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The Russian invasion of Ukraine

Russia's invasion of Ukraine is all but surprising, considering Moscow's history of aggression against neighbouring countries. In addition, Russia's expectation of quick success may have contributed to the decision to launch a military operation against Ukraine.

Panther trumps Leopard

A deal without losers? Why the arms deal between South Korea and Poland holds benefits for both countries, and which implications it carries for Europe and the Indo-Pacific.

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FOREWORD

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About the Magazin

Conflicts are being openly fought out in several regions of the world. Be it the Russian invasion of Ukraine or the violent protests in Iran. Elsewhere, severe political and social crises do not augur a rosy future. Many believed in the last decade that the world was becoming more peaceful. But those who lulled themselves into a sense of security have been taught better. Politicians, experts and the people face the challenges of crises, conflicts and wars. Everyone is asking the question - is the world at war or close to it?

In six articles, the magazine looks at different facets of political conflicts. In doing so, the authors try to analyse the question and answer it by applying it to various examples around the whole globe. But international foreign affairs and security policy is too complex for simple answers. Perhaps it is yet too early for answers at the beginning of conflicts, since as Plato already knew 2.500 years ago: Only the dead have seen the end of war.

About EPIS

The EPIS Magazine is a publication of the EPIS ThinkTank e.V. As an association, we engage in debate on foreign and security policy issues. We participate in a fact-based and neutral manner with analyses and statements. As a think tank, we are looking for bright minds to join our team of researchers or authors. Join us and take part in the debate!

The Political and Economic Power of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps

This article was reviewed by Lorenz Garbe and Daniel Gertjes

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In the face of the extreme violence with which the Iranian regime is responding to the protests in the country, which have been ongoing since September 2022, a discourse has flared up on how to deal with the responsible actors. At the centre of the debate is the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). Recently, the EU Parliament called on the European Union to ban the Iranian Revolutionary Guard as a terrorist organisation. Reactions from the Iranian regime accused the EU of subordination to the USA (Iran International, 2023). In addition to violent crackdowns on protesters, the IRGC also has long been associated with terrorism. The US Department of State identifies the Revolutionary Guard as central to the Iranian regime's international spread of violence. The organisation intensively supports Islamist groups and also resorts to terrorist means itself. For the period between 1985 and 2020, the agency lists 17 incidents in Europe alone in connection with the Revolutionary Guards. The USA has designated the IRGC together with its sub-unit the Al Quds Brigade as a foreign terrorist organisation in 2019 (US Department of State, 2020, pp.24-29). An important but rarely mentioned side effect of the ban debate is the power of the Revolutionary Guard in Iran. As it is one of the most powerful institutions in the state apparatus, a break with it can be tantamount to a break with the recognition of the legitimacy of the institution of the Islamic Republic. The following article examines the role of the IRGC as a political and economic actor within Iran.

Who is the IRGC?

The Iranian Revolutionary Guard, part of the Armed Forces of Iran, is generally considered an influential player within the Islamic Republic of Iran (Negahban, 2017; Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. xi; Sinkaya, 2016, p. 1). In order to understand the power of the IRGC within the Iranian regime, it is necessary not to limit the term to the formal organisation alone. The Revolutionary Guard as a power factor encompasses more than the active cadres. Veterans in particular are an integral part of the network. In the RAND Corporation's The Rise of the Pasdaran, the IRGC is defined as: *„[...] not only the formal institution of active military personnel but also the networks of IRGC veterans and former members whose ascension has been facilitated by the informality of Iranian political life."* (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 12) The formal organisation is therefore in the focus, but people from within the immediate circle remain just as relevant. Therefore, in the following, if not explicitly indicated otherwise, the terms Revolutionary Guard and IRGC are used for the entire network.

A revolutionary army

The Revolutionary Guard as a formal organisation was founded in 1979 in the course of the Iranian Revolution on the orders of Ruhollah Khomeini. This step was taken with the explicit justification of creating a revolutionary counterweight to the regular military, which still dated from the time of the Shah's rule. In contrast to the regular army, the mission from the beginning also included fighting the internal opposition. Their role as defenders of the Islamic Revolution is also constitutionally stipulated (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 20-23). Khomeini attached great importance to the IRGC not interfering in political affairs, analogous to the army. Politicisation would undermine the fulfilment of their mission (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 78). Here we are presented with an obvious constitutional contradiction between revolutionary orientation on the one hand and a prescribed apolitical role on the

other. The organisation did not follow this original idea of Khomeini. At the latest with the presidency of the reformer Khatami, the Revolutionary Guards finally began to constitute itself as a political actor (Forozan, 2016, p. 87; Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 17). From 1999 at the latest, actors from the ranks of the IRGC explicitly professed political partisanship. The idea that the military is obliged to be neutral, one commander told the radical newspaper Keyhan, is a misinterpretation of Ayatollah Khomeini's teachings (Samii, 1999). Within Iran's political landscape, the organisation and its network are clearly on the side of the hardline faction (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 16). Significant ideological influence on the IRGC was exerted by the cleric Ayatollah Taqi Mesbah-Yazdi, whose teachings grant defenders of the Islamic Revolution almost unlimited powers (Safshekan & Sabet, 2010, p. 550-553). Anti-Semitism directed primarily against Israel and the goal of Islamic control over Jerusalem also play an important role in the ideology of the Revolutionary Guards. As early as during the Iran-Iraq war, this could be observed in the naming of operations; one of the first major operations was entitled "Tariq al-Quds", "Road to Jerusalem". A common propaganda slogan, also alluding to Shiite mythology, was: "The road to Jerusalem passes through Kerbala" (Ostovar, 2016, p. 75-79). Ideology and the revolutionary myth thus occupy a high position in the IRGC's self-image.

Important subdivisions

An integral part of the IRGC structure is the Basiji militia. This usually poorly trained popular army plays a key role in fighting the domestic opposition. Like the Revolutionary Guard, it was founded in the course of the Islamic Revolution and cooperated with it from a very early stage. During the Iran-Iraq war, its high level of sacrifice ensured propagandistically exploitable successes. Through student organisations and groups for workers, Basiji are strongly present in parts of Iranian society that are loyal to the regime. Since 2007, the militia has also been formally affiliated to the IRGC (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 25-29). The militia played a central role in the brutal crackdown on protests against the results of the 2009 presidential election (Thaler, et al., 2010, p. 46). To this day, the Basiji remains the force responsible for violently combating protesters on the streets. In the current unrest, too, it is the Basij that is cracking down on the protesters with violence (VOA, 2022). Another centrally relevant part of the IRGC is the Al-Quds Brigade. The very name Al-Quds, Arabic and Persian for Jerusalem, testifies once anew to the strongly anti-Israeli orientation. Under the leadership of Qassem Soleimani, who was killed by the USA at the beginning of 2020, the relevance of the division has greatly increased. It now controls the bulk of the Revolutionary Guard's foreign operations and is the primary tool for exerting Iranian influence in the neighbouring region (Ostovar, 2016, p. 6). They are closely linked to Iran's efforts to acquire weapons of mass destruction (Wahdat-Hagh, 2003, p.311). Another important project dominated by the Quds Brigades is Iran's cooperation, known as the "Axis of Resistance", with non-state actors such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, Shiite militias in Iraq, the Huthis in Yemen and various regional volunteer corps. This pillar of Iranian foreign policy in the neighbouring region, based on asymmetrical structures, emerged in the mid-2000s as a reaction to the American invasion of Iraq. Israel also belongs to the circle of enemies of the "resistance". The most important state partner is the regime of Bashar al-Assad in Syria. Politically and ideologically, the project is subordinate to the Supreme Leader of Iran, Ali Khameinei (Steinberg, 2021, p. 7). Through the Quds Brigade, the IRGC has offices in Iranian embassies around the world and works closely with the Iranian foreign intelligence service MOIS (Wahdat-Hagh, 2003, p.311). This is particularly worrying as the use of diplomatic facilities as cover for sometimes terrorist operations against Iranian opposition members abroad and other targets classified as hostile is well documented (Pop & Silber, 2021, p.158, Levitt, 2018, pp. 10-14).

Is the IRGC a stakeholder in its own right?

Although the IRGC as an organisation is formally subordinate to the Supreme Leader, there is extensive autonomy with regard to its practice. Early in its existence, the organisation managed to escape comprehensive control by the government and the clergy. In particular, the decisive authority over filling positions within the organisation lies with the leadership of the Revolutionary Guard itself (Katzman, 1993, pp. 393-395). Clerical representatives appointed by the Supreme Leader primarily serve the ideological control of the organisation and the avoidance of direct political confrontation. Operational independence in particular has been strengthened since 2007 through innovations in the command structure on the initiative of the then commander Mohammad Ali Jafari. In combination with its broad operational field, this form of autonomy of the Revolutionary Guard, in contrast to the regular armed forces, strengthens its abil-

Source: Anonymous (ca.1980s). https://commons.wikimedia.org/wiki/File:31st_Ashura_Division_combat_engineering.jpg

ity to act as a political force (Forozan, 2016, p. 57; 68). Ostovar describes autonomy from the organisation's relationship to the Supreme Leader as follows:

> *„The organization's activities are inherently sanctioned by the leader and thus touched with the same essence of sacredness that he represents. So long as the leader does not publically disagree with the organization, its actions are essentially unimpeachable within the context of Iran's system." (Ostovar, 2016, p. 238)*

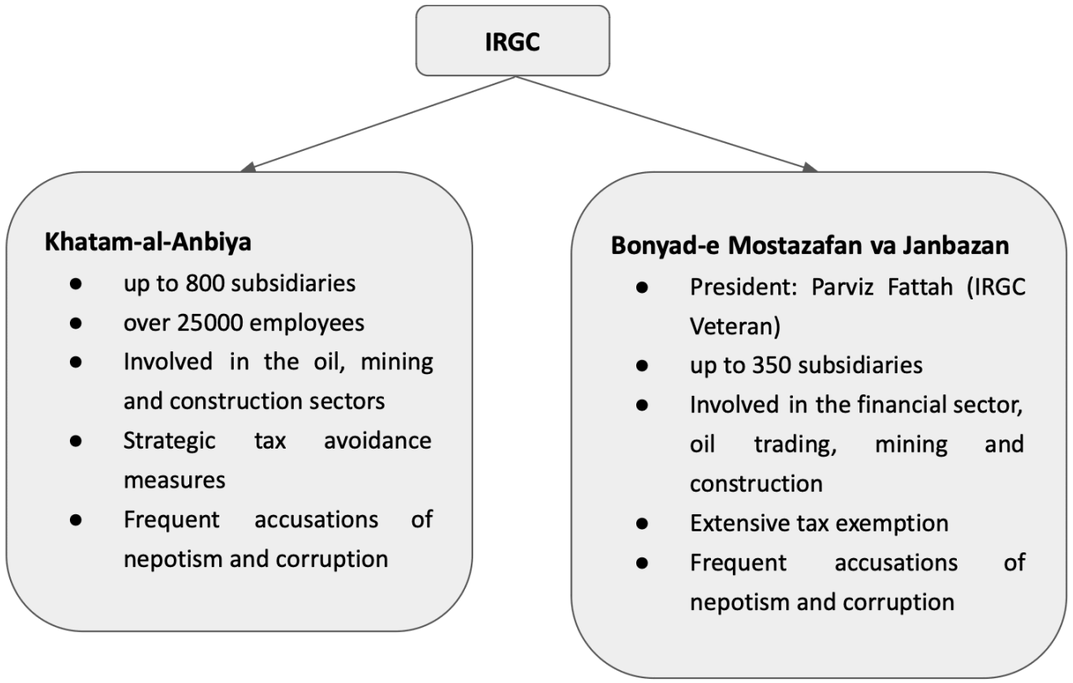
Within the leadership of the IRGC, there is a close network that has existed since the 1980s. Of central importance for the composition of this network is a network of personal relationships that developed in the course of the Iran-Iraq war. Central to this network were and are, among others, the persons Mohammad Ali Jafari, Esmail Qaani and Qassem Soleimani (Fulton, 2013, p. 7-10; 37). The events of the Iran-Iraq war under the propaganda slogan of "sacred defence" were also of decisive importance for the formation of the ideological identity of the Revolutionary Guards. Even today, this term is important for the organisation's self-image and external presentation as a religiously legitimised actor (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 23-24). The known factual situation thus points to a high degree of autonomy of the IRGC vis-à-vis Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei, despite its nominal subordination. It is conceivable that the close-knit leadership elite acts on its own initiative within the framework of anticipatory obedience.

Closely tied to the political establishment

Within the formal political apparatus, members of the IRGC can be found in local administrations, in parliament and as part of the government in cabinet posts. (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. xi). The previous peak of direct representation in presidential cabinets is found in the Ahmadinejad era with 18 cadres out of a total of 45 cabinet members during the first term and 19 out of 42 during the second term. In the periods examined below, six out of 34 and 12 out of 35 cabinet members from the ranks of the Revolutionary Guards, respectively, were part of the elected government (Boroujerdi & Rahimkhani, 2018, p. 165). Under President Raisi, the IRGC continues to have a strong presence. Cabinet member Mosen Rezai and Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi are wanted by Interpol for their involvement in the IRGC-linked terrorist attack on the AMIA Jewish community centre in Buenos Aires in 1994 (Taleblu, 2021). As a close confidant of Qassem Soleimani, the current foreign minister Amir-Abdollahian, who is also responsible for the nuclear negotiations, must also be counted among the network around the IRGC (Sadeghi, 2021). It is clear that the IRGC is also deeply involved in the institutions of Iran's elected government and can count people in decisive positions among its cadres and sympathisers.

An economic powerhouse

To fully understand the multidimensional nature of the IRGC, its linkages with the Iranian economy must also be considered. Since 2005, the network around the IRGC has managed to rise to the economic elite of Iran. It is estimated that the IRGC's corporate network is worth up to around $100 billion. To a large extent, the relationship to the Revolutionary Guard is deliberately concealed in order to avoid controversy within Iran on the one hand and to be able to undermine existing international sanctions on the other. This often makes attribution difficult. The vacuum existing under the existing sanctions regime initially enabled the economic expansion of the IRGC, but is increasingly becoming a serious problem for the organisation, especially after the US withdrawal from the JCPOA (Bazoobandi, 2019, pp. 4-9). The most important entities underpinning the broad economic power of the Revolutionary Guard are the Khatam-ol-Anbiya conglomerate and the Foundation Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan. As early as after the Iran-Iraq war, then President Rafsanjani encouraged the IRGC to increase its budget through economic activities. Before that, Rafsanjani had initiated cuts in the defence budget. The economic activities were to serve as an additional independent source of funds for the organisation (Forozan, 2016, p. 143). Especially during Ahmadinejad's presidency, the Revolutionary Guard was able to gain control of numerous formerly public companies, such as telecommunications, in the course of increasing privatisation. Although also controversial in Iran, these takeovers by the IRGC occurred under the blessing of Ali Khamenei. Also not uncontroversial in Iran are the IRGC's numerous tax avoidance measures (Bazoobandi, 2019, p.3). Especially during Ahmadinejad's presidency, the Revolutionary Guard was able to gain control of numerous formerly public companies, such as telecommunications, in the course of increasing privatisation. Although also controversial in Iran, these takeovers by the IRGC occurred under the blessing of Ali Khamenei. Also not uncontroversial in Iran are the IRGC's numerous tax avoidance measures (Bazoobandi, 2019, p.3). In doing so, the IRGC took advantage of its close involvement in Ahmadinejad's cabinet. This approach arguably built on existing contacts. Even before his presidency, Ahmadinejad had given Khatam al-Anbiya no-bid contracts (Forozan, 2016, pp.147-148). Through close contacts with various media and the operation of numerous newspapers, magazines and websites, The Revolutionary Guard also has a widely ramified propaganda network in Iran (Wehrey, et al., 2009, pp. 48-53).



Khatam al-Anbiya, the most important conglomerate

The Khatam al-Anbiya is of particular importance as a driving force of development and industrial projects. With over 800 affiliated companies and 25000 engineers and employees, the company is now considered the main engineering arm of the IRGC and represents one of the largest contractors for industrial and development projects in Iran. It also occupies a central position in the oil and natural resources industry (Rizivi, 2012, p.591). Khatam al-Anbiya is also active abroad, reportedly responsible for the construction of a missile launching pad in Venezuela (Weinthal, 2011). Khatam al-Anbiya makes it obvious how IRGC companies benefit from their proximity to state institutions. Especially the direct awarding of contracts without tendering is well documented and meets with criticism in Iran. In addition to the aforementioned contracts awarded by Ahmadinejad, Khatam al-Anbiya has also received numerous contracts worth billions of dollars from the Iranian oil ministry without prior tendering. As MEED reported, in 2010 Khatam al-Anbiya even managed to oust foreign competitors Shell and Repsol from a stake in gas production in South Pars (MEED, 2010). Deputy Director Abdolreza Abedzadeh denied being favoured by the government in an interview. Decisions were based on the work delivered and partly also a desire on the part of the government to shorten long award processes. However, when asked if revenues from Khatam's construction projects are also used to fund defence initiatives, he admitted, *"It helps. It helps with the development funding that the government provides to the armed forces."* (Wehrey, et al., 2009, pp. 63-64). As MEED reports, in 2010 Khatam al-Anbiya even managed to oust foreign competitors Shell and Repsol from a stake in gas production in South Pars (MEED, 2010). In addition to nepotism, it is also documented that the IRGC put competitors out of business in the past by more drastic means. In 2004, the Revolutionary Guard forced the closure of Khomeini International Airport in Tehran, which had opened only days earlier, through a military occupation. The IRGC accused one of the Turkish consortia contracted to operate the airport of being a security risk due to alleged business contacts with Israel (Forozan, 2016, p. 146). The contracts with the Turkish company were then terminated and Iranian companies with ties to the IRGC took over the operation of the airport without any new tender (Bazoobandi, 2019, p.6). It seems obvious, therefore, that the IRGC is willing to use its military as well as political position to its economic advantage.

Airlines allegedly used for arms trafficking and smuggling

- Mahan Air
- Yas Air
- Pouya Air
- Qeshm Fars Air
- Saha Airlines
- Iran Air

Arms trade and political-economic synergies

One aspect in which the synergies between its political and economic activities become particularly clear is the IRGC's exploitation of its involvement in civil aviation for clearly political-military purposes as well as arms trade and smuggling. Of particular importance is the airline Mahan Air, which is closely linked to the Revolutionary Guard through its chairman Hamid Arabnejad Khanooki (US Department of State, 2020, pp.35-36). In the course of the protests against Syrian leader Assad since 2011, Iran supported him in order to be able to maintain its influence over the country and its access to the Mediterranean coast. As early as 2011, Iranian airlines - such as Mahan Air - were repeatedly accused of transferring personnel and military support in the form of weapons to Syria on behalf of the IRGC by US officials (Ostovar, 2016, p. 208). In October 2011, the US Treasury sanctioned Mahan Air as part of the Al Quds Brigades terror infrastructure network to circumvent aviation security measures. In addition to shipments to Syria, the agency also pointed to shipments to Lebanon's Hezbollah. According to the Under Secretary for Terrorism and Financial Intelligence, the use of the airline for military purposes illuminates how the IRGC exploited its infiltration of the civilian economy for political gain (2011). Yas Air has also been linked to the delivery of heavy weapons. According to the report, both airlines are pursuing a strategy of using cargo and passenger flights to transport weapons - declared as humanitarian goods - to crisis areas. According to a 2012 report by U.S. authorities, Turkish authorities discovered these smuggling activities during an inspection of a flight operated by the Iranian airline Yas Air. One particular flight to Syria had "spare car parts" on its manifest, but instead had weapons and large quantities of ammunition and an assortment of mortar shells on board (Ostovar, 2016, p. 208). According to the US Department of State, Mahan Air and companies around it continue to serve military purposes for the Revolutionary Guard to date (2020, pp.35-36). There is also evidence, albeit not very reliable, that the use of civil aviation for such purposes may also possibly include the state airline Iran Air. In the wake of the power struggle at the end of Rohani's presidency in 2021, then Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif, in a leaked interview, also accused the IRGC and Quds Brigades commander Soleimani of using Iran Air to transport military material and personnel to Syria without the government's consent (Fassihi, 2021). There seems indeed an internal struggle and further action in Syria regarding Assad and the Islamic State. From 2014 February onwards, contrary to the more restrained course indicated by President Rohani, the IRGC narratives clearly continued to determine the course in Syria. The troop presence under Qassem Soleimani was greatly increased throughout the year (Akbarzadeh & Conduit, 2016, pp 144-145).

A comparable use of airlines can also be observed in the support of Russia's war against Ukraine by the Iranian regime through the supply of weapons. As reported by sources in the Open Source Intelligence Community, airlines with links to the Revolutionary Guard are involved in arms shipments to Russia. The focus is on the cargo airlines Pouya Air and

Qeshm Fars Air, both of which have been active in the service of the IRGC in the past, according to the US, and again the passenger airline Mahan Air. In particular, the frequency of Pouya Air and Qeshm Fars Air from Iran to Russia have increased significantly following the invasion of Ukraine, suggesting a use for transporting Iranian-produced military equipment (Gerjon, 2022). Ukraine names Iran Air, Mahan Air, Pouya Air, Saha Airlines as responsible for the arms shipments. There are also reports of weapons being transported by sea. Vessels of the Iranian Industrial Company, which also belongs to the IRGC, are said to be responsible (Center of National Resistance of Ukraine, 2022). In addition to arms deliveries, according to US officials, IRGC personnel were also allegedly deployed to the occupied Crimean peninsula for training purposes. The Institute for the Study of war points out that the exact purpose of the mission remains unknown (ISW, 2022).

The Mostazafan va Janbazan Foundation

For the extensive economic empire of the Revolutionary Guards, in addition to corporate conglomerates, the Bonyad Foundations play a special role for the IRGC as extralegal economic networks. Particularly important here is the Bonyad-e Mostazafan va Janbazan (eng.: Foundation of the Oppressed and Disabled). It was established in 1979 on the orders of Ruhollah Khomeini as part of the seizure of the properties of the Pahlavi monarchy (Rassam & Vakil, 2020, p. 15). The current president of the foundation, Parviz Fattah, is a former IRGC officer with good relations to the slain General Qassem Soleimani and was previously part of Ahmadinejad's cabinet as energy minister (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2020). Bonyad-e Mostazafan is deeply integrated into the Iranian economy through an enormous number of subsidiaries and branches. According to estimates by Iran Watch, the number of companies is as high as 350. Economic activities of the foundation are exempt from tax according to a decree issued by Ali Kahmenei in 1993 (Iran Watch, 2021). According to the U.S. Department of the Treasury, the companies owned by Bonyad-e Mostazafan include numerous financial, mining and oil firms, the most notable being Behran Oil (2020). The foundation also includes large companies in the agricultural and food industries and construction firms with major contracts, including the construction of terminal one of Imam Khomeini International Airport. Bonyad-e Mostazafan has also accepted contract work abroad in the past. Currently, the foundation maintains economic relations with countries in the Middle East, Africa, and South Asia, as well as Russia and other former Soviet Union states (Wehrey, et al., 2009, p. 58). By its own account, the total value of Bonyad-e Mostazafan's holdings was said to have been $1.3 million in 2016, with net profits of $64 million that same year (Rassam & Vakil, 2020, p. 15). Directly striking in the context of the Bonyad Mostazafan is the tax exemption, as it fits in with the IRGC's previously mentioned attempts to avoid taxation in cases of private sector economic activity.

The question of the ban, a complex issue with pitfalls

As has been shown, the IRGC has had a long evolution, during which it has become an actor that dominates the entire Iranian state as well as large parts of the Iranian economy. A 2020 analysis by the Hoover Institution justifiably refers to this network around the IRGC as the "Iranian Deep State" (Rassam & Vakil, 2020). In its economic activity, the Revolutionary Guard benefits greatly from its infiltration of state institutions, which enables it to engage in tax evasion and nepotism. The IRGC's influence in politics and the economy gives it the power to use both aspects to its ends. This synergy has been particularly evident in the case of the use of civil aviation for military purposes and arms smuggling. The IRGC's power is based on its military professionalism, its broad economic power and its proximity to Ali Kahmenei. The assumption made at the beginning that a break with the IRGC on the part of Western states, e.g. by banning it as a terrorist organisation, could appear as a break with the institution of the Islamic Republic as a whole, seems very plausible against this background. This aspect must be kept in mind by Western decision-makers, but should not be misunderstood as a counter-argument against action on the IRGC. The activities from the ranks of the group demand a clear response from policy makers. Banning the Revolutionary Guard would significantly complicate its work against the Iranian opposition and other possible targets in the West, as the security authorities would have a much better handle, and diplomatic missions and other institutions could no longer be used as cover for IRGC activities.

> *"The IRGC's influence in politics and the economy gives it the power to use both aspects to its ends."*

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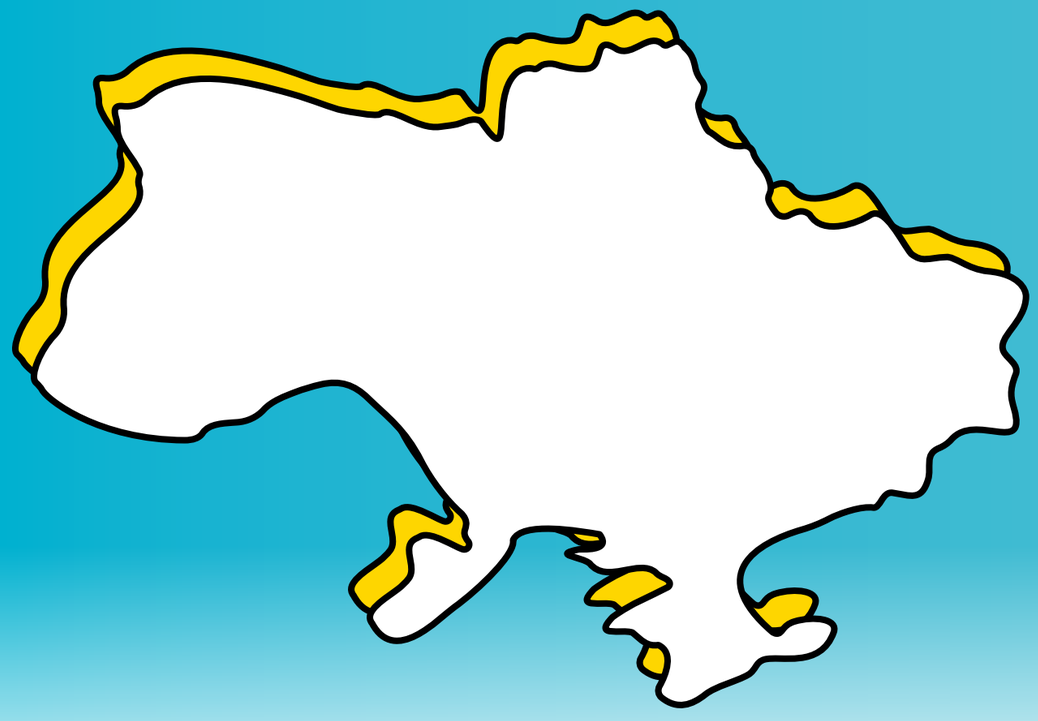

The Russian invasion of Ukraine

An analysis of Russia's reasons, motivations, and intent behind the 2022 invasion of Ukraine

This article was reviewed by Johannes Hollunder and Lisa-Marie Stilper

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Since the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, the future of the Russian Federation has been uncertain. The consequences of the failure of communism and the resulting economic decline left the former empire in disarray, and the ascension of Vladimir Putin as an authoritarian leader further compounds the issues of Russia's internal political situation (WGI-Interactive Data Access). In addition, the eastward expansion of both NATO and the European Union further threatens the power and existence of a future Russia. Considering this background, the invasion of Ukrainian territory by the Russian Federation on February 24th, 2022, is unsurprising, even if the specific reasons remain elusive. Due to this uncertainty, several hypotheses are being discussed, both in academic environments and in casual conversations (Popova & Shevel, 2022; Lieven, 2022). This paper will explore two prominent alternatives by constructing the appropriate theoretical framework for the specific hypothesis and then applying them to the information that is currently available.

The first of the hypotheses that will be discussed concerns itself with the realist notion that the security of the state is paramount. Therefore, the Russian invasion of Ukraine is the effect of NATO's eastward expansion (Sullivan, 2022) and the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyy in favour of Petro Poroshenko as president of the Ukrainian government and the resulting degradation of this bilateral relationship (Torbakov, 2017 p.73). The analytical framework here will explore differences in realist theory, both in and between International Relations and Foreign Policy Analysis concluding with offensive realism as the best-suited option to assess the actions of the Russian state. Following this assessment, this framework will be applied to current events as well as the historical development of this crisis that might have led to the invasion of Ukraine to create an insight into the causes of this war from a realist perspective.

The second hypothesis discussed in this paper views the current events not as a result of political frameworks and structural influences but rather as a consequence of decisions made by individuals in power, namely Vladimir Putin, his close advisors, as well as the general discourse within the country of Russia. This approach will rely on research into Foreign Policy Decision making and psychological insights to construct a framework including rational choice theory (Smith, 2000) and a cognitive approach by Brecher, Steinberg, and Stein (1969) which dissects the decision-making process into its basic elements and therefore creates insights into the process that might have led to the current conflict.

After exploring the validity of all hypotheses, this paper will compare the results to find similarities and differences in the two approaches and how they interplay and conform into a singular cohesive construct that delivers reasons for Russia's invasion of Ukraine on different levels of analysis, therefore, creating a clearer view of the reasons for this invasion and the possible long-term implications that follow. It will then conclude with a look into generalizable insights from this specific case that might prove valuable to preventing the development of future conflicts hoping to contribute to a more peaceful future as well as the consequences for future interactions with Russia.

Realism and War:

The invasion of Ukrainian sovereign soil by the Russian Federation on the 24th of February 2022 marks a breach of norms and values that have been the foundation of the inter-

national system since the Second World War (Crisis Group, 2022). Unsurprisingly, this major moment in history has created speculation about the "real" reason for the invasion. One widely accepted hypothesis is that Russia decided in favour of this course of action because its security was threatened by NATO expansion and the regime change in Ukraine that resulted in the election of a pro-European government (Center for Strategic Studies, 2019). This view on the invasion nestles nicely into the realist perspective of International Relations. Realists concern themselves with the security of the state and therefore focus on systemic relationships rather than the decision-making of individuals. Even though these assumptions are shared by all schools of realism, they differ in the conclusions and additional assumptions they make (Monten, 2006).

The first of three schools of realism that requires consideration is neoclassical realism. This branch of the neorealist school concerns itself with both internal and external factors and argues that states act based on their level of material power compared to other state actors in the international arena. What differentiates this school from more traditional schools of realism is however that it is not the actual level of strength that is the base for decisions but rather the perceived level of strength that is used by its leaders to develop its foreign policies. Furthermore, neoclassical realists argue that leaders are not only constrained by the material power at their disposal but also by the structure of the selected state as well as its society. This has the consequence that decisions made might not be ideal if viewed from a purely material perspective, while they are, in fact, the ideal choice for the specific government in the specific case (Rose, 1998 pp. 146-147).

Moving to the opposed set of schools that are defensive and offensive realism, the shift towards a system-focused perspective is clear. Defensive realism, like offensive realism, is based on the notion of an anarchical system in which there is no higher authority than nation-states. This leads to an environment in which states are in a constant fight for survival (Bull, 2012) and therefore they constantly seek to improve their security. This fact becomes problematic when the other side of this argument is considered. The increase in the security of one state brings with it the decrease in the security of other states prompting a counter-reaction. This is part of the phenomenon called the security dilemma and creates the risk of an arms race and war since cooperation cannot be guaranteed (Jervis, 1978). Therefore, defensive realists argue that moderate policy decisions should be followed and that strong states should show restraint in their decisions (Taliaferro, 2001 p. 129).

On the other hand, offensive realists come to different conclusions about the implications of the anarchical system. John Mearsheimer argues in his book "The Tragedy of Great Power Politics" (2001), the seminal work of offensive realism, that states do not have definitive knowledge of the intention of others. He couples this with the argument that states always have some military options and therefore comes to the conclusion that the chances of survival of a state depend on the power that it can wield compared to others (Mearsheimer, 2001 p. 3). Viewing this in conjunction with the desire for power in the theoretical environment of defensive realism the major difference becomes clear. States under the assumptions of offensive realism ultimately strive for global hegemony while defensive realism asserts that states are content in a setting where a balance of power is in effect (Mearsheimer, 2001 p. 21).

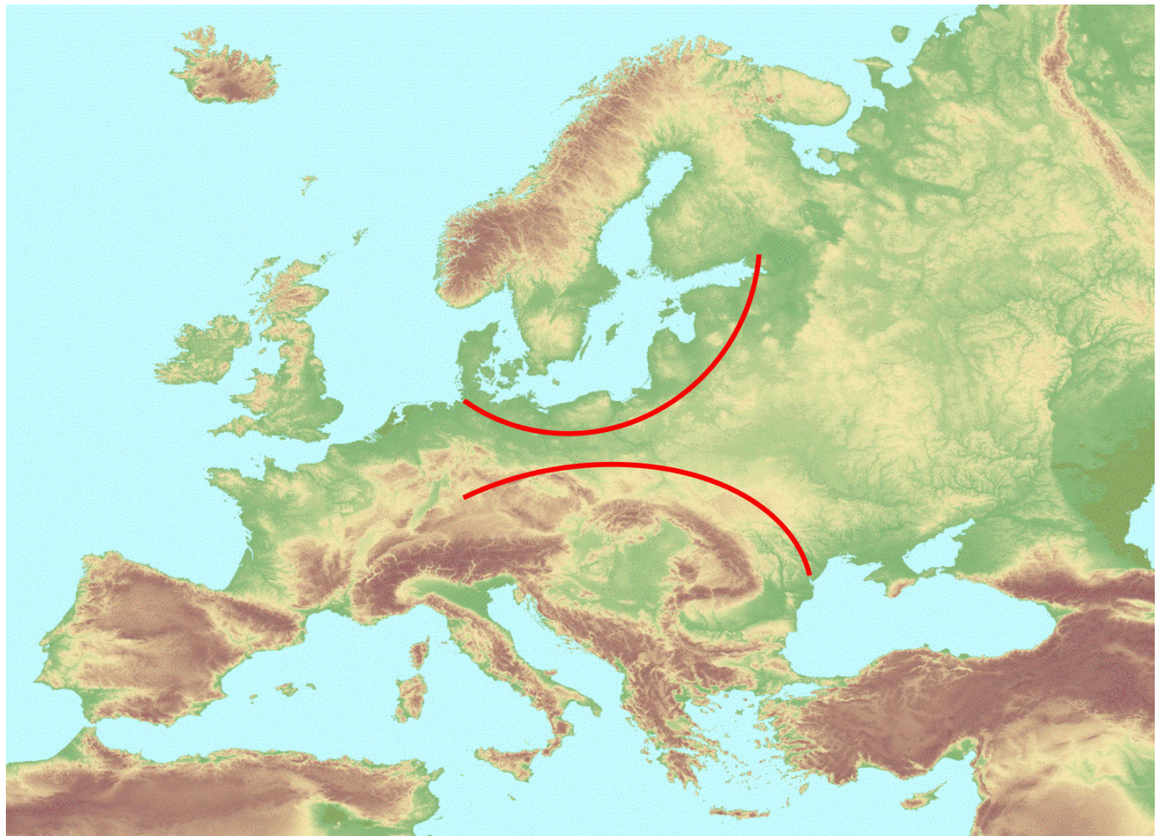
With this foundational theoretical overview established, it is necessary to explore the case at hand to gain an understanding of the situation and therefore the best possible means of explanation. This involves an understanding of the actors that realist theory considers of impact. One major assumption of realism is that of groupism which asserts that humans mostly interact with each other in groups (Brooks and Wohlforth, 2008). The consequence of this is that the nation-state has remained as the unit of interaction ever since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 and, therefore, realist analysis regards nation-states as the only major actors in the international arena and therefore the only units of relevance. Following this assumption, this paper will view the actions of different nation-states before the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation on February 24th, 2022, to find an explanation for Russia's actions.

The end of the Cold War in 1991 and the collapse of the Soviet Union marked a significant reduction in power and territory for Russia. This threatening situation was further compounded by the loss of control of many of the former Soviet satellite states in Eastern Europe and their subsequent integration into NATO. While the first wave of this expansion was met with harsh criticism by the Russian government, the second wave in the early 2000s was not met with the same reaction, but instead a rather mellowed response (Franekova, 2002). Continuing from this phase of NATO expansion this trend of measured and restrained responses does not hold. In the summer of 2008, Russia invaded several regions of strategic importance in the Republic of Georgia which served to secure Russian interests in the region and expanded its sphere of influence (Allison, 2008 pp.1145-1146). This is congruent with the modus operandi that would emerge in the following years. Only six years later, in 2014, the Russian Federation invaded and subsequently annexed the region of Crimea and aided pro-Russian movements in the Ukrainian regions of Donetsk and Luhansk that have the goal of secession. This destabilized Ukraine while simultaneously strengthening Russia's position in Eastern Europe (Bebler, 2015 pp. 189-208). These events then lead to the topic of this assignment, the reasons for the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February of 2022.

Looking at these past events the trend for aggression is clear. Comparing this to the different approaches discussed above, the similarities to the environment offensive realists present are striking. The foundational assumptions of an anarchical system, a striving toward global or regional hegemony, and a lack of complete information (Mearsheimer, 2001) are all present in Russia's actions surrounding the recent invasion of Ukraine. In his televised speech on the 21st of February, Vladimir Putin (2022a) reasoned that Ukraine was a creation by Bolshevik Russia and that a functioning government never materialized in Kyiv. Furthermore, Putin states that the pro-west rhetoric combined with the efforts to include Ukraine in the NATO alliance are indicators of corrupt elites and their systemic effort to destroy the country. In an additional speech on the 24th of February, Putin (2022b) again strongly criticized NATO expansion policy and accused the United States of acting without consideration of international institutions and principles, and then announced a special operation which was, in fact, a declaration of war in all but name against Ukraine.

From the perspective of an offensive realist, these actions are not born out of sympathy and compassion but rather a milestone in expansionist actions that have taken place since the early 2000s. Looking at this conflict from a geographical perspective, the necessity of it for security and to form the basis for further expansions becomes clear. The western part of Russia is situated at the end of the North European plain. This very flat terrain creates a straight path from France over Moscow to the Ural Mountains. Furthermore, the plain is shaped like a funnel making it difficult to defend for Russian troops and therefore poses an immense security risk. Consequently, Russian interest has always tried to increase the amount of territory between Moscow and its European enemies (Marshall, 2016 pp. 14-16). To accomplish this Russia has always aspired to enlarge its territory in Eastern Europe, and especially to control Belarus and Ukraine (Marshall, 2016 pp. 23-24). This enlargement would benefit Russia twofold. On one hand, it would create a larger buffer of land that could be used in case of conflict, and on the other hand, it would reduce the length of a potential frontline making a defence by Russian troops easier.

This geographical issue is compounded by several political ones. First, Russia, as Vladimir Putin stated, views Ukraine as a part of the Russian empire, resulting in a constant effort to retain a grasp on Ukrainian policy and its decisions. This long-standing hold faltered with the election of President Zelensky in 2019 (Torbakov, 2017 p.73) which could be viewed as a trigger for the invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Furthermore, the considerable loss of power and influence after the fall of the Soviet Union resulted in the expansion of NATO into Eastern Europe and therefore a loss of power over the former vassal states. This favours the reasoning that the Russian national interest displays a tendency of longing after its former greatness and in turn, contains actions that will set Russia on a course towards more influence and power.



Source: (European Environment Agency, 2004)

In conclusion, viewing the Russian invasion of Ukraine from a realist perspective reveals several key insights. This invasion is not the first act of aggression by Russia and therefore it is likely not the last one. While an argument regarding the defensive nature of the invasion of Ukraine can be made due to NATO expansion and changes in the Ukrainian government this would neglect Russian actions in Georgia and frequent assassinations across Europe (Tenzer, 2021). This constant aggression and disruption of peace initiated and maintained by the Russian Federation point toward a sinister future. To stem the longing for its former glory Russia might decide that territorial gains in Ukraine might not be satisfactory and further expansionist actions should not be ruled out.

> *"This constant aggression and disruption of peace initiated and maintained by the Russian Federation point toward a sinister future."*

Decision-making and Rationality:

The second hypothesis that this paper will explore surrounds the decision-makers themselves. Many regard this invasion as illogical and erratic and therefore assume the same of Russia's leader Vladimir Putin (Paas-Lang, 2022). This section will explore the decision-making process through different understandings of rationality and the impact and influence of actors that surround the central decision-maker as well as limitations to rationality followed by an endeavour into cognitive approaches. This assessment of approaches will be followed by an analysis of the events that led to the invasion of Ukraine through consideration of actors inside and outside of the Russian government as well as the influence history and foreign actors hold over these unfolding events ultimately answering whether the decisions by the Russian government are based in reason, ideology, or insanity.

Rational decision-making as a concept has its roots in Adam Smith's book "The Wealth of Nations" (2000) where he assumes that humans make their decisions based on a rational process. The core here is that humans rank their preferences in order and can therefore discern the relationship between different choices and their impact. Moving from the realm of economics towards rationality in International Relations their intertwined relationship is made clear. Both realism and

liberalism, two foundational schools of international relations, view the actions of international actors through a lens of rational decisions (Novelli, 2018). While these theories focus on nation-states and organizations as the main actors in world politics this grounding in rationality is providing a foundation for theories with humans as their primary actors. While this rational approach to decisions and actions provides a clear logic with predictable consequences the reality often looks different.

Rational choice theory assumes that humans value gains and losses equally while it has been proven that humans are more sensitive to losses and therefore view risks regarding possible gains differently than they would assess losses (Levy, 1997). This necessitates other approaches to decision-making that go beyond purely rational theory. Margaret and Harold Sprout (1957) divide the aspects of decision-making into two different parts. The first is the psychological environment which represents the decision-maker and his considerations on an issue followed by the operational environment which is the reality in which the decisions from the psychological environment are enacted. This decoupling of the individual mind from reality creates a space for misinformation and imperfect decisions based on the available information and their psychological state of mind. This basic divide can then be used as a foundation for more complex models of decision-making. The model used for this analysis was developed by Brecher, Steinberg, and Stein (1969) and uses the foundational division by the Sprouts to create a model that considers internal and external factors in the operational and psychological environments as well as the impact that processes like communication, the formulation of policy, and the implementation of decisions have in the overarching process of decision-making (See figure 1). In the following section, this paper will apply this model to the events and actions that led to the Russian invasion of Ukraine while expanding on the individual components of this model.

To commence the analysis this model requires the analysis of the different factors that make up the operational environment. The fundamental assumption here is that this environment influences the decision-maker through their subjective understanding while directly impacting the realization of decisions. Furthermore, the operational environment is divided into two separate categories, external and internal factors. External factors are the decisions made by entities outside of the nation in question while internal factors are domestic influences on the foreign policy of a nation (Brecher, Steinberg & Stein 1969 p. 82). Applying these considerations to Russia's decision to invade Ukraine the following major categories of analysis in the operational environment emerge: first, the actions by other nations, and second, factors inside of Russia that created the possibility for this decision.

Assessing the external factors to this decision begins with the shape of the global system and its interactions. Considering Russia's position in this system it is clear that it has diminished in importance since the Cold War and the rise of China as a new global power while simultaneously becoming more and more isolated due to the autocratic rule of Vladimir Putin and the spread of democratic ideas in Eastern Europe. Furthermore, on a bilateral level, a change in the relations between Russia and Ukraine has occurred in recent years, specifically the rise of a pro-West sentiment in Ukraine and the worsening of Russia-Ukraine relations with the election of Volodymyr Zelenskyy as President of Ukraine while the territory of Ukraine is seen

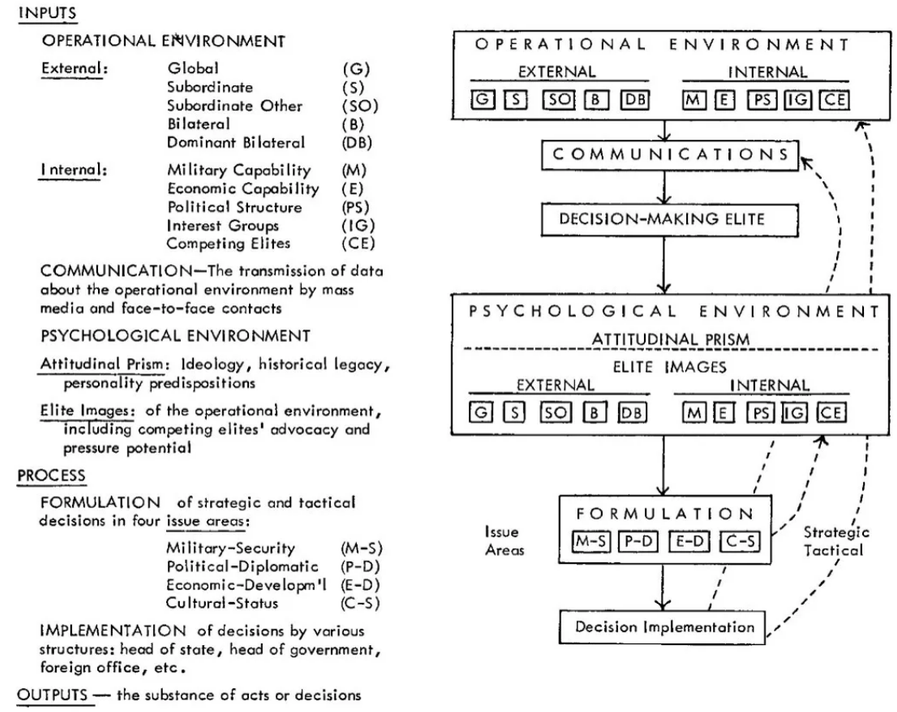


Figure 1: Brecher, Steinberg, and Stein Model (1969 p. 80)

by many Russians as the birthplace of the Russian Empire (Lavrov, 2016). Moving toward the internal factors of the operational environment the first two major variables to consider in this model are the military and economic capabilities of Russia. While the armed forces of Russia are considerably smaller than they were before the fall of the Soviet Union, they have undergone a modernization process that has strengthened them in comparison to their capabilities in the early 2000s (Cancian & Saxton, 2021). In contrast, Russia's economy is steadily moving towards a recession with an annual GDP growth rate of -3% in 2020 (The World Bank, 2021) due to the Covid-19 pandemic delivering the latest figure in this downward trend.

Furthermore, this model requires the assessment of the political structures in the state, including its form of government, the role of interest groups, and political elites. Commencing with the form of government, Vladimir Putin is pursuing an authoritarian style of rule, including the suppression of the free press and opposition parties. At the same time, Russia's vast economic inequality has led to an oligarchic society creating an elite of extremely wealthy individuals that form the strongest domestic interest group involved in Russian foreign policy. The next category to consider moves away from the operational environment and assesses the communication network. Here factors like the amount of the total information conveyed and its accuracy are at the forefront of the analysis. Here Russia is severely limited by a heavily censored press sector that is almost exclusively part of the government itself. This makes it likely that a substantial amount of information reaching the upper echelons of the Russian government is not accurate or complete. The next point to consider in this model is the decision-making elite. Putin's government

here is characterized by a very small number of individuals that provide information and aid in decisions. This leads to an environment where decisions lack broad consideration and knowledge for specific issues are excluded due to missing experts on a topic.

The next step of analysis in this model is the psychological environment which concerns itself with the same sub-categories as the operational environment but not from an objective perspective. Instead, it focuses on the internal perception of these factors which then leads to the formation of policy. Therefore, this paper will consider these factors under the policy formation step of the analysis to clearly understand the process. Commencing with the perception of the operational environment, European, and especially US foreign policy prioritized China as the major threat to the West resulting in more perceived freedom to act. Furthermore, the pro-Russian separatist movements in Donetsk and Luhansk in 2014 helped to create the view that Ukrainians were not pro-European which was reinforced by the successful annexation of Crimea shortly after. Combining this with Putin's suppression of opposition and dissent creates an environment in which Putin is successful in his military endeavours while facing little criticism and negative information about his actions domestically. This confidence in his military and the probable success of an invasion was then strengthened by the fact that the vast majority of analysts depicted Ukraine's chances in a conflict as minimal producing a viable path of expansion towards Vladimir Putin's dream of returning Russia to its former greatness. This led to the formation of an aggressive foreign policy to expand Russian territory further into Ukraine without the expectation of a reaction beyond economic sanctions and military aid by NATO leading to a decisive victory and the first step towards Russia's return as a world power.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, while both hypotheses independently offer compelling reasons for Vladimir Putin's decision to invade Ukraine in 2022, they do so on different levels. The realist approach offers reasoning based on a system-level approach while the second hypothesis provides answers regarding individual decision-makers and their considerations. Therefore, combining these different levels of analysis results in a clearer picture that grounds the decision by Vladimir Putin and Russia to invade Ukraine in a core theory of international relations as well as a decision-making process that considered a variety of factors and provided the outlook of a successful military campaign with relatively little risk. On the system level, the policy decision by Russia follows the considerations and assumptions of offensive realism which prompts the question of whether Russia would be content with the annexation of Ukrainian territory or whether this is an indicator of future aggression. This issue can also be considered with the choices of Vladimir Putin in mind. Here statements issued point toward a yearning after the former glory of the Russian Empire and the Soviet Union which makes further aggression a likely possibility. This analysis shows that the decision by Russia to invade Ukraine is complex and cannot be answered by simple absolute statements and rather is based on both, a systemic development of world politics and the decisions by one individual and his close advisers and their perception of the future of a nation and its roots. Whether this specific decision will indeed be the start of the return to power of Russia or an overreach and its downfall remains to be seen.

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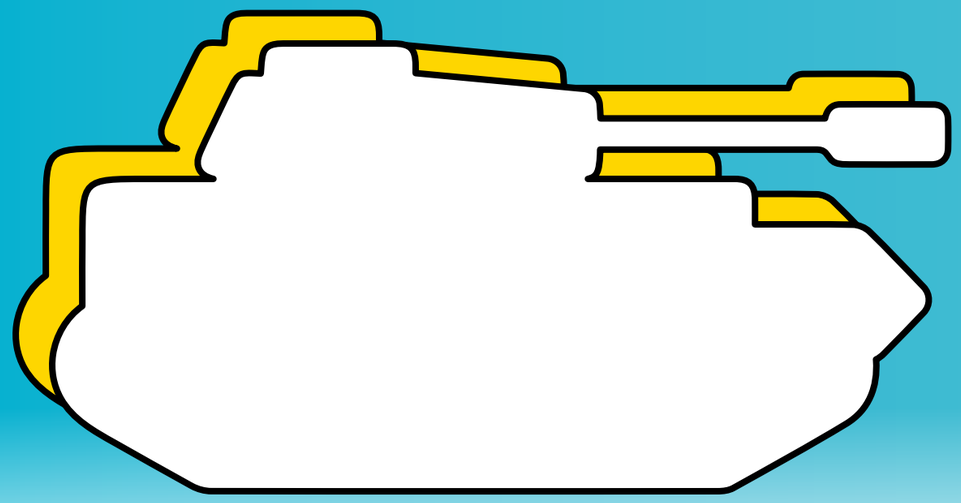

Panther trumps Leopard

The Arms Deal between Poland and South Korea and its Implications

This article was reviewed by Lisa Bielmaier and Elie Castanie

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In the face of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it hardly comes as a surprise that a country in Europe decides to overhaul its military. Especially if this country shares a common border with Russia and one of Russia's closest allies, which leaves it under a constant threat of possible future acts of aggression. And yet Poland's decision comes as a surprise - because it is not buying defence equipment from its close allies Germany or France. Rather, Poland is renewing its military with products from South Korea. Instead of German Leopard-2 tanks, Warsaw is now buying almost 1000 K2 «Black Panther'' tanks from Hyundai Rotem, as well as 48 FA-50 jets and 672 K9 Thunder howitzers, which are already in service in Australia, Norway, Estonia and Finland (Dominguez, 2022). Both countries have good reasons for the deal, and by signing the agreement, they are sending a clear message to their neighbours and to the global political stage. This article examines the deal by looking at political factors enabling it as well as at the agreement's future implications for Europe and South Korea. It argues that it is South Korea's all-in-one approach to arms deals that renders Korean products especially attractive for Eastern NATO countries.

> *"Both countries have good reasons for the deal, and by signing the agreement, they are sending a clear message to their neighbours and to the global political stage."*

The Black Panthers from South Korea

For South Korea, this deal serves as a clear indication of the country's political and economic ambitions. The Asian Tiger state has increasingly shifted its focus towards the development of its defence industry which acting president Yoon Suk-yeol described as a *"new future growth engine"* and *"pivot of the high-tech industry"* (Al Jazeera, 2022). He further proclaimed it his goal to make his country one of the world's four largest arms exporters (Lennon & Bae, 2022). According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), South Korea already ranked 10th in the world in 2021, after occupying only rank 31 in 2000; when only looking at sales between 2017 and 2021, the country even occupies the 8th rank (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute, 2022). If the ambitious goal is achieved, South Korea would surpass countries such as China, Israel, but also Germany. And while there may be an array of disagreements between the country's two largest parties, there seems to be consensus on the importance of the defence sector. This is underlined by the large investments made under the previous liberal President Moon Jae-in.

With South Korea's growing ambitions, the pool of potential customers is also growing. While purchasing countries have so far mainly been in the Asia-Pacific region, countries from other regions of the

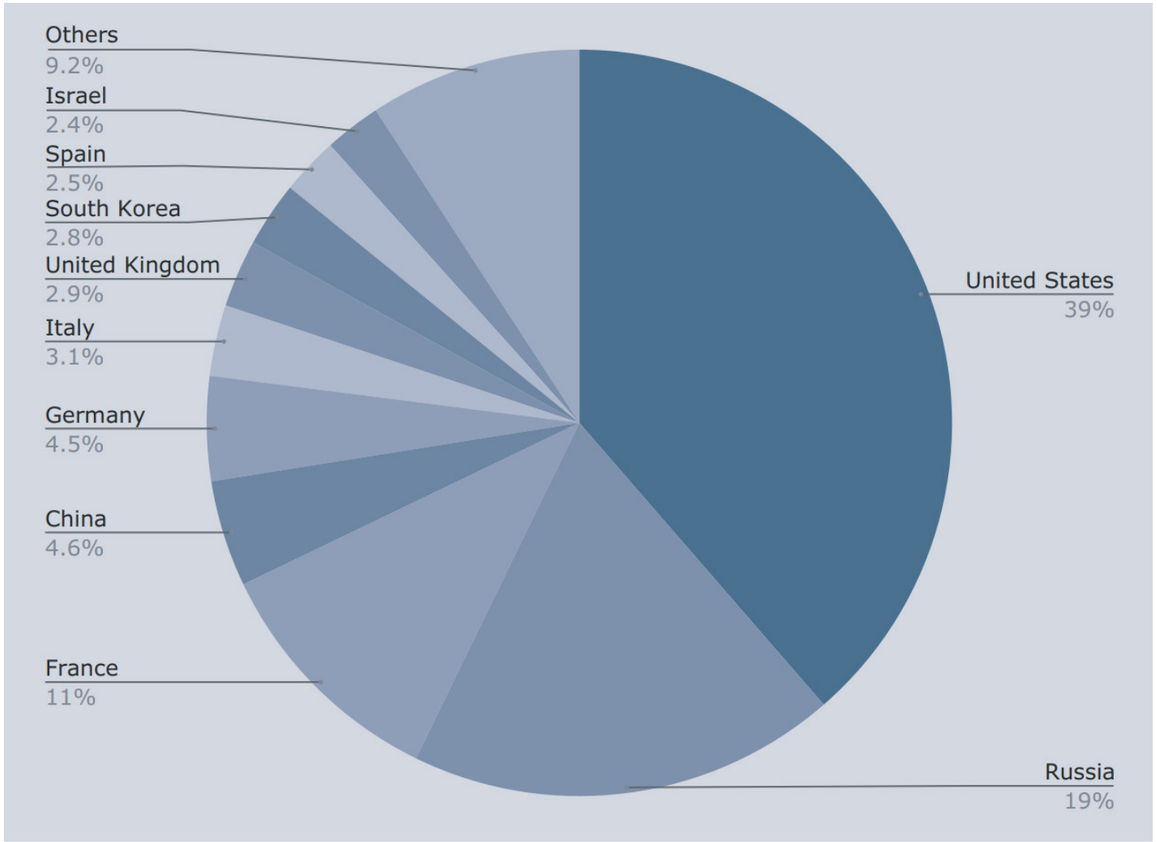

Figure 1: Global share of exports of major arms by the 10 largest exporters, 2017–21

Source: Kuimova, A., Wezeman, T., & Wezeman, P. D. (2022, March 14). Trends in International Arms Transfers, 2021. SIPRI. Retrieved January 4, 2023, from https://www.sipri.org/publications/2022/sipri-fact-sheets/trends-international-arms-transfers-2021

world are increasingly interested in what Seoul has to offer. In 2022 alone, extensive contracts have been signed with Egypt and Australia, and in the past there have been a number of agreements with countries in the Middle East, Latin America, Africa and Northern Europe (Ryall, 2022). In addition, Turkey is already producing its own tanks based on the Korean K2 Black Panther, and Poland uses Korean K9 howitzers, for which Warsaw has now placed a large order, as the basis for its domestically developed AHS Krab artillery pieces (Army Recognition, 2022; Hyundai Rotem, 2008).

From a technological perspective, the reasons for the popularity of South Korean armaments are manifold. On the one hand, their technical specifications are comparable to those of products from the USA or Germany. Due to the South Korean military's close ties to the USA, all equipment is compatible with NATO structures and has a similar technological standard. The K2 tanks are technologically akin to the German Leopard-2 and the American Abrams M1A2. They have a 120 mm cannon and are equipped with 1500 hp engines. According to the manufacturer, however, they are seven tonnes lighter and, with a unit price of around 8.5 million US dollars, cheaper than their counterparts from Germany and the USA.They also have a computerised gun with a relatively high rate of fire of 15 rounds per minute.

The K9 howitzer also has similar capabilities to its German counterpart, the Panzerhaubitze 2000, but is cheaper with a unit price of 3.8 million euros. Moreover, South Korea has already gained combat experience with the K9: When North Korea shelled Yeonpyeong Island in 2010, the South Korean military responded with K9 howitzers and, according to its own information, destroyed several targets in North Korea.

The FA-50 fighter is a light aircraft for ground combat. Technically, the FA-50 is based on the American F16 Fighting Falcons. Further developments are planned to make the aircraft capable of fighting larger ships (Aeroflight, 2016).

From Defence Agreements to Strategic Partnerships

Besides technological aspects, South Korea's *"whole-of-government approach"* (Dominguez, 2022) is another factor that appeals to potential customers. When purchasing Korean products, Seoul grants loans to the buyer countries and exhibits flexibility towards repayment. At the same time, such agreements pave the way for further trade and investment relations as well as technology transfers.

With this strategy, Seoul intensifies its relations with other states and creates networks of interdependence between itself and other countries. Furthermore, through the export of sophisticated defence products, South Korea elevates its position in the international community to that of a technologically advanced country, which makes cooperation and trade more attractive. These factors contribute to South Korea's security in the region, where the

Figure 2: K2 Black Panther Tank

Source: 대한민국 국군 Republic of Korea Armed Forces

country is surrounded by global superpowers China and Japan as well as its nuclear-armed neighbour to the North. In this setting, a strong defence industry helps South Korea to avoid dependency on its neighbours or even being crushed in a regional conflict. Consequently, the intention behind Seoul's pursuit to become a global player in defence and other complex technologies can be seen as a pursuit to strengthen its position in the international system and to ensure long term survival. In this respect, arms trade is beneficial to both the buyer states and South Korea itself.

So far, this could mainly have been observed in the Asia-Pacific region, where Seoul is particularly seeking proximity to the ASEAN states. South Korea has important investment and trade relations with these countries; only China does more trade with the Southeast Asian bloc of states (ASEAN-Korea Centre, n.d.; Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, 2017). Besides trade relations, Seoul maintains important security links to the region. These are exemplified in the joint development of a fighter jet between South Korea and Indonesia (Kwon, 2021; Parameswaran et al., 2022). Additionally, South Korea was the main supplier of arms to the Philippines, Indonesia and Thailand between 2017 and 2021, and was the third most important supplier to Vietnam in the same period (Kuimova et al., 2022). Furthermore, the recent development of a dedicated Indo-Pacific strategy indicates the elevated role of the region in Seoul's foreign policy (The Korea Times, 2022). Overall, South Korea has already established itself as an important regional power in Southeast Asia.

The agreement with Poland demonstrates that South Korea could now transfer this strategy that has already been successful in the Asia-Pacific region to the global level. The country no longer wants to be perceived as a mere regional power, but wants to take on a pioneering role in defence and security worldwide. The Poland deal can thus also be seen as a door opener for further arms deals between South Korea and Europe. The agreement underpins Seoul's aspiration to join the ranks of the world's most powerful states in economy and security. This is the path South Korea has chosen to distinguish itself from its two powerful neighbours and to ensure its own security and prosperity in the long term.

A Common Pursuit for Security

South Korea's defence industry however is not the only indicator for the country's changing ambitions. Another factor are its security policies and its role in the global security architecture. In this regard, the country's relationship with NATO and the European Union are of special relevance.

Currently, South Korea is not a NATO-member state and considering its relationship with China, it is unlikely that Seoul will pursue a NATO-membership in the future. However, the North-East Asian nation is considered a NATO Partner State in the Asia-Pacific region, along with Japan, Australia and New Zealand, and has recently opened a diplomatic mission to NATO, as the last of these four states (NATO, 2022b). Furthermore, the country already participates in NATO's cyber defence unit (Terry & Orta, 2022). All this hints at South Korea increasingly drawing close to NATO under its current conservative leadership.

At the same time, close ties to Seoul would also benefit NATO, after the alliance has declared China a *"systemic challenge"* (NATO, 2022a). Through a strong partnership, NATO could render a major global arms producer one of its allies and thus prevent the potential rise of a powerful rival in future. Additionally, Seoul could serve as an intermediary between NATO and states in South-East Asia, helping the alliance to increase its influence in the ASEAN region. South Korea could hence become an important strategic asset in NATO's China-containment strategy.

Moreover, the North-East Asian tiger state seeks close security ties with the European Union. Seoul and Brussels have already been cooperating on a range of security issues, among which cybersecurity stands out. South Korea has been chosen as a partner for a pilot project regarding cybersecurity, which led to joint consultations on several related issues such as mutual trust building or combating cybercrime (Delegation of the European Union to the Republic of Korea, 2020). There have also been joint cybersecurity exercises (Casarini & Putz, 2021). South Korea additionally participates in European preventive diplomacy missions such as the anti-piracy operation NAVFOR (Operation Atalanta) off the horn of Africa, and discussions between Seoul and Brussels have started on ways to cooperate in regard to space technology (Casarini & Putz, 2021). This comes after South Korea has joined the development of Europe's satellite system Galileo in 2006 (The Hankyoreh, 2006).

Against this backdrop, South Korea has now closed a comprehensive defence agreement with a state that is pivotal in the EU's security policy. This elevates South Korea's position in Europe's security policy as it creates dependencies on the Asian tiger state. Inevitably, ties between Seoul and Brussels will grow even closer in future. That way, South Korea may take the step from a regional power in the Asia-Pacific region to become an important power on the world stage.

Why Poland picks the Panther

In regard to Europe, the implications of the agreement are comprehensive and complex. They affect domestic and foreign policies of both individual states and the European Union as a whole.

Firstly, the integration of weapons poses a challenge for the Polish military, as additional systems will be included in the already rather fragmented landscape of weapon systems. Soon Poland will provide the largest tank army in the EU. However, it will then consist of systems from the Soviet Union, Germany, South Korea and the USA. Thus, ensuring interoperability will be a challenge not only for the Polish military leadership, but also in conjunction with NATO partners. However, this is where the Korean systems have an advantage, as they are already operating in East Asia in conjunction with the USA and have been tested in joint use.

Secondly, the agreement will bring the European defence industry competition from Asia. Europe does have numerous competitive defence manufacturers such as RheinMetall, Airbus or MBDA. However, they are subject to strict European regulations and generally do not produce on the scale required for national and alliance defence. Consequently, procurement processes also take a comparatively long time. In this regard, South Korean armaments make for an attractive alternative to established products. Not only are they readily available, defence agreements may also include technology transfers that allow

buyer countries to produce the purchased products domestically. Hence Seoul's all-in-one approach may help these countries to reduce dependencies on other nations. This pattern can be observed with the Poland-agreement. While South Korea will initially supply 180 tanks until 2025, over 800 units will be manufactured in Poland as an adapted variant "K2PL" from 2026 onwards (The Defense Post, 2022).

Thirdly, the agreement strengthens the bridges between Europe and South Korea. Through the deal, Europe deepens its ties with a partner that shares its liberal democratic values. This broadens strategic options and provides the opportunity to further intensify economic cooperation in future. How close these ties already are cannot be overlooked in Poland. For example, the Korean conglomerate LG operates Europe's largest factory for electric vehicle batteries near Wroclaw, and the operating company of Korea's Incheon International Airport has been selected as a strategic partner for Poland's new major airport project, which is to become one of the most important airports in Europe (aeroTELEGRAPH, 2021; Kane, 2022). The European Union and the East Asian state are already closely linked. The arms agreement now indicates that the already existing political and economic relations will be further deepened in the future, and that specifically the Polish-Korean relationship will be at the centre of future developments.

However, the search for new partners is not the only motivation for the Polish government to buy defence equipment in the Far East. The agreement also signals the incumbent PiS government's critical attitude towards Germany. After stating that Poland was *"not arguing with the EU, but with Germany"* (Koźmiński, 2022), the government is now following up its words with deeds to underline its position. Against this backdrop in particular, the PiS party can domestically sell it as a political success that it has turned to Seoul rather than to Berlin for the renewal of the country's military. Additionally, Seoul's aforementioned all-in-one approach provides the country here with a competitive advantage as it is not only buying military equipment but also know-how from its Asian partner. Therefore, Poland is less reliant on political climates in other countries such as Germany because it can produce its arms domestically.

The big loser of the agreement could ultimately be Germany, and in particular German defence manufacturers. Admittedly, German defence products still enjoy an extraordinarily good reputation worldwide. However, rapid availability in large quantities becomes an important factor against the backdrop of a new real threat of war. In times of need, it remains doubtful whether Germany will be able to meet this requirement. In general, German armament policy is traditionally lengthy, complicated and often non-transparent. For example, it is not readily apparent why Leopard-2s are supplied to Saudi Arabia. In the wake of the Russian attack on Ukraine, Eastern Europeans in particular have therefore perceived German policy as erratic, hesitant and not very reliable. Among other things, a so-called ring swap in which Poland was to receive Leopard 2 tanks from Germany in return for giving Ukraine its own T72 tanks failed. The lack of trust in Germany is driving the search for alternative partners. Moreover, Berlin has long dismissed concerns about a Russian attack in the East as exaggerated, which is likely to have further diminished confidence in Berlin. Korean systems, on the other hand, offer an attractive alternative. They are inexpensive, relatively quickly available, and their technical specifications can compete with Western products (Gould, 2022). In fact, Norway, another European country, mulls purchasing the Korean K2 rather than the German competitor Leopard-2. Germany may thus lose another potential customer for its defence products out of similar motives.

The Poland Deal as final Door Opener?

All in all, the defence agreement between Poland and South Korea holds benefits for both nations. Poland gets to renew its military amidst looming threats from the East and can use the deal as an outlet to express its distance towards Germany. The European Union draws an important partner closer to itself which allows for more strategic leverage in the Asia-Pacific region, whose strategic importance is increasing rapidly. And finally, the export of tremendous amounts of defence equipment contributes to South Korea's aim of becoming one of the world's top arms exporters and additionally secures the small nation significant strategic influence beyond its region. The deal moreover bolsters economic relations between South Korea and Poland as well as the European Union which further increases the benefits of the agreement.

Time will tell to what extent South Korean products can hold their own on the European market. This will also depend on how the Russian war of aggression in Ukraine progresses and how Germany continues to shape its 'Zeitwende'. However, Korea is an ambitious first-time competitor that could become more than just a stopgap in Europe.

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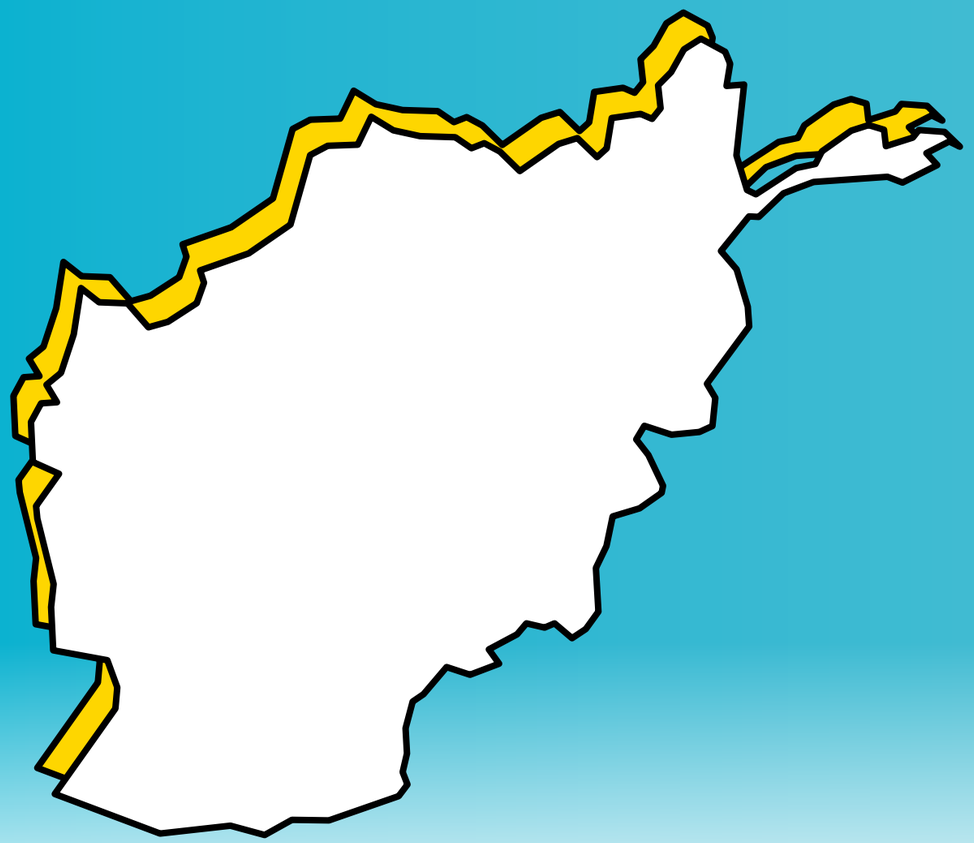

The Islamic Republic of Iran as a factor of influence in Afghanistan

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Since the fall of the Taliban in Afghanistan regime after the Western intervention in 2001, numerous actors continue to be involved in the events in the country, including the major powers Russia and China, but also the neighbouring state Iran. The consequences of the recent change of power are still unforeseeable. What seems to be definite is that the country's security and stability have already deteriorated significantly. According to the Fragile State Index, Afghanistan shows the second highest deterioration in the world since 2021 (Fund for Peace, 2022, p.9). In the following, the problematic role of the neighbouring state Iran in recent political developments in Afghanistan will be highlighted. As will be shown, Iran has been a significant factor in political developments in Afghanistan since the 1990s. Against the background of ideological and strategic motives, different parts of the Iranian regime served both sides of the intra-Afghan conflict. In addition to support for the regular government of the neighbouring state, which can clearly be identified as instrumental, various forms of support were provided for the Taliban and episodically also for Al-Qaida. This approach is part of a familiar pattern of Iranian sphere-of-influence policy and constitutes an important factor in the continuing instability in Afghanistan. The present text is intended to shed light on Iran's activities in Afghanistan against the background of known patterns of Iranian hegemonic policy and their ideological-strategic basis.

Iran's sphere of influence strategy

A central pillar of Iranian foreign policy is a claim to hegemony and the associated concept of exporting revolution. There is a congruence between ideological interests and strategic power interests. The first indications of the roots of this offensive grand strategy can already be found in the constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Here, the revolutionary state

(1) Iranian and Afghan Presidents, Hassan Rouhani and Ashraf Ghani in Tehran

(2) Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Taliban Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi

of Iran is given a world-historical significance, the telos of which is the creation of an Islamic world community. Accordingly, the state is not self-sufficient, and a policy oriented towards the constitution always points beyond its own borders with religious legitimation:

> *„With due attention to the Islamic content of the Iranian Revolution, the Constitution provides the necessary basis for ensuring the continuation of the Revolution at home and abroad. In particular, in the development of international relations, the Constitution will strive with other Islamic and popular movements to prepare the way for the formation of a single world community (in accordance with the Koranic verse "This your community is a single community, and I am your Lord, so worship Me" [21:92]), and to assure the continuation of the struggle for the liberation of all deprived and oppressed peoples in the world."(Constitution of IRI, Preamble)*

The claim is primarily aimed at the states of the Muslim world. The reference to oppressed nations reflects the Manichaean worldview of Iran's ideological father, Ruhollah Khomeini. His anti-imperialist thinking divides the world into oppressed and oppressors to be fought. Israel and the USA form the extremes of the oppressors' pole. The concept of exporting revolution, which tends to have no borders, also goes back to Khomeini's political thinking (Wahdat-Hagh, 2003, pp. 196).

In connection with this claim to hegemony in its own politics, a military component is also named in the preamble of the Iranian constitution:

> *„[...] they [Note: Army and IRGC] will be responsible not only for guarding and preserving the frontiers of the country, but also for fulfilling the ideological mission of jihad in God's way; that is, extending the sovereignty of God's law throughout the world." (Constitution of IRI, Preamble)*

Once again, the expansive and global claim is formulated. When thought together, this results in a religiously underpinned, anti-imperialist mission to spread one's own influence by diplomatic as well as military means. In practice, this state-ideological basis and its connection to strategic power interests is clearly reflected in the project of the "Axis of Resistance". This strategy is primarily directed against a perceived threat from the USA. Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Israel are also among Iran's strategic opponents. The core of this axis is an informal network of allied proxy groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, as well as Iraqi and Syrian militias. Lebanese Hezbollah plays a special role as Tehran's direct arm. The group was the first non-Iranian organisation to accept the Velayat-e Faqih and thus placed itself under the religious and political authority of Ruhollah Khomeini and Ali Khamenei respectively. The Iranian Revolutionary Guard (IRGC) and its Quds Brigades are the central actors for the support and coordination of these groups (Steinberg, 2021, pp. 7-12). In the case of Afghanistan, this part of the Iranian armed forces will also prove to be an important driving force. Although formally subordinate to the supreme leader it is an assertive actor within the Iranian regime with a high degree of autonomy (Forozan, 2016, pp. 56-, p68). This autonomy goes back a long way in the history of the organisation (Katzman, 1993, pp. 393-395). Nevertheless, the IRGC does not operate independently of the rest of the regime; its activities can be understood as anticipatory obedience (Ostovar, 2016, p.238).

Iran's approach within the framework of its hegemonic sphere of influence policy can be divided analytically into the two dimensions of hard power and soft power. Eisenstadt identifies four strategic elements for the dimension of hard power and five for the dimension of soft power: Armed proxies, people's war, an asymmetric navy and strategic missile programmes on the side of hard power, as well as image propaganda, the export of revolutionary Islam, support for Shiite militias, economic dependence and state propaganda on the side of soft power. In addition to the military component for asserting one's own claim, an extensive programme is thus employed that includes cultural and religious aspects, e.g. by means of cadre training, classical propaganda via the media, as well as political pressure through economic levers (Eisenstadt, 2011, pp. 6-7). In the case of Afghanistan, the dimension of soft power is particularly relevant. As will be shown, Iran worked with all five aspects mentioned. Only the support of the Shiite militias is replaced by cooperation with Al-Qaeda and, more recently, with the Taliban.

Iran's Afghanistan policy in the recent past

According to analysts, Iran's Afghanistan policy has long been shaped by geopolitical considerations (Nader & Laha, 2011, pp. 5-6). The country began to play a role in foreign policy shortly after the Iranian Revolution in 1979. The young regime supported nu-

merous, mostly Shiite mujahedin groups in the fight against the Soviet Union. In the 1990s, Iran was opposed to the Sunni Taliban and began to support the opposition coalition. After the killing of several Iranian diplomats and a journalist by Taliban fighters in Mazar-i Sharif in 1998, there were brief preparations to intervene militarily. Until the Western intervention, which was supported by intelligence, Iran remained the Northern Alliance's biggest ally (Akbarzadeh & Ibrahimi, 2020, p.4). After the intervention, Iran took a leading role in the formation of the Karzai government. Pressure from Tehran persuaded the Northern Alliance leadership to bow to compromises. At the same time, the focus of Iranian interest in Afghanistan began to change fundamentally. More and more, the US presence took a central place as a perceived threat (Nader & Laha, 2011, pp. 5-6). In line with the ideology developed by Ruhollah Khomeini, the American troop presence now appeared to the leadership in Tehran as colonial powers alien to the region (Wahdat-Hagh, 2019a, p.86).

In the new Afghan state, numerous opportunities opened up for Iran to exert influence. Tehran has provided hundreds of millions of US dollars in reconstruction assistance since 2002. Soon, the then president of Afghanistan publicly thanked Iran for its "limitless help" in restoring stability in Afghanistan (Akbarzadeh, 2014, p. 67). In the same year, Iranian President Khatami travelled to Kabul on a state visit and signed a joint trade agreement (Nirumand, 2002, p.13). In the following years, economic relations grew enormously. According to official figures, exports between March 2005 and March 2006 amounted to 300 million US dollars. Exports included oil, electricity, and services in the form of infrastructure projects. The volume of imports from Afghanistan at the same time was three million dollars (Wahdat-Hagh, 2019a, p.87). According to official figures, 2000 Iranian companies had started activities in Afghanistan by that time (Nader & Laha, 2011, p.7). In 2018, Iran became Afghanistan's largest economic partner with a total trade volume of almost US$2 billion, ahead of the previous leader Pakistan, with Iranian exports accounting for by far the largest share of this sum (Mohammadi, 2018). There is a clear imbalance between the trading partners. A power-political component has long been suspected in these economic relations (Wahdat-Hagh, 2019a, p.84).

An indication of such a politicisation is the partial blockade of fuel deliveries to Afghanistan through early 2011. Iran severely restricted the export of fuel for several weeks, with only 40 transporters per day allowed to cross the Iran-Afghanistan border. At times, up to 2000 vehicles were jammed. Petrol prices rose by up to 35% nationwide. The Afghan Chamber of Commerce and Industry stated that Iranian officials had feared a transfer of Iranian fuel to Western troops (Shalizi, 2011). The end of the blockade was accompanied by the conclusion of a new trade agreement that provided for an expansion of relations and closer customs cooperation (Nirumand, 2011, p.15). A power-political abuse of the dependence of Afghanistan's significantly smaller trading partner on Iranian fuel supplies in the silent conflict with Western actors in the country is obvious in this case.

There seems to be an explicit sense of superiority on the part of Iran towards Afghan refugees who have been seeking protection in Iran since the Soviet invasion in 1979. Many of those seeking protection do not have a recognised status even after years. Integration into the majority society does not take place, marriages between Iranian women and Afghan refugees result in the loss of Iranian citizenship. Children from such marriages are also denied citizenship (Wahdat-Hagh, 2019b, p.96). At the same time, the Iranian regime is taking advantage of the situation of Afghans. Since 2014, Shiite refugees from Afghanistan have been recruited as fighters for the Liwa Fatemiyoun militia. Coordinated by the IRGC, the militia fights as an Iranian proxy group against Sunni rebels in Syria (Smyth, 2014).

Iran is also trying to gain a foothold in Afghanistan in the field of cultural policy. The state radio has been broadcasting programmes in Pashto and Dari for decades. The Iranian clergy has also been exerting great influence on Shiite clerics in Afghanistan for a long time. The Emdad Imam Khomeini Committee foundation, which is committed to conveying Iranian state ideology as a counterweight to Western influence, plays a significant role. In 2008 alone, almost 10,000 Afghans attended training courses run by the foundation. Anti-Semitism directed at Israel is also part of these targeted propaganda measures. In 2010 Afghan clerics close to Iran accused the Afghan TV station Emrooz TV of supporting Zionism. Between August and October 2010, the channel was briefly banned in response to Shia pressure (Wahdat-Hagh, 2019c, p.89-94). A final pillar of Iran's power policy towards Afghanistan is its increased support for the Taliban since the late 2000s, which analysts believe serves as leverage against the central government in Kabul in addition to countering Western powers (Nader & Laha, 2011, pp. 13-14). Iran's relationship with the Taliban is examined in more detail below.

Iran's influence policy on Afghanistan by means of political-economic and cultural strategies thus reflects the soft power strategy described at the beginning. After the fall of

(3) US Army/Sgt. Ken Scar (2012).

the Taliban in 2001, Iran first appeared as a generous donor and economic partner. Iran's highly imbalanced economic relations correspond to putting Afghanistan's smaller partner in a position of dependency, the political dimension of which became clear in the 2011 border blockade. Furthermore, Iran attempted to introduce its Islamist state ideology into Afghan society. This was not without success, as the number of visitors to the training courses, the invitation of the Iranian cleric by the Afghan embassy and the temporary ban on Emrooz TV show. Patterns can thus be discerned that suggest a hegemonic motivation on the part of Iran in its Afghanistan policy.

Iran's cooperation with the Taliban until August 2021

According to UK, US and NATO officials, evidence of Iranian support for the Taliban in the form of Iranian-made assault rifles and explosives was discovered as early as 2007. However, there was no direct evidence of the origin of the weapons. At the time, it was suspected that the weapons were connected to the IRGC. The Iranian regime denied supporting the Taliban (CNN, 2007). Which of the two sides initiated the increasing rapprochement cannot be proven. Also in 2007, the Taliban launched several diplomatic forays, one of which was addressed to Iran. It referred to the common interest in withdrawing American troops from Afghanistan and asserted that they posed no threat to neighbouring states. Accompanying this push, the Taliban's relationship with Iran's enemy Saudi Arabia cooled considerably (Rubin, 2020). The indications of support for the Taliban by the Iranian regime was substantiated in the following years by investigations by the USA. In 2010, the U.S. Department of the Treasury identified two senior members of the Quds Brigades of the IRGC, Hossein Musavi and Hasan Mortezavi, as responsible for supporting the Taliban with financial resources and hardware. Selected Taliban fighters were also supported through military training (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2010). The central interest for Iranian aid at this time was to fight American troops in Afghanistan, and the Taliban in practice worked in the role of a proxy group for the Iranian regime. As The Sunday Times reported, citing a Taliban financial manager, tens of thousands of US dollars flowed to the Taliban through a network of Iranian companies. Up to 1000 dollars would be paid as a bounty for each US soldier killed (Amoore, 2010).

Yet, there is also evidence that points to a scepticism towards Iran that existed at the time, at least in parts of the Taliban. The Taliban representative Tayyab Agha reportedly described Iran as Afghanistan's most dangerous neighbour in talks with a US representative (Rubin, 2020). This scepticism was only clarified in the following years. In 2012, the Iranian regime had allowed the Taliban to set up a representative office in the country. In addition, there had been concrete considerations in IRGC circles to supply the Taliban with surface-to-air missiles (Abi-Habib, 2012). According to Afghan sources, such weapons were supplied to the Taliban until at least 2020 (Fazeli, 2020a). Also in 2012, the U.S. Department of the Treasury identified the Quds Brigades general Gholamreza Baghbani as a crucial player in supporting the Taliban. Through existing networks of drug smuggling from Afghanistan through Iran, Baghbani orchestrated the delivery of weapons to the Taliban (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012).

After internal leadership disputes, the Taliban's relations with Iran improved further from 2014 onwards. An important circumstance was the emergence and increasing success of the Islamic State in Afghanistan. Following a visit by the then Taliban leader Akhtar Mansour at the invitation of the IRGC, Iran established political relations with the Taliban (Rubin, 2020). In mid-2018, The Sunday Times reported that hundreds of Taliban fighters were being trained at Iranian military academies (Loyd, 2018). It was not until late 2018 that Iran then openly acknowledged these ties. At this point, the Taliban also acknowledged their ties with Iran (Akbarzadeh & Ibrahimi, 2020, p.6). After a delegation trip to Tehran, Taliban representatives stated that they had exchanged views with Iranian officials on the political future of the region after the end of the foreign troop presence (AFP, 2019). Shortly afterwards, a news site close to the Iranian IRGC published a report that considered the Taliban as partners in the fight against the Islamic State as well as the US (Tabatabai, 2019). Once again, the central role played by hostility towards Western troops in the alliance between the Taliban and Iran becomes obvious. The official expression of condolences on the occasion of the killing of Quds Brigades commander Qassem Soleimani by the USA also provides information about this motive. In it, the Taliban leadership expressed its admiration for the "great warrior" and its contempt for "American adventurism" (Fazeli, 2020b).

Iranian cooperation with the Taliban as of August 2021

Despite this long cooperation, scepticism seems to have been aroused in Tehran in view of the rapid triumph of the Taliban and the re-establishment of the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan in August 2021. Tehran seemed to be particularly concerned about the diplomats in the Herat region. Ebrahim Raisi welcomed the withdrawal of the USA and the West, but did not address the Taliban. He called for Afghan unity, including the Taliban, and said Iran stood ready as a partner for a future of peace. He also repeated this view to Chinese President Xi Jinping as well as Vladimir Putin (Nirumand, 2021, p.17). The leader of the pro-Iranian Afghan Hezbollah expressed his confidence in the new leadership to provide security for Shias in Afghanistan to the Iranian news agency Tasnim (Tasnim, 2021). Raisi repeated the call for an inclusive government in June 2022 (Fars News, 2022a). Ali Khamenei spoke of making Iran's next steps dependent on the behaviour of his counterpart (Fazeli, 2021). After the visit of a Taliban delegation to Tehran in January 2022, a spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry stated that the talks had been positive, but that Iran would not recognise the Taliban as the government in Afghanistan at this point in time (Motamedi, 2022). Strategically, this ambivalent position of Iran can also be interpreted as an attempt to keep the Taliban in uncertainty about future support from Tehran. As things stand, Iran is one of only ten states that maintain diplomatic relations with the Taliban (Voice of America, 2022). Iran also returned to its normal economic mode quite quickly; at the Taliban's request, oil exports to Afghanistan were resumed as early as the end of August 2021. The country remains dependent on these supplies (Sharafedin & Payne, 2021). In early June 2022, the Iranian news agency Fars reported that Afghanistan was one of the five main importers of Iranian goods even after the Taliban took power. Trade relations are to be expanded further, and official representatives from both sides are in close exchange to this end (Fars News, 2022b).

There is also circumstantial evidence to suggest a pre-emptive concession by the Taliban. Social media reports from September 2021 suggest that American-made Afghan army military equipment has been sold to Iran. The equipment passed on, including Humvees and MRAPs, is said to be used for reverse engineering purposes (Mousavizadeh, 2021). The Taliban leadership also continued to send positive signals towards Tehran. As the pro-regime newspaper Tehran Times reported, the Taliban welcomed calls by Ali Khameinei to fight American influences to overcome the historical rifts between Sunnis and Shiites. According to a Taliban spokesman, Afghans would stand firmly together against foreign conspiracies (Tehran Times, 2021). Despite these positive references, a violent clash occurred on the Iranian-Afghan border in late November 2021. According to the IRGC news organisation Tasnim, it was a mere "misunderstanding". A Taliban representative confirmed the incident but did not give further details. Reuters cites tensions over escape routes across the border as a possible background (Reuters, 2021). The situation on the border between the two countries remains unstable. A similar incident with equally unclear circumstances occurred at the end of July 2022. According to Iranian media, a Taliban flag had been hoisted on Iranian territory. The Taliban reported one Afghan border guard killed (Reuters, 2022). An official statement by the Iranian army names misunderstandings about the course of the border on the Afghan side as the cause of the repeated conflicts. The friction can be resolved through diplomatic efforts, and there is no need for military action (Mehr News, 2022). Further tensions between Tehran and the rulers in Kabul as well as the Afghan population exist regarding the situation of Afghan refugees in Iran. After several videos of mistreatment surfaced, violent protests broke out in April 2022 in front of the Iranian embassy in Kabul and the consulate in Herat. Iran summoned the Afghan representative and suspended its diplomatic service for a short period for security reasons (Mehdi, 2022).

Although the relationship is still not smooth, it is clear that the Taliban have been and continue to be an important partner for Iran. The longstanding support for the Taliban suggests a relationship of dependency between the two sides, and the repeated ambivalent affirmations of the need for national unity in Afghanistan appear to be an attempt to strengthen this relationship through an implied uncertainty about the future course. In the past, Iran acted as a donor and arms supplier, while the Taliban filled the role of a proxy group in the fight against Western troop presence and as a lever against the central government. By supporting the Taliban, Iran's role in destabilising Afghanistan and seizing power in August 2021 cannot be denied. The IRGC, which belongs to the faction of radical hardliners, has repeatedly presented itself as a driving force in the Iranian regime. The statements made in connection with the collapse of the Afghan government suggest that other parts of the regime are less convinced of the Taliban's suitability as an ally, or that this image is to be conveyed. In any case, Afghanistan remains dependent on Iran's oil supplies at the present time. The expressed intention to further expand economic relations suggests a projected increase in Afghan dependence beyond the energy market. An important security-related factor for the future of this alliance is the ongoing war of the Islamic State in Afghanistan (Jadoon et al, 2022, pp.33-43).

Once again the Taliban and Iran are facing a common enemy and once again Iran can play a role as a stronger partner in Afghanistan. In the current situation also without being hindered in its grip by Western actors. Iran's position in Afghanistan has thus been significantly strengthened by the withdrawal of Western troops. Further cooperation with the Taliban is thus to be expected despite partial ambivalences. The close ties to the new rulers and their dependence continue to bring strategic advantages for Iran beyond the immediate region. Against the background of the events in Afghanistan, Tehran appears to be an anchor of stability. A first consequence is strengthening the geopolitical alliance of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) around China and Russia. Following a change of course by the Afghan neighbouring states Tajikistan and Uzbekistan in the light of the events of August 2021, which had previously been sceptical about Iran's too close involvement, the possibility of full membership in the SCO opened up for Iran in September of that year (Silk Road Briefing, 2021). An official application for membership in the organisation was signed by Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on 15 September 2022 (Hafezi, 2022). It must be explicitly emphasised at this point that an intention regarding the support of Afghan actors for this purpose cannot be proven.

Iran's cooperation with Al-Qaida

Contacts between the Iranian regime and Al-Qaida have reportedly existed since the early 1990s. In 1995, for example, the Quds Brigade of the IRGC offered leading cadre Mahfouz Ould al-Walid the use of a Hezbollah training camp in Lebanon to train Al-Qaeda fighters. The extent to which this offer was taken up is not known (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017). Also since the 1990s, the Iranian regime allowed members of Al-Qaeda to transit through Iran to Afghanistan. At that time, Al-Qaeda sometimes acted as a mediator for the Iranian regime with the Taliban, who were enemies at the time. The decisive actor on Iran's side was again the IRGC, and the coordinator on Al-Qaida's side was Mustafa Hamid, who was temporarily resident in Iran (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2009). After the Western invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, the Quds Brigade again offered Al-Qaida help, and members were promised refuge from American attacks. Parts of the Iranian regime went along with this plan with the ulterior motive of handing over the cadres to the USA in the course of an easing of relations. This plan failed, among other things, because of the unwillingness of the American government under George W. Bush to approach Iran. Among the members of Al-Qaeda who found shelter in Iran were the leading figures Saif al-Adel, Abu Mohamed al-Masri and parts of Osama bin Laden's family, including his son Hamza bin Laden (Levy & Scott-Clark, 2017). Al-Masri as well as his daughter, Hamza bin Laden's widow, were killed by Israeli intelligence in Tehran in August 2020 (Goldman et al, 2020). This circumstance suggests that cadres remain in Iran to this day, thus evading international prosecution. Iran is not merely a retreat for Al-Qaeda, but is actively used as an operational base. The US Department of the Treasury identified Iran as the central hub of the terrorist network. There is an agreement between Al-Qaida and the Iranian government that grants operational freedom such as unhindered entry and exit in exchange for a security guarantee on Iranian soil (U.S. Department of the Treasury, 2012). In its Country Reports on Terrorism, the US State Department emphatically points out that such coop-

eration continues to this day. Iran continues to be unwilling to identify or extradite leading Al-Qaeda cadres residing in the country (U.S. Department of State, 2021, p.200). This cooperation with Al-Qaeda remains ambivalent in tendency, the Iranian regime also seems to pursue strategic purposes, as repeatedly occurring arrests of Al-Qaeda members by Iranian authorities suggest. In 2015, for example, five senior cadres were extradited to Yemen in exchange for a kidnapped Iranian diplomat (U.S. Department of State, 2021, p.299).

One aspect that allows Al-Qaeda to benefit from Iranian activity in Afghanistan is the group's close ties to the Taliban. According to a UN Security Council report from May 2020, there are still strong indications that, contrary to the Taliban's statements, the ties are being maintained. In the context of the Taliban's negotiations with the USA in Doha, representatives of the Haqqani network repeatedly consulted Al-Qaeda (UN Security Council, 2019). The follow-up reports also continue to see no break between the two actors (UN Security Council, 2020). Furthermore, with the Taliban coming to power, there is growing evidence that Afghanistan is again a safe haven for Al-Qaeda (UN Security Council, 2021). This close relationship with the Taliban makes the assumption of a strengthening of Al-Qaeda through Iran's policy since August 2021 seem very plausible. This dimension of support became visible at the latest with the killing of Al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri in early August 2022. Al-Zawahiri had been hiding in a house of the Taliban interior minister Sirajuddin Haqqani in Kabul (Associated Press, 2022).

The Iranian regime has thus maintained a close strategic partnership with Al-Qaida for almost three decades. These contacts go beyond indirect cooperation through Al-Qaida's proximity to the Taliban, even if the motive seems to lie in the common hostility towards the USA. In particular, the treatment of the group's cadres, which fluctuates between security guarantees with operational freedom and arrests for prisoner exchanges, also suggests that this is only partly a case of cooperation at eye level motivated by the common image of the enemy. Rather, Iran seems to see Al-Qaida very clearly not as a partner, but as a strategic means of pursuing its own interests, brought into a relationship of dependency through assistance. Furthermore, Al-Qaida also benefits indirectly from Iran's course towards the Taliban. Through its behaviour, Iran contributes directly and indirectly to the continuing danger of international terrorism.

Summary

As has been shown, there are clear indications of attempts on the part of Iran to transform Afghanistan into a dependent state. Iran is working in many ways with the soft power strategies of image propaganda, the export of a revolutionary Islam, the support of militias and the creation of economic dependence. During the period of Western troop presence, the Iranian regime played both sides of the inner-Afghan conflict. This set the course early on for a positive relationship with all possible future rulers after the West's withdrawal. The shift to support for the Taliban, who were enemies of Iran until the early 2000s, represents a remarkable adjustment of strategy. With regard to the prospect of membership in the SCO, this step has turned out to be a success even outside the direct reference to Afghanistan. The initial support of Shiite mujahedin associations was only substituted by cooperation with the Northern Alliance, and after Western intervention, by cooperation with the Taliban and Al-Qaida. Again and again, the IRGC and its Quds Brigade appear as driving sub-actors of the Iranian regime. It seems plausible to interpret the organisation's involvement in activities as a source of its political power within the regime. At least until 2021, the Taliban functioned in Afghanistan in the role of a proxy group in the fight against Western troops perceived as hostile, especially the US Army. However, unlike other proxies of Iran, most notably Lebanon's Hezbollah, there is no ideological control and no Taliban commitment to the Velayat-e Faqih. The Sunni orientation of the group may play a decisive role in this. It is thus not an Iranian proxy in the sense of Hezbollah. This difference is clearer in the case of Al-Qaida. The organisation served the Iranian regime as a bargaining chip and bargaining chip beyond strategic purposes directed against the USA.

> *"Iranian activity in Afghanistan can be seen as an important concomitant of the destabilisation of the state."*

All in all, Iranian activity in Afghanistan can be seen as an important concomitant of the destabilisation of the state. The Iranian regime's actions clearly strengthen the position of Islamist terrorist organisations. The course taken since 2001 towards the Taliban has proved successful in preventing a confrontation like the one in 1998 on the one hand, and in strengthening its own regional power on the other. Last but not least, Afghanistan, which is perceived as unstable under the Taliban, reinforces Iran's self-portrayal as an anchor of stability and an indispensable actor in the region. Even after the withdrawal of Western troops, a continuation of this cooperation can be expected for the future. The Taliban, as the new rulers in Afghanistan, continue to see themselves forced to adopt an Iran-friendly course in view of the economic ties that have been built up over the years and the threat posed by the local offshoot of the Islamic State. A definitive answer to the subsequent question of whether and to what extent the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan is developing into an Iranian proxy state is reserved for future research.

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Security, communication and the role of the police in Germany

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Security and its construction

To be safe and to feel safe is a basic human need and for states it is of high priority to provide the overall status quo of security in order to ensure stability. This article illustrates how safe people feel in Germany and what role the police play in the feeling of security. Furthermore, the measures taken by the police to ensure security and what communication dynamics form the basis of their actions will be laid out.

Etymology in this case can be very revealing. Security, from the Latin *sine cura*, originally meant "to live without worry". This sounds like an unattainable ideal. As this is, of course, an excessively broad framework, we have to limit it somewhat. In the context of this article, we are primarily interested in so-called "public security", i.e. primarily crime or terrorism that affects individual citizens (Frevel, 2016: 7). Of course, this definition leads to the following question: When does security prevail and can this question be answered at all above an individual feeling? In a sense, two dimensions can be used to measure security.

The first one is the objective dimension: Statistics that try to be as objective as possible can be consulted, which show approximately how great the probability is of being exposed to a certain security risk in a certain region and time. An example of this are the official crime statistics, which are updated at regular intervals and which, at least in the context of recorded crime, can show how safe an area, at least statistically measurable, is. An area where no murders have occurred for years can be characterised as objectively relatively safe, at least as far as 'naked life' is concerned (Daase, 2012: 39).

But to return to the *sine cura*, when is the individual actually without concern for his safety? Here we come to the subjective dimension. Here, surveys try to explore how the fear of a threat to "internal security" comes about. Indi-

vidual experiences often play a decisive role here; victims of crime often have an increased sense of threat (Frevel, 2016: 20). But not only experiences with crime, but also social or general fears mostly have an effect on the individual feeling of safety. Thus, factors that are only directly related to actual crime, or perhaps have nothing to do with it at all, can create a feeling of insecurity (Miko-Schefzig 42). This ranges from a general feeling ("It is safe in my neighbourhood"), to the evaluation of the smallest everyday situations. Situations are always vague and continuously allow for different interpretations (Reichertz 2019: 161). For example, graffiti on a wall may be perceived by one person as an indication of deviant behaviour and therefore threatening in the overall perception, but perhaps by another person as an indication of a vibrant and modern community. But what can be done to increase security? The first thing to mention here is, of course, the factual increase in security. This can be done by state institutions such as the administration, police, regulatory agency, army and intelligence services and ultimately by citizens themselves. This complex field of de facto security provision ("policing") is a struggle of the actors involved to "justify, anchor and ultimately enforce certain strategies of action". They require political, legal and ethnic legitimation, which is produced discursively (Reichertz, 2011: 16). This refers above all to the objective share of safety.

In order to capture the subjective part of security that is not directly measurable on actual data, a constructivist approach is chosen. In this regard, the individual perceived security is a communicative event that cannot occur beyond a discourse. Thus, by setting a certain discourse (e.g. Islamic terrorism) by people with power (e.g. politicians, figures of the media), a certain feeling of security or even insecurity can be generated (Schirmer 2008: 85). At the same time, a discourse can also be an impetus and legitimation for factual measures, so ultimately objective security (Foucault, 1978: 101f). Let's stay with the example of attack danger by Islamists: For example, politicians urge caution, the media increasingly report on such cases and heavily armed police officers are more likely to be found on the streets. A discourse has already been woven, the thoughts and actions of people, in this case also their subjective sense of security. As a result, citizens could be required to exercise greater surveillance and the presence of more police.

Security in German society and the role of the police

After stating the basic definition of security for the topic of this article, the focus will lay on the subjective dimension of security in Germany. It is objectively one of the safest counties, according to the GPI (*General Peace Index*) - Germany is ranked 16 out of 163 countries (Institute for Economics & Peace, 2022). The GPI includes the number of internal and external violent conflicts, level of distrust, political instability, potential for terrorist acts, number of homicides, and military expenditures as a percentage of Gross Domestic Product. With this in mind the following part focuses on displaying how on the other hand the overall status of the feeling of security in German society is conducted. For a country as safe as Germany, it is interesting to look further into what the citizens fear and how they perceive security on a subjective level. The police, as the main actor of security on a domestic level, plays an important role when examining the security situation in a country. The focus of this part is to lay out what role the police play when it comes to providing the feeling of security, prevention of crime and to what extent fails to provide security for certain groups and why.

A victimisation survey by the BKA (*Federal Criminal Police Office*) from the year 2020 shows detailed information about what German citizens fear and how safe they feel. It provides information on different topics considering security in Germany. With a total of 46 000 participants and a duration of one year it is one of the biggest surveys on security in Germany (Birkel et al., 2022). One part of it focuses on the perception of safety and fear of crime. Fear of crime is divided into personal and social fear. *Personal fear* focuses on the individual fear of being a victim of criminality based on emotional, cognitive and behavioural aspects. *Social fear* means the public feeling of security in regards to society and institutions, like the police or the criminal justice system (Birkel et al., 2022: 134). The survey focuses only on the personal fear of crime. Over the past decades, criminological research on fear of crime has primarily been oriented toward one operationalization of the construct: the so-called standard indicator. This is usually expressed in German in the formulation "How safe do you feel when you are out alone in your neighbourhood in the evening?". Nevertheless, this indicator provides less to none significant information. That is why this article looks at the crime specific numbers divided by gender and migration background.

It is shown that statistically people in Germany fear internet fraud (40%), burglary (27,1%), property damage (24,2%), theft (22,1%) and physical assault (18,5%) the most. Furthermore, sexual assault (16,4%), bias-motivated crimes (14%) and terrorist attacks (18%) are least feared (Birkel et al., 2022: 141). Significant differences between genders can be seen for sexual assault, internet fraud, burglary and terrorist attacks. Women generally fear those crimes more than men (Birkel et al., 2022: S.142). Those numbers refer to the affective level, meaning the general concern regarding crime. Additionally there is the cognitive level, referring to the actual risk of being a victim of crime. On this level, the difference between men (2,9%) and women (12,9%) estimating the probability of being a victim of sexual assault is significant (146). This example shows again, how women generally are much more exposed to the fear of being sexually assaulted.

Differences between people with a migration background and people without one are also visible, but can not be causally interpreted since the group of people with a migration background is made up of for example a different demographic than the group of people without one. To analyse a causal correlation, there has to be a broader analysis of parameters like for example living situation, financial background and social status. In the context of this article a broader analysis would go beyond the scope. Generally, it can be said that there are differences in the feeling of security in German society. Fear of crime can therefore be interpreted as an expression of social insecurity, which makes personal fear of crime also a subject of social issues. As Singelnstein puts it: *"Fear of crime can be interpreted against this background as an expression of profound social insecurity, a projection of social and existential fears arising from social transformation processes."* (Singelnstein & Stolle, 2012: 40).

Furthermore, this means that the perception of security is also always linked to

contemporary events and changes in society (Singelnstein & Stolle, 2012). As an example, a survey from 2016 shows how the main fears of people were linked to the rise of refugees entering Germany. The question of the survey by the magazine Stern was "What measures could increase security in Germany?". Most popular answers were 89% "More personnel and better equipment for the police", 76% "Quicker deportations of refugees" and 73% "Stricter border controls" (Stern, 2016). The need for different preventive security measures is therefore linked to current political or social issues combined with the personal social situation.

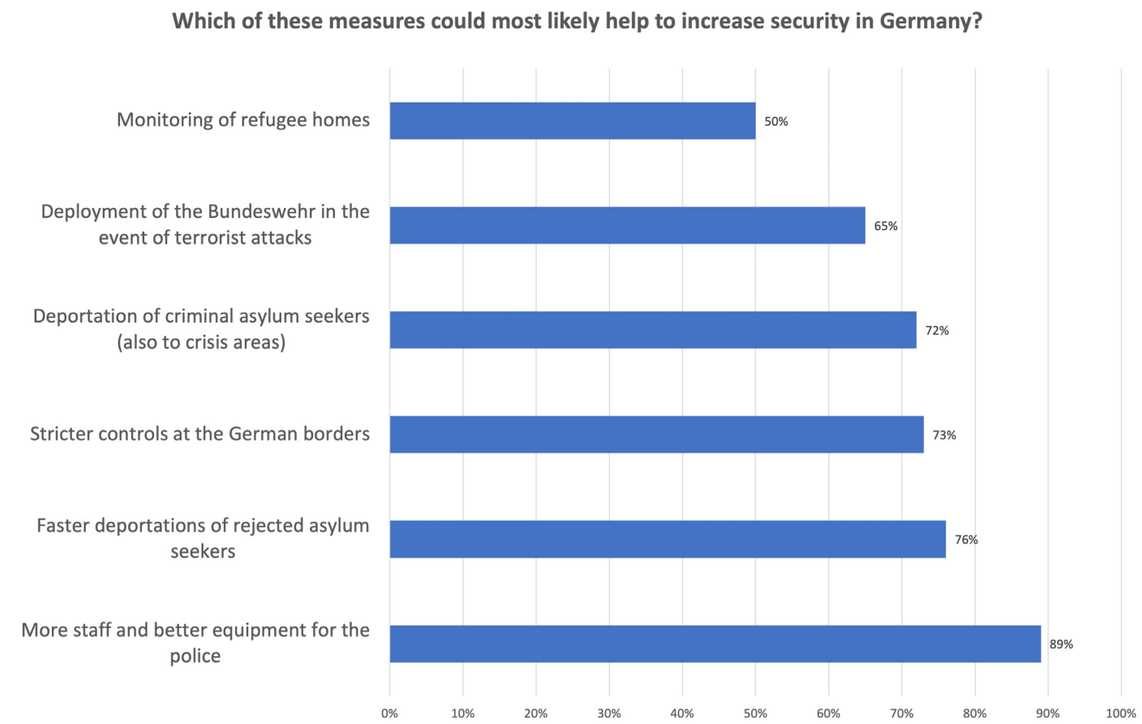

Figure 1: "Which measures would most likely contribute to increasing security in Germany?"

Source: Stern, No. 32, 04.08.2016, page 20, published online by Statista Research Department: https://de.statista.com/statistik/daten/studie/586941/umfrage/moegliche-massnahmen-zur-erhoehung-der-sicherheit-in-deutschland/

After examining the general feeling of security in Germany, the general public opinion on the police and its work is going to be presented. Trust in the police proves to be the basis for the perceived legitimacy of the police and thus the prerequisite for cooperative behaviour (Tyler, 2006). In the before mentioned BKA survey from 2020 around 85% think that the Police is doing good work and is working effectively (Birkel et al., 2022: 191). This shows that overall people in Germany are satisfied with the work of the police. If we look at the survey closer though, it is shown that only about 65% think the police are effectively preventing crime (Birkel et al., 2020: 191) One of the concepts the survey refers to, to capture the overall trust in the police, is procedural justice (Tyler, 2006). This concept describes the idea that the police generally operate fair, neutral, with respect and with appropriateness. Another concept is distributive fairness, which refers to the question to which extent the police treat people equally. Overall distributive fairness aspects were a little worse than the procedural fairness aspects (Birkel et al., 2022: 160). This is especially shown in the answers to the question if the police treat Germans and Foreigners the same, where only 76,4% agree (Birkel et al., 2022: 160).

In conclusion only a fourth of the people in Germany consider the aspect of distributive fairness by the police as adequate. This leaves the concluding question of how the police can encourage the feeling of security prevention in the society. Furthermore, it raises the question of why the police are perceived as not treating everyone equally, which should be the minimum. The police as the executive power has to not only provide an overall feeling of security but also needs the trust of all the citizens. If certain groups feel mistreated or feel like they can not fully trust the police, there has to be a change in how the police operate and communicate with all German citizens.

In the following part, the communication dynamics of the German police are going to be presented to illustrate how the police turn the discourse about trust in their work into how the police itself is facing security problems.

Communication dynamics of the German police

"We are being attacked more often. We are experiencing more and more heated exchanges of words and even serious riots (Welt 2022)," complains Jochen Kopelke, the new federal president of the police union ("Gewerkschaft der Polizei"). Currently, the topic of "violence against the police" is present in the media as never before. There is talk of it reaching a high level. According to the media, the propensity for violence against police officers is continuously increasing (Bild 2022). Demands for tougher penalties for perpetrators, as well as an extension of powers and militarisation of the police are becoming louder (Focus online 2022). This can be illustrated by the "Bundeslagebericht gegen Polizeibeamte 2019". On 28 May 2020, when the report was published, the Federal Criminal Police Office (BKA) stated in a press release "Police officers in Germany are exposed to violent attacks on a daily basis (...)" In 2019, 36.126 cases of "resistance to and assault on law enforcement officers and persons of equal rank" were cited.. This corresponds to an increase of 8.6 percent compared to the previous year. It remains questionable whether the figures published by the police crime statistics match the statements. For the key 621110 "Resistance", § 113 StGB (German Criminal Code) and 621120 "assault", § 114 StGB on police officers, 32,875 cases were counted in 2019 (BKA 2019: 53). Assault, § 114 StGB is any action with hostile intent aimed directly at the body of the other person, regardless of its success (e.g. also throwing a bottle that misses the police officer or firing shots). No reference is made to the act of enforcement. Physical injuries do not have to occur. The offence does not have to be aimed at preventing or aggravating the act of duty. It is sufficient if the act is motivated by general hostility against the state or personal motives against the public official (BKA 2019: 8). The case numbers in the press release come from the key 621100, which, in addition to resistance and assault, also includes breach of the peace under §§ 125, 125a StGB (BKA 2019: 9). This key also includes cases under

§ 115, i.e. offences against persons who are equivalent to law enforcement officers, such as members of the professional, compulsory, works or voluntary fire brigades, the disaster control service or a rescue service (Lackner, Kühl, Heger, StGB, § 115 marginal no. 1ff.). The third chapter of the report deals exclusively with "acts of violence against police officers". According to the BKA, 38,635 cases of violent offences involving police officers were registered in 2019. This represents an increase of 1.3% over the previous year. The sum key 892000 "violent crime" (murder, manslaughter, robbery offences, bodily injury resulting in death, dangerous and grievous bodily harm) shows a decrease of 31.6 % compared to the previous year. Moreover, the murder and manslaughter offences are pure attempts (BKA 2019: 53). Further violence against police officers in the form of intentional, simple bodily harm (-39.1%), deprivation of liberty (0%), coercion (-12.3%), resistance (-1.8%) and threats (+2.9%) also declined in total. Only § 114 StGB, which was newly recorded in 2017 and recorded for the first time in 2018, recorded an increase of 23.7% (BKA 2019: 53). Violence in both attempted and completed offences against police officers increased by only 1.3% overall.

This contradicts the figure of 8.6% mentioned in the press release (DPA 2020). Also, the increase in offences such as murder or grievous bodily harm claimed in the press release can be refuted. The increase of 1.3% is not fully reliable, as the police have a wide scope of definition for the offences of §§ 113 ff. StGB. The police crime statistics only depict police registration behaviour (Belousova, 2020). Since it does not show in how many cases the registration is followed by a conviction, the overall information content is limited. This example shows the exaggeration of politics and police on the topic of "violence against the police".

Self-enactment through external communication

In the light of shown discrepancies between actual and communicated levels of violence against police officers, the question needs to be raised, if and how neutral police communication actually is. Firstly, it has to be annotated that the police, when communicating about security matters, is never a spectator from an objective, third perspective, but a self-acting conflict party (Feltes 2021, 185, 188). Complete objectivity of stated facts, therefore, is eo ipso not possible. It is important not to regard police communication just as a neutral conveying of relevant information, but also as an instrument of self-enactment by an active and engaged organisation. (Pudlat 2012, 197, 202f; Pudlat, in: Frevel, Wendekamm 2017, 73, 84f.).

This of course does not mean that there is no external reporting about the police from third parties, e.g. journalists, which in principle also do not lack necessary distance to the portrayed occurrences to be seen as neutral. In reality however, these parties have certain dependencies on the police regarding information, which only the latter has immediate access to. If the quoted institution has shown enough credibility in the past, public police statements are at times reused without further verification to guarantee media coverage as fast as possible (Brockling, 2020; Feltes 2021, 185, 188). Police thus also possess controlling ability regarding external communication of third parties which must not be underestimated and can be used for self-enactment (Feltes, 2021, 185).

Motives for said self-enactment are manifold. Firstly, communication serves effective prevention and repression of criminality by using publicity as a support method for ongoing investigations, e.g. while tracing a person of interest (Pudlat, in: Frevel, Wendekamm 2017, 73, 91). On the other hand, the police legitimises itself as an institution. (Pudlat, in: Frevel, Wendekamm, 2017, 73, 92 ; Hunecke, 2014, 267, 272f.) Strengthening of backing in society is essential to ensure that new offences are being reported, ongoing investigations are supported e.g. with witness statements and measures can be carried out more effectively. In addition, the previously described construction of insecurity in society is an ideal catalysator to legitimise more and further-going powers of state intervention towards the citizens, conveniently, because they stand at the receiving end of those powers. In particular: only if society regards insecurity as an existing and substantial problem, it will advocate for response measures (Pudlat, in: Frevel, Wendekamm, 2017, 73f.). Then the problem will often be addressed by implementing an intensified range of sentences. At the same time, those demands will correspond with existing police interests of generally penalising crimes harder and giving more powers to police officers (Hunecke, 2014, 267, 289).

> *"It is important not to regard police communication just as a neutral conveying of relevant information, but also as an instrument of self-enactment by an active and engaged organisation."*

Stated extensions, however, do not exhaust themselves in the scope of action of single officers, but are also related to the standing of police within governmental structure, be it by politically adopted financial support, new equipment or by arguing against proposed cost savings (Beck, 2010, 21, 25; Hunecke, 2014, 267, 290; Drucksache BT 18/11161).

Conclusion & Implications

As presented previously, the communication dynamics of the German police turn the discourse about trust in their work into how the police itself is facing security problems, when strengthening reliance in society is so much more essential to ensure effective police work. If society views insecurity as a serious issue, it will support solutions like tougher punishments and more power for police personnel. This fabrication of insecurity is fuel for legitimizing further and deeper governmental action towards citizens. The following implications shall show an alternative approach.

Measures that address citizens` feelings of security in different spaces, such as video surveillance, police presence or urban planning measures, become more successful by integrating how subjective security emerges in a certain place and time. In line with the importance of the socio-spatial context for the

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perception of safety, numerous strategies and measures have been developed at the municipal and neighbourhood level to counteract local factors. These were aimed at strengthening social control, especially in disadvantaged urban neighbourhoods, reducing incivilities, and strengthening social cohesion and promoting collective efficacy among the often marginalised, stigmatised population that is weak in social capital and resources.

The first strategy is one which focuses on the reorientation and integration of police action in social spaces. Regarding the effectiveness of community policing, previous studies have primarily shown an improvement in subjective safety and greater satisfaction with the work of the police and improving cooperation and communication with the population (McGarrell & Giacomazzi, 1997). In this way, community policing increases the legitimacy of police action (Tyler, 2017). However, this effect is thought to be due to an increase in informal social control and collective efficacy resulting from more intensive collaboration between police and local actors (Kochel, 2012). Some findings show that while community policing can be useful in reducing fear of crime, the preventive effect remains limited if the concept is reduced to the implementation of individual measures and if the aspect of community problem solving is disregarded.

The civil society perspective makes it clear that a one-sided focus on crime and police work can only partially lead to an improvement in the subjective feeling of security. To further strengthen this effect and to involve marginalised sections of the population, structures and programs should be offered that guide and promote the exercise of informal social control and the perception of collective effectiveness. It is indisputable that with the increasing importance of the issue of subjective security, the need for the population to make a greater contribution to crime prevention has also risen. In this respect, all strategies and measures require a methodologically sound evaluation regarding their effects. In this context, temporal, spatial and social aspects must be precisely differentiated.

Fear as a result of subjective insecurity has negative consequences for the individual, for the community and for society. Uncertainty as an anthropological constant ultimately means not knowing about what awaits us in the future. Nothing is more understandable than that people, no matter in which cultural environment they live, strive to reduce the extent of their insecurity by providing themselves with security wherever and as much as they can, with police action being only one of numerous factors. However, security is no reality, but a target value. This ultimately expresses the fact that there is no such thing as a reliable or definite security; we can come closer to it, but we cannot realise it once and for all. But this should not lead to the inaccurate conclusion that it is not worthwhile to strive for security. As shown above, it is crucial and decisive for the chance of people to live a satisfied and dignified life, as individuals, societies, and nations.

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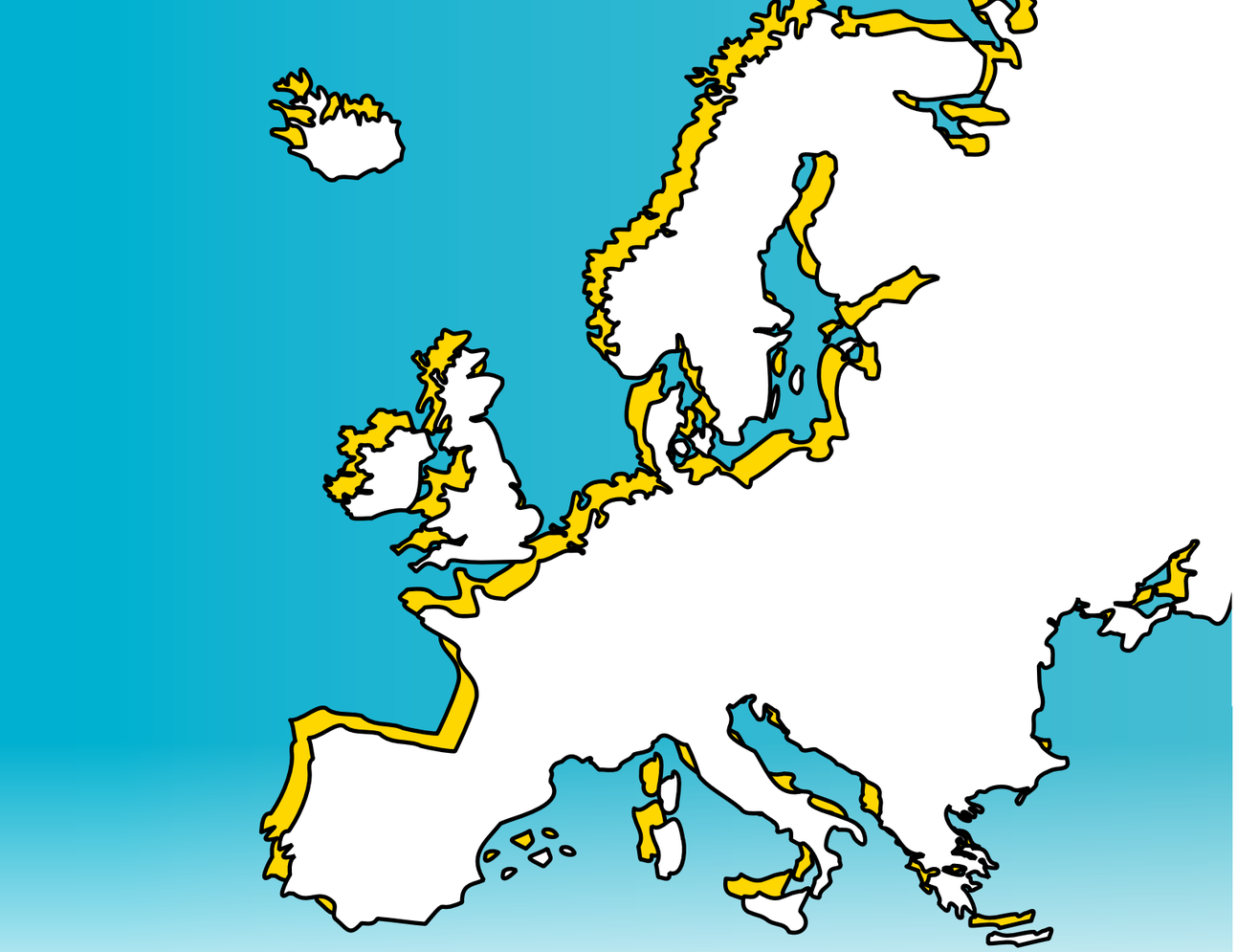

The Future of the European Union

This article was reviewed by Tobias Bauer and Chiara Pfaffenzeller

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The Status Quo

The biggest successful peace project in history. A strange mechanism that turns money into bureaucracy. Both descriptions can be heard when people are asked about the European Union (EU). However, many Europeans are traditionally neither fans nor haters of the EU – they just feel indifferent because of their perceived distance towards it (Baglioni and Hurrelmann, 2016). Lately though, a shift in public opinion can be detected. While a recent survey shows that a record high of about two thirds (65%) of Europeans are in favor of an EU membership of their country (Eurobarometer, 2022), numbers also show that the vote share for Eurosceptic parties has more than doubled in the last two decades (Henley, 2020). This combination signifies that the EU has become a polarized topic and a reason for heated debates in parliaments as well as pubs. At the same time, current developments in different parts of the world demand the attention of European leaders. They must decide if they want to compromise and take a joint European stance or follow their own agenda. Thus, the question of "more or less Europe" becomes ever more pressing for the future of the Union. Which way will the fate of the EU turn? In this article, we will outline three possible scenarios for the future of the bloc. While many factors play a role for the direction in which the tide will turn, conventional wisdom tells us that "communication is key". This communication is transported by people, in particular the national leaders. The OECD shows in its survey (2021) that the perception of government commitment is one of the pillars of trust for political institutions – like the EU. This is why we will first have a look into the mechanisms and missings of communication and examine possible pitfalls created by personal egoisms.

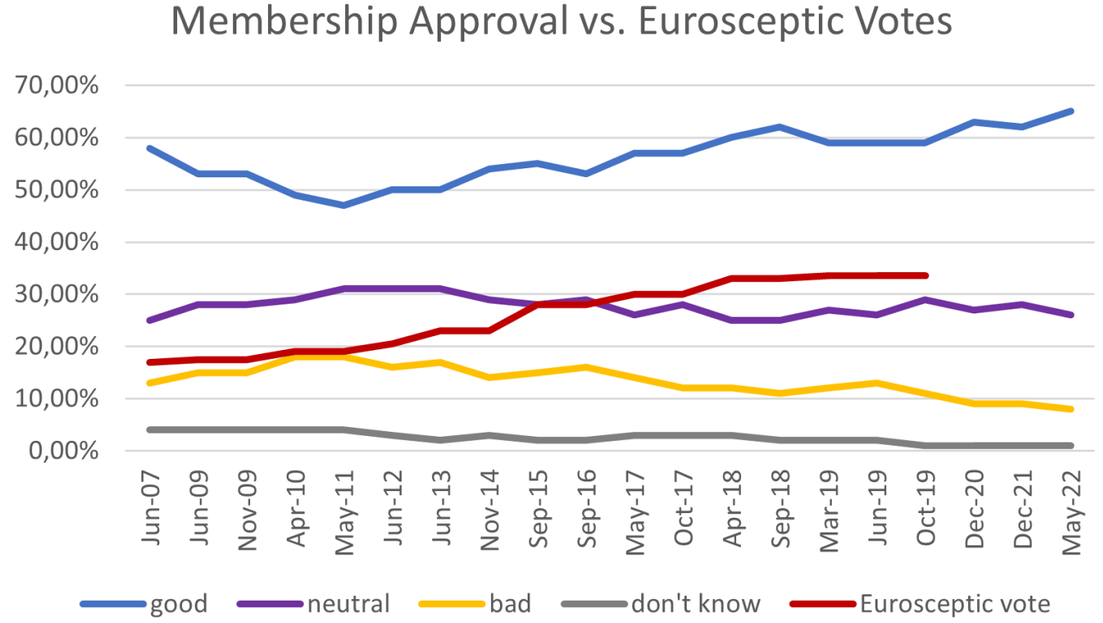

Chart 1: Approval rates for EU membership vs. the votes for Eurosceptic parties in the EU.

Sources: Eurobarometer, The PopuList

After the failed EU referenda on the European Constitutional Treaty in 2005, the EU commission set up a dedicated communication strategy called "Plan D" (D stands for democracy, dialogue and discussion). Its aim was to make the EU more visible in the life of the average citizen, e.g. through visits of Commission members to the regions of the member states or in the national parliaments. These parliaments were also asked to participate in pro EU media campaigns. Shortly after, in 2006, this first reaction was boosted by the so-called "White Paper on a European communication policy". In this document, additional steps to reach the goal of more visibility for the EU were mentioned, like the use of digital technologies and the widening of the Eurobarometer-surveys (Seeger, 2006).

Both documents had been brought forward by Margot Wallström, who was dedicated EU commissioner for communication strategy back then. This portfolio was however canceled in 2009, because it had no powers due to missing resources and missing cooperation with other commissioners and heads of national governments. The strategies laid down in Plan D and the White Paper failed for these reasons as well. Nowadays, there is no dedicated manager for media and public communication. These areas are managed by the office of the president of the EU commission and always fall short because of the huge tower of tasks that are to be handled by the office.

> *"The question of 'more or less Europe' becomes ever more pressing for the future of the Union."*

Another problem is the sheer number of relevant media: because there are 24 languages spoken in the EU, getting input into the different media channels is a huge task of its own. And even if that is successful, the EU commission is missing a connection to the smaller, local newspapers that the average Joe reads at the breakfast table.

The biggest challenge for a positive and influential EU policy and the communication about it might however be the following factor: political leaders often have narcissistic traits – it seems to be part of the job description. They want to get the most media attention and will try their best to steal the spotlight from the EU Commission. Especially when there are results to proclaim – then their personal engagement has brought forward an agreement. For bad news however, the guilty party is the EU and its organs by default. That these egoisms can have dire consequences could be seen during the gas crisis and the search for new sources. Manfred Weber, chief of the European People's Party (EPP), postulated that the isolated negotiations of national states for supplies weakened the union and let gas prices rise, because every EU country government tried to trump the others (der SPIEGEL, 2022). Short-sighted actions like this do not only weaken European solidarity amongst each other, they also fail in achieving an advantage for the countries that 'win' these negotiations – because the direct and indirect political and economic costs are far higher than the benefits. When

Figure 1: Quo Vadis, Europe? © Daniel Gerjets, 2023

EU countries act with uniformity on the other hand, their impact is significant – as can be seen in the case of sanctions against Russia, which have hit the Russian economy hard (Stamer, 2022).

So, having looked into the status quo, there is a question that is looming above all: How will this be going? How will European cooperation develop? We have imagined three hypothetical outcomes and will sketch out these scenarios in the following.

A) "It's time for the next step!" - The European Power Scenario

The European Project is – at heart – still the same thing it always was: an effort to create a deeper understanding for each other. Understanding is the first step in the process of improvement, of finding solutions that work. However, people need to be open to really listen to what others have to say and to mindfully process these bits and pieces of information, hopes and fears. Only then a true connection can be established. Sometimes, external pushes are needed to create this openness. Four deep crises in very short sequence – first the financial crisis, then migration crisis, the COVID pandemic and lastly the Russian open war against a European country – are these pushes. Europeans begin to finally really understand that they are only together strong enough to face today's world full of autocrats and oligarchs. After short backlashes into nationalism in several European countries, people in the EU see and feel a negative impact in their daily lives and begin to voice a desire for an integrated

Europe. Civil movements promoting "more Europe" gain traction and become very visible in the streets. Media coverage and social networks become more international, slowly forming the nucleus of a European society. Political parties promising to support a stronger European approach get more votes in more and more countries. This leads to the transfer of executive powers onto the European level. It will take some time of course and the European voters will need to bring in some new faces to replace several old leaders that are not able to understand the need for a new level of cooperation. It starts – as so many things in the EU – with a new answer to the fiscal question of how to finance the EU. In order to evade the heated and energy-sucking discussions about the EU budget for the future, leaders from smaller EU countries bring up the old idea to create an "EU tax" as part of the value added tax (VAT). This would end the endless debates and the logrolling – and make the EU household independent of the goodwill of national leaders. The fiscally strong countries, who are to pay a lot more into the EU budget with this reform, agree to it under the condition that the EU commission gets the last say on national budget planning and a veto power for changes to this planning in order to discipline those countries with a history of spending sprees. Until then, the national budget had already to be sent to the EU for screening, but the assessment of the EU had only been non-binding advice. With this assessment becoming binding, the EU gains a lot of new power at once, shifting the balance towards the commission. The EU tax authority is rebuilt and gets a new high representative who becomes part of the commission, turning it more and more into a proto-government for Europe. The new rules also lead to the Euro becoming a currency in all EU countries. With the center of governmental power now shifting to Brussels, foreign leaders turn their attention more towards the EU and less towards national leaders.

Acknowledging this, pro-European governments start a voluntary transfer of foreign politics to the European level with the creation of an EU foreign office. Like the Schengen rules for free travel inside Europe, it gains more and more countries supporting this movement. The countries behind this movement finally get enough support inside the European Council to vote for the announcement of a new European Convent, where bigger changes to the European Treaties can be discussed and proposed to the national parliaments. This convent had already been demanded by the "conference about the future of Europe" in 2021. The result of the convent is an EU Constitution that would promote the EU to become a new national entity and the member states to become federal states inside this new country. There had already been a try for a European Constitution in 2004, which failed because of the rejection by voters in France and the Netherlands. Therefore and because of the knowledge gained during the Brexit period, it was decided that all the countries in favor of this Constitution would form this new entity together in any case, with the possible nay-sayers becoming second level countries in a then diminished "old EU". With the fear of harming themselves like the Brits with Brexit, the new Constitution was voted for unanimously. With the EU now suddenly a real state, more reforms like the one to harmonize military forces and other decisions of statewide importance were swiftly taken. The new structure of the EU leads to streamlined processes and faster political decisions, also giving the new EU much more clout in the everlasting international quarrels for power. It therefore leads to something that was very unlikely in the past: Europe becoming a third "world power" between the USA and China.

B) "Let's give ourselves some space…" – the breakup scenario

The European Union is held together – at its core – by the promise of creating wealth and economic security for its members and thus guaranteeing a peaceful coexistence. This promise has extended into other areas of life and politics, but the economic cooperation is still the very basic fundament that the European project is built upon. The British vote for Brexit was mainly successful because the Brexiteers were able to sow serious doubts about the economic membership benefits for Great Britain and promote the view that the country and its people would be more wealthy and more competitive outside of the EU (Minford, 2016). With the ongoing multiple crises affecting the EU, this view gains momentum in other European countries as well, although Brexit never became a success. Inept PR management of the European Commission and ineffective policy handling at the European level unsettle national leaders and voters alike. National governments start to make unilateral moves without consulting their European partners. Fiscally strong countries have more possibilities to maneuver, so their nationalist actions are seemingly more successful than coordinated measures, that are always too late and too little to unfold in a significant way. This encourages a "go it alone" mentality. The gap between the wealthier and the less wealthy countries deepens, minimizing the willingness to compromise in the European council. This creates an ongoing policy blockade at the European level, further damaging the image of European politics in the public eye. During one of the endless fruitless household discussions, a country with a high monetary deficit escalates the situation by threatening to default on their obligations in the Euro transfer system in order to put political pressure on countries like Germany that have an export surplus. This threat causes several "donor countries" to announce public votes on their membership inside the European Union. Once this political stunt was publicized, it develops a life of its own and there is no turning back. When the first results come in and signify a goodbye to the European Union in these countries a shockwave ripples through the EU. Because these countries are members of the Euro area, their separation of the EU raises question marks about the modalities of the mutual debts and thereby about the future of the currency itself. More and more countries fear that they have been entangled in something like a Euro ponzi scheme and hasten to cancel their membership. In the end, this political turmoil reaches even France and Germany, once touted as the "engine of Europe". They are forced by their mood at home to split apart. The European Union is in shambles and with it, more than 70 years of economic cooperation and political rapprochement. The legal and political issues of sorting out assets, debts, obligations and contracts tie down the continent for decades, leading to a worldwide recession and an impoverishment of many European countries.

C) "Let's talk about it later…" - The murky muddling in the middle scenario

Power needs legitimacy. Since the victory of democracy in those countries forming the European Union later, this legitimacy is

formed by the will of the people. With acceleration and spreading of media coverage, this will is measured ever more detailed and continuously also in between elections. European leaders have observed that during the crises, the peoples of the different European countries have turned to their respective governments for leadership. These governments were quick to take up that trust and act on their own. This however meant that fighting these crises became easier for financially potent countries while making it harder for those that were already in a weaker economical position. This created unrest among the Union, which was built on the promise of unity and cooperation. As a response, the development of more European measures is agreed upon and the European Commission is trusted to deliver those measures. As it turns out however, the Commission is mostly overwhelmed by these tasks. The difference between the means needed to accomplish solid solutions and the powers granted by the national governments is just too big. Seeing the need for basic cooperation and wanting to avoid too much responsibility for their own actions, the national governments forge basic compromises out of the blueprints the Commission creates. However, these compromises often involve the creation of new bureaucratic bodies controlled by the European council instead of the Commission. Thereby, the governments are able to keep more competencies in their own hands at the price of internal transparency and coordination. The whole situation is further complicated by the actions of the European Parliament whose members fight against national egoisms with a plethora of laws and initiatives. All this keeps Europeans occupied with themselves, with the additional bureaucracy binding power and attention that would be of use for foreign political initiatives instead. With the European focus turned towards the inside, Europeans disengage themselves from world politics and become less and less important for the rest of the world. With the dwindling political power starts the loss of economic power, rendering Europeans less wealthy in comparison to other regions of the world. However, Europeans are rather content with their "European middle way", diluting power and responsibility with the aim to create a feeling of safety and ignorance for citizens and governments alike. This whole process occurs over a long period of time, with its impact only becoming fully visible over decades.

Conclusion

By drawing different images of future Europe, it can be shown that "more Europe" is the scenario that creates all in all the most value for European countries. This surplus value might be unevenly distributed however, creating the desire for new balancing measures that will in return spark debates about the distribution of political power. The currently more probable "everything stays more or less the same" scenario leads to a slight decline of European significance, while a deconstruction of the whole European Union – which is the aim of left- and right-wing extremists – would have catastrophic consequences not only for European countries, but for the whole world. Europeans therefore should focus on more cooperation and try to untangle national and European politics more clearly, thereby creating more prosperity and safety for the continent.

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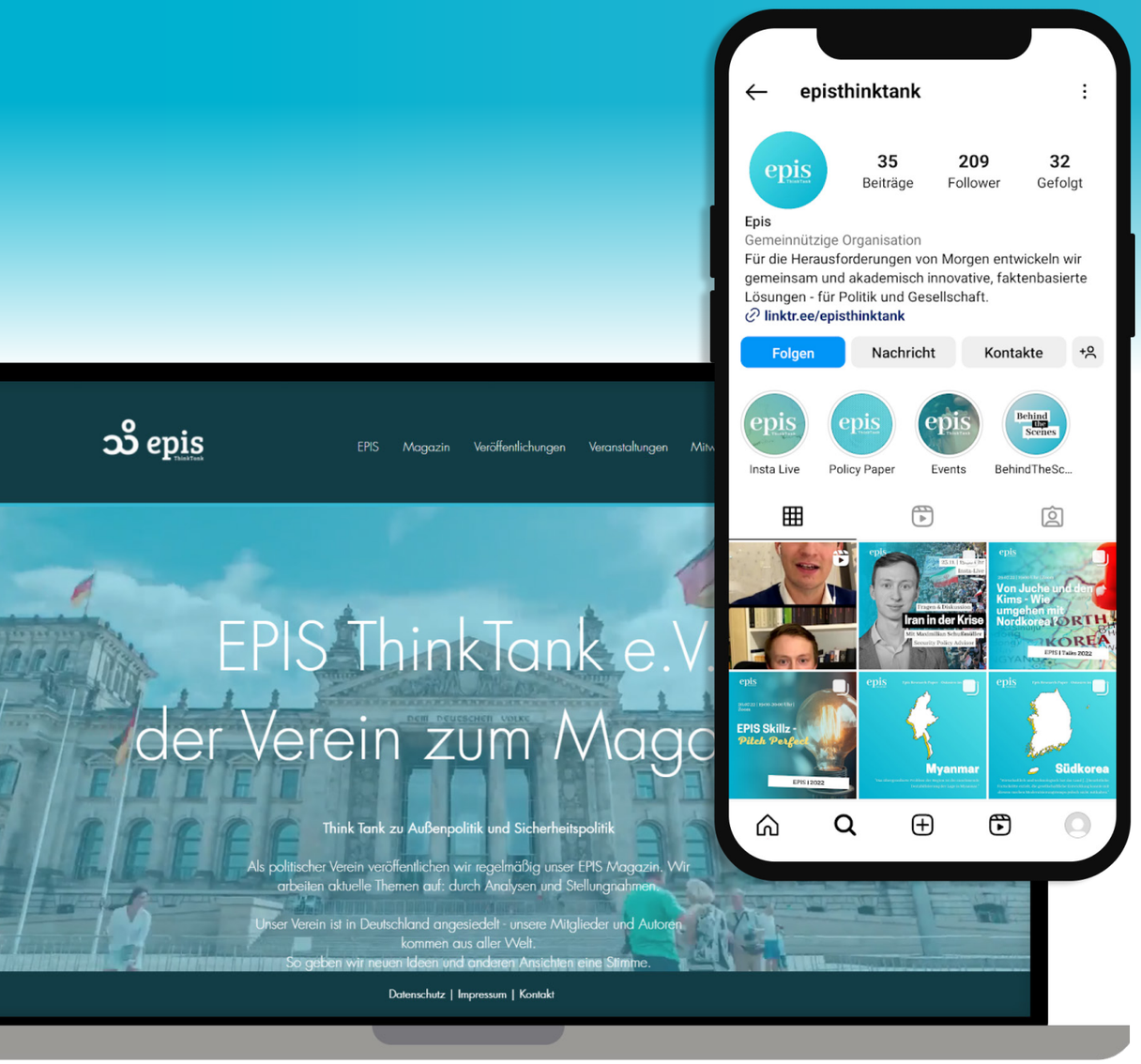

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