



Geopolitical overview of conflicts 2017

Spanish
Institute of
Strategic
Studies

ieee.es
Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos



MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA



Geopolitical overview of conflicts 2017

Spanish
Institute of
Strategic
Studies

ieee.es
Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos



MINISTERIO DE DEFENSA

SPANISH OFFICIAL PUBLICATIONS CATALOGUE
<http://publicacionesoficiales.boe.es>

Edita:



<http://publicaciones.defensa.gob.es/>

© Author and Publisher, 2018

NIPO: 083-16-308-8 (print on demand)

Publication date: july 2018

NIPO: 083-16-309-3 (e-book edition)

The authors are solely responsible for the opinions expressed in the articles in this publication.

The exploitation rights of this work are protected by the Spanish Intellectual Property Act. No parts of this publication may be produced, stored or transmitted in any way nor by any means, electronic, mechanical or print, including photocopies or any other means without prior, express, written consent of the © copyright holders.

ÍNDICE

| | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| Chapter one | |
| Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat | 11 |
| <i>Jesús Díez Alcalde</i> | |
| Introduction | 13 |
| Background | 14 |
| Current status of the conflict | 20 |
| The role of external players | 26 |
| Conclusions and outlook for the future | 31 |
| Geopolitical indicators | 32 |
| Conflict Timeline | 33 |
| | |
| Chapter two | |
| Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict | 35 |
| <i>José Pardo de Santayana y Gómez de Olea</i> | |
| Introduction | 36 |
| The agreement was extended in 2010 until 2047 | 38 |
| Immediate background of the conflict | 39 |
| Russian annexation of Crimea | 41 |
| The Donbass conflict | 42 |
| Minsk Agreements | 44 |
| Current Situation | 45 |
| Role of external players | 49 |
| Conclusions and future perspectives | 50 |
| Geopolitical indicators | 51 |
| Cronology | 52 |
| | |
| Chapter three | |
| Sinai: a time bomb about to go off? | 53 |
| <i>Emilio Sánchez de Rojas Díez</i> | |
| Introduction | 55 |
| Antecedents of the Conflict | 56 |
| From Salafism to terrorism: Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad | 58 |
| After the fall of Mubarak | 60 |

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Current situation of the conflict | 67 |
| 2016 | 67 |
| 2017 | 70 |
| External Actors | 75 |
| Conclusions and perspectives for the future | 77 |
| Chronology of the conflict and geopolitical indicators in the Sinai | 78 |
| Chapter four | |
| The Caucasus | 81 |
| <i>José Luis Cabello Rodríguez</i> | |
| Introduction | 83 |
| Background of the conflict | 83 |
| Current situation of the conflict | 85 |
| The areas of the Caucasus | 85 |
| The role of external actors | 96 |
| Conclusions and perspective for the future | 100 |
| The Caucasus. Geopolitical indicators | 102 |
| The Caucasus. Chronology of the conflict | 104 |
| Chapter five | |
| Iraqi Kurdistan | 107 |
| <i>Miguel Ángel Ballesteros Martín</i> | |
| Introduction | 108 |
| Geopolitical analysis of Kurdistan | 108 |
| Human factor in Kurdistan | 109 |
| Natural resources | 112 |
| Political Kurdistan | 114 |
| Iranian Kurdistan | 116 |
| Iraqi Kurdistan | 116 |
| The actors in the Iraqi Kurdish conflict | 119 |
| The Parliament and the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq | 120 |
| The Iraqi parliament in Baghdad | 121 |
| The referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan | 123 |
| Conclusions | 126 |
| Iraqi Kurdistan. Geopolitical indicators | 128 |
| Chronology of the conflict | 129 |
| Chapter six | |
| Iraq after the recovery of Mosul | 131 |
| <i>Francisco José Berenguer Hernández</i> | |
| Introduction | 132 |
| Background to the conflict | 132 |
| Current situation of the conflict | 136 |
| Role of the external actors | 144 |
| Geopolitical indicators of Iraq | 149 |

| | <u>Page</u> |
|--|-------------|
| Chapter seven | |
| Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen | 151 |
| <i>Ignacio Fuente Cobo</i> | |
| Introduction | 152 |
| What are the origins of the conflict? | 153 |
| Who are the Houthis? | 155 |
| What are the reasons that explain the swift takeover of power by the Houthis? | 157 |
| Why did the negotiations for a political agreement fail? | 158 |
| Whatever happened to the Yemeni army? | 160 |
| Why did Saudi Arabia intervene at the head of a coalition of Arab countries? | 161 |
| What role is Iran playing in Yemen? | 164 |
| What is the position of the United States in Yemen? | 166 |
| Conclusions and perspectives for the future: Can the Yemen war be ended? | 168 |
| Chapter eight | |
| Somalia: increased threats to security | 171 |
| <i>Blanca Palacián De Inza</i> | |
| Introduction | 172 |
| Background of the conflict | 175 |
| Armed conflict | 175 |
| Present Situation of the Conflict | 179 |
| Conclusions and Perspective for the Future | 187 |
| Geopolitical indicators of Somalia | 189 |
| Chapter nine | |
| Niger: epicenter of conflicts | 191 |
| <i>Juan Alberto Mora Tebas</i> | |
| Introduction | 192 |
| Historical and political background of interest | 192 |
| Instability Factors | 199 |
| Intercommunity Conflicts: Cattle breeders Farmers | 200 |
| Religious affiliations | 202 |
| Regional and International Cooperation on Defense and Security | 208 |
| Chapter ten | |
| Nigeria, catalogue of conflicts | 215 |
| <i>Jose María Santé Abal</i> | |
| Introduction | 216 |
| Antecedents of the conflict. History of Nigeria | 219 |
| Colonization | 221 |
| From independence to the Constitution of 1999 | 224 |
| Since the Constitution of 1999 | 226 |
| Current situation of conflict. Conditions in Nigeria | 228 |
| The role of external actors | 231 |
| Conclusions and a Perspective on the Future | 232 |

| | Page |
|---|------|
| Chapter eleven | |
| The kashmir conflict | 241 |
| <i>Josefa Izquierdo Alberca</i> | |
| Introduction | 242 |
| It all started after the partition | 246 |
| Current Situation | 252 |
| The role of the external actors | 256 |
| Conclusions and Prospects | 260 |
| | |
| Chapter twelve | |
| Mexico at the crossroads. Ten years of war against drug trafficking | 267 |
| <i>María Luisa Pastor Gómez</i> | |
| Introduction | 268 |
| Background to the conflict | 271 |
| Main drug trafficking routes in Latin American and the Caribbean | 272 |
| Current State of the Conflict | 277 |
| Role of the External Actors | 281 |
| Conclusions and Prospects | 283 |
| | |
| Chapter thirteen | |
| Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare: terrorism, separatism and extremism | 289 |
| <i>José Ignacio García Sánchez</i> | |
| Introduction | 291 |
| Background to the conflict | 292 |
| Current conflict situation | 299 |
| Role of external actors | 302 |
| Conclusions and outlook | 304 |
| Timeline | 307 |
| Geopolitical Indicators | 309 |
| Tables of Imports and Exports | 315 |
| | |
| Chapter fourteen | |
| The Korean peninsula: the neverending conflict | 317 |
| <i>Francisco Márquez de la Rubia</i> | |
| Introduction | 319 |
| Background to the conflict | 319 |
| Current situation of the conflict | 321 |
| Role of the external actors | 325 |
| Conclusions and outlook | 329 |
| An approach to the possible evolution of the situation | 339 |

| | <u>Page</u> |
|---|-------------|
| Chapter fifteen | |
| The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world order?..... | 343 |
| <i>Pedro Sánchez Herráez</i> | |
| Introduction | 344 |
| Background to the conflict | 346 |
| Current conflict | 349 |
| Role of external players | 357 |
| Conclusions and perspectives for the future | 361 |
| Chronology of the conflict | 363 |
| Geopolitical indicators | 364 |
| Import and Export tables..... | 373 |
| Work group composition..... | 375 |

Chapter one

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

Jesús Díez Alcalde

Abstract

In January 2012, a violent Tuareg revolt broke out –with the connivance of radical Islamists– in the northern region of Mali. As an illegitimate reaction, a military *coup d'état* ended the democratic regime and eventually the jihadist militias expelled the rebels and launched –in January of 2013– an offensive strike towards Bamako. In response to a “cry for help” of the Malian Government, France (Operation Serval) fought an all-out battle against the jihadist tyranny, freed the northern populations and paved the way for the deployment of the EUTM Mali training mission and MINUSMA forces. At political level, democratic elections proclaimed President Keita as the responsible for the country’s recovery, who succeeded in sealing a complex and ambitious peace agreement with the Tuareg rebels in June 2015; an accord containing all the necessary steps in order to reach the consensual “national overhaul”.

However, almost six years after that fateful 2012, the outcome of the Peace Agreement start up is far from positive: little progress has been made on either the political process, national reconciliation or development. As a perverse consequence, threats to security –jihadist delirium, community clashes and organized crime– have been increased and expanded with complete impunity throughout the country and beyond its borders. At present, Mali –the epicentre of the Sahel and very close neighbour to the European

Union– faces an extremely complex challenge. Only with the determination and will of all the parties involved, as well as the necessary involvement of the population that suffers its consequences, this African country will be able to return to the path to peace and stability, which still is foreshadowed as too far away.

Keywords

Mali, conflict, Tuareg rebels, jihadist groups, Peace Agreement, MINUSMA, EUTM Mali, MINUSMA and G5 Sahel.

Introduction

September 2017: “The progress in Mali is notable”, says the Secretary General of the United Nations, Antonio Guterres, “but it is still very fragile, especially in light of recent confrontations between armed groups and the recurring attacks all over the country. New processes, institutions and laws have not brought significant improvements to the daily lives of the Malian population and there are still difficulties getting the humanitarian aid through. The window of opportunity for the Government to make good on the long-awaited dividends of peace is slowly closing...”¹. This is the tragic assessment of a conflict that broke out nearly six years ago in the epicentre of Western Africa for which there is still no real end in sight and which poses a complex threat to its closest European neighbours that crosses borders with total impunity and threatens to destroy the future of millions of Africans.

In 2012, Mali collapsed under the fiercest aggressions the country has sustained since its Independence for French colonial Powers. A concatenation of fatal events - a new and violent rebel uprising led by the Tuareg people, the coup d'état led by Captain Sanogo against the constitutional government and the brutal imposition of Jihad by radical Islamist groups - highlighted the grave deficiencies of the African country. Mali, which had been an exemplary democracy for the world since 1992, was subjugated by violence 20 years later. Suddenly incapable of protecting its territorial integrity and sovereignty, the dangerous consequences of poverty and underdevelopment, social inequality and frustration, endemic corruption and organized crime... in short, anarchy, quickly became apparent.

