



# ANKASAM

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# YPG/PKK: The Oil Anatomy of Terror



Ömer Faruk PEKGÖZ

The Syrian Civil War, which broke out on March 15, 2011, has, over the past 13 years, evolved into a proxy battlefield where all major powers have competed for dominance. Meanwhile, the dynamics of energy security, which have been severely ignored while security issues were prioritized, have been significantly disrupted with the annexation of the region in northern Syria by YPG/PKK terrorist organization. It can be said that the primary reason for Syria's economic crisis is the YPG/PKK terrorist organization's usurpation of energy fields.

Syria, in comparison to other Arab countries, possesses more modest oil and natural gas reserves that are sufficient to meet its needs within its national borders. However, the "asymmetric" nature of energy resources has caused significant regional shifts in the country's economic dynamics. In addition to the terrorist occupation, the frequent sabotage of energy infrastructure, power plants, and substations is among the lasting effects of the civil war.[1] If the concept of electrification is examined in terms of energy security, no country that has not completed or developed its electrification can undertake structural reforms in industry or the economy, nor can it increase its welfare level.

The YPG/PKK terrorist organization controls approximately 70% of Syria's oil resources. Among the significant oil fields in Syria are the Al-Ward and Al-Taym fields, each producing 50,000 barrels of oil per day. Other important fields include the T2 Station on the Iraq-Syria oil pipeline, as well as the Al-Jafra and Conoco fields. The Al-Suwaydiyah and Al-Rimelan fields, located in the southern countryside of Al-Hasakah province, also have a large production capacity; while the Al-Suwaydiyah fields has 1,322 oil wells, the Al-Rimelan field has 25 gas wells. The combined production of these two fields was approximately 200,000 barrels per day until the end of 2010. Additionally, the small oil wells in the Markada and Tishreen-Kabibiya regions, as well as in the Al-Raqqqa province, are also considered significant production areas.

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The Al-Shaer field in central Syria stands out with a daily gas production of 3 million cubic meters, and the fields in the Palmyra region, particularly Al-Haik, Arak, Hayyan, Jahar, Al-Mahr, and Abu Rabah, produce a total of 9,000 barrels per day. Syria's oil production, which reached 600,000 barrels per day in the 1980s, declined to 400,000 barrels per day in 2010. The civil war in 2011 and sanctions led foreign oil companies to halt their operations in Syria.[2]

Energy revenues make up 30% of Syria's budget. Following the YPG/PKK occupation, oil in the controlled areas is sold through intermediaries or transported illegally to regime-held areas. It was known that hundreds of trucks carrying oil were transported daily to regime-held regions. Production in the areas under YPG/PKK control is largely used for local consumption and fluctuates between 50,000 and 100,000 barrels per day.[3]. However, as the war has significantly destroyed the infrastructure, full production capacity cannot be achieved. It is known that sanctions have been bypassed through special licensing permits, and there are claims documented that U.S. oil companies have carried out oil trade in the region multiple times, with former special forces members reportedly taking a share of this trade.[4].

It is difficult to determine exact figures regarding the revenue obtained from these fields. This is because part of the trade occurs unlawfully, and there is a lack of transparency. However, according to an estimate made by The New York Times (2019), YPG/PKK is able to obtain up to \$50 million dollars annually in oil revenue. Most of these revenues come from sales to local markets and some international buyers. In 2023, it is estimated that the revenues obtained from oil production in the regions controlled by YPG/PKK amounted to approximately \$1-2 billion.[5]. With the revenues obtained, the organization has not only gained international support over time, but has also expanded its military activities through private companies.[6].

Apart from oil, the YPG/PKK also produces gas from the gas fields in the Deir ez-Zor region. However, gas production is not as significant as oil production, but it still contributes to the region's energy needs and to the income of the YPG/PKK.

These resources have played a critical role in sustaining the autonomy of the YPG/PKK, but they have also attracted international attention. Specifically, the United States has sent troops to the region to protect these oil fields from other groups or the Syrian regime. Oil trade has become a central point in the geopolitical struggle in Syria, with various actors competing for control over these valuable resources.

With the complete end of the Assad regime on December 8, 2024, it is expected that there will be a de facto unification of the factions in the country and the establishment of a national consensus. However, after 13 years of civil war, Syria has lost all critical components of its energy infrastructure. In this situation, the presence of oil revenues in the hands of YPG/PKK is seen as a significant leverage for the drafting of a unifying constitution in the new government. For YPG/PKK, oil trade is not only used as a tool for financing terrorism but also as a geopolitical domain exploited to create international legitimacy.

The oil revenues are of vital importance in the process of reconstructing the country. In the case of a possible conflict, it is not a difficult prediction that opposition forces and YPG/PKK will confront each other on the ground in a short period of time. The creation of a fair and widely distributed revenue model is dependent on preserving the unitary state structure, and during the transitional government period, it is necessary to ensure that institutions are not excessively damaged or that the administrative memory is not erased due to regime change.

It has been determined that the key to Syria's transition to a legitimate and prosperous society lies in the fields located in the areas occupied by the YPG/PKK terrorist organization. The state, which has largely lost its industry during the civil war, requires all financial resources during the regime transition to open areas that will allow for the launch of reverse migration. In addition to security policies, the establishment of a legitimate Syrian Government recognized internationally will also contribute to the elimination of the YPG/PKK on the ground.

Lastly, Turkey may also be involved in the reconstruction of Syria's electricity infrastructure. Turkey's experience in the construction and energy sectors could play a significant role in rebuilding Syria's energy infrastructure. Such cooperation could offer economic opportunities for Turkey and also serve as an important step in Syria's reconstruction. A potential collaboration aimed at ensuring regional energy security with Syria's new government could involve energy lines and pipeline projects. Turkey plays a critical role in the transportation of energy from the Middle East to Europe through energy lines that pass through Syrian territory. In this regard, Turkey and Syria's new administration could work together to secure energy transport lines.

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[2]. "Syria's oil industry was once booming. Could it be again?", Al Majalla, <https://en.majalla.com/node/321896/business-economy/syria%E2%80%99s-oil-industry-was-once-booming-could-it-be-again>, (Date Accessed: 09.12.2024).

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[4]. "US oil firm operating in 'murky' Syria oil business", MEM, <https://www.middleeastmonitor.com/20210125-us-oil-firm-operating-in-murky-syria-oil-business/>, (Date Accessed: 09.12.2024).

[5]. "Annual Report and Accounts 2023", Gulfsands, [https://gulfsands.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Gulfsands\\_Annual-Report-2023\\_WEB.pdf](https://gulfsands.com/wp-content/uploads/2024/05/Gulfsands_Annual-Report-2023_WEB.pdf), (Date Accessed: 09.12.2024).

[6]. "US and British volunteers describe fighting with Kurds in Syria", MEE, <https://www.middleeasteye.net/news/us-and-british-volunteers-describe-fighting-kurds-syria>, (Date Accessed: 09.12.2024).



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Critical Turning Point in Georgia-EU Relations



Ergün MAMEDOV

While Georgia has made significant progress in its integration process with the European Union (EU), recent developments have highlighted the country's contradictory stance towards this goal and the growing tensions in its relations with the West. Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze's announcement of suspending negotiations until 2028 has sparked widespread reactions both domestically and internationally. This decision has led to questions on the international stage regarding Georgia's democratic commitments and its relations with the West, while domestically triggering large-scale protests and criticism towards the government. These events mark a critical turning point for Georgia's political and strategic orientation.

On November 28, 2024, Georgian Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze attracted international attention by announcing the suspension of EU membership negotiations until 2028 and the rejection of the bloc's budgetary grants during this period. Kobakhidze's statement underscored Georgia's conflicting strategy in its EU integration process and further highlighted the tensions in its relations with the West. The Prime Minister justified the decision by emphasizing Georgia's desire to achieve "dignified integration" and accused European politicians and bureaucrats of "insults and blackmail" against his country. Furthermore, he accused the European Parliament of being used as a "tool of blackmail" against the Georgian government and stated that integration could only progress on a foundation of "mutual respect."<sup>[1]</sup>

This statement reveals that the emphasis on independence and sovereignty has become prominent in Georgia's stance towards EU membership. Prime Minister Kobakhidze's assertion that the government would fulfill 90% of its EU-related obligations with its own resources by 2028 and his framing of EU membership not as a "favor" but as a "dignified right" reflect the country's distancing posture towards the West. However, this approach by the Georgian government has triggered a new wave of tension in its relations with the West, drawing harsh criticism from both the United States (US) and the EU.

Following the announcement, the opposition called on the public to protest against the government, resulting in a large crowd gathering in front of the parliament. Protesters expressed their dissatisfaction with the decision and the government, further escalating tensions by creating challenges for security forces during demonstrations. This situation illustrates both the public's discontent with the decision and the growing pressures faced by the government in domestic politics.

[The United States has criticized Georgia's increasing authoritarian tendencies and the disproportionate use of force by police against protesters. The U.S. Department of State announced the suspension of the U.S.-Georgia Strategic Partnership due to the Georgian government's anti-democratic practices and called on Georgia to return to the path of Euro-Atlantic integration, conduct transparent investigations into electoral irregularities, and repeal laws restricting freedom of expression. State Department Spokesperson Matthew Miller argued that Georgia's deviation from its goals of EU and NATO integration makes the country more vulnerable to Moscow's influence.<sup>[2]</sup> Similarly, EU Foreign Policy Chief Kaja Kallas expressed support for the Georgian people's choice of a European future, condemned the violence against protesters and signs of democratic backsliding by the government, and stated that this situation would have direct consequences for the EU.<sup>[3]</sup>

During this period, Council of Europe Secretary General Alain Berset highlighted the international community's close monitoring of developments in Georgia through his visit to the country. In his meetings with President Salome Zurbishvili and Prime Minister Kobakhidze, Berset expressed concerns over the growing polarization in the country and the violent incidents during protests. Emphasizing the need to investigate allegations of excessive use of force by law enforcement, Berset underlined the importance of protecting freedom of expression and the right to peaceful assembly for Georgia's democratic future and stability.<sup>[4]</sup> The Council of Europe's announcement that it would continue to support Georgia within the framework of its current Action Plan demonstrates Georgia's ongoing efforts to seek international support on its path to EU integration. However, the Georgian government's contradictory stance in its EU integration process has heightened internal political tensions. Tbilisi Mayor and Georgian Dream Party Secretary General Kakha Kaladze accused the opposition of orchestrating sabotage within state institutions and attempting a coup, stating that such actions would be addressed within the constitutional framework.<sup>[5]</sup> Prime Minister Kobakhidze, on the other hand, claimed that the opposition was trying to create a "national Maidan" in the country but that this attempt had failed. He also expressed regret over the lack of condemnation from Western diplomats regarding these events. The government has framed the protests as a reaction against what it perceives as the EU's "blackmail" demands toward Georgia.

The policies of the Georgian government should be analyzed within the framework of regional balancing efforts and strategic calculations in its relations with the West. Georgia is pursuing a policy of balance to reduce the risk of conflict with Russia and to maintain its strategic partnership with China. Instead of EU membership, Georgia aims to establish a model of a country characterized by an "European Georgia" identity—originating from the "East" but politically "balanced." The postponement of negotiations until 2028 is considered not only an attempt to mitigate the EU's perceived coercive policies but also a measure to gauge the sentiments of national and international public opinion.

In this context, Georgia's greatest challenge lies in balancing tensions with the West while simultaneously developing policies that preserve domestic stability. Neglecting democratic reforms or harshly suppressing protests could undermine trust in Georgia on the international stage. Therefore, Georgia must adopt a more inclusive approach and recalibrate its democratic commitments to achieve its long-term development goals. This strategy could help Georgia secure a more sustainable position both in its relations with the West and within regional balances.

The recent developments in Georgia have made the country's vulnerabilities in internal and external politics more evident. The protests that erupted following the suspension of EU membership negotiations are seen not only as a reaction to the government's stance against the EU but also as an objection to its governance style in domestic politics. The growing influence of the opposition during this period and its efforts to rally public support have been met with accusations of an attempted "coup" by the government. This tension has become a factor threatening Georgia's political stability, prompting the government to intensify efforts to re-establish its authority among the public and within state institutions.

On the international stage, the sharp rupture in Georgia's relations with the EU has further complicated the country's integration process with the West. Criticism from the Council of Europe and Western countries regarding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law has the potential to damage Georgia's international reputation. Additionally, alleged signs of potential rapprochement between the government and Russia may reinforce the perception in the West that Georgia is shifting its foreign policy direction. This could risk Georgia losing its role as a regional balancing factor and becoming more vulnerable in geopolitical conflicts.

Considering possible scenarios, Georgia's internal political crises may develop in two primary directions. In the first scenario, the government might intensify its authoritarian policies, harshly suppress protests, and seek to marginalize the opposition. However, this could bring relations with the West to a breaking point and lead to long-term political polarization within the country. The second scenario envisions the government adopting a more inclusive approach by creating a platform for dialogue with the opposition and reconsidering EU negotiations. This approach could foster a less tense atmosphere domestically and allow Georgia to adopt a more balanced stance in foreign policy. Essentially, this strategy would not only improve Georgia's relations with the EU but also help the country avoid becoming a target of Western criticism in the international arena. Furthermore, maintaining strategic partnerships and balance policies with the East, particularly with China, would offer significant advantages for Georgia.

It is anticipated that Georgia's exploratory attempts to gauge reactions will not persist for long and that the country will normalize relations after assessing the responses from national and international public opinion as well as the West. In line with the expectation of resuming negotiations with the EU in the near future, Georgia's foreign policy objectives are predicted to take shape. The Georgian Dream Party (GDP) is not expected to maintain its current stance, as attempts by the West, particularly through NGOs, to instigate regime change or increase internal tensions under the guise of "color revolutions"—as seen approximately 21 years ago during the 2003 Rose Revolution—are unlikely to be risked by the GDP in the long term. Moreover, considering that the GDP secured power with 53% of the vote in the October 2024 parliamentary elections, it is unlikely to take steps that would make the situation even riskier.

In conclusion, Georgia must adopt a balanced and strategic policy to overcome the current crisis. Reducing tensions in relations with the West, accelerating democratic reforms, and fostering constructive dialogue with the opposition (seen as feasible if the opposition moves away from its radical pro-Western stance) are critically important for maintaining the country's internal stability and international reputation. However, Georgia's transformation into a regionally isolated actor under increasing political and economic pressures, and its shift to a more vulnerable position in the search for strategic balance between the West and Russia, does not appear likely in the current order. Just as Europe's importance forms the foundation of Georgia's geopolitical position, Georgia's significance remains vital from the West's perspective. In this context, it is anticipated that Georgia will formulate a policy that considers not only its internal dynamics but also regional and global power balances during this process.

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[2]. Matthew Miller, "Statement on Georgia's Suspension of European Union Accession", U.S. Department of State, <https://www.state.gov/statement-on-georgias-suspension-of-european-union-accession>, (Access Date: 04.12.2024).

[3]. Lex Harvey, "Georgia is Being Rocked by Growing Protests. Here's What You Need to Know", CNN World, <https://edition.cnn.com/2024/12/02/europe/georgia-tbilisi-eu-protests-intl-hnk/index.html>, (Access Date: 04.12.2024).

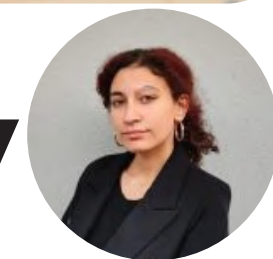
[4]. "Situation in Georgia: Secretary General exchanges views with President Salome Zourabichvili and Prime Minister Irakli Kobakhidze", Council of Europe, <https://www.coe.int/en/web/portal/-/situation-in-georgia-secretary-general-exchanges-views-with-president-salome-zourabichvili-and-prime-minister-irakli-kobakhidze>, (Access Date: 04.12.2024).

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Canada's Arctic Strategy and Security Priorities



Ayşe Azra GILAVCI

Canada's Arctic policy has been redefining its strategic priorities concerning the Arctic region, which has gained importance in recent years due to rising geopolitical tensions and the effects of global warming. Russia's increasingly aggressive posture and China's growing interest in the region have prompted Canada to question its low-tension policies, necessitating the adoption of a more robust defense and foreign policy.<sup>[1]</sup> This analysis examines Canada's new policy, particularly within the framework of realist theory, and evaluates the potential impacts of this strategy.

According to realist theory, states primarily strive to safeguard their security and sovereignty. Canada's strategy to increase defense spending in the Arctic and collaborate with the United States reflects this perspective. Notably, the modernization of NORAD systems and the establishment of consulates in the region highlight Canada's desire to monitor and control the area more effectively. <sup>[2]</sup> The modernization of NORAD involves updating radar systems, early warning mechanisms, and command infrastructure to meet contemporary threats, enhancing the defense capabilities of Canada and the U.S. against threats such as hypersonic missiles.

Russia's growing military presence in the Arctic has accelerated Canada's efforts to secure its northern borders. Similarly, China's deployment of vessels for resource extraction and scientific research in the region is perceived as a challenge to Canada's sovereignty. In response to these threats, Canada aims to strengthen its military presence and assert control over the region within a transparent national defense paradigm.

Canada's rejection of claims by the U.S. and other countries that the Northwest Passage constitutes international waters aligns with this realist perspective. By maintaining control over these waters, Canada seeks to assert its sovereignty over this route, which has gained strategic importance with the increasing use of commercial shipping. Canada's focus on multilateral diplomacy highlights another key aspect of its Arctic policy. By opening consulates in Anchorage and Nuuk and establishing an Arctic ambassador position, Canada aims to enhance regional cooperation and take on a more prominent role in multilateral mechanisms. Additionally, Canada emphasizes the significance of regional platforms like the Arctic Council in resolving conflicts and promoting collaboration.

Canada's commitment to resolving ongoing border disputes with Denmark and the United States reflects its dedication to diplomatic solutions. These efforts are expected to have increasingly significant implications for environmental issues and maritime routes in the future. The Canada-U.S. disagreement over the Northwest Passage could also lead to notable outcomes in the realms of trade and energy policy.

Relations with Indigenous peoples hold a central place in Canada's Arctic policy. Including Indigenous communities in the policymaking process aligns with both the principles of historical justice and inclusivity. However, infrastructure challenges faced by these communities hinder Canada's ability to establish an effective presence in the region. As noted by Natan Obed, the lack of infrastructure such as road connections and ports in Indigenous areas could constrain Canada's sovereignty claims.<sup>[3]</sup> This underscores the necessity of strengthening regional development policies to address these gaps.

For sovereignty claims to become permanent, Canada must increase its investments in Indigenous communities and prioritize the provision of essential services. Infrastructure deficiencies can not only affect relations with Indigenous communities but also directly impact regional defense and logistical capabilities. For instance, the construction of new military bases or maritime surveillance points could strengthen Canada's presence in the region. However, this process requires a sensitive approach that necessitates deep cooperation with Indigenous peoples.

Canada's growing interest in Arctic policy is based on several key factors that influence global security dynamics. Russia and China's activities in the Arctic have put pressure on the international order, prompting Canada and other Western countries to reassess their Arctic policies.<sup>[4]</sup> It is likely that Canada will seek closer cooperation with NATO in the future. This collaboration may manifest through increased NATO exercises in the Arctic and the expansion of regional security measures.

Furthermore, Canada has the potential to bolster its position as a global leader in addressing climate change. By advancing sustainable development models in the Arctic and prioritizing the reduction of environmental harm, Canada could significantly enhance its diplomatic influence on the international stage.

In conclusion, Canada's Arctic policy is based on the complex balance between international security, environmental policies, and local development. This policy aims to enhance regional security while addressing the needs of local communities. The modernization of NORAD, cooperation with NATO, and sovereignty claims over the Northwest Passage are key steps that strengthen Canada's strategic objectives. Collaboration with Indigenous peoples and infrastructure investments are crucial for bolstering Canada's national interests and its position on the international stage.

In the long term, Canada will not only exert economic and military influence in the Arctic but also play a key role in shaping global environmental sustainability goals. This could position Canada as a pivotal rule-making actor in the Arctic.

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[3] "Canada Moves to Protect Arctic From Threats by Russia and China", The New York Times, <https://www.nytimes.com/2024/12/06/world/canada/canada-arctic-russia-china.html>, (Accessed on: 06.12.2024).

[4] Ibid.



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# New Members of the Schengen Area: Bulgaria and Romania



Sena BİRİNCİ

The Schengen process in the European Union (EU) stands out as an important example of integration in economic, social and political terms, providing free movement between member states by removing border controls. This process embodies one of the fundamental values of the EU, freedom of movement, while creating a complex mechanism covering issues such as external border security, visa policies and information sharing. While the effective functioning of the Schengen area requires cooperation between member states, factors such as migration crises and security threats have an impact on the sustainability of this system.

Participation in the Schengen process has been a gradual process aimed at removing border controls for European countries. The Schengen Agreement, signed by Germany, France, Belgium, the Netherlands and Luxembourg in 1985, formed the basis of this process, initially aiming to facilitate economic cooperation but eventually gaining a political integration dimension. With the accession of Spain and Portugal in 1995, the region expanded and the Schengen principles reached the southwest of Europe. Following Italy and Austria in 1997, Greece, the Scandinavian countries and the Baltic states joined the process in the 2000s. 2007 was an important turning point in the expansion of Schengen, with many countries from Central and Eastern Europe integrating into the Schengen area after their EU membership.

Switzerland joined the Schengen Area on December 12, 2008 as a non-EU member state. Liechtenstein then joined the Schengen area on December 19, 2011. Croatia officially joined the Schengen Area on January 1, 2023. While this process strengthened the integration in the east and west of Europe, the exclusion of some EU member states, such as the United Kingdom and Ireland, created differences in the Schengen area. The inclusion of non-EU countries, such as Norway, Switzerland and Iceland, extended the geographical boundaries of the Schengen process beyond the EU.

Romania and Bulgaria will join the Schengen Area as full members as of January 1, 2025. This process began in 2011 when the European Commission declared that both countries were ready for membership. The final decision by the EU interior ministers was made possible after Austria lifted its long-standing veto. This decision was considered a historic step in terms of European integration, and the expansion of Schengen contributed to the vision of a stronger and more united Europe. However, despite this great success, it was stated that security checks will continue at the land borders between Hungary and Romania and Romania and Bulgaria for "at least" six months.<sup>[1]</sup> This may delay the full realization of free movement.

This development is a positive step for the expansion of the Schengen Area, but it should not be seen as a full integration process, especially since it is shaped under the influence of security concerns regarding irregular migration. The recent re-introduction of internal border controls by countries such as Germany, France and the Netherlands highlights the difficulties facing the Schengen ideal of free movement. Although these steps are thought to be used as a political message to the public, the effectiveness of such controls is debatable. Strengthening solidarity and cooperation between member countries is of critical importance for the full functioning of the Schengen Area.

Austria's decision to lift its veto on Romania and Bulgaria's full membership in the Schengen Area stands out as an important step towards expanding free movement in Europe. Austria initially blocked the process by demanding concrete steps to combat irregular migration. [2] However, as a result of the measures taken, there has been a significant decrease in migrant crossings. In particular, the significant decrease in the number of migrants caught at the Hungarian border shows that Austria's demands have been met. This development can be considered as a positive development in terms of increasing the effectiveness of the Schengen Area and strengthening cooperation between member states. However, the extent to which such policies will serve the ideal of free movement in the long term and their effects on migrants' rights continue to be discussed.

Many Schengen countries have implemented temporary border controls due to increased irregular migration, terrorist threats and security concerns. Germany has attracted attention in Europe by deciding to tighten controls at its land borders. Austria, France and Italy are among the countries that have adopted the same policy. Austria has taken measures, especially on its borders with Hungary, Slovenia and the Czech Republic, and justifies this step with the aim of reducing pressure on the asylum system and preventing terrorist threats. [3] France has maintained internal border controls due to migration pressure from the south. Scandinavian countries have also tightened border controls due to increasing security threats and infrastructure risks. Denmark has focused on its border with Germany, while Norway and Sweden have increased controls at ports. [4] These measures are linked to the threat of terrorism and the impact of the Russo-Ukrainian War on European security. These measures have complicated the Schengen Area's principle of free movement, although countries have argued that such temporary steps are necessary due to security concerns.

The Schengen Area serves more than 400 million people as the largest free movement area in the world without border controls. [5] The accession of Romania and Bulgaria will reinforce the region's commitment to the integration process and will be an important milestone in expanding the EU's free movement principles. This process will bring economic, strategic and security advantages. The accession of the two countries will contribute to the acceleration of trade relations by strengthening free movement and will facilitate logistics processes in the European internal market. In addition, the geographical locations of Bulgaria and Romania will play a critical role in diversifying the EU's trade routes and establishing strong connections between Eastern and Western Europe.

Full membership would increase regional stability by deepening the integration of Southeastern Europe. [6] This process will expand the EU's influence in the Balkans and strengthen confidence in its enlargement policies. Bulgaria and Romania are strengthening their political and economic alignment with the EU, ensuring greater cooperation and solidarity. In terms of security, border management developed in line with the Schengen standard has made it possible to protect the EU's external borders more effectively. When these countries join the Schengen Area, they will take on greater responsibility in combating illegal immigration and cross-border crime, thus contributing to the EU's security architecture.

In summary; Romania and Bulgaria's 13-year wait for full membership in the Schengen Area will finally come to an end. As of January 1, 2025, both countries will fully join the free movement area, including their land borders. This decision was taken after Austria lifted its veto, citing the flow of migrants. This development is considered a historic step in terms of Schengen's expansion and the EU's vision of integration. As a result, Bulgaria and Romania's full membership in the Schengen Area has been a step that strengthens the EU's integration process, increases economic dynamism and makes security measures more effective. This will ensure that not only the two countries, but all of Europe, gains a more united and powerful structure.

[1] Jorge Liboreiro & Maria Psara, "Romania and Bulgaria are granted full Schengen membership with one caveat", Euronews, <https://www.euronews.com/my-europe/2024/12/12/romania-and-bulgaria-are-granted-full-schengen-membership-with-one-caveat> (Access Date: 12.12.2024).

[2] "Austria drops veto on Bulgaria and Romania fully joining Schengen travel zone", Reuters, <https://www.reuters.com/world/europe/austria-drops-veto-bulgaria-romania-fully-joining-schengen-travel-zone-2024-12-09/> (Access Date: 12.12.2024).

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[6] Ibid.



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# China's Belt and Road Initiative and the Western Balkans

Erdem Baran ALKAN

In 2014, China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) began expanding into the Balkans, significantly increasing the region's strategic importance. Starting from the Greek shores and extending to Central Europe via the Vardar River, the trade route plan offers promising opportunities for the small economies in the region. However, the European Union (EU) has exerted pressure to deter the initiative, citing concerns over China's growing influence in the area. Despite this, China continues to expand its economic activities across the region.

The first Confucius Institute in the Balkans was established in Belgrade in 2006, followed by the opening of additional institutes in other Western Balkan countries. Moreover, China has developed a media presence in the region to promote the Belt and Road Initiative. Various scholarships and research partnerships have been initiated in Serbia, North Macedonia, and Montenegro. Additionally, China has introduced visa-free travel arrangements for numerous countries in the region, further facilitating its engagement.

Serbia stands at the forefront of China's economic partnerships in the Balkans. [1] The historical context of their relationship, particularly during the Kosovo conflict, where the Chinese embassy in Belgrade was struck during NATO's 78-day bombing campaign, has fostered what is now described as an "iron-clad friendship."

Over the years, this relationship has deepened, with approximately 30 agreements signed to promote a "common future," significantly advancing bilateral relations and economic cooperation. [2] One of the earliest notable investments was the acquisition of Zelezara Smederevo, Serbia's sole steel plant, by the Chinese Hesteel Group in 2016. This investment alleviated concerns among both employees and the government at a time when the facility faced operational challenges. The plant had previously been owned by an American company from 2003 until the economic downturn of 2008, after which China's intervention saved it from closure, bolstering China's image in Serbia. Following this investment, China has increasingly concentrated on infrastructure development within the country.

The Belgrade-Budapest Railway Project, launched in 2021, exemplifies China's largest infrastructure initiative in the region. Constructed by China International Railway, the project links the capitals of Serbia and Hungary and is envisioned to extend southward to Athens. This development represents a significant advancement for the Belt and Road Initiative, marking another critical milestone in China's strategic expansion into the region.

In addition to Serbia, Montenegro is another Balkan country that has developed high-level relations with China. Since gaining independence in 2006, Montenegro has actively sought to diversify its economy by attracting foreign investment. China has played a key role in this effort, undertaking several significant infrastructure projects. One notable example is the construction of the Boljare Highway, which connects Bar, Montenegro's main port, to the easternmost regions of the country and extends to Belgrade. The modernization and enhancement of Montenegro's railway network are also included in these initiatives. China's presence in Montenegro extends beyond infrastructure to include the energy sector. A prominent example is the construction of the Pljevlja Coal-Based Thermal Power Reactor, completed by the China-based Dongfang Electric Company. These projects reflect China's growing influence in Montenegro and its integration into the broader framework of the Belt and Road Initiative.[3].

Albania is regarded as one of the most strategically significant countries for China among the Western Balkan nations. With its advantageous location and ports along the Adriatic coast offering attractive opportunities for trade, Albania is anticipated to witness a substantial increase in Chinese investments. Similarly, Bosnia and Herzegovina ranks as a key destination for Chinese investments in the region, second only to Serbia. China has established a prominent presence in the country through its significant contributions to transportation and infrastructure development, the construction of hydroelectric power plants such as the Vranduk and Neretva projects, and the establishment of production facilities. Furthermore, China continues to provide incentives across a wide range of sectors, underscoring its commitment to deepening economic engagement in the Western Balkans.[4]. On the other hand, the Chinese company COSCO has emerged as a major port operator by acquiring a significant share of the Port of Piraeus in Greece. This investment is intended to enhance China's access to Europe and strengthen its logistics networks.

As participants in the Belt and Road Initiative, these countries are profoundly influenced by economic partnerships that significantly impact the development of both individual nations and the region as a whole. Economically smaller nations in the region, such as those in the Western Balkans, derive substantial benefits from these collaborations, which play a critical role in their development.

In summary, China's investments in the Balkans have grown substantially in recent years. Viewing the Balkans as a strategic bridge to Europe, China has undertaken various initiatives to strengthen its economic ties with countries in the region. A significant focus has been placed on developing transportation infrastructure, including roads, railways, and ports, with Chinese construction companies both financing and managing these projects. Furthermore, China has made considerable investments in the region's energy infrastructure, primarily targeting coal and hydroelectric power plants. Additionally, it has demonstrated increasing interest in renewable energy projects, reflecting a broader diversification of its investment portfolio.

As a result, China's investments in the Balkans are primarily shaped by the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative, a global strategy designed to enhance China's economic connections on a worldwide scale. Given the Balkans' strategic location along this route, China has been making substantial economic and trade investments in the region. Its growing economic influence in the Balkans is driven by infrastructure projects, energy investments, and trade agreements. These efforts not only contribute to the economic development of the countries in the region but also strengthen the diplomatic and economic ties between China and the Balkan nations.

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[3]. Zeneli, Valbona. (2022). "China In The Balkans", per Concordiam, Journal of European Security and Defense Issues, <https://perconcordiam.com/china-in-the-balkans/>, (Accessed date: 12.02.2024).

[4]. Ibid.



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Strategic Calculations of Israeli Operations in Syria



Prof. Dr. Murat ERCAN

The Syrian Crisis emerged in 2011 with widespread protests against the Bashar al-Assad regime, inspired by the Arab Spring, and swiftly escalated into a civil war. Initially marked by peaceful demonstrations in the city of Daraa, the regime's disproportionate use of violence caused the movement to spread nationwide. Protesters' demands for democracy, freedom, and economic reform were met with harsh repression, exacerbating the conflict through sectarian divisions and socioeconomic inequalities. Opposition groups rapidly organised, and the ensuing instability transformed Syria into a theatre of proxy war, inviting the intervention of foreign actors. In the process, countless lives were lost, and millions were displaced. After nearly 13 years of conflict, the crisis culminated in December 2024, when Bashar al-Assad, the final representative of the 61-year-old Arab Socialist Baath Party, fled to Russia following a mobilisation of anti-regime forces in late November.

The fall of the Bashar al-Assad regime has profound implications for both Syria's domestic balance and regional security. The collapse of Baathist rule has opened the door to new strategic scenarios and potential crises at both the national and regional levels. Questions remain over how the post-regime order in Damascus will be shaped and how the transition process will unfold under opposition control. While the United States and other Western nations stress the need to prevent radical groups from dominating the country, Türkiye prioritises the preservation of Syria's territorial integrity and the safe return of refugees. Türkiye aims to stabilise the region by facilitating refugee repatriation, but this ambition hinges on ending Syria's internal conflict and establishing a new government. Consequently, Türkiye and other international actors are pursuing cautious diplomacy during this transitional period, striving to prevent the emerging power vacuum from triggering regional instability.



Amid these efforts by Türkiye and international stakeholders to guide Syria's transition and the nation's internal focus on rebuilding and navigating a post-Assad era, Israel launched coordinated air, sea, and land attacks on strategic targets near Damascus. These included military bases, arms production facilities, ports, and depots, with Israeli forces occupying key strategic regions. This invasive operation, named "Bashan Arrow" by Israel itself, raises critical questions.<sup>[1]</sup> Why did Israel escalate its attacks during Syria's normalisation process? Does the regime change and transitional period in Syria constitute a security threat to Israel? What justification does Israel offer for targeting Syria's military infrastructure and other strategic assets? Furthermore, what might be the strategic or symbolic significance of the operation's name, "Bashan Arrow?"

### Points of Israeli Attacks<sup>[2]</sup>

An analysis of Syria's strategic map reveals that Israeli attacks are predominantly concentrated in and around the capital, Damascus. The targets of these operations include military bases, airports, weapons production facilities, and alleged chemical weapons storage sites. Israel's offensive extends to areas such as Tartus and Latakia, where Russia maintains a significant military presence. By striking YPG-controlled ports and military installations, Israel aims to significantly degrade Syria's military capacity. A particular objective has been the neutralisation of the Syrian navy and the destruction of Russian-manufactured military equipment, including helicopters. These moves not only target Syria's internal security and defence systems but also convey a broader strategic message to other actors in the region.

While Israel justifies its actions as a means of preventing weapons in Syria from falling into the hands of radical groups, the broader pattern points to strategic expansionist objectives. This approach mirrors its strategy in Palestine and Lebanon, where Israel has pursued geopolitical advantages and territorial gains. A notable example is the Golan Heights, seized during the 1967 Six-Day War and formally annexed in 1981. By bolstering its military presence in the Golan and creating buffer zones, Israel enhanced its strategic depth and reinforced its security posture. Viewed through this lens, Israel's northward incursions into Syria can be seen as part of a larger effort to establish control over new strategically significant territories.

Israeli attacks have been particularly concentrated in major Syrian cities such as Damascus, Hama, Homs, and Aleppo. These cities are strategic centres where Syria's military bases, air defence systems and ammunition depots are located. By striking these targets, Israel aims to weaken the operational capacity of the Syrian army and neutralise its military infrastructure. Damascus, as the administrative heart of Syria, houses the regime's central decision-making bodies. Hama and Homs serve as logistical and military transit hubs in Syria's interior, while Aleppo, an industrial and military centre in the north, plays a pivotal role in the country's military mobility. These regions are also key sites for Iran's military presence and its logistical support for Hezbollah. By targeting these areas, Israel seeks to weaken the Syrian army's operational capacity, dismantle its military infrastructure, and reduce Iranian influence within Syria.

To counter Israel's actions, the Syrian regime has reinforced its air defence systems, particularly around Damascus. However, Israel's strategic objective is to neutralise these systems to facilitate future operations. The Golan Heights remains a focal point in this security equation, given its geopolitical significance to Israel. By conducting military activities around the Golan, Israel seeks to bolster its defensive posture against regional threats. Furthermore, Israeli strikes on Deir ez-Zor and Qamishli go beyond military targets to include Syria's energy resources and logistics routes in the east. These operations signal Israel's broader intent to weaken Syria's economic and military capacities by asserting control over strategic resources in these areas.

By striking the ports of Tartus and Latakia, Israel aims to curtail Syria's access to the Mediterranean Sea, thereby restricting Damascus' capacity to receive external support in any anti-Israeli initiative. These attacks are designed to obstruct Syria's ability to benefit from foreign aid, effectively limiting the strategic manoeuvring space available to anti-Israeli forces. By doing so, Israel seeks to consolidate its regional dominance while diminishing Syria's reliance on external assistance.

Israel's military operations in Syria are not solely tactical military manoeuvres; they are deeply rooted in historical, religious, and ideological considerations. The concept of the "Promised Land" plays a fundamental role in shaping Israel's national identity and foreign policy objectives. The Golan Heights holds particular religious and strategic significance for Israel, with references to the region as "Bashan" in Jewish sacred texts being used to legitimise Israeli policies in the area. From a security standpoint, the Golan Heights is indispensable to Israel's national defence strategy, as its elevation offers a commanding vantage point over the surrounding region. Israel's security concerns and expansionist policies extend beyond Palestine, impacting the wider region, including Syria, Lebanon, and Türkiye. Against this backdrop, Israel's interventions in Syria reflect a strategy driven by a confluence of historical, religious, and security imperatives.

Beneath Israel's expansionist agenda lies not only the theological aspiration of the "Promised Land" but also broader strategic objectives linked to its regional ambitions. Central to this vision is the so-called "David Corridor," a strategic concept underpinning Israel's long-term regional strategy. The plan for the David Corridor is said to have influenced Israel's policies and military actions since its inception. Corridor, as a broader geostrategic ambition, underscores Israel's long-term interest in maintaining dominance over this vital route, which could serve both logistical and strategic military purposes.<sup>[3]</sup> Control over the Golan Heights is, in this context, a flashpoint of contention between Israel and Syria. While Israel annexed the Golan in 1981, the international community continues to recognise it as Syrian territory. The David corridor, which stretches from the Golan Heights through Suwayda and Deir ez-Zor, eventually reaches Iraq. It is envisioned as a route extending through Iraq, Syria, and Jordan to the Mediterranean Sea.

Israel plans to execute its strategy not through the direct deployment of its own soldiers, but rather by employing terrorist organisations such as the YPG/PYD and PKK. In this context, Israeli Foreign Minister Gideon Saar declared on 10 November 2024 that the Kurds are "natural allies" of Israel and that Israel should strengthen its ties with them. Saar, commenting on regional policies, asserted that "the minorities in the region must unite. Kurds are victims of the oppressive policies of Iran and Türkiye. Israel needs to strengthen its relations with these groups by increasing its communication with them." Saar also referenced the Druze in Lebanon and Syria, remarking, "We are a minority community in the region, so it is inevitable that we establish natural alliance relations with other minorities."<sup>[4]</sup> His remarks imply a shared experience of persecution, suggesting that "we have been persecuted like the Kurds, we understand them very well, so we have to develop our relations with them and build an alliance." However, the "Kurds" referenced in this narrative are, in practice, terrorist organisations such as the PKK, PYD, and YPG, with which Israel seeks to establish this strategic alliance.

The efforts of Türkiye, the Syrian National Army, and opposition forces to clear Syria of terrorist organisations have unsettled the YPG and PKK, compelling them to seek assistance from the United States and Israel. This unease has been particularly acute following the removal of YPG and PKK elements from Deir ez-Zor by the Syrian National Army and the opposition. This development has caused considerable disquiet for Israel, as Deir ez-Zor occupies a critical position in the broader framework of the "David Slingshot" (also named as "David Wall") strategy, which envisions the establishment of a satellite state in the region. The military successes achieved by the Syrian National Army and opposition forces, with Türkiye's support, have delivered a significant setback to Israel's strategic designs. Consequently, Israel and influential pro-Israel lobbies in the United States have intensified pressure to impose economic and diplomatic sanctions on Türkiye's regional manoeuvres.

Evidently, Israel's regional strategy is a multidimensional policy aimed at more than neutralising threats from Iran; it also seeks to counterbalance Türkiye's expanding influence in the Middle East. The completion of the David Corridor would confer critical military and economic advantages upon Israel. This strategic route, extending from the Golan Heights to Iraq, would not only mitigate Israel's security concerns but also bolster its capacity to control vital energy and trade routes by ensuring access to the Eastern Mediterranean. Such access would facilitate the consolidation of Israel's regional power and enhance its control over energy resources.

Thus, the matter at hand is not limited to the so-called "Bashan Arrow Region" carved out within Syria. It also encompasses the broader aim of constructing a sustainable geopolitical corridor under the David Corridor framework. This corridor, which stretches from Iraq's Sulaymaniyah through Syria to Israel and opens to the Mediterranean Sea, is envisioned by Neocon Atlanticist and Zionist circles as a means to secure control over vital economic and strategic assets. The successful establishment of this project would place energy resources, oil and natural gas pipelines, trade routes, and access to the Mediterranean firmly in the hands of Israel and the United States. Simultaneously, Türkiye would be effectively isolated from the Middle East by the erection of a geopolitical wall along its border. Furthermore, Türkiye and Iran would be encircled and rendered neutral, with Syria's internal fault lines exploited to provoke large-scale conflicts both within Syria and across the broader region. Such destabilisation would serve to sustain the presence and influence of the United States and Israel in the region. Central to this strategy is the YPG/PKK terrorist organisation, whose role is pivotal in advancing these objectives. It follows, therefore, that the removal of such groups from this scenario is imperative. For over 40 years, Türkiye has waged an arduous struggle against terrorism. Tens of thousands of the Mehmetçik (Turkish soldiers) have been martyred, and trillions of dollars have been expended in the fight against terrorism. At this juncture, Türkiye's struggle will either culminate in decisive victory or be thwarted by the alliance between the United States and Israel. From this point forward, the course of action hinges upon the decisions made by the Republic of Türkiye and the valiant actions of the heroic Turkish Army.

May their path be clear, and may no stone touch their feet...

[1] Süheyla Demir, "İsrail'in Suriye'ye Saldırısının Perde Arkası Ortaya Çıktı! Netanyahu'nun Hayali Suya Düştü", Youtube, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVYrrShAGcs>, (Retrieved: 13.11.2024).

[2] "İsrail, 2024'te Suriye'deki İran destekli gruplara en az 43 hava saldırısı düzenledi", Anadolu Haber Ajansı, <https://www.aa.com.tr/tr/dunya/israil-2024te-suriyedeki-iran-destekli-gruplara-en-az-43-hava-saldirisiduzenledi/3327209>, (Retrieved: 12.11.2024).

[3] Map of the David Corridor; News Global, Image taken from the video titled "İsrail'in Suriye'ye Saldırısının Perde Arkası Ortaya Çıktı! Netanyahu'nun Hayali Suya Düştü". See: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eVYrrShAGcs>, (Retrieved: 10.11.2024).

[4] "İsrail'den Kürtlere ittifak çağrısı: "Onlar bizim doğal müttefikimiz", Medyascope, <https://medyascope.tv/2024/11/11/israilden-kurtlere-ittifak-cagrisi-onlar-bizim-dogal-muttefikimiz/>, (Retrieved: 11.11.2024).



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Evolution of Indian Foreign Policy

Jameela RIZWAN

### Nehru's Era (1947–1964): Fundamental Ideas

India's first prime minister and a major figure in the development of its foreign policy, Jawaharlal Nehru, placed a strong emphasis on the following ideas:

1. **Non-Alignment Movement (NAM):** In order to preserve strategic autonomy, Nehru led India away from Cold War alignments and toward non-alignment. In 1961, India joined NAM as a founding member, promoting the interests of recently independent countries.
  - a. **Panchsheel Agreement:** In 1954, China and the United States signed the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence, which emphasized non-aggression and respect for one another. The Sino-Indian War of 1962, however, put this idea to the test to a great extent and revealed flaws in India's diplomatic and defense policies.
  - b. **Emphasis on Asia and the Global South:** To combat colonial legacies and advance decolonization, Nehru placed a high priority on solidarity with Asian and African countries.
  - c. **Opposition to Military Alliances:** Stressing a policy of peace and international nuclear disarmament, India rejected alliances such as CENTO and SEATO. Limitations and Accomplishments: Nehru's idealism improved India's moral stature but also made the nation vulnerable, especially in terms of defence readiness, as the 1962 conflict demonstrated.

### The Post-Nehru Era (1964–1991)

Regional Difficulties and Realpolitik Subsequent leaders modified foreign policy in response to regional and worldwide developments after Nehru's passing:

- **1965–1977, 1980–1984: Indira Gandhi – Realpolitik Approach:** Motivated by regional domination and national security, Indira Gandhi began making more sensible decisions.
- **During the 1971 Bangladesh Liberation War:** India firmly backed the Mukti Bahini in their conflict with Pakistan, which resulted in the establishment of Bangladesh. India's strategic posture was strengthened by the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation (1971).
- **Nuclear Policy:** In 1974, India rejected the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and announced its decision to pursue nuclear deterrence with the Pokhran-I Nuclear test.

- **The 1977–1980 Janata Government:** Although the Janata regime departed from India's long standing Soviet affiliation and tended toward better ties with the United States, its stay was too brief for meaningful changes.
- **Rajiv Gandhi (1984–1989): Economic Diplomacy:** centered on trade and technology, establishing connections with developing international economies.
- **Efforts to Maintain Peace:** In 1987, the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) was dispatched to Sri Lanka; nevertheless, its poor success led to controversy.

### The Post-Cold War Era (1991–2000)

A Reorientation to the World With the conclusion of the Cold War, India's foreign policy began to move toward strategic pragmatism.

- **Economic liberalization:** Under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh, India adopted economic liberalization in 1991, which had an impact on foreign policy. The development of economic relations with wealthy countries and regional blocs such as ASEAN was prioritized.
- **Strategic Autonomy:** By launching India's "Look East Policy," Rao bolstered relations with countries in Southeast Asia in an effort to offset China's influence. The improvement in India-U.S. ties was characterized by defence and technological collaboration.
- **Nuclear Assertiveness:** India's strategic independence was highlighted by the Atal Bihari Vajpayee government's 1998 Pokhran-II nuclear tests. India continued to maintain a credible minimum deterrence posture in spite of international sanctions.
- **Kargil War (1999):** The Kargil War highlighted the difficulties posed by Pakistan's acts and the necessity of strong defence plans.

### Global Integration and Multi-Alignment in the 21st Century (2000–Present)

1. **During the Manmohan Singh Era (2004–2014),** Singh's administration prioritized investment and trade, particularly with the US, EU, and ASEAN. India's energy security and strategic connection with the United States were reinforced by the Indo-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement (2008). India was a major player in multilateral organizations that promoted South-South cooperation, including BRICS and IBSA.<sup>[1]</sup>
2. **Narendra Modi Era (2014–present):** Neighbourhood First Policy: Modi placed a high priority on ties with South Asian neighbours, striking a balance between assertiveness and collaboration, particularly with China and Pakistan. Act East Policy: Improved security and connectivity with ASEAN countries, strengthening the "Look East" effort.
3. **Strategic Partnerships:** – Improved ties with key powers, such as the United States, Russia, Japan, and European countries. In order to oppose China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific, the Quad (Australia, Japan, the United States, and India) became a crucial alliance.
4. **Border and Security Issues:** Controlled tensions with China, particularly during the Galwan Valley conflict (2020) and the Doklam stalemate (2017). In Jammu and Kashmir (2019), Article 370 was revoked, sparking discussions around the world and raising tensions with Pakistan. The promotion of India's cultural diplomacy and the use of the Indian diaspora to fortify bilateral ties are examples of Soft Power and Diaspora.

### Key Trends in Indian Foreign Policy

1. **From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment:** Important Developments in Indian Foreign Policy Although non-alignment was required during the Cold War, India has adopted a multi-alignment policy in the post-Cold War era, interacting with several states to protect its interests.
2. **Economic and Strategic Prioritization:** Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and Digital India diplomacy demonstrate how economic growth and security concerns now dominate India's foreign policy.
3. **Assertiveness in Regional and Global Arenas:** In keeping with its ambitions to lead the world, India has raised its voice on topics like terrorism, climate change, and maritime security.
4. **Balancing Relationships:** India maintains its strategic autonomy by balancing its relations with other nations, such as the United States and Russia or Iran and Saudi Arabia.

### Conclusion

From Nehru's idealism, Indian foreign policy has developed into a practical, multi-aligned strategy that tackles today's pressing global issues. Although it is based on historical values, it today represents India's desire to have a greater impact on the world stage by striking a balance between strategic security, economic progress, and cultural influence.

[1] India-Brasil-South Africa Dialogue Forum (IBSA).



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# The Search for Geopolitical Balance in China-Cambodia Relations



Simay GÜZEL

China-Cambodia relations have been shaped by economic cooperation, military ties and geopolitical harmony in recent years, and have played an important role in redefining the balance in the Asia-Pacific. On December 4, 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping met with Chairman of the Cambodian People's Party (CPP) and Senate President Hu Sen in Beijing and called for mutual support to consolidate the strong friendship between the two countries.[1] As a strategic part of the Belt and Road Initiative and an ally in Southeast Asia, Cambodia is of great importance to China. At the same time, Cambodia, which pursues a delicate balancing act in its relations with the United States (US), has become a geopolitical hub between the two great powers.

It would be right to talk about military cooperation and strategic partnership in the South China Sea as the most solid point of China-Cambodia relations. Cambodia stands out as a key military partner in China's Asia-Pacific strategies. The modernization of the Ream Naval Base and China's warship grant to Cambodia are important indicators of this military cooperation.[2] Although allegations that China will use this base for military operations have increased regional and global tensions, Cambodia has denied the allegations. On the other hand, the US plans to restart military training programs in Cambodia and increase economic cooperation.[3]

China-Cambodia military cooperation is of strategic importance not only in terms of regional security but also in the context of sovereignty struggles over the South China Sea. It can be said that Cambodia has generally supported China on the South China Sea issue, but this position has been indirect rather than openly expressed. Especially during the Hun Sen era, Cambodia has adopted a policy of supporting China in the South China Sea within ASEAN. His son Hun Manet, who took over as prime minister after Hun Sen, has not completely changed this approach of Cambodia during his current term as prime minister. In addition, Hun Manet has expressed his intention to increase regional cooperation by prioritizing ASEAN in foreign policy.[4] This situation points to Cambodia's potential to pursue a more careful and balanced policy on sensitive issues such as the South China Sea. ASEAN's emphasis on economic integration and the importance of agreements such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) may indicate that Cambodia does not want to remain solely dependent on China in this regard. Although Cambodia is still generally pro-China, it seems possible that under Hun Manet's leadership this policy will include more balance and be reshaped in the context of ASEAN.

Cambodia has been following a careful balancing act to maintain close economic and military cooperation with China while also maintaining trade and diplomatic relations with the United States. The appointment of Prime Minister Hun Manet in 2023 has been seen as an opportunity to redefine this balance, and the United States has sought to revitalize its relations with Cambodia.[5] Another point to note here is that Hun Manet was a graduate of the US Military Academy. This was seen as a diplomatic advantage for Washington.[6]

Although the US continues to criticize Cambodia for its democracy and human rights-focused policies, it does not seem to ignore the country's regional strategic importance. On the other hand, the US has also expressed concerns about the modernization of the Ream Naval Base in Cambodia. Although Cambodia has denied these claims, the US believes that China could use the base as a strategic point to increase its military influence in Southeast Asia.

Despite all this, it is possible to say that the US's democracy-oriented rhetoric and sanctions have had a relatively limited impact on Cambodia. This situation allows Cambodia to continue its own governance model with China's economic and diplomatic support. Cambodia adopts a strategy of preserving its independence and continuing its economic development by carefully managing its relations with both powers. This balancing policy of Cambodia maintains its importance as part of the strategic balance of Southeast Asia. Chinese investments and US diplomatic efforts are seen as important elements that will shape the country's future position.

China is Cambodia's largest trade and investment partner. Despite US support, China's military aid and large investments in infrastructure projects play an important role in Cambodia's development. Cambodia also stands out as an indispensable partner for China in Asia-Pacific strategies and the Belt and Road Initiative. However, the sustainability of this relationship depends on Cambodia successfully implementing its balance policy and increasing economic transparency.

Today, Cambodia under Hun Manet's leadership continues to maintain strong relations with China, which were established during the time of his father Hun Sen as prime minister. While China's financial and military support forms the basis of this relationship, Manet has confirmed in statements that they are committed to the "One China" policy and will take part in projects such as the Belt and Road Initiative. However, there are signs that Cambodia is inclined to take a more balanced approach in foreign policy. Manet has stated that Cambodia needs to diversify its alliances in order to reduce its dependence on a single power and has emphasized its desire to strengthen relations with the United States and Western countries. Recent meetings with Western diplomats indicate a desire to strengthen ties, especially in the areas of economic development and governance. Manet's ASEAN priority also highlights the importance of economic integration and multilateral agreements such as RCEP.

In conclusion, although Cambodia-China relations remain strong, it is possible to say that Hun Manet aims to pursue a more balanced foreign policy. Trying to establish a balance between the US and China, Cambodia must carefully evaluate long-term risks and opportunities in its relations with these two powers. In this context, China-Cambodia relations will continue to play a critical role in redefining regional strategic balances.

[1] The National People's Congress of the People's Republic of China, "Xi holds talks with Cambodia's senate president Hun Sen", Headlines, [http://en.npc.gov.cn.cdurl.cn/2024-12/04/c\\_1050333.htm](http://en.npc.gov.cn.cdurl.cn/2024-12/04/c_1050333.htm), (Access Date: 10.12.2024).

[2] Walker, T., "China builds strategic South China Sea foothold in Cambodia", Dw.com, <https://www.dw.com/en/china-builds-strategic-south-china-sea-foothold-in-cambodia/a-69205691>, (Access Date: 10.12.2024).

[3] Sun, N., & Meyn, C., "Embracing China, new Cambodian PM approached by US.", Voice of America, <https://www.voanews.com/a/embracing-china-new-cambodian-pm-approached-by-us-/7554083.html>, (Access Date: 10.12.2024).

[4] Rim, S., "Cambodia's foreign policy under new prime minister Hun Manet", ThinkChina, <https://www.thinkchina.sg/politics/cambodias-foreign-policy-under-new-prime-minister-hun-manet>, (Access Date: 10.12.2024).

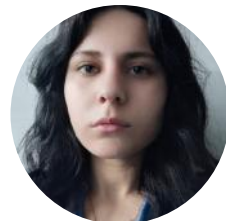
[5] Ibid.

[6] Rim, S., "Opinion: Why the US is suddenly going soft on Cambodia", South China Morning Post. <https://www.scmp.com/opinion/asia-opinion/article/3269812/why-us-suddenly-going-soft-cambodia>, (Access Date: 10.12.2024).



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Palm Oil Industry in Indonesia and Its Effects on Global Climate



Itir BOZDAĞ

Palm oil, widely used in many processed foods and cosmetics, is a preferred product due to its low cost. Despite frequent discussions about its environmental impacts and potential health risks, it continues to be included in many products. The production of this oil mainly takes place in Southeast Asian countries, which play a significant role in the economies of these countries. One of these countries, Indonesia, holds a leading position in the palm oil industry.

Indonesia is the world's largest exporter of palm oil. In 2023, it produced 47 million tons of palm oil, accounting for 54% of global exports. The rising international demand for palm oil has accelerated the growth of this industry. This growth has also become one of the main factors driving deforestation in Indonesia. In the last 20 years, approximately 3 million hectares of forest have been lost due to palm oil production.<sup>[1]</sup>

Indonesia has achieved some positive results in its efforts to prevent deforestation, and the deforestation rate has decreased in recent years. However, the 2.4 million hectares of forest allocated for palm oil production remain both an opportunity for conservation and a threat to the environment due to expansion.<sup>[2]</sup>

The increase in palm oil production brings environmental risks to Indonesia and other exporting countries. The failure to restore forest areas converted into palm oil plantations exacerbates already worsening environmental and climate issues. The widespread use of palm oil in the cosmetics and food industries indicates that demand for palm oil will continue to rise in the future. However, various sustainability issues persist.

As of 2022, Indonesia's largest palm oil export markets were China (14%), India (12%), and the European Union (EU) (10%). Additionally, there has been a noticeable increase in domestic demand for palm oil. The local usage rate, which was 32% in 2018, rose to 44% in 2022. Half of the local consumption was used in the biofuel and oleochemical sectors, while the rest was used in food products.<sup>[3]</sup>

To prevent deforestation and ensure the sustainability of palm oil production, both the improvement of production methods and the reduction of dependence on palm oil are necessary. The rise in local demand can balance the decline in foreign markets and help maintain production levels. Supporting alternative products, such as offering tax incentives for these products, could reduce local demand for palm oil.

Indonesia, China, and India are important markets for palm oil exports, and they also use supply chains that contribute to high deforestation rates. This situation reveals that the imports of these three countries account for 75% of Indonesia's total deforestation impact. On the other hand, markets like the US, EU, and the UK, which procure from companies with zero deforestation commitments, only accounted for 9% of Indonesia's total production in 2022.<sup>[4]</sup>

Increasing the market share of companies with zero deforestation commitments could be an important step in reducing deforestation rates. However, the higher costs of such companies lead larger markets to turn to different suppliers. This could lead to larger environmental issues in the future.

Palm oil production is associated with significant greenhouse gas emissions. Between 2015 and 2022, an average of 220 million tons of carbon dioxide was emitted annually, making it the fifth-largest emission source in Indonesia. Although only 14% of palm oil plantations are located in carbon-rich peatlands, soil degradation and fires in these areas account for 92% of emissions.<sup>[5]</sup>

Indonesia's steps to reduce greenhouse gas emissions could serve as an example for other Asian countries. Such policies not only provide environmental benefits but can also offer long-term economic advantages. Additionally, the growing demand for sustainable products in international markets may support Indonesia's efforts in this direction.

Palm oil plantations do not support biodiversity in native forests, and while some species survive in these areas, invasive species are becoming dominant. Tropical forest species of plants and animals are harmed during the expansion of palm plantations. Clearing land by burning forests, clearing land for timber production, and continuous human intervention are key factors threatening biodiversity.<sup>[6]</sup>

The long-term impacts of palm oil on the environment and biodiversity should not be overlooked. In addition to Indonesia, countries like Malaysia and Thailand also consider palm oil an important export product. However, without the adoption of sustainable policies, many plant and animal species in these countries may face the risk of extinction.

The EU aims to take new steps by introducing the Deforestation Regulation (EUDR) in consideration of palm oil's environmental impacts. The regulation prohibits the import of products obtained through the destruction of forests into the EU. As part of this, the regulation aims to eliminate deforestation from supply chains of products such as beef, soy, and palm oil, which are responsible for 16% of tropical deforestation linked to international trade.<sup>[7]</sup>

To comply with the regulation, buyers must ensure traceability of palm oil products down to the farms where the fruit is grown and provide accurate geographical coordinates. However, producer countries like Indonesia and Malaysia argue that small farmers will struggle to meet these standards, which could lead to their exclusion from global supply chains.<sup>[8]</sup>

In the long term, the EU regulation has the potential to force palm oil producers like Indonesia to adopt zero-deforestation policies. It could also contribute to replacing palm oil with alternative products. However, much of the palm oil production in these countries is carried out by small producers. The inability to meet EU standards due to costs and other factors could lead to monopolization of palm oil production by firms capable of meeting these standards, which would harm small producers and national economies in the long term.

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Polynesia in the Context of China-US Rivalry



Simay GÜZEL

The Pacific Islands stand out economically and strategically due to their overlapping Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZs) with neighboring countries, their central position in maritime and air traffic, and the ongoing US-China rivalry in the region.<sup>[1]</sup> Polynesia represents one of the three major island groups in the Pacific. Like other countries in Polynesia, China is steadily deepening its relations with Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu. This development emerges as a particularly notable strategic move within the context of the China-US competition. In addition to existing regional collaborations and organizations, the Pacific Islands Forum, where Turkey is also a Dialogue Partner, plays a significant role in regional leadership and diplomacy. However, competition around this forum is intensifying. The relations of these three countries with China are of critical importance for Beijing, as they aim to balance the US influence in the region.

The colonial histories of the United States and some other countries in this region have contributed to its underdevelopment. Populations still suffer from health issues caused by nuclear and other weapon tests, while also grappling with the consequences of the climate crisis. China's increasing diplomatic missions and expanding economic aid programs in the Pacific aim to weaken the US influence in the region. In response, the United States is stepping up its influence in the Pacific Islands through climate change assistance and security collaborations. Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu are attempting to implement balancing policies between these two major powers.

The United States initially underestimated China's influence in the region, but after China began to increase its presence, the US shifted its focus to the region from 2010 onward. By 2018, the countries that saw the most significant economic investments from China, thereby expanding its sphere of influence, were the Cook Islands, Samoa, and Tonga.<sup>[2]</sup> Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu, located in the western part of Polynesia, have become key stages in the China-US rivalry, despite being small island nations in the Pacific. Recent developments in this context are also noteworthy.

Samoa has maintained friendly relations with China for a long time. On November 26, 2024, Chinese President Xi Jinping and Samoa's Prime Minister Fiame Naomi Mata'afa met and emphasized their friendly ties through various statements.<sup>[3]</sup> China provides Samoa with significant assistance, including infrastructure projects and healthcare services. These aids from China support Samoa's economic development while simultaneously increasing the country's dependence on Beijing.

Countries like the United States and Australia are concerned about China using its economic aid as a tool for strategic influence. Samoa has become an important diplomatic partner for China, particularly as Beijing seeks to balance the US presence in the South Pacific.<sup>[4]</sup> While strengthening its economic development projects with Samoa, China continues to expand its diplomatic relations to limit the US influence in the region. Samoa, while receiving financial support from China, also demonstrates openness to security-focused cooperation with the United States. At the same time, it can be said that Samoa is pursuing a balancing policy by coordinating strategies with US allies in the region.

Tonga's relations with China have largely been shaped by economic support and infrastructure investments.<sup>[5]</sup> In return, China strengthens its diplomatic ties with the country by offering grants and public projects. Meanwhile, the United States and its allies are working on new strategies to strengthen political relations with Tonga's leadership. The US offers Tonga climate change assistance and military cooperation proposals. Tonga also seeks to balance China's economic influence by collaborating with Australia and New Zealand. However, despite these efforts, the United States is still unable to prevent China's investments from putting it at an economic disadvantage.

Finally, Tuvalu is clearly an important actor in the China-Taiwan struggle. Tuvalu remains one of the few countries that officially recognizes Taiwan. Tuvalu's long-standing friendly relations with Taiwan have become a factor that complicates China's efforts to draw Tuvalu to its side through economic and diplomatic means. On the other hand, Tuvalu's need for international support in the fight against climate change has led the country to adopt a more cautious policy toward China. The United States has observed this situation and seems to position Tuvalu as a supporter of Taiwan, attempting to use it as an advantage against China.<sup>[6]</sup>

Recently, the strategic importance of Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu in the context of the China-US rivalry has increased due to the influence of great powers in the Pacific. Developments in these countries indicate that the region has become the center of geopolitical conflict. The 2024 Pacific Islands Forum held in Tonga highlighted China's efforts to increase its influence and the counteractions by the United States. China's aim to achieve "Development Partner" status for Taiwan at the Pacific Islands Forum clearly demonstrates Beijing's strategy to enhance its diplomatic influence in the region, while the United States and its allies defending Taiwan's participation signal their intention to resist China.<sup>[7]</sup> Such tensions at the forum confirm that the region has become a front line in the US-China competition.

China's stance at the forum indicates that the number of Beijing-friendly countries in the Pacific Islands may increase. On the other hand, US allies and countries like Tuvalu, which recognizes Taiwan, are using the support they receive from the US to strengthen their diplomatic positions. Indeed, Taiwan has extended its Development Partnership Agreement with the Pacific Islands until 2027. Support in areas such as agriculture, education, and healthcare ensures that Taiwan is viewed as a permanent ally in the region.<sup>[8]</sup> However, it is likely that China's diplomatic pressures will continue to challenge these ties in the Pacific.

Like other Pacific regions, Polynesia has become a significant arena for the US-China struggle for influence. The economic vulnerabilities of these countries, the threats posed by climate change, and their geopolitical positions suggest that this rivalry will continue. This dynamic in the region reflects not only a regional but also a global power struggle. These small nations are emerging as a platform that shapes the strategic interests of superpowers, determining how economic and diplomatic support will be reciprocated in the region. These developments further enhance the international importance of Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu. China's efforts to increase its influence in the region through economic aid and infrastructure investments are closely monitored by the US. Meanwhile, small countries like Samoa, Tonga, and Tuvalu will strive to maximize their own interests in this power struggle.

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## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Decline of French Military Presence in Africa and Regional Dynamics



Gökтуğ ÇALIŞKAN

Significant shifts have occurred in recent years regarding France's military presence in Africa. Particularly, the decisions by Chad and Senegal to terminate their defense cooperation agreements with France signal a new political atmosphere on the continent. These steps are significant as they highlight a growing emphasis on independence from former colonial powers and the strengthening of national sovereignty policies. While African countries strive to build a more resilient structure against external interventions, such decisions also have the potential to reshape geopolitical balances in the region. The Chadian government reinforced its emphasis on national sovereignty with this decision, made during Independence Day celebrations, while the Senegalese government has taken a similar stance. This new approach adopted by both countries towards France can be interpreted not only as a military strategy but also as an effort to redefine Africa's position in global politics. Indeed, these changes in the region clearly reflect the desire of African leaders and peoples to confront and move beyond the remnants of colonial structures."

Chad's decision to terminate its military cooperation agreement with France on its 66th independence anniversary has reverberated across the continent. This move can be seen as a critical step toward reducing France's influence in the Sahel region. For a long time, France maintained a significant military presence in the area under the pretext of counterterrorism, notably through Operation Serval and later Operation Barkhane. However, these operations have faced increasing backlash from local populations in recent years. Not only have France's efforts failed to achieve complete success, but they have also inadvertently amplified the influence of separatist and terrorist elements in the region. In this context, Chad's decision to end France's military presence reflects growing anti-French sentiment among its people. Similarly, Senegal has announced the closure of French military bases in line with its independence and national interests, a move that has been closely watched on the international stage. Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's emphasis on the importance of ending France's military presence for national sovereignty highlights the firm stance regional leaders are taking on this issue.

The decline of France's influence in the Sahel region is not limited to Chad and Senegal. France's forced withdrawal from countries like Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger has dealt a significant blow to its strategic objectives in the region. Military coups in these countries, accompanied by rising anti-French rhetoric, have substantially weakened France's influence. Particularly, the withdrawal of French forces following the military coup in Niger has sparked debates over the disruption of counterterrorism coordination. While French media and sources emphasize that this withdrawal has created significant gaps in the regional security architecture, they have also criticized other international actors' attempts to fill the void. In this process, Russia's growing influence through the Wagner Group (now known as the African Corps) and China's investments in infrastructure projects have intensified a new climate of competition in the region.

On the other hand, the decisions by Chad and Senegal have the potential to reshape the continent's security architecture. The roles of regional organizations such as the African Union and the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) have become increasingly significant in this process. For example, ECOWAS's decision to impose economic sanctions following the coup in Niger reflects its efforts to strengthen internal security mechanisms. However, the impact of such decisions on regional security can lead to negative outcomes if adequate coordination is not achieved. The Sahel States Federation stands as a prime example of this. Formed by Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger, the federation has made notable progress within approximately one and a half years.

France's withdrawal also presents African countries with a significant opportunity to achieve economic independence and manage their resources more efficiently. With the closure of French bases, local governments have gained greater potential to implement their own economic projects in the areas previously occupied by these installations. For instance, the Senegalese government plans to fill the economic gap left by the closure of French bases through incentives aimed at supporting local entrepreneurs. In this context, there are plans to increase investments in infrastructure projects and the tourism sector.

The decline in investments from French companies has created an opportunity for African countries to diversify their economic relations and develop new partnerships in global markets. Economic collaborations with countries like China, Turkey, and India have stimulated activity across the continent in sectors such as infrastructure, energy, and technology. For example, China's Mombasa-Nairobi Railway Project in Kenya has revitalized regional trade and provided employment for thousands of people. Such projects enable African countries to enhance their own economic capacities.

With France's withdrawal, the reduction of external dependence on local economies and the more efficient utilization of local resources (especially natural resources) have become possible. This situation not only supports Africa's efforts for economic independence but can also contribute to achieving sustainable development goals. The emergence of a more balanced and diversified structure in Africa's economic relations can be seen as a significant step toward making the continent a stronger actor in the international system.

The rising anti-French wave in Africa has become increasingly evident, largely influenced by the continent's young leaders and dynamic political movements. The youth population has developed a Pan-Africanist consciousness that critiques Africa's dependence on France, and this has directly impacted the political decisions of leaders. Given that, as of 2022, 60% of Africa's population is under 25, it is clear how this demographic will shape the continent's politics in the future. The growing presence of young leaders on the political stage is ensuring that national independence and economic reforms are more strongly advocated. In this context, Senegalese President Bassirou Diomaye Faye's emphasis on independence through a young leadership approach, while prioritizing regional cooperation, serves as an example.

This leadership model is seen as a herald of a new political understanding that represents the continent's future direction. The increasing political awareness among the youth carries potential not only at the national level but also within the decision-making bodies of continental organizations such as the African Union. Investments in areas like education, technology, and digitalization could further enhance this generation's contribution to Africa's independence efforts. This new wave represents not only a challenge to former colonial powers like France but also an awakening to Africa's will to shape its own future.

The end of France's military presence has opened the door to a new era of developing local solutions to Africa's security issues. France's withdrawal presents a significant opportunity for African countries, allowing local armies to operate more independently. Furthermore, it will provide African countries with the chance to enhance their own security capacities. This transformation could encourage the continent to develop more unique and independent strategies in its fight against terrorism. In Burkina Faso, the increase in the national defense budget and investments in local security forces are signs of efforts to close security gaps following France's withdrawal. These developments highlight the importance of local leadership and the search for solutions, while limiting the influence of external actors.

Although private security entities like the 'African Corps' may have a short-term impact, this situation has made the necessity of local solutions even more apparent in the long run. For African countries to effectively utilize their own resources to address these issues is one of the most important steps in supporting the continent's independence goals. This new process can not only ensure Africa's security stability but also enable it to emerge as a stronger political actor on the international stage.

The independence efforts of African countries are being closely monitored on the international stage. The gradual reduction of France's military presence has accelerated the continent's efforts to strengthen its resistance to external interventions. This situation indicates that Africa is progressing from being a regional power to becoming a global actor in terms of its geopolitical significance. However, this process has also brought about economic and political uncertainties. Adopting an approach that prioritizes their national interests could play a key role for African countries in overcoming these uncertainties. If countries like Chad and Senegal support their independence efforts with sustainable development projects and regional cooperation, these changes could be solidified. The international community's support for Africa's transformation process could enhance the continent's influence on global politics and economics. If managed correctly, Africa will not only shift the existing geopolitical balance but also take significant steps toward becoming a global power center.

In conclusion, Chad and Senegal's decisions to end military cooperation with France represent not only a continental transformation process but also a reshaping of global politics. These decisions bring an opportunity for Africa to reach a stronger position in the international system, while also carrying risks and uncertainties. If Africa proceeds with internal reforms and fosters regional solidarity in a coordinated manner, it can transform its independence movements into a global success story. With sustained will and determination, Africa will shape its own future and establish itself as a continent that determines the direction of global politics.



## ANKASAM ANALYSIS

# Negative Effects Russia's Isolation from the Arctic Council



Emekli Deniz Albay  
Dr. Ferhan ORAL

According to the latest findings, the Arctic region contains 90 billion barrels of oil and 47.3 trillion cubic metres of natural gas.[1]. In addition to this immense energy potential, the Northern Sea Route (NSR), where melting ice due to climate change currently permits partial passage and is expected to allow year-round navigation after 2030, significantly shortens maritime transport between Asia and Europe.[2].

However, Arctic waters are particularly sensitive and vulnerable to oil spills from ship accidents. The absence of adequate infrastructure and the remoteness of the region mean it can take days or even weeks to respond to a spill. This risk is further compounded by the anticipated increase in transport activities in the area. The Arctic Council, established by the Ottawa Declaration in 1996, is a consensus-based intergovernmental forum addressing Arctic issues. It comprises eight permanent member states (the United States, Russia, Canada, Iceland, Sweden, Norway, Finland, and Denmark), six indigenous organisation members, and 13 observer countries.[3].

The Council operates on a rotating chairmanship system, with each of the eight Arctic states holding the position for two years. It has played a crucial role in fostering scientific cooperation and sustainable development, particularly on environmental challenges, including climate change. The Council's work has been instrumental in maintaining peaceful relations in the Arctic region in the post-Cold War era.[4] While military matters fall outside its mandate, the cooperative activities facilitated by the Council provide a platform for Arctic states to engage in constructive dialogue, mitigating potential conflicts or misunderstandings.

Even during periods of geopolitical tension, such as the Russian annexation of Crimea in 2014 and the Syrian Civil War, the Council continued its cooperative initiatives. These included research projects and the establishment of regulations on critical issues such as fisheries, transport, search and rescue operations, and environmental impact assessments. However, following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, the remaining seven members temporarily suspended the Council's activities. This decision froze ongoing projects on scientific cooperation, including those addressing emergencies like oil spills, biodiversity preservation, marine debris reduction, resource-saving technologies, and the protection of indigenous cultural and historical heritage. By June 2022, some project work had resumed without Russian participation.

The absence of Russia, which possesses over half of the Arctic coastline, has diminished the scope and effectiveness of the Council, jeopardising its ability to achieve its objectives. The isolation of Russia from Council activities has also hindered cooperation by restricting access to Russian climate and environmental research. Consequently, Russia has sought alliances with non-Arctic countries, organising events with its so-called 'friendly countries', including China, Brazil, Mongolia, Belarus, and Kazakhstan. Russia has also sought partnerships with organisations and regions such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, Latin America, the Middle East, the Gulf States, Turkey,[5] and Thailand.[6]

China, identifying itself as a 'Near Arctic State' in its 2018 Arctic Policy White Paper and holding observer status in the Council, may view this crisis as an opportunity to expand Arctic governance to the international community and enhance its influence. Additionally, Russia's exclusion from the Council could lead it to accelerate its ongoing armament and infrastructure development activities in the region.

Efforts are underway to find a resolution. Norway, currently holding the Presidency of the Council, has been negotiating with Russia to address the issue.[7]. Notably, Russia participated in a virtual exercise among the Arctic states in March 2024, simulating a major oil spill off Norway's northern coast.[8]. Despite these steps, a return to the previous cooperative spirit appears unlikely while the Ukraine War persists. Nevertheless, limited collaboration in the Arctic continues, even amid heightened tensions.

Consequently, the permanent loss of this forum, which assists in vital policy work as a result of the further erosion of political co-operation between the Arctic States, would make it more difficult for the West to control Russian activities in the region, while at the same time exacerbating the effects of climate change for the entire world. While Russia has stated that it does not intend to create an alternative forum to the Arctic Council and will remain in the Council—provided its right to participate in its meetings and work is respected—it is believed that continued isolationist efforts could undermine the 'core circumpolar vision' at the centre of the Arctic Council. In light of these considerations, the power of diplomacy is needed in this area more than ever to preserve the Council's capacity to address the shared challenges facing the Arctic region.

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