia creates some opportunities for Western countries to develop their counter-narratives and try to reengage with the most pragmatic of Russian voices. ¹⁰



Opening ceremony of the VIII World Congress of Finno-Ugric Peoples in June 2021 in Tartu, Estonia. Russia refused to participate in the Congress. Tartu Postimees / Scanpix

Being a Target



INGA SPRINĠE

investigative reporter
and co-founder of *Re:Baltica*

In a mid-July interview, Roman Dobrokhotov, founder and editor-in-chief of the investigative outlet *The Insider* wondered why his website wasn't declared an "undesirable organisation" or a "foreign agent". Shortly after the interview, as has happened with other Russian independent media outlets critical of the Kremlin, *The Insider* was labelled a "foreign agent" and Dobrokhotov's apartment was raided by the police. The formal reason for the search was a criminal libel case over a tweet with alleged "disinformation about the downed Boeing MH17."

Since early spring Russia's authorities have been attacking independent media outlets one-by-one. It started with *Meduza*, then *Proekt*. Police arrested and raided the house of investigative journalist Roman Anin. What's happening?

I would also add the independent outlet *Doxa* to this list. It was run by students at Moscow's Higher School of Economics. I think at least three of them are in prison now. They were arrested on the pretence that they were inspiring teenagers to participate in protests.

What has changed that led the government to such a crackdown?

Although real suppression of journalists started this January, I think the turning point was last summer when [Russian President Vladimir] Putin decided to change the Constitution. (One of the

amendments allowed Putin to run again for two more six-year presidential terms - I.S.) It was a very unpopular decision. They had to falsify the voting. It wasn't even a referendum. It was some weird voting without a law behind it. As I understand, Putin was waiting for very strong protests in different regions. Especially because it coincided with protests in Belarus and Khabarovsk where the arrest of the local governor angered people. Putin thought that the situation could explode and he was probably right to worry as the tension was very high.

Was that the reason for attacks on the main opposition leader Alexey Navalny?

Putin decided to murder Alexey Navalny twice last summer- the first attempt was in June, the second in July. For me, it shows that Putin was afraid because

Navalny was supposed to lead the protests in different regions. When he failed to kill Navalny, and the latter returned to Russia, the Kremlin started putting tough pressure on civil activists. There were several new laws. One of them allowed to be called any peaceful movement an extremist movement. As a result, Navalny's fund was labelled as an extremist organisation.

Why did Navalny return to Russia from Germany where he was treated after poisoning? He knew that most likely he would be arrested.

I think he was hoping that he would not be arrested. I haven't discussed it with his team, but I believed there was a 50/50 chance he would be arrested in Russia. Navalny wanted to lead by example and go in the streets. He didn't want to be someone like Garry Kasparov, who lives

in America, writes critical political columns, but is not a real political figure in Russia. Kasparov can't influence anything abroad even if he is a clever and brave person. If you are a journalist, you can work from abroad. If you are an activist – it's impossible. Navalny decided that he would rather be a Russian Nelson Mandela than a Garry Kasparov.

Nelson Mandela had a long imprisonment but Navalny has a high risk of being killed...

Yes, it is risky, but if you are in opposition and activist, you have to take a risk to reap a reward.

You said that Vladimir Putin was expecting a backlash from society after changing the Constitution. But it didn't happen. Why?

Well, the government was doing a great job of suppressing opposition. They made protesting so costly that common people

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were afraid to participate. They poisoned Navalny – one of the main organisers of this kind of activity. They are threatening thousands of people. All one has to do to receive anonymous death threats is observe a peaceful election. This is a very poisonous environment. In addition, the coronavirus pandemic banned activities

on the streets. I know it's not a very good excuse as in many countries people still were protesting. In Russia, some activists thought we should wait a couple of months and then protest. Unfortunately they lost the momentum.

The Kremlin has opened dozens of criminal cases against activists with many arrested and imprisoned. If you put all this into context, it's clear why there is pressure on journalists now. Before last summer, there was a red line the Kremlin didn't dare to cross. When they decided to go after [Meduza reporter] Ivan Golunov, it was a decision made by some mid-level FSB officers who, allegedly, wanted to punish Golunov for his investigations into the Moscow government. It wasn't even a federal story. After the huge support Golunov received from Russian media and public figures, it was clear to everybody that you shouldn't cross this red line and accuse journalists. I would say that in 2020 journalists felt pretty safe.



Roman Dobrokhotoev leaving the Internal Affairs Ministry's office in Moscow after interrogation on 28 July. TASS/Scanpix

How do these last suppressions differ from Golunov's case?

It's a new kind of suppression because this is not ordered by some unknown mid-level FSB officers. These are people who work for the Kremlin and the activity is sanctioned by Putin. Now they touch important investigative journalists who are well known inside and outside of the country. I think they are just testing how far they can cross this red line. Journalists are now the ones with enough courage to confront Putin and his cronies directly, showing their links with the mafia, corruption, assassinations etc. They, of course, influence public opinion a lot.

Still, in Russia, it's not like in Turkey, where they decided to go after all famous journalists and activists and arrested thousands of them. In Russia, the logic is a bit different. They are coming after journalists one by one to create an atmosphere of fear; a chilling effect. Dozens of journalists are leaving the country, especially after seeing what happened in Belarus. Usually, Belarus is one step forward in the sense of oppression. They have already started imprisoning dozens of journalists. I don't believe that in Belarus there will be one independent media outlet left by the end of this year. In the last two weeks, all journalists who could leave Belarus, left. We don't have such a big flow of journalists leaving the country yet, but still, it's the biggest fleeing in modern Russian history.

Do you have a guess why *Meduza* was declared a "foreign agent" as they don't focus on investigative journalism?

Independent media existing is a crime in Russia. If you are *Meduza*, of course, you will mention *The Insider* story with *Bellingcat* about the poisoning of Alexey Navalny by FSB officers. Or you will quote *Proekt's* investigations about Putin's daughter. You can't just ignore these stories, because then you will immediately be a propagandist. There is a very thin line between being neutral and being anti-Putin. If you write that Putin tried to kill Navalny, it's [regarded as] some kind of anti-Putinism. Now we all are in the same boat; activists, journalists, human rights watchers, NGOs, people from the educational system. Everyone who is not

ROMAN DOBROKHOTOV

Roman Dobrokhotov is founder and editor-in-chief of *The Insider*, one of Russia's most well-known investigative news sites. Having graduated from Moscow State Institute of International Relations with a PhD in political science, he started working as a journalist in 2005. In 2013 he founded an online internet magazine *The Insider*, which focused on investigations and debunking fake news.

Along with international research network *Bellingcat*, Dobrokhotov has covered some of the most notorious cases Russia has allegedly had a hand in in recent years: the poisoning of Russian spy Sergei Skripal in the United Kingdom and Russian opposition figure Alexei Navalny, the fatal missile attack on Malaysian Airlines Boeing MH17 over Ukraine, and the murder of a Georgian in Berlin's Tiergarten. He has also participated in investigations concerning Russian trolls and hackers, the invasion of Ukraine, the corruption of the Russian government and many others.

totally loyal to the government is called, and imprisoned as, an enemy of the state.

So, it means the death of investigative journalism in Russia?

I think that the new reality for Russia will be a big number of domestic journalists working abroad. There will be tough restrictions on the internet, with websites available only via VPN. The internet will be much more anonymous than before because there are lots of penalties, not only for journalists but also readers if they share independent media articles. A reader can be fined and criminally charged for sharing an article published by a so-called "undesirable organisation".

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I don't believe that in Belarus there will be one independent media outlet left by the end of this year.

This is the new reality. We don't know how far people like Putin and the ones around him – like the most anti-western such as [Alexey] Gromov (responsible for state propaganda – I.S.), [Nikolai] Patrushev (the Secretary of the Russian Security Council – I.S.) – will go.

To sum up: the silence after changes in the Constitution last summer and Putin's worries about the outcome in the upcoming State Duma elections in September are the main reasons why Kremlin is silencing potential critics?

Yes, because until the change of the Constitution, Russia's political system played the game of legitimacy. They pretended it's a bit different from Western countries but still a kind of democracy with free media, political parties, and elections. Now they are tearing down these decorations. This is the first time in Russian elections when they not only reject independent candidates, but open criminal investigations against all who run for parliament.

Is Putin paranoid about losing power? These speculations have been around for many years.

I still remember the year of 2005 when the Kremlin was going after activists who were talking about the possibility of an Orange revolution in Russia. People were saying that there is no sign of a real color revolution in Russia, but saw what happened in Ukraine. Civil society in Ukraine was very active even during [President Viktor] Janukovich's times, and in 2014, when Euromaidan just started, no one could expect that Janukovich would leave the country and there would be a revolution. But it happened and it happened because of a very strong civil society. So what is Putin doing now? He is destroying all networks in civil society that can be the future skeleton of the protest mechanism. He is both paranoid and pretty rational at the same time.

Your investigations with *Bellingcat* about Russia's military operations were explosive. How safe do you feel yourself?

Many people, including myself, are surprised that we have not yet been declared "foreign agents" or "undesirables". The Kremlin has its own logic and it's hard

to predict why they chose these journalists to be the first ones to be punished. But everyone agrees that at some point we will be the target. (*The Insider* was declared a “foreign agent” on July 23. Five days later Dobrokhотов’s apartment was searched by police based on defamation charges filed by the Dutch blogger Max van der Werff – I.S.)

We are preparing for this by making the structure of our organisation safe from any legal or economical suppression. For example, we are organising all the payments to journalists in a way that it’s not possible to stop them or in a way that is hard to understand who is working for *The Insider*. The most difficult part is how to save our web domain in case they blacklist us. In general, I think we are stronger than them because we are quicker, more motivated, and, in our team, we have the best people skillful in technologies, legal issues, etc. On their side is Vladimir Putin and bureaucrats who are not really motivated.

How big is your team now, if you can reveal such information?

It’s around 15 people, including people in and outside Russia who are working full time.

Where do you get money?

We have different sources, for example, through advertising. Most important for us is crowdfunding when people subscribe monthly. When we started *The Insider*, we had hopes that people would pay for single articles. Nobody did, although thousands were reading. But monthly donations are working differently. You just subscribe and regularly pay small sums from your card or PayPal account. You can be in and out of Russia, it’s very safe. Even if it’s 5 dollars from a person, it’s enough to feed dozens of independent media. Simple math: if we have three million viewers per month and if only 1/100 donates a dollar monthly, it’s enough to support independent journalism.

In America, after Donald Trump was elected as president, liberal media experienced a sharp rise in subscribers. Do you have the same after all these suppressions?

Yes, support from the public has been huge.

“FOREIGN AGENT”

According to Russian law, an organisation can be determined a “foreign agent” if it engages in politics and receives funding from abroad. Practically, it means that the media organisation has to add the label “foreign agent” to every page on its website and has to submit detailed reports of its incomes and expenditures to the authorities. If it refuses to do so, the authorities can impose fines, press felony charges against the editor-in-chief, and even block content in Russia. Most advertisers withdraw their ads out of fear of being accused of cooperating with an “enemy of state”. It scares away potential sources of information too. Journalists or even people who just share the materials of the media outlet, can potentially be labelled as individual “foreign agents” too. If this happens, these individuals are forced to report all their income and expenses to the Russian Ministry of Justice.

“UNDESIRABLE ORGANISATION”

In short - it’s death for a media outlet. It is illegal to distribute materials created by “undesirable organisations”, or even to share the links to their articles on social media. Participating in the activities of an “undesirable organisation” is a misdemeanour offense. Donating money or offering any form of financial assistance can lead to felony charges. Russian citizens are prohibited from collaborating with “undesirable organisations” both inside Russia and abroad.

Sources: RSF; Meduza; BBC

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The amount of the younger generation who grew up without television is growing. The fatigue from Putin is increasing, and businesses do not like sanctions.

I spoke with the editor in chief of Meduza recently and he said that in the last months he is feeling anxious every time he picks up the phone; that some bad news will be delivered again.

Do you share his concerns?

Yes, it is the same. I have anxiety every time the doorbell is ringing. But that’s a new reality.

You are an experienced activist but what about your family? Aren’t you afraid about their safety?

I don’t think that my family is in danger. But family is an important factor when we are thinking about moving our work out of Russia. It’s easier to move abroad for *The Insider* team members who have no families.

In 2008, you interrupted a speech by then Russian President Dmitry Medvedev, when he proposed constitutional amendments extending the presidential term. Would you do the same with Putin now if they would let you in?

I wasn’t allowed to participate in Putin’s press conference despite the fact that I was accredited. Besides, I didn’t have an intention to interrupt him. I just wanted to ask a couple of questions that would be very difficult for him to dodge.


For example?

I wanted to ask about the GRU officers who tried to poison Sergei Skripal in London and why money from the offshores of [Sergey] Roldugin (a cello player and close friend of Putin – I.S.) was spent on palaces and assets connected to Putin.

I know it’s hard to make any prognosis but what do you expect to happen in the following months – before and after the State Duma elections?

I would bet that the Kremlin will continue tightening the suppression for the next few years but then at one moment the situation will explode.

Because?

Several reasons. The amount of the younger generation who grew up without television is growing. The fatigue from Putin is increasing, and businesses do not like sanctions. 

**MARGARITA ŠEŠELGYTĖ**

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The Price of Leadership? Weaponised Migration on the Lithuanian-Belarusian Border

Illegal migrants began crossing into Lithuania in May, 2021 after Alexander Lukashenko threatened to flood the country with “migrants and drugs” in response to harsh EU sanctions.

Weaponised migration is not a rare phenomenon in international politics; according to Keelly M. Greenhill political leaders often manipulate migrants and refugees to pursue political, military and economic goals.

Lukashenko may pursue a number of goals by weaponising migrants. First, by dividing EU members and silencing Lithuanians, he may hope to soften EU sanctions or receive financial aid from the EU to “solve” the crisis. Additionally, Lukashenko attempts to intimidate Lithuania for its criticism of his regime and support for its opposition while attempting to undermine the legitimacy of Lithuania’s fight for democracy.

This case’s uniqueness is the broader geopolitical battle that goes beyond sanctions and involves multiple powers. Hybrid operations, specifically cyber and information warfare, are a daily reality in Lithuania (especially after the beginning of the war in Ukraine). These offensive measures manipulate existing vulnerabilities to destabilise politics, reduce societies’ loyalty and question the values of democracy, the EU and NATO. Lithuania is being punished for its criticism of the Russian regime and its staunch support for democracy.

The migration crisis is, therefore, a move in the broader geopolitical game where Lukashenko, possibly with Kremlin

backing, skilfully manipulates existing vulnerabilities to damage Lithuania.

An active, value oriented foreign policy makes Lithuania quite visible internationally. However, as sanctions against Belarus hit Lithuanian businesses and the migrant crisis challenges national stability, doubts about its aims and results rise. Should Lithuania have chosen a more pragmatic stance?

**Lithuania is being
punished for its criticism
of the Russian regime and
its staunch support
for democracy.**

The way the Government has managed the migrant crisis has been heavily criticised: the reaction is too slow, communication is inconsistent, there is a lack of coordination between institutions and unwillingness to take leadership. The power games between the President and the Government (which started before the crisis) do not help the situation – they hamper unity and make both institutions less credible.

Moreover, the toxic situation is aggravated by the upcoming Russian-Belarusian joint military exercise, Zapad 2021, adding to fears of external manipulation.

While the security community discusses potential challenges from influxes of illegal migrants (such as increased criminality, potential terrorist attacks

and hostile activities of infiltrated foreign forces) societal instability could become the gravest problem for Lithuania, leading to a political crisis and, in the long run, opening the door to radical political forces.


As society slowly recovers from the epidemic and strict quarantine, strong feelings of insecurity, anxiety and dissatisfaction provoke divisions which may turn explosive.

It seems the Lithuanian government is slowly learning how to manage the crisis through experience. It utilised EU support – human and technical assistance under the Frontex mission is a great help for Lithuania’s border guards.

In sum, there are several lessons learned in this situation.

First, Lithuania received the epiphany that leadership is a dangerous job with a high price and punishments. Specifically, small states with limited resources are vulnerable to the power games of larger undemocratic powers.

Second, an ambitious foreign policy needs internal unity and careful study. In the long run, a well-defined and articulated foreign policy strategy involving clear definition of goals, means, expected results, available resources and the cooperation of various institutions to achieve these goals is needed. Practicing various scenarios and evaluating of potential risks is important.

Finally, skilful leadership never wastes a good crisis; hopefully Lithuania will use this as an opportunity to build sustainable foreign policy leadership for the future. 

**BITTE HAMMARGREN**

senior associate fellow at
the Swedish Institute of International Affairs

EU-Turkey Migration Deal Can Turn into a Race to the Bottom

Since the European Union reached a migration deal with Turkey in 2016, the gates for Syrian refugees in Turkey who wish to seek a safe haven in Europe have been closed. Today's approximately 3.7 million Syrians in Turkey live in limbo. They cannot be given refugee status or apply for asylum in Turkey due to its limitations to the 1951 Geneva Refugee Convention, whereby only Europeans can ask for asylum in the country. Nor do they have prospects of a safe return due to Syria's frozen front lines and the Bashar al-Assad regime's refusal to budge an inch.

Turkey, a hub for migrants of many nationalities, hosts the world's largest refugee population. Syrians constitute nearly 4,5 percent of Turkey's population, a figure which is likely to increase due to higher birth rates. Turkey is thus undergoing a demographic transformation where the mostly Sunni Arab Syrians must be added to the cultural and social mosaic.

New Demographic Reality

Against this backdrop, one would expect serious debate in Turkey about this new demographic reality. But it is not happening. Opposition parties blame President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and his ruling, Justice and Development Party (Turkish: *Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi*, AKP), for its grave geopolitical miscalculations in Syria, and are not willing to discuss amendments to Turkey's exceptions to the Refugee Convention.

At the same time, Turkey has recruited proxies from the so-called Syrian National Army for control of territory in north-east Syria. The alleged "safe zones" were captured from the Kurdish-dominated Syrian Democratic Forces after Erdoğan changed course in 2015, while seeking support from the ultra-nationalist MHP and the military.

Even though Turkey and its proxies have military footprints in Syria, Libya and the Caucasus, as it sided with Azerbaijan in its war with Armenia, Erdoğan's image is shattered at home. Critics compare him to Central Asian autocrats or dictators in Latin America during the Cold War.

Meanwhile, Turkey's civil society struggles to hold its ground, trying to combat discrimination of all sorts – against Kurds, Alevis, women, LGBT – and an arbitrary court system, with judges issuing verdicts to please "the Palace", i.e. the president. The country's environmental movement struggles against a multitude of problems. While the economy is under stress, public tenders are given to the president's loyalists, driving potential entrepreneurs abroad or to apathy.

In spite of all the flaws, Turkey remains a candidate country to the EU, even though all negotiations have been frozen since 2018, due to Turkey's backslide in terms of democracy, rule of law and fundamental rights. However, the EU remains Turkey's largest trading partner and main source of investments. There is thus room for the EU to sharpen its policies by using sticks and carrots to exert influence over

Ankara. The EU27 should translate this soft power into a clearer human rights approach – underlining that Turkey as a member state of the Council of Europe cannot treat the rulings of the European Court of Human Rights à la carte. Compliance is a must. Consequently, the philanthropist Osman Kavala and the former HDP leader Selahattin Demirtaş must be unconditionally released.

Moreover, the Venice Commission, which gives legal advice to the Council of Europe on constitutional issues, in 2017 ruled Turkey's constitutional changes as "dangerous step backwards", paving the way for "an authoritarian and personal regime".

Carrots and Sticks

Stronger EU demands for the ratification of the Paris agreement, and Ankara's return to the Istanbul convention, would also be welcomed by constructive forces in Turkey.

One carrot is the modernisation of the Customs Union, but it is doubtful whether President Erdoğan would accept the transparency it requires. Another carrot is visa liberalisation, an unfulfilled promise from the EU since 2016.

Yet, given how EU member states are currently competing to show the most hostile attitudes towards refugees, the Union cannot take the moral high ground when speaking to Turkey about migration. Before issuing any criticism against

Turkey, “the EU and Europe in general need to sincerely look inwards,” says one of my well-informed Turkish interlocutors. Otherwise, he continues, Turkish officials can “rightfully” respond with “whataboutism”. The same goes for requests for Turkey to abolish its anti-terror law. “As the French National Security Law is looking more and more like the Turkish one, it is hard to make this argument convincing,” says this source from civil society.

Erdoğan Needs the West

Yet, the EU is seeking to prolong its refugee deal with Turkey by spending another 3.5 million euros in the coming three years to get Ankara’s help in halting further flows of refugees to Europe. The EU Commission is trying to reach similar pacts with Tunisia and, most notoriously, with Libya, a country which has abysmal standards for migrants and refugees, and a fragile ceasefire in view of the scheduled elections on December 24.

Given how EU member states are currently competing to show the most hostile attitudes towards refugees, the Union cannot take the moral high ground when speaking to Turkey about migration.

Without a rights-based approach towards Turkey and more legal ways for migration to Europe, such policies risk becoming a race to the bottom.

Would President Erdoğan be ready to open ‘the floodgates’ for migrants to Europe again? He did so briefly in early 2020, when Turkey’s migration deal with the EU was about to be renegotiated, and when a Russian offensive in the Idlib province in Syria caused the loss of Turkish soldiers.

Still, the migration deal appears to be ‘the least bad’ alternative for both the

EU and the Turkish president – despite a recent standoff between Turkey and its fellow NATO members, Greece and France, in the eastern Mediterranean.

After all, Erdoğan needs the West. Local elections in 2019 showed that the AKP can be defeated, and polls indicate that he needs to boost his standing before the next parliamentary and presidential elections, to be held before 18 June 2023, and possibly in 2022. So, Erdoğan appears to be ready to engage in a temporary charm offensive with the West, to improve the economy and his own ratings at home. But once elections are won, such a charm offensive could end, Turkish interlocutors argue.

Under severe pressure – if a Russian/Assad offensive in Idlib causes another mass influx of Syrians to Turkey, or if the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan leads to a major refugee flow – Erdoğan might reopen the gates for asylum seekers in Europe. After all, from the ordinary Turkish citizen’s perspective, that could be seen as fairer burden-sharing. ^(b)



A family from Afghanistan gathers at an abandoned building in Edirne, near the Turkish-Greek border in March 2020. If a Russian/Assad offensive in Idlib causes another mass influx of Syrians to Turkey, or if the Taliban takeover in Afghanistan leads to a major refugee flow, Turkey might reopen the gates for asylum seekers in Europe,” Bitte Hammargren writes. AP/Scanpix

Central Asia in the Middle of Russian and Chinese Tensions

Due to its economic, geopolitical and security position, Central Asia is of great interest to Russia and China. As the Russian and Chinese relationship is likely to take a turn for the worse in the future, Central Asia will be caught in the middle of tensions. The EU can provide a much-needed partnership for the region in testing times.



KATJA GERŠAK

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Historically, as part of USSR, the region was much more closely bound to Russia than China. This was reflected in economic ties which persisted after the republics' independence, with Russia remaining one of the major trading partners of the region. Many citizens from the republics continue to seek better work opportunities in Russia and remittances are a remarkably stable source of income for Central Asian countries. Russia maintains significant military capabilities through bases in Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan and has joint security and economic initiatives in the region such as the Eurasian Economic Union and the Collective Security Treaty Organization. Russian also remains the *lingua franca* in the republics.

Furthermore, Chinese foreign direct investment in the region remains low and lags behind Russian and European investments. While the Chinese have pledged numerous new projects and areas of cooperation this has not yet translated into concrete investments on the ground. The transport infrastructure – particularly railways, which are key for a region that is landlocked – is still primarily gravitating towards Europe and Russia.

China's Foray into the Russian 'Backyard'

However, in the past decades the Chinese have made big strides into the region and are gradually becoming one of the key partners and players in Central

Asia. While the region's ties to Europe and Russia remain significant, the trend is going to continue in the direction of rising Chinese influence in the region.

China's penetration in the region is reflected in its share of trade. In 1998 the region's biggest trading partners were Europe and Russia with 29% and 28% respectively. By 2018 China has become the region's biggest trading partner (29%), while trade with Russia declined to 18%.

The region is very attractive to China because of its rich natural resources in oil, gas, uranium and other minerals. Chinese engagement in the energy sector includes the construction of the Kazakhstan-China Oil Pipeline and the Central Asia-China Gas Pipeline, which significantly altered the energy landscape of the region. Due to robust Chinese economic growth, China's thirst for energy is going to continue growing steeply. Its consumption of natural gas is projected to grow by almost 190%

In 1998 the region's biggest trading partners were Europe and Russia with 29% and 28% respectively. By 2018 China has become the region's biggest trading partner (29%), while trade with Russia declined to 18%.

between 2020 and 2050. With natural gas reserves, the Central Asian Republics will play a key role in helping China diversify its energy supply and reduce its dependence on energy coming from west Asia.

Furthermore, the region's stability, or lack thereof, has security implications for China. China is concerned about the impact of the potential resurgence of

terrorism in Afghanistan on the Central Asian region and spill over effects in Xinjiang. Instability also does not bode well for furthering other commercial energy and transport projects in the region. China has, therefore, in the past years also upped its military footprint in the region by conducting military exercises with Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Uzbekistan.

Economy First

In the Central Asian republics there is a sense of apprehension related to the growing Chinese presence. Neither the people nor governments have fully embraced a Chinese presence, however it is difficult to forego the economic allure and potential that China represents.

For the governments of the Central Asian republics, the economic perspective is increasingly important. Central Asian countries have young populations



Unemployed men gather on the side of a road with the hope of landing odd jobs in Dushanbe, Tajikistan in April 2020. If Tajikistan's key economic partner, Russia, had not sealed its border in March to slow the spread of the coronavirus, many of the men would have been seeking work there. AFP/Scanpix

(half of the region's population is under the age of 30), and the governments of the republics are acutely aware that economic growth and job provision is a necessity to maintain societal coherence and stability of their region. The economic incentives are therefore very important to these countries. Between 1998 and 2008 Central Asia's GDP increased by 356%, with trade growing by 698%. In the decade afterwards (2008 – 2018), GDP growth amounted to only 31% while trade growth slowed to 1%.

The economic growth across the region is still significant, however; the region has faced cyclical slow-down in growth rates in periods when oil and natural gas prices have declined, when there was a decrease in remittances and during the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Therefore, the region needs to develop new economic drives, diversify away from commodity revenue rents and remittances, and promote private sector-led economic growth. From this perspective, a foreign policy based on strong economic incentives for the Central

Asian states is successful. China, with a primary focus on enhancing economic ties and an approach of offering funding that carries no conditions of reforms, is likely to further expand its influence in the region.

The Russia – China Equation

These developments, of course, have a significant impact on Russia, which traditionally has close ties, and real security and economic interests in the region. Russia, the largest power on the continent defines its security in terms of territorial might. Russia's security posture requires a buffer around Russia and implicit recognition of "spheres of influence." Russia still views the Central Asian states as "its backyard."

The interests of China and Russia in Central Asia are likely to diverge in the future.

The interests of Russia and China in Central Asia already diverge and the gap will only grow bigger. Russian-Chinese relations have had their fair share of ups and downs. In the past decade, they have strengthened a partnership that was further solidified in 2014 after the Russian invasion of Crimea. But, given China's increasing foray into regions which Russia perceives as key to its security, including eastern Europe and Central Asia, the partnership may not be long-lasting.

Furthermore, Russia is increasingly becoming the "junior partner" in the relationship. The Russian economy remains dependent on revenues from natural resources (natural gas, coal, oil hydropower) which its leadership has used to quadruple its military budget. President Vladimir Putin has not implemented reforms that would make Russia more attractive not only for investment, but also as a role-model for the former Soviet Union countries of Central Asia. Russia is also facing a population decline; current trends indicate that population will shrink from 141 million to 111 million in 2050.



A worker checks a cast gold bar at the processing plant of the Jerooy mine in the Tien Shan Mountains in Kyrgyzstan. The mine is being developed to explore gold deposits by a company connected to the Russian Platina group. AFP/Scanpix

Given Russia's acrimonious relations with the West, it is becoming more and more dependent on the Chinese market. Russia is increasingly diverting oil to China, purchasing advanced weapons systems from China, and increasing the share of yuan in its foreign currency reserves (in an effort to avoid the dollar). In addition, Russia has signed a deal with Huawei to develop its 5G equipment. President Putin once said that the country with the most developed AI will rule the world. In a Machiavellian twist of faith, the Russian President will now be getting AI (at least the hardware) from China.

Prospects for the Region

China will continue to expand its influence in the region. We are likely to see a growth of much needed economic incentives and probably a growth of foreign direct investments in infrastructure and transport projects, which will further link the region with China. Governments in the region will welcome the investments as the pressures for economic growth and job creation become more acute.

At the same time, Russia is going to work towards maintaining influence and presence in the region and the interests of China and Russia there are likely to diverge in the future. Despite Russia's challenges and weaknesses, it will remain a key regional player.

Furthermore, the Chinese are also viewed with a sense of apprehension by the Central Asian citizens. Particularly, the Chinese government's poor treatment of Uighurs and other Muslims does not go well with the people of Central Asia. In Central Asia, where outward demonstrations are a rare phenomenon, there have been some overt protests aimed against the rise of Chinese

In Central Asia where outward demonstrations are a rare phenomenon, there have been some overt protests aimed against the rise of Chinese influence in these countries.



LINKING ASIA AND EUROPE

Central Asia, encompassing Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Turkmenistan and Tajikistan, lies at a strategic point on the Silk Road linking Asia and Europe. It is at the heart of the Eurasian continent, a continent, which has been the greatest source of big empires. The region is rich with natural resources ranging from oil and natural gas to uranium and rare metals and has historically experienced an extensive flow of goods and people. It also plays a critical role in broader regional affairs contributing to stability, which is of key importance given the unfolding situation in Afghanistan. Ruslan Olinchuk / Scanpix


influence in these countries. This will impact China's ability to project influence and play into the hands of Russia.

The Russian and Chinese relationship is likely to take a turn for the worse in the future and the Central Asian region will be caught in the middle. The EU and US should continue to harness relations with the region and strive towards increasing economic exchanges. Particularly Europe, which is a significant trading partner, should continue economic, social and cultural engagement.

The EU's aid for Central Asia has increased over the past decade and its direct investment in the region is worth 62 billion euros. The EU should expand programmes focused on education, exchanges and support for capacity building in the area of good governance and rule of law. The EU can serve as a model

in this regard, despite the fact that it is perceived as rather remote and unknown to the population of Central Asia.

The EU has not projected power in the region and its influence is likely to remain limited, however; the security of the region is of importance to Europe. Particularly with US withdrawal from Afghanistan, there is a higher risk of terrorism spilling across borders. Youngsters can be particularly vulnerable to radicalisation and drug abuse (as drug routes from Afghanistan traverse Central Asian countries as well).

Intensifying diplomatic relations and ramping up developmental aid is therefore in the EU's interest. The EU also has valuable experience in developing the internal market and can help the Central Asian economies become more integrated regionally. 

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India's Security Choices in the Choppy Waters of the Indo-Pacific

At the start of the 2020s, India has been confronted with a massive viral spread and a relentless People's Liberation Army (PLA) on its borders. Last year, even as India was responding to the pandemic that originated in Wuhan, it had to mobilise its forces to counter Beijing's invasion on the Himalayan heights. Both the pandemic and the invasion resulted in loss of lives and both show no signs of going away. While the virus is threatening to rise again in a 'third wave', China has literally dug in at high altitudes in its quest to secure real estate and territory that it believes is crucial to provide access to a warm water port in the Arabian Sea for its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and is critical to a larger project that seeks to reshape the geopolitical map of Asia. While the two nations have taken modest steps to disengage, military and diplomatic negotiations have not yielded substantive results.

In June 2021, reports emerged that China had been ramping up infrastructure along the Tibetan border. Following this, around 200,000 Indian soldiers have been deployed on the frontier, an increase of over 40 percent from 2020. For India, China poses a clear and present danger. To respond to an expansive and

belligerent northern neighbour, it has had to reorient its conception of its security as well as deployment of its political and diplomatic resources. This was not the case until very recently.

Fool's Gold

Pakistan had been India's major preoccupation since independence in 1947. Its occupation of parts of the Indian state of Jammu and Kashmir, its export of terror to India as a means of waging an asymmetric war, and its nuclear proliferation had positioned it as the main threat to India's national security. For long, China had escaped critical scrutiny despite provocative actions. The Indian security establishment was not very vocal when China tested an atomic device during President Ramaswamy Venkataraman's state visit in May 1992—clearly intended to send a message to India. Indian Defence Minister George Fernandes' prophetic assertion at the turn of the century that China, not Pakistan, was India's "potential threat No. 1" was not universally shared in the strategic community in New Delhi.

In 2013, transgressions by Chinese forces in Depsang were diplomatically and militarily countered. Yet, here too, there was not much discussion and debate in the upper echelons of government. Greater clarity was to emerge in 2014 when India, under the newly elected Prime Minister Narendra Modi, was on the receiving end of Chinese incursions into Ladakh even as a summit was under way with the

The US-India partnership has evolved rapidly. Washington has helped thwart moves by China to internationalise the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, enabled India's entry into the international nuclear order and brought pressure on Pakistan to crack down on terrorism.

visiting Xi Jinping. With these two episodes in close succession, it would be fair to say that a change in India's approach to its northern neighbour was thrust upon it.

In recent years, India has been able to recalibrate its approach towards the Middle Kingdom even as the world order is changing. The US-India partnership has evolved rapidly. Washington has helped thwart moves by China to internationalise the issue of Jammu and Kashmir, enabled India's entry into the international nuclear order and brought pressure on Pakistan to crack down on terrorism. The Quad grouping, where Japan and Australia join the duo to keep the Indo-Pacific region inclusive and open to all, is working on providing alternatives to the BRI and is seeking a number of resilient arrangements, including on technology supply chains. A Quad vaccine for all is on

For India, China poses a clear and present danger. This was not the case until very recently.

the anvil and other countries are looking to partner with the Quad on important global issues.

The 'La Pérouse' maritime exercises in the Bay of Bengal, with France joining the Quad members, and the Australia-France-India ministerial dialogue demonstrate that the idea and the ideals of 'Quad Plus' are gathering steam. The UK has floated the 'Democracy 10', which includes the Quad countries, to tackle issues related to 5G and emerging technologies that may have a bearing on collective security. Whitehall's recent assessment of its economic, security and diplomatic interests may see it engage more deeply with India in the Indo-Pacific. Old Europe is certainly finding a place at the core of India's security calculations.

A testament to India's recalibration is NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg's pitch, at the Raisina Dialogue 2021, to broaden cooperation. NATO views the rise of China as having huge security implications and assesses India as its

Through back channels, India also has to work towards a reset between the US and Russia.

partner. PM Modi's historic Porto Summit with leaders of the EU and the 27 EU member-states helped boost cooperation on terrorism and maritime security. The 'connectivity partnership' between the EU and India seeks to finance projects in other nations, offering an alternative to China's BRI.

X factor Russia

Even as India strengthens and redirects its relationship with the old world, Russia remains the X factor. New Delhi's strategic ties with Washington have become a sore point for the Kremlin. If two new poles emerge—the US and its partners and allies, and the Beijing-Moscow

'axis'—India's room for manoeuvre may be affected. India is alive to this possibility and is redoubling its efforts to work with Russia, its largest weapons supplier over the past decades. India has to convince President Putin that the bilateral relationship allows him greater latitude while dealing with his southern neighbour. Through back channels, India also has to work towards a reset between the US and Russia and to convince the EU that pushing Putin into Xi's corner is dangerous and counterproductive. The recent Biden-Putin summit may have gone some way to making this a possibility.

A resurgent China, with its plan to establish regional hegemony in Asia, even as it tries to split and dominate Europe, is Delhi's biggest security challenge. The Indo-Pacific will define the future of the Asian Century. India has been astute in ensuring that its partners and fellow stakeholders from the Atlantic order work closely with it to navigate the choppy waters of the Indo-Pacific. D



Indian army helicopter on the deck on an aircraft carrier during the Malabar naval exercise in November 2020. India, Australia, Japan and the United States (the Quad) are keeping a wary eye on China's growing military power in the Indo-Pacific.

AFP / Indian Navy / Scanpix

Decisive Elections in an Undecided Germany

All around Europe, eyes are on Germany this summer. No wonder, as the German federal elections of 26 September 2021 will end the era of Angela Merkel, 16 years after she moved into the top job of Germany's government. Beyond that, only a few things seem certain about the federal elections today.



DANIELA SCHWARZER

executive director for Europe and Eurasia of the Open Society Foundations and honorary professor of political science at Freie Universität Berlin

One foreseeable thing is that the Christian Democrats (CDU) will once again constitute the largest Parliamentary group with opinion polls showing support rates of around 28 percent over the past weeks. If the CDU comes out strongest, it does not however necessarily imply that a Christian Democrat will be the next German Chancellor. Even if the Conservatives teamed up with the party that comes in second, which will very likely be the Greens or the Social Democrats (SPD), they could fail to gain the majority of seats in Parliament. In that case, a Green or possibly Social Democrat led three-party-coalition is likely to govern Germany.

Search for a Leader

Another given is that none of the lead candidates of the CDU/CSU, the Greens or the SPD today have strong voter support to succeed Angela Merkel in office. The Conservative, Armin Laschet, has

failed to position himself successfully after a tedious intra-party leadership battle. A recent poll shows that only 15 percent of Germans would vote for him if they could do so in a direct vote. Germany's current Finance Minister and Vice Chancellor, Olaf Scholz, in similar polls comes out strongest with support rates at about 20 percent. But it is unclear whether his highly personalized campaign will allow him to actually make more Germans vote for the SPD whose leadership he failed to win. Since the beginning of the year, the SPD has ranged third after the Greens with a few percentage points less, currently at around 17 percent.

In a nutshell, the results of the German elections are uncertain. Various coalition constellations are possible and any of the three candidates can become Chancellor. Neither of the three would come in from a position of strength: both the CDU's Laschet and the Green Annalena Baerbock are fighting allegations of

plagiarism. Scholz has to smartly leverage the support he has without decoupling from his party. Coalition negotiations, in particular if they include two parties of rather comparable strength (the Greens and the SPD combined with liberal and likely rather assertive smaller FDP), could be long and tedious. In all likelihood, in autumn 2021, Germany will be more focused on itself than on the challenges out there in Europe and the world.

Role in the World

And yet it should. Due to its European and international openness that is the base for its economic success model, Germany is particularly affected by transnational risks like pandemics or climate change, global transformation processes like digitisation and the advancing systemic conflict between liberal democracies and rising autocracies around the world. As a trading power in the center of Europe, the Federal Republic is highly

**In all likelihood,
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dependent on economic openness and political cooperation with countries all over the world.

The more difficult the world gets out there, the more Germany needs to rethink its foreign policy and international positioning: Germany's sources of strength – international openness and economic partnerships – have not only turned into a source of vulnerability as the COVID-19 pandemic and its economic effects have lately illustrated. International dependencies, even if mutual, restrict Germany's willingness and capacity to act internationally. Possibly more than ever before, the ques-

tion of whether Germany's economic model and its values-based foreign policy remain a credible and tangible combination is out there.

Another question is how Germany can protect its major source of strength: its economic competitiveness. In the race for technological and digital leadership Germany, like the EU, fell far behind competitors. The only way to catch up and regain leadership positions, which are necessary in order to be able to co-shape the norms and structures of order in the digital world, will be for Germany and the EU to partner with like-minded countries, in particular the US, but also Asian partners. The goal here is not only to strengthen economic competitiveness, but more fundamentally, to co-shape the regulatory framework for technologies that are at the heart of the conflict between liberal democracy and rising autocracies. These are some of the key questions that Germany's new leader will be facing – and the way she or he will position the country will crucially



The German federal elections of 26 September 2021 will end the era of Angela Merkel, 16 years after she moved into the top job in Germany's government. Reuters/Scanpix

impact transatlantic relations, and Germany and the EU's strategy towards China, Russia, Turkey and others.

If there is one certainty from the German perspective, it is that a strong EU continues to be essential; EU membership and Germany's leadership position in the Union of 27 has increased its prosperity and power, and, alongside NATO, it is the essential political framework that defines Germany's geopolitical position. The EU – or, with Brexit, Europe – remains the prism through which the next German leader will very likely think Germany's international role and concrete strategies to deal with the most pressing foreign policy challenges.

Possibly more than ever before, the question of whether Germany's economic model and its values-based foreign policy remain a credible and tangible combination is out there.

The EU, ridden by more than 15 years of consecutive crises, is deeply divided internally. It will hence be a key task for the next German government, as it was for the outgoing Chancellor, to hold the EU together – in Europe's and Germany's very own self-interest. Berlin will likely try to continue to bridge the north-south and east-west divides. While they of course deserve a granular analysis and do not cleanly group countries in homogeneous camps, both notions highlight important tension in the EU. The former stands for socio-economic divergence and conflicting visions of economic governance, while the latter is used to describe deeply differing notions of national and European identity, sovereignty and, for some governments like the current ones in Hungary and Poland, the understanding of liberal democracy.

The new German leader will have the task to build trust and reliable relationships with leaders all around the EU. This will take time and require strong political engagement. The leaders are keenly aware that they are about to lose their longest-serving peer in the European

Council; Angela Merkel. No other Head of State and Government has seen the EU through so many crises starting with the financial crisis of 2008, the following sovereign debt and banking crises, Russia's annexation of Crimea and the war in Donbas, the migration crisis, Brexit and finally COVID-19 and the deep economic and social repercussions it entails.

While some of the positions Germany took under her leadership were highly conflictual, Merkel is recognized for her calm and stamina in helping build European compromise, over and over again. France, which is traditionally less interested in reaching out and building broad compromise, will continue to be a key partner to Germany – and the French Presidential elections in spring 2022 from a German and European perspective will likely be the most consequential political event for the future of Europe in the first half of next year.

In her 16 years at the helm of Germany, Merkel built a leadership position that went well beyond the European Council. When US President Donald Trump started to deconstruct the liberal international order and put an axe to democracy and liberal society at home, hope was projected onto Merkel as the “new leader of the free world”. While she took strong positions in transatlantic relations during the Trump Presidency, she decisively pushed back on attacks on liberal democracy within Europe, as the Hungarian and Polish governments started to change their constitutions and weaken the free press and civil society.

New Leadership

It is against that backdrop of a divided EU and challenges to liberal democracy that Germany's new Chancellor will have to take clear positions and show ambition and pragmatism – and a very strong

It will be a key task for the next German government, as it was for the outgoing Chancellor, to hold the EU together – in Europe's and Germany's very own self-interest.

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sense of partnership with likeminded countries across the EU and globally.

Almost a decade ago, German leaders discussed a new and stronger role for Germany, with landmark speeches at the time given by then federal President Joachim Gauck, then foreign minister Frank-Walter Steinmeier and then defense minister Ursula von der Leyen at the Munich Security Conference in 2014. With the growing power of the Federal Republic within the European Union and in the international structure, there was a high demand – internally and externally – that the Federal Government assume more responsibility. Merkel delivered on some aspects, but on others expectations were never met. And yet, compared to today, things were comparatively simple then. The international environment has changed so decisively that it is increasingly difficult for Germany, as it is for any other country, to actually assume meaningful leadership and shape developments in the EU or internationally.

This is why the challenges for the next German government are so hard. The multitude and simultaneity of risks and challenges facing Germany and the EU require a preventive and comprehensive approach to deal with them – and they require an ability to act quickly. However, Germany, like its partners in the EU, is struggling to adapt its economic, political and social model to the fundamental changes in the international environment. It is by now clear that international and domestic developments are closely intertwined and require coherent approaches. National ones will not suffice. Deeper, more pro-active and inventive European cooperation among likeminded governments is key, given the internal and external challenges our continent is facing. 

Options for Rules-Based Players in a Changing Global Order

The future should be built on the right lessons from the past rather than the wrong ones. It is crucial to reach out to Russian people. China is not attempting to trash the international order the way Vladimir Putin is. Longtime Ambassadors Daniel Fried and Jüri Luik discuss how rules-based players in the global arena could deal with an acute threat – Russia – and a “systemic” challenge – China.

Jüri Luik (JL): When looking at the European theater of foreign and security policy, there is no doubt that the crucial influencer and spoiler of peaceful and stable cooperation is Russian President Vladimir Putin. Now Putin has become kind of an amateur historian, specifically with reference to the articles in the National Interest and the recent one regarding Ukraine. What worries me is the dilettante historian's attempt to create intellectual space and justification for marking the areas where Russia might have illegal territorial claims. Taken together with various military

maneuvers which Russia has lately conducted near Ukraine there is ample reason for concern.

Daniel Fried (DF): Your concern is, unfortunately, spot on. Putin is not a historian—he is using history to rationalize Russian aggression and claim to Ukraine. He is essentially denying Ukrainian sovereignty in any form except in subordination to Russia. It is a revamped historical narrative of a great Russian chauvinist.

In contrast to Putin's vision, I posit two alternatives. First is that from Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, who said that he hoped

that Ukrainians would see their future as aligned with Russia, but to reach that future Russia must reach out to Ukraine with respect and friendship. Second, as the smaller nation, it was up to Ukraine to decide its own future. That was a decent way of proceeding from someone who is a Russian patriot (some even accuse Solzhenitsyn of being a Russian nationalist).

There is also a very interesting historical counterpoint to Putin's narrative that came from the Ukrainian, Polish, and Lithuanian foreign ministers who issued a declaration, basically a recollection of

the old Polish-Lithuanian commonwealth, and they argued that it held off the Russians for a couple of centuries and at the same time developed constitutional traditions rather than political absolutism. What I liked about that declaration is that obviously the Poles, Ukrainians, and Lithuanians who signed it are well aware of all the problems in their past, but they did not decide to indulge their nationalistic grievances, they indulged a better vision of multinational cooperation.

Well, isn't this the same ethos of the EU? Isn't this the ethos we need? They are deciding to build a future on their best traditions not their worst. As an American, the parallel is this – we recall the declaration of independence and not the ideology of white racism and slavery.

I wish the Russians would take the right lessons from the 20th century and not the wrong ones. What we do about it is strengthen our defenses against Putin's aggression. Push back on Russian aggression, strengthen resilience at home, and then don't fear to talk to the Russians or cooperate where it is possible.



AMBASSADOR JÜRI LUIK

Ambassador Jüri Luik has served as the Minister of Defense of Estonia several times. He has also served as the country's Foreign Minister as well as Ambassador to Moscow, NATO and Washington and as the director of the International Centre for Defence and Security (ICDS) in Tallinn.

Ambassador Luik is a valued expert on defense and security policy and one of the key architects of Estonia's NATO policy. As a Minister without Portfolio, he led the talks with Russia on the withdrawal of Russian forces from Estonia.

Ambassador Luik has now been nominated to the post of the Permanent Representative of Estonia to NATO.

I would also say, reach out to the Russian people. They are not the enemy. I do not believe the Russians are somehow despotic by nature, or primitive, or can be ruled only by despots. I think that is nonsense. There is an alternative view of what Russian history can be—it is not our responsibility it's Russia's responsibility to reach a better future. But let us reach out to Russian people and not assume Putin speaks for all of them because he most surely does not.

JL: In a politically correct way we all repeat the importance of the Minsk agreements, but we are sort of stuck with these agreements. I am particularly concerned, that the enormous power of the U.S., which the Russians actually recognize, regardless of what they say, is lacking in the Ukrainian peace process.

Where do you see we should be going from here? Should the U.S. join the Minsk group? If that even possible? Or can the issue be pushed forward in talks between Biden/Putin? What is your take on where we should move on policy-wise regarding Ukraine?



Servicemen of different countries walk past military vehicles during the three Swords 2021 multinational military exercise of the Lithuanian-Polish-Ukrainian Brigade at the International Peacekeeping Security Centre near Yavoriv, western Ukraine, in July 2021. More than 1,200 military personnel and more than 200 combat vehicles from Ukraine, Lithuania, Poland, and the U.S. took part in the international exercise. AFP/Scanpix

DF: You are certainly right that the Minsk framework has not produced the results we hoped for. It principally failed because Putin wants it to fail.

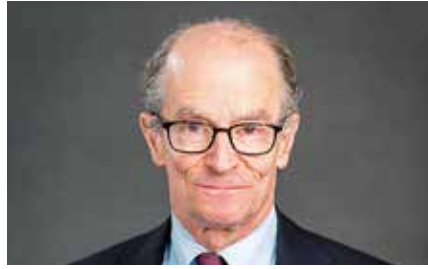
The Minsk agreements have their flaws, but they also have certain advantages. They recognize Donbas is Ukrainian sovereign territory. They recognize that the end state, a solution, includes Ukrainian sovereign control over its eastern international border. The Minsk agreements, if Putin is willing to act on them in good faith, could be the basis of a fair settlement. The problem is not the forum, the problem is Putin. So, the issue is how do Ukraine, Europe, and the U.S. convince Putin that it is in his interest to settle in Donbas, and not increase the pressure against Ukraine. I fear that we have been passive for too long and we need to put greater pressure on Russia.

Now, the Ukrainians face two great challenges: one is external aggressions and Russian aggression operating within Ukraine—disinformation, agents of influence, corruption, etc.—but there is also Ukraine's need to transform itself even when its territory is under attack. Ukrainian patriots have given the Ukrainian nation time and space to act, to reform and transform themselves. In doing so they may build up their sovereignty from within. The Kremlin wants Ukraine to be weak, corrupt, divided, and therefore manipulatable. The West wants Ukraine to be strong and independent, with strong independent institutions of a modern state, both government and non-government.

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What worries me is the dilettante historian's attempt to create intellectual space and justification for marking the areas where Russia might have illegal territorial claims.

JÜRI LUIK



AMBASSADOR DANIEL FRIED

In the course of his forty-year Foreign Service career, Ambassador Daniel Fried played a key role in designing and implementing American policy in Europe after the fall of the Soviet Union. During the years he became one of the U.S. government's foremost experts on central and eastern Europe and Russia.

Ambassador Fried helped craft the policy of NATO enlargement to central European nations and, in parallel, NATO-Russia relations, thus advancing the goal of Europe whole, free, and at peace. He also helped lead the West's response to Moscow's aggression against Ukraine starting in 2014: as State Department Coordinator for Sanctions Policy, he crafted U.S. sanctions against Russia, the largest U.S. sanctions program to date, and negotiated the imposition of similar sanctions by Europe, Canada, Japan and Australia.

Ambassador Fried is currently a Weiser Family Distinguished Fellow at the Atlantic Council. He is also on the Board of Directors of the National Endowment for Democracy and a Visiting Professor at Warsaw University.

Source: Atlantic Council

Domestic reform is national security, and I am not saying this to avoid your question which is a legitimate one—what the U.S. should do? How it should bring greater pressure to advance a settlement and help Ukraine continue its own transformation? The Biden administration reacted strongly and swiftly to Putin's military threat against Ukraine. They take it seriously. But it is also up to the Ukrainians, and they can do this, but they have not—they have done this—the transformation at home—unevenly back and forth.

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Push back on Russian aggression, strengthen resilience at home, and then don't fear to talk to the Russians or to cooperate where it is possible.

DANIEL FRIED

But who am I as an American to start complaining about someone's problems with reform—by God look at us! I am going to quote Solzhenitsyn again, “The line of good and evil runs through every nation and every human heart.” And I am quoting Solzhenitsyn, not because he is my favorite political thinker, but because it is important to remember a better Russian tradition and to remember that we all have gained from the better parts of Russian culture.

JL: Indeed, it seems that President Biden also invests a lot of hope in Russia appreciating being part of the club of civilized nations and wanting to be back around the table. Biden opened the way to talk to Putin; the EU also discussed the possibility of having a high-level summit—this did not pass in the EU Council. The EU decided after a lot of debate that Russian behavior does not justify such a meeting.

Regarding Biden, one of the reasons for the Geneva meeting was to look into the eyes of Putin and say, “look, we are serious”. I do not think Biden saw the soul of Putin and he did not expect to see it, which of course is even more important.

But on concrete issues—the strategic dialog for instance. With strategic nuclear weapons, Estonia has no particular angle, as these weapons fly over our head, figuratively and literally. However, when it comes to discussion regarding the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty, tactical nukes or conventional forces, there are interests of the European allies, including Estonia, which should also be taken into consideration, and we will of course make this clear to the Biden administration.

So, from the area of hard military security, do you believe this is a feeble exercise where they will sit around the table and talk about stuff, or do you think there is a possibility of a breakthrough? Do you believe that allies will be kept in the loop? The U.S. tradition is mixed when it comes to these kinds of issues...

DF: I do not see a breakthrough. These channels can be useful, but I would not expect too much dealing with Putin.

I get the point about U.S. consultations. I believe in it myself and I think the American administration needs to remember that Europe is France, Germany, Britain but it is also Estonia, Poland, Sweden. We have a lot of friends, and real ones for God's sake.

You walked around an issue that I thought you would hit on, so I will do it anyway—it is cyber, right? The Biden administration offered Putin a stable and predictable relationship and

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The enormous power of the U.S. that the Russians actually recognize, regardless of what they say, is lacking in the Ukrainian peace process.

JÜRI LUIK

Putin's answer was to increase provocations against us, including cyber-attacks made by private criminal organizations in Russia. I am sorry but you—President Putin—do not get to privatize your means of aggression against the U.S. then throw up your hands and say you have no idea about what's going on. You are responsible.

The Biden administration is now grappling with the question of how to respond. I do notice that suddenly the Russian criminal hacking organization REvil has gone offline. Who knows if this was a U.S. Cyber Command operation but they have reached out and visited the Internet Research Agency, the St. Petersburg troll farm, in the past.

What you are going to have in U.S.-Russian relations is a strange, yet not unique, combination of nasty business in the shadows and a measure of dialog and cooperation. Do not forget, I believe the U.S. is going to be reaching out to Russian society. Putin hates that. There's a school of thought in the U.S. that we ought to not do such things. That debate is still with us in some quarters, but the programs are still there and well funded.

JL: Even from five years ago and when I was Estonian ambassador to Moscow, the situation has gone from bad to horrible.



Russian President Vladimir Putin shakes hands with U.S. President Joe Biden prior to the U.S.-Russia summit at the Villa La Grange, in Geneva on June 16, 2021. AFP/Scanpix

Declaring various democratic organizations as extremists, Putin effectively has disbanded them, people have self-disbanded these organizations just to protect themselves from being thrown into prison.

When it comes to the foreign agents' law which is actively used against democratic organizations, the question is how can we actually help them? Many of these democratic organizations do not want us to send them money or material or us coming to Moscow to meet them because every one of these steps can lead them to prison in the worst circumstance. At the same time, I agree it is in our self-interest to strengthen the Russian civil society because this also influences and puts a stronger check on Putin and on his aggressive foreign policy endeavors. The situation is horrible, I would say that on certain instances it might be worse than during the Soviet times.

DF: It does feel Soviet, but how did all that work out for the Soviet Union? In the early 1980s, the Soviet Union was externally aggressive, internally repressive, and many in the West thought they were winning, and that democracies would never get organized to compete against them. It is not that I expect history to repeat itself, but Putin keeps going back to Soviet tactics as if he thinks he could replay the Cold War and this time it would come out differently.

Well, during the Cold War, let us remember, they were able to threaten Western Europe and they had 300,000 soldiers in the middle of Germany. Now they're fighting to maintain control over Donbas. How is that working out for Russia? Their great alliance with China—where they are a junior partner? Didn't we learn in school that the history of Muscovy began when they overthrew the Mongol yoke? That means Putin is inviting the Mongol yoke right back. Do you think the Chinese have forgotten what the Russians did to them in the late 19th century? I do not.

We, the West, are not a threat to Russia. The threat to Putin from the West is the idea of democracy. Play Czar Nicholas I if you must, but that led Russia to miss the industrial revolution and deepen its backwardness.

I am talking about these historical points because they can make a rough



70th anniversary celebration of the founding of the People's Republic of China. "China is not attempting to trash and destroy the international order the way [Vladimir] Putin is," Ambassador Daniel Fried argues. EPA/Scanpix

sense and you can see the parallels with today. During the Cold War, the most effective programs we ever had were not the ones that were tough and confrontational, they were the programs that included outreach to Russian society. It was exchange programs and student programs. We should remember that our best weapon, so to speak, is also our best virtue: the rule of law, honesty, transparency, freedom.

JL: You mentioned Chinese-Russian relations and I absolutely agree with you that Putin is toying around with the idea of some type of an Alliance. No one in China believes in it. Very few in Russia believe in it. I do not think Putin himself believes in it; it is more just to show he has options available other than the West.

But let me come to U.S.-Chinese relations. President Biden said in his visit to Europe there were two important deliverables: one was to show the U.S. is back, and of course it is undeniable, his is a very pro-European administration, a pro-international cooperation and pro-international organizations etc.

The other result was to prove to Europeans, I am paraphrasing, that China is a threat, a real threat. Do you believe China is a threat? There are several schools of thought in the U.S., Richard Haas has

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The Biden administration offered Putin a stable and predictable relationship and Putin's answer was to increase provocations against us, including cyber-attacks made by private criminal organizations in Russia.

DANIEL FRIED

written about it saying we overemphasize or overjudge the Chinese ability to maintain big power status although they have made a whole list of mistakes which countries of that kind usually do and it weakens them. This belief that within 5-10 years China will catch up with the U.S. is an overblown threat. On the other hand, it is a fact that China is militarizing. There is a certain discrepancy between the U.S. and Europe regarding their assessment of China. Even if you read the 2021 NATO summit communiqué, you see that Russia is called a threat, but China is called a “systemic challenge” to the international world order.

What is your assessment? Is China a real threat to the U.S.? Is China a military threat in the Pacific? I would say if you take protecting Taiwan as a starting point, I can easily understand the enormous limitations the U.S. has in terms of weaponry, ships and the need to catch up. But what is U.S. policy towards Taiwan?

DF: I agree with you that Russia is an acute threat. With China it is much more complicated. At one end, there is as you say a potential military flashpoint if the Chinese attempted to attack Taiwan. That is the worst. There are potential flashpoints if the Chinese challenged the U.S. as it is sailing in the high seas. But China is not attempting to trash and destroy the international order in the way Putin is. Putin is almost a nihilist. He just wants *чем хуже тем лучше*; the worse the better.

The Chinese have gained a lot from their participation in the international economic system that the U.S. took the lead in building and maintaining. It has worked out well. It is interesting that when asked about this a while ago, Secretary of State Tony Blinken gave an answer that I think we saw elaborated on during Biden's June trip to Europe—Blinken said we are not seeking a Cold War with China, we are seeking to strengthen the international rules-based system so that they have to play on our rules rather than write their own in a way that benefits them and their system.

Look at the U.S.-EU summit declaration. I know people look at the headlines and never read the documents from meetings but look at the document

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Even from five years ago and when I was Estonian ambassador to Moscow, the situation has gone from bad to horrible.

JÜRI LUIK

because it outlines areas in which the U.S. and EU can cooperate to do exactly what Blinken was talking about, which is strengthen the rules-based system.

Some time ago the U.S. government put out a set of regulations—so-called Business Advisories—cautioning business to do due diligence to avoid participating in slave labor in China and repression in Hong Kong. Basically, Uyghur-gulag produced products. This is very clever; it is not a hard sanction but is a way to enforce our own rules against slave labor. This is what we need to do.

JL: I agree, one of the important issues for us is clearly the distinction between Russia and China. Of course, there are people in Europe who are concerned that the political establishment in the U.S. will unavoidably focus on China and will lose the political time and space to deal with other threats. Obviously, the Biden administration has been strong in emphasizing this is not the case, that they recognize the threat of Russia and the U.S. as a superpower has enough resources to

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We [the West] should remember that our best weapon, so to speak, is also our best virtue: the rule of law, honesty, transparency, freedom.

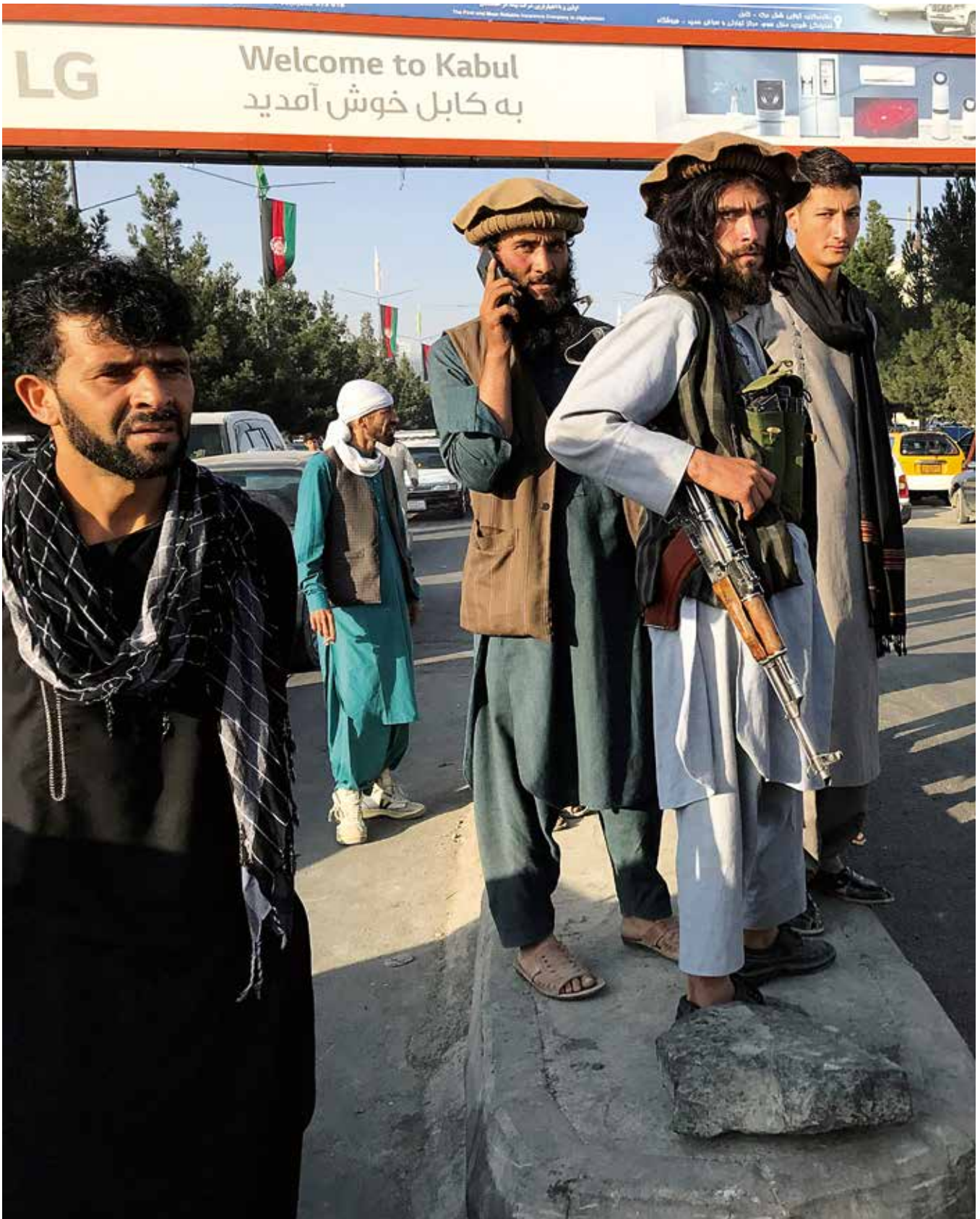
DANIEL FRIED

deal with two countries simultaneously as well as various other threats.

There are other issues on the agenda of President Biden. One of the challenges of course is Afghanistan. Estonia has, similarly to U.S., invested in comparative terms a lot of treasure and blood there. We have now decided jointly to withdraw. Are you worried that should Afghanistan fall into the hand of the Taliban again, which seems to be a very realistic scenario, that this would send a signal to all our enemies that in the end if they can wait us out or if they can raise the cost high enough, we will get tired and go home? Also, is there a risk Afghanistan will become the birthplace of terrorism as it was before we started the military operations?

DF: I take the point about your concern that if we are too focused on China we tend to forget the Russian threat. There are two problems, one is that the moment that we jump down the rabbit hole of trying to buy Russian support against China we risk selling out some other country. I heard such cynical nonsense from the Trump administration; that such approaches are a favorite game of amateur and shallow strategists who think they are playing at the big table, and they have not a slightest clue what's going on. So, it is a problem but not much of one. Remember that the President Biden and Secretary Blinken are Europeanists. There are other “Asian first” people in the administration. So, I get it but even if we want to park the Russian relationship in a stable place and concentrate on China, Putin is not making that possible. Count on Vladimir Putin to make us deal with the problem.

On Afghanistan, I understand where Biden is coming from. 20 years—how much more, how much longer are we going to stay there and to what end? The counter argument is we did not have that much in Afghanistan but what we had could keep off the Taliban and if the country collapses like Saigon in 1975 then that is a big problem. But the Biden administration is going to have to consider its options. It is taking a risk. I understand where they are coming from, but it is not an easy decision either way. It is just not as deep or steep a problem. I hope. 



Taliban fighters have gained control over Afghanistan since 1 May when US forces began withdrawing. EPA/Scanpix

**JAMES LAMOND**

director of the democratic resilience program
at the Center for European Policy Analysis (CEPA)

The Western Response to Weaponized Technology and AI

The world is at the beginning of what is likely to be the next great technological leap forward with Artificial Intelligence (AI) powered technology.

An independent commission in the U.S. that was tasked with making recommendations for the U.S. President and Congress on how to advance the development of AI and machine learning to address the national security needs of the United States completed its two-year long study. The findings made quite a splash when the commission co-chairs, former CEO of Google Eric Schmidt and former Deputy Secretary of Defense Robert Work wrote, “America is not prepared to defend or compete in the AI era... China’s plans, resources, and progress should concern all Americans. We take seriously China’s ambition to surpass the United States as the world’s AI leader within a decade.”

The U.S. and China are by far the world leaders in AI technology. But the Communist Party wants China to be the world leader in AI by 2030, and has committed to spending \$150 billion to achieve that goal. The concern is not just that China is investing in AI, but how it has already weaponized the technology for political control. AI is also an effective tool for spreading disinformation quickly by generating automated, carefully tailored and personalized disinformation campaigns through social media platforms.

This is not only about the Chinese government using this technology on its own citizens, which is a concern in its own right. Research by the Carnegie

Endowment for International Peace and Security found at least 25 different countries where Chinese AI technology is already being deployed, touching every continent.


The question is how can Western democracies not only counter or limit these dangerous applications, but also harness the good that exists and form a proactive agenda. Here are three important steps.

First, is an investment in the intellectual infrastructure needed to drive tech policy and harness AI. This includes the necessary investments in engineering and computer science. But beyond the technical and scientific investments, it’s critical to build the ties between policymakers and the scientific world. There is a cavernous gap between those working in the sciences and the political leaders who govern, regulate, and often fund relevant research. A better understanding among our leaders in government, especially in the national security space, will be important in both building the resources we need and understanding how to use them.

Second, western democracies should work together to develop the international

guidelines and norms around the use of new and emerging technologies, particularly AI. The West has largely forgotten how to think big and work together to forge the rules of the road. But it was the transatlantic alliance that largely built the post-World War II international architecture that has governed for the past 70 years. It is what built the norms around the use of nuclear technology and the prohibition of chemical weapons.

Finally, Western democracies can invest in the societal resilience necessary to withstand and counter the weaponization of AI or other technologies for disruptive or political purposes. Civil society can play a crucial role to help democracies resist authoritarian tools of surveillance. Organizations focused on issues like privacy, human rights, public health, and free speech can help spot and communicate to the public some of the threats and challenges AI technologies can pose. Investments in building these organizations both at home and abroad will go a long way to counter the effects of malicious uses of new technology.

Much of the conversation around AI developments and uses by China and other authoritarian states is alarming and anxiety-inducing. But democracies have survived through previous technological shifts, including existential, planet ending weaponry obtained by Joseph Stalin, one of the most ruthless authoritarians in history. They can do so again, with the right investments, resources, and maybe some creative thinking. 

There are at least 25 different countries where Chinese AI technology is already being deployed, touching every continent.

A Glimpse back at Lennart Meri Conference 2019





The Belarusian Armed Forces: Structures, Capabilities, and Defence Relations with Russia
The International Centre for Defence and Security, 2021

This analysis describes the *de facto* subordination of the Belarusian armed forces to Russia's military command structures, and their wartime role of providing substantial logistic support to Russia's armed forces.



Artificial Intelligence and Autonomy in Russia
Center for Naval Analyses, 2021

This report provides a current understanding of the Russian AI and autonomy ecosystem as well as a foundation from which to evaluate future Russian developments in these fields.



Assessing Chinese-Russian Military Exercises: Past Progress and Future Trends
Center for Strategic & International Studies, 2021

Excellent reading in the light of the Zapad 2021 exercise. The paper reviews the evolution of Chinese-Russian military exercises, assesses their purposes and results, forecasts their future evolution, and evaluates the policy implications for U.S. military planners.



NATO's New Strategic Concept. Balancing Responses to Multiple Threats
The International Centre for Defence and Security, 2021

NATO is challenged by Russia, China, and the south. Can its new concept find a balanced response? This analysis looks at Baltic interests in this question and compares them with the official statements of other Allies and opinions expressed by thought leaders from Allied states.



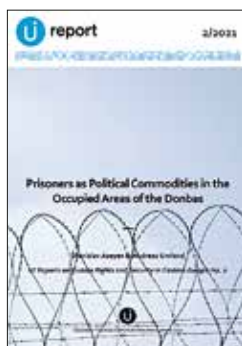
Dialogue with Russia. Russia Needs to Reset Relations with the West
The International Centre for Defence and Security, 2021

Six expert views on Western-Russian relations and a set of proposals for a way forward for conducting dialogue with Russia. The West should strive for a relationship to be conducted on a purely pragmatic basis, rather than another 'reset'.



Baltic and Nordic Responses to the 2020 Post-Election Crisis in Belarus
Latvian Institute of International Affairs, 2021

This policy brief examines and compares the reactions of Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Iceland, Latvia, Lithuania, Norway and Sweden. What could the international community have done differently for the cause of a peaceful change in Belarus and how to move forward?



Prisoners as Political Commodities in the Occupied Areas of the Donbas
The Swedish Institute of International Affairs, 2021

This report highlights the illegal detention of persons and the use and abuse of detainees by the Russia-supported pseudo-states in eastern Ukraine.



So Far, Yet So Close: Japanese and Estonian Cybersecurity Policy Perspectives and Cooperation
The International Centre for Defence and Security, 2021

Leading Estonian and Japanese researchers in cybersecurity policy give a valuable insight into the experiences and perspectives of these two countries, their success stories and challenges in building a secure cyberspace, as well as the potential for cooperation.