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N°02

THE PERSPECTIVE

SINCE 1963

BRIDGES FOR PEACE

STORIES AND STRATEGIES FROM THE
FRONTLINES AND THE MARGINS



*The Lund Association of Foreign Affairs
has the pleasure to welcome you to their*

PERIOD DRAMA ROYAL BALL

Paco, Kate, Anaïs, Annie, and Santeri (Presidium)



© Philipp Montenegro

*On the 21st of April, the UPF Annual Spring Ball took place at
Grand Hotel. Truly a Royal Night to remember!*

EDITORS' NOTE

Dear reader,

With “Bridges for Peace,” we close off our operational year as Editors-in-Chief of The Perspective. Although the title of this edition - extensively discussed in our committee meetings - was long set before we as Editors even began to think about the “end of editing”, it is somehow symbolic that we are ending our operational year with the metaphor of a bridge.

Looking for cover images, we tried out pretty much every possible conceptualisation of a bridge. Should we take our title literally and go for our local Öresund, would some interpretative artwork suit better, or perhaps a disputed border that still remains to be bridged?

The bridge that now graces our cover - selected out of so. many. bridges. - is the Golden Bridge, located in Vietnam. Although we have sharpened up our Photoshop skills these last months, this interesting construction actually exists like this in the real world; two concrete hands holding up a delicate golden arch. It paints a serene image, perhaps in slight contrast to some of the more realist articles on conflict and war also included in this edition, but nevertheless, the hopeful idea we hope the theme of this magazine expresses.

The articles in this edition show that peace is much more than just the absence of war. As difficult as it can be to achieve, peace is a prerequisite for people to live a good life and for states to develop and progress. Its importance should therefore motivate us to fix issues that might endanger future peace: environmental challenges, long-running conflicts, or tensions in the international political arena.

Back to bridges: they always have to start and end somewhere - just like our journey as Editors-in-Chief. We are incredibly grateful to have had the opportunity and luck to run The Perspective magazine. From an early Groningen reunion in

Lund to countless hours spent together in the office - the past months have been an incredible journey and we were able to learn so much.

Producing this magazine would not be possible without our amazing reporters and sub-editors - you all have done amazing work! Connecting with the wonderful people who contributed to this project over the year is something we will value forever. Thank you to the whole board of 22/23 and our friends for the continuous support, and thank you to everyone else who witnessed and endured our hours-long InDesign sessions - we are happy to have this behind us (for now at least).

We hope this magazine may offer a good distraction during your final exams or maybe a nice companion during your travels this summer. While this is a goodbye from our side, The Perspective will be back next academic year. We look forward to what's to come.

Onto many more writings,

Dianne Kok & Ronja Oechsle
Editors-in-Chief



PRESIDENTS' ADDRESS

Dear members of UPF,

This is our last Presidents' address of the operational year, and what a ride it has been! Thank you to all who have been part of it. We would like to take a look back on all that we have been through in these last nine months – all the way to the incredible UPF Ball and the Annual Election Meeting of 2023.

When we stepped into the role of Presidents we felt an immense sense of responsibility and pressure to face this seemingly insurmountable task. Thankfully, it didn't take long for us to realise that we were not alone, but that we had the support of the Presidium, the Board, and the members of UPF. With your help, no task has been too great, no problem was unsolvable, and no goal unachievable. You have made our job easier, you have made our job a pleasure.

We would like to thank our committees for all of their hard work. Activity, Career, Debate Lecture, Magazine, Pod & Radio, PR, Travel, and Webzine. All of them together have created another wonderful year of UPF operations. We are thankful for all of it, from amazing sittings, to opportunities for members to discuss foreign affairs, to having the restraint to keep a conversation on monkey diplomacy to an acceptable level.

Everyone in this Association has been a part of something much bigger than ourselves, the board, or our active members. We have created something beautiful. You can hear it in the laughter that emanates from the office when you walk into the fourth floor hallway of AF. You can smell it in the millions of scented candles and liters of coffee that we make every day at the risk of cutting out the electricity. You can see it in the smiles and hugs of friendship between our members at committee meetings, lectures, sittings, and other events. Together we have made this association a place of camaraderie, a place of vulnerability, a place of love. We have made this place our home. Thank you from the very depths of our hearts for sharing this home with us.

See you all next year!

Annie "POUPF" Anderek &
Kate "VEEP" Dolan



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BOARD 2022-2023



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Ana Caselles Calle
Love Kirkegaard
Sara Friman
lecture@upflund.se

MAGAZINE

Dianne Kok
Ronja Oechsle
magazine@upflund.se

WEBZINE

Annalena Herrmann
Julia Hampel
webzine@upflund.se

POD&RADIO

Freeman Elliott Gunnell
Natalie de Souza
radio@upflund.se

PRESIDENT

Annie Anderek
president@upflund.se

VICE PRESIDENT

Kathryn Dolan
vice-president@upflund.se

TREASURER

Lucile Corcoran (- February)
Francisco Cobos Cabral
treasurer@upflund.se

SECRETARY

Santeri Rönty
secretary@upflund.se

UFS REPRESENTATIVE

Anaïs Le Pluart
lund@ufsverige.org

DEBATE

Francisco Cobos Cabral
Minahil Malik
debatecoordinator@upflund.se

CAREER

Anna Holm
Victor Åstrand
career@upflund.se

ACTIVITY

Ella Fasting
Isabella Silva Ortiz
activity@upflund.se

TRAVEL

Donja Tavakolinia
Hannah Höfle
travel@upflund.se

PR COMMITTEE

Claudia Muñoz-Rojas
Dominguez
Zahra Aghazada
pr@upflund.se

THE PERSPECTIVE MAGAZINE

EDITORIAL TEAM EDITORS-IN-CHIEF

Dianne Kok
Ronja Oechsle

REPORTERS

Mark Belkin
Albin Emanuel Brattberg
Edoardo Campanile
Nicolas Fiessinger
Linnéa Förmegård
Gian Gantenbein
Oskar Hedman
Jonna Hugsén
Mathilde Perrin
Karen Reuter
Marco Rizzi
Santeri Rönty
Katharina Summ
Kris van Velzen

LEGAL PUBLISHER

Ronja Oechsle

LAYOUT

Albin Emanuel Brattberg
Dianne Kok
Ronja Oechsle

ILLUSTRATIONS

Saar Boter
Ola Grabowski

LOGO

Elisabet Åberg

PRINT

Trydells Tryckeri AB

EDITION

350

CONTACT

Utrikespolitiska
Föreningen
Sandgatan 2
223 50 Lund



The Perspective Editorial Team 2022-2023

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The magazine has no affiliations with any political parties. Opinions presented are the writers' own. This material is partly financed by FBA (Folke Bernadotte Academy). FBA does not necessarily share the opinions found in the magazine and responsibility for the articles' contents rests fully on the writer.



The Perspective Magazine is part of The Perspective Collective, the Media branch of UPF Lund. We also publish articles on our website, theperspective.se, and produce a podcast - so you can find your favourite stories about foreign affairs from UPF in print, online, and wherever you get your podcasts!



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Interested in contributing to the
magazine? Any questions?
Reach us at magazine@upflund.se

Cover image: Golden Bridge, Vietnam
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Soldiers in Niger © Katja Tsvetkova



EDOARDO CAMPANILE | ANALYSIS

THE POWER OF DIPLOMACY: TURKEY'S QUEST FOR MEDIATION AND NORMALISATION IN UKRAINE AND THE MENA REGION



Turkey is often referred to as “the bridge between East and West.” While travel agencies still foster this romanticised idea of the country, news broadcasters in the West usually convey conflicting judgements and opinions on Turkey and its leaders. For sure, in the last decade, the country’s external relations did not benefit from Ankara’s pursuit of aggressive foreign policy tones and means, both toward the West and the Middle East. However, at least since 2022, there is evidence of a transition in the country’s approach to new and old external challenges.

The words ‘diplomacy’ and ‘mediation’ characterised President Recep Tayyip Erdogan’s speech in front of the United Nations General Assembly in September 2022. On that occasion, he referred to Russia’s war in Ukraine. More broadly, these two concepts exemplify the new approach of Turkish foreign policy decision-makers over the last couple of years.

“The words ‘diplomacy’ and ‘mediation’ characterised Erdogan’s speech.”

Since the outbreak of the conflict on February 24, 2022, Turkey has been the external actor most committed to encouraging dialogue between the two belligerents. Erdogan’s close ties with Vladimir Putin and Volodymyr Zelensky, the result of interpersonal connections patiently built up over the years, but also of the historical and geographical importance that the Turkish straits play for both Russia and Ukraine, allowed Turkey to take on the demanding role of mediator. Although the war is still fiery and the end of

hostilities seems far off, Ankara, together with the United Nations, seems to have already achieved paramount goals.

In July 2022, Turkey encouraged and facilitated the signing of an agreement to unblock grain exports from Ukraine, thus averting a food crisis that would have dramatically affected numerous countries, especially in Africa and the Middle East. Moreover, in September, the United States National Security Advisor Jack Sullivan published a tweet thanking “the Turkish government for helping facilitate the exchange of prisoners between Ukraine and Russia,” a largely symbolic achievement that nevertheless proves Turkey’s intense efforts.

These results are especially remarkable considering that Ankara managed to maintain a stable relationship with Russia, behaving as “the friendliest of all NATO countries toward Moscow,” despite its clear military, diplomatic, and humanitarian support to Kyiv.

Did the war in Ukraine provoke this shift? Yes and no. Within a few hours, Russia’s aggression on Ukraine overturned the international order imagined by Ankara and many others. The perspective of a Russian-Western relationship marked by both scepticism and cooperation, in which Turkey could easily have played a balancing role, was crushed by Putin’s announcement of a “special military operation” in Eastern Ukraine.

Ankara clearly revised its calculations as a consequence of this twist. Nonetheless, a mutation in Turkey’s foreign policy was becoming apparent even before February 2022. In fact, Ankara has shown the intention

of cooling down and normalising diplomatic relations around its territory and beyond, especially in the Middle East and North Africa.

The Turkish reconciliation with the United Arab Emirates (UAE) since 2022 has been emblematic of this. In the last ten years, the two countries fought on manifold grounds, geopolitical and ideological. In Libya, Turkey supported the Tripoli-based Government of National Accord of Fayez al-Sarraj, while the UAE backed the opposition led by Khalifa Haftar.

“The gradual reconciliation between Turkey and the UAE will likely have consequences on the regional balance.”

In Syria, Turkey endorsed the fall of Bashar al-Assad’s regime, while the UAE has increasingly normalised diplomatic ties with Damascus. Turkey’s endorsement of the Muslim Brotherhood throughout the region further collides with the UAE’s efforts to fight and erase the organisation. As if that is not enough, the two countries are also embroiled in a tough geopolitical competition for influence in the Horn of Africa.

Nevertheless, Erdogan’s visit to Abu Dhabi in February 2022, the first in almost ten years, bodes well for the future. It seems that both sides have identified that the only way out of the impasse (especially in Libya) has to emerge from dialogue and cooperation.

Although it would be too hasty to talk about a Turkish-Emirati axis, the gradual

reconciliation between these two actors will likely have consequences on the regional balance.

Similar processes have taken place in Turkey’s bilateral relations with Egypt, Israel, and Saudi Arabia, with mixed results so far. The most surprising development, however, is the rapprochement process between Turkey and Syria under Russian surveillance, which started in January 2023.

Again, the reasons behind this overturn are blurry, but should be read as a strategic move directly connected to the Turkish presidential elections set to take place in May 2023. Presumably, Erdogan’s regime aims to restore the relationship with Damascus to reassure its voters that it will be able to repatriate some of the nearly four million Syrian refugees currently residing on Turkish soil - indeed, we should not forget that Turkey still occupies territories in Northern Syria.

And what about the West? Undoubtedly, American President Joe Biden’s assurance that “diplomacy is back” at the core of the foreign policy of the United States has encouraged Turkey, among others, to seek de-escalation and readjustment with its neighbours and allies. The war in Ukraine, for the moment, seems to have enhanced Turkey’s relationship with its Western partners, especially France and the United States.

Notwithstanding the countless frictions between Ankara and the West, many analysts agree that this relationship will likely benefit from the continuation of the war in Ukraine, having taken away some fundamental points of reference to Ankara and so prompting the

country to reach out to safer friends in the West.

Is all this enough to set Erdogan on track to receive a nomination for the Nobel Peace Prize? Probably not. While the economic and financial problems that originated from the COVID-19 pandemic played a crucial role in Ankara's quest for tranquillity, the country is still at the centre of numerous internal controversies that frequently hit the headlines, not least the outrageous inadequacy of the buildings destroyed by the tragic earthquake of February.


Moreover, the President's goodwill probably conceals a lust for personal advantages, such as regional and global prestige, that the mediation between Russia and Ukraine seems to have strengthened.

In addition to its valuable mediation in Ukraine, Turkey is an actor involved in several crucial contexts. Given its relevance in conflicts such as those in Libya and Syria, it would be unthinkable to cease hostilities without Ankara's cooperation.

Either way, Turkey is a country we will have to look at very closely in the foreseeable future. The use of soft power and diplomacy has so far shown positive results, and the chances of witnessing a domino effect in the region are not too far off. Hopefully, when trying to cope with their foreign policy issues, more countries will be willing to talk rather than shout.

“It would be unthinkable to cease hostilities without Ankara's cooperation.”





March, 1994: roller skater on the Catholic side of the Belfast Peace wall © Rory Nugent/Shutterstock

MATHILDE PERRIN | ANALYSIS

**BUILDING WALLS FOR PEACE? BREXIT
AND THE REIGNITION OF UNRESOLVED
TENSIONS BETWEEN NORTHERN IRELAND,
THE REPUBLIC OF IRELAND, AND THE UK**

On February 27, 2023, in London, Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, and Rishi Sunak, Prime Minister of the United Kingdom (UK), agreed on the Windsor Framework: an agreement seen as aiming to ease the tensions provoked after Brexit in Northern Ireland, triggered, inter alia, by the Northern Ireland Protocol.

The Northern Ireland Protocol is aimed at framing the trade rules between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland. Since Brexit, Northern Ireland – part of the UK – is no longer part of the European Union (EU). To facilitate trade between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland (Éire), and above all, to prevent a physical border between the two, the Northern Irish Protocol provides that Northern Ireland stays in the European single market, which means that the free movement of goods and the customs union are maintained between Northern Ireland and the Republic of Ireland.

This provoked a de facto internal UK border in the Irish Sea, between Northern Ireland and Great Britain. Consequently, the Unionists (Ulster Unionist Party) feared that their British identity would be threatened. The tensions that emanated from this agreement present a good opportunity to look back at the conflicting history of Northern Ireland.

To understand the origins of the Northern Ireland conflict, one can go back to 1171, when Henri II Plantagenet, King of England, took over Dublin through Waterford, marking the beginning of English colonisation. In 1494, Ireland was under London's political control. 300 years later, the Society of the United

Irishmen, a revolutionary organisation calling for the emancipation of Catholics, was created in Belfast. A decade later, the Acts of Union were proclaimed by London, which saw the unification of the Kingdom of Great Britain and the Kingdom of Ireland to create the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Ireland.

In 1905, the Republican and Independence party Sinn Féin (“ourselves” in Irish) was founded in Dublin and nine years later the Home Rule provided relative autonomy for Ireland, intending to provide self-government of Ireland within the UK. This was followed by the proclamation of the Irish Republic (Forógra na Poblachta) by Irish nationalists, signed by seven members of the Provisional Government of the Irish Republic with the purpose of announcing a separation from the UK.

“You can’t guarantee that if the walls came down violence won’t start.”

In 1918, the Irish Republican Army (Óglaigh na hÉireann) was created and escalating tensions led to the beginning of the Irish War of Independence between the IRA and the British Army. In 1921, the Anglo-Irish Treaty concluded this war by providing for the establishment of the Irish Free State, comprising 26 counties of Ireland. However, six counties in Ulster remained a self-governing part of the UK. These compromises lead to the Irish Civil War between the IRA, which was against the provisions of the treaty, and those who were in favour of the treaty.

The Republic of Ireland (Éire) was proclaimed on April 18, 1949. Twenty years later, a civil war between Catholics and Protestants began. This period, called The Troubles (Na Trioblóidí), lasted until 1998. One memorable event of this period is Bloody Sunday, in 1972 at Londonderry, which inspired the famous song “Sunday Bloody Sunday” by the Irish band U2. On this day, soldiers from the British army shot 26 unarmed Catholic civilians during a protest march organised by the Northern Ireland Civil Rights Association (NICRA).

The Northern Ireland conflict ended on April 10, 1998, when the Good Friday Agreement was signed in Belfast between the Governments of the Republic of Ireland and the UK. In 2015, Prince Charles visited Ireland and met with the leader of the Sinn Féin Party Gerry Adams, a chance, according to him, to “promote reconciliation”. However, only four years after that, new incidents between Catholics and Protestants occurred in Northern Ireland, particularly through the acts of and against the New Irish Republican Army (New IRA).

“There is hope for the future.”

On January 31, 2020, Brexit took effect: the UK officially withdrew from the EU. The new border between the Republic of Ireland and Northern Ireland, a separation between the EU and the UK, revives the tensions between the Unionists and Loyalists, mostly Ulster Protestants, wanting to stay part of the UK, and the Irish Nationalists and Republicans,

mostly Irish Catholics, wanting to join the Republic of Ireland.

Following the 1969 Northern Ireland riots - a period of five days of violence in Northern Ireland that started with the Battle of the Bogside on August 12 between the Royal Ulster Constabulary, Loyalists, and Catholic nationalists, the first peace lines were built in Belfast. A wall was constructed to separate Catholic and Protestant neighbourhoods and therefore minimise inter-communal violence.

A 2011 report written by the organisation ‘Belfast Interface Project’ identifies a total of 99 different security barriers and forms of defensive architecture across the city associated with residential areas. In 2013, the Northern Ireland Executive Office released a plan to remove all the barriers by 2023, however, tensions remain. As stated by Johnny Byrne, an Ulster University academic in a BBC Article, “You can’t guarantee that if [the walls] came down violence won’t start.” In 2022, according to the Belfast Telegraph, around 60 peace lines remained in Northern Ireland, most of them in Belfast.

There is hope for the future. As put forward in a 2022 Irish Times article, some removal, reduction, and transformation at five peace wall sites have recently occurred in Belfast and Derry. However, as stated by Aoifke Madeleine from Durham University, the 2021 Northern Ireland riots, notably “incited by the border and goods crisis as a result of Brexit,” and more recently, the terrorism threat level in Northern Ireland increasing from substantial to severe, give rise to a question: will the tensions in Northern Ireland ever ease, and end?

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Aerial view of Lake Chad coastline © Homo Cosmicus/Shutterstock

MORE THAN A CLIMATE CRISIS: LAKE CHAD BASIN IS DRYING UP

Serious and deadly consequences from climate change can for some people seem like a non-immediate problem. Unfortunately, many are already suffering from its consequences. Climate change can lead to a shortage of resources and instability, which may ultimately lead to further conflict. In Northern Central Africa especially, the effects of climate change already affect millions of people.

Bordering Chad, Niger, Nigeria, and Cameroon, Lake Chad constitutes an essential source of income and wealth for the population in the region. The lake's basin passes through seven countries on the continent: Chad, Cameroon, Niger, Nigeria, Libya, Algeria, and the Central African Republic. Thus far, for nearly 30 million people, Lake Chad is an important source of freshwater. Additionally, Lake Chad resources are also used for agriculture and farming, fishing, and sanitation, while still being one of the most important sources of drinking water for people. But it faces several challenges, one of which is the constantly increasing population.

Coupled with climate change, overuse, and warmer temperatures, the amount of water in the lake and its basin has been shrinking. In fact, since the 1960s, it has shrunk by around 90%. The lake has been described as especially sensitive to climate change and extreme weather such as drought and floods.

As a result of these, the shrinking of the lake has led to conflict in the region.

Because of the importance of Lake Chad's water resources, there has been conflict between fishers, farmers, and herders, which has led to deaths, migration, and demolition of people's property. The struggle over water resources has forced many people to emigrate and leave their homes. In 2021, approximately 60,000 Cameroonians had to flee from Chad's northern region because of the numerous outbreaks of violence triggered by the competition over water resources.

“The struggle over water resources has forced many people to emigrate and leave their homes.”

According to aid workers in the region, the governments have failed to stop the violence between farmers and herders over control of water resources. Government officials from Chad and Cameroon have instead paid armed groups to control bodies of water, which lead to an escalation of the violence.

This situation, with Lake Chad drying out, has created flows of people migrating in the region. From Nigeria, people are fleeing to the central part of the African continent and

the Middle Belt. Their relocation often means that they intrude on other people's farmland, which has caused conflicts over destroyed crops or stolen livestock, which tend to become violent and can often end in killings.

Poverty, conflict, and loss of resources have led to 2.6 million people being displaced across a number of countries. This escalation in migration has also led to conflict between refugees and their hosting communities. The insecurity caused by migration and loss of livelihoods and resources has been taken advantage of by extremist groups in the region: the Islamic terrorist group Boko Haram and the Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) have, for instance, exploited the migrant and economic crises to recruit young people into drug and weapon trafficking, which profits are an important source of income for the groups.

Additionally, many social considerations must be taken into account. Lack of education, healthcare, income, and future opportunities are some of the reasons that push young people to join the terrorist groups. These give them a purpose in life and a "cause" to fight for. Women and children are at high risk of being sexually assaulted or of being forced into marriage.

The violence by Boko Haram started in 2009 and since then multiple schools, health facilities, and more importantly infrastructure have been demolished. In 2021, it was estimated that 350,000 people had died indirectly or directly from the conflict, nine out of ten being children under the age of five. The unstable situation has also caused problems with agriculture and trade. Many people are

displaced and need shelter, food, water, and medical assistance. The humanitarian crisis in the region has ultimately led to an insecure situation, where terrorist groups are fast to take advantage of people already suffering.

“The conflict rooted in climate change has led to millions of people suffering.”

To deal with and manage all the previously mentioned issues, some initiatives are taken. In Niger from January 23-24, 2023, the third High-Level Conference on the Lake Chad Basin Region was held. 30 countries and international organisations and another 100 civil society organisations attended the conference. The aim of the conference was to uphold public and political attention to the ongoing crisis in the region and to extend the efforts against the humanitarian crisis in an organised and coordinated way.

The conference resulted in the Lake Basin Commission countries (Cameroon, Chad, Central African Republic, Libya, Niger, and Nigeria) and institutional donors vowing to put 500 million dollars towards a cohesive reaction to the terrorism in The Lake Chad region. In 2018, the council of ministers of the Lake Basin Commission approved the Regional Strategy for the Stabilization, Recovery and Resilience (RSS) of the Boko Haram-affected areas of the Lake Basin Region. This initiative along with others has improved the situation in the region and as an outcome of this, it is easier now to improve the climate for infrastructure restoration and to supply social services.



Lake Chad seen from space, 2019 © lavizzara/Shutterstock

“As the current situation is a mix of different crises and conflicts, there is still a lot to be done with regard to the humanitarian crises, the refugee crisis, and the food supply crisis.”

But despite all the initiatives and actions that have been taken, many attendants of

different conferences noted that there is still much more that needs to be addressed. As the current situation is a mix of different crises and conflicts, there is still a lot to be done with regard to the humanitarian crises, the refugee crisis, and the food supply crisis.

The conflict rooted in climate change has led to millions of people suffering. Three million people are believed to have been displaced, and 11 million are in need of humanitarian aid. Children and women are especially vulnerable. Although some progress has been made, farmers and herders will still struggle to find water resources and it seems unlikely that the insecure situation in the area will end anytime soon.

KRIS VAN VELZEN | ANALYSIS

BRIDGING THE LEVELS OF FEDERAL POLITICS: AN ANALYSIS OF THE POLITICAL-ECONOMIC CHALLENGES TO LULA'S INFRASTRUCTURE RESOLUTIONS

A Black child, an indigenous leader, a Black woman, and a disabled man formed the meaningful replacement of Brazil's ex-president Jair Bolsonaro at the inauguration ceremony for Lula Da Silva on January 1 this year. Tradition prescribes that the former president hands over the presidential sash to the newly elected president. However, after losing the elections and facing charges of corruption, Bolsonaro instead sought refuge in Florida, his absence a chance for Lula to open his third term with a powerful symbolic statement.

By inviting the representatives of different marginalised groups in Brazilian society to garland him with the traditional sash, Lula demonstrated a clear rejection of the preceding years of racism, machismo, religious conservatism, and military nationalism. A strong message that marks the start of what will be a challenging term of office for Lula and his Partido dos Trabalhadores (PT). Lula awaits the almost impossible task of both rebuilding bridges between the polarised parties in parliament, as well as bridging the two camps of voters

*The presidential inauguration ceremony (CC BY 2.0)
Palácio do Planalto/Flickr, edited image*



that have formed in Brazilian society. 58.2 million Bolsonaro-supporters voted for the former far-right president, compared to 60.3 million votes for Lula.

One aspect of Brazilian society that quite literally needs rebuilding is the infrastructure network. A World Bank report from 2022 defines the appalling state of the roads and railroads as an obstacle to long-term economic growth in Brazil. In a meeting with representatives of the civil construction sector a few weeks before the elections, Lula promised to boost public investment in infrastructure by reviving the growth acceleration programme (PAC).

This infrastructure construction project was built together with businesspeople, mayors, and local governors during Lula's last administration in 2007. Where Bolsonaro campaigned with the promise to attract more private investment to finance large infrastructure projects, Lula emphasises the need for government participation. In this specific meeting, Lula expressed his wish for each state governor to list the three or four most important infrastructure projects in their states.

Why does infrastructure occupy such an explicit role in Brazil's presidential elections? For one, of all the BRIC countries (Brazil, Russia, India, and China), Brazil is the only country whose overall performance on infrastructure has decreased since 2010. This is problematic for a country with a vast landmass and large distances between producing and consuming regions. For any government, the planning, funding, and maintenance of large infrastructure projects

is a political and economic challenge. For Brazil, this is even more so due to the rigid federal budgeting system. Half of the budget for infrastructure flows directly to subnational governments, leaving the federal government with a limited mandate.

At the same time, Brazil's high heterogeneity of transport infrastructure and geographic conditions make for a complex logistics system. For these reasons, Brazil is in need of a centralised and strategic approach to infrastructure projects.

“Brazil is in need of a centralised and strategic approach to infrastructure projects.”

The challenge to such a strategy lies, among others, in the fact that Brazil is a presidential democracy. The president is responsible for long-term strategic thinking across multiple policy domains. At the same time, the president has to build a consensus with the separately elected legislature, which in Brazil is designed to represent localised interests.

To complicate matters further, all state governors are independently elected. Consequently, the Bolsonaro administration left the domain of infrastructure largely up to entrepreneurs from the private sector, with little government guidance on what will be built where and for whom.

Even though this strategy was applauded by many, more voices from Brazil's political elite

now recognize the need for state involvement. Venilton Tadini, president of the infrastructure association Abdib, told the Business Americas news platform that roads and railroads are simply not attractive enough to be financed through private capital solely. In this context, Lula's call upon local officials to bring forward crucial infrastructure projects seems to be a response to the gaps left by the private sector.

The question, however, remains which kind of infrastructure projects will be favoured by his administration. Since Brazil ended nearly all interurban passenger train services ten years ago, Brazilians are highly dependent on the road system. The heavy favouritism of roads in Brazil's past infrastructure plans - including PAC - is both a result of this policy and of the presidential system.

Investment in long-term infrastructure projects historically does not generate a lot of popular support, especially if the public does not immediately benefit. Yet, Lula will need all the popular support that he can get since half of the population does not automatically support him (anymore). This situation is

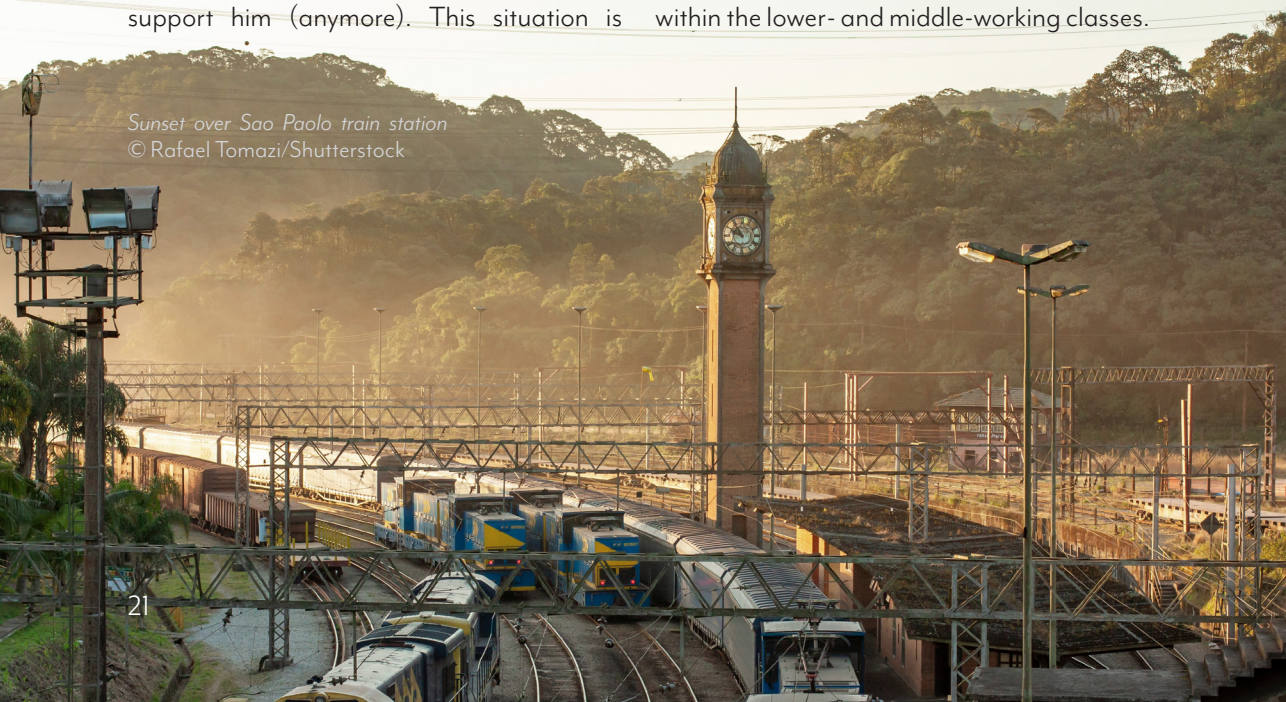
for a large part a direct result of the huge money-laundering scandal known as the 'The Carwash', in which many high-ranking politicians from PT were involved.

“Brazil will have to invest 3.7% of its GDP per year to meet the 2030 SDG deadline on infrastructure.”

Investments in roads do actually receive a lot of support from Brazilian voters, as highways and regional roads play a central role in most Brazilians' livelihoods. Brazil's economy relies heavily on commodity exports and these commodities need to be transported from the inland to the ports. A growing group of Brazilians responds to the high demand for transportation by working as independent, self-employed truck drivers.

This group also forms a core constituency within the lower- and middle-working classes.

Sunset over Sao Paolo train station
© Rafael Tomazi/Shutterstock





Lula visiting stadium construction work in Sao Paulo, 2011
© Nelson Antoine/Shutterstock

For the politically vocal middle- and upper-class, well-maintained highways are essential as they enable travelling with a private car to visit family, commute to work or make recreational day trips. For the poorer segment of Brazil's society, the bus is the only option to travel to work or visit rural family homes. All in all, roads form a crucial strategic investment point for Lula's public expenditure.

However, eight years ago in 2015, the Ministry of Transport released a transport scenario that recognizes Brazil's heavy bias toward roads in comparison to 15 other countries of the same size. They argue for a countering of this bias and the promotion of a more diverse transport matrix. The strategic framework proposes a new Brazilian rail network with 11,800 km of new rail lines. Whether it be roads or railways, fact is that the World Bank estimates that in the upcoming years, Brazil will have to spend 3.7% of GDP per year to meet the SDG deadline on infrastructure

investment in 2030. The \$778 billion that this comes down to will be subjected to the complex dynamics of Brazil's federal layers of political-economic interests.

Mayors, state governors, parliament, the president himself, and the Ministry of Transport all see different priorities in tackling Brazil's infrastructure gap. Lula will have to carefully balance his own popularity against what is best for the long-term productivity of the country while satisfying a great variety of local political stakeholders. Additionally, the legacy of Bolsonaro's private sector-favouring policies has exacerbated inequalities, leaving the social cohesion in civil society in a weak state. It will be worth keeping an eye on how this social and political landscape will shape the concrete choices made on the infrastructure agenda, as these choices will certainly affect Brazil's relations with its largest trading partners: China and the USA.

FRONT LINES AND FRONT PAGES: EXPERIENCE OF A REPORTER FROM THE HEART OF THE RUSSIAN WAR IN UKRAINE

In recent months, Ukraine has been at the forefront of international news, targeted by the Russian war in its territory. As a result, it has become an area of interest for journalists and reporters around the world, not least in this magazine. One such reporter is Hindrek Pärj, who embarked on a gruelling 30-hour journey to Ukraine on March 7 and 8, 2022, together with his photographer to report on the situation for an Estonian newspaper.

As an experienced reporter, Hindrek Pärj witnessed the effects of the ongoing conflict on the local population firsthand. He spoke with locals who shared their stories of struggle and perseverance. In this interview, our guest will share his experiences and insights from his time in Ukraine by discussing the challenges he faced as a reporter and the importance of sharing stories from conflict zones.

Marco: Tell me about your experience in Ukraine as a reporter, what were your duties and your daily tasks?

Hindrek: So, I actually didn't spend that much time in Ukraine, a total of 30 hours I would say. We didn't know beforehand how far we would be able to go, but we had one clear goal in mind. We wanted to go to Odessa for sure. It was back in March of last year and there was still a bit of uncertainty about the development of the conflict, but we felt that

if we were to go to Ukraine, we should find another angle because everybody was in Kyiv and the North and Northeastern parts of the country. We actually wanted to go a bit further, but our Editor-in-Chief didn't allow us, because at the time both my colleague nor I had any prior experience going to a war zone. To answer your question about the tasks, there weren't any specific ones, we have so much freedom here in our editorial: it was just whatever we can do, whatever we can see, wherever we can go.

M: So, how was your interaction when interviewing locals?

H: They were very nice. Especially during the early stages of the war, they wanted to get their story out there. They wanted to let other people in. I come from Estonia, a country that has supported Ukrainian rights since the beginning as we share common values and fears of Russian attacks. Therefore, I could understand even better what this population is going through, what they are experiencing, and I could establish a safe ground for talking: they were very grateful for the opportunity to share their experience with the rest of the world, and let people realise what they're going through.

M: The role of reporters or journalists in these kinds of areas is very important.

What role do you think journalists play in such events? Do you feel a sense of responsibility in reporting the narrative of events, and in being able to provide the audience with trustworthy stories?

H: You're always responsible as a journalist. But even more during times of war. Coming from my personal feelings, I remember when the war started, it was 24th of February. That morning was one of the most horrific mornings you could ever ask for. I mean, it is our Independence Day, the most important day for Estonians. I remember waking up around 7:00 AM for no reason, I looked at my phone and it was full of push notifications from media outlets. Russia started the war, and for the first couple of days, I felt the worst I've probably ever felt. It was horrific because at the time we thought that we were going to be next, we knew that. And we still know that if Russia succeeds in Ukraine, we will be next.

“I could understand even better what this population is going through, what they are experiencing.”

So, when I went to the war zone, to Ukraine, I had that extra sense of responsibility. I felt responsible not only for the Estonian public who I was writing to but also towards the Ukrainian people, towards the people who I was speaking with. As a journalist, you always feel responsible when reporting a story, may it be a court case or a story about an athlete. But when speaking to people who are being attacked by another nation and that don't know if they will have a home the next day, you

The Russian Embassy in Tallinn, Estonia
© Dianne Kok, Magazine Committee



have a bit of an extra sense of responsibility. Moreover, when writing stories, you have to be really conscious of the fact that you are indeed forming a narrative. You're part of the narrative. Whatever you write, it impacts the people that read it.

M: What did the locals tell you? Was there hope in their words?

H: Almost every conversation was about the future, they were just hoping this nightmare would end soon. They all expressed hope for a brighter and better future. Everybody was so hopeful. They were, and they still are. And they expect the reporters to not destroy this kind of hopefulness they have, not to burst their bubble.

And you could really perceive this hope and desire to go back to peacetime: what I noticed that showed me how brave Ukrainians were and their resilience was that buses and trains were still running and even the service which picks up garbage was still in force and regularly working. They were trying to live their lives, using their basic services, and this sense of normality surprised me and made a strong impact on me.

M: Given both the geographical and emotional proximity, as an Estonian reporter you said you feel a special connection with Ukrainians. How did you prepare yourself both mentally and physically for reporting in this conflict zone? How do you cope with the emotional toll of reporting from such a devastated area?

H: It may sound ruthless, but I told myself that it is just a job and I must do it. The reason why I volunteered to go to Ukraine while

others didn't was that I felt like I needed to do something more. I could donate money to support the Ukrainian population, but I still felt that I could do more. I know what my strong aspects are: I know that I can write, I can tell stories, especially human ones, and through them forward emotions.

Of course, when I put that aside, I was anxious. I remember feeling nervous when I stepped on the plane to go to Warsaw, and then from there to Romania. Another time I felt a bit anxious was when I told my mom. I was about to fly to Romania, and only then I texted her, saying, "Oh yes, by the way, I'm going to Ukraine." It was a way to protect her from worrying about me.

Once I arrived in Ukraine, I worked with pure adrenaline, which probably can get you in a lot of stupid situations. But fortunately for us, we stayed away from the front lines. I remember the first night sleeping on a school's gym floor for four hours, and then walking for ten hours straight. Mentally, it is challenging, and I kept repeating to myself, "It's work, it's something that I have to do, it's something I want to do."

M: How did you stay safe during your mission? Did your employer provide you with any equipment?

H: The way in which people tried to live their lives as if nothing was happening, going to the butcher's, running errands made me feel safe. When the air raids started and kept going for around half an hour, I looked at the faces of Ukrainians while we were hiding in a bomb shelter, and I saw no fear in those. They were mostly on the phone talking to their relatives. This made me realise that if they're not worried, there is no reason for me to be. I

was thinking: “They have been under attack for over a week so why the hell should I feel scared if they aren’t?” If they feel safe, as safe as one could feel when an air raid is going off, then I’m good as well. My employer provided me with all the necessary equipment: we had bulletproof vests and helmets.

In case things got really bad, we also got a handy first aid kit because, like I said, at that time it was still unsure whether or when the city would be attacked. We have always kept in touch with my Editor-in-Chief through Telegram and Messenger, and he has completely supported us. When he felt unsafe to send us somewhere we expressed

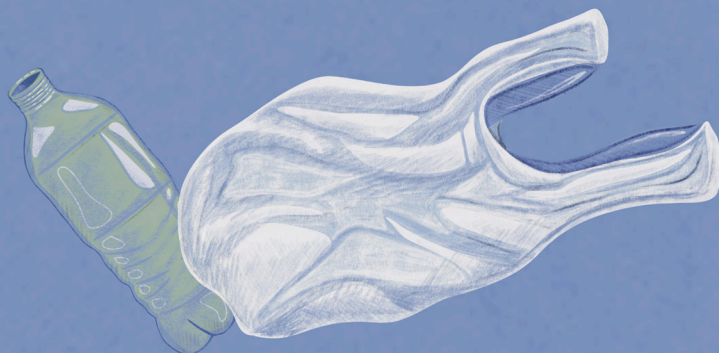
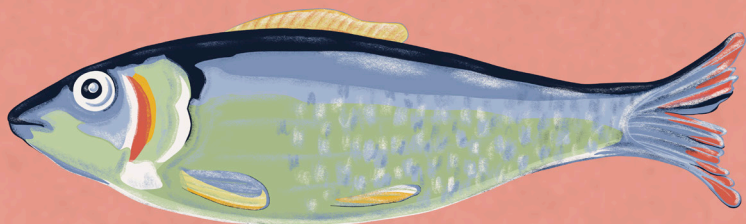
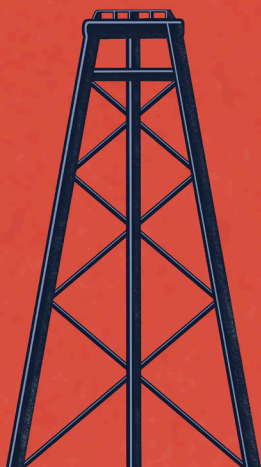
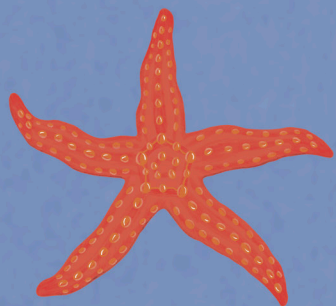
that we wanted to go, he just blocked us. I think it was probably for the best because we weren’t really that prepared to get closer to the frontline.

M: Any last considerations to conclude the interview? What do you keep with you from this experience?

H: I think that both the Ukrainian economic system and the infrastructures have been highly hit, and it would take a lot to rebuild cities the way we knew them. What will never be hit is the sense of belonging of Ukrainians towards their country and the sense of resistance they have and share with each other.

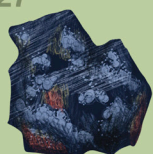
November 21, 2018: National Armed Forces, military parade © Khorkins/Shutterstock





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THE RIGHT TO CLAIM THE OCEAN: IS THE “HIGH SEAS TREATY” A CHANCE FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION ON A GLOBAL SCALE?

March 4, 2023, has constituted a new benchmark in history and the quote “the ship has reached its shore”, issued by United Nations Ambassador Rena Lee from Singapore, has flooded news articles all over the internet. After almost twenty years of negotiations, the official and final agreement on the high seas territory of the ocean has been publicly announced.

The treaty concerns the “conservation and sustainable use of marine biological diversity of areas beyond national jurisdiction” and has been established by the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). What exactly does this “High Seas Treaty” entail? And why has it become so crucial to finally agree on an international convention on the regulation and organization of the high seas in the first place?

“Overfishing, exploration, and exploitation are why protection and internationally binding rules are so urgently needed.”

The Earth’s surface is made up of 70% of water, 182 countries and 13 dependencies are connected to a coastline. The ocean is essential for human oxygen intake and the absorption of a significant share of human-induced CO₂ emissions. Sustaining the

ocean, oceanic life, as well as minerals and resources lying in its seabed is therefore significant for maintaining our planet and a crucial part of climate adaptive and preventative policy.

The sea itself can be divided into different maritime zones. Waters surrounding coastal areas of states belong to the corresponding state territory and within these, states have sovereignty over the water’s activities, its seabed and subsoil. 200 nautical miles (370 km) beyond these waters, the high sea area begins, which makes up nearly two-thirds of the sea and is an unregulated territory outside of national dominance. The seabed of the high seas is referred to as “the Area”, which comprises 50% of the Earth’s seabed in total.

The high seas are regulated by various bodies of the UN which up to this point have operated beside each other with no internationally accepted guideline on the boundaries of the territory they govern. Its resources were restrained for peaceful purposes by the UN and the high seas itself considered as the shared ‘property of humankind’. However, this has made the high seas especially prone to overfishing, exploration, and exploitation in relation to seabed mining, which is why protection and internationally binding rules such as the “High Seas Treaty” have been so urgently needed.

The high seas are vulnerable to exploitation on various levels. Minerals and resources lying on its seabed have repeatedly gained attention, due to a growing global demand, especially for technologies in countries of the Global North. Up until now, these resources could easily be extracted from countries in the Global South. Nevertheless, they are becoming scarce, while the global interest in them is far from declining.



At the current state, there are three different resources that are especially prone to being exploited in the seabed. These are polymetallic nodules, which include different metals such as iron or copper, polymetallic sulfides, including iron or zinc, and cobalt crusts inheriting nickel or cobalt.

Many of the resources found in the high seas are crucial in order to produce so-called green technologies, such as technologies for mobile devices or a sustainable infrastructure, as for example batteries for electric vehicles. Moreover, the high seas have fallen victim to overfishing activities, ocean acidification, as well as to plastic pollution, which contribute to a loss of biodiversity.

What are the changes portrayed by the “High Seas Treaty”? Whereas activities on the high seas have been open to every country up until now as the area is beyond national jurisdiction, the treaty includes states into a

nationally binding treaty in which they have to follow legal restrictions. These should be in the interest of humankind and not only specific states themselves. Following the ratification of the treaty, the involved countries have to design laws, mechanisms, and policies at national and international stages to accomplish the agreements made in the treaty.

After nearly twenty years of ongoing discussions, the High Seas Treaty is therefore celebrated as a major win for multilateralism. It is unique regarding its connection of the protection of the sea with climate change laws, which have been treated separately before, even though one cannot work without the other.

The fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by the UN and the pledge to conserve 30% of the Earth’s land and water until 2030 is not possible without strict global protection of the ocean and the treaty thereby provides a great step in the right direction.

“Is the treaty a serious attempt to restore the oceanic life and diversity and can it lead to peaceful activities on the high seas?”

However, the treaty does not come without its flaws. Before the agreements made in the treaty can pass into law, it has to be ratified by at least 60 countries. Moreover, exploration activities regarding deep sea mining, which are already being executed

and to which contracts have been passed preceding the “High Seas Treaty”, are exempt from its agreements. Previous to the treaty, 31 contracts to explore the high seas and to pursue deep-sea mining have already been passed. This means that there is a remaining danger that significantly damaging practices to the deep sea will still be executed.

“Instead of admitting limits to growth, the growing scarcity of resources is responded to by transferring extraction to other spheres - a paradox in itself.”

Accordingly, a significant question remains: is the treaty a serious attempt to restore the sustainment of oceanic life and diversity and can it lead to peaceful activities on the high seas? Only time can tell if the ideas of the treaty will successfully be implemented into law and violations of the very will be punished accordingly. Promising contracts, such as the Paris Agreement, have been made before, however, their execution has been inadequate.

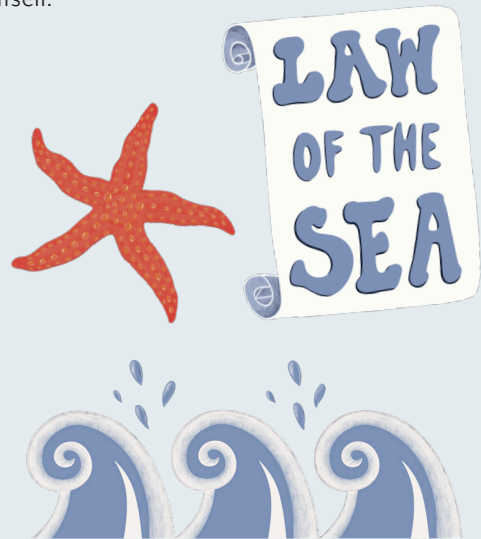
More than that, the chances that exploration of mining practices in the high seas will continue is still very likely. This brings several risks as extracting resources from the seabed is not only highly energy intensive due to the process of extraction itself, but also damaging as the consequences for the biosphere are not researched enough yet.

This portrays a violation of peace with nature, as planetary boundaries are not accepted.

Instead of admitting limits to growth, the growing scarcity of resources is responded to by transferring extraction to other spheres, which is a paradox in itself.

Nevertheless, the treaty remains a sign of hope. The attempt for stronger regulations of the high seas in order to tackle the abuse of animals and minerals by states and companies is a significant success. Respecting the treaty and protecting the high seas area is crucial in order to sustain biodiversity on Earth and its compliance and further protection cannot fall into oblivion.

Practices executed on the high seas are highly precarious and exploitation of resources and overfishing have to be questioned generally in order to restore peace not only amongst humanity but also with animals and nature itself.



Signs of hope and multilateralism are important but following these agreements and facing their consequences is even more significant. The high seas should be respected and treated with care and not as a laboratory for humanity.

MARK BELKIN | ANALYSIS

MERCENARIES WITHOUT BORDERS: HOW A LAWLESS FORCE IS SHIFTING POWER RELATIONS ACROSS THE AFRICAN CONTINENT



Five soldiers holding rifle running on white sand © Pixabay/Pexels

The UN has failed: despite the presence of one of the largest peacekeeping operations in the Central African Republic, or CAR, 13,000 peacekeeping troops could not end the ongoing violence in the country. Neither the UN Mission MINUSCA (Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in the Central African Republic) nor the three-year-long French intervention “Operation Sangaris” managed to deliver long-term stability. Ever since gaining independence from France in 1960, the CAR and its citizens have been subject to civil wars and armed coup d’états. The people are frustrated, particularly outside the capital Bangui.

Their despaired attitude is best illustrated by the popular expression “The State stops at PK12”, the name of the most remote district of the capital city, highlighting that the government has virtually no presence beyond Bangui. Various rebel groups along religious and ethnic lines have capitalised on the absence of functioning state institutions and economic opportunities. The major groups “Anti-balaka” and “Seleka” gather followers and deplete the country of its vast mineral resources through illegal mining or coerced taxation of controlled mining operations. As in many African states, the French colonial legacy is partially responsible for the current

instability. Through patronage networks, the French have supported small groups of elites and centralised economic activity, marginalising a majority of the country's population.

“French influence in the CAR is decreasing and the resulting power vacuum is increasingly being filled by the Kremlin.”

The colonial legacy as well as several civilian casualties, caused by Operation Sangaris and its lack of success, have created growing resentment against France among Central Africans. Since the completion of Operation Sangaris in 2016, French influence in the CAR is decreasing. The resulting power vacuum is increasingly being filled by the Kremlin, steadily expanding its diplomatic efforts in the region.

Simultaneously, a new actor joined the scene, as, according to the BBC, a foreign military group has established a strong presence throughout the country. The group has been training governmental armed forces and carrying out joint missions. Its presence in the CAR proved effective: They have repeatedly prevented the invasion of Bangui by rebels. Throughout the city, the group and its soldiers have been celebrated during demonstrations, and a film positively portraying their actions has been watched by thousands in the country.

The name of this now infamous group is Wagner, a Russian private military company that is de jure illegal in Russia. Its leaders are sinister, to say the very least. Dmitri Utkin, a former army officer and self-proclaimed neo-Nazi, initiated the group together with other elite soldiers. Today, Wagner is headed by Yevgeny Prigozhin. While Russia's constitution officially does not permit private military organisations, it has become an open secret that Wagner is not only tolerated but also sponsored by the Russian defence ministry.

Thousands of leaked documents, verified by the German news outlet “Welt”, confirm the arms deals between Wagner and the government, while also proving that several private meetings between Prigozhin and Russian president Vladimir Putin took place. Prigozhin, an ex-convict nicknamed “Putin's Chef”, made a career catering to public institutions, including the army. Prigozhin allegedly financed Wagner's actions with the wealth he acquired primarily through corrupt contracts, as per Navalny, Putin's imprisoned political opponent.

Wagner's troops have been involved in wars with major significance to Russia, such as in Syria and now in Ukraine. Moreover, the group has been expanding its influence throughout the African continent. Here, Prigozhin orchestrates operations on multiple fronts to increase Russian geopolitical but also ideological dominance. The film on Wagner's “heroic” actions in the CAR mentioned earlier is called “Tourist” and has been financed by the group itself. It depicts French troops supporting an uprising against the current government – and Wagner saving the day side by side with government troops.



Advertising billboard reads: "PMC Wagner: Join team of victors now!" (CC BY 4.0) Alexander Davronov/Wikimedia

"Tourist" is not the only attempt to win over partners for Moscow, which is increasingly isolated on the global political stage. In Mali, Wagner has spread fake footage of a supposed massacre committed by French troops, according to the Financial Times. In the CAR, a pro-Russian-anti-Ukrainian demonstration was organised, showing people wearing T-shirts with the words "Je suis Wagner," or "I am Wagner." Another bizarre while also cynical propaganda attempt is a cartoon made by Wagner: it shows a rat, dressed in a striped shirt and wearing a beret, threatening to evict a man from his house. Luckily, a Wagner soldier appears and kills the rat with a sledgehammer, Wagner's preferred execution tool.

The propaganda and military support seem to be paying off. Both Mali and the CAR voted against calls for Russia to pay war reparations to Ukraine, and most African countries abstained from the vote. During his previous Sahel tour, Russian foreign minister Sergei Lavrov secured several mining concessions across Mali and Sudan. Wagner itself received vast access to mining resources,

including gold mines in Sudan and diamond mines in Mali and the CAR. "Mercenary entrepreneurship" is a lucrative business.

"In the CAR, over 500 human rights abuses are related to the Wagner group."

Wagner has diversified its income streams and expanded its ventures to sugar, timber, and coffee export, potentially earning billions for Prigozhin's undertaking, according to The African Report. Parts of the revenue are most likely being invested to fight the costly war in Ukraine, where Wagner continues to sustain heavy losses. While conducting its "business operations" across Africa, no taxes have to be paid, there is no regulatory oversight, and no consequences for Wagner's actions. The lack of accountability opens the door for a vicious cycle of violence and exploitation.

Prigozhin tries to sell himself as an anti-elitist army man, being one of the few insiders openly calling out Russian bureaucrats and parliamentarians. He regularly accused the

Russian army of being “soft” and demanded an even harsher crackdown on Ukraine. Ex-Wagner members report an “ultra-strict discipline” – members who disobey commands are being executed on the spot. The harsh internal doctrine is reflected in Wagner’s brutal actions in places where the group is involved in Africa.

In the CAR, the UN reported over 500 human rights abuses related to the Wagner group that included harassment, torture, and sexual violence. According to the NGO ACLED, which monitors political violence in Mali, civilians were the victims in 71% of the cases involving Wagner, revealing that the majority of those harmed were non-combatants. Few dare to speak out against Wagner’s actions, fearing repercussions by the group, but also by local forces cooperating with Wagner. Those who are suspected of collaboration with rebels are arrested by Wagner without any access to justice or extrajudicially executed, according to Human Rights Watch.

Where do Wagner’s actions lead the African countries in which the group is involved? The continuous abuse of civilians could play into the hands of rebels and Islamic terrorist groups, which are currently

gaining traction across the Sahel, following the withdrawal of most western troops from the region. Out of fear of further attacks for motives of vengeance, more people might turn their backs on their government and join the various rebel and terrorist groups.

In Libya, Wagner’s assistance is directed towards a rebel leader, whereas in the CAR and other nations, their efforts are geared towards stabilizing the incumbent leadership. However, it remains unclear how long-lasting these efforts will be. Wagner’s support comes with no inner political strings attached. No good governance is needed, and neither reforms nor human rights are being imposed. The underlying issues, within the countries where Wagner operates, are not being addressed. Once Wagner’s presence diminishes, the countries hosting the group are likely to fall back into disarray.

The calls for military support by several African leaders in the face of imminent threat are plausible and with the West militarily retreating from the continent, Wagner’s troops often offer the only option to prevent violent uprisings. However, there have to be legal accountability mechanisms to address atrocities committed by Wagner, if necessary, supported by the UN. Without repercussions for Wagner’s actions, those harmed by the group will never receive any justice and the spiral of violence will carry on.



OSKAR HEDMAN | ANALYSIS

DIFFERENT PROSPECTS, SAME OBJECTIVE: THE FUTURE OF EU ACCESSION IN THE WESTERN BALKANS

If the outbreak of the First World War tells us anything, it is that stability in the Balkans – the supposed periphery of Europe – is anything but inconsequential. Who would have thought in 1914 that an assassination in the remote capital of Bosnia, Sarajevo, performed by a mere 20-year-old Serbian nationalist, would indirectly lead to arguably the greatest political disaster in Europe since the collapse of West Rome in 476 AD? Still, over a century after Archduke Ferdinand and his consort were shot dead by Gavrilo Princip, the region, or at least western parts of it, remains somewhat of a political anomaly from a European perspective.

Leaders of the EU and Western Balkans after a summit
© Alexandros Michailidis/Shutterstock

None of the six countries, which are collectively referred to as 'the Western Balkans' – Montenegro, Serbia, Albania, North Macedonia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, and Kosovo – are members of the European Union (EU). But what they all have in common is that they have their eyes set on future EU accession, which, by all estimates, both the political class and the general population in the countries eagerly covet. According to a survey conducted in 2021 by the 'Balkans in Europe Policy Advisory Group (BiEPAG)', approximately 80% or more of the general population in all six countries but Serbia (where only 53% of the population is in favour of joining the EU) supports EU accession.



The six countries are also gradually becoming economically and politically integrated with the EU. The EU is by far the biggest trading partner and investor in the region, making up over 70% of the Western Balkan's trade and currently pooling tens of billions of euros to help the region with everything from improving its infrastructure to reducing its energy dependence on Russia. In addition, under German headship, the EU has also created a Common Regional Market (CRM) in the Western Balkans, which ensures the free movement of capital, goods, people, and services between the six countries – the four famous freedoms associated with the EU. With visa-free travel to the Schengen Area being extended to Kosovo in 2023, all six countries in the Western Balkans now also enjoy free travel to much of the European continent.

“Approximately 80% or more supports EU accession.”

However, it has now been 20 years since the European Council first declared its intention of integrating the region into the EU and on both sides many have become frustrated with the painstakingly slow accession processes. The EU laments the lack of necessary reforms, and the applicants have become hesitant, not knowing if EU membership is years or decades away. It is also clear that the prospects for EU membership vary considerably between the countries. Even so, in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2022, things have started to move.

North Macedonia and Albania, whose accession processes are handled collectively

by the EU, finally started their accession negotiations in July 2022, after North Macedonia amended its constitution to recognize the existence of a Bulgarian minority within the country. In Montenegro, the smallest country in the region, the pro-EU minority government has vowed to undertake necessary judicial reforms to accelerate the country's already quite advanced EU negotiations which started in 2012. The quality of governance and the safeguarding of civil liberties in the countries are also approaching EU standards; in recent years the widely used Economist Intelligence Unit's "Democracy Index" has upgraded Montenegro's, North Macedonia's, and Albania's status from "hybrid regimes" to "flawed democracies".

Moreover, all three have acquired NATO membership, which in all cases but Finland, Sweden, and Austria has preceded EU membership since the end of the Cold War. It seems that in the long run the compass points to Brussels, and if no insurmountable hurdle appears pertaining to corruption or constitutional matters, it is quite likely that Montenegro, Albania, and North Macedonia will become members in the next 10-15 years.

Even though Serbia is close to completing its EU negotiation process, it is hard to know whether the country is or only appears to be on the cusp of becoming a member. The main reasons for this are Serbia's and specifically its president Alexander Vucic's well-known affection for and dependence on Russia. Russia is a key supporter of Serbia in its territorial dispute with Kosovo (which according to Serbia illegally seceded from the county in 2008), and Serbia evidently

returns the favor by, for example, not imposing sanctions on Russia and cancelling commercial air travel to the country in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. If Serbia were to join the EU, the country would in all likelihood have to sever its much too close ties to Moscow. One can assume that the heavyweights in the EU - the French and the Germans - definitely do not want another Trojan horse like Hungary in the EU that through veto power can hinder future ambitions of a collective European foreign, fiscal, and migration policy.

The outbreak of the war in Ukraine has also influenced the position of Bosnia and Kosovo and has driven them further into the arms of the EU; on December 15, 2022, Bosnia was granted candidate status by the EU and Kosovo officially applied for EU membership. But a necessary breakthrough in negotiations is probably far off. Besides being plagued by corruption and quasi-democratic intuitions, Bosnia continues to struggle with its ethnocentric constitution and political structure, operating with three presidents and three parliaments for each ethnic group – strikingly similar to South Africa under apartheid. As for Kosovo, the mere

“The EU has much to gain by consolidating the entire region.”

existence of the country – which declared its independence from Serbia in 2008 – remains controversial. It is not – thanks to Russian and Chinese vetoes in the United Nations Security Council – a member of the UN and even some EU members – Spain and Greece – have not recognized the country due to fear of legitimizing irredentist claims. Kosovo is also, as Bosnia, inhibited by its urgent need to combat organized crime and reform the judicial system to EU standards.

Despite the varying prospects for EU accession in the Western Balkans, it is obvious that the EU has much to gain politically and economically by in due course consolidating the entire region. EU accession is what the region's population and politicians desire and it simultaneously will thwart Russian and Chinese influence in the region. According to Olivér Várhelyi, the European Commissioner of Neighborhood and Enlargement, EU membership for the Western Balkans is “the only real long-term solution for peace, stability and prosperity.”

Roadsign promoting EU reconstruction project in Serbia © BalkansCat/Shutterstock



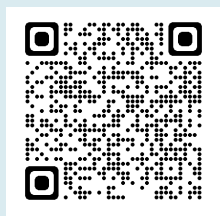
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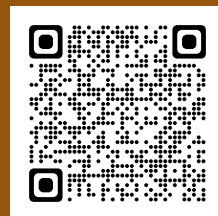
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ALBIN EMANUEL BRATTBERG | OPINION

FAILING HOPE FOR THE 21ST CENTURY: DOES ANYONE STILL BELIEVE THE INTERNATIONAL CLIMATE TARGETS CAN BE MET?

On March 20, 2023, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) published the final instalment of its mammoth sixth assessment report, almost certainly the final warning to limit global temperatures to 1.5 degrees Celsius. Based on current policies, by the publication of the next IPCC report in 2030, the remaining carbon budget will have been used up. Given this grim trend, can anyone honestly say they have confidence in the future and the potential of overcoming this unfolding societal crisis?

All around there is a resignation, a generational pessimism, and disillusionment among young people towards the political system and where society is headed. Does anyone still believe the international climate targets can be met? It should be indication enough that many recent protest movements have started from and been spearheaded

by youth civic activism. With a starting point of 1.5 degrees as the limit beyond which a catastrophic tipping point causes irreparable damage to the biosphere, we should seriously doubt the ability to meet such a goal.

Somewhat soberingly, for a report that is the scientific basis behind the international climate regime and supposed to advise governments in a pivotal decade, Assessment Report 6 (AR6) makes some questionable methodological choices in its global greenhouse gas (GHG) budget calculations. By changing the reference year for 'pre-industrial' emissions from 1750 in AR5 to 1850-1900 in AR6, up to 0.2 degrees of warming are skewing calculations on the remaining budget. Likewise, not all IPCC budgets include non-CO2 emissions such as methane (CH4), meaning many budgets are significantly underestimated.

Almeda wildfire in Southern Oregon 2020
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Furthermore, in several instances, the IPCC's treatment of uncertainty does not align with the precautionary principle when there is a chance of causing irreversible harm. This is exemplified by the use of budget estimates that allow for between a 17 and 83% probability of missing the 1.5-degree temperature limit. Likewise, the complete exclusion of transformative emissions reduction pathways is a grave overestimation of the sequestration potential of pathways relying on overshoot and carbon removal methods. In short, there are serious grounds to consider a much smaller global GHG budget than the one used by the IPCC and the actual possibility to meet the 1.5-degree target could therefore be much lower in reality.

While the idealised target on which emissions pledges are based can be scrutinised, neither is there a credible pathway toward reaching it in practice. The independent scientific monitoring group Climate Action Tracker predicts current national policies and action will lead to a median climate scenario of 2.7 degrees, using an uncertainty range of 2.2-3.4 degrees. This warming would be so significant that there would be a high to very high cascading climate risk across all aggregated, cross-system, and global-scale impacts cited as "reasons for concern" in AR6.

While some national emission reduction rates have been fast, the mitigation has been intermittent rather than continuous and is dwarfed by emission increases in the rest of the world. Reductions achieved within national borders have also been highly linked to offshoring and outsourcing of emission-intensive manufacturing. Yet, the grimmest

prospect for the achievability of any climate commitment is arguably the untenability of current preferred means. The dominant method of reaching a net zero economy, which is used and advocated by almost every signatory to the Paris Agreement, is based on the biophysical myth and assumption that it is possible to decouple emissions from throughput in economic activities.

“The biophysical myth of ‘green growth’ is the de facto strategy employed and promoted to solve the climate crisis.”

From national to international policy, including the EU and major institutions for governance such as the OECD, UNEP, and the World Bank, 'green growth' is the de facto strategy employed and promoted to solve the climate crisis, asserting that technological change and substitution will increase the ecological efficiency of the economy. It promises a 'decoupling' of economic output from environmental damage. However, physical and hard laws, such as the thermodynamic law of conservation of energy set an irreducible minimum quantity of resources necessary for the production of material objects. Furthermore, the law of entropy sets biophysical constraints on the ability to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of energy and natural materials' conversion chains (resources) so that the resulting impacts are minimised. Technological optimisation and productivity improvement of resource use is only possible to a certain extent and at a certain cost

before the recovery and reuse of the same matter-energy is infeasible. This results in an inescapable dependence on corresponding primary resources.

Furthermore, the economic law of increasing marginal cost, or 'best-first principle', indicates that the most readily available and cheapest materials and resources are mobilised first. This makes the mobilisation of remaining stocks more complex, more technologically demanding, more expensive, and more energy- and pollution-intensive. This means efficiency gains and pollution abatement only become more difficult as the economy gradually decouples. Empirically, emission reductions are already receding in almost every country where a limited mitigation success has been achieved, while a trend of declining marginal rates of improvement further slows down emission reduction.

Some sectors are especially difficult to decouple, and evidence shows non-energy sector emissions, such as from industry and agriculture, are major roadblocks. Neither is it possible to simply shift these primary and secondary sectors over to a leaner service economy where materials have supposedly been substituted for more labour-intensive work. Firstly, services have a substantial carbon footprint, since there is a linear relationship between service expenditure and CO₂ emissions. More importantly, services do not substitute physical and material flows in the production of economic value. There is always dependence on a material economy. The most developed service sector economies have not decreased their environmental pressures and continue to rely

heavily on externalised production, moving the environmental burden to other territories.

However, even in the energy sector, which has seen recent dropping prices in renewable energy technology, investments in fossil fuels have never been more lucrative. Exxon, Shell, Chevron, and BP are performing at record levels and Saudi Aramco recorded the largest-ever annual profit by an oil and gas firm in 2022. Meanwhile, ongoing and planned expansion projects by coal, oil, and gas exploration and production companies are estimated to alone exceed the world's remaining carbon budget twice over, pumping out 1182.3 gigatonnes of CO₂ in "carbon bombs" over the course of their operation.

“Necessary radical political action is undermined by the silencing of crucial social differences.”

While several more arguments have been levelled against decoupling, from rebound effects to inappropriate technological change to problem-shifting, what green growth also demonstrates is the ubiquitous post-politics of sustainability and the discourses of climate delay. Like sustainable development, the politics of green growth are governed by a "carbon consensus" of business-as-usual strategies with the seemingly innocent promise of being able to make everyone happy, even as it clearly privileges and maintains the power of business groups. It is a discourse of technocratic fixes and sustainable branding of firms, which relies on heavily scrutinised markets in carbon credits



and carbon removal projects while promising innovation and future technologies, which by definition are unproven to work and certain to arrive too late.

Necessary radical political action is undermined by the silencing of crucial social differences between the rich and the poor, the historically responsible and the victim, and the private interest and the public good. This creates a post-political condition painting everyone as an equal victim of an abstract natural 'enemy'. It denies conflicts between the environment and economic profit and manages antagonisms between interest groups through a consensual depoliticised order of 'sustainable goals', for which there is no real alternative.

Likewise, the promotion of minimal non-transformative action and shifting the burden of responsibility to ambiguous future innovation and consumer choices are fundamental drivers of climate delay. It is no wonder that across scientific reviews on

green growth there is no empirical evidence of an absolute, permanent, and sufficiently rapid decoupling of economic growth from critical environmental pressures at the scale necessary to realise the international climate goals. At the global level, such sufficient decoupling would require an average annual decline in carbon intensity of economic output at 14%. Today, the average annual decline is less than 1%.

Finally, beyond a failure of target-setting and implementation, there is also a systemic procedural failure to address these climate ambitions. Democratic political competition and inclusive democratic institutions have been found to be crucial for climate policy adoption, yet more than half of the world, including some of the biggest emitting countries such as Russia, China, and Saudi Arabia, does not follow democratic political practices. Beyond domestic mobilisation, it is also highly doubtful that authoritarian rulers will be accountable to international consensus politics.

However, even among the 'democratic' super polluters, climate change continues to be a largely partisan issue regarding the passing of 'hard' climate policies such as taxes and regulations, while agendas and programmes also tend to change with every electoral cycle. All it takes is one Trump to cause a lag or even reverse prior gains, and in such a landscape, new year's resolution politics like the Paris Agreement remain ineffective. Moreover, major legislation is often only passed near democratic races, meaning promises for political terms often wane on delivery. In equally problematic fashion, many so-called 'democracies' behave much more like plutocracies in practice, run by oligarchs and political and media elites with vested interests and fossil fuel assets.

This paints a grim picture of the future, and apocalyptic writing has some significant moral implications. Narratives and discourses have a tremendous impact. Research in climate psychology warns that doomsday narratives and negative climate communication can cause excessive climate anxiety and lead to interpretive or implicatory climate denial as a form of emotion-focused coping, which can threaten to paralyse climate engagement. For those who lack psychological resources for problem-focused coping, and in a media landscape where there is already a

bias toward negative stories, difficult and disturbing narratives can cause dissociation and indifference. However, overemphasis on optimism can instead lead to an overreliance on a status quo of inaction, be disingenuous to people's true fears, and be offensive to groups who suffer environmental racism and whose reality is climate tragedy and ecological oppression.

Moreover, political moderates and conservatives, those with individualistic worldviews or those who feel less burdened by the climate crisis, often exhibit lower risk perception and outcome efficacy, and to this audience, a doomsday narrative may be necessary. Although, make no mistake - pure negativity is as good as surrender, and itself a discourse of climate delay. Yet the state of silence on the infeasibility of 1.5 degrees and the unworkable politics of green growth reveal a stealth crisis in the unfolding apocalypse of the status quo.

The unprovoked quiet of business as usual is a warning sign of empty promises, of systematic avoidance of the conflicts of sustainability for business interests and consumers, of climate delay to an eruption of disaster and discontent. In the words of political-economic geographer Erik Swyngedouw: the apocalypse will be disappointing.





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THE WOMEN OF LIBERIA MASS ACTION FOR PEACE: AN INSPIRING EXAMPLE OF SUCCESSFUL PROTEST WITHOUT VIOLENCE

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, which for the first time on a state level recognised that women should be involved in peace processes. The resolution sentences sexual and gender-based violence as a crime and not an unavoidable side-effect of war. In the following years, ten more resolutions related to the involvement of women were added. Even though women have always been affected by wars, this shows that the importance of involving their voices in peacebuilding has finally been recognised in international relations. Peace agreements have been found to be 20% more likely to last at least two years when women are involved.

Women are impacted by wars in unique ways. One brutal weapon regularly used in conflicts all around the world to suppress women is rape. Studies (for example by Dara Kay Cohen in the American Political Science Review) have found that the more brutal rituals employed during the hazing of soldiers, the more likely these soldiers are to commit sexual violence and rape throughout conflict.

The severity and frequency of this signal the urgency of focusing on women's and children's perspectives in times of war and to particularly consider them in the process of finding solutions. Specifically, the perspectives

of women in the Global South need to be heard more, along with a critical assessment of how these women are perceived in the Global North.

Strategies of resistance have been found by women all around the world when faced with injustices. Even though progress has been made through measures like Resolution 1325, in the analysis of war, realist and masculine ideas of causes and impacts are regularly still fore-fronted. Women are not just passive victims and should not merely be perceived this way through a Western gaze that often homogenises these women as traditional, uneducated, and powerless.

“Peace agreements have been found to be 20% more likely to last at least two years when women are involved.”

An inspiring example of women from the Global South taking a stance of resistance is the Women of Liberia Mass Action for Peace (WAP). WAP was influential in achieving peace and thereby contributing to the end of a period of two brutal civil wars in Liberia that waged from 1989 to 2003. In the first one, the militia National Patriotic Front of Liberia (NPFL) overthrew the totalitarian government and fought rivalling groups and



Faces of Liberia Project, Together Liberia © Ken Harper/Flickr

the country's armed forces in the following years.

The leader of the NPFL, Charles Taylor, became president in 1997 after peace had been implemented in 1996. In 1999, after two years of peace, the rebel group Liberians United for Reconciliation and Democracy (LURD) invaded the North of Liberia. This group was an anti-Taylor group supported by Guinea. Subsequently, another rebel group, the Movement for Democracy in Liberia (MODEL), invaded the South of the country in 2003, leaving Taylor to control only one-third of Liberia.

The Accra Comprehensive Peace Agreement ended the long period of brutal civil wars in 2003 in which more than 250,000 people died. Both the LURD and Taylor's forces obliged children to fight the war. Soldiers,

including these children, often developed drug addictions, as drugs were used in order to make them more effective fighters. Another common weapon was rape, used by all sides, leaving people severely abused and traumatised.

The women of Liberia were not willing to let these horrific circumstances prevail. In 2003, Leymah Gbowee organised a group of Christian women to form a peace movement. Soon, they were joined by Muslim women as well, thereby leaving religious differences behind for the common purpose of achieving peace.

Over months, these women with different backgrounds organised protests and sit-ins in the name of the WAP. They tried to get President Taylor's attention until finally a government representative agreed to speak

to them. They also organised talks with the rebel side, urging the warlords to agree to peace talks.

The movement got increased media attention through a sex strike that the women started with the goal of motivating men, specifically their own partners, to join their cause. The women taking to the streets dressed in white showed their neutrality towards all conflict parties.

Finally, peace talks took place in Ghana. These were disappointing at first, with the different sides unwilling to change their positions. However, eventually, around 200 women present at the talks blocked the exits of the building and successfully forced the parties to come to the Accra peace agreement, which formed the end of many bloody years of conflict.

After this important achievement, the WAP remained active, being engaged in democracy promotion and voter registration, and supporting the election of Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, who was elected the first female president in 2005 in a historic win. Today, the political situation in Liberia is stable and has increasingly been so since the end of the second civil war in 2003. Nevertheless, issues like corruption and violence against women continue, therefore the resistance and activism of the Liberian women remain vibrant as well.

The WAP inhibits many interesting aspects for thinking about the role of women in war and peace. The civil wars are brutal examples of how women are disproportionately impacted, especially through sexual violence.



Leymah Gbowee at the UNGA, 2018
© lev Radin/Shutterstock

But the WAP also exemplifies the agency of women and how they find their own voices and ways of resisting. While wars often play out to be specifically brutal to the lives and bodies of women, the women of Liberia specifically used their bodies to fight back.

The way the WAP successfully employed non-violent forms of protest against the patriarchal and aggressive threats around them is especially inspiring and relates to approaches like Feminist Foreign Policy that highlight the importance of human security and human rights over military measures.

Movements like the WAP underline the value of incorporating women's perspectives in peacebuilding and the influence that civil society has on durable peace. If women form 50% of the world's population and are heavily impacted by wars, how could peace be sustainable and lasting when their knowledge and experiences are not involved in the process of achieving peace? When building bridges for peace, how can the foundation be stable without the pillar of women's and other marginalised groups' insights? The WAP is an example of women establishing this foundation and their essential involvement in the construction of bridges for peace.

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SANTERI RÖNTY | ANALYSIS

PROSPECTS FOR PEACE IN LIBYA: WHAT ARE THE CHANCES FOR REUNIFICATION?

Arch of Marcus Aurelius with view of Gurgi Mosque in Tripoli, Libya © Z El-Baz/Unsplash

Contemporary Libya encompasses numerous things – an abundance of oil and gas, a migratory crisis, and a major internal geopolitical division between the East and West. As a consequence of the decade-long crisis in Libya following the collapse of Muammar Gaddafi’s regime, the country’s government split into two parliamentary and governmental entities. The House of Representatives (HoR), based in Tobruk and supported by the Libyan National Army, controls much of the eastern parts of Libya and is backed by the UAE, Egypt, and Russia. The western part of Libya is governed by the Government of National Unity (GNU) based in Tripoli and supported by the United States, Turkey, and the United Nations, among others.

The division of Libya into east and west is facilitated by the location of the population and geographic structure of the country, divided roughly between Tripoli and Benghazi. In addition to the two political entities, much of the southern territories bordering Algeria, Niger, Chad, and Sudan are controlled by armed militias and tribesmen.

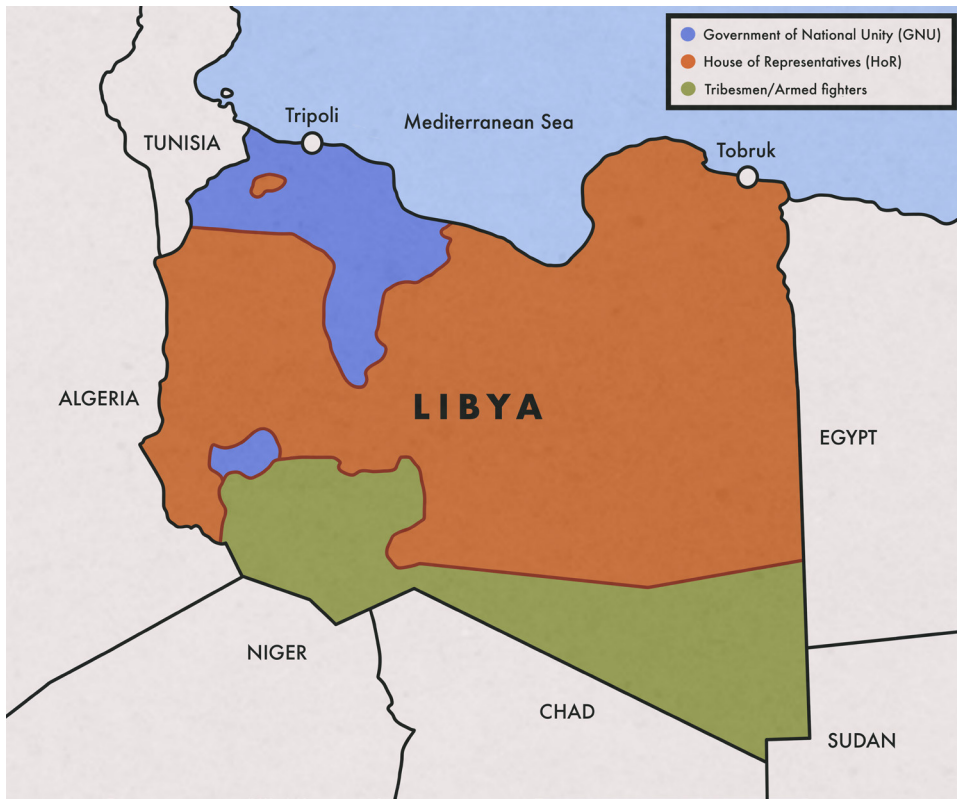
This geopolitical division gives many international actors the chance to support their side one way or the other. Outside actors’ interests lie in a unified, strong, and peaceful Libya – an image mostly painted by the United Nations, which recently announced the goal of presidential and legislative elections by the end of 2023. For years, the UN has attempted to bring the two Libyan governments together in order to negotiate peace and create a common framework for a constitution, which would enable parliamentary and presidential elections in

Libya. This is not the first time the UN is trying to orchestrate elections in the country – its latest attempt was in December 2021 and before that in November 2019. The United Nations Support Mission in Libya (UNSMIL) strives to support the creation and continuity of national institutions, as well as to promote democratic principles of governance. Will Libya give itself a chance to unite and strive for long-term peace and are the aspirations of the UN enough to pursue such sustainable, enduring change?

On March 14, 2023, Libya’s High Council of State voted for a constitutional amendment, which allows for the establishment of electoral laws in Libya. The vote came after the Head of the UNSMIL, Abdoulaye Bathily, assured at the beginning of March that he was setting up a committee of major political figures in Libya in order to set a framework for organising elections.

“The meeting held on March 26 was the first inclusive meeting in Libya in more than a decade.”

Following the amendment, the UNSMIL coordinated a meeting between military commanders united in the western, eastern, and southern regions in Tripoli on March 26. The meeting focused on strengthening dialogue between the intra-Libyan actors, rejecting all forms of violence throughout the territory of Libya, and forming a unified government for all Libyan state institutions. Most importantly, emphasis was put on the



Politico-territorial map of Libya and surrounding states

importance of pursuing elections and for all the actors to cooperate in order for that to happen. In addition, the participants agreed to arrange another meeting during the month to follow, which was eventually arranged in Benghazi on April 7, concerning the same themes as the first one.

In what way are the circumstances and factors for elections in Libya favourable? The meeting held on March 26 was the first inclusive meeting inside Libya in more than a decade, and the fact that a second meeting was arranged also sends signals of national cohesion. The obstacle that had earlier been deemed challenging – if not impossible – has now been overcome. Reaching a milestone of such significance indeed does convey a message in the strive for national unity. The

fact that the representatives of the different political entities of Libya were willing and able to meet under a common agenda says a lot about what the future might bring. In any case, the revival of a common agenda might ensure the creation of a collective, national electoral legislature. Still, this alone will not guarantee that actual elections will take place, nor does it give any insight into when these would happen.

The longer the process of initiating cooperation between the intra-state actors, the larger the number of variables that might alter the outcome. If the creation of a framework that allows for a constitution enabling collective elections were to fail, the possibility for a divided Libya would persist. This division might endure as an internal

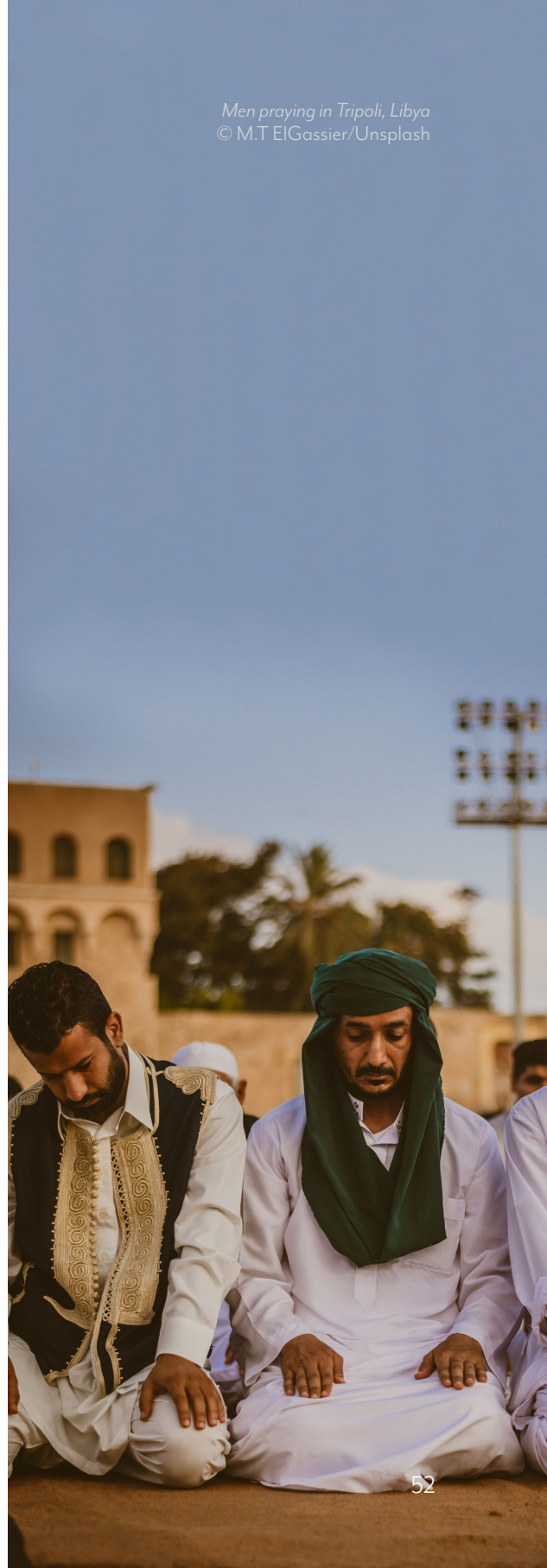
division, or even take the form of a total segmentation of the country.

Due to the geography of Libya and the distribution of natural resources throughout its territory, it is more likely that each of the actors would rather be in favour of claiming the territory in its entirety than to see it cut in pieces. Even if the potential common constitution were to allow for elections to take place, during the years that have lacked proper political consensus, many Libyans have become sceptical of democratic processes, suspecting that the goal of many politicians is to delay any election that could topple them from their positions.

Since 2011, Libya has not seen national unity in its domestic politics and the country remains internally divided. The division of Libya could come to an end in the near future if the different political entities operating in the country find a common framework for a constitution that enables the implementation of presidential and legislative elections.

Having gathered the representatives from all the major political entities in Libya for meetings on March 26 and April 7, the UNSMIL was able to pursue a sense of cooperation among the participants, implying a desire for a unified Libya. While the first steps of such a mutual effort are the most crucial, the outcome is yet to be determined. Before the people are able to shape the result of any election, the future of Libya is primarily in the hands of the political elite and military commanders from across the country. Nevertheless, the symbolic steps taken suggest high hopes for a reunification of Libya.

Men praying in Tripoli, Libya
© M.T ElGassier/Unsplash



NICOLAS FIESSINGER | ANALYSIS

RELIGIOUS LEADERS, INSTITUTIONS, AND PEACEMAKING: A BACKWARD TENDENCY?



Religious leaders gather in Jerusalem's Moscow Square to call for peace in Ukraine- Russia war © Gil Cohen Magen/Shutterstock

*“Bringing the spiritual dimension into the peacemaking process can create access to the more deep-seated, affective base of the parties’ behaviour, enabling them to examine critically their own attitudes and actions.” Gerrie ter Haar, summarising Hizkias Assefa’s words in *Bridge or Barrier: Religions, Violence, and Visions for Peace*.*

In various places across the globe, individuals are attacked or threatened because of their beliefs or belonging to a certain religion. Thus far, when talking about ‘religion’ in international affairs, mention is usually made of conflict and inter-faith violence. Whether the focus is on Africa or the Middle East, examples of contemporary conflicts in which religion and beliefs lie at the core of the outbreaks of violence are numerous and well-documented. Thoroughly explored and

studied, the link between war and religion is a full-fledged field of study today. Reasons abound: almost two-thirds of current global conflicts have a religious component and this proportion is even more significant in certain regions.

In the African Sahel region, eight out of ten conflicts display a religious dimension. Most people living in the Northern part of the continent (above the Sahel region) are

Muslims, while the central and Southern parts are mostly Christian. Religion is usually considered the most central character in the definition of someone's identity in this part of Africa, making the outbreak of violence recurrent due to inter-faith competition. Terrorist groups, such as the Shabaab in Somalia or Boko Haram in Nigeria, usually operate against Christian and ethnic minorities. Similar issues occur in the Middle East, with the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, for which the primary reason is an inter-group competition between Jews and Muslims over land. Hitherto, the role religion can play in peace-making and peace-building, on the flip side of its link with war, is often unconsidered and neglected. Nevertheless, despite the lack of studies on 'religious peacebuilding', numerous attempts have been made to resolve specific conflicts by including religious leaders.

“In mediation efforts, religious leaders are becoming more and more important in acting as a third party.”

This inclusion does not come out of nowhere. As for the moral aspect, religions promote values such as redemption, kindness, and forgiveness through their discipline. Being their 'physical' emanation, religious leaders embody these values and can thus play a role of moral warrants that constantly strive for justice and peace. Their authority and words are respected, as religious leaders are also in

some cases community chiefs and thus the central authority people refer to. Because of the moral leverage that traditional mediators do not have, the inclusion of religious leaders in a mediation process can provide significant added value. With an increasing role in mediation efforts, religious leaders are becoming more and more important in acting as a third party along with other (non-) governmental actors.

Two of the most famous mediations held by religious leaders and institutions took place in Sudan and Mozambique. In Sudan, a country still characterised by a high degree of instability, civil wars have been ongoing for decades. The Addis Ababa Agreement (1972), which put an end to the First Sudanese Civil War (ongoing from 1955 to 1972), is the result of a successful peace process led by both the All Africa Conference of Churches (AACC) and the World Council of Churches (WCC).

While having their specificities and missions (the AACC promotes ethics and morality in Africa while the WCC acts globally to seek cohesion among Christians), the two organisations define themselves as “ecumenical fellowships” that work towards unity. They want to enhance peaceful cooperation among religions and within Christian churches by promoting interfaith dialogue and relations. The fact that the AACC and WCC were chosen to overview the peace process does not come out of nowhere either: according to John S. Mbiti, the ‘father of modern African theology’, “religion permeates into all departments of African life so fully that it is not easy or possible always to isolate it.”

“AACC efforts made great contributions to the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.”

Another example of a successful role played by the AACC in peace process efforts is the actions the ecumenical fellowship has put in place to contribute to the end of the Apartheid regime in South Africa.

In Mozambique, religious leaders and government officials negotiated the Rome General Peace Accords (1992), which ended the Mozambican Civil War (ongoing from 1977 to 1992). Including members from the Community of Sant'Egidio (Christian community of the faithful of pontifical right), the Mozambican Church Council, and representatives of the Italian government, the mediator team signed a significant success that brought a semblance of democracy to Mozambique. Alongside the UN, the mediator's team enabled the resolution of a 15 years conflict that killed over 1 million people and destroyed nearly all public infrastructure.

Last but not least, the Alexandria Process is an innovative attempt launched in 2002 to build peace in the so-called 'Holy Land', by promoting interfaith dialogue “between the Muslim, Christian, and Jewish Communities”. By the inclusion of religious leaders and authorities such as the Archbishop of Canterbury George Carey, the grand imam of Al-Azhar Sheikh Mohamed Sayed Tantawi,

and the Latin Patriarch of Jerusalem Michel Sabbah (among others), the process aims to find a solution to the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. In the Alexandria declaration, the stakeholders pledged a ceasefire and reconciliation in Jerusalem by emphasising their common faith and traditions.

Even though the initiative suffered from a lack of political support (no powerful traditional third parties showed support over time), it played a key role in resolving the 2002 Siege of the Church of the Nativity. For 39 days, Palestinian militants were hiding in the Church of Nativity located in Bethlehem, being besieged by Israeli Defense Force

Archbishop Desmond Tutu
© Peter Rhys Williams/Shutterstock



soldiers. The mediation of the siege was held by Andrew White from the Church of England, acting as a representative of the Archbishop of Canterbury and “Vicar of Baghdad”. Andrew White is also a former Director of the International Centre for Reconciliation (now part of the Coventry Cathedral Reconciliation Ministry), an institution which tries to achieve peace in conflicts including the three monotheistic faiths.

David Smock, from the United States Institute of Peace, qualifies the relationship between religion and peace as “maturing”. According to him, some generalities can be drawn on the link between religion and peace, which he has found through in-depth research he led on different conflicts, such as interreligious dialogue in Macedonia and interfaith organisation in Iraq. The first relevant factor is that religious leaders are not political leaders. In most of the studied cases, we can observe a lack of mutual support between the two entities that should complete each other and not compete with each other.

2002 siege of the Church of nativity (edited image)
(CC BY 3.0) Israeli Defense Forces/Wikimedia



The second one is inherently linked to the religions themselves. Through the values they promote in their discipline, religions can create an environment that is conducive to expressions of “apology, repentance, and forgiveness”. An example here would be the Yelwa-Nshar case, in which, according to Smock, “the apology and repentance by the leader of the Muslim community constituted a transforming moment in the mediation.” The third one is that to be effective, the mediation needs to be held by communities that approach parity in terms of institutional strength. This facilitates mutual recognition and thus avoids imbalance in the negotiation process.

Even though it is true that religious institutions and leaders can dramatically exacerbate conflicts and violence, it is essential to keep in mind that inter-faith competition rarely results in dramatic events such as the ones presented here. The community that religion offers is, and should stay, a safe space for people to live in and rely on, that should never promote violence or war in any way.

CHINA'S FOREIGN AID IN AFRICA: A BLESSING OR NEW COLONIALISM IN DIGUISE?

China's increasing power and global influence create a lot of tension and the US-China trade war seems perpetual with no end in sight. China is viewed as 'the new evil empire' by many in the West and is believed to have a hidden agenda of replacing freedom with authoritarianism - but to what extent is this actually true? Taking a look at China's extensive foreign aid, it might seem like they have a genuine interest in global development and want to contribute

with their expertise in infrastructure to provide a better world for everyone.

Historically, American and European organisations, such as the IMF and the World Bank, have dominated the development of infrastructure in Africa for a long time, especially during the post-war period. This influence however gradually decreased with the African countries' increasing independence from neo-colonial power. The

An aerial photograph showing a large concrete railway tunnel portal built into a hillside. A dirt road and a railway track lead to the portal. The surrounding landscape is hilly and covered in green vegetation, with some cleared areas and a dirt road visible in the foreground.

Aerial view of the railway and tunnel portal of the of the Chinese-built Nairobi-Entebbe railroad line, southeast of Nairobi, Kenya© schusterbauer.com/Shutterstock

pressures of market capitalism shaped the rest of the story of Sub-Saharan development. China has been present for the same amount of time, although mostly in the background up until the country began reorganising itself as a market economy in 1978.

China's most known project is probably the BRI (Belt and Road Initiative) initiated in 2013, which includes 147 countries as of March 2022. Africa remains China's main continent for investment with almost half of their financial aid going there, the largest part of investments going to Sub-Saharan Africa, as China has long had an apparent interest in the resources of that region. Their aid does not only go towards infrastructure, although it constitutes over 30% of the total

infrastructure projects in Africa but also includes other sectors such as energy and communication.

With China's foreign aid, a growing difference can be observed in donor practices and rules, where China goes their own way. It can be said that China has a special relationship with the African continent because they recognise their development stage, which is similar to China just thirty years ago. Since China has also dealt with a rapidly growing population and a lack of infrastructure, they know what to do from their own experience. When African countries seek to improve their economic conditions for social well-being their first need is finance, and there China comes sweeping in.



Why are many African countries interested in China's aid? Cavince Adhere, a Kenya-based international relations scholar, emphasises that African leaders want to be treated as equals and collaborate as partners, rather than facing the influence of a big brother. One of the key features of the approach of Chinese foreign aid is collaboration and they stress equality as a basis of their relationships - despite it sounding unnatural considering the nature of foreign aid. What attracts certain African leaders even more is China's 'non-interference' policy, which prevents China from mediating in any internal affairs of the country, therefore differentiating themselves from most Western aid, which has an agenda of implementing democracy.

However, this 'non-interference' has shown to be a difficult promise to keep. According to the Mercator Institute for China Studies, China's involvement in mediation projects has only increased since the BRI project was launched in 2012 - from three in 2011 compared to nine in 2018, including several BRI countries such as Afghanistan, Myanmar and Iran. China's department of Foreign Aid defends itself as still having a non-intervening role in these conflicts in two ways: Firstly, through 'consultative intervention', i.e. making the host government actively welcome their help. Secondly, focusing on peace-making and solutions rather than giving attention to why the conflict happened in the first place limits the scope of China's means and goals.

What are China's real objectives in Africa? Is their aid a blessing or is it a new form of colonialism in disguise? Sadly enough, the reality is that it is simply too naive to believe that anyone would help in exchange

for nothing. Most foreign aid is ultimately controlled by some hidden agenda, whether Chinese or American, whether considered good or bad. Indeed, aid programs assist the receiving countries in their development process but the question is: in which direction are they developing as a result of the aid? Most Western aid policies steer towards democracy and human rights, following the principles of organisations such as the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development).

“African leaders want to be treated as equals and collaborate as partners, rather than facing the influence of a big brother.”

China, on the other hand, has supported governments that are denounced by the international community for not respecting human rights, for example, Zimbabwe and Ethiopia. Due to a lack of transparency, it is difficult to get a complete overview of China's aid and determine its objectives, however, empirical evidence suggests that natural resources play a part in who China helps: almost half of China's main receiving countries gave access to oil or granted rights to prospect for oil, for example, Nigeria and Angola. The principal point here is that there is a definite interdependence between China's objectives and the amount of aid that they give. Although, what seems to be China's main goal is political support and to increase their soft power, as that is what they need most in today's geopolitical environment. No one wants to be called 'the new evil empire', right?

Kampala, Uganda: Large scale road construction works performed by a Chinese contractor © Robin Nieuwenkamp/Shutterstock



“No one wants to be called ‘the new evil empire’, right?”

China’s aid attracts a lot of attention and receives criticism concerning corruption, debt traps, and lack of transparency. There are cases where these concerns are found to be true, such as when a Bloomberg article revealed that Chinese cash flowed through a Congo bank to the former president, as well as cases where China has lent money to countries that clearly cannot pay it back, thus creating debt traps. However, it is important to not overemphasise the criticism as it has shown not to be true in many cases, and

several studies point out that we should not believe that everything China does is coherent because, in fact, there are several providers with separate interests, and not everything is determined by “an all-ruling elite”.

China might want to provide a better world for everyone - but the definition of ‘a better world’ is ambiguous. No matter what we think, China has emerged as a critical provider in many African countries and the African continent will always remain important for Chinese interests. We can only guess China’s ultimate objective, but their power and influence are not going to disappear anytime soon, so we need to encourage collaboration, face our differences, make peace, and show them the way to a better future.

GIAN GANTENBEIN | ANALYSIS

BURNING BRIDGES IN THE SAHEL: AFRICA'S VERY OWN AFGHANISTAN?

The Sahel: a region rich in culture and resources, yet also threatened by food insecurity and climate change. Spanning five million square kilometres, the area is a hub for transnational terrorism. At the intersection of drugs and arms smuggling and central migration routes, we find an increasingly complex security situation. In the midst of the deadliest UN mission in history, with an ever-growing number of actors and shifting alliances, several EU member states have decided to pull out of the region. As a result, the deployment of thousands of military and development personnel from France, Sweden, and several other states has

come to an abrupt halt. Seemingly without an exit strategy and in the absence of a long-term plan for Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso, the vast majority of EU personnel have now left the region.

At the same time, massive Chinese foreign direct investments in mining and other crucial economic sectors and the spread of the Russian mercenaries have transformed the Sahel. Ten years ago, these sectors were almost exclusively dominated by France, the EU, and its allies. This interplay has turned the region into one of the most intriguing and fast-paced scenes of global power politics.

Barkhane military operation
in Ansongo, Mali © Fred
Marie/Shutterstock



The hasty European exit from the Sahel burned bridges and its effects continue to negatively impact states all over West Africa. The future of the Sahel, especially Mali and Niger, looks bleak.

Nigerian journalist, author, and specialist for the region, Seidik Abba, question whether this situation is Africa's own "Afghanistan". Why did the Africa's former colonial power France, enter the Sahel in the first place? How and why should the EU continue to operate in the region?

“Without an exit strategy and in the absence of a long-term plan, the EU has now left the region.”

Countering terrorism in Mali

In 2013, shortly after the 2012 coup d'état – one of many as we will see – which overturned the controversial former francophile president Amadou Toumani Touré, the Malian transitional government found itself facing a rise in jihadism in the North of the country. The jihadist terrorists managed to utilise existing ethnic conflicts and separatist movements to gain influence.

Quickly, jihadist rebels seized control over a region known as Azawad, home to many different ethnic groups such as the partly nomadic Tuaregs and Berbers, spanning from the Mali-Algeria border in the North to Mopti in central Mali. In Timbuktu, located in the Southern Azawad, the terrorist group Ansar Dine destroyed several world heritage sites, among them 14 out of 16 mausoleums contributing to Mali's rich history, as well

as a library containing the world's largest collections of Islamic manuscripts. Soon they began moving towards Mali's capital city, Bamako.

The interim government called upon France for support to protect Bamako and fight the spreading terrorism. In January 2013, the French-led Operation Serval began, backed by a United Nations Security Council resolution for military action in Northern Mali. In the beginning, Operation Serval was successful and the goal of pushing back the jihadists was temporarily achieved. It soon became clear, however, that Serval, focussing solely on the military dimension, lacked a long-term plan to reach its second objective: restoring Mali's territorial integrity and stabilising the country. Observers at the time noted that this shortcoming was due to a lack of comprehension of local societal and historical circumstances and the nature of the conflicts in the North on the part of French decision-makers and their military.

Dozens of different ethnic populations, rebel groups, and jihadist organisations have been struggling for influence, territorial control, and power in Mali for decades. Serval was unidimensional as the mission tried to fight a single enemy. In 2014, the military dimension of Serval was replaced by the French-led Operation Barkhane, which included the specialised task force Takuba, with the goal of “hunting” terrorists. In all of these missions, African and European, including Swedish, military forces were deployed side by side.

Integrated Multidimensional Stabilization

To counter the problems arising from a unidimensional, military-focused approach,

in 2013, the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali was installed. Some of its ambitious objectives included the achievement of peace and the stabilisation of Mali, restoration of the state's authority especially in remote and rural areas, and the protection of human rights and civil society.

“Spillover effects of the untamed conflict in Mali have also long destabilised neighbouring West-African countries.”

Simultaneously, the European Union Military Mission to Contribute to the Training of the Malian Armed Forces (EUTM Mali), aiming to educate and train the Malian military, was put into place. Later, the scope of the mission included Niger as well. In the spirit of ‘helping Malians to help themselves’, Malian and Nigerien soldiers and officers were trained to effectively combat rebel and jihadist groups. This mission was complemented by the European Union Capacity Building Mission in Mali and Niger, a civilian crisis management mission training police forces and supporting judicial and administrative entities fighting corruption and administrative malpractice to contribute to an environment of good governance.

In 2014, Mali, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania, and Chad, combined their efforts in fighting poverty, developing infrastructure and agriculture, as well as coordinating security questions and founded the G5 Sahel. Together, the G5 countries implemented a

Joint Force of about 5000 soldiers and police officers to support international and regional organisations and combat organised crime in areas such as drug trafficking, human smuggling, and terrorism.

The Status Quo – devastation and criticism

Today, questions arise whether MINUSMA and the European engagement in fact contributed to a destabilisation rather than to stabilising the Sahel, and the missions are increasingly under criticism.

The current situation is grim. The UN estimates that around 412,000 people in the tri-state region of Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso have been internally displaced and almost nine million people require humanitarian assistance, a 17% increase since the beginning of last year. Between 2007 and 2022, more than 22,000 people died in terror attacks and combats in the Sahel. Reports of human rights abuses by peacekeeping troops have increased, and with around 260 dead peacekeeping soldiers to this day, MINUSMA is the deadliest UN mission in history.

Adding to the pile of problems is the fact that a notable amount of military personnel trained in EUTM Mali and other special force training have switched sides, while the Malian military remains relatively unorganised and mismanaged. One of the most notorious, and by far not the only example, is Ibrahima Traoré, leader of the 2022 coup d'état in Burkina Faso. He was trained by US-American and EU instructors before joining MINUSMA. Now, he finds himself amidst allegations of cooperation with the Russian mercenary group Wagner, which is rapidly gaining influence in the Sahel.



Barkhane military operation © Fred Marie/Shutterstock

Spillover effects of the untamed conflict in Mali have also long destabilised neighbouring West-African countries. From Northern Cameroon and Nigeria to Benin and the Ivory Coast, terrorist activities have increased rapidly.

A new series of coup d'états

The diffuse status quo in 2021 was complicated further nearly overnight on May 24, 2021, following the second coup in nine months and the seventh in the short history of the country overall.

Vice President Colonel Assimi Goïta captured the transitional President N'Daw, Prime Minister and Minister of Defence, who only nine months prior ousted the democratically elected president Keïta. Goïta, who now leads the new interim government as self-proclaimed president, previously worked

for the Malian and the US Army Special Forces. In a training session organised by the US army, he met Mamady Dombouya, a Guinean Special Forces member and former French legionnaire, who also overthrew his government in 2021 with the knowledge gained in US- and EU-led trainings. Now, he is interim president of Guinea.

Under Goïta, Mali left the G5 Sahel Joint Force fighting against terrorism, broke with international agreements, requested France to leave Mali, and now demonstrably cooperates with the Wagner Group.

In the meantime, transnational jihadist terrorism has spread all over the Sahel with a new epicentre in Burkina Faso, where a seemingly never-ending series of terrorist attacks haunt the population, while reports of the use of child soldiers emerge. This led to

an almost complete withdrawal of Western external military actors, leaving the sorely afflicted civilian population in the hands of a military junta and Russian mercenaries.

The future of EU engagement in the Sahel – challenges, hopes and expectations

Geopolitically, the Sahel has gained particular importance in recent years. Often neglected, the Sahel now is a fiercely contested target for almost all global players.

Given the fact that China is surpassing both the EU and the US in terms of foreign direct investments, import volume, and infrastructure on the African continent, the EU and its Member States cannot afford to give up more influence and need to drastically change their policy towards Sub-Saharan Africa. Regional powers in the Middle East and Turkey have entered the scene, pursuing their very own economic and political interests.

China often acts rapidly and without any consideration for civil society or democracy building, sustainability, as well as human and people's rights when directing foreign investments or loans to Africa. While European development aid or FDIs are tied to the achievement of goals in these realms, Chinese investments or loans are handed out to autocratic regimes without any conditions obliging governments to improve their citizens' situation.

If the EU and its Member States are at least in part sincere and genuine when it comes to their commitments to sustainable development goals and aspirations for democracy building and humanitarian

improvements, a sustainable presence in the Sahel is of utmost importance and leaving the field to Russia and China a fatal mistake.

“EU and its Member States have the obligation to rebuild the burned bridges left in their wake.”

Climate change already disproportionately affects less developed societies and populations, but its impact is increasingly perceptible in our latitudes. With a rapidly growing population, the African continent not only provides numerous economic opportunities, growing markets, and labour resources but also constitutes a crucial building block for tackling climate change. A sustainable future for Africa is a sustainable future for the world.

Lastly, migration flows to Europe are expected to increase even faster within the next decades and most African migration routes pass through the Sahel. Considering all these points, remaining engaged in the Sahel is a key element for future crisis prevention and has various political and economic prospects.

Considering this edition's theme, the EU and its Member States have an obligation to rebuild the burned bridges left in their wake and should initiate closer cooperation with states in the region, directed towards a more secure, sustainable, democratic, and developed Sahel in order to finally build bridges for peace. Building bridges for peace requires an approach that is politically, economically, and certainly ecologically sustainable.



Centre for Advanced Middle Eastern Studies

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Upcoming events:

25 May: *Drought and Altruism – Insights from Surveys of Refugees from Iraq and Syria*, research seminar with Stefan Döring
13:15-14:30, at CMES (Finngatan 16) and on Zoom

8 June: *Borderization of Palestine*, research seminar with Nina Gren
13:15-14:30, at CMES (Finngatan 16) and on Zoom

28-29 June: *CMES in Almedalen*, in Visby, Gotland

For more information about the events, please visit www.cmes.lu.se/calendar



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223 50 Lund

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