Right now, the country is held together by a fragile peace accord in an attempt, thus far unsuccessful, to lay the foundation for a national reconstruction; and by international cooperation which, despite the considerable deployment of forces on the ground, has not been able to guarantee the country's security or to consolidate a political process in which all of the conflicting parties in this violent crisis come to the table voluntarily and without spurious interests, but also the representatives of a society affected by its consequences. Through a chronological narration of the events and an analysis of the underlying causes of the conflict, this document examines the main obstacles – political blockade and expansion of violence – that are preventing peace in Mali and, by extension, in the Western Sahara.

It also examines and evaluates the national and international responses that have thus far been put forward to overcome them.

¹ Window of opportunity for peace in Mali «slowly narrowing» warns Secretary-General. UN News Centre, 20/09/17. Available at: <http://www.un.org/apps/news/story.asp?NewsID=57618#.WcNpPOQUkdV>. Consultation date: 21/09/17.

Background

It has been more than five years now since peace and the rule of law in Mali were broken to pieces and today there is still no end in sight to a conflict that had been incubating for decades and exploded virulently in 2012. At that time, Tuareg rebels joined the Azawad National Liberation Movement (ANLM) – led by the dominant Ifoghas tribe – took up arms against the central government in Bamako, demanding the secession of the Azawad region, which is only recognized as a cultural entity by the Malian government. Underlying this new rebellion – the fourth since Mali's Independence in 1960²— were decades of revindications and reports of oppression perpetrated, according to the rebels, by the state against the Tuareg people and the entire Arab and black population in northern Mali. Also acting as a subversive force was the enormous quantity of weapons looted by the Tuareg militias and violent Salafists from Libyan arsenals after the fall of Gaddafi's regime in 2011 and finally the support of jihadist groups fleeing Algeria that had been settling in the vast Malian desert since the late nineties.

In a few short months, the entire northern region of the country (Kidal, Timbuktu and Gao) succumbed to the rebel and jihadist offensive; while the government – army and local authorities – abandoned more than two-thirds of its sovereign territory, terrified and humiliated. To the surprise and disbelief of the international community, which still regarded Mali as an oasis of political and social stability in the epicentre of the Sahel, the country entered a downward spiral of violence and political crisis that seemed to have no end. In March 2012, Captain Sanogo led a bloodless coup d' état, seized the presidency of the country from Amadou Toumani Touré and installed a military regime that ended the democracy established in 1992. Shortly after that, on 6 April, the Azawad National Liberation Movement (ANLM) – under the authority of Billal Ag Acherif³ – took advantage of the country's political collapse to unilaterally declare Azawad's independence.

Both seditions were unanimously rejected both inside and outside of Africa, but the most dramatic events were yet to come. In June, after radical Islamists confiscated the revolt from the Tuaregs and proceeded to impose sharia law throughout the northern region, a stunned and defenceless population began

² The first major rebellion following independence occurred between 1962 and 1964, causing thousands of Tuaregs to flee to neighbouring countries after a forceful military response. In the early nineties, Tuaregs from Mali and Niger launched a new offensive against their respective governments, this one bloodier and better coordinated than the last, which ended with the signing of a national accord with the Tuaregs in 1995. However, the slowness of the process and the lack of results, combined with the fiercely centralist and repressive policies of President Touré (2002-2012), resulted in a third Tuareg rebellion in 2007 led by Iyad Ag Ghali, who years later (2011) would go on to create the jihadist militia, Ansar Dine.

³ *Déclaration D'Indépendance de L'Azawad*, 06/04/2012. Available at <http://www.webcitation.org/6AGfVdHeO>. Consultation date: 27/07/13.

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

to flee the violent despotism of the jihadists, with hundreds of thousands of Malians seeking refuge in communities in the south or in neighbouring countries.

Faced with this alarming situation, the international community decided to take military action in Africa — baptized AFISMA⁴— to restore Mali's territorial integrity and constitutional rule of law. However, the jihadists⁵ – at the time, Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM), Ansar Dine and the Movement for Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJWA) – took the initiative and on 9 January 2013, led by Ansar Dine, launched a coordinated offensive from their northern bastions to take over Bamako, with the obvious intention of conquering, for the first time in Africa, an entire country. The occupation of Bamako by the jihadists would have posed a serious threat to the entire region that would have been complicated to resolve; to prevent it, the international response, led by Paris, was swift.

In response to the call for assistance by the recently installed transitional civil government of Dioncounda Traoré (April 2013), France, a former colonial power and Mali's closest western ally, deployed Operation Serval to stop the advance of the radical Islamic groups with the support of Malian and Chadian forces. In a few short weeks, the jihadists were repelled by the international response and practically without a fight abandoned all their northern bastions, concealed themselves among a terrorized and defenceless civilian population, took refuge in their hideouts in the Sahelian desert or crossed Mali's borders to disappear into the "black hole" of the jihadist movement in southern Libya. At the same time, and as a preview of what was to come, the jihadists embarked on a campaign of terror inside and outside the country⁶ which has done nothing but expand since then. From the shadows, it has adapted its strategy in an effort to regain control and in so doing created an atmosphere of violence that even the leader of the AQIM movement himself,

⁴ AFISMA (African-led International Support Mission to Mali) was the first international response to expel the jihadists from the northern part of the country. This military mission was organized by Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) and authorized by the United Nations (Security Council Resolution 2085). Although the initial plan was for AFISMA to be deployed in September 2013, because of the advances being made by the jihadists that deployment actually began in January 2013 and ultimately had as many as 6,000 members. However, although it initially made some very valuable contributions, there were glaring deficiencies (operational, logistical, and financial final) which ultimately resulted in the mission being replaced by the UN's MINUSMA forces in July 2012.

⁵ By the end of 2012, more than 6,000 Islamic radicals had converted northern Mali into the world's largest jihadist sanctuary in terms of land area.

⁶ With the launch of the Operation Serval, the jihadists began to "internationalize" their violence. Outside Mali's borders, the first attack in Algeria was the hostage crisis at the In Anemas gas plant on 17 January 2013, in which 23 workers and 32 terrorists were killed. On 23 May, extremists launched two attacks in Niger, killing 22 Nigerian soldier and a civilian employee. In both cases, the Algerian radical Islamist, Mokhtar Belmokhtar, second-in-command of AQIM and founder of the terrorist group "Those who sign with blood", claimed responsibility for the attacks and became the most wanted and elusive terrorist in Africa.

Abdel Malek Droukdel, has called unfortunate and reckless because the jihadist movement in Mali was “a baby in its first days that is still crawling”⁷.

2013: The return of democracy and the beginning of international military forces

Even though it appeared that the first objective had been achieved, that is liberating the northern part of the country from the despotic jihadists and their violent imposition of Sharia (Islamic) law, there was much to be done to restore peace and stability to the country and it was going to be a long and complex undertaking. This being the case, the international community reinforced its commitment to come up with a common response in order to collaborate with the interim government in Bamako to confront a challenge that was expanding beyond Mali's borders. Against all odds, with strong international pressure and the goal of restoring the legitimate and democratic regime lost in the coup, Mali, with the decisive involvement of the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS)⁸, completed its “road map” and held presidential elections in August 2013. Although the consternation prevailing in the northern part of the country was not the most conducive for holding such important elections, the level of participation (50%), driven by the popular enthusiasm for starting the process of restoring peace, was reasonable and in any event much higher than in previous elections.

Ibrahim Boubacar Keita was the incontestable winner of the elections, which were determined to be legitimate and credible by more than 6,000 international observers, taking 77.6% of the votes in the second round of the election process. At his public proclamation in Bamako on 19 September in front of a public jubilant with hope and an unprecedented number of foreign dignitaries, President IBK, as nicknamed by Malian citizens, promised to “rebuild the army, reconcile Malians and build a strong nation” in order to “turn the page once and for all on the dark days this country has suffered”. Since then, the inclusive and unconditional political dialogue, with the impassable red line of “preserving democratic achievements, guaranteeing national unity, the Independence of our country and integrity of our national

⁷ As he fled Timbuktu following the launch of Operation Serval, Droukdel left a “manifest” behind dated July 2012 in which he criticized the Islamist groups for imposing sharia law on the Malian population too soon and also predicted France's intervention. Doyle, M. Mali Islamists warned about Sharia in al-Qaeda «manifesto». BBC, 26/02/17. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-21587055>. Consultation date: 26/08/17.

⁸ In 1975, Burkina Faso, Benin, Ivory Coast, Gambia, Ghana, Guinea, Guinea Bissau, Liberia, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Senegal, Sierra and Togo ratified the ECOWAS foundational treaty, which was ratified by Cabo Verde a year later. Mauritania left the organization in 2000, which has to a large extent rendered it ineffective in confronting a crisis that directly affected its neighbour to the west, Mali. This critical absence was vital to the creation of G5 Sahel in 2014 (Mauritania, Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger and Chad).

territory”⁹, was seen as the key factor for IBK to fulfil his promise. It was his responsibility to rebuild the nation and also to determine the extent of the international assistance, which had already taken shape in the notable military presence in the country.

Mali set out on a precarious constitutional path with a total power void in the north. Meanwhile, Operation Serval along with the progressive deployment of the AFISMA forces, replaced in 2013 by a UN MINUSMA mission, and the commencement of the European Union’s EUTM Mali mission to train the Malian army began to restore security and stability to the country.

However, the much coveted peace was soon shaken by an uptick in violence by rebels and terrorists alike, which shows that despite the international presence, neither side was going to cease in its efforts to promote its own spurious interests through violence. In May 2014, violating the Ouagadougou Accord (Burkina Faso) signed by the government and MNLA in June 2013 for the umpteenth time, Tuareg militants from MNLA attacked and humiliated Malian soldiers in response to the visit to Kidal by then prime minister Moussa Mara¹⁰. The radical Islamists had been reorganising secretly, inside and outside of Mali, to avoid harassment by international military forces. At the same time, they had stepped up their campaign of attacks on French and Malian forces and especially the “blue helmets” of the MINUSCA peacekeeping mission, often working with rebel groups.

The 2015 peace accord and increase in Islamic radicalism

When it became clear that peacekeeping forces alone were not going to solve the seemingly endless conflict, the international community – led by the United Nations and the African Union – urged government authorities and Tuareg insurgents to reach a peace agreement, confront the deep-seated reasons for the conflict and lay the foundation for the country’s political future. In January 2014, President Keita asked the Algerian government to oversee – as it had done in all of the previous disturbances – the political conversations that were intended to be, above all, inclusive and representative. From the start of the peace process in Algiers (June 2014), this was non-negotiable condition for Bamako, despite the head-on opposition of groups that were sympathetic to the MNLA – now banded together in the coalition called the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA, which argued that it was the only legitimate representative of the Tuareg people. Bamako needed to ensure the inclusion of Tuareg groups from the rivalling Ighmad tribe –

⁹ Díez Alcalde, J. Presidente Keita: Democracia frente a los desafíos de Mali. IEEE, 24/09/13. At http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2013/DIEEEA49-2013_Keita_DemocraciaMali_JDA.pdf. Consultation date: 09/09/17.

¹⁰ Mali: Tuareg rebels «defeat government army in Kidal». BBC, 22/05/14. Available at <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-27511448>. Consultation date: 17/09/17.

recognized as the Platform, loyal to the national government and guarantors of Mali's territorial integrity – as well as other civilian movements.

After nine long months of negotiations, an ambitious and demanding preliminary peace agreement was reached in March 2015 and signed by all parties, although the leaders of the Coordination coalition refused to attend the official signing ceremony in Bamako on 15 May. For the Tuareg groups that had instigated the 2012 revolt which threw the country into the most absolute chaos, in collusion with the radical Islamists, the Algiers accord “largely failed to meet the expectations of the Azawad people”. However, they agreed to sign it “at the request of various members of the international community, neighbours and allies in the region (...) and in a spirit of goodwill to demonstrate our interest in reaching a lasting peace»¹¹. However, the international pressure continued and on 20 June the Coordination coalition acquiesced and signed the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali¹² which contained all the provisions for achieving the promised “refounding of Mali”. That refounding process had been delayed by a resurgence of armed conflicts and power struggles between different Tuareg groups and, more dramatically still, the expansion of the jihadists' delusional attempt to prevent the country from advancing toward stability.

A year after the peace agreement was signed, President Keita was alone in his extremely optimistic outlook regarding the advances being made in the political process. Ban Ki Moon, the Secretary General of the United Nations at the time, took a more prudent approach when, albeit recognizing limited progress, he stated that: “The slow progress in the activation of the defence and security provisions in the agreement, including the mixed patrols and the cantonment, the delayed restructuring of the security sector and the continued absence of law enforcement institutions in a large part of the Malian territory, have significantly contributed to the deterioration of the security environment in the north.»¹³.

Similarly, civilian associations and the Malian political opposition, fearful that the establishment of an interim government in the northern region would end up with rebel groups imposing their own power structures, did not give much credence to the benefits of the agreement, since no progress had been made in the country's territorial integrity process. The urgent development projects that would have allowed the population to perceive the “fruits” of

¹¹ Díez Alcalde, J. Mali: Si no avanza el diálogo político, gana la violencia. IEEE, 25/06/16. Available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEE075-2016_Mali_JDA.pdf. Consultation date: 26/08/17.

¹² Accord pour la paix et la réconciliation au Mali. Full text available at <http://maliactu.net/wp-content/uploads/2015/02/ACCORD-POUR-LA-PAIX-ET-DE-RECONCILIATION-AU-MALI-1.pdf>. Consultation date: 26/08/17.

¹³ Report of the Secretary General of the United Nations on the situation in Mali S/2016/498, 31 May 2016. Available at <http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/2016/498>. Consultation date: 21/08/17.

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

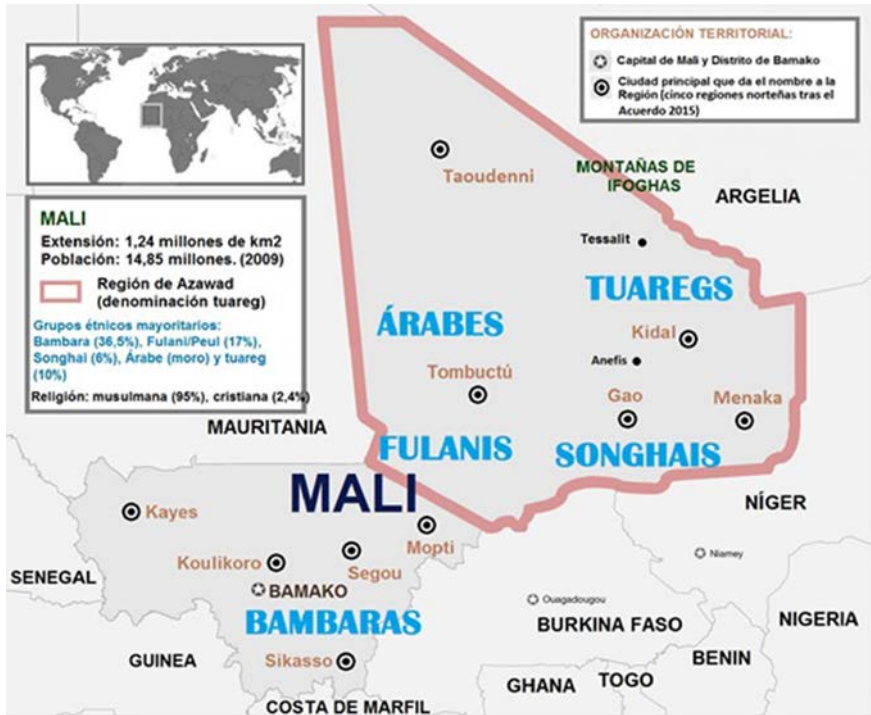


Figure 1.1. Territorial layout of Mali. Main ethnicities and religions.

peace had not been undertaken and the only incontrovertible fact was that the tyranny of the jihadists continued to expand both inside and beyond Mali's borders.

Undoubtedly, in the absence of progress on the political front and as a direct consequence of this situation, radical Islamists gained ground in the volatile Malian scenario. Far from being scared off by the forceful yet insufficiently resolute military response, in order to sabotage the peace process, they revised their macabre strategy and set their sights on striking Western targets with the clear intention of further destabilizing the country, attacking the "distant enemy" - a maxim professed by al-Qaeda since its inception- and having a greater international impact.

As the strikes continued on military forces in the northern part of the country, two attacks in Bamako in 2015 - one on 7 March at the La Terrasse restaurant (5 killed) and the other on 20 November at the Hotel Radisson Blu (27 killed) - marked an alarming turning point in the jihadist threat. This was further reinforced in 2016 with the dual attack in the capital of Burkina Faso (15 January with 27 mortal victims), the attack on the Grand-Bassam tourism complex in Ivory Coast (13 March, with 17 mortal victims) and just a few days later (21 March) the aborted attack on the general HQ of EUTM Mali. This was an obvious expansion of the terrorism perpetrated by Al Qaeda-associated

extremist groups which, FDD's Long Journal War¹⁴, had waged 257 attacks in Mali and the whole of Western Africa in 2016, a 150% increase over 2015 (106 attacks).

Current status of the conflict

In early 2017, with little time left before the expiration of the 18-24 month provisional period established in the Peace Agreement, the only thing that was obvious to both Mali and the rest of the world was that the political process of "refounding Mali" had come to a standstill. At that point, very few of the measures that had been agreed by the parties for that period of time had actually been implemented, with the exception being the peace agreement monitoring committees. As the only path for keeping the political dialogue alive, these committees met periodically thanks to international mediation and, more specifically, thanks to the encouragement and financing of the European Union. In particular, no progress had been made on the "establishment of the authorities responsible for the administration of the Northern communes, localities and regions" or the implementation of the Operational Coordination Mechanism (OCM) that would lead the deployment of joint patrols – Malian military forces and members of the Coordination and Platform militias – in the areas most severely affected by the barbarism. Moreover, the reconciliation process and development projects continued to be a utopia, repeatedly postponed because of the lack of security in the most severely punished northern and central regions.

Clearly, the population was growing weary of the authorities' inability to politically manage a long and deeply entrenched conflict and the most violent factions were the ones to cash in on the situation. From their dens in Malian desert, southern Libya and remote rural areas, the jihadists devised their campaign of terror to capture the central region of Mali and planned attacks beyond the country's borders. Meanwhile, Tuareg groups faced off with each other to protect their own spurious interests, which had little to do with achieving a lasting peace. In the centre of the country, the rivalry between the Fulani (stockbreeders) and (farmers) went well beyond the ancestral fight to work the land. And underlying this entire dramatic scenario, the organized crime that included drug and weapons trafficking and, even worse, human trafficking continued to grow and expand with impunity throughout the region to finance not only the growing dictatorship of the most violent factions but also the endemic corruption affecting the entire country. Not surprisingly, the crude reality was the best indicator that the peace process was not going as planned. As the analyst Sofía Sebastián notes, " it disregards the links

¹⁴ Weiss, C. Al Qaeda linked to more than 250 West African attacks in 2016. FFD's LWJ, 07/01/17. Available at <https://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/01/over-250-al-qaeda-linked-attacks-in-west-africa-in-2016.php>. Consultation date: 14/09/17.

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

between rebel organizations, organized crime, and terrorism, underpinned by shared strategic interests and economic opportunities associated with drug trafficking”¹⁵.

Aware of the political paralysis and the grave deterioration of security but also facing a crucial re-election year in 2018, on 6 January President Keita announced the reactivation of the peace process with a calendar of immediate actions that included: a new National Conference which was billed as a “transcendental milestone for the rehabilitation of social cohesion and co-existence in Mali (...) during which there must be an honest debate about the deep-rooted causes of the conflict»¹⁶; the return of the provisional authorities to all northern localities within three months; and the imminent deployment of the joint patrols. But once again the jihadists moved to thwart even the slightest glimmer of stability and proceeded to trample the fragile peace process. On 18 January, members of the Al Mourabitoun jihadist group perpetrated the largest terrorist attack to date in Mali, at a military barracks in the city of Gao. According to official Malian sources, the attack left more than 60 soldiers and members of the Coordination and Platform coalitions dead as they prepared to launch the first “military reconciliation unit”. The attack triggered a new controversy between the signatories of the fragile Peace Agreement: “Why the hurry?” asked the CMA’s Ag Mahamed. “If they don’t have the resources to guarantee security, then it would be best to keep them in a safe place until the conditions are right for the OCM to work»¹⁷.

Although the attack was a major setback for the peace process, IBK was determined to press ahead with his initiatives, many of which did not produce the expected results and only served to discredit him among the Malian population and increase the criticism levelled by political opponents. After being postponed a number of times, the National Conference was held at the end of March, and despite the initial boycott by Coordination and the opposition, all parties were in attendance at the closing ceremony in Bamako on 2 April, although no tangible signs of progress toward peace came out of it. For the first time ever, the final declaration on the summit called for negotiations with the Malian leaders of the jihadist groups: Amadou Koufa of the Macina Liberation Front and Ag Ghali of Ansar Dine but the proposal

¹⁵ Sebastian, S. *Why Peace Negotiations in Mali Will Not Succeed*. International Relations and Security Network (ISN), 27/04/15. Available at <http://www.isn.ethz.ch/Digital-Library/Articles/Detail/?lng=en&id=190170>. Consultation date: 05/05/15.

¹⁶ Daou, S. Conférence d’entente nationale: Le Président de la République, Ibrahim Boubacar Kéïta, annonce la tenue des assises nationales pour mars 2017. Malijet, 06/01/17. Available at <http://www.maliweb.net/nation/conference-dentente-nationale-president-de-republique-ibrahim-boubacar-keita-annonce-tenue-assises-nationales-mars-2017-1975202.html>. Consultation date: 10/07/17.

¹⁷ Rugiriza, E. et al. *Gaoattack highlights fragility of Malipeaceprocess*. Justice Info, 23/01/17. Available at <http://www.justiceinfo.net/en/justice-reconciliation/31796-gao-attack-highlights-fragility-of-mali-peace-process.html>. Consultation date: 16/07/17.

that was rejected outright by the government of Mali. It was agreed to draw up a “Charter for peace, unity and reconciliation in Mali”, which was delivered by President IBK on 20 June and rejected just a few hours later by the CMA: “There is a radical and systematic denial by the state of the Azawad question a formulated in the process. The government’s position is far from reconciling the parties and therefore no agreement is possible»¹⁸.

Keita was also unable to move forward with the most important political reform: the first revision of the 1992 Constitution, which was provided for in the Algiers Accord. A referendum was scheduled for 9 July. The signatory groups, in a play to achieve greater territorial representation in Bamako, demanded that the newly reformed constitution¹⁹ sanction, among other things, the creation of nine territorial regions – five of them in the north effectively already existed – and the creation of a Senate. But they also demanded new presidential prerogatives (direct election by two-thirds of the Senate, in addition to the presidents of the Supreme Court and the Constitutional Court), which infuriated the Malian citizenry. Starting in June, Bamako saw massive demonstrations organised by the “An té A bana” movement (“Don’t touch my constitution”) against the reforms because, in addition to giving the President more power, the referendum would exclude a large part of the population not controlled by the central government. Under pressure from people, on 19 August President Keita announced that he was postponing the referendum indefinitely: “I have done this because, given the way that our country is confronted with so many major challenges, we cannot add to the existing problems controversy and misunderstanding”²⁰. Clearly, an unprecedented victory for Malian civilian society which has nonetheless created a new source of friction with the CMA, which believes that the current Constitution must necessarily be amended so that the terms of the Peace Agreement can be officially ratified.

The Tuaregs and their questionable involvement in resolving the conflict

As people in the capital roundly rejected the direction which the peace process was taking, in the north the different groups making up the two rebel movements led by the Tuaregs, Coordinator and Platform (see Plan 1.2.), once

¹⁸ The “Charter for Peace” presented by the President of Mali was rejected by the Coordination of Azawad Movements. Africa Fundación Sur, 21/06/17. Available at <http://www.africafundacion.org/spip.php?article27899>. Consultation date: 13/07/17.

¹⁹ Révision de la constitution du 25 Février 1992. Proposition d’amendement. Dépôt N° 2017-16/5L, projet de loi portant. Assemblée Nationale, République de Mali, 01/06/17. Available at http://malijet.com/a_la_une_du_mali/187726-texte-integral-de-la-nouve-lle-constitution-malienne.html. Consultation date: 07/08/17.

²⁰ Mali president postpones referendum on reforms. Reuters, 19/08/17. Available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-mali-politics-idUSKCN1AZ0CS>. Consultation date: 21/08/17.

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

again demonstrated their erratic and volatile position regarding the peace process. In the months of June and July, and in order to further undermine the fragile peace process, the CMA militias and the Tuareg Imghad and Allies Self-Defence Group (GATIA) continued to stoke armed clashes in Kidal²¹ – the bastion of the CMA's ifoghas – with the aim of gaining more territorial power and at the same time reaping the formidable economic benefits of controlling the illegal trafficking trade.

To stem the fighting and prevent it from spreading to Gao (a region dominated by the Platform) Bamako sent Mahmoud Dicko to mediate. Dicko, the President of the High Islamic Council and an increasingly prominent religious authority in the peace process, managed to stop certain confrontations in which, according to MINUSMA, both sides were committing human rights violations²². Finally, on 23 August, the clashing rebel groups reached a two-pronged agreement which, for the time being, seems to be making some positive progress vis-a-vis the battered peace agreement²³. On the one hand, they signed a fifteen-day ceasefire – paradoxically in the middle of the definitive ceasefire brokered in the Peace Agreement – which on 9 September was extended for an additional thirty days²⁴. On the other hand, they agreed on the return of the governor to the city of Kidal, thereby reinstating the government's presence in the five northern regions, based on the way in which the territory was divided in the Agreement: Menaka, Gao, Timbuktu, Kidal and Toaoudenni. These provisional authorities must now focus their efforts on preparing for the local and regional elections that are slated to be held before the end of 2017. However, given the precarious situation in the northern part of the country, this is unlikely to happen.

By all indications, the Tuareg groups yielded to international pressure, especially the rapid decision of the United Nations²⁵, in response to a specific request by President Keita in early August, to impose a “series of selective

²¹ Ahemd, B. Mali: risque d'escalade après les affrontements meurtriers près de Kidal. Jeune Afrique, 28/07/17. Available at: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/461841/politique/mali-risque-descalade-apres-les-affrontements-meurtriers-pres-de-kidal/>. Consultation date: 12/08/17.

²² Ahmed, B. Mali : Gatia et CMA impliqués dans des violations des droits de l'homme à Kidal, selon l'ONU. Jeune Afrique, 08/08/17. Available at: <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/464568/politique/mali-gatia-et-cma-impliques-dans-des-violations-des-droits-de-lhomme-a-kidal-selon-lonu/>. Consultation date: 12/08/17.

²³ Mali: retour du gouverneur à Kidal, trêve entre CMA et Gatia. RFI Afrique, 22/08/17. Available at: <http://www.rfi.fr/afrique/20170822-mali-retour-gouverneur-kidal-tre-ve-cma-gatia>. Consultation date: 23/08/17.

²⁴ Cessez-le-feu entre les groupes armés: la CMA et la Plateforme renouvellent la trêve pour 30 jours. Studio Tamani, 07/09/17. Available at: <http://www.studiotamani.org/index.php/politique/12792-cessez-le-feu-entre-les-groupes-armes-la-cma-et-la-plateforme-renouvellent-la-tre-ve-pour-30-jours>. Consultation date: 08/09/17.

²⁵ United Nations Security Council Resolution 2374 (2017) of 5 September 2017. Available at: [en http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2374\(2017\)](http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2374(2017)).

sanctions against those responsible for thwarting the enforcement of the Agreement”, in response to the “repeated violations of the ceasefire since early June 2017, particularly in the Kidal region”.

While the alternating cycles of confrontation and cooperation between the Tuareg groups continue to repeat themselves, there is little doubt that until a firm commitment can be reached that brings stability to northern Mali, the extremists will gain more ground across the entire region and the civilian population will continue to be deprived of the tangible benefits of peace in terms of safety, governance and development.

Stopping the tyranny, recruitment and financing of jihadist movement

Thanks to the Operation Serval counteroffensive, in 2013 the radical Islamists lost control of the territory and were decimated on the battlefield as French soldiers, initially supported by AFISMA and later by the UN MINUSMA forces, fought in the cities and the most remote corners of the Sahelian desert. In recent years, the jihadist groups have retreated to their hideouts, recovered their recruitment capabilities, expanded and projected their acts of terror well beyond the northern region of the country and honed their terrorism skills, which have become increasingly complex and lethal. They have succeeded in converting Mali into the epicentre of the African jihadist movement, despite the considerable international military deployment – the French forces of Operational Barkhane and the “blue helmets” of the MINUSMA peacekeeping forces – and the reinforcement of Malian forces in the north, many of them trained by the EUTM Mali mission.

From a military perspective, due to the disparate capabilities of the deployed forces and their limited number - some 15,000 troops - it has not been possible to guarantee their own protection or that of the civilian population across a region that covers more than 800 square kilometres in the northern region of Mali alone. In addition, these forces face the ubiquitous and elusive threat of jihadist terrorism, which has its “best allies” in: instability, lack of governance, and underdevelopment, not to mention its pragmatic connivance with organized crime to continue recruiting followers of its abject cause among a poor, defenceless and alienated population, often with no hope for the future other than joining the fight.

A scenario that has highlighted the fact that security measures alone – although indispensable – will not bring an end to radical Islamic violence. The situation becomes even more critical when, in the absence of a government to protect them, the only way for many young Africans to protect themselves and their families or their subsistence is to enlist with terrorist or rebel groups and to travel with them, as is the case in northern Mali. A complex equation that must be solved in order to eliminate the circumstances that are allowing jihadist groups in Africa to continue recruiting supporters to their

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

ranks, often using terror tactics. Because despite the popular narrative in the West, the role of Salafist indoctrination and radicalization is not as decisive as it is portrayed to be, although it should not be underestimated.

It is within this context which is favourable to their wicked cause that the different supporters of the Jihad movement have managed to forge stronger bonds and coordinate their campaign of terror ever more effectively. In March 2017, in a drive to unify Al Qaeda members in the region, a new alliance was created by the name of "*Jamaat Nusrat Al Islam wa Al Muslimin (JNIM)*" (Islam and Muslim Support Group). Since it appeared on the scene, this group has become the largest one on the African continent and the most widely extended in terms of land area, whose followers are an amalgamation of races and ethnicities. This coalition is the result of the unification of some of the Sahel's oldest and most active extremist militias: AQMI, Ansar Dine and Al Morabitoun as well as the Macina Liberation Front²⁶ which was formed in 2015 by Fulani extremists who broke away from MUYAO, which many analysts believe has all but disappeared (see plan 1.2).

In a joint statement released through Mauritanian media sympathetic to the extremist cause, the Tuareg terrorist and head of Ansar Dine, Iyad Ag Ghaly, proclaimed himself the leader of this new Al Qaeda franchise and renewed his oath of loyalty to the organization's global leader, Ayman Al-Zawahiri and also to the emir of AQMI, Abdelmalek Droukdel, which for the first time put its leadership in the hands of a Malian extremist group with the clear intention of "nationalizing" the Jihad to gain social legitimacy among the Malian population. Just a few days later, on 5 March, the spokesperson for JNIM claimed responsibility for its first attack on a military base in Boulikessi (a city on the border with Burkina Faso) in which 11 Malian soldiers were assassinated. Since then, its attacks on Malian and international forces have been constant in northern and central Mali. To date, its most lethal attack and the first one perpetrated against western targets, was the attack on the "Le Campement" resort (six kilometres from Bamako), in which five people died²⁷, among them a member of the EUTM Mali mission.

Although it is still early to know the real extent of the impact it will have, and considering that the different militias will continue to act independently, there can be no doubt about the two objectives obviously pursued by this new jihadist alliance. On the one hand, it is a clear warning to the African soldiers of Daesh who seek to occupy the African domain of Al Qaeda as they continue to retreat from what little remains of the territories they once

²⁶ T. Joscelyn. *Analysis: Al Qaeda groups reorganize in West Africa*. FDD, s Long War Journal, 13/03/17. Available at: <http://www.longwarjournal.org/archives/2017/03/analysis-al-qaeda-groups-reorganize-in-west-africa.php>. Consultation date: 16/07/17.

²⁷ Al Qaeda claims responsibility for terror attack that killed at least five people at luxury resort in Mali. Independent, 20/06/17. Available at: <http://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/africa/mali-attack-resort-bamako-le-campement-al-qaeda-claim-responsibility-death-toll-injured-latest-a7798361.html>. Consultation date: 21/06/17.

controlled in Syria and Iraq. On the other hand, it is the clearest indication yet of the jihadists' intention to position themselves as the most violent and elusive players in Mali's political process and, in keeping with their declared objective, to impose the most rigid Islamic law both inside the country and beyond its borders. The situation would surely be even more dangerous if, as Ag Ghaly proposes, JNIM were to join the other two jihadist groups operating in the region: Ansarul Islam in Burkina Faso, whose leader, Ibrahim Dicko, has close ties to Ansar Dine; and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara, a splinter group of Al-Mourabitoun which has sworn loyalty to Daesh and operates in the border region between Mali, Niger and Burkina Faso under the leadership of Adnan Abu Walid Sahraoui.



Figure 1.2. Tuareg rebel groups and jihadist militias (Sept. 2017). Prepared by: IESEE.

The role of external players

In early 2012, the rebel and jihadist threat that had been gestating for decades in the northern part of the country – silently and with scant repercussions beyond Mali's borders – exploded in violence. Not only the Bamako government but the entire international community, inside and outside of Africa, took notice and was immediately alarmed. Since then, as the situation has gotten progressively worse, Mali, and by extension the Western Sahel, have become a focal point of external cooperation, which has not ceased to grow and to redefine its strategy to curb and eradicate an amalgamation of increasingly challenging threats, to date without success. As underscored by the heads of state at the United Nations meeting at the

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

outset of the Malian crisis, “the consolidation of a jihadist sanctuary in the Sahel, as well as the drug, arms and human trafficking in the region are creating not only an inadmissible humanitarian crisis but a grave threat to international peace and security”²⁸.

In terms of bilateral efforts, France, as a former colonial power that still has very close political and economic ties to the country, has been the Malian government’s staunchest in its fight against Salafist terror and also its most vociferous defender before the international community. Hence, the launch of Operation Serval (3,000 troops, 2013) to contain the jihadist offensive, which was relieved by Barkhane (a 4,000 strong contingent deployed in the G5 Sahel countries since 2014) are examples of the France’s firm commitment to security in Mali – where more than 6,000 of its citizens live – and the entire region. France also played a key role in the United Nations Security Council approving the deployment of MINUSCA and throwing its support behind the G5 Sahel Joint Force, and was very active in promoting the launch of the European Union’s EUTM Mali training mission.

African and international organizations are currently the key players in external aid to Mali. There is a tremendous contingent of civil and military aid missions on the ground, primarily security forces, but also a significant political support component, especially by the European Union, whose mission is to work with the Bamako government and the signatories of the Peace Agreement to ensure enforcement of the Agreement, with special emphasis on reinforcing the rule of law, democracy and the development of key pillars for stabilising the country in particular and the entire Sahelian region in general. However, there are some disadvantages to this recognizable international commitment which should be borne in mind in the interest of overcoming the challenges and threats facing the regional of Africa, for the good of all.

Firstly, the main focus of this international aid is security, which is necessary but does not address the root of the problems that are causing the violence. Steps must be taken to incentivize good governance, stability and development, all of which are the fundamental responsibility of the state itself. Secondly, national leaders are clinging excessively to the narrative that radical Islamic terrorism is a global threat and as such its eradication requires all the international support in the world. An indisputable assertion, to be sure, but one which often results in their strategies that are not at once focused on implementing economic and social policies designed to prevent radicalism or jihadism from serving as an escape route from poverty, abandonment or frustration. Finally, the proliferation of regional

²⁸ Díez Alcalde, J. Reunión de alto nivel en Naciones Unidas sobre el Sahel: consenso internacional sin soluciones concretas. IEEE, 10/10/12. Available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2012/DIEEEA45-2012_CumbreSahel_NNUU_JDA.pdf. Consultation date: 10/09/17

and international organization will similar objectives, all in the same area, something which has been referred to by Colonel Mora as “institutional polygamy”, requires intensive coordination and equilibrium; otherwise, “their effectiveness will be limited to distributing resources and making decisions and that in turn will cause a credibility problem for governments among their own people”²⁹.

The United Nations: MINUSMA, a demanding mandate in a jihadist environment

Within the framework of the United Nations, the international community’s decision to redirect the conflict (UN Security Council Resolution 2100³⁰) is embodied in the deployment of the United Nations Multidimensional Integrated Stabilization Mission in Mali (MINUSMA)³¹. Since it was launched in July 2013, more than 14,000 members of the military and police forces have done their best to fulfil a demanding mandate in an environment where, for the first time, jihadism poses the greatest threat to the civilian population and the security forces themselves. In fact, in just four years MINUSMA has become the most lethal mission ever deployed, with 123 mortal victims. According to the Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, there are still “significant deficiencies in military capability, which makes it difficult for them to perform the entrusted tasks in one of the most hostile peacekeeping environments»³².

Convinced that this will inevitably be a very long mission, in June the Security Council³³ extended the mission’s mandate through June 2018, reiterating that the “strategic priority continues to be supporting the application by the government and the Platform and Coordination coalitions, as well as other pertinent Malian stakeholders, of the Agreement for Peace and Reconciliation in Mali, in particular the political and security aspects of the accord and especially with regard to the re-establishment and gradual expansion of the government’s authority”, in addition to protecting the population “against the asymmetrical threats” of rebels and jihadists.

²⁹ Mora, J. G5 Sahel: La Fuerza [antiterrorista] Conjunta (FC-G5S). IEEE, 19/07/17. Available at: <http://www.ieee.es/contenido/noticias/2017/07/DIEEEA37-2017.html>. Consultation date: 08/08/17.

³⁰ United Nations. Security Council Resolution 2100/2103 of 25 April 2013. Available at: [http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2100\(2013\)](http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2100(2013)).

³¹ MINUSMA official website: <http://www.un.org/es/peacekeeping/missions/minusma/>.

³² United Nations. Report of the Secretary General on the situation in Mali (S/2017/478), 6 June 2017. Available at: <https://undocs.org/sp/S/2017/478>.

³³ United Nations. Security Council Resolution 2364 (2017) of 29 June 2017. Available at: [http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2364\(2017\)](http://www.un.org/es/comun/docs/?symbol=S/RES/2364(2017)).

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

The European Union: an integral approach in support of its neighbours

According to the Spanish Ambassador, Ángel Losada, the EU's special Representative for the Sahel, «Europe's security depends on the Sahel's security» because it is a vital region “in terms of its own security and the region's importance in migratory and developmental matters; and also because it is a route commonly used by terrorist networks and traffickers of people, goods and weapons”³⁴.

An accurate reflection that underpins the EU's cooperation policy in Mali since the beginning of the crisis, based on an integrated approach to resolving all aspects of the conflict. Today, however, Mali is one of the places where Europeans have focused their efforts abroad, not only in terms of the resources they have deployed there but also in terms of the critical role the EU plays as one of the key external players involved in the enforcement of the Peace Agreement.

The first mission to hit the ground was EUTM Mali³⁵, with orders to train a decimated and inoperative Malian army. Since April 2013, European military forces have trained 10,280 soldiers and officers of the Malian Armed Forces and eight Interarms Tactical Groups. A larger and considerably better equipped and trained military force, which in 2013 had just 7,000 members, is now able to control the jihadist threat in northern and central Mali with some efficiency. At present, the mission comprises 579 members, 136 of whom are Spaniards. Since the beginning Spain has been the largest contributor to the mission in global figures, a mission that was led by Spain in 2004 and 2015 (General García-Vaquero) and will be again January 2018.

In 2015, the European Council launched the civilian EUCAP Sahel Mali³⁶ mission which, like its counterpart in Niger, is meant to assist security forces inside the country in restoring the government's authority throughout. At this time, all of the European Union's efforts are focused on supporting the deployment of the G5 Sahel Joint Force, especially its Common Security and Defence Policy. This is a comprehensive African initiative which, as noted by the EU's High Representative, Federica Mogherini, in Bamako on 6 June after announcing Europe's €50 million donation to this ambitious project, seeks to “join forces in the fight against terrorism, all kinds of trafficking, including human trafficking, and improve border control. The cooperation between G-5

³⁴ Sahuquillo, M. «La seguridad de Europa depende de la seguridad en el Sahel». El País, 25/06/17. Available at: https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/06/25/actualidad/1498390337_072696.html. Consultation date: 07/07/17.

³⁵ EUTM Mali official website: <http://eutmmali.eu/>.

³⁶ EUCAP Sahel Mali official website: <https://eucap-sahel-mali.eu/>.

Sahel countries is the key to success for ensuring the security of the Sahel territory»³⁷.

G5 SAHEL: A joint force to guarantee security and facilitate development

G5 Sahel is the latest regional organization on the African continent. Since February 2014, its members include Burkina Faso, Mali, Mauritania, Niger and Chad and its purpose is to take a global approach to overcoming security and developmental challenges through cooperation and mutual agreement.

Just three years later, in Bamako on 6 February 2017, the five heads of state approved the organization's first major initiative: the G5 Sahel Joint Force (JF)³⁸. With the support of France and the entire European Union, work is underway to prepare for the G5's deployment which, despite the challenges it faces, is scheduled to take place by the end of October of this year. Although it was agreed at the Summit that the Joint Force must have a clear mandate from the United Nations, France's demands before the Security Council did not have the expected result. To prevent a veto by the US³⁹, the Security Council ultimately adopted a basic resolution which merely "welcomes the deployment of the G5-S JF (...) and its operating concept" as well as "its effort to create a safer environment in the Sahel region and in so doing facilitate the fulfilment by MINUSMA of its mandate to stabilize Mali". The resolution makes no mention of the use of force or when the operations will end, and this has become one of the most pressing problems for deployment.

Despite this setback, planning continued and on 9 September the Force's headquarters in Sevare (Mali) were inaugurated by President Keita. In the meantime, different options are being explored for obtaining the funds needed to launch and maintain this new African mission. According to the initial plans, the G5-S JF would have 5,000 members in the first phase and would increase to 10,000 with an additional deployment in the second phase. The most notable and positive thing about its mandate is that in addition to its priority objective of fighting terrorism and trafficking (drugs and humans), the Joint Force will also assist with restoring the government's authority, providing humanitarian aid and implementing development projects. Hence, the operation combines security, governance and development, the three

³⁷ UE entrega 50 millones de euros para la fuerza conjunta del G5 del Sahel. EP, 06/06/17. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-ue-entrega-50-millones-euros-fuerza-conjunta-sahel-20170606070402.html>. Consultation date: 12/07/17.

³⁸ G5 SAHEL. Communiqué final du Sommet de Chefs d'Etat du G5 Sahel. Yamena, 20/11/15. Available at: http://www.g5sahel.org/images/fichiers/communiqu_final_du_Sommet20_11_2015.PDF. Consultation date: 21/07/17.

³⁹ Mali urges UN to support anti-jihadists force for the Sahel. AFP, 17/06/17. Available at: <http://www.news24.com/Africa/News/mali-urges-un-to-support-anti-jihadists-force-for-the-sahel-20170616>. Consultation date: 22/07/17.

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

essential elements that are needed to end the armed conflict and eradicate jihadist terrorism. An ambitious “African solution to an African problem” whose success will depend not only on operational effectiveness but primarily on the determination and ability of the governments involved to supplement military action with policies focused on resolving and remediating the deep-rooted underlying problems that are destabilizing Mali and the entire region.

Conclusions and outlook for the future

The total collapse and chaos experienced by Mali in 2012 is now behind it, but there is still a long way to go in definitively closing the chapter on a violent political crisis that continues to threaten the present and future of Mali, a conflict whose repercussions are being felt far beyond its own borders. For the time being, efforts to enforce the fragile Peace Agreement have been too heavily focused on security and the incipient restoration of the government’s power in the north of the country, without producing the desired results. However, there have been few measures focused on reconciliation, justice and social development, all of which are essential to reinforcing the meagre advances made in the interest of peace and the fruits of which are still imperceptible to the people. It is only through security, good governance and progress that a country can be credibly and viably rebuilt.

Despite enormous international support on the ground in Mali, the complex and pervasive spiral of violence continues to impose its macabre reign of terror in northern and central Mali, which is spreading across the entire region and beyond its borders. However, the primary objective must be to put an end to the continuous violations of the ceasefire by the Coordination and Platform coalitions, whose commitment to the Peace Agreement continues to be highly questionable; calm the confrontations between communes in the centre of the country; and above all eradicate the expansion, the recruitment capabilities and the financing of the jihadist barbarism, whose violent actions are becoming increasingly violent and far-reaching. One of the indispensable requirements for doing so is to rein in the organized crime networks: the invisible threat underpinning the violence that fosters omnipresent corruption and undermines peaceful co-existence.

Overcoming the numerous obstacles faced by this African country is a colossal challenge and one that will be all but impossible if urgent and decisive steps are not taken to address the most deep-rooted causes of this deeply-embedded conflict. Otherwise, we’ll just have to wait until Mali, the epicentre and key to the stability of the Western Sahel, becomes a more serious threat to global peace and security: a scenario which the international community should not tolerate and one which the national leaders, who are responsible for what happens to their countries, should prevent.

Geopolitical indicators

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS | |
|---|--|
| Land area | 1,240,000 km ² |
| 2016 population | 17.88 million |
| 2016 Population growth rate (annual %) | 3.0 |
| Population structure (age/% of total) 2016. | 0-24: 48.17 |
| Average age of population: 16.2 | 25-64: 45.1 |
| | > 65: 3.7 |
| Ethnic groups | Mande 50% (Bambara, Malinke, Soninke), Fulani / Peul 17%, Voltaic 12%, Songhai 6%, Tuaregs and Arabs (Moors) 10%, other 5% |
| Religions (2006 census 2006) | Muslim 94.8%, Christian 2.4%, Animist 2%, None 0.5%, Unspecified 0.3% |
| 2016 fertility rate (children per woman) | 6.01 |
| 2016 mortality rate (children under 5 /1,000 inhabitants) | 115 |
| 2016 literacy rate (% of people ≥ 15 years of age) | 33.1 |
| 2016 youth unemployment (15-24 years of age) | 11.1 |
| 2011 poverty rate (% of population) | US\$1.9 per day: 49.3 |
| 2016 GDP growth (annual %) 2016 | 5.3 |
| 2016 per capita GDP (US\$) | 760 |
| 2016 GDP structure, aggregate value as % | Agriculture: 41% |
| | Industry: 19% |
| | Services: 40% |
| Military spending (% of GDP) | 2.3% |

Principal sources: World Bank (<https://datos.bancomundial.org/pais/mali>) and the CIA's The World Factbook (<https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ml.html>). Consultation date: 12/09/17.

Mali: Obstacles and Responses to a Complex Threat

Conflict Timeline

| DATE | EVENT |
|--------------------------|---|
| 22 September 1960 | Independence of the Republic of Mali following Senegal's withdrawal. President of the Republic: Modibo Keita. |
| 1961-1964 | 2nd Tuareg rebellion: Armed uprising with separatist aspirations. Military repression. |
| 1990-1996 | 3rd Tuareg rebellion: Armed uprising, immobilization agreement and reintegration of rebels. |
| 2007-2009 | Tuareg rebellion: Armed uprising. Negotiated ceasefire and declaration of amnesty for rebels. |

| DATE | EVENT | |
|----------------------|--------------------|---|
| MALI CONFLICT | | |
| 2012 | 17 January | Start of the Tuareg revolt led by NMLA with rebel attacks on the army in Menaka, Aguelhok and Tessalit. |
| | 22 March | Coup d'état led by Captain Sanogo that overthrew President Touré and put a military junta in place. |
| | 06 April | The NMLS unilaterally declares the Independence of the "State of Azawad". |
| | 12 April | Dioncounda Traoré sworn in as interim President of Mali and Cheick Diarra as Prime Minister. |
| | 27 June | Battle of Gao. MUJWA and Ansar Dine expel the NMLA. Northern enclaves controlled by jihadists. |
| | 12 July | With the capture of Kidal and Timbuktu, Ansar Dine's power in northern Mali is consolidated. |
| 2013 | 10 January | Start of offensive by armed terrorist and extremist groups targeting southern Mali, led by Ansar Dine. |
| | 11 January | Start of the French Operation Serval to repel the jihadist offensive and retake the northern enclaves. |
| | 18 June | Tentative agreement signed by the government, the High Council for the Unity of Azawad and the NMLA in Burkina Faso. |
| | 4 September | Ibrahim Boubacar Keita sworn in as President of the Republic of Mali. |
| 2014 | June | Peace conversations between the government and Tuareg rebel groups begin in Algiers. |
| 2015 | 15 May | Peace and Reconciliation Agreement signed by all parties except the Coordination of Azawad Movements (CMA) coalition. |
| | 20 June | CMA ratifies the Peace and Reconciliation Agreement. |
| 2017 | 18 January | Largest jihadist terrorist attack in Mali (at least 60 killed) on a barracks in Gao. |
| | 28 February | Reinstatement of provisional authorities commences in five northern regions. |
| | 2 March | Announcement of the foundation of the jihadist group. |
| | 2 April | Closing ceremony of national peace conference in Bamako. |
| | 19 August | President Keita announces postponement of constitution reforms (no date). |
| | 23 August | Cease fire signed by CMA and Platform following the confrontations of recent months. Return of provisional government to Kidal. |

Bibliography

- CHIVVIS, C. *The French War on Al Qaeda in Africa* Paperback, Cambridge (UK): Cambridge University Press, 2016.
- CALDUCH, Rafael. *Impacto estratégico de la crisis del Sahel. Panorama Estratégico 2013*, Madrid: Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 2013.
- COULIBALY, Ch. *Crise Politico-Institutionnelle au Mali*, Bamako: Harmattan Mali, 2016.
- GALY, M. and BERTRAND, B. et al. *La Guerre au Mali*, París: Editions La Découverte, 2013.
- INIESTA, F. *El Planeta Negro. Aproximación histórica a las culturas africanas*, Madrid: Los Libros de la Catarata, 1998.
- LACHER, W. and TULL, D. *Mali: beyond counterterrorism*, Berlin: SWP German Institute for International and Security Affairs, 2013.
- LEMARCHAND, Philippe. *Atlas de África. El Continente Olvidado*, Madrid: Acanto Editorial, 2000.
- BALLESTEROS M., y DIEZ, J. et al. *Sahel 2015, origen de desafíos y oportunidades*. CE. 176. Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Madrid, 2015.
- ROBLES PIQUER, Carlos. *Europa y el drama de África*, Madrid: Editorial Taurus Grupo Santillana, 2006.
- SELLIER, Jean. *Atlas de los pueblos de África*, Barcelona: Editorial Paidós Ibérica, 2005.
- THOMSON, A. *An introduction to African politics (Fourth Edition)*, New York: Routledge, 2016.
- UNDP. *Journey to Extremism in Africa. Drives, incentives, and the tipping point for recruitment*. United Nations, 2017.
- WILLIAMS, P. *War & Conflict in Africa (Second Edition)*, Cambridge (UK): Polity Press, 2016.

Chapter two

Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict

José Pardo de Santayana y Gómez de Olea

Abstract

The war in Ukraine is already in its third year and there has been little progress for its resolution. Both this war and the annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation have produced a marked deterioration of Russian-Western relations reminiscent of some aspects of the Cold War. The pressures of the West are not giving any result. The Kremlin has reacted by strengthening its international position through its military intervention in Syria. The resulting multi-polar order aligns Russia and China against the United States. Russia trains and prepares its Army in that war, where they are testing new weapons and procedures that shows how future wars could look like. Although the media does not pay much attention to this war, it occupies a prime place in world's geostrategy.

Keywords

Ukraine, Russian Federation, USA, EU, Crimea, Donbass, war.

Introduction

The Russian annexation of Crimea in February 2014 and the subsequent conflict in Donbass has changed the strategic scenario of Europe, returning to some of the Cold War characteristics in the East-West relation. The Ukrainian conflict has become one of the main obstacles to build on a constructive international order and the reason that triggered the current multipolar order with the Russian Federation plus China in clash with USA. This situation does not favour any of the parties making it very difficult to find a solution considering the distrust that is increasing between Russia and the West.

Furthermore, this conflict is a privileged observatory to understand the *modus operandi* and the serious consequences of the wars in our time, where cyber-threats are omnipresent, drones are plunging into the battle zone and the hybrid strategy is contaminating everything, blurring all kinds of borders. This conflict is emerging as the most relevant military testing ground of our time and the war scenario with the greatest electromagnetic intensity in the world.

The paper *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2014* (2014 Geopolitical Conflict Panorama) explained the conflict background in detail as well as the characteristics of the Ukrainian republic¹. These are the most relevant events.

With a total population of 44,033,874 inhabitants (July 2017), the country has considerable national and language divisions: 77.8% of the population is Ukrainian with different historical origins and 17.3% are Russians, in addition to a dozen other nationalities, none of which exceeds 1% of the population. 67.5% speaks Ukrainian, 29.6% Russian and 2.9% speaks other minority languages². The most important fracture however is regional in nature, as ethnic Russians and Russian-speaking people live mostly in the east of the country, in the provinces closest to the Russian border. The further to the west, the greater the Ukrainian nationalism that is Russian-hostile. The war, as is logical, has contributed to polarise society even further.

To understand the relation between the republics of the former Soviet Union (USSR) and its Russian centre of gravity, one has to start with the second Congress of the Russian Social Democratic Labour Part, held between Brussels and London in 1903, where the Bolshevik split and became the leading revolutionary force of the Russian empire. Some of the points proposed by Lenin entrusted the recognition of the right of self-determination of Russian-

¹ BALLESTEROS, Miguel Ángel, «Ucrania y el nuevo liderazgo estratégico ruso», *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2014*, IEEE. Available from http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_geopolitico_2014.pdf.

² Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), *The World Fact Book 2017*. Available from <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/up.html>.

oppressed nations. This set the grounds for the future resolution of regional integration matters of the various USSR republics, which under section 72 of the Constitution the right to separate freely from it had been recognised.

The possibility of a Soviet Republic becoming independent from the USSR seemed like an illusion during the Cold War. It was configured as a union of territories constituted as republics linked to the central control in Moscow, which had de facto absolute control over all of them. However, Hungary opened its borders to Austria in September 1989 and initiated a transformation process in East-West relations that would end with the fall of the Berlin Wall two months later, the collapse of the Soviet Union in December 1991 and, later, with the dismemberment of all its republics.

Ironically, what ended up opening the door to leaving would be the Russian Federative Republic. The debacle was triggered when in June 1990, the Russian Congress declared the sovereignty of its territory. However, it was the Baltic countries where the nationalist feelings favouring the split had first gained force.

If the declaration of independence of Baltic republics was to be expected and even be absolutely unstoppable and unavoidable, Ukraine was a different matter. The unionist referendum had been initially held there in March 1991. The result then was in favour of maintaining the USSR with 70.2% and a participation of 83.5%, and an overwhelming support from the most eastern area³.

After the Russian Federative Republic, Ukraine was the most important and populated republic in the USSR, with considerable farming and mining weight as well as heavy steelworks from the Donbass area. Furthermore, for the great Russia, this republic was of special historical, political and cultural relevance.

After the inclusion of Ukraine in the USSR in 1922, certain territories in the west had developed their own identity, separate from the soviet Russia, which the central government tried to appease. As a result of Gorbachev's Perestroika, the Ukraine Communist Party fractured between those that wanted to move forward along the lines of the reform and national sentiment, led by Leonid Kravchuk, and the conservatives, in favour of the opposite. The progress of the Perestroika favoured the reinforcement of identity positions.

On the day after the attempted coup d'état in August 1991, Ukraine declared its independence and decreed the suspension of activities of the Communist Party. Passions arose at all levels of society and the desire to seek a better future disconnected from the out-dated USSR joined the independent nationalism and identity trend. Despite the declaration of its Parliament, the

³ LÓPEZ-MEDEL, Jesús, MAÑUECO, Rafael M., «Gorbachov. Primavera de la libertad. Ocaso y caída del Imperio Ruso», Study, 2016.

temporary President Kravchuk announced that all decisions related to the Union Treaty would be suspended until after an independence referendum to be held on 1 December. The referendum question was: Do you support the Ukrainian declaration of Independence? The proposal was supported by 90.32% of the votes and a participation of 84%, ratifying Kravchuk as President⁴. On 8 December, Ukraine, Russia and Belarus agreed to create the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS); an international organisation with a profile somewhat lower than initially expected and in which Ukraine was not a member De Jure, as it did not ratify the statute of the organisation, although it is a de facto participant.

The most delicate matter at that time was regarding nuclear weapons deployed in Ukraine; the third arsenal in the world after USA and Russia. However, international pressures and the memory of the Chernobyl accident helped Ukraine to return all its tactical weapons to the Russian Federation in 1992, which would later also hand over the strategic nuclear heads, signing the Non-Proliferation Treaty in November 1994 and declaring itself a nuclear-free State⁵.

The matter of the Crimean region, which had been transferred by Kruchoy from Russia to Ukraine in 1954 and the status of Autonomous Republic, was another important challenge resolved in 1994 after Moscow signed with Kiev a commitment recognising Crimea as part of the Ukrainian territory, as well as the sanctity of its borders.

In 1995, Russia and Ukraine signed an agreement whereby a part of the Russian fleet in the Black Sea could remain in the Port of Sebastopol, Crimea. The agreement was extended in May 1997, so that Russia could use three radars and an airport, in addition to the port infrastructure, during a 20 year period in exchange for money.

The agreement was extended in 2010 until 2047.

During the first years after the collapse of the USSR, everything seemed much easier than what it seemed at first; otherwise, disillusion would emerge soon. Business expectations were not met and the deep divisions affecting the Ukrainian society emerged once again.

However, the determining factor in the political fracture of the Ukrainian society was regarding the direction that the country should take in future moving closer to the EU and NATO or keeping important ties of all kinds with the Russian Federation. While NATO's interest on integration was very

⁴ LÓPEZ-MEDEL, Jesús, MAÑUECO, Rafael M., «Gorbachov. Primavera de la libertad. Ocaso y caída del Imperio Ruso», Study, 2016.

⁵ CHARAP, Samuel, COLTON, Timothy J., «Everyone loses, the Ukraine crisis and the ruinous contest for post-soviet Eurasia», IISS, January 2017.

Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict

variable depending on countries, Russia saw it as a top geostrategic matter. Before 2004, with NATO integration in Baltic countries, Slovakia, Slovenia, Romania, Bulgaria, the inclusion of Ukraine was not even on the agenda.

Two concerns would become priorities for Moscow. The so called *colour revolutions* and the possible inclusion on Georgia and Ukraine in the western block, both by NATO and the EU. In late 2004, a peaceful mass protest called the "Orange Revolution" forced the authorities to revoke a fraudulent presidential election and allow a new election with international observers that brought a reformist to power, Victor Yushchenko. Moscow saw it as an attempt of the West to weaken Ukraine's ties with Russia.

The Kosovo Independence declaration, with a majority support from western countries, seriously upset Moscow. Discord grew even more with the NATO Summit in Bucharest in April 2008, which seemed to open the door to the admission of Georgia and Ukraine. The Kremlin reacted by tightening its ties with the Georgian pro-independence regions in Abkhazia and South Ossetia as well as distributing Russian passports in those regions. Tensions continued to increase and, when violence escalated in August forcing the Georgian government into a military intervention, the Russian Federation invaded those territories with its troops. NATO countries clearly expressed their rejection and tensions increased between the West and Russia, but western capitals reacted in different ways. The effervescence of the moment was addressed, but evidenced that on one part, Russia was ready to use military force to defend what it considered its essential area of influence and, on the other part, that western countries lacked an effective response against a policy of *fait accompli*.

The Kremlin perceived the West as a serious opponent with regards to its geostrategic aspirations and initiated preparations for a subdued confrontation. Putin retook the initiative through the Eurasian Economic Union. It was essential to include Ukraine in order for a project of such enormous economic importance could be successful. Moscow did everything at its avail to control the political stages of Kiev.

Immediate background of the conflict

Victor Yanukovich had become Ukraine's prime minister in August 2006 and elected president in February 2010. Although he was more pro-Russian, his opportunistic nature engendered little sympathy in the Kremlin. The Ukrainian president had been playing a dangerous game flirting with Russia and the EU simultaneously. On one hand, he sought a loan from the EU and on the other blackmailed Moscow not to fall in the hands of Brussels. Moreover, Putin was cautious in the negotiations with Kiev with regards to signing an EU Association and Free Trade agreement, especially because it could prevent Ukraine's participation in the Eurasian Economic Union. Russia even

tried to negotiate a double assignment, but the EU did not accept because it could have become a covert entry gateway for Russian products.

The conflict and violence spiralled in November 2013, which would end triggering the war. In order to hinder Kiev's negotiations with the EU on the Association agreement, Moscow pressured Yanukovich by offering a better loan than Brussels'. The president of Ukraine changed his mind and did not sign the agreement with the EU. Those in favour of the "European path" went out in the streets and started to protest in Maidan Square⁶.

Initially spontaneous, extremists infiltrated the protests. The occupation of said Central Square in Kiev degenerated into violent confrontations between Yanukovich's supporters and pro-European Ukrainian nationalists. Black Thursday, 20 January 2014, with over 60 dead protesters, forced a government change and the Yanukovich's subsequent flee to Russia. That same day, 22 February, Rada appointed Oleksandr Turchynov, who favoured the European way, as temporary president.

By then, a volcano had come to life and was very close to eruption. Russia and the EU were taking opposite positions. The seriousness of the situation resided in the deep imbalance of strategic priorities between the parties. Putin knew how far he was willing to go; the EU defended principles, important no doubt, but was not aware of the seriousness of the process that could be triggered, nor was it a matter affecting its vital interests.

Moscow saw the process as a manoeuvre supported by the US and some EU countries that financed opposition parties. It was particularly concerned that constitutional order had been subverted by the arrival in power of extremist and decidedly anti-Russian factions. There were enormous strategic interests at play: the *colour revolutions* were seen as a threat to the already deteriorated regional stability. President Putin made it clear in his speech to the ambassadors and permanent representatives of Russia. "Everyone in Europe needs some kind of safety net so that those from Iraq, Libya, Syria and, I am sorry to have to add Ukraine to this group, do not act as contagious diseases. This is particularly dangerous in a post-Soviet space, given that these States are still not consolidated political or financially and do not have politically stable systems"⁷. Furthermore, if Ukraine entered sphere of NATO and the EU, the Sebastopol naval base in Crimea, the strategically most important of all and the only one facing south, would be isolated.

Some EU leaders had been actively involved in the mediations between protesters and Yanukovich's government. After his escape, they supported

⁶ FERNÁNDEZ SOLA, Natividad, «Las relaciones de la Unión Europea y Rusia desde la perspectiva rusa», Cuaderno de Estrategia 178, IIEE, Madrid, November 2015.

⁷ Cited by BALLESTEROS, Miguel Ángel, «Ucrania y el nuevo liderazgo estratégico ruso», Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2014, IIEE. Available from http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_geopolitico_2014.pdf.

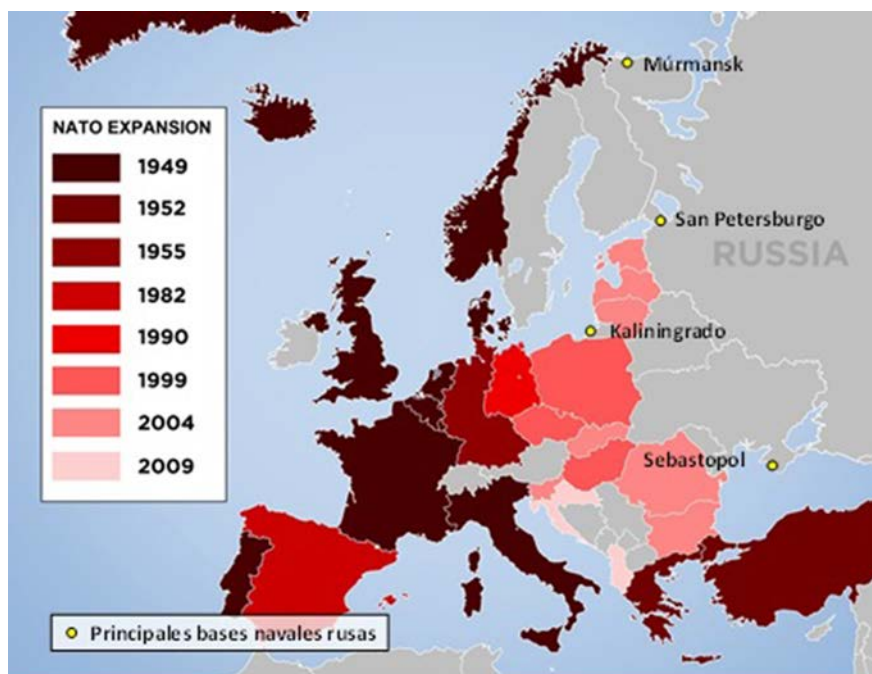


Figure 2.1. NATO expansion in Europe. Source: in-house.

successive governments resulting from the Maidan revolution. With regards to Ukraine, Henry Kissinger stated it should have served as a bridge and not an advance post of one part and the other⁸.

To make matters worse, the first thing the new Ukrainian government did was to repeal the law on language co-officiality, firing up the anger of Russian speakers. In a context of major political confusion in Ukraine, several events occurred in Crimea that triggered the war.

Russian annexation of Crimea

With the excitement of the moment and, probably, Moscow's support, a considerably well organised secessionist movement emerged in the Crimean Peninsula. On 27 February, 5 days after Yanukovich fled from Ukraine, the Russian flag was raised in the Crimean Presidency and Parliament buildings. The day after, an armed and uniformed militia, although without badges, rolled out in the two airports and other key places for the military control of Crimea. On the other part, the Russian troops in Sebastopol increased their presence on the streets. The involvement of Russian intelligence services

⁸ KISSINGER, Henry, Jeffrey Goldberg interview in The Atlantic, 10 November 2016. Available from: <http://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2016/11/Kissinger-order-and-chaos/506876/>.

and Armed Forces in those events, as President Putin himself admitted, is unquestionable today.

A referendum for the inclusion in the Russian Federation was convened for 25 May, although it was advanced to 16 March in order to maximise the general confusion of the international community and maintain the initiative. Russia carried out an aggressive communications campaign focusing on the lack of legitimacy of a Ukrainian government, arriving in power through a coup d'état, and the majority sentiment of Crimeans that would be expressed in referendum and that the separatists knew would win. The Kremlin had spent some time designing various strategic options and the various intents had been carefully analysed. With this understanding (just like Napoleon), Putin demonstrated great ability to improvise and adapt to circumstances.

On 11 March, both the autonomous republic of Crimea and the city of Sebastopol, with the special statute, declared their independence, which was immediately recognised by the Kremlin. From the Russian perspective, if the results of the referendum were favourable it would be considered a voluntary inclusion of a territory in the Russian Federation; something that was provided in its Constitution. With 85% of the electorate taking part, the ballot count results were to be expected: Crimea 96% in favour and 95% in Sebastopol. Three days later, on 19 March, Russian President Vladimir Putin and the representatives of Crimea and the city of Sebastopol signed an agreement for the integration of both entities in the Russian Federation.

The EU and US reacted with a set of sanctioning measures that have been increasing with the passing of time and depending on new events. The consequences of these sanctions were compounded by the effects of the fall of oil prices on the Russian economy after June 2014, which after one and a half years would lose practically two thirds of its value, with gas prices also being negatively affected. But the most serious aspect was that everything that had been achieved in East-West relations since the fall of the Berlin wall, was undone overnight. East Ukraine became the next confrontational scenario.

The Donbass conflict

The Kremlin's main objective had been achieved. Crimea had become part of Russia and the international community had been unable to avoid it while the Russian Federation had not been seriously threatened at any time. The success of the previous operation had been so notable that a similar strategy could be used in other pro-Russian territories in Eastern and South-eastern Ukraine or, at least, to destabilise the country in order to hinder its inclusion in western structures. Appeals to history were made, highlighting that New Russia was a Russian territory given by Lenin to Ukraine after the republic joined the USSR. On 17 April, Putin publicly stated that Russia had to protect the rights of Ethnic Russians and Russian speakers in that part of Ukraine.

Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict

Pro-Russian protests had started since early March in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk; the only provinces in which the independence movement would gain certain relevance, which intensified after the inclusion of Crimea and Sebastopol in the Russian Federation. The first armed conflict took place on 12 April, starting an escalation that led to armed conflict between pro-independence forces and the government in Kiev, as well as pro-Ukraine groups that emerged to challenge separatists.

Russia had infiltrated military and intelligence elements to create an insurgency in the East of the country that would be ready to act at the right time. It took advantage and promoted discontent, but there were many difficulties in organising a cohesive separatist political movement. Moscow used various means to recruit combatants in Russia, including private military organisations such as PMC Wagner nationalists and extremists, which joined local volunteers to form the core of the rebel forces, many of the leaders were Russian that came from outside⁹.

The presidential elections for Ukraine took place on 25 May with very poor results for the parties leading the protests in Maidan square. The winner was Petro Poroshenko who among other measures to hinder the entry of combatants and material equipment, proposed to establish a 10-km wide neutral zone throughout the Russian border. Initially the rebels demanded his complete surrender; later on 4 July, he proposed to negotiate a lasting cease fire with the separatists.

The first military operations launched by Kiev against the rebels in mid-April had evidenced serious shortages. The lack of reliable Ukrainian forces and military infrastructures in the East of the country helped those in favour of independence to quickly take over areas in the provinces of Donetsk and Luhansk. The substitution of the second minister of Defence took place on 3 July, appointing Valeri Guleţei. A conventional operation was designed as a pincer to isolate the cities of Donetsk and Luhansk from the Russian border and prevent pro-Russians from receiving weapons and reinforcements. Slavyansk was taken on 6 July, forcing the rebels to retreat immediately. Both sides wanted to control the airport for logistics purposes.

The Kremlin changed its strategy; its main effort went from expanding the pro-Russian insurgency to consolidating its position in Donbass, reinforcing the resistance against the efforts of the Ukrainian government. Moscow did not want to abandon that territory, but believed it would not be easy to crush the Ukrainian Armed Forces. However, the instability caused by the situation was enough for the geostrategic interests of the Russian Federation. A two-phase campaign was arranged: first, an operation was initiated to defeat and contain the Ukrainian offensive in Donbass; later the objective was changed

⁹ HOLCOMB, Franklin, «The Kremlin's irregular Army: Ukraine separatist «order of battle»», Russia and Ukraine security report 3, ISW, 2017.

to seek the collapse of the Kiev government to gradually destabilise and create political and military vulnerabilities that could be exploited¹⁰. From August 2014 to February 2015, the Kremlin launched a series of operations involving its own forces that managed to stop the enemy from advancing, consolidate a rebel territory adjacent to the Russian border and define a frontline, which since then has suffered only slight variations. Russia sent a humanitarian convoy to the conflict zone between 22 and 25 August, used to introduce combat resources. The Ilovaisk battle in August was particularly relevant, allowing pro-Russian forces to launch offensives that contained the Ukrainian troops next to Donetsk airport (28 September - 21 January) and the railway hub in Debaltseve (14 January - 20 February).

In this scenario, a missile was launched from the pro-Russian rebel occupied territories on 17 July that knocked down a Malaysia Airlines Boeing 777 causing 298 fatalities, and creating a very serious international incident attracting the attention of the world towards the conflict. The Russia-West confrontation climbed another step.

Minsk Agreements

Diplomatic initiatives were triggered in parallel with the military operations. After several attempts to cease combat in the Donbass region, on Putin's proposal and under the auspices of the OSCE, the Minsk agreements were signed on 5 September involving the representatives of Ukraine, the Russian Federation, the Donetsk Popular Republic (DNR) and the Luhansk Popular Republic (LNR).

The protocol defined twelve points:

1. Ensure an immediate bilateral cease fire.
2. Guarantee the supervision and verification of the cease fire by the OSCE.
3. Decentralisation of power, even if through the approval of a Ukrainian law on "provisional arrangements for local governance in certain areas of the Oblasts (regions) of Donetsk and Luhansk" ("special status law").
4. Ensure permanent monitoring of the Russian-Ukrainian border and its OSCE verification, through the creation of safety areas in the border regions between Ukraine and the Russian Federation.
5. Immediate release of all hostages and anyone that had been illegally detained.
6. A law on preventing the persecution and punishment of people involved in the events that took place in some parts of the Oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk, except in the case of serious crimes.
7. The continuation of inclusive national negotiations.

¹⁰ HOLCOMB, Franklin, «The Kremlin's irregular Army: Ukraine separatist order of battle», Russia and Ukraine security report 3, ISW, 2017.

Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict

8. Taking measures to improve the humanitarian situation in the Donbass region, in east Ukraine.
9. Guarantee early local elections in compliance with Ukrainian law (agreed in this protocol) on the "provisional local government arrangements in some areas of the Oblasts of Donetsk and Luhansk" ("special status law").
10. Withdrawal of illegal armed groups, military equipment, as well as combatants and mercenaries from Ukraine.
11. Approval of the economic recovery program and reconstruction of the Donbass region, in east Ukraine.
12. Guarantee the personal safety of participants in the negotiations.

The parties did not seriously commit to the agreement, but used the negotiations for other purposes and in the two weeks after the signature of the Minsk Protocol there were frequent cease fire violations by both parties. The continuation of operations caused the initiative to fail completely. A second attempt was kicked off at year end. Faced by the success of the separatists, the Obama Administration started to consider if military support for Ukraine, including the shipment of lethal weapons, should be increased. France and Germany then wanted to lead the process and president François Hollande and chancellor Angela Merkel presented a new peace plan on 7 February 2015, prepared after conversations with the presidents of Ukraine and Russia. On 12 February it was announced that the parties in conflict had agreed on a new package of peace measures that included an unconditional cease fire that would be observed by the OSCE as of 15 February, the withdrawal of heavy armament from the combat line, the release of war prisoners and a constitutional reform in Ukraine.

It cannot be said that Minsk II is being fulfilled; there is no efficient mechanism to impose the agreed conditions, