

# INTERNATIONAL REPORTS



Global *(In-)*Security

# INTERNATIONAL REPORTS

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## Editorial

Dear Readers,

The “golden age of security”, as the Austrian writer Stefan Zweig characterised the time before the First World War, ended just over 100 years ago. After the atrocities of two world wars and the end of the so-called Cold War, many hoped that the cessation of the East-West conflict would herald the beginning of a new era of security – but those remaining hopes were shattered no later than the terrorist attacks of 9/11.

In this issue’s opening interview, Patrick Keller points out that it is not entirely without reason that many believe the world to be less secure today than ever before. The simultaneity of various crises is primarily a consequence of power shifts in the international system leading to conflicts in many regions of the world.

One of these regions is the Indian Ocean, where tensions between China and India are increasing. This conflict is by no means merely regional – in addition to India and China, the U.S. has concrete economic and security interests in the region. A stronger commitment to stability in the Indian Ocean is therefore in Germany’s interest as well, as Peter Rimmele and Philipp Huchel point out in their article.

If Germany also wants to contribute to stability and security in the crisis-ridden Middle East, it is heavily reliant on strategic partnerships. One of these is with Jordan, which is regarded as an “anchor of stability” in the region. But the country itself faces enormous economic and domestic challenges. Jordan’s jihadist scene in particular could develop into a serious threat, as Annette Ranko and Imke Haase explain in their article.

Mali provides a cautionary example of the devastating consequences of the rise of Islamists for a country’s stability. As the heartland of the Sahel, the country plays a crucial role in the entire region’s security. The tense situation in Mali means that sustainable strategies are required for lasting peace there, as Tinko Weibezahl states in his article.

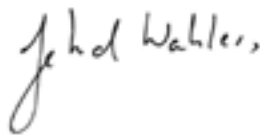
Organised crime in Latin America poses a completely different kind of security threat, especially when it forms an almost symbiotic link with state structures, as it does in Brazil. Using the example of the illegal drug economy, Thiago Rodrigues shows that the current image of organised crime as a kind of parallel state is not only inaccurate, but even obscures our view of the actual problem.

Finally, Daniela Braun looks at pandemics and epidemics, which in her view must ultimately be regarded as a security risk, too. The danger of the rapid spread of infectious diseases is greater than ever before. Although epidemics have the potential to destabilise a state or even entire regions, only a few countries are sufficiently prepared for the outbreak of a pandemic. But such an outbreak is only a matter of time.

As varied as the security policy challenges in the different regions of the world may be, their consequences cannot be limited to those individual regions. Instead, as the articles in this issue make clear, the world is also interconnected in this respect as well as being urgently dependent on cooperation.

I wish you a stimulating read.

Yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gerhard Wahlers". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looped initial 'G'.

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**Dr. Gerhard Wahlers** is Editor of International Reports, Deputy Secretary General and Head of the Department European and International Cooperation of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung (gerhard.wahlers@kas.de).



6 ● *under discussion*  
“There Are Good Reasons  
for Talking of a New Insecurity”  
An Interview With [Patrick Keller](#)

12 ●  
Jordan and the Jihadist Threat  
How Stable Is Germany’s  
Ally in the Middle East?  
[Annette Ranko/Imke Haase](#)

23 ●  
An African Afghanistan?  
On the German Troop Deployment  
in Mali  
[Tinko Weibezahl](#)

33 ●  
A New Stage in the Rivalry  
Between the Great Powers?  
How China, India and the USA Are  
Competing for Influence in the  
Indian Ocean  
[Peter Rimmele/Philipp Huchel](#)

46 ●  
Symbiotic Interactions  
On the Connection Between Drug-Trafficking,  
the Legal Economy and State Power in Brazil  
[Thiago Rodrigues](#)

57 ●  
Invisible Enemies  
Why Viruses and Bacteria Constitute  
a Security Policy Issue  
[Daniela Braun](#)



## OTHER TOPICS

68 ●

### Is Islam a Part of Eastern Europe?

Thoughts on History, Religion, and National Identity in the Eastern EU Countries

[Alexander Beribes](#) / [Leo Mausbach](#) / [Johannes Jungeblut](#)

82 ●

### From Trinkets to Values

China's Engagement in Africa Also Has an Ideological Dimension

[Christoph Plate](#)



*Ai: Dr. Keller, terrorist attacks in the heart of Europe, Russia's increasingly aggressive foreign policy, countless trouble spots in the Middle East and North Africa, streams of refugees heading to Europe – in the face of these developments, some are calling attention to a “new insecurity” in the political landscape. Is there anything to back this claim? Has the world really become more dangerous over the last few years?*

**Patrick Keller:** The world has always been dangerous. There is a false nostalgia for the supposed stability of the Cold War era. Nonetheless, it is true that in recent years we have been confronted by an array of different crises simultaneously. Globalisation and the rising level of global interconnectedness, resulting in countries being affected by geographically distant crises all over the globe, are only partly responsible for this development. For the most part, this is the outcome of gradual power shifts in the international system, accelerated by revolutionary technological advances, both of which are exerting pressure on the post-World War II order.

*Ai: What kind of power shifts do you mean?*

**Patrick Keller:** We are in a period of transition; the Old is coming to an end, but we still don't know what the New will look like. This applies to both the shape the digital age will assume and the interrelated power politics of the new world order. The past twenty years have been a very long unipolar moment of American hegemony, based on the order that was predominantly created and established by the United States after 1945. Now we sense that this hegemonic order is breaking down – particularly as a result of China's increasing economic and political power, but also due to the dark side of globalisation, namely the empowerment of all kinds of non-governmental organisations, from classic NGOs to international corporations and terrorist networks.

And the new weakness – or at least the crisis of self-confidence – of the West, represented in its less-than-successful interventions, such as those in Afghanistan, Iraq and Libya, as well as in the economic and financial crisis of 2008, is encouraging dissatisfied actors to openly question the status quo. On top of this, when we accept that, despite all the prophecies of doom, the US is still far more powerful than any of its challengers, things become really complicated and even potentially dangerous, since misjudging one's opponent's capacities and determination can often lead to violence.

*Ai: So who do you think the “opponents” are, and what risks do they pose?*

**Patrick Keller:** The word “opponent” is of course a bit thorny in the diplomatic sense; I use it here in a rather theoretical sense. But there's also no point beating about the bush. The above-mentioned actors aim for a fundamentally different social order than the one we enjoy in an open society like Germany. They aim to widen their sphere of influence, and consider that their claim to power is threatened by the appeal of liberal ideas. I'm referring to major authoritarian powers such as China and Russia, but also smaller powers, such as Iran and North Korea, as well as terrorist organisations, such as the so-called Islamic State. These “strategic competitors” are clearly named in the US's latest strategy papers, such as the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy. The specific threats they pose are very different. These range from propaganda to political pressure, including sabotage and terrorism, all the way up to military force.





In light of this, it is necessary to keep a large number of instruments in both effective and operational shape so as to counter these dangers and mould the strategic environment in a positive way.

*Ai: You referred to the empowerment of non-state actors as the “dark side of globalisation”. Of course that’s true of terror networks such as the so-called Islamic State. But what about global corporations like Amazon and Facebook or NGOs like Greenpeace and Transparency International – isn’t there an upside to their growing influence?*

**Patrick Keller:** Of course, it’s not a matter of black and white, and there are obvious advantages.

But we were talking about political unpredictability, and the new power of these organisations, which has mainly been created by digitalisation and the internet, is a major factor in the changes that people find so unsettling – even if in the end (perhaps by means of prudent policies) it turns out that these changes have brought benefits to the majority of people. Now this also applies to the international order: when non-state actors gain considerable global influence, this disturbs the existing state-based system. That has nothing to do with whether you agree with the aims of an organisation such as, let’s say, Greenpeace, or not. Whatever the moral



Immutable anchor: "Germany has always done just enough to establish its ability to form alliances and maintain US protection." [Source: © Ford Williams, U.S. Navy, Reuters.](#)

standpoint of an NGO may be, I would still question their democratic legitimacy, particularly as compared to the elected leadership of a liberal state.

In any case, we are currently undergoing a process of realignment, of finding a balance, a stabilisation of power politics – and that is always going to cause friction.

*Ai: In this context, could one perhaps argue that the lack of security in question has changed little over recent years and that it merely boils down to a perceived lack of security? The risk of becoming a victim of war or of terrorist violence in Europe or North America is, as we know, still negligible – and will probably remain so for some time to come. Nevertheless, one has the impression that more and more supposedly irrefutable certainties are being shaken and that there is a great sense of uncertainty: what's right and what's wrong, what's true and what's fake? How do we decide what's true and what's false, and who is the authority in such matters? What lessons have we learned from the past? What constitutes our society, which values do we stand for, and who are our partners? Do you also have the impression that something has changed, particularly in this respect?*

**Patrick Keller:** The term “perceived lack of security” is an unfortunate one because it suggests that a lot of people are subject to vague, delusional fears. There are good reasons for talking of a new insecurity. But we have to distinguish between the different levels that you mention. One level is that of international security policy. The risk of – and readiness for – conflict has increased over recent years, and violent conflicts have moved closer to Germany – be it Russia’s incursions in Ukraine, or the metastasising war in Syria. Both have a direct impact on Germany, even though very few Germans have lost their lives as a result – if this is what you use as a benchmark. (Incidentally, people in Ukraine are being killed in the conflict on an almost daily basis. Ukraine is also part of Europe, which is why your reference to the security situation in Europe only applies to a limited extent.)

The other level is what one might call postmodern irritation, something that is currently having a great impact on societies in Europe and North America. The fact that this phenomenon is less pronounced in other societies of the West, such as Australia and Japan, is perhaps a key to explaining it. The aftermath of the social and academic revolution of the 1960s, which was particularly strong in the US and Western Europe, can be heard today as an eerie echo: the liberating cry of “anything goes” has morphed into a disorientating “what is even valid?” When we add to this the fundamental – and still ongoing – changes to our ways of living, working, communicating and consuming in the course of the digital revolution, these uncertainties are very understandable. As is the resistance of those who wish to preserve their traditions, but in doing so may, at times, run the risk of accepting the atavistic.

*Ai: But isn't it symptomatic of the developments of recent years that the West's "strategic competitors", especially Russia, are consciously thinking at both levels? In this sense, insecurity can be created not only by amassing troops at the border and attacking one's neighbours, but also by systematically attempting to undermine the pillars of liberal democracy – trust in an independent press, free elections and a common set of values.*

**Patrick Keller:** That’s right. But the two levels require disparate responses. We need to have a wide range of tools at our disposal, along with the wisdom and determination to select the right tool for the job. Security policy goes far beyond its core area of defence policy.

*Ai: When you look at German and European toolboxes, what are the biggest shortcomings in your opinion?*

**Patrick Keller:** Given recent newspaper reports, my first thought is the state of the Bundeswehr. And it’s true – after more than twenty years of drastic cuts, our armed forces are no longer in a position to fully master the tasks they have been given. That won’t change overnight, and Minister von der Leyen’s shift on defence spending is only an initial step, because it’s not just about budgets but also about other things, such as procurement processes.

But the military is not the only thing in the toolbox. I also see a need for action to protect and ensure the resilience of our critical infrastructures, such as cyber security, equipping and networking the intelligence services and federal security agencies, as well as the blue lights, i.e. the emergency services, namely the police, fire brigade, and ambulance

services. All of this applies at the German level; with a view to European cooperation, it can be multiplied. We are well aware of the obstacles to cooperation between sovereign states with political and strategic cultures that have developed in different ways.

I therefore consider the fundamental challenge – in toolbox terms – to be a social one. The citizens of this country need to understand to what extent the strategic position of our country and our continent has changed. Germany is not an island of blessed souls, isolated from the evils of the world – albeit a world with which one, of course, still does business. We are all affected and targeted by authoritarian challengers, migration trends and the breakdown of states. Therefore, more clearly than in the past, we have to agree upon who we are and who we want to be, what we stand for and what price we are prepared to pay for it. This requires political leadership, but also the involvement of the media, business, the churches – ultimately, every single one of us.

*Ai: So we seem to be dealing with a considerable gap between ambition and reality. And this despite the fact that calls for Germany to finally take on more responsibility and provide sufficient funding are not exactly new. Do we perhaps have to admit to ourselves that Germany is simply not ready and, therefore, not in a position to take on more responsibility? Could it be time to adapt our ambition to reality, as the opposite is clearly not working?*

**Patrick Keller:** I don't agree.

Ambition and reality are in a constant state of flux and are mutually dependent. Our ambition is the result of a process of political and social negotiation. Reality is the strategic position of our country, along with all the obligations that arise from this. It is natural for a country to try to achieve as much as possible with the lowest possible cost and risk, but above all to achieve the minimum required level of security. When we look at it this way we see that Germany's security policy has actually been quite successful. For years Germany has been accustomed to sheltering beneath the wings of a superpower when things got really threatening. Yet, despite all its savings and restraint, Germany has always done just enough, for example by participating in foreign missions, to establish its ability to form alliances and maintain US protection.

But given the fact that the strategic situation has begun to change drastically over recent years, we can assume, as indeed I do, that this minimalistic policy will no longer suffice – not just with regard to the US, but also in terms of European cohesion. That's why the German government's policy change is so welcome, even though its speed and scope is still subject to criticism. In this situation, I consider it to be negligent to continue the attitude of the Bonn Republic and belittle our influence. Particularly because this timidity must seem like a mockery to many of our partners and allies, most of whom are weaker than we are. Who, if not ourselves, will stand up for our interests and beliefs and attempt to shape the future accordingly?

*The interview was conducted by Sebastian Enskat.*

*–translated from German–*



[Global \(In-\)Security](#)

# Jordan and the Jihadist Threat

How Stable Is Germany's Ally in the Middle East?

[Annette Ranko/Imke Haase](#)

Jordan is widely considered to be an “anchor of stability” in a crisis-ridden region. That is why Germany is also seeking to extend its strategic partnership, not least noticeable through the relocation of its *Bundeswehr* Tornado jets from Turkey to Jordan. It should be noted, however, that Jordan is currently facing some serious economic and domestic challenges. These include a jihadist scene, in which recent developments suggest that the country is still at risk of terrorist attacks, necessitating innovative approaches for preventing extremism.

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Against a backdrop of growing tensions between Turkey, Germany and other NATO states, the German *Bundeswehr* redeployed its military troops and Tornado surveillance jets from the NATO base in Incirlik, Turkey, to the Jordanian desert oasis of al-Azraq in autumn 2017. Subsequent state visits by Germany’s Defence Minister, Foreign Minister, the German President and Chancellor Angela Merkel underline the growing strategic importance that Germany attaches to Jordan and indicate that a longer-term partnership in the area of foreign and security policy is in the pipeline. Particularly since the start of the Syrian refugee crisis, the two countries have been working closely together on development cooperation projects. Germany is currently Jordan’s second-largest bilateral donor in the area of development assistance and humanitarian aid.<sup>1</sup>

Compared to other countries in the region, Jordan is the ideal partner for Germany when it comes to its Middle East policy. It is one of only two Arab countries to have signed a peace treaty with Israel.<sup>2</sup> Unlike other Arab states, the Jordanian royal family espouses a moderate and progressive view of Islam, which it advocates beyond its own national borders.<sup>3</sup> Jordan also takes a balanced approach to foreign policy in the region. It explicitly seeks to be the country with the most rational foreign policy in the Middle East. Thus, for example, Jordan takes a moderate stance towards the Iranian-Saudi contest for regional supremacy.

Furthermore, Jordan is largely considered to be an “anchor of stability”<sup>4</sup> in a crisis-ridden region. Yet, Jordan has also been struggling with a number of economic and domestic challenges in recent years. The border closures with neighbouring Syria and Iraq (as a result of the conflicts in these countries) mean that Jordan has lost some of its key trading partners and transit routes. Youth unemployment has further increased, and currently stands at 36 per cent. The country’s national debt is 95 per cent of GDP. An economic reform programme agreed with the International Monetary Fund, which has led to cuts in subsidies and tax hikes, puts an increasing strain on lower and middle-income groups. This has already led to a number of protests which started in early 2018, with people expressing their dissatisfaction with the economy and venting their frustration at the slow pace of political reform. The protests reached their peak in June 2018 and resulted in the creation of a new government. The high number of Syrian refugees in the country (Jordan is one of the world’s largest host countries), is also putting its infrastructure to the test and – increasingly – threatening social cohesion.

This situation has enabled jihadists in Jordan to recruit new members over recent years. Whilst the country had not been affected by Islamist violence (compared to other Arab states) for many years, and was an exporter of rather than a target for Jihadist attacks<sup>5</sup>, this changed between 2015 and 2016.

In 2016, the country suffered a series of terror attacks.<sup>6</sup> Since then, three terrorist cells have been uncovered in the country. They were armed and were planning to attack civilian targets. Additionally, there is also some concern that Jordanian fighters, who have been affiliated with IS in Syria and Iraq since 2011, could return to Jordan in the wake of its recent territorial losses.

## Jordan is a key country in Germany's efforts to help countries ramp up their security.

This article deals with the current dynamics of the Jordanian jihadist scene and asks to what extent it has the potential to challenge the stability of Germany's new partner, Jordan. Germany is already taking this issue seriously. Since 2016, Jordan has been a focus country of the empowerment initiative, which aims to assist the country in its fight against terrorism.<sup>7</sup> It should be noted, however, that recent developments in the Jordanian jihadist spectrum could generate new potential sympathisers among young people, a group that is particularly at risk of radicalisation. Coupled with contextual factors that fuel dissatisfaction in society, there continues to be a risk of further terrorist attacks in Jordan requiring innovative approaches in the area of preventing extremism.

### Jordan's Broad Islamist Scene

Jordan's large Islamist scene has many facets. Most of the Islamist movements and groups are opposed to violence, but it is supported by a dangerous minority, the jihadists.

#### *The Muslim Brotherhood and Their Party*

Traditionally, the biggest and strongest player is the Muslim Brotherhood and its political wing, the Islamic Action Front (IAF). The group was founded in 1946 and, until the mid-1990s,

it was a social and political force favoured by the former King Hussein. It exerts a powerful influence over education and culture and runs an extensive network of charitable associations. The Muslim Brotherhood has always sought to bring about gradual social and political change in Jordan, while rejecting the use of violent means. It does not condemn the state and government of Jordan as being "apostate" and therefore does not use violence against them. The group's political wing, the IAF, is the strongest opposition party and many Jordanians of Palestinian origin believe it represents their political views. In the country's freest elections to date, in 1989, the group won 27.5 per cent of the votes.<sup>8</sup>

#### *Quietist Salafists*

Another large but non-political part of the Islamist spectrum is made up of the quietist Salafists, who also reject violence and do not consider the state and rulers as "apostate". Supported by Saudi petrodollars, this movement has been growing in Jordan since the 1980s. Their numbers were further strengthened by the many Jordanian guest workers who came into close contact with Salafi ideas and customs in Saudi Arabia. Quietist Salafists want to return to what they believe is a "pure" form of Islam, as practised at the time of Mohammed. They refuse to engage in political processes and their prime aim is to make society more devout. They believe there is only one true form of Islam, which is derived from a strictly literal understanding of the religious sources, the Quran and Sunnah. They are also of the opinion that the "right" belief is underpinned by "right" actions in everyday life. In this respect, they differ from the Muslim Brotherhood, whose members do not view an individual's daily actions as direct evidence of their belief or disbelief, and who do not insist on a literal interpretation of religious sources but allow for human interpretation instead.<sup>9</sup>

#### *Salafist Jihadists*

To date, the Salafist jihadist movement only makes up a small part of the Islamist spectrum.





Rising threat level: Jordan, too, has become the target of terrorist attacks in the recent few years.  
Source: © Muhammad Hamed, Reuters.

Like the quietist Salafists, supporters of this movement believe there is only one correct way of living and interpreting Islam. They, too, follow a literal interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah, mainly based on identical legal and theological concepts and instruments. However, the jihadists conclude that today's states and rulers in the Arab world are "apostates". They believe it is a religious duty to take up arms against them because they have collaborated with the illegal occupiers of Muslim territories, especially the USA and Israel. Jordan's jihadists fall roughly into two camps: one follows the

teachings of Palestinian-Jordanian scholar Abu Muhammad al-Maqdisi – one of the world's most influential jihadist ideologues – while the other follows Abu Musab al-Zarqawi, a Jordanian who was killed in Iraq in 2006 and was the former leader of al-Qaeda in Iraq (a forerunner of IS). The main difference between the two is that the IS-linked camp recognises Abu Bakr Al-Baghdadi as a caliph, while the followers of al-Maqdisi do not. Furthermore, the IS-linked camp believes their leaders' authority is largely rooted in their combat experience, whereas the al-Maqdisi camp believes it derives



from their deep understanding of theology and law. Accordingly, the al-Maqdisi camp is characterised by a stricter judicial approach to the interpretation of religious sources and the justification of violent acts. It therefore often views the violence of IS as illegitimate from a religious, Salafi viewpoint.<sup>10</sup>

### Islamists and the State

Rather than trying to reduce the scope of the Islamist groups as a whole, the Jordanian government is pursuing a strategy that allows the Islamists a certain amount of latitude, while trying to create internal divisions within the groups, and playing them off or using them as bulwarks against each other. Although the Muslim Brotherhood was traditionally granted a privileged role by the state, this changed when the current King Abdullah took the throne in 1999, and certainly since the start of the Arab Spring, when the Muslim Brotherhood was considered the main challenger to the government. The state tried to weaken the group by encouraging internal splits, a strategy that was successful when it led to the emergence of the Zamzam Initiative and the Muslim Brotherhood Society. In the medium term, however, neither group managed to seriously rival the Muslim Brotherhood. What is more, especially since 2011, the Salafis have been supported as counterweights to the Muslim Brotherhood. This not only affected quietist Salafis, but ultimately also the jihadist element in the movement. Two of the most prominent jihadist thought leaders from the al-Maqdisi camp were released from prison: al-Maqdisi himself in 2015 and Abu Qatada in 2014.<sup>11</sup> Shortly afterwards, the state made use of them both to counteract IS and its sympathisers in Jordan. They both publicly condemned IS's ideology and actions as being incompatible with the correct Salafi interpretation of the Quran and Sunnah. However, since the attack in Karak in December 2016, the government has taken a different approach to the whole jihadist movement in Jordan. Supported by appropriate legislation, the security services<sup>12</sup> are now taking tough action against jihadists of all shades, along with their sympathisers.<sup>13</sup>

### Recent Changes in Jordan's Jihadist Scene

Leading Jordanian experts have described recent changes among jihadists in Jordan, who suggest the threat of attacks in the country remains acute. There are four main trends:

#### *Combat Experience Rather Than Theological and Legal Expertise*

Increasingly, the authority of jihadist leaders is based primarily on their experience in combat. Hence, jihadist ideologues with theological and legal expertise, such as al-Maqdisi and Abu Qatada, who were long regarded as leading thinkers for jihadists the world over, are now losing the upper hand to jihadists who have close ties to IS. This is accompanied by a greater willingness to embrace violence, which is now less strictly derived from religious sources with Salafi concepts and instruments. New leaders have been emerging in Jordan's Salafi scene. They are little known in the outside world, as their discourse is more aggressive than that of the ideologues in the al-Maqdisi camp. The government does not therefore allow them to express their ideas publicly, so they have gone underground. Key figures include: Sa'd al-Hunayti, Abu Muhammad al-Tahawi and Umar Mahdi Al Zaydan, who were all previously supporters of al-Maqdisi but who have turned to IS since its rise to prominence.<sup>14</sup>

### Jihadists still view the rise of IS as a success story.

#### *IS as a "Success Story"*

The increasing unattractiveness of the al-Maqdisi camp among jihadists also arises from the fact that this camp is close to al-Qaeda. In Jordan at least, IS is more attractive as an organisation than al-Qaeda. The founding of IS in 2013 led to massive change in the jihadist spectrum, which until then had been mainly influenced by al-Qaeda. Unlike al-Qaeda, whose primary goal was

fighting the USA, IS proclaimed much loftier goals, namely to create a home for believers – a supposed “true Islamic state”. Many of the Jordanians who joined IS in Syria went there “to live, not to die”<sup>15</sup>. The founding of IS and its rapid territorial expansion caused problems for Arab authoritarian regimes and the West alike. For many, it was a symbol of power and provided proof that God was on their side. Even the massive territorial losses suffered by IS in Syria and Iraq in recent months, have not diminished the fame of IS as the first organisation to achieve this. The rapid ascent of IS continues to be viewed by many as a success story, while the loss of territory is merely regarded as a temporary setback.<sup>16</sup> In addition, the growing influence of Shiite Iran in the region (especially in Iraq and Syria) and the denominational tensions that accompany it, are expected to continue for the foreseeable future and secure further support for IS. For the first time in modern history, Sunnis in the region – who also make up the majority of the population in Jordan – are living in real fear of losing their Sunni cultural identity. Al-Qaeda’s greatest foe was the USA, but this changed with the advent of IS, who view the Shia as their number one enemy.

## Women and teenagers are playing an increasingly important role in the jihadist movement.

### *From “Lone Wolf” to Family Structures*

A new study by the Center for Strategic Studies at Jordan University suggests that a change in the structure of the jihadist spectrum is making it harder for the intelligence services to recognise and destroy these structures and make jihadist ideology less attractive to its followers. Jihadist groups are no longer predominantly made up of lone men, but instead are increasingly attracting entire families to their ideology. For example, entire families have travelled to Syria to live in IS-controlled areas. This trend involves three main factors: firstly, in Jordan there are whole

generations of jihadists who pass on their fighting spirit and Salafi ideology from father to son. Therefore, fathers and their sons are sometimes indicted in the same court cases. Secondly, members of the Salafi jihadist movements are increasingly joining forces through marriage. Thirdly, women and teenagers are playing a more important role in the jihadist movement. Researchers at the Center for Strategic Studies call it the emergence of a “society within a society”. It currently involves less than one hundred families, but their numbers are growing.<sup>17</sup>

### *Broadening of Jihadist Ideology*

Over recent years another trend has emerged in Jordan’s jihadi scene: the Umma Party’s transnational network, led by Kuwaiti Salafi Hakim al-Mutayri, has also gained a foothold in Jordan. Naeem Tellawi is the leader of the group’s Jordanian subsidiary, which is mainly based in the Zarqa region. Throughout the region, the Umma Party is promoting a new concept of jihad that potentially has more mass appeal than the traditional jihad concept espoused by the jihadists. Historically, the problem for jihadists has always been that they are on the fringes of society. The majority of the population often dismissively call them *takfiris* (Muslims who call other Muslims apostates). Calling fellow Muslims apostates strongly deviates from Islamic orthodoxy, according to which only God can judge a person’s belief or lack of belief. The Umma Party’s legitimising of violence and jihad, however, is not based on the often despised practice of *takfir* (declaring someone an apostate), but has more of a secular nature. In short, this is a violent second wave of the Arab Spring (after the failure of the first wave in 2011). The aim is to trigger revolution throughout the entire region and establish new regimes that will supposedly create popular sovereignty and social justice: purported democracies with an Islamic identity.<sup>18</sup> Although the Jordanian branch of the Umma Party is small in terms of numbers and its leader Naeem Tellawi recently had to publicly admit that the Umma Party has failed to become a leading player among jihadists in Jordan, it should nonetheless be stressed

that the Umma Party has led to new elements finding their way into the jihadist discourse. In principle, these have the potential to generate more mass appeal than the jihadists' traditional legitimisation of violence, and could therefore potentially attract new followers to jihadism.

### **Jihadists' Influence on Young People**

A survey conducted by the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Jordan and the Jordanian institute NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions, looked at the influence of jihadists on the section of Jordanian society that is often cited as being most at risk: young people.<sup>19</sup> The survey suggests that only a small minority of young people have jihadist sympathies, but it also reveals that there is potential for this to change.

According to the results, young Jordanians tend to favour religious conservatism. For example,

75.5 per cent of respondents said that if religion and science contradict each other in certain respects, religion is always right. 71.2 per cent believed women should cover their hair. 65.3 per cent thought that politicians would do their jobs better if they were more devout. Furthermore, 83.1 per cent believed that women should not hold leadership positions. In practice, however, this conservative attitude does not seem to preclude a certain degree of tolerance, particularly towards other religious minorities. This is particularly evident in the questions about coexisting with Christians in Jordanian society. 80.8 per cent of those questioned described Muslim-Christian relations in the country as very good. Furthermore, 44.2 per cent of the young people surveyed strongly agreed and 39.4 per cent concurred that people of other faiths are no less moral than people of their own faith. This tolerance is a clear deviation from jihadist ideology, which states that all non-Muslims as



well as Muslims of a different denomination are enemies who must be fought against.

However, the survey also shows that a small group of young people espouse jihadist ideology. When explicitly asked, around four per cent said they supported the ideologies of extremist groups such as IS, al-Qaeda or the al-Nusra Front. For example, 4.3 per cent of those questioned agreed with the statement that *all* women *must* wear the face veil, something that Salafis regard as a religious duty. Some six per cent of respondents believed that jihadist groups such as al-Qaeda should be classified as a legitimate resistance movement and not as terrorists. 3.8 per cent said they admired the “jihadist way of life”. However, the figures were lower when asked about specific IS practices, such as the destruction of antiquities and the trafficking of women.

Nevertheless, there is considerable potential for young Jordanians to sympathise with the jihadists. What is particularly striking is the lack of confidence in how jihadist groups are portrayed in the media. 48.2 per cent of the young people surveyed believed they are misrepresented, and 40.3 per cent thought they are portrayed in an exaggerated way. 48 per cent of respondents consider the Shia and their growing influence in the region as the most acute threat at present. When asked about the use of violence, 50.5 per cent of young people thought it was legitimate in order to defend their religion, 65.8 per cent considered it legitimate to defend their country against foreign occupiers, and 58.8 per cent considered it legitimate as a way of opposing injustice in society and unjust regimes.

### **Economic Conditions Fuel Frustration**

Factors such as social inequality are often cited as a breeding ground for radicalisation. This has

always been the case in Jordan, and it is now becoming more pronounced due to the country’s bleak economic situation.

## **Jordan’s poor economic situation provides a fertile breeding ground for radicalisation.**

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Over the last few years, the conflicts in Syria and Iraq and the resulting border closures with Jordan in 2015<sup>20</sup> have caused the country to lose vital trading partners as well as key transit routes. Jordan has not yet managed to make up for this loss by opening up new export markets.<sup>21</sup> Jordan’s existing dependence on foreign aid has increased still further in the wake of the floods of Syrian refugees who have entered the country (Jordan is one of the main host countries).<sup>22</sup> On top of this, Jordan’s national debt has continued to rise in recent years and currently stands at 95 per cent of GDP. This led to Jordan and the International Monetary Fund signing an agreement in 2016 aimed at reducing public debt by 2021 through tax reforms and cuts to subsidies.<sup>23</sup> However, the initial measures have had the greatest impact on lower and middle-income groups and on young people, who are often most at risk of unemployment. 70 per cent of the population is under 30 years of age, and youth unemployment stands at around 36 per cent.

Young people’s frustrations are often fuelled by a lack of economic prospects, but also by the fact that nepotism is seen to be widespread. Jobs and access to information are often dependent on family and tribal affiliations. For many young people, this creates a sense of social inequality and exclusion. In 2018, this frustration seems to be manifesting itself in new ways, with an increase in the suicide rate and unprecedented levels of violent crime. For example, since January 2018 a number of banks, petrol stations and pharmacies have been victims of armed robbery. On social media these are often celebrated as “Robin Hood acts” in the sense of social justice.

Niqab Barbie: Young people espousing extremist views are (still) clearly in the minority.

Source: © Ali Jarekji, Reuters.

## It is unlikely that Jordan will completely lose control of its state, as has happened in Syria and Iraq.

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Young people's frustration over inequality and the increasingly difficult economic situation have also resulted in protests. Specific reasons behind them include recent cuts in bread subsidies, rising electricity and gas prices, and tax hikes resulting from the agreement with the IMF.<sup>24</sup> At the beginning, in early 2018, public demonstrations had mainly taken place in the provinces, particularly in Salt and Karak. The protests and the accompanying discourse in social media also reflected the dwindling confidence of certain sections of the population with regard to the government. Protests cumulated in May and June 2018, by then they had reached the country's capital Amman, and resulted in the creation of a new government. Should this dissatisfaction continue or should it be exacerbated, this might attract more supporters in the future.

### Jordan's Capacity to Counter the Jihadist Threat

What is the Jordanian government doing to counter the jihadists, and will they succeed in destabilising the country? Firstly, Jordan has one of the most professional intelligence services in the region. At least at present, it has managed to keep tabs on the dangerous minority of already radicalised individuals who are prepared to take up arms or have already done so. It is therefore unlikely that Jordan will experience the kind of decline in security and loss of control over parts of its territory that has been seen in Syria and Iraq. One challenge, however, is how to counter the new developments in the jihadist scene and the potentially growing pool of sympathisers. Changes in the structure of the jihadist scene away from the predominance of the "lone wolf" towards the integration of entire families, along with the emergence of secular and potentially attractive narratives about violence (as the second wave of the Arab Spring) in the jihadist

discourse, and the current economic context, all require broader, innovative government strategies for the effective *prevention* of extremism. Such strategies should not only involve the security apparatus, but also the economic, social and cultural aspects, too. To achieve this, the paper on a National Strategy to prevent extremism issued in May 2017<sup>25</sup>, needs to be finally debated and approved by the government and the portfolio clearly allocated to a specific government department. In 2016, responsibility was transferred from the Ministry of the Interior to the Ministry of Culture, which currently finds itself seriously underfunded and has traditionally been one of the weaker ministries. As a result, it has come up with very few initiatives to date. That is why the allocation of the prevention of extremism portfolio has suffered delays once again, and it is still not clear which ministry will be responsible for it. Some Jordanian experts recommend that an inter-ministerial body should be set up, comprising representatives of the Ministries of Education, Culture, Economy and Social Development, and reporting directly to the Prime Minister.

However, many Jordanian experts argue that the concept of security should also be viewed from a broader perspective, which is not limited to the issue of jihadism. Recent protests and the new, more violent forms of crime that have emerged since early 2018, highlight the fact that these developments also need to be monitored and addressed. This is the only way for Jordan to remain *the* anchor of stability in the region in the long term, providing a foundation for prospering relations between Germany and Jordan.

*—translated from German—*

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- 1 In 2016, the Kingdom received 470 million euros, increasing to 578 million in 2017. Cf. Zeit Online 2018: Bundesregierung übergibt Militärausrüstung an Jordanien, 14 Jan 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2knZgpc> [20 Mar 2018].
- 2 In October 1994, Jordan signed a peace treaty with Israel (also known as the Wadi Araba Treaty), making it the second Arab state after Egypt to sign a peace treaty with Israel. Egypt and Israel signed a peace treaty in 1979 following talks at Camp David. Cf. King Hussein Cyber Library, in: <http://bit.ly/2gA047M> [20 Mar 2018].
- 3 This is particularly clear in the Amman Message, a statement calling for tolerance and unity in the Muslim world and opposing extremism. This was issued in 2004 by Jordan's King Abdullah II, and signed by 552 Islamic scholars and leaders. Cf. The official website of the Amman Message, in: <http://ammanmessage.com> [19 Mar 2018].
- 4 For example, Germany's Minister of Defence Ursula von der Leyen and German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier visited Jordan in 2017 and 2018. Cf. Zeit Online, n. 1; idem 2018: Steinmeier mahnt Unterscheidung von Fluchtgründen an, in: <http://bit.ly/2saGc0S> [20 Mar 2018].
- 5 Cf. Ranko, Annette 2017: Länderporträt Jordanien: Vom Exporteur zur Zielscheibe islamistischer Kämpfer?, KAS dossier on extremism, in: <http://kas.de/wf/de/71.16807> [8 May 2018].
- 6 On 6 June 2016, five Jordanian intelligence officers were killed in a shooting near the al-Baqaa camp. One week later, six Jordanian soldiers were killed in Ruqban, on the border between Syria and Jordan. IS claimed responsibility for the attacks. On 26 September 2016, for the first time, an intellectual and someone who was not a member of the security services became a victim of terrorism. While standing outside a courthouse, Nahed Hattar was shot in the head several times by a Jordanian engineer and Islamist. Hattar was accused of sharing a cartoon about IS on social media, which was perceived as being anti-Islam. He had already received death threats as a result of this. However, what really grabbed the world's headlines were the events of 18 December 2016, when several people attacked a police patrol in al-Qatranah, a village near Kerak. The attackers then fled and took a group of tourists hostage in Kerak Castle. Ten people were killed, including one from Canada, and 34 others were injured. IS claimed responsibility for the attack. This incident was an embarrassment for the security forces as they were only able to overcome the Islamists with the help of local people. A number of high-ranking security officers were replaced in response to this. Cf. Schmid, Ulrich 2016: Ein Mord erschüttert die jordanische Ruhe, Neue Zürcher Zeitung, 27 Sep 2016, in: <https://nzz.ch/ld.118857> [20 Mar 2018]; Beaumont, Peter 2016: Jordan security forces storm castle to free captured tourists, The Guardian, 19 Dec 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2gYXvOu> [20 Mar 2018]; Global Terrorism Database, Jordan, in: <http://bit.ly/2sbjIhp> [20 Mar 2018].
- 7 German Ministry of Defence 2018: Ertüchtigung – mit Hilfe zur Selbsthilfe zum Erfolg, 1 Feb 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2knZpZK> [20 Mar 2018].
- 8 Cf. Rantawi, Oraib 2017: Muslim Brotherhood and the Political Authority: A Compounded Crisis, in: Political Parties in Jordan, pp. 138–174.
- 9 Cf. Ranko, Annette / Nedza, Justyna 2015: Crossing the Ideological Divide? Egypt's Salafists and the Muslim Brotherhood after the Arab Spring, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 39: 6, pp. 519–541, in: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2015.1116274> [9 May 2018].
- 10 Cf. Wagemakers, Joas 2018: Jihadi-Salafism in Jordan and the Syrian Conflict: Divisions Overcome Unity, Studies in Conflict & Terrorism 41: 3, pp. 191–212, 30 Mar 2017, in: <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2017.1283197> [8 May 2018].
- 11 Cf. Black, Ian 2015: Jordan releases jihadi cleric and Isis critic after group's murder of pilot, The Guardian, 5 Feb 2015, in: <http://bit.ly/2IMFluq> [15 Mar 2018]; Malik, Shiv 2014: Abu Qatada cleared of terror charges by Jordan court and released from jail, in: <http://bit.ly/2xbLxLi> [20 Mar 2018].
- 12 The legal basis is the anti-terrorism law of 2014. Article 3 on cybercrime gives a vague definition of a terrorist act: “[use the] information systems, or the internet, or any means of publishing or media, or establishing a website to facilitate terrorist acts or support a group, or organization, or charity that commits terrorist acts, or promote their ideas, or fund it, or take any action that could jeopardize Jordanians or put their property at the risk of hostile or retaliatory acts”. Cf. Anti-Terrorism Law no. 55 of Year 2006, in: <http://bit.ly/2IHRox3> [22 Apr 2018]. A cybercrime law was also drafted in September 2017 but it is yet to be ratified by parliament. The draft law states that anyone who posts or re-posts something on social media that is considered to be “hate speech” will be liable to a prison sentence of one to three years or fines of 5,000 to 10.000 JOD. Cf. draft law on cybercrime, to supplement the existing cybercrime law of 2015, in: <http://bit.ly/2x9ogcQ> [22 Apr 2018].
- 13 Cf. Al-Sharif, Osama 2016: Jordan and the Challenge of Salafi Jihadists, Middle East Institute, 21 Mar 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/1Rk91PW> [16 Mar 2018].
- 14 Cf. Wagemakers 2018, n. 10.
- 15 Interview conducted on 15 Mar 2018 with Dr. Mohammed Abu Rumman, Islamism expert at the Center for Strategic Studies, University of Jordan, in Amman, Jordan.
- 16 Ibid.
- 17 Cf. Shteiwi, Musa / Abu Rumman, Mohammed 2018: Sociology of Extremism and Terrorism in Jordan, Center for Strategic Studies, Amman.
- 18 Cf. Ranko, Annette / Nedza, Justyna / Röhl, Nikolai: A Common Transnational Agenda? Communication Network and Discourse of Political-Salafists on Twitter, in: Mediterranean Politics 23: 2, 2017, pp. 1–23.

- 19 Cf. Study “Youth Violent Extremism”, conducted by NAMA Strategic Intelligence Solutions and KAS Jordan, 2017. A survey of 1,811 people (equally split between men and women) aged 16 to 26 years was conducted in all twelve governorates in Jordan.
- 20 The border crossing with Iraq has been partially reopened for goods traffic since August 2017, but the border to Syria is still closed. Cf. Al-Khalidi, Suleiman 2017: Jordan border crossing with Iraq to reopen in major boost to ties, Reuters, 29 Aug 2017, in: <https://reut.rs/2iGKTy3> [9 May 2018].
- 21 There are 660,000 Syrian refugees registered with the United Nations Refugee Agency in Jordan; the Jordanian government has even claimed there are 1.26 million Syrians in the country. Cf. UNHCR 2018: Syria Regional Refugee Response, Jordan, in: <http://bit.ly/2GO7HCW> [9 May 2018]; Ghazal, Mohammad 2016: Population stands at around 9.5 million, including 2.9 million guests, The Jordan Times, 30 Jan 2016, in: <https://shar.es/anrHLr> [9 May 2018].
- 22 In 2017, 3.65 billion US dollars flowed in, with the main donors being the US, Germany and the EU. Saudi Arabia, which has long been Jordan’s biggest donor, has turned a significant portion of its aid into investment and is currently the country’s largest foreign investor. Cf. Jordan Ministry of Planning and International Cooperation 2017, Contracted Foreign Assistance in 2017, in: <http://bit.ly/2smoeJH> [9 May 2018].
- 23 In 2016, the IMF and the Jordanian government signed an agreement to generate income and curb government spending. By 2021, public debt is to be capped at 77 per cent of GDP, whereas it currently stands at 95 per cent of GDP.
- 24 Cf. Maayeh, Suha 2018: Jordan protests against price rises signal growing resentment, The National, 5 Feb 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2E7uQ6Z> [20 Mar 2018]; The New Arab 2018: Riots break out in Jordan over bread price hikes, 5 Feb 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2Ls0GLv> [20 Mar 2018]; Al-Khalidi, Suleiman 2018: Jordan unveils major IMF-guided tax hikes to reduce public debt, 16 Jan 2018, in: <https://reut.rs/2Dj6NQV> [19 Mar 2018].
- 25 The strategy paper has been drawn up jointly by UNDP and Jordanian representatives. It attaches particular importance to social and economic aspects in this prevention work. Cf. Malkawi, Khetam 2017: Anti-extremism strategy to be ready next month, The Jordan Times, 26 Jan 2017, in: <http://bit.ly/2xc8Vlr> [9 May 2018]; UNDP Jordan 2016: National Strategy on Preventing and Countering Violent Extremism in Jordan (P/CVE), 17 May 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2d5P1VQ> [9 May 2018]; Bondokji, Neven 2017: Countering Violent Extremism Research in Jordan: High Potential and Limited Impact, WANA Institute, in: <http://bit.ly/2KVfq4H> [8 May 2018].



[Global \(In-\)Security](#)

# An African Afghanistan?

On the German Troop Deployment in Mali

Tinko Weibezahl



A lack of state structures, more frequent attacks by Islamic extremists, persistent poverty, and a steady expansion of military involvement on the part of Europe – in German public debate, the mission in Mali is often compared to the situation in Afghanistan. Despite all efforts, strong words and support from Western nations, so far nothing has helped to significantly weaken the Islamists. Vast swathes of the country are beyond the control of the central government, allowing the Malian desert to become a haven for terrorist groups. Why is Germany involved, what is the situation today, and what does the future look like?

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On 26 April 2018, the German Bundestag decided to continue the *Bundeswehr*'s mission in Mali as part of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA). In a roll-call vote, 496 members of parliament voted in favour of the German government's motion, with 156 against.<sup>1</sup> This decision means the troop ceiling for the new mandate has been increased to 1,100. In early December 2017, Germany also assumed responsibility for managing Camp Castor in Gao, Mali. This will require more personnel, as will the additional protection measures and the planned expansion of the air base in Niamey, the capital of Niger. The EU-led training and advisory mission EUTM Mali will also continue its involvement. Germany plans to take over command of the EUTM Mali mission once again from November 2018 (as was the case in 2015/16). The German Parliament extended the mandate until 31 May 2019 and raised the troop ceiling from 300 to 350.<sup>2</sup> In theory, this would allow up to 1,450 German soldiers to serve in the two missions in West Africa; alongside Afghanistan, the Mali mission would thus be the *Bundeswehr*'s largest foreign military engagement.

Beforehand, Federal Chancellor Angela Merkel stated that Germany would "spend 1.7 billion euros on the Sahel region and its development between 2017 and 2020 alone" as part of a reorganisation of its development cooperation.<sup>3</sup> Merkel also called for more international

support, stressing the importance of a coordinated approach to security and development policy. She remarked that combating illegal migration would require not only security but also development in the regions.

Germany's military engagement is intended to supplement development assistance and foreign policy initiatives for Mali. As recently as late February 2018, comprehensive military and development assistance was discussed with France and the EU during the G5 Sahel Conference.<sup>4</sup> As a core country of the Sahel zone, according to the German government, Mali plays a key role in the stability and development of the entire Sahel region, not least because of the cross-border nature of challenges such as terrorism, organised crime, irregular migration and smuggling. The German government estimates that additional expenditure for the period from 1 May 2018 to 31 May 2019 will amount to some 268.6 million euros. It identifies the stabilisation of Mali as a priority for Germany's engagement in the Sahel region and a key goal of the government's Africa policy. 2018 will be a decisive year for Mali as it faces presidential and parliamentary elections. It would therefore be vital to stabilise the country with the help of MINUSMA and EUTM. It is also envisaged that the missions in Mali will cooperate with the new regional force set up by the G5 Sahel states. In the future, German soldiers may also be deployed in Niger, Mauritania and Chad in



Military presence: French soldiers already engaged in battle in Mali prior to the official start of EUTM and MINUSMA.  
Source: © Joe Penney, Reuters.

order to offer advice and training, particularly to the new G5 Sahel Joint Force. The plan is to provide logistical assistance in developing infrastructure, support with the transportation of consumer goods, as well as help with transporting casualties within the country. Mali in West Africa is about three and a half times the size of Germany and has approximately 10,000 regular soldiers.<sup>5</sup>

### **The Genesis of Military Engagement in Mali**

By 2012, Mali was already in a state of severe crisis. The ongoing conflict between the Tuareg rebels in the north and the Malian government had been smouldering for decades. It reached

a new peak in the spring of 2012, a direct result of the fall of the Gaddafi regime in Libya, as Philippe Hugon, Africa expert at the IRIS political institute in Paris, observed at the time: “When the Libyan government fell apart, rocket launchers and anti-tank mines went with them. All kinds of groups had access to these weapons. They included the Tuareg, who fought for Gaddafi. Suddenly these people were left empty-handed because of course it was impossible to join the Malian or Libyan army. That’s why they joined the rebellion”, says Hugon.<sup>6</sup> The struggle of the so-called National Movement for the Liberation of Azawad (*Mouvement pour la Libération de l’Azawad*, MNLA), a Tuareg movement for an independent Berber state called

Azawad, received new impetus when heavily armed Tuareg returned to Mali from Libya.

Just a few months later, in April 2012, the Tuareg overran the weak Malian government troops in the north in the space of a few weeks and declared territorial independence. The advance of the rebels was favoured by a military coup in the capital. In Bamako on 22 March, a group of officers seized power and forced President Amadou Toumani Touré to flee. The soldiers claimed to be unhappy with the government's feeble attempts to tackle the crisis in the north. As a result, Mali effectively split in two: the rebel state in the north, which was not internationally recognised, and the territory in the south of the country that was still under the control of the central government.

The UN Security Council addressed the situation in Mali in December 2012. It passed Resolution 2085, authorising the deployment of an African-led International Support Mission to Mali. However, by the beginning of January 2013 the Malian army visibly deteriorated after many months of fighting. The rebels were advancing on the strategically important city of Mopti, which provides access to the capital, Bamako. This led the president of Mali's transitional government, Dioncounda Traoré, to formally request military support from France to prevent the jihadist offensive.

On the evening of 11 January 2013, French President François Hollande announced that French troops had, that afternoon, actively engaged in the conflict in Mali. He said the objective was to support Mali's government troops in their fight against "terrorist elements". He noted that the operation would last as long as necessary. A few days later, at a press conference in Dubai, Hollande stated that French troops would not leave Mali and terminate the operation until Mali was secure and had a legitimate government and electoral process. He added that the terrorists would no longer be allowed to threaten Mali's territorial integrity. He outlined three main objectives of the operation:

- Stop terrorists trying to control the country;
- Ensure that Bamako is secure, along with the several thousand French nationals who live there;
- Enable Mali to restore its territorial integrity, with the help of the African-led International Support Mission to Mali (AFISMA), supported by France.<sup>7</sup>

On 20 January, French Defence Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian declared that the aim of what the French had now named *Opération Serval* was the complete end of any Islamist control over parts of the country. So France was now using military force against the Islamists. The decisive factor here was the realisation that not only were the Islamists committing large-scale murder, they also had the potential to destabilise the entire region over the long-term. Commenting on the French intervention, President Hollande said that the very existence of this "friendly state, the security of its people and that of our compatriots" was at stake. He said Mali was facing a "terrorist aggression from the north" of the country, which was notorious for its "brutality and fanaticism".<sup>8</sup>

However, Hollande initially only wanted to help train Malian soldiers, saying the direct deployment of troops to Mali should be left to African countries. France would only intervene in the wake of an international resolution – this was the message from Paris just a few days before troops were deployed. Nevertheless, the advance of the Islamists led Hollande to change his mind. This unilateral decision initially attracted international criticism.

### **According to Merkel, terrorism in Mali is also a threat to Europe.**

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In January 2013, in the course of the EU's internal discussions on how to support AFISMA, German Chancellor Merkel met with Ivory Coast President Alassane Ouattara, who at the time

was Chairman of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). She pledged initial support for the mission that was planned to involve some 3,000 troops, by supplying two German Transall transport aircraft. Following talks with François Hollande, the Chancellor also stressed “we are under a lot of time pressure”, saying: “Terrorism in Mali is a threat not just for Africa, but also for Europe.” She added that every country “must determine its capacity to contribute without endangering the safety of its soldiers involved in other missions”<sup>9</sup>.

### **EUTM and MINUSMA**

An extraordinary summit of EU foreign ministers was held on 17 January 2013, also attended by Mali’s foreign minister Hubert Coulibaly. This officially approved the launch of EUTM Mali, the EU’s military training mission in Mali. The German government agreed to provide personnel to support EUTM Mali. The objectives of EUTM Mali were defined as follows:

- To provide training and advice at key Malian military locations with a particular focus on command personnel;
- To advise Mali’s Defence Ministry and the Malian armed forces’ command staff and training institutions;
- To support and encourage cooperation between the armed forces of the G5 Sahel states to increase their cross-border capabilities;
- To advise personnel deployed by the G5 Sahel states at their headquarters;
- To train formations deployed by the G5 Sahel states in Mali.<sup>10</sup>

On 28 February 2013, the Bundestag for the first time approved the deployment of German troops to support AFISMA based on UN Security Council Resolution 2085 (2012). Germany directly supported AFISMA by providing air transport capabilities for conveying supplies from neighbouring countries to and within Mali and carried out air transport and air refuelling for French forces. After the UN Security Council’s decision on 25 April 2013 under Resolution

2100 (2013) to establish the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilisation Mission in Mali (MINUSMA), German support for AFISMA was transferred to MINUSMA following approval by the German Bundestag on 27 June 2013.<sup>11</sup>

More than 50 nations are currently participating in the stabilisation mission in Mali with around 11,000 blue helmets, 1,500 police officers and civilian personnel.<sup>12</sup> Germany is also providing personnel for the Forces Headquarters (FHQ) in Bamako and is operating an air transport base in Niamey, the capital of neighbouring Niger, to supplement material and personnel transport and medical care for casualties. The German contingent is supporting MINUSMA’s mission, which at present includes the following aspects:

- Maintaining the ceasefire;
- Supporting the implementation of the peace agreement;
- Protecting the civil population;
- Stabilising key population centres;
- Helping to restore state authority;
- Supporting the political process and protecting human rights;
- Helping to secure humanitarian aid;
- Protecting cultural heritage and sites in cooperation with UNESCO.

In January 2016 the German Bundestag approved the extension and expansion of the mission, which involved raising the troop ceiling from 150 to 650. This expansion of Germany’s contribution was partly used to relieve the Dutch forces on the ground and was primarily focused on reconnaissance capabilities.

The disagreement between Germany and France in the wake of France’s unilateral action in Mali was resolved with a joint statement by Chancellor Merkel and President Hollande at the EU-Africa Summit in Brussels. They both stated their intention of working together in Africa. Hollande said that, through their friendship, the two countries make a stronger joint contribution to security policy in Europe than is the case between other states. “In addition, we



Counting votes: The persistent weakness of state structures inevitably leads to legitimization crises.

Source: © Joe Penney, Reuters.

want to ensure that this friendship also extends to, and develops on, the African continent.”<sup>13</sup> The Enable and Enhance Initiative (E2I) played a major role at the summit. With this, “we want to enable Africans to build up their own security structures and then equip them with the necessary materials,” explained Merkel.

### **Military Alliances**

In addition to Mali’s national armed forces, the international community is striving towards a military alliance with the G5 states’ new

regional intervention force. This 5,000-strong multinational force has been created largely because of the sluggish implementation of the African Standby Forces. The aim is to bring together units from the G5 states of Niger, Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania and Chad under one single command. This new joint force will enable a fast military response to regional crises. The countries’ five leaders established the *G5 du Sahel* (group of five) in February 2014. At the G5 summit in February 2017, it was decided to establish the G5 Sahel Joint Force under a joint high command, to be operational by



spring 2018. In April 2017, the African Union's Peace and Security Council approved the strategic deployment concept, and the UN Security Council also finally welcomed the deployment of the joint force with Resolution 2359 (2017). The soldiers and police officers from the G5 nations are spread across seven battalions. They are commanded from a joint headquarters in Mali and three regional commands (West, Central and East) focusing on the three interstate borders on the north-south lines between Mauritania and Mali, between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso, and between Niger and Chad.

The G5 Sahel states will provide ten million US dollars each to develop the force, while the EU will contribute 50 million US dollars for infrastructure, equipment and training. France will contribute eight million US dollars, 70 vehicles and communications equipment to relieve *Opération Barkhane*. The total estimated cost of the G5 Sahel Joint Force is 432 million US dollars. Germany is supporting the establishment of the regional command in Niamey in Niger as part of the infrastructure measures. The German government is providing equipment for the G5 Defence Academy in Mauritania and is financing the establishment of a regional training network in the area of biosafety with funds from the upgrading initiative.<sup>14</sup>

### **The Political and Economic Situation in Mali**

Ever since Mali was founded, the central government has never had full control of the north of the country. The lack of state structures and hence the guarantee that the central government is able to assert itself, is not a problem caused by the 2012 rebellion, but has instead existed for decades. As a result, in large swathes of the country the government is incapable of safeguarding security or meeting the basic needs of its people in terms of legal certainty, education, health and infrastructure. This encourages the formation of armed groups of all kinds, whether that be religiously motivated terrorism or for criminal reasons.

### **The immense military efforts and expenditure on the part of the international community have so far failed to bring any sustained improvement to the security situation in Mali.**

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The lack of state structures is also particularly noticeable with regard to the future prospects of Mali's fast-growing population. High unemployment, rising food prices, an inadequate

education system – this is clearly an ideal breeding ground for economic, political and religiously motivated conflicts, with corresponding implications for the security situation. The massive military efforts and expenditure on the part of the international community have so far failed to bring any sustained improvement to the security situation in Mali. Although the country elected a new president, Ibrahim B. Keita, following the international military intervention in 2013, the north of the country remained unstable. Islamists continued to attack, while the Tuareg minority was subjected to retaliatory action. At the end of 2013, the Tuareg ended the ceasefire with Mali's central government. After the rebels had recaptured many cities on the borders with Algeria and Niger at the end of May 2014, a new peace agreement was negotiated in March 2015; not all parties involved signed it, however. Extremist groups in the north are still committing violent acts today. The situation remains tense and has deteriorated in some areas over recent years, which is a key reason why the international community has extended and expanded its military engagement.

Mali's internal economic and political problems should not be underestimated as contributing factors to the security crisis. Mali is one of the world's poorest countries. Agriculture is effectively its only economic sector, despite the fact that only a small part of the land can be cultivated. According to a government study published at the end of 2017, 4.1 million Malians will be affected by food insecurity by mid-2018. Around 800,000 people, mainly in northern and central Mali, are in need of humanitarian aid.<sup>15</sup> Focusing the international debate on the security sector, that is to say the threat posed by terrorism and rebel groups from the north, has pushed the domestic, home-grown dimensions of the situation in Mali into the background, as Africa expert Denis Tull of the Stiftung Wissenschaft und Politik (SWP) notes in his analysis.<sup>16</sup> He sees the "logic of the evacuation of endogenous political factors" as an attempt by the Malian government to ignore social and political factors in the Mali crisis and in this way negate its own responsibilities.

## Few states in the Sahel region are able to retain a monopoly on the use of force in their own territory.

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Indeed, the generally widespread weakness of state structures is not a new phenomenon in Mali, but it is one that persists today. Like its neighbours in the Sahel region, few state structures are able to assert a monopoly on the use of force in their own territory. This means their sphere of influence becomes limited to a few provinces, and often only to the regions in the immediate vicinity of the capital and seat of government. This inevitably creates a problem of legitimacy among the population. When state institutions are unable to guarantee a minimum level of security and social services, it leaves a gap for other actors to fill. In March 2015, Annette Weber and Guido Steinberg of the SWP produced a study of jihadism in Africa, which shed light on this vicious circle of eroding structures and the rise of terrorist groups.<sup>17</sup> According to this, the people of Mali lack confidence in state bodies, and indeed often perceive them as a threat. Moreover, Mali's peripheral populations are often closer to their neighbours on the other side of the border than to their own governments – an explosive long-term consequence of arbitrarily drawn state borders during the colonial era.

### Conclusion

Europe's security is increasingly threatened by the consequences of developments in Africa. Particularly since the beginning of the refugee crisis in mid-2015, this long neglected fact has finally reached those who make decisions on security policy in Germany, too. The effects of civil wars and other conflicts, corruption, mismanagement and overpopulation are primarily mass refugee movements towards Europe (with Germany a favoured destination), but also the growth of Islamist terrorism, which finds fertile ground for recruiting new members in the dissatisfaction of the masses. Ungoverned regions provide havens

for terrorism and organised crime. In turn, terrorism and crime are having a detrimental effect on the majority of the population's living standards, such that people are increasingly seeking a brighter future outside their own country. This downward spiral of war and economic decline has been evident in Mali since 2012. Even then it was clear that it is in Germany's interests to make an active contribution to the ceasefire and to restoring stability in Mali. Not only are German interests affected when it comes to avoiding mass illegal migration, which would overwhelm Germany's overall capacity and willingness to accept foreigners; it is also a matter of drying up breeding grounds for international terrorism, securing trade routes and helping to make West Africa a region where people have a chance of living in dignity. The protection of Mali's natural resources and people's livelihoods is therefore also in the vital self-interests of Germany and Europe.

The weakness of state institutions in Mali is primarily due to the ruling elite's lack of political will as regards taking effective steps to introduce reforms over the past decades, which would have legitimised political power and encouraged stronger economic development. This also – and particularly – applies to the security sector. Policymakers may call for a sustainable security architecture, but at the same time, they are extremely cautious when it comes to actually satisfying this demand by providing the adequate resources and skills.

**By focusing on security, other urgent topics such as employment and education will fall by the wayside.**

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Faced with the bleak situation in 2012 – to quote Denis Tull once again – the international community has, since then, rightly responded with a range of political, military and development-related assistance.<sup>18</sup> However, in view of the government's lack of initiative, it is time to set new standards for external aid. We must ensure

that the status of being an international security risk is not used to outsource urgently needed reform projects to foreign actors – in this case the French and German military – so as to avoid having to do something themselves. There is also a danger that, by focusing the discussion on security, other equally urgent topics such as health care, education and employment will fall by the wayside.

The causes of the ongoing crisis in Mali lie not primarily in the security sector, but rather in the lack of rule-of-law structures, inadequate infrastructure and high unemployment. Even the most ambitious military support mission can do little to tackle these persistent problems in the long term – a lesson that should have been learned from the disappointing results of the Afghanistan mission. Therefore, civilian and military instruments available for peacekeeping and development cooperation should be used in a systematic, coordinated way, including by Germany. This requires a well thought-out strategy that is adequately based on one's own political and economic interests. In light of the above-mentioned threat that African wars and conflicts pose for Europe, it is obvious that Germany's own interests are largely congruent with those of African nations. Political and financial engagement in Mali of course requires the willingness to enter into long-term commitments too, and if necessary in the face of public opposition at home. The situation in Mali and neighbouring countries will not change drastically in just a few years – neither in the security sector nor any other sector.

Another aspect to consider is the evaluation of the existing military engagement. To date, there have been a lack of opportunities to determine exactly who the Malian armed forces nominate in order to benefit from German military training assistance (such as EUTM). Moreover, at the end of their training, the participants are not followed up, and no checks are made to see whether the training was successful. The question of whether the quality of Mali's army has actually improved owing to the international training remains largely unanswered. And last



but not least, the question must be asked at the political level in Germany as to whether the *Bundeswehr* will be able to cope in the long term with the material and personnel demands of Mali in terms of equipment and training levels. The security policy challenges facing Germany have increased significantly over recent years. It does not take much political foresight to predict that this trend is likely to continue. The development of a coherent strategy and intensive coordination and communication with potential partners – inside and outside the European Union – should be a top priority when making foreign and security policy. This particularly applies to the difficult political and economic climate in the Sahel states in the medium term – and above all to Mali.

*–translated from German–*

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[Global \(In-\)Security](#)

# A New Stage in the Rivalry Between the Great Powers?

How China, India and the USA Are Competing  
for Influence in the Indian Ocean

[Peter Rimmele / Philipp Huchel](#)

As the geopolitical and geo-economic importance of the Indian Ocean continues to grow, economic and strategic interests threaten to make it a more frequent scene of rivalries between the great powers India, the USA and China. Along with the Pacific, the Indian Ocean is thereby one of the main stages for potential conflict between old and new powers. But the European Union, and especially Germany, should also be doing more to defend their interests in the Indian Ocean.

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During the Cold War, the Atlantic and Pacific in particular were considered key theatres of geopolitical conflict between the two superpowers, the USA and the Soviet Union. But in the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the (re-)emergence of Asia, particularly of China and India, has lent the Indian Ocean greater economic and security-related significance. Some observers believe the Indian Ocean is the world's most important ocean, the "center stage for the 21<sup>st</sup> century"<sup>1</sup>. "Whoever controls the Indian Ocean dominates Asia. [...] In the twenty-first century, the destiny of the world will be decided on its waters"<sup>2</sup> – at first glance, this quote, attributed to the former US Admiral Alfred Thayer Mahan, seems to overestimate the importance of the Indian Ocean. However, these words highlight its growing geo-economic and geopolitical significance and have shaped the strategic thinking of decision-makers in China and India.<sup>3</sup>

The Indian Ocean has particular geopolitical importance due to its role as a transit zone for the world's trade routes and because its narrow points of access are easy to control. These maritime chokepoints are not only important for trade, they are also critical points for global energy security. The two most important "maritime oil chokepoints"<sup>4</sup> are located in the Indian Ocean: the Strait of Hormuz and the Strait of Malacca. In 2015, 17 million barrels of oil passed through Hormuz and 15.5 million barrels through Malacca every day, representing 30 per cent and 26 per cent of all seaborne-traded oil.<sup>5</sup> The increasing economic importance of the Indian Ocean has led to more players becoming

active in the region. For example, the abrupt surge in piracy off the Somali coast since 2005 has highlighted the vulnerability of international shipping and prompted many nations to engage militarily in the region. Germany has been supporting the Atalanta counter-piracy operation for the protection of free seafaring off the coast of Somalia since 2008. China in particular has increased its economic activity in the region and in the last few years has also ramped up military operations, also to protect its investments and interests. India perceives this as a growing threat to its interests, which has led to an expansion of its own economic and military activities and an increased cooperation with other countries. Other countries, such as the US, Japan, Australia and France, also plan to or have already stepped up their involvement in the face of future rivalries between the great powers.

The Indian Ocean is extremely important to Germany because of the country's export-oriented economy. Germany depends on unfettered sea trade and the unhindered access to raw material and export markets in Asia. The growing rivalry in the Indian Ocean between the increasingly active great powers is a threat to maritime security and therefore to Germany's economic and security interests in maintaining maritime supply routes. During his state visit to India in March 2018, German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier stated in an interview that Germany "as a globally active trading power [...] has a keen interest in peace and stability [...], and increasingly in an open, safe

Indian Ocean”<sup>6</sup>. Germany’s strategic priority should therefore be to expand security policy cooperation with its partners in the region and, as stated in the White Paper on Security Policy of 2016, to continuously review and refine regulatory “agreements and institutions”<sup>7</sup> in the Indian Ocean and actively work to maintain them. As the geostrategic importance of the Indian Ocean continues to grow and, along with the Pacific, the ocean is increasingly becoming the stage for conflicts between great powers, it is therefore vital that effective institutions are implemented for preventing conflicts.

## The Indian Ocean is considered to be the most important ocean in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

### Growing Economic Importance of the Indian Ocean

The economic importance of the Indian Ocean will continue to grow in the coming years, though it is already considered “the world’s preeminent energy and trade interstate seaway”<sup>8</sup>. At present, some 50 per cent of global container traffic and 70 per cent of the world’s oil trade pass through the seaways of the Indian Ocean.<sup>9</sup> Roughly 30 per cent of all trade is handled in Indian Ocean ports.<sup>10</sup> The high economic growth experienced by countries that border the Indian Ocean – exemplified by India’s forecast 7.4 per cent growth in 2018 – indicate that the importance of trade will continue to increase in the coming years and decades.<sup>11</sup> India is particularly dependent on trade across the Ocean because of its geographic location. Access is blocked by Pakistan to the west and the Himalayas to the north, forcing it to import 80 per cent of its oil across the Indian Ocean, and to ship 95 per cent of its trade via this route.<sup>12</sup> However, trade between the countries of the region only accounts for 20 per cent of trading activity in the Indian Ocean. For countries outside this region, particularly Europe and the East Asian and Pacific

states, the Indian Ocean is of enormous importance for their trade relations. Trade agreements such as that between the EU and Japan and South Korea and the planned agreement between the EU and India will swell this main artery of world trade still further.

The Indian Ocean is also tremendously important for energy security. Every day, nearly 30 per cent of global oil seaborne trade and 30 per cent of global LPG seaborne trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz, which connects the Indian Ocean with the Persian Gulf. 80 per cent of this goes to Asian markets, mainly China, Japan, India, South Korea and Singapore. The Strait of Malacca, located between Indonesia, Malaysia and Singapore, connects the Indian Ocean with the South China Sea and the Pacific Ocean. For China, this is probably the most important chokepoint, as some 80 per cent of Chinese oil imports transit the Malacca Strait.<sup>13</sup> Along with China, this conduit is also of great importance to many other countries, as half of all the world’s ships would have to find an alternative route if the Strait of Malacca were to close.<sup>14</sup> The fact that the significance of the Straits of Hormuz and Malacca is likely to increase rather than decline is also due to China and India’s growing need for energy. By 2030, China will likely overtake the US as the world’s largest consumer of oil. And after 2025, India’s oil consumption is set to grow faster than that of China.<sup>15</sup>

Along with its monumental significance as a transit zone for goods and energy carriers, the Indian Ocean also has vast stocks of fish and minerals. Between 1950 and 2010, fish catches increased more than thirteen-fold to 11.5 million tonnes and aquaculture in the region has grown twelve-fold since 1980. Most of the fish stocks in the coastal regions have been overfished, but there are still large stocks of deep-sea fish. The sea bed also holds significant mineral deposits. Along with manganese nodules containing nickel, cobalt and iron, the Indian Ocean also holds sulphide deposits containing copper, iron, zinc, silver and gold. Various rare earths are also present in the Indian Ocean, though it is not yet

commercially viable to extract them.<sup>16</sup> Along with other nations, China and India are actively exploring and exploiting these resources and Germany has also been exploring sulphide deposits in the southwestern Indian Ocean since 2015.<sup>17</sup>

### **Increasing Geo-Economic Rivalry Through Connectivity Initiatives**

The establishment of initiatives for improved connectivity in the Indian Ocean region is changing its overall economic and political picture. The aim of these initiatives is to exploit economic potential, eliminate the current lack of infrastructure investment, achieve greater economic integration and gain influence. The main players, between which geo-economic rivalry has consequently increased, are China and India.

#### *China's Maritime Silk Road*

Perhaps the most significant connectivity initiative was launched by China in 2013. The “Maritime Silk Road” is a development strategy to boost infrastructure connectivity throughout Southeast Asia, Oceania, the Indian Ocean and East Africa and enhance China's interests. It is the maritime complement to the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which, with its other land-based elements, focuses on infrastructure development in Central Asia towards Europe. China's economic and strategic interests overlap in this initiative. It also has the aim of increasing China's influence in Asia. From an economic perspective, China is hoping to increase its exports, expand existing and open new markets, export Chinese technical standards, and reduce transport costs through improved connectivity and the possibility of eliminating overcapacity. Politically and strategically, the aim is to connect the previously economically weak western regions of China, shorten supply routes and reduce dependence on transport through chokepoints such as the Strait of Malacca. It is also an attempt by China to build closer ties between states and to take on a leading role in the region. To this end, China is focusing on

significant investment, expanding port facilities, constructing oil and gas pipelines and developing infrastructure projects along its maritime supply routes. Critics of the project have questioned the economic viability of these projects and to what extent they merely serve China's geopolitical intentions.<sup>18</sup> There are concerns that China's supposedly commercial investments could also be used for military purposes. There are also concerns that these large-scale investments are also structured in ways that could allow China to exert undue leverage over the domestic and foreign policies of heavily indebted recipient countries.<sup>19</sup>

The weight of the overlap between China's economic and strategic intentions is clear in a number of infrastructure investments. The expansion of the port of Gwadar in Pakistan is part of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which will connect the Chinese province of Xinjiang with the Indian Ocean in order to improve the province's accessibility and promote its economy. At the same time, however, the port is geographically close to the main supply line for China's oil imports from the Persian Gulf. Despite official statements that this is strictly for economic purposes, it can and will also be used militarily by the Chinese People's Liberation Army. Chinese investment in other ports, again supposedly for strictly economic reasons, has been followed by visits and deployments of warships and submarines, as has been seen in Colombo and Djibouti.

### **The Indian Ocean has vast stocks of fish and minerals.**

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High interest rates on Chinese loans have caused several countries to become heavily indebted as a result of the Silk Road projects in China. Sri Lanka is a prime example of how China can use this debt to gain more rights and thus more control. At China's urging, the government converted the debt into a controlling equity stake in the port of Hambantota and

**Fig. 1: Connectivity Initiatives of China and India**



— India's Land Corridor      — China's Land Corridor      — Gas- /Oil-Pipeline  
- - - India's Maritime Corridor      - - - China's Maritime Silk Road      ⚓ Ports

Source: Own illustration based on Center for Strategic & International Studies (CSIS), n. 18.

leased it to China for 99 years, ultimately giving China complete control over the previously financed infrastructure project. Similar cases have occurred with investments in the expansion of the port facilities at Gwadar in Pakistan, Payra in Bangladesh, Kyaukphyu in Myanmar and in the Maldives. As mentioned above, this

ultimately confirms concerns that China could exert pressure on indebted countries as a result of its loans. This has also led to tender processes for contracts in these port facilities being restricted to Chinese companies, which for all intents and purposes precludes free and fair competition.<sup>20</sup>

India is seeking to counteract China's growing influence in the region and in the Indian Ocean and boost its own dwindling influence by launching its own connectivity projects. However, compared to the Belt and Road Initiative and its "Maritime Silk Road" component, such initiatives are much smaller, more fragmented and more reactive in character.<sup>21</sup> These activities are mainly former initiatives that are being resumed or expanded, a result of India's lack of financial resources, human resources and administrative skills. In 2015 India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi put forward his vision for India's activities in the Indian Ocean with his concept of Security and Growth for All in the Region (SAGAR). India's objective with this vision is to create a climate of trust and transparency, to ensure all countries comply with international maritime rules and norms, to strive for peaceful conflict resolution and to enhance maritime collaboration.<sup>22</sup>

### **China's economic and strategic interests overlap in the silk road project.**

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In practical terms, India initially concentrated on its immediate neighbourhood in order to link this region more closely – a region that the World Bank calls the world's least integrated region.<sup>23</sup> Since 2015 the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has been paralysed by the conflict between Pakistan and India and was largely neglected by India in favour of the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). This organisation of countries that border the Bay of Bengal was established in 1997 and was given a new lease of life by India in 2016. Its main aim is to build closer ties between India, Bangladesh, Myanmar and Thailand, both economically and politically. A recent meeting of national security advisors discussed the need for investment



in infrastructure, security issues and maritime security in particular. In 2014 Modi upgraded the Look East policy, which had been in place since the early 1990s, to an Act East policy in



Limited means: India's prospects of offsetting Chinese influence remain low. Source: © Danish Siddiqui, Reuters.

order to strengthen cooperation with countries such as Japan and the ASEAN member states. India is also pushing ahead with the expansion of its own port facilities. As part of the Sagar

Mala Project, India is seeking to build six mega-ports and create special economic zones centred around them. It will also grant the ports greater autonomy in order to facilitate trade.



Perhaps the most ambitious project at the moment is the investment in the port of Chabahar in Iran. India is keen to bypass Pakistan and establish links to the countries of Central Asia – the India-Central Asia Transport Corridor – and to Russia – the North-South Transport Corridor. So far, however, only one grain delivery has been made to Afghanistan and no other successes have been reported.<sup>24</sup> The worst setback for India is probably the fact that Iran recently permitted China and Pakistan to use the port facilities, too.<sup>25</sup>

A new and previously unthinkable feature of India's foreign policy is the idea of working with its neighbours on projects in South Asia. Working with USAID in Afghanistan or the USA in the construction of overhead lines in Nepal would have been inconceivable just a few years ago.<sup>26</sup> Other projects include the expansion of the port of Trincomalee in Sri Lanka, planned jointly with Japan, and the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), also planned with Japan, which aims to link the African countries bordering the Indian Ocean more closely with the Asian region. However, all these projects are still at the draft phase.

## India is trying to counteract China's growing influence in the region with its own connectivity projects.

### Growing Geopolitical Rivalries

China's increased security commitment in the Indian Ocean is motivated by a desire to protect its maritime routes to the Persian Gulf, and therefore its oil supply. It also wants to secure its investment in the port facilities along the coast, which are intended to reduce its geo-strategic dependency on the Strait of Malacca. Over the last few years, China has not only modernised its armed forces and expanded its naval capacities, but it also stated in its 2015 Defence White Paper that its operations will

not only focus on protecting its coastline but also place more emphasis on the high seas.<sup>27</sup> China has been active in the Indian Ocean since 2009, initially combating piracy in the Gulf of Aden. Since then, it has significantly expanded its military presence and in 2016 it built its first military base outside its own territory, in Djibouti, though the Chinese claim this is merely a logistics centre and supply base. This is a distinct departure from China's previous policy of not deploying troops outside its own borders and clearly shows that China is prepared to engage militarily in order to defend its interests in the Indian Ocean. China has also expanded its military activities, docked warships and submarines in ports close to maritime supply lines, and sent out patrol ships under the guise of combating piracy. This has fuelled concerns in India and the US that China's investment in port expansion has been undertaken with a view to using them for military as well as economic purposes. China's actions in taking control of the port of Hambantota as described above also demonstrates that China is striving for greater freedom in the use of its maritime infrastructure in foreign countries. Its increasingly aggressive presence in the South China Sea, most recently through the deployment of missiles on the Spratly Islands, has also given rise to concerns that a conflict in the South China Sea could spill over to the Indian Ocean and that China could take a more offensive stance in the Indian Ocean, similar to its actions in the South China Sea.

In response to China's growing military presence, perceived as a "string of pearls" strategy, along with its encirclement by Chinese bases, and its own regional and global ambitions, India has ramped up its maritime capabilities in recent years. With its Maritime Security Strategy of 2015, India formally expanded its sphere of action in the Indian Ocean. In line with this, India has expanded its maritime capabilities with its own nuclear-powered submarines and the aircraft carrier *Vikramaditya*, which entered service in 2013. The country is currently expanding its fleet and another aircraft carrier is currently under construction, this time

in India itself. India has also strengthened its bilateral security cooperations. India has signed agreements to expand its military cooperation with the island states of Seychelles, Mauritius, Maldives and Comoros, and it has also installed radar stations for monitoring maritime activities in a number of countries, including Madagascar.<sup>28</sup> Senior officials from the USA, Japan, Australia and India also met in November 2017 to revive the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which had been interrupted due to differences of opinion on foreign policy. However, all the participating countries now seem to have generally accepted that this strategic framework is necessary due to China's growing military activities in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Military cooperation with the USA has also been expanded since the early 2000s. Its highlight is the annual Malabar naval exercise, in which Japan also takes part. Yet, despite its conflicts with China, India still refuses to enter a formal alliance to counter China.

### Despite the conflicts India refuses to enter a formal alliance to counter China.

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Following China and India, the USA is the most important strategic player in the Indian Ocean region. It has a number of major naval bases, and large naval units are stationed in the Persian Gulf, Djibouti and Diego Garcia. In view of the economic problems and China's increasingly aggressive behaviour, the USA is endeavouring to find strategic partners in the region. The USA is looking for allies to help counter what it perceives as China's attempts to challenge the existing world order. On the European side, France is particularly active in the Indian Ocean because of its overseas territories and has recently expanded its cooperation with India. In March 2018, French President Emmanuel Macron agreed with Modi that both countries would in future be able to use the naval bases for their fleets. Without referring directly to China, Macron made it clear that: "The Indian Ocean,

like the Pacific Ocean, cannot become a place of hegemony".<sup>29</sup>

As Macron's words suggest, the ramping up of activity, particularly on the part of China, has been accompanied by an increasingly unified view of the Indian and Pacific Oceans. Back in 2007, Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe spoke to the Indian Parliament of a "confluence of the two seas"<sup>30</sup>. Abe advocated that Japan and India, as like-minded democracies, should promote freedom and prosperity in the Indo-Pacific region. His vision was a region that includes not only the Asian states but also the United States and Australia; a region in which people, goods, capital and knowledge can move freely and unhindered. The strategy aimed to combine the economic dynamics of Asia and Africa and envisaged greater regional integration along the Indian and Pacific coasts through infrastructure development and improved connectivity. At the same time, this strategy represented a geopolitical counterweight to China's activities, which have the aim of establishing the country as a maritime power. The concept of the Indo-Pacific has become more significant over recent years. In the USA's latest National Security Strategy, the concept of the Indo-Pacific is found for the first time in an official US security document. The region is presented in a very stylised way as the scene of a struggle: "A geopolitical competition between free and repressive visions of world order is taking place in the Indo-Pacific region"<sup>31</sup>. This wording was also reflected in the speeches of US President Donald Trump on his first trip to Asia, during which he repeatedly stressed the importance of a "free and open Indo-Pacific". The idea behind this phrase is that in future the democratic Pacific rim countries in the Indian Ocean and the countries bordering the Indian Ocean in the Pacific should be more committed to security and the freedom of the high seas. This was also confirmed by former US Secretary of State Rex Tillerson when he spoke of viewing the region as a "single strategic arena".<sup>32</sup> This new description serves to curb China's activities in both the Indian and Pacific Oceans and



to unite the states that are concerned about this development.

The growing geopolitical rivalries recently emerged during the government crisis in the Maldives in February 2018, where China has become an important political player in recent years through major investments in local infrastructure and tourism.<sup>33</sup> In early February, the Constitutional Court of the Maldives ordered the release of political prisoners and overturned the sentences against the former president and other opposition politicians living in exile. President Abdulla Yameen responded by imposing a state of emergency. As a result, opposition politicians called for Indian intervention to restore political democracy in the Maldives. India, however, showed restraint and an Indian government official explained: “We must keep an eye on regional stability, while the consequences of intervention are never foreseeable”<sup>34</sup>. What he meant by this was clarified in an article in China’s *Global Times*. The article called for restraint from India and threatened that China would take any necessary steps should India intervene.<sup>35</sup>

### **Lack of Security Mechanisms Leads to Growing Insecurity**

The increasing rivalries in the Indian Ocean are fuelling insecurity and the risk of confrontation seems to be growing due to a lack of security mechanisms. The Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) is one organisation that counts most of the bordering countries as members. However, its activities and institutions are largely dependent on which country is currently leading it. Cooperation under the auspices of the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), which brings together the highest military forces of the navies of the bordering states and other

important states in the Indian Ocean, has also so far failed to yield any effective consultation mechanisms. The institutions and coordination mechanisms set up within the framework of anti-piracy missions are also threatening to disappear as the latter draw to an end, despite the fact that the common interest in securing trade routes was particularly evident here. The importance of the Indian Ocean as a major transit zone for world trade, the pressing need for all countries to protect their own sea routes, and the progress of globalisation – none of these have so far led these states to decide that such protection could be afforded more effectively by joint security efforts rather than by going it alone.<sup>36</sup> China’s activities in particular have created an environment of unpredictability and mistrust in the Indian Ocean. China’s strategy of using debt traps to blackmail other states, of using supposedly civilian port facilities for military purposes, and of deploying submarines in the Indian Ocean under the pretext of combating piracy (although they are clearly unsuited to this task) indicates that China is not interested in joint efforts but is mainly seeking to strengthen its own position, even if it is at the expense of others’ security. If China continues down this path, this will lead to a growing sense of threat – a feeling that already prevails in some countries, such as India – and as a result China’s opaque motives for action will in individual cases increasingly be perceived as hostile and directed against its own interests. This will lead to a counter-coalition of the states that feel threatened, and indeed the first steps towards this have already been taken through the reformation of QUAD. The USA’s stylised description of the rivalry as a competition between repressive and free world orders also points to a further escalation of conflict. It remains to be seen whether China will continue to fuel insecurity through its policies and ultimately provoke reactions from other states, or whether it will return to the rules of the liberal world order that made China’s rise possible, but it seems rather unlikely in view of its current activities in the Indian Ocean. It is therefore in the European and especially German interest to get more involved in stability of the Indian Ocean region. In addition to its

Playing with fire: Given the increasing rivalry between regional and global powers, the danger of a direct confrontation on the Indian Ocean is growing.  
Source: © Danish Siddiqui, Reuters.

strong economic interest, Germany also has an overwhelming interest in upholding its values by maintaining the freedom of the high seas and, above all, the liberal world order. Despite its geographical distance, with its commitment to Operation Atalanta, Germany has already demonstrated that it is ready to take action in the Indian Ocean to defend these interests.

*–translated from German–*

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[Global \(In-\)Security](#)

# Symbiotic Interactions

On the Connection Between Drug-Trafficking,  
the Legal Economy and State Power in Brazil

[Thiago Rodrigues](#)

The illegal drug trade in Brazil might not be as separated from the world of state power as one would like to believe. Rather, based on historical developments, a significant number of socio-politically entrenched, symbiotic interactions can be traced between the two. A focus on four aspects of this relationship illustrates how both sides seem to benefit from this arrangement.

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## Introduction

One of the most well-propagated myths regarding the practices of so-called organised crime groups in developing countries is the alleged existence of “parallel states” within the constituted states. This evaluation follows at least two analytical flaws. The first one derives from superficial or generalising statements on the territorial, economic, social, political and cultural influence or power of illegal gangs and groups. These accounts do not consider how material resources, scope, dimensions and actual capabilities to engage with political institutions and local economy vary. Such variations depend on a series of elements: the type of political regime in a particular country; the influence of powerful countries’ foreign strategies (such as the US ‘war on drugs’) on a given developing country government; the fact of being a major producing region of a certain kind of illegal commodity; or, otherwise, the fact of being ‘transit territory’ for illegal goods towards consumer countries, among other particularities.

The second problem is one of a political and economic nature. If one merely accepts the existence of different spaces of sovereignty within a country, the analysis fails to make sense of how the illegal groups have emerged; how they have spread their influence over some parts of the country, or sometimes over parts of cities; how they relate to the legal and illegal economy; how they connect to political institutions, such as the state’s bureaucracy, the armed forces, police forces, and political parties; and, finally, how ‘organised crime groups’ establish relationships both of collaboration and repression with local communities.

I claim, instead, that ‘organised crime groups’, the legal economy and political institutions establish a *symbiotic connection* and not a parallel or even necessarily competitive type of relationship. To be analytically coherent, it is mandatory not to universalise this assumption, assuming a global standard for this *symbiotic connection*. For that reason, this paper proposes a study that focusses upon the Brazilian case, with some punctual comparisons with other Latin American countries (such as Colombia and Mexico), given the formation and transformations of the drug-trafficking economy in the country since the late 1970s until the present day. Firstly, we are going to clarify some important conceptual aspects regarding the illegal economy and its organisations. Secondly, we are going to apply the proposed analytical framework to the Brazilian case in order to encourage further studies on Brazil’s drug-trafficking dynamics, and to garner possible clues to understand how symbiotic connections could operate in other countries and continents.

## Symbiosis: The Illegal Economy and the Legal Authorities

The historian Charles Tilly compares the emergence of the European nation-states, between the 14<sup>th</sup> and 16<sup>th</sup> centuries, to the mode of how mafias operate.<sup>1</sup> According to Tilly, a state is, in its most vertebral nature, an institution that provides security in exchange for an amount of money, threatening to use coercive force to punish those who harm or wish to harm another’s life or property: the basic “service” every single mafia offers to a given population. To be respected, such an organisation must have the



credible ability to use force, and to collect part of social wealth in order to sustain its activities. This is, in other words, the essence of sovereign authority, i.e. the capability to establish rules, to enforce these rules, to fight emergent concurrent forces, to control a given territory and its population, and to confiscate part of the economic production.

Following Michel Foucault's<sup>2</sup> analysis on the same subject, the centralisation of political authority in the hands of a group (a political and economic elite) is a violent process of centralisation of political and economic power. The solemnity and legitimacy of state institutions was established alongside the victories of certain forces over others: when philosophers, historians, painters, sculptors, theologians and men of law developed theories and aesthetics dedicated to offer divinity or civil acceptance to the authority of a king or an aristocracy.

Later, after the liberal revolutions of the 18<sup>th</sup> century, and the deep economic and demographic transformations produced by the Industrial Revolution, the nation-state model would add other political elements to the first generation of "protection-centric" activities. According to Foucault's research on that particular historical period, the "art of governing" increased populations and accelerated the production and circulation of goods. It also focussed upon people's general quality of health, hygiene of cities, levels of education, capacitation for industrial work, general order and discipline of the poorest, and other practices which he named the "biopolitics of population", i.e. the politics of governing both the individual and collective body and life (*bios*) of a given society.

The expansion of industrial capitalism – considering the accumulation of wealth during European naval and colonial expansion between the 15<sup>th</sup> and the 17<sup>th</sup> centuries, as well as 19<sup>th</sup> century imperialism in Africa, Asia and Oceania – took place in a twilight zone in-between legal and illegal practice. These practices included: piracy and human trafficking (slavery and economic migration); the contraband of goods;

the collection and the unlawful collection of taxes; colonial conquering and the genocide of numberless peoples; the following destruction of many ecosystems. The global economy that emerged in the 19<sup>th</sup> century would not have been possible without the symbiosis between legal and illegal activities, both from private actors (companies, banks, individuals) and states (violation of international conventions, support to some economic sectors, warfare in the name of economic and geopolitical interests, etc.).<sup>3</sup> In sum, neither the nation-state nor the contemporary capitalist global economy would be possible without the existence of this symbiotic connection between the legal and the illegal.

### **The expansion of industrial capitalism took place in a twilight zone in between legal and illegal practice.**

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Regarding the subject of this paper, the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the emergence of a new and powerful chapter of this symbiotic connection when a set of psychoactive drugs were prohibited in a growing number of countries. Until the 1910s and 1920s, drugs such as cocaine and heroin were produced, sold and used legally, worldwide. Important pharmaceutical companies, of mainly European and American origin, fabricated and commercialised drugs in a global economy, which integrated regions and countries where the raw materials were produced (such as the Andean region for the coca leaf, and India and Turkey for poppy cultivation) with the countries where these substances were processed, sold and consumed (such as the US, England, Holland and Germany).

However, a quick and broad process of control and/or prohibition of the free production, selling and use of some drugs then occurred. This followed a number of international conferences, in which countries such as the US, Brazil, France, and China, among many others, demanded the



In the crossfire: The fractioning of drug-trafficking in Rio led to an increasing level of violence among the different drug-trafficking organisations in order to control the most strategic favelas. Source: © Ricardo Moraes, Reuters.

reduction or complete suspension of the economy and social habits centred around drugs like cocaine, heroin and marihuana<sup>4</sup>. The diplomatic delegations expressed the views of a complex combination of conservative lobby and pressure groups (religious denominations, evolutionist hygienists), as well as the varied concerns surrounding national biopolitical problems, regarding the control and government of an increasing urban proletarian population both in the North (the US and Europe) and in the South (Mexico, Brazil, Argentina, and China, among others).

The celebration of international conventions, the subsequent adaptation of national legislations, and the inclusion of drug controlling into the universe of the international community (first in the League of Nations, and after 1945, in

the United Nations) globalised the prohibitionist legal framework. This aimed at the complete halt of the production, selling and use of some drugs (such as cocaine, heroin and marihuana), while limiting the market for others (such as morphine and amphetamines). Nevertheless, the radical goal of Drug Prohibitionism has never been accomplished, despite the many reforms into the international regime of drug regulation, and despite the effort led by the United States, since the late 1960s, towards the securitisation of the illegal drug economy.

As the history of Alcohol Prohibition in the US (between 1920 and 1933) teaches us, the goal of total suppression of selective parts of the psychoactive economy produces a potent illegal market, conducted by criminal groups which collude with state agents (policemen, judges,

the military, elected representatives, mayors, city councillors, etc.) which are coopted by a combination of bribery and threat. Such criminal groups also establish local bases where they operate. In producing areas, the illegal organisations connect themselves with local farmers, which are, in general poor people to whom the illegal economy offers better remuneration than that of legal crops. Clandestine laboratories hidden in remote regions also gather people seeking better economic opportunities. In urban areas where illegal drugs are sold, gangs and local drug-trafficking organisations (DTOs) receive the illegal substances delivered by gross DTOs

and prepare them (mainly by adulteration) for the final buyer. There are many other DTOs and mafias of various provenances (such as the Italian Cosanostra, the Nigerian mafia, the Russian mafyas and the Chinese Triades), some with enough power to control international routes, border checkpoints, as well as port and airport facilities. Such groups have the capacity to distribute drugs internationally, accumulating economic power and political influence in order to manage their business.

The global illegal drug economy is a free market in which groups celebrate alliances, or fight one



Burning drugs: There would not be such a gigantic global illegal economy surrounding some psychoactive drugs were they not prohibited. Source: © Tomas Bravo, Reuters.

another, depending on the context. According to Sarmiento's and Krauthausen's<sup>5</sup> model, there are bigger chances of violent confrontation in the consumer flank, where the number of illegal groups tends to be higher, and the competition for the market generates cruder disputes for territories and clients. The case of Mexico is singular, since its congruity to the most important world market, the US, put its DTOs in a position to violently compete for territories within the country. Such territories are used to produce raw material (poppy and marihuana), establish laboratories for drug refinement (methamphetamines, heroin, cocaine), control ports to receive drugs and synthetic precursors, and, finally, control passages (tunnels, submarines, boats, etc.) across the Mexico-US border.<sup>6</sup>

It is possible, therefore, to notice transterritorial connections between producing areas, routes of illicit flows, and urban spaces occupied by local DTOs. In each one of these territories it is possible to identify a certain degree of articulation among and between criminal groups, the local population, local authorities, private entities, etc. The force and wealth of this illegal economy draws people and institutions in by means of economic seduction, fear, violence, threats, and offers of social support (healthcare, pensions, entertainment facilities, sports centres, etc.). The control over territory and the population is important for any mafia or DTO as a means to keep safe havens for their operations and their survival and reproduction. They form *enclaves* of authority within a given sovereign state in which the state forces and institutions cannot operate, or are able to do so only after the criminal heads' clearance. Remembering Tilly's and Foucault's arguments, we can see how DTO enclaves function following a state-like model, since the state itself has a mafia-like historical DNA. However, to say this is not the same as to acknowledge the existence of a "parallel state" within the legal state.

In the next section, we shall indicate four aspects of the symbiotic connection in the drug-trafficking economy, focussing upon the Brazilian context.

**1. The business attains its success from the drug prohibition:** there would not be such a gigantic global illegal economy surrounding some psychoactive drugs if they were not prohibited. Healthcare professionals, psychiatrists and social workers have recognised, since the 1980s, that the mere existence of laws against the production, selling and usage of some drugs do not suffice to diminish the voracity for those substances. In econometric terms, the demand for psychoactive drugs is inelastic, i.e. it obeys a logic related to individual idiosyncrasies and the social collective process in some ghettos or circles of society, among other elements. Besides that, for some substances, such as the opioids, there is the most significant stimulus driven by psycho-physical addiction. For that reason, securitised strategies towards the increase of wholesale prices of illegal drugs do not reach the desired goals of a decrease in consumption, but instead open windows of opportunity for more dangerous and adulterated drugs to be brought to the market. In sum, Drug Prohibition creates a strong illicit market without diminishing the demand for those drugs: this is the first symbiotic connection between illegality and the existence of drug-trafficking.

**The vast majority of the people involved in the drug-trafficking economy are poor, under-educated, with low life expectancy.**

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**2. Some drug-dealers may be rich and famous, but none of them "free":** a well-off drug-dealer is a rare figure. We know the most famous, notorious or quaint of them, such as Pablo Escobar Gaviria and Joaquín "El Chapo" Guzmán. They became myths and characters fit for television series, books and movies. However, they are the exception. The vast majority of the people involved in the drug-trafficking economy are poor, under-educated, inhabitants of slums, with low life expectancy. They are the

people who kill and are killed every single day in the streets of the American continent. These drug-dealers do not have access to the global interconnected financial mazes and networks of electronic money transfers and off-shore havens. The poor drug-dealers are responsible for small fractions of a transterritorial business over which they have neither knowledge nor control.

They are constantly combating police forces, the military or gang rivals trying to defend their own territories, or to expand them by conquering new ones from the competition. They are, in fact, young men and women with no concrete opportunities in the legal economy who find a way to live through the drug-trafficking way of life. They cannot come out of their controlled slums and neighbourhoods without great risk of being arrested and murdered. They are confined to some territories and established contacts with the “exterior” through a network of lawyers, civilian supports, and corrupt state agents, such as policemen (from whom they usually buy guns, machine-guns, ammunition, grenades and other equipment). This is the most simple and lowest level symbiotic connection between legal and illegal activities: poor drug-dealers negotiating weapons and some privileges with under-paid and under-trained police and military soldiers. Sometimes, a well-known drug lord, such as “El Chapo” Guzmán is arrested, extradited, and convicted, but they are the exception that confirms the rule. There is also inequality in the world of drug-trafficking: the “big fish” do not live in favelas but operate complex financial transactions from fancy neighbourhoods around the globe, exposing the symbiotic connection between the illegal money from the drug trade and the legal or barely legal activities in the world of global finance.

**3. The “Drug Enclaves” do not defy state power as a whole:** in countries such as Brazil, Colombia and Mexico it is possible to identify several regions in rural and urban areas ruled by DTOs. In those areas, as mentioned above, the illegal organisations reproduce the state-like type of government, providing services while punishing misdemeanours. Nevertheless, it would be

an exaggeration, in Latin America, to ascribe to these DTOs and their enclaves any kind of traditional political claim for political sovereignty. In general, what occurs is quite the opposite: through bribery and unofficial agreements between DTOs and state representatives, the illegal groups seek to establish a balance of power with state forces – and sometimes among the DTOs themselves – dividing zones of influence and markets in order to provide maximum profits with minimum necessary confrontation. In sum, both a ‘war against the cartels’ and ‘wars among the cartels’ serve to bring more losses (of life, goods, security for the bosses and their families, as well as their legal/money laundering investments, etc.).





Display of horror: The exhibition of their victims' bodies is a typical drug cartel practice. Source: © Reuters.

Characters such as Pablo Escobar, who directly defied the Colombian state and the drug lords from the Cali Cartel, spreading a pseudo-ideological and nationalistic rhetoric are exceptions. They invariably attract the attention and special repressive efforts of the state, and are subsequently destroyed, while the illegal economy of drug-trafficking prospers. The most powerful drug *capo* does not have fire power to withstand focussed attacks from military forces (especially when supported by US military training and technological consultancy).

Labrousse and Koutouzis<sup>7</sup> proposed a typology to measure the relationship between DTOs and state structures. They distinguished between

“Official Narcocracies” and “Unofficial Narcocracies”. The former would be the rarer case, in which high governmental staff – including the president and his/her ministries – would be directly involved with drug-trafficking. General Hugo Bánzer’s dictatorship in Bolivia (1980-1983) and the current Guinea-Bissau situation are examples of this case. The latter case would occur when high governmental figures have involvement in the drug trade, but the official discourse is nonetheless aligned to the global “war on drugs”. This would be the case of Paraguay, Mexico and Myanmar. Nonetheless, both official and unofficial narcocracies are the exception, not the norm. In general, DTO bosses do want to influence the political

environment – from the local to the national level – but not by seizing power. The shadow of illegality is more convenient and lucrative. Their intention is to keep the symbiotic connection that impulses their illegal transactions.

**4. DTOs are usually born inside the prison system and have made of it their castle:** the *Salvadoreñas Maras* gangs, both in the US and in El Salvador, the commandos in Brazil, the *cartels* in Colombia and Mexico were born within a space of direct connection between the prison systems and the urban areas controlled by the same groups who are imprisoned. The gangs virtually control and govern the prison facilities, even holding negotiations with the prison's directors and the governmental security authorities. Inside the prisons, the DTOs create laws of conduct and enforce them with an iron fist. Contact with the exterior world is facilitated by the illegal use of mobile phones and computers, as well as through communication with attorneys and family members. If some internal governmental decision or action outside the prison walls bothers the capos, violent protests arise. These usually include the destruction of pavilions and the invasion of rival areas provoking multiple assassinations by mutilation, and the subsequent grotesque exhibition of body parts, such as arms and heads. The arrested leaders are, in general, able to maintain control over outside activities, conducted by "lieu-tenants" who are still in charge in the *barrios*, *comunas* or *favelas*.

In Brazil, for example, the beginning of drug-trafficking activities, in the early 1980s, was related to the formation of a group called *Comando Vermelho* (Red Commando) born in a super-max prison on an island nearby Rio de Janeiro. The history of the Red Commando is emblematic, since it originates from the contact established between bank robbers and kidnapers on the one hand, and leftist guerrilla members who were arrested during the 1970s, while fighting the dictatorship (1964-1985), on the other. These two groups were charged and convicted with the same crime, since the *guerrilleros* used to assault banks and kidnap businessmen

and foreign diplomats in order to gather money for their cause and to call for national and international attention. During the period of coexistence in that prison, knowledge was shared between the two groups, especially regarding tactics and urban guerrilla.

When the transition to democracy began, after 1977, the leftist inmates started being released, while the poor (and mainly black) non-politicised inmates remained imprisoned. In order to survive in a very hostile environment, marked by disputes amongst gangs, those prisoners used the organisational skills they had learnt from the *guerrilleros*, and violently controlled the super-max facility. Because of their contacts with the communist militants, the new gang was named "red commando" by the prison authorities. Not so much time later, the Red Commando (or CV, in the Portuguese acronym) had infiltrated many of Rio's slums (*favelas*), combining a social rhetoric and assistencialist practices towards the impoverished population with illegal activities, such as robbery and kidnapping. It was the beginning of the 1980s, and the flourishing economy of Andean cocaine attracted the new CV leadership. The group started distributing Andean cocaine for the Brazilian market and – in cooperation with European mafias, and later African DTOs – began facilitating the passage of cocaine through Africa towards the European market.<sup>8</sup>

### Between the 1980s and 1990s, new drug-trafficking organisations and markets emerged.

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From the late 1980s until the late 1990s dissidences within the CV gave rise to new organisations, such as the Third Commando (*Terceiro Comando*) and the Friend's Friends (*Amigos dos Amigos*, ADA). The fractioning of drug-trafficking in Rio led to an increased level of violence among the DTOs in order to control the most strategic *favelas*, the most interesting local

markets, and the most profitable contacts, with Peruvian and Colombian drug-traffickers, as well with European and African mafias.

In 1993, within the São Paulo state prison system, another group was formed: the *Primeiro Comando da Capital* (the Capital City's First Commando, or PCC in the Portuguese acronym). In their first moments, the PCC presented similarities with the first years of CV activities in Rio. They published manifestos in defence of inmate rights and started ruling the inside life of facilities under their control, punishing acts of violence, such as rape and robbery amongst prisoners.<sup>9</sup> The PCC, however, gradually expanded its influence over the São Paulo prison system, as well as the São Paulo favelas and poor periphery neighbourhoods. At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the PCC had already gained control over the entire São Paulo prison system, as well established a form of *pax criminalis* in the previously violent poorest neighbourhoods of the city.

### **At the turn of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, the PCC had already gained control over the entire São Paulo prison system.**

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In 2006, the PCC demonstrated its power when it undertook a coordinated series of attacks against policemen, fire-fighters and other members of security forces, while simultaneously taking control of several prison facilities across the state. They wanted to avoid the isolation of their leader, Marcos “Marcola” Camacho, in a super-max prison. The state government threatened, and then accepted their demands. Since then, the PCC has established connections with European criminal organisations, as well direct contacts with Andean DTOs. In 2016, they brokered an alliance with the CV, and have initiated an ambitious project with the goal of controlling all organised crime in country. They intend to do this by making alliances with local gangs in the North and Northeastern regions of Brazil, and by invading Rio de Janeiro after celebrating

a cooperation agreement with ADA. Rio de Janeiro has been in turmoil since then, which announces the possible beginning of a new phase in the history of Brazilian organised crime, power and influence.

### **Final Remarks**

Since July 2017, Rio de Janeiro has been under military intervention. The state's governor formally asked for the presence of federal troops, assuming the incapacity of the two branches of local police (the Civilian Police and the Military Police) to cope with the “drug war” in the city. The Ministry of Defence promptly deployed Army and Marine troops to occupy avenues, streets and to siege favelas controlled by DTOs, especially the ones under CV rule. This situation was further intensified when, in January 2018, the state government gave up its functions of public safety, and an actual military intervention started in Rio. The secretary of public safety was substituted by an Army General and troops arrived to support police activities in the capital city and the whole state.

The mass media stressed the “chaos” in Rio, comparing the state to a failed country, unable to rule itself. This situation opens a new panorama for the security analysis on Brazilian organised crime, since it follows the expansion of a mafia-like group – the PCC – and the subsequent militarisation of public safety, which affects primarily the “old” and “less professional” commandos. The fight for the control of drug-trafficking and other illegal activities occurs simultaneously in the favelas, peripheral neighbourhoods, and behind prison bars. We may be witnessing the emergence of a new kind of symbiotic connection between organised crime groups, the military, and police state forces, – not forgetting the local organisations, NGOs and think tanks that operate in areas under violent dispute. Drug policy reform in Brazil is, however, stifled by conservative opposition, and not given priority, the focus being on other issues of political instability that have been affecting the country. The traditional patterns of “criminalisation of poverty” – which



articulate racist punitivism, police violence and mass incarceration – remain firm and immovable, while the numbers of homicides grow by each year. The notion of symbiotic connections could be useful to avoid the questionable concept of a “weak state”, at least when talking about complex and highly institutionalised societies such as Brazil (and most of the Latin Americans). The important message, finally, is to critically face the idea of a “parallel power” when talking about organised crime, and, in particular, drug-trafficking in Latin America. This analytical displacement would allow us to see the problem from another angle and, by doing so, propose better-informed actions that could have a real impact for the most vulnerable parts of societies, worldwide.

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[Global \(In-\)Security](#)

# Invisible Enemies

Why Viruses and Bacteria Constitute a Security Policy Issue

Daniela Braun

Epidemics and pandemics are hardly a thing of the past. In fact, it is quite the contrary, as the risk of rapid spread of infectious diseases is greater than ever before. For this reason and because of their drastic socio-economic consequences, epidemics and pandemics are increasingly being assessed through the prism of security. This makes health a matter of national security – and some people are still not happy with this idea.

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## Preface

Health crises such as the rapid spread of dangerous infectious diseases are increasingly being brought into the context of security and stability. For example, the German Federal Government's 2016 White Paper on Security Policy and the Future of the Armed Forces (*Weißbuch der Bundesregierung zur Sicherheitspolitik und zur Zukunft der Bundeswehr*) makes mention of pandemics and epidemics as a threat to regional stability. In the US, health has played an important role in strategy documents on foreign and security policy since the early 2000s. The background to this development is that globalisation and the increased movement of people and goods have raised the risk of serious epidemics and pandemics to an unprecedented level. At the same time, past serious health crises, such as the Ebola outbreak in West Africa in 2013, have shown the severity of the burden epidemics can place on state structures and supply systems, as well as such crises' ability to ultimately destabilise those systems. Nevertheless, critics doubt that health is a security issue. They believe that modern epidemics do not endanger state stability and that the consequences of increasing security – the illumination of health from a security perspective – are harmful to global health and security policy. This article examines the debate on health security – the security policy view of health – and argues that health does indeed have great relevance to security. What is worrying here is that, although health security is mentioned in important strategy documents, it has thus far scarcely seen any policy implementation on the ground.

For example, the global community remains inadequately prepared for the outbreak of a new epidemic or pandemic. This is particularly alarming given that the question is not whether we will see an epidemic or pandemic in the coming years, but when.

## Pandemics – As Old as Mankind

2018 marks the 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the outbreak of one of the most severe pandemics in modern times. The Spanish flu spread twice around the world between 1918 and 1920, infecting one in three people and killing an estimated 50 to 100 million, or 2.5 to five per cent of the world's population at the time. The pandemic affected the course of the First World War and influenced political events in other parts of the world.<sup>1</sup> While the Spanish flu is only one example, it is particularly indicative of the destructive power of epidemics. The Black Death, or bubonic plague, spread along the travel and trade routes from Asia to Europe in the 14<sup>th</sup> century, killing about one third of the world's population. Even before that, epidemics and pandemics had always influenced human civilisations, brought down empires, and changed the course of battles and wars.

However, the consideration of health issues as an element of national or international security is a relatively recent development that began only in the late 1990s.<sup>2</sup> Previously, health was considered exclusively as an issue of low politics and security threats were essentially limited to external military threats.<sup>3</sup> The 1990s ushered in a change that can be attributed to two trends.

First, the overall understanding of security expanded after the end of the Cold War; security policy was no longer solely understood as fending off external military threats. New issues, such as terrorism but also climate change, were increasingly recognised as threats to security and stability. The focus shifted increasingly towards the connection between development policy and security, and concepts such as the networked approach gained in importance. The reference object for security – the group of people for whom security was to be guaranteed – was also expanded. The state was no longer at the centre of security policy considerations, as notions such as the Human Security concept, which provides for an individual approach, show.<sup>4</sup> On the whole, the understanding of security was broadened in the 1990s, and became much more comprehensive than it had been during the Cold War.

### **The Return of Epidemics**

Another trend ensuring that the health security concept prevailed is a phenomenon, which experts described as the “return of modern epidemics”.<sup>5</sup> From the 1980s onwards, infectious diseases increased again and spread rapidly across national borders. Some of these diseases were deadly pathogens, such as HIV/AIDS and SARS, which had previously been unknown. But even diseases that had long been regarded as eradicated, such as the plague, cholera, or diphtheria, re-emerged and caused great uncertainty.

The shock was particularly deep because the assumption in the 1960s and 1970s had been that the age of epidemics was over. Many experts were of the opinion that infectious diseases would be gradually controlled and eradicated in the coming years thanks to medical progress. Safe vaccines, the widespread availability of antibiotics, and significant advances in medicine fuelled this hope. The return of modern epidemics, especially the appearance and incredible destructive power of HIV/AIDS, brought medical optimism to an abrupt end.

The reasons for the return of epidemics are manifold. For one, microbes are extremely adaptable to external conditions and are constantly evolving.<sup>6</sup> For example, the use of antibiotics has led some microbes to develop complex survival strategies making them resistant to many types of antibiotics. For another, various megatrends associated with globalisation are greatly multiplying the extent of infectious diseases.<sup>7</sup>

Infectious diseases have always spread via trade and travel routes. The increased mobility of goods and people has also greatly increased the speed and geographical range of epidemics, which in turn led to a dramatic rise in the general risk of infection. The SARS pandemic in 2002 and 2003 made it particularly clear just how rapidly and widely an infectious disease can spread in a hyper-connected world before the international community even realises what it is dealing with – let alone being able to respond appropriately. From Hong Kong, SARS spread to three other continents within two days, resulting in over 8,000 cases of the disease and over 770 deaths worldwide and causing significant socio-economic damage and great uncertainty among populations.

### **The risk of rapidly spreading infectious diseases is higher today than ever before.**

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Steady population growth is another reason for the increased occurrence of modern epidemics. As the world population grows, so does the number of potential hosts for pathogens. Whereas in 1950 there were 2.5 billion people on earth, the figure is currently around 7.6 billion. By 2050, an estimated 9.7 billion people will populate the world.<sup>8</sup> At the same time, urbanisation is reducing the geographical distance between these people, further increasing the risk of infection. Insufficient hygienic conditions, such as poor or contaminated drinking water supplies and a lack of waste disposal in megacities, are ideal reservoirs for the spread of pathogens.

The escalating destruction of the environment is also associated with an increased risk of pandemics and epidemics. This is because many dangerous pathogens can pass from the animal kingdom to humans. So-called zoonoses are transmitted to humans ever more frequently because of environmental degradation, since humans penetrate previously undiscovered reservoirs and this increases their exposure to exotic animals. It is highly likely that the devastating Ebola epidemic in West Africa from 2014 to 2015 was caused by a bat that transferred

the deadly virus to an 18-month-old boy in the province of Guéckédou in southern Guinea.<sup>9</sup>

Contrary to the assumptions of the medical optimism that prevailed in the 1960s and 1970s, we live today in one of the most dangerous times in terms of the rapid spread of infectious diseases. The former Director-General of WHO, Gro Harlem Brundtland, describes the current conditions of diseases as follows: “Today, in an interconnected world, bacteria and viruses travel almost as fast as e-mail and financial



flows. Globalization has connected Bujumbura to Bombay and Bangkok to Boston.”<sup>10</sup> Bill Gates, who works with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation to fight diseases worldwide, also says, “We’ve created, in terms of spread, the most dangerous environment that we’ve ever had in the history of mankind.”<sup>11</sup> These highly favourable conditions for viruses and bacteria are leading to a disturbing shift in the sensitive relationship between humans and microbes. Never before in history have new diseases developed as rapidly as they do today, at the rate of

about one per year.<sup>12</sup> Professor Stefan Elbe, who is conducting research on infectious diseases through the prism of security at the University of Sussex, says, “The medical optimism of the twentieth century has thus been displaced. We have entered a new era of deep microbial unease.”<sup>13</sup>

### Health Security – What Does It Mean?

Health Security is a concept that considers this development and deals with health issues from a security point of view. Exactly what it entails depends on the perspective of the actor. There is still no generally accepted definition. What is certain, however, is that health issues have been on the agenda of national security institutions since the late 1990s. This development and the presence of the security paradigm in the health policy debate, clearly show that what were previously two strictly separate areas – health and security – have moved closer together.

In essence, three narratives are mentioned time and again in the security policy debate on health issues.<sup>14</sup> One is that pathogens today can spread very quickly, sometimes unnoticed, due to the strong networking of the world as explained above.

A second narrative is driven by the fear of a deliberate use of pathogens, either by terrorists or by state-funded bioweapons programmes. The anthrax attacks in the US in 2001, brought this danger very much to the attention of Western decision-makers. The reawakened fear of the use of bioweapons has led to a worldwide increase in so-called biodefence programmes since 2001. However, the majority of high-security laboratories today not only research the intentional use of pathogens, but also the natural occurrence of disease outbreaks. Paradoxically, the increase in these programmes, the development of high-security laboratories with the associated materials, and the intensification of research have contributed to a higher risk that bioweapons will be used, since dangerous pathogens can be stolen from these laboratories, or accidents can occur at these facilities.<sup>15</sup>



Rapid reaction force: Mega-cities in particular, where many people live together in a small area, create ideal conditions for pathogens to spread rapidly.  
Source: © Tyrone Siu, Reuters.

The growth in research on dangerous pathogens, and in particular the progress in the field of gene synthesis, increase the risk of dual use when research results are published and the necessary materials become commercially available. Most recently, a heated debate arose in July 2017 about the publication of the research results by a Canadian research team, which had reconstructed horse pox, – that were extinct in the wild – in the laboratory. The DNA building blocks were legally purchased from a large German company. Although horse pox is not dangerous to humans, experts assume that creating a synthetic variant harmful to humans would be relatively easy.<sup>16</sup>

### Health problems have the potential to destabilise states or even entire regions.

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The third narrative propounds that the drastic socio-economic effects of epidemics endanger state stability. This idea intensified with the debate on HIV/AIDS. The January 2000 meeting of the UN Security Council is regarded as one of the most important milestones in the securitisation of health. For the first time in the history of the United Nations, a health problem – the rapid spread of HIV/AIDS – was discussed as a security threat. The connection between health and security is very direct in the case of HIV/AIDS, since the operational capability and military clout of many armed forces in sub-Saharan Africa, is endangered by their HIV/AIDS rates, some of which are very high. Yet, other socio-economic effects of the disease also give cause for concern with respect to security.<sup>17</sup> In his speech before the UN Security Council, then Secretary General Kofi Annan stressed that the drastic socio-economic consequences of HIV/AIDS threatened state stability: “By overwhelming the continent’s health services, by creating millions of orphans and by decimating health workers and teachers, AIDS is causing social and economic crises which in turn threaten political stability.”<sup>18</sup>

At the core of the health security concept is the recognition that a health problem can destabilise a state or even entire regions due to its dramatic impact on the economy, social coexistence, state welfare systems, and trust in state institutions. This also means that not every health problem automatically poses a security threat. Only diseases that have the potential to undermine social and national coexistence pose a threat that is relevant to national security. For this reason, the security policy discourse to date has been limited almost exclusively to communicable diseases that cause acute and particularly serious damage – that is, diseases giving rise to especially severe symptoms or with a high mortality rate. However, it is not only a question of how serious the damage is, but also of how disruptively it occurs. Non-communicable diseases such as diabetes, cancer or cardiovascular diseases already account for a greater burden in emerging and developing countries alike.<sup>19</sup> Another decisive element of the security policy discourse, however, is how acutely damage caused by the disease occurs. The more immediate the damage, the higher the potential to massively disrupt state welfare systems and social coexistence. As a result, highly infectious diseases with a high mortality rate and severe acute symptoms are those usually perceived as security threats.<sup>20</sup>

#### Health Security – A Controversial Concept

Treating health problems as a security threat is also heavily criticised for a variety of reasons, however. One is that health is not a matter of national security, since modern epidemics have yet to trigger an immediate state collapse. Even though HIV/AIDS or the Spanish flu were particularly serious pandemics and resulted in immense numbers of deaths, critics argue such diseases have (to date) never completely destabilised any state.<sup>21</sup>

Critics also warn of the consequences and dangers of treating health as a matter of national security. Humanitarian and development actors argue that the pursuit of health policy goals in developing and emerging countries should not

merely favour the strategic interests of Western countries, but instead is to be treated primarily as a human rights issue. Commitment to global health should be guided more by humanitarian principles than by security considerations. Security concerns do not lend themselves well to sustainable health promotion, and their ascendancy opens the door for authoritarian measures if security policy motives and instruments come to play an important role in global public health. Criticism is mainly directed towards the military's increased commitment to health, as humanitarian and development policy actors fear it will undermine political neutrality, which is vital for their survival. The increasing violence against hospitals and medical facilities in war zones, is also being closely linked to the securitisation of health.

Critics from the security policy camp believe that health crises represent a lesser threat than traditional national security concerns do; they sneer at the idea of health security. They often still believe health to be an exotic and relatively unimportant security concern. They also fear that the additional remit of health will further exhaust security policy resources. When it comes to military operations in health crises, some fear the likelihood of an increased 'mission creep'.

Aside from these critical voices, the military does in fact play a role in many areas of global health, such as the research, control, and surveillance of a wide range of dangerous diseases by the American laboratories belonging to the Navy Medical Research Unit (NAMRU).<sup>22</sup> Most visible, however, is the military commitment to health that involves combating acute health crises, such as Ebola in West Africa and Zika in Brazil. As is the case when responding to natural disasters or humanitarian crises, the military mainly took on logistic tasks and – as regards Ebola – trained personnel in dealing with the disease. Acknowledging the role of the military and efforts to discover where the military already provides added value in global health, in what areas the involvement of the security sector is beneficial, and where the military should

not intervene, needs to be discussed in an open, evidence-based manner, free of taboos and ideologies.

### **Health Is a Security Concern**

This criticism can be countered by the fact that health problems do indeed represent a massive security threat because they have the potential to destabilise states, societies, and regions. Even if, as critics argue, no state has completely collapsed as a result of a modern epidemic, past outbreaks of infectious diseases have unequivocally demonstrated their potential for immense disruption to societal and state functions. Furthermore, critics of the concept of health security seem to forget that all the trends leading to the return of modern epidemics, such as the interplay of globalisation, mobility, and population growth, will continue apace in future and that the scale and number of epidemics and pandemics will most likely increase. Today, diseases that used to terminate of their own accord, reach urban agglomerations more quickly due to greater mobility and can spread exponentially from there.

### **The fact that the threat posed by Ebola was underestimated for a long time had devastating consequences for West Africa.**

The West Africa Ebola crisis showed this connection very clearly. Experts underestimated the extent of the epidemic in West Africa for so long because previous Ebola outbreaks in remote regions of Central Africa usually terminated quickly, or it was possible to interrupt the infection chains in time. This was not the case in West Africa in 2014, as the virus quickly reached populous regions.

In the main countries affected, the already-weak health sector almost completely collapsed due to the great burden caused by Ebola and led to dramatic repercussions on general medical



care that are still felt over the long-term. Public life came to a standstill because schools, public squares, and markets closed, but also because people feared infection. Food became scarce and prices rose dramatically given that farmers too were affected by the epidemic – they fell ill, died, or fled their farms – and fields could not be cultivated. Economic productivity and trade collapsed due to the panic triggered by the illness and because workers became ill, died, or were caring for relatives. Businesses, banks, hotels, transport companies, and almost all sectors of the economy cut back or shut down their operations completely. Internationally, the countries most affected became increasingly isolated, since other states closed their borders, no longer allowed citizens of the three countries to enter, and suspended travel and trade in the region.<sup>23</sup> In Liberia in particular, the imposition of a quarantine and a dangerous mixture of deep mistrust of state institutions and panic caused by the deadly disease, resulted in riots and violence against security forces and health workers.<sup>24</sup>

The legitimacy of state structures will also be increasingly called into question if, in the wake of an epidemic or pandemic, as in the case of Ebola, the state can no longer maintain public services or security; leading to a collapse in the public order. If trust in state institutions has suffered long-term damage due to epidemics, this may still have ripple effects many years after health crises have been overcome.

The West African Ebola outbreak was certainly one of the most drastic examples of the link between security and health in the recent past. Other health crises, such as SARS 2002-2003, also seriously impaired trade, the economy, and travel to name a few. The economic ramifications of the pandemic had a deep impact on states such as Canada and Singapore.

On the academic side, Andrew Price-Smith, professor at Colorado College, examined the empirical relationship between health and security. In two extensive studies, he demonstrated that a large number of infected people have a

significantly negative impact on governmental capacities and stability.<sup>25</sup>

In view of the fact that the above-mentioned megatrends such as global mobility of people and goods, population growth, urbanisation, and environmental degradation, will further increase in the future, the risk of epidemics and pandemics will also continue to rise. This will also amplify the danger to stability and security.

### Unprepared and Vulnerable

The Ebola crisis in West Africa should never have reached such proportions and it shows us how unprepared and vulnerable the international community is in the fight against epidemics and pandemics. As early as March 2014, it was known that the West Africa outbreak involved Ebola's deadliest form, Zaire, an infectious disease which had been researched since the 1970s. It still took the World Health Organisation until 8 August 2014 to declare a Public Health Emergency of International Concern, however.<sup>26</sup> Moreover, Ebola is not a particularly contagious disease, since it can only be transmitted directly from person to person, and not through the air. Some experts went as far as to say just how lucky we are that it was *only* Ebola. If a known, non-airborne disease could wreak such havoc, one dreads to think what devastation a novel, highly contagious, deadly virus might cause.

### Important health infra-structures are chronically under-financed.

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The epidemic in West Africa was an urgent wake-up call to intensify efforts in the fight against global epidemics. In the period immediately after the epidemic, it seemed as if Ebola had actually been a game-changer. Numerous high-level panels, lessons-learned events, and papers with reform proposals were published and discussed, and important reform processes



Flu vaccination: Reacting quickly and appropriately to the outbreak of a pandemic requires more than just sufficient vaccines. Source: © Reuters.

were initiated, such as those implemented by the WHO. The introduction of the World Bank's Pandemic Emergency Financing Facility or the EU's European Medical Corps, were also important steps in the fight against global epidemics. Nevertheless, according to a World Bank report in May 2017, most countries are, at present, insufficiently prepared for the outbreak of a pandemic or epidemic.<sup>27</sup> For example, important health infrastructures that make it possible to detect the outbreak of dangerous infectious diseases early on, such as laboratories, but also emergency centres, are chronically under-financed and neglected. Monitoring especially in countries with particularly dangerous hotspots as regards the development and spread of infectious diseases falls short of what is required.

Especially in the case of flu, experts warn that there is a danger of a worldwide pandemic. Such an outbreak would occur if a new type of influenza virus were transmitted from animals to humans, and developed the ability to transfer from one person to another. People are particularly concerned about H7N9, the deadly avian influenza, which repeatedly occurs in chickens and wild birds in China, and has been transmitted to humans from time to time. In the winter of 2016/2017, 759 people in China fell ill with H7N9, 281 of whom died as a result of the disease. Influenza viruses can mutate particularly rapidly with the risk of person-to-person transmission. The influenza virus that caused the Spanish flu also mutated several times before triggering the serious pandemic that lasted from 1918 to 1920.<sup>28</sup>

## Health Security as an Opportunity

Putting the international community in a position to respond quickly and appropriately to epidemics and pandemics is one of the greatest challenges of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Substantial financial resources and comprehensive reforms are needed. The costs incurred from failing to make these preparations and allowing epidemics to continue to endanger social and political stability, will be considerably higher.

An important step in the fight against global epidemics would be to recognise that health is a security issue. Health security must be not only placed on the political agenda, it also needs to be strongly integrated into policy-making as well. The concept of health security has given health policy issues higher priority in social discourse, increased attention, and provided a broader spectrum of actors and considerably more resources. Security policy actors, approaches, and instruments can play an important role in improving efforts to counter global epidemics. However, none of this will be possible unless it is accepted and backed by concrete policy measures. This does not mean that the security policy approach in the fight against epidemics and pandemics is some sort of 'silver bullet', or that it does not pose any risks, but that security policy actors and approaches ought to be incorporated in preparation for epidemics. The trend is clear: epidemics and pandemics are a real threat to security and stability in the hyper-connected 21<sup>st</sup> century. We cannot afford to ignore this fact any longer.

*–translated from German–*

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[Other Topics](#)

# Is Islam a Part of Eastern Europe?

Thoughts on History, Religion, and National  
Identity in the Eastern EU Countries

[Alexander Beribes](#) / [Leo Mausbach](#) / [Johannes Jungeblut](#)

The refugee crisis revealed lines of division in the EU that had previously been hidden, especially with respect to the eastern member states. The discussion in Germany often fails to take sufficient account of the variety of experiences and perspectives in these countries. One significant explanatory factor for the reaction to the reception of refugees from Islamic countries is the historic understanding of national identity.

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The EU expansion eastwards was intended to finally remedy almost half a century of European division. However, in light of the refugee crisis and conflicting views it brought about on the placement of asylum seekers, stereotypes are returning, dividing in media discourse our continent into “progressive and tolerant Western Europeans” on the one hand and “backward Eastern Europeans” on the other. Despite the fact that populist and Islamophobic parties have even been successful in Western Europe as well, it is crucial to examine the matter in a nuanced light when considering the eastern part of the EU.

The purpose of this article therefore is to illustrate several explanatory approaches, the intent of which is to better understand the social and political framework conditions that shape relations with Islam and Muslims in eastern EU countries. To this end, the states in question are divided into three groups: the Visegrád Group, the Baltic States, and the EU members in Southeast Europe. Within these groups, the focus will be on Poland, Lithuania, and Bulgaria.

This article does not claim to establish general truths about the relationship of mainstream society to Islam in all eastern EU countries. Rather, the intent is to encourage a nuanced study of this complex and multifaceted issue through a mosaic of approaches. Particular attention will be paid to historic developments and internal and foreign policy. The results should serve to provide objectivity to a frequently emotionally-charged debate.

### **Visegrád Countries**

The Visegrád Group, founded in 1991 and still at a lower level of institutionalisation, consists of Poland, Slovakia, the Czech Republic, and Hungary. After the four countries achieved membership in NATO and the EU, interest in the cooperation declined. It experienced no significant revival until the European refugee crisis of 2015.

What especially unites the four East-Central European countries is their objection to the majority decision of the Council of the EU Ministers of the Interior of 22 September 2015 regarding the placement of refugees. One justification for this stance is the assertion that those seeking asylum from predominantly Muslim countries pose a security threat from which citizens must be protected.

For example, in the autumn of 2015, the president of the Czech Republic, Miloš Zeman, characterised the refugee flow as an “organised invasion”<sup>1</sup> and made it clear in a number of interviews that he did not deem it realistic to integrate Muslim refugees. In the autumn of last year, he emphasised that he would rather do without EU subsidies than accept refugees.<sup>2</sup> Fidesz, the party of Viktor Orbán, who was re-elected Hungary’s prime minister in April of 2018, even plans to declare the redistribution of refugees unconstitutional via an EU resolution as long as it does not receive explicit approval by the Hungarian parliament.

The governments of the Visegrád countries can count on support from large swathes of their populations for restrictive refugee policy. There are a number of reasons for this.

## Politically, East-Central Europeans do not feel that they are equally treated within the EU.

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First, people have little contact with Muslims in their everyday lives.<sup>3</sup> Their most central source of information is therefore the media, whose portrayal of the Islamic world has been heavily influenced by terrorism and the wars in North Africa, the Middle East, and Afghanistan for many years. After their countries joined the EU in 2004, many East-Central Europeans migrated to Western Europe and came in contact with people of the Islamic faith for the first time. The heated debates on integration, parallel societies, and Islamic fundamentalism often reinforced existing reservations, but did not seem to affect the Visegrád states directly. This changed with the looming refugee crisis. After September 2015, Poland, for example, saw a balance between advocates and opponents of granting asylum to refugees from the Middle East and Africa.<sup>4</sup> As the number of refugees grew, however, concerns of becoming inundated grew. Hungary was in the centre of the action and later participated in the closing of the refugee route through the Balkans. Germany's crisis management was often perceived in the Visegrád states – quite contrary to the self-image of German policy-makers – as ruthless and irrational, since it allegedly overlooked concerns and made moral convictions absolute.

The refugee crisis fostered still deeper differences between old and new EU member states. Even today, the experience that the noble aims professed by the Communists usually concealed deceit, injustice and lack of freedom means that justifying policies using values-based arguments arouses suspicion among many in the

former Communist part of Europe. For instance, shortly after the German Chancellor's decision to grant entry to refugees stranded in Budapest, absurd conspiracy theories emerged purporting to expose Angela Merkel's "true" motives. Trust in the effectiveness of Hungary's own nascent national institutions also remains lacking. Although a modest level of prosperity has been achieved after difficult years of transformation and a rising middle class has emerged, great social inequalities persist. Every achievement seems fragile. The persistent lagging behind Western Europe is also agonising. Instead of native businesses, the cityscape is dominated by international chains and companies. Politically, East-Central Europeans do not feel that they are treated equally in the EU. In view of the Nord Stream natural gas pipeline and its planned expansion, which entirely bypasses the transit countries in East-Central Europe, many find German calls for solidarity less than credible.

Given inter alia these concerns, there is a growing conviction among the Visegrád states that their restrictive approach is the only one that represents responsible handling of the refugee crisis. This is clearly formulated in the Hungarian Visegrád presidential programme of 2017/2018.<sup>5</sup> Slovakia holds the rotating presidency for 2018/19. The only Euro member in the Group often strives to fulfil the role of mediator between the other three countries and the European Commission. At an April meeting with the new prime minister of Slovakia, Peter Pellegrini, Commission president Juncker expressed optimism that the relationship with the Visegrád countries "could enjoy continued improvement when Slovakia assumes the presidency on 1 July".<sup>6</sup> This could become significant in the context of the ongoing negotiations over the reform of the Dublin Regulation.

A closer examination of Poland is beneficial because of the country's political and economic prominence within the Visegrád Group. Poland is also Germany's second-largest neighbour and its most important trade partner in Eastern Europe. In the aftermath of the two Chechen wars in the 1990s, Poland absorbed almost





Need for orientation: The identity defining the Catholic Church in Poland is deeply divided on the refugee issue.  
Source: © Damir Sagolj, Reuters.

90,000 Chechen refugees, of which an estimated one in ten remained.<sup>7</sup> At the time, solidarity in view of the fierce Russian conduct of the war and the desire to enter the Western community of nations played a role. Although granting asylum to these people garnered a certain public awareness, it never led to conflict within Polish society. It was only the spotlight of the refugee crisis that triggered controversy over asylum seekers from Chechnya. It was primarily politicians on the right who capitalised on the fear of

Muslims and stoked it. Parliamentary elections were held in Poland at the end of October 2015. The victory of the national-conservative Law and Justice (PiS) was also due to the fact that, unlike the liberal Civic Platform (PO) which had preceded it as the ruling political force, the PiS strictly opposed the reception of refugees.

There are not many historic references to Islam in Polish history. In the 14<sup>th</sup> century, the Muslim Tatars settled in what was then Poland-Lithuania,



which is why one occasionally comes across picturesque wooden mosques from the 19<sup>th</sup> century in Poland, Lithuania, and Belarus. The so-called Lipka Tatars assimilated over the course of the centuries, which is why today there are few Poles who identify themselves with this minority. The Turkish siege of Vienna in 1683, when a Christian army under the command of King John III Sobieski defeated the Ottomans, has an even stronger effect on the image of Islam in Poland. The rescue of Vienna by iconic Polish Winged Hussars created the myth that Poland is an *antemurale christianitatis*, a “bulwark of Christianity”, and the feeling that Europe owed Poland something.

This motif returned in the perception of the 1920 Battle of Warsaw, the “Miracle of the Vistula”, in which the Red Army’s western advance was stopped, a feat that, according to an interpretation of events popular in Poland, amounted to saving Europe from Bolshevism. What the country is most conscious of, however, is the experience of the Second World War, in which Poland’s Western allies provided no effective support against the German attack and accepted a partition of the European continent when the war was over. In doing so, they left the country *de facto* in the Soviet sphere of influence, a fact that Poland perceived as betrayal. Europe is in Poland’s debt: given this view, acceptance into the EU and the associated support for economic development is merely the fulfilment of a moral obligation.

In times of foreign rule, it was the church that preserved the national consciousness like in a cocoon. This has made Catholicism part of Polish identity. In Poland, the Catholic Church still possesses an authority that should not be underestimated. It is deeply divided on the question as to whether Poland should grant asylum to refugees from Muslim countries.

For instance, Bishop Piotr Libera warned in September 2015 that Polish history teaches, “If you once let a stranger into your house, a house that you have just built, a small house, a weak house, you can cause yourself great misfortune.”<sup>8</sup> The

Primate of Poland, Wojciech Polak, the symbolic head of the Polish church, has repeatedly expressed support for the openness of Pope Francis and said that he would suspend any priest in his archdiocese who participated in a demonstration against refugees.<sup>9</sup>

## The East-Central European countries are united by the constant threat to their national independence.

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One historical experience that East-Central European countries share is the constant threat to national independence.<sup>10</sup> The devastation of the Second World War was followed by almost a half-century of Soviet domination. After the fall of the Iron Curtain, hope arose that, by joining NATO and the EU, the country could finally escape this geopolitical dilemma: Europe was to be a safe haven of national sovereignty, not its incremental abrogation. Populists were adept at capitalising on these growing fears and moods. The resistance to the so-called forced quotas became a symbol of perceived emancipation from Western European paternalism. It scarcely mattered that the requirement of the Visegrád countries had been reduced to a gesture of solidarity in the form of relatively small refugee groups.

### Baltic States

The Baltic States are often underestimated in the political debates on EU cohesion. Only experts give their political positions the recognition they deserve.

Estonians, Latvians, and Lithuanians all look back on an eventful history. Foreign domination and the resulting injustices long governed societal conditions. In 1918, after the end of the rule of the Tsars in Russia and the redrawing of political borders in the aftermath of the war that broke out in 1914, new states arose in Europe – among them the Baltic republics.

Unlike Estonia and Latvia, Lithuania was able to construct a national identity based on, among other things, its own state traditions from the Middle Ages.

The failure of the political elites to establish harmonious cooperation 100 years ago created difficult conditions for the realisation of socio-political potential. The primary reason in domestic politics was that the democratic form of government in the Baltic States – given the circumstances – was unstable and allowed an authoritarian style of government to assert itself.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, the tense Polish-Lithuanian relations also affected Estonia and Latvia, so that the countries were unable to present unified positions in the context of their foreign policies.

Due to the Hitler-Stalin Pact, people in the Baltic States fell once more under the influence of occupying forces centred in Moscow and Berlin, that, among other things, suppressed the cultural wealth of the just approx. 20-year-old republics, and robbed the people of their identity. The millions of crimes committed by the National Socialists changed Northeast Europe as well.<sup>12</sup> The experience of Soviet occupation that lasted for about half a century still influences the way the Baltic States perceive themselves.

After the collapse of the socialist economic and societal order, the governments of Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania pursued a principle that might be summed up as follows: “As much integration into the Euro-Atlantic structures as possible!” For instance, all three countries are also part of the eurozone.

In the years since the Baltic States joined the EU and NATO, they have been challenged by a variety of problems – ultimately, 2015 drastically changed the language used within the Union so that uncalled-for and defamatory positions became part of the political debates. Right-wing populists are currently represented in the parliaments of many countries of the EU.

In the Baltic States, strong minorities are present. Many ethnic Russians live in Estonia<sup>13</sup> and Latvia<sup>14</sup>, and in Lithuania, also many Poles.<sup>15</sup> What is not well-known is that Muslims have lived in the Baltic region for several centuries. This is particularly true of Lithuania. The oldest mosque, built in 1815, is in the village of Keturiasdešimt Totorių, near Vilnius.

Until the Holocaust, Lithuania was one of the centres of Judaism in Eastern Europe. The capital Vilnius was given the nickname “Jerusalem of the North”. The Lithuanian parliament commemorated this fact in a resolution on 10 May 2018. The resolution called for the history of the Jews in Lithuania to be comprehensively memorialised<sup>16</sup> in 2020 on the occasion of the 300<sup>th</sup> birthday of Vilna Gaon.<sup>17</sup> So far, Islam has been unable to match this multiculturalism Judaism once enjoyed both in Lithuania and either of the two other Baltic States.

## Lithuania’s political leadership has expressed openness to granting asylum to refugees.

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The Muslims who live in Lithuania are primarily Lipka Tatars, a group which has not influenced the country’s national identity as it developed historically so far, not least because of its insignificant numbers. Mainstream society also had hardly any contact with Muslims, which is why there are cultural barriers. The proportion of Muslim Tatars has remained at about 0.1 per cent since the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>18</sup> The situation is quite similar in Estonia and Latvia.

The September 2015 decision of the Council of the EU Ministers of the Interior to place refugees among member states has been perceived differently in Lithuania. Society rather rejected the decision reached in Brussels. However, Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevičius emphasised in the same month that Vilnius was sympathetic to efforts to place the load on the shoulders of the entire EU.<sup>19</sup> This meant that

the political leadership set the idea of solidarity within the European community above the principle of sovereignty. From a Lithuanian perspective, this decision was an advised and foresighted one, since Lithuania and the other two Baltic States benefit greatly from the solidarity of their allies. It should also be mentioned that it is not rare for refugees to leave the Baltic States in hope of being granted a protection status in Western European countries.

From the beginning of the refugee crisis, it was clear that solidarity was the top priority for Lithuania. An in-part painful history prompted the post-socialist political elite of the country to approach modern national identity from the perspective of a comprehensive multilateral declaration of solidarity. It is therefore illuminating that Lithuania's President Grybauskaitė, in a speech given during a visit by German President Steinmeier to the Baltic States in the summer of 2017, spoke of the "spirit of responsible solidarity" which Germany and Lithuania would preserve together.<sup>20</sup> Reading between the lines, the statement meant that solidarity in practice also meant reaching decisions that are controversial in society.

Estonia fulfils the NATO goal of spending two per cent of its national GDP on defence. Current forecasts indicate that Latvia and Lithuania will meet the alliance goal this year.<sup>21</sup> All three Baltic States are also maintaining their debt levels below and their deficit above the Maastricht limits. The decision to grant asylum to (Muslim) refugees is in line with these efforts.

Trust and reliability are stable resources in international relations. The Baltic States are conscientious in fulfilling their obligations in order to render entirely superfluous any accusations of having been lacking solidarity. Following Russia's annexation of the Crimean Peninsula, the political leadership in Vilnius is conscious of the fact that, in a crisis, the country is entirely reliant on support from its NATO allies.

## Southeast European EU States

Even after the closing of the Balkan route, the EU states of Southeast Europe continue to be considered transit countries for refugees and migrants on their way to Central and Western Europe. They have little significance as destination



countries themselves. Compared to the transit figures on the Western Balkan route for 2015/16, the route across the Turkish-Bulgarian border or from Turkey across the Black Sea to Romania played no significant role. Nevertheless, all Southeast European member states are located in the transit corridors, are thus hit harder by

(potential) migrations than many other EU countries and are therefore reliant on European solutions.

But the problems of transit countries are fundamentally different from those of destination countries. While destination countries are



Newcomers: Since the beginning of the refugee crisis, transit countries such as Bulgaria have been pressing for a joint solution to the protection of Europe's external borders. Source: © Stoyan Nenov, Reuters.

concerned with long-term social, economic, and political effects of refugee and immigration waves, transit countries face other challenges. Prominent among these challenges is an effective border regime, which involves, among other things, combating corruption – including within the countries’ own border protection authorities.<sup>22</sup> Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia are all desperate to enter the Schengen area and are therefore dependent on convincing other member states that their border regimes work well. Schengen member Slovenia, a transit country that was also greatly engrossed during the height of the refugee crisis, considers itself to be a “very good protector of the Schengen border”.<sup>23</sup>

### **In Bulgaria, Islam has stronger historical and institutional roots than in any other eastern EU country.**

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With respect to the composition of societies in the eastern states of the EU, Bulgaria occupies a special position. More than any other country in the region, its history and institutions have Islamic influence. For that reason, Bulgaria will be given special attention below.

While the Borisov government supported the distribution of refugees from Italy and Greece in 2015, it has said that Bulgaria will not participate in further relocations within the framework of the EU-Turkey agreement. The political leadership is taking steps to make permanent residence difficult, but also to prevent refugees from crossing the border in the first place. For instance, a residence requirement was introduced in 2017. On top of that, the Turkish border was patrolled not only by the border police, but by the military as well. Right from the onset, the Bulgarian EU Council Presidency in the first half of 2018, which also marks the debut of a South-east European state at the head of the Council of Ministers, was marked by the promotion of joint solutions for the protection of the external borders of the European union of states.

Although forecasts show that Bulgaria will not be a destination country for refugees and migrants in the foreseeable future, Prime Minister Borisov warned in 2015 that “Muslims coming from the outside could change the country’s demographics”.<sup>24</sup> These concerns are surprising because Bulgaria’s 15 per cent<sup>25</sup> Muslim population represents the highest share of Muslims of any EU country, and the number of Muslim refugees is comparatively negligible. Borisov combined his statement with assurances that mainstream Bulgarian society had nothing against the Muslim minority in the country.

This put Borisov in line with a widely-held view. Society and the media regard external influences on Bulgarian Islam as dangerous, view them with little differentiation, and confuse them with topics such as Jihadism and Wahhabism, even though Bulgaria’s Grand Mufti, Dr Mustafa Haji, exercises strict control over external influences.<sup>26</sup> Imams who were trained in Arab countries must gear their teachings to the beliefs of Bulgarian Muslims. The Office of the Grand Mufti strives toward a form of Islam that maintains its Bulgarian character. Participation in the political decision-making process also promotes Bulgarian Muslims’ self-image. This is made clear by the “Movement for Rights and Freedoms”, for instance, a de facto party of the Muslim minority. It was already part of the government for two full legislative periods (2001 to 2009, the Saxe-Coburg-Gotha and Stanishev cabinets) and again from 2013 to 2014 (the Oresharski cabinet).

The first Muslim settlers date back as far as the 11<sup>th</sup> century. After it was conquered by the Ottoman Empire in 1392, the area remained under Muslim rule for five hundred years – but Christians were able to maintain their cultural and religious identities across the centuries. Muslims in the area that covers modern-day Bulgaria adopted regional habits and customs. In some places, Christians and Muslims still share pilgrimage sites. The unquestioned dominance of the Ottomans ended with the Russian-Turkish war of 1877/1878 and the Congress of Berlin. The Principality of Bulgaria was liberated from

the Ottoman Empire. It attained de facto independence, though not de jure. In the aftermath of the demise of the Ottoman Empire and its defeat in the First Balkan War, the Principality of Bulgaria expanded its territories. There were forced conversions of the Muslim population with the intent of radically changing existing majorities.

Like the Bulgarian Orthodox Church, Muslims suffered from limitations on religious freedom during the Marxist-Leninist domination, which reached its peak in 1984. Todor Zhivkov, Bulgaria's head of state from 1954 until November 1989 and First Secretary of the Bulgarian Communist Party, pursued a policy of radical assimilation into Bulgarian mainstream society. Muslims were forced to adopt Bulgarian names and abandon Muslims habits and customs. During this time, hundreds of thousands of Muslims left the country and emigrated to Turkey. The end of socialist rule meant the end of this assimilation policy. The Bulgarian parliament sent a strong message in 2012 by condemning this policy without a single dissenting vote.<sup>27</sup>

### **In Bulgarian society, worries about radical Islamist influences from outside are widespread.**

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In contrast to the West Balkan countries, even the transition and instability of the 1990s did not bring any conflict motivated by religion or ethnicity. Today, almost all Bulgarian Muslims are Bulgarian citizens as well. Muslim opinions indicate a clearly secular influence. For instance, religion does not play an overly large role in the lives of most Muslims, and more than 70 per cent of them say they want a pluralistic society. The approval rate among Christians asked was less than 50 per cent.<sup>28</sup> Islamist tendencies have so far been seen almost exclusively in a small group of Muslim Romani. A symbolic step was taken when the ban on full-face veils was passed with cross-party support in 2016. So although native,

historically developed and institutionalised Islam is considered a part of Bulgaria, there is still concern about radical influences from outside.

Islamophobic attacks reported from Bulgaria<sup>29</sup>, as well as right-wing parties trying to include fear of radicalisation and terrorism in their agenda do not necessarily imply general scepticism towards Islam or the majority Muslim states. For example, Bulgarians have favoured EU admission for Turkey in the past at significantly higher rates than Germany or France. The central government's policy in previous years was characterised by communication and dialogue. Efforts to avoid a societal separation into Christian and Muslim groups were the central thrust of the meeting between Borisov and the Grand Mufti in 2015. The Prime Minister emphasised, "We have a wonderful model of peaceful coexistence. It is our responsibility to preserve it."<sup>30</sup> Rumen Radev, Bulgaria's president, emphasised in March of this year that it is important for the state to support Muslim religious communities financially to prevent foreign interference. Islam in Bulgaria ought to develop on the foundation of its own traditions.<sup>31</sup>

### **Conclusion**

The various reactions of the Northeast European, East-Central European, and Southeast European states to the refugee problem ultimately reveal the heterogeneity of the eastern part of the EU. This situation can be traced back to the various compositions of these individual societies, deviating domestic and foreign policy circumstances, various historical experiences (including occupation), and disunity concerning what the core principles of the EU ought to be.

The governments in Tallinn, Riga, and Vilnius agreed to the EU distribution mechanism primarily on the basis of a sense of solidarity across all areas of action. The Baltic States are dependent on their NATO partners, especially in matters of security policy, and therefore declared their support of the principle of solidarity in the context of the refugee issue. Although Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and the East-Central



Not representative: Despite repeated instances of Islamophobic attacks in Bulgaria, the case cannot be made that this has given rise to a general skepticism towards Islam. [Source: © Stoyan Nenov, Reuters.](#)

European countries have had some similar historical experiences, their attitudes towards and treatment of Muslim refugees vary. The example of the Baltic republics has the potential to invalidate the uncompromising positions of the East-Central European states.

The situation in the Southeast European member states is different today. Bulgaria, Romania, and Croatia continue to be especially impacted as transit countries and still seek to enter the

Schengen area. To do so, they must demonstrate a functioning border regime in order to remove any grounds for reservations about their admission.

Despite the many differences, there are also similarities, especially those arising from their common history of transformation. It is important to remember that the new and re-established states that have arisen after the collapse of the socialist economic and societal order have only



also commemorating the founding of Czechoslovakia 100 years ago. Within German society, the significance of 1918 for our neighbours is often underestimated. For them, it was the beginning or the renaissance of an independence of which they were violently dispossessed two decades later. This experience of the possibility of losing everything so quickly creates identity and influences political thinking.

The refugee crisis has revealed hitherto unseen societal lines of division throughout the EU. No one should make the mistake of seeking simple explanations for these conflicts. Instead, the focus should be on the overall picture so that connections that are not obvious at first glance can be recognised. At its core, the problem is not solely refugees. Challenges seldom addressed during the first three decades after the fall of the Iron Curtain are now at the centre of attention.

The societal discussions triggered in Germany by the refugee crisis can lead to a better understanding of and greater empathy for our eastern neighbours. The challenge is to be much more conscious than we have been of the wealth of experience and unique potential of our own German, particularly East German, stories of transformation. No other Western European country can play a comparable mediating role between the old and the new EU member states. It is therefore Germany's responsibility to take its place as a rational voice in this highly emotional debate and to search for common ground with the eastern EU states.

*–translated from German–*

been independent for about 30 years. Societies that have experienced such radical transition, often accompanied by suffering, apply different values than societies that have lived in stability and prosperity for decades.

2018 is a special year for many states in Eastern Europe. The people of Poland, Estonia, Latvia, Lithuania, and other countries are celebrating the centennial of the regaining of their independence. The Czech Republic and Slovakia are

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- 1 Neue Zürcher Zeitung 2015: Flüchtlingsstrom ist laut Zeman "organisierte Invasion", 6 Nov 2015, in: <https://nzz.ch/1.18642349> [17 May 2018].
- 2 Cf. Willoughby, Ian 2017: Zeman: Loss of EU subsidies better than forced acceptance of refugees, Radio Praha, 6 Sep 2017, in: <http://radio.cz/en/article/524661> [17 May 2018].
- 3 The share of Muslims in the population varies from less than 0.1 per cent in Poland to 0.4 per cent in Hungary. Cf. Pew Research Center 2017: Europe's Growing Muslim Population, 29 Nov 2017, p. 4, in: <http://pewrsr.ch/2zABqwg> [17 May 2018].
- 4 Cf. Public Opinion Research Center (Centrum Badania Opinii Społecznej) 2017: Stosunek Polaków do przyjmowania uchodźców, in: *Komunikat z Badań*, No.1/2017.
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- 6 Cf. Gotev, Georgi 2018: Juncker upbeat on Slovak presidency of Visegrad, Euractiv, 13 Apr 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2LZqjTp> [17 May 2018].
- 7 Cf. Stummer, Krisztián 2016: Forgotten Refugees: Chechen asylum seekers in Poland, in: *Political Critique*, 11 Feb 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2tevIiH> [19 Jun 2018].
- 8 Cf. Wilgocki, Michał 2015: Uchodźcy jak Krzyżacy. Bp Libera: Jeśli wpuścisz obcego do słabego domu, możesz sobie zgotować wielką biedę, *Gazeta Wyborcza*, 21 Sep 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2lOfT3F> [17 May 2018].
- 9 Cf. *Newsweek Polska* 2017: Prymas abp Wojciech Polak chce karać księży, którzy wystąpią przeciwko uchodźcom, 18 Oct 2017, in: <http://bit.ly/2te3vYi> [17 May 2018].
- 10 After its partitioning by Prussia, Austria, and the Tsarist empire of Russia, Poland vanished from the map for 123 years. In 2018, the country celebrated the re-establishment of its nationality one hundred years ago. Hungary and Czechoslovakia were also granted national status at the same time.
- 11 Antanas Smetona in Lithuania, Kārlis Ulmanis in Latvia, and Konstantin Päts in Estonia are leading political personalities that should be mentioned in this context.
- 12 The fact that all three republics maintain trusting relationships with Germany is by no means a matter of course and should not be seen as such. Germany's assumption of the leadership role for the multi-national task force in Lithuania as a framework nation in NATO's Enhanced Forward Presence programme is an expression of the partner relationship. The commitment of Germany's armed forces 73 years after the end of National Socialism is a significant component of security in the Baltic region.
- 13 In 2017, around 330,000 ethnic Russians lived in Estonia (around 25 per cent of the society). Cf. *Statistics Estonia, Population by ethnic nationality*, 1 January, years, 9 Jun 2017, in: <http://www.stat.ee/34278> [17 May 2018].
- 14 In 2017, around 500,000 ethnic Russians lived in Latvia (around 41 per cent of the society). Cf. *Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia 2018: Statistical Yearbook of Latvia 2017*, 12 Jan 2018, p. 129, in: <http://bit.ly/2l0Jutq> [17 May 2018].
- 15 In 2017, 0.3 per cent of society had Russian citizenship and 0.1 per cent Polish citizenship. Unlike the other two Baltic States, the government in Vilnius provides no specific information about ethnic minorities. According to the last census completed in the EU in 2011, 6.6 per cent of the Lithuanian society indicated a Polish ethnic background and 5.8 per cent a Russian ethnic background, making the Polish minority the largest in Lithuania. Cf. *Statistics Lithuania 2017: Statistical Yearbook of Lithuania 2017*, Nov 2017, p.80, in: <http://bit.ly/2K2V3pe> [17 May 2018]. Cf. *Statistics Lithuania 2017: Ethnicity, mother tongue and religion*, 15 Mar 2013, in: <http://bit.ly/2yppJMW> [17 May 2018].
- 16 Gaon: Honorary title. Originally: Designation of leaders in rabbinical schools (Talmud academies) in the Middle and Far East between the seventh and eleventh centuries. The teachings of the Vilna Gaon, who lived in the 18<sup>th</sup> century, still influence Judaism.
- 17 Cf. website of the Lithuanian Parliament 2018: 2020 designated as the Year of the Vilna Gaon and the History of the Jews of Lithuania, 10 May 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2lqq6Qe> [17 May 2018].
- 18 A census conducted by the Tsarist empire of Russia in 1897 shows, for instance, that only 0.1 per cent of society under the Kovno Governorate were Tatars. Cf. *Zentrales Statistisches Komitee des Innenministeriums* (ed.) 1904: *Erste Allgemeine Volkszählung des russischen Imperiums des Jahres 1897*, XLII. *Gouvernement Kowno*, 1904, p. 3. This demographic situation remains unchanged, so that the EU census of 2011 indicates that about 0.1 per cent of Lithuanians are Tatars. Cf. *Statistical Office of Estonia / Central Statistical Bureau of Latvia / Statistics Lithuania* (eds.) 2015: *2011 Population and housing censuses in Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania*, May 2015, p.24, in: <http://www.stat.ee/dokumentid/220923> [17 May 2018].
- 19 Cf. website of the Prime Minister of the Republic of Lithuania 2015: Prime Minister Algirdas Butkevicius: we will address the current refugee crisis together with the rest of the Community, 9 Sep 2015, in: <http://bit.ly/2l2MHZC> [17 May 2018].
- 20 Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania 2017: Toast remarks by President Dalia Grybauskaitė at dinner in honour of Frank-Walter Steinmeier, President of the Federal Republic of Germany, speech, 24 Aug 2017, in: <https://lrp.lt/en/28298> [17 May 2018].
- 21 Cf. *Zeit Online* 2018: Nato-Länder erhöhen Verteidigungsausgaben nur langsam, 15 Mar 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2JW5ozV> [17 May 2018].
- 22 Cf. U.S. Department of State 2017: *Bulgaria 2016 Human Rights Report*, 3 Mar 2017, p.21, in: <http://bit.ly/2K2Ezgy> [15 May 2018].

- 23 Šefic, Boštjan 2017: Staatssekretär Šefic: “Slowenien beschützt die Schengen-Grenze”, interview, Der Standard, 8 Feb 2017, in: <https://derstandard.at/2000052276619> [17 May 2018].
- 24 Zhelev, Veselin 2015: Migration threatens demographic balance, says Bulgarian PM, euobserver, 24 Apr 2015, in: <https://euobserver.com/beyond-brussels/128450> [17 May 2018].
- 25 Cf. Pew Research Center 2017: Religious Belief and National Belonging in Central and Eastern Europe, 10 May 2017, p. 52, in: <https://pewrsr.ch/2GENYWP> [17 May 2018].
- 26 Cf. Zhelyazkova, Antonina 2014: Bulgaria, in: Jocelyne Cesari (ed.): The Oxford Handbook of European Islam, Oxford, p. 602.
- 27 Cf. Radio Bulgaria 2012: Bulgarian parliament condemns assimilation attempts against Muslims during Zhivkov regime, 11 Jan 2012, in: <http://bnr.bg/en/post/100136246> [17 May 2018].
- 28 Cf. Pew Research Center, 2017, n. 25, p. 154.
- 29 Cf. Emin, Hayri 2017: Islamophobia in Bulgaria. National Report 2016, p. 106 ff., Bayraklı, Enes / Hafez, Farid (eds.): European Islamophobia Report 2016, in: <http://bit.ly/2JPtNeG> [17 May 2018].
- 30 Office of the Grand Mufti 2015: Boyko Borisov: We must not allow separation in society and differentiation of Muslims and Christians, Jan 2015, in: <http://bit.ly/2JX3SB5> [17 May 2018].
- 31 Cf. Office of the Grand Mufti 2018: The Grand Mufti Dr. Mustafa Hadzhi held a meeting with the President of Bulgaria Rumen Radev, Mar 2018, in: <http://bit.ly/2M5PXCj> [17 May 2018].



[Other Topics](#)

# From Trinkets to Values

China's Engagement in Africa Also Has  
an Ideological Dimension

Christoph Plate

China's engagement in Africa attracts both enthusiastic proponents and vehement critics. Does Beijing have a master plan for subjugating the entire African continent? What is certain is that Africa is part of China's global strategy, in which disinformation and propaganda appear to be as important when it comes to protecting Chinese interests as trade relations and naval bases.

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At the edge of the motorway to O.R. Tambo International Airport in Johannesburg, there is a large billboard. Nobody who drives by can miss it: It depicts a lorry of the Chinese FAW make in dusty surroundings. Rough terrain and the red African sun suggest that this vehicle must stand up to the toughest of conditions. Appropriately, the billboard bears the words "Africa tough". Meaning: China, via its products, is already aware of how to deal with difficulties on the continent. Independent of whether a FAW is a good lorry or not (and experts say that its greatest asset is its low price), this advert demonstrates what distinguishes China's engagement in Africa: its readiness to take on the most adverse conditions, whether they be topographical, cultural, political, or economic. Rwanda's president, Paul Kagame, once said that China delivers what Africa needs. The long-time ruler was certainly not only referring to lorries that meet the challenges of African off-road conditions with simple, affordable technology.

The Chinese ability to adapt, the pragmatism of their negotiators, car salesmen, road construction workers, mining experts, and kitchen operators who have gone to Africa over the last twenty years is much appreciated there. This also helps Africans to overlook certain shortcomings, such as the poor quality of many Chinese products, the predatory competition against local suppliers, and the tendency to buy the necessary influence with financial favours towards immigration officials, land registry heads, and ministers.

A few figures indicate that the continent may have been waiting for China's engagement: Up

to one million Chinese are actively involved, not just as merchants, but primarily in mining, building construction, and civil engineering. In 2000, Chinese trade with Africa was just ten billion US dollars; just 14 years later, it has risen to 220 billion. The African countries with the greatest Chinese direct investment – Egypt, Nigeria, Algeria, and South Africa – are regarded as economic centres in Africa due to their good infrastructure or large reserves of raw materials. The recipients of most Chinese loans – Ethiopia and Kenya (besides Angola) – are countries whose historical and economic developments could scarcely be more different from one another. Here, the former empire, which became a socialist country and a dictatorship that is only slowly opening itself to the world; there, the economic centre of East Africa, which has stayed away from all ideological experiments and whose development has suffered only from corruption and massive political intervention. Here as there, the Chinese seem to ask no questions about the past as long as the country and its characteristics are strategically and economically promising. Incidentally, Chinese direct investment in Africa overtook that of the US for the first time in 2016.

In Europe, China has used huge amounts of investment, in Greece and Hungary, for example, to drive wedges into the European Union. Europe's failure to present a united front towards China is a grave error. Is China too important to be criticised? Beijing cares as little about what Europeans think about its engagement in Africa as it does about European reservations regarding its domestic policies. China

knows that the weight and scope of its investments, credit, and infrastructure projects can brush aside any European attempt at gaining economic influence.

## **A majority of Africans perceive Chinese influence on the continent as a positive one.**

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German diplomats and representatives of the Konrad-Adenauer-Stiftung in Kinshasa, Windhoek, or Harare have many stories to tell of how Chinese emissaries are wooed while they themselves, as representatives of the West, struggle to call attention to such concerns as preservation of competition, respect for human rights, and separation of powers.

### **In Germany and in the Congo**

Chinese consumer and household products can today be found in any German household. From the flashlight to the designer lamp to the laptop chip, China is omnipresent. In many Congolese households, it is the pens, bikes, and malaria medication that come from China. And last but not least, the low-cost smartphone. In addition to Chinese construction of football stadiums, roads, and telecommunication infrastructure, that is, to profit-oriented activity, there is also an ideological component of Chinese engagement in Africa that propagates much that the West cannot countenance: single-party states, reduced freedom of speech, and ruthless treatment of minorities.

The pragmatism of the Chinese is viewed with favour by many African governments. This is unsettling to Africa's Western partners. While Europe considers how best to combat the causes of refugee waves (and it is right to do so, even if it does not always apply the correct concepts), the Chinese are building and investing at a pace that causes some African observers to wonder why Beijing can so quickly accomplish things that take years of negotiations with

ministries in Berlin or Paris. Every day, the Chinese, by creating tangible improvements in quality of life, including that of the lower classes, also create reasons to remain on the





Enquiries unwelcome: China now attempts to spread the restrictions of freedom of speech and freedom of the press practiced at home to Africa. [Source: © Carlos Barria, Reuters.](#)

continent. The West can do little to counter this sheer volume of investment. Nor can the West match the prices at which the Chinese build roads, railways, and airports. It is of little

help to point out that a German road in deepest Africa lasts longer than a Chinese one. Despite the manifest Chinese head start, they have not, however, won the people's hearts yet. Promise

and vision continue to come from Europe and the US, not from China.

According to a survey by the opinion research institute Afrobarometer, conducted in 36 African countries in 2015, more than 60 per cent of respondents perceived Chinese influence positively.<sup>1</sup> The Chinese are not familiar with the openness with which they are received in Africa. They neither experience it in Asia, nor in Europe, where people are concerned for their national industries, and for the protection of European values.

One may well wonder whether the Western view of China and of Chinese engagement in Africa represents a case of wishful thinking. The assumption is that China will grow into its role in world politics and fulfil its obligation to provide humanitarian aid; whether or not the assumption is born of the wish, however, is unknown. The Economist Magazine analysed Western misconceptions of China in a March 2018 issue, concluding that the assumption that Western values, such as separation of powers and independent justice will establish themselves in China is fallacious. One way or another it is clear that democratisation from within, resulting from a rising middle class that demands civil liberties, has in any case failed to materialise.<sup>2</sup>

### **The increase in repressive tendencies in Africa could further increase the migratory pressure.**

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Just the opposite appears to have occurred – the dictatorial tendencies in the country, where the president could remain in office for life, might entail precisely the antipode of what we have always hoped. The Chinese reluctance to accept outside suggestions for their country’s politics is met with great sympathy by many potentates. In Kinshasa as in Kigali, rulers are tired of hearing from Berlin or the EU or the State Department

that they do not respect human rights, are doing too little to combat corruption, or simply have an outdated view of democracy. Then the Chinese come, look, build, make no political demands, and refrain from questioning the rulers. This pleases the likes of President Kabila of the Democratic Republic of the Congo and Rwanda’s Paul Kagame very much. The latter may purchase his weapons from Israel or the US. But his model of supposed freedom on the internet is an African variant of the Chinese surveillance state: He allows almost all websites and social media, creating the impression of relative freedom, while in fact using these tools for comprehensive nationwide surveillance.

### **Accounting for African Diversity**

It is important for politicians, foundation representatives, and investors to represent Western values. But this representation must be carried out with much more chutzpah and self-confidence if it is going to effectively counter the overly casual Chinese manner in Africa and the brutal selfishness of the representatives of Beijing. There must be more assertiveness and open pride in the achievements of Western democracies. The ever-growing Chinese loans and the new Chinese roads are not the core of the problem. “There are indications that China wants to limit the territorial scope of the liberal system of order for the long term,” a study by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs (SWP) concludes.<sup>3</sup> If Africa becomes more Chinese, it will become less free, and repressive tendencies on the continent will be strengthened. This development is worrying in view of the expected population growth and the associated migratory pressure.

Just as the comprehension of Africa is most likely to arise when national differences are taken into account, a nuanced look at China’s activities on the continent and at the wide variety of motives for the Chinese to move to Africa is also beneficial. First, there are the merchants, who, with their cheap but useful trinkets have been changing retail trade on the African markets for years. Much like the Chinese

construction workers who, with large sun hats protecting them, asphalt the roads between Entebbe and Kampala, many of these men may often not know exactly where they are. Like many Chinese immigrants, they are looking for business and success.

## The biggest group of Chinese on the continent live in South Africa.

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Then there are those who got degrees at universities, which do not belong to the first socioeconomic tier; they are looking for opportunities and know that if they display a certain willingness to take risks, they can make something of themselves here as brokers, doctors, or merchants. And finally there is Chinese diplomacy which, with a phenomenal scope of cultural, economic, and military cooperation makes it clear that China is looking for long-term prospects in Africa and does not intend to leave any time soon. Chinese embassies, in Windhoek or Nairobi, for instance, are often enough larger and more modern than those of the US or Russia. There are a total of 52 Chinese diplomatic missions in Africa, almost one in every country on the continent, against 49 for the United States.

The biggest group of the approximately one million Chinese on the continent live in South Africa. More than 300,000 settled there from the People's Republic after the end of Apartheid. Angola is next with about 250,000 Chinese, followed by Madagascar with 100,000. Georgetown University China expert Yoon Jung Park reports that Chinese diplomats are seriously worried about their country's reputation, since many immigrants to Africa are considered uneducated. Park tells of an unnamed Chinese diplomat who said, "These people give me the worst headaches."<sup>4</sup> Some Chinese are worried about their image as new colonisers who crowd out African merchants and cheat customers, so they support charity work for schools and the needy. The

Chinese ban on the ivory trade is also said to have been imposed out of concern for the public image of the People's Republic on the continent and beyond.

### Rapid Development in 30 Years

All of this has only come about since the fall of the Berlin Wall. But it has happened with breathtaking speed. Thirty years after the end of the Cold War between the states of the Warsaw Pact and the West, new ideological struggles are being carried out in Africa. By 1989, African heads of state such as Mobutu Sese Seko in Zaire (in power from 1965 to 1997), Jomo Kenyatta in Kenya (1964 to 1978) and Siad Barre in Somalia (1969 to 1991) were masters at using the ideological struggles of the Cold War to further their own ends. Questions regarding the respect of human rights and tolerance towards the opposition were rarely posed, even by the West, because it seemed more important to prevent losing each respective partner to one's ideological opponent.

At that time, the engagement of the People's Republic of China in Africa consisted mostly of solidarity actions for liberation movements or for states such as Tanzania and Zambia. The TAZARA Railway project is legendary: Chinese engineers worked to make Zambian copper exports independent of ports in South Africa, where the white minority government had imprisoned Nelson Mandela and was touting the superiority of the white race.

In a true feat of strength, and by means of a masterful performance of the Chinese engineers, the TAZARA was built. At the beginning of the 1980s, there were standardised railway buildings at each tiny station along the line on the long ride from Mbeya in southern Tanzania to the port city of Dar es Salaam where Chinese mechanics in blue Mao suits could be seen. These mechanics with their friendly smiles went along for the journey, tapping axles and nuts during stops at the stations, thereby avoiding intensive contact with travellers and the Zambian and Tanzanian populations as much as possible.



The strategists in London, Bonn, and Washington thought themselves relatively safe in the face of such predominantly solidary involvement on the part of the Chinese. In view of their limited resources, there did not appear to be such a great threat from Beijing. And, strictly speaking, Soviet engagement was merely a military threat, intensified by Cuban intervention in Angola, not an economic or ideological one. In repressive states such as Zaire, Rwanda, and Uganda, Western values such as freedom of speech, separation of powers, and liberality had an allure against which the Soviet Communist Party's propaganda apparatus could do little. On top of that, the Soviets had little to offer economically. Western cars, clothes, and music were always more attractive to the elite than the limited Soviet consumer offerings.

Kenyan President Jomo Kenyatta recognised the limited pull of the Soviet model on his elite early on. It is said that he intentionally sent as many Kenyan students to study in the USSR as possible. He sensed that after spending ascetic years in the Soviet Union, they would return home as steadfast capitalists.

Then the Berlin Wall fell and the USSR collapsed. Cuba had already scaled back its engagement in Africa and was in any case on its own given the loss of Soviet support. Suddenly Bonn, London, and Washington found themselves unchallenged as potential partners for African governments. The USSR was no more. And the People's Republic of China was not yet far enough along. Very quickly, the West put together conditions and criteria for cooperation that presented African partners with great challenges: For instance, Kenyan President Daniel arap Moi was similarly irked by calls for multi-party democracy as Mobutu Sese Seko in what was then Zaire.

From time to time, these rulers probably longed for the good old days of East-West conflict. Their successors today are making good use of the opportunity to do business with the new alternative to the West: the People's Republic of China.



### **A Struggle About a Way of Life**

The Economist Magazine quotes China's President Xi, who, in a speech at the 19<sup>th</sup> CPC National Congress in 2017, announced "a new option for other countries" regarding "Chinese wisdom and a Chinese approach to solving the problems facing mankind".<sup>5</sup> This amounts to a declaration of war on traditional Western interests in many corners of the world, including in



Gold rush: The state budget of Zimbabwe can also benefit from Chinese investments. Source: © Philimon Bulawayo, Reuters.

Africa. While people in the capitals fume about the “shithole” comments of the American president, China offers extensive cooperation on an equal footing.

In many cases, this economic cooperation is defined not by quality, but by price and quantity. Chinese industry’s seemingly insatiable demand for oil, ore, agricultural products, and high-grade timber has led to a restrained

gold-rush atmosphere in countries like Zambia and Zimbabwe. Zimbabwe’s ailing tobacco economy is being rebuilt with Chinese help, and the demand of the Chinese market seems endless.<sup>6</sup>

In 2017, the People’s Republic of China opened its own naval base in Djibouti. The current ostensible mission is the protection of international merchant shipping around the Horn of

Africa. But it seems clear that Beijing considers military presence in Africa indispensable for the protection of its investments and citizens on the continent. Since 1978, up to ten million Chinese citizens are said to have moved abroad for extended periods of time. Those who went to New York or Oxford to study are an important minority, but most set off in search of success, business, and prosperity. That brought many to Africa – one million Chinese have emigrated to the continent in the last 20 years.

### Since 2017, China has also had a military presence in Africa.

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The Chinese are exporters of a globalisation from which they themselves have profited in the last 30 years. Their presence on the continent is, for many, the promise of a bright future, since China has made the leap that many in Africa dream of. This promise is also the great challenge for the West, for the media, and for the work in political communication aimed at defending Western values on the continent.

Wits University in Johannesburg holds regular conferences of Chinese and African academics to take stock of China's progress.<sup>7</sup> The tough question of who is benefiting from all this engagement is rarely discussed, however. The presence of Chinese academics and representatives of Chinese state media means that much remains between the lines or is not expressed at all. Such topics as "Road to a New Future: The Chinese Built Bingu Highway in Malawi" and "The donkey skins pipeline to China" about the growing trade of African donkey skins for China's pharmaceutical production are preferred. The most important insight is that Chinese engagement on the continent is not uniform, but highly adapted to national and regional conditions. And it is completely apolitical. China is also popular because it does not harm anyone. Their very reporting on African issues is so innocuous and friendly that Western media audiences would at best react with a yawn. Such

reporting is very popular with African heads of state and government. This Chinese pragmatism often makes reference to positive Chinese-influenced journalism and to Western colonial history in Africa.

### Competing for Hearts and Minds

This aggressive competition for African minds, the touting of the Chinese model of success, which consists of dictatorship and economic development, only started with the Chinese economic miracle of the 1990s. At that time, Xinhua, China's state news agency, opened offices in Nairobi and Johannesburg, and private as well as semi-governmental media companies also began to focus on Africa, to propagate China's view of the world in English, French, and Portuguese, but also in Arabic and Swahili.

Just as the West long dismissed China's economic commitment as a trade in cheap goods and only very late realised how pragmatically the Chinese had been able to deal with African imponderables, many institutions of educational cooperation and many media outlets did not realise until late how much China had set about shaping the perception of African opinion leaders. This influence is exerted primarily through scholarships, invitations to travel to China, and offers of media cooperation through which texts from Xinhua are offered for reprint free of charge while the offers from Western news agencies are, as a rule, on the expensive side.

Chinese policy is about more than just roads and a naval base. It is about winning the hearts and minds of the people, and exerting significant influence over opinion leaders and decision-makers. Beijing wants "more than to influence the content of news and debates in the long term with their foreign investments in media companies, their offers of think-tank cooperation, and their research projects. Beijing also wants to establish the rules and procedures for political discussion in the long run and as it sees fit", says a study by the German Institute for International and Security Affairs.<sup>8</sup>

## One aim of Chinese policy is massive influence on African decision-makers.

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When analysing Chinese engagement in Africa, it is important to distinguish between the attempt to win over politicians and those who work in the media. Moreover, as Dr Bob Wekesa of the University of Witwatersrand in Johannesburg emphasises, it is important to differentiate between the effect of Chinese engagement from country to country.<sup>9</sup> “Wherever democracy is part of the political culture, in places like Kenya and Nigeria, the Chinese will have less success than where democracy is less well established, in places like Uganda or Rwanda,” Dr Wekesa said.

Dr Wekesa is one of those academics from Africa who is familiar with Chinese influence from his own experience. He studied for four years at the Institute for Communication Studies in Beijing, where he earned his doctorate. It was during his stay there that China began trying to gain influence, especially in Africa, developing the tool of “positive journalism”. Positive journalism is a kind of intermediate journalism “in which Chinese thinking is communicated, but clouded over with Western philosophy and concepts,” says Dr Wekesa.

The media expert considers self-censorship to be the greatest danger for those who go to China. This is because, unlike Western scholarships and invitations, such programmes in China entail great pressure to adopt their perspectives; the Chinese expectation for visitors to show political or journalistic gratitude is usually tacitly present.<sup>10</sup>

Africa is very much a part of the overall strategy to influence public opinion, Dr Wekesa explains. He thinks that the attempt to keep people from asking critical questions constitutes a threat. When this policy is criticised, the Chinese often cite the alleged Western efforts to achieve hegemony on the African continent, Dr Wekesa recalls. The Economist Magazine recently warned of

the growing “sharp power” of the Chinese in the world, i.e. conscious influence over thinking and opinions. “Counter-intelligence, the law and an independent media are the best protection against subversion” the magazine stated.<sup>11</sup>

When officials of the African National Congress in South Africa or the ruling Jubilee Alliance in Kenya travel to China for party management training, it is less an expression of ideological affinity than a conscious departure from Western conditionality, which often ties cooperation to compliance with human rights and basic democratic principles.

The failure of the West to consistently insist on such values with all its African partners is now taking its toll. Experience has shown that countries that could help achieve economic and military goals have heard less of such insistence than partners who had little to offer.

What is the optimal response to this? Perhaps the insight that a courageous manner – if both feasible and advisable towards Turkey or the US – may also work with China. But Germany will be able to do this effectively only within the European network. Greater self-confidence, which has definitely grown in recent years in dealings with the US and Russia, is now needed towards China. Pride in things such as democratic achievements, freedom of speech, and the separation of powers may seem audacious in the face of Chinese projects that seem overwhelming considering the sheer number of them. But these Western constructions represent an offer to which there is no alternative for African societies, who are concerned not only with basic needs, but also with freedom and participation.

*–translated from German–*

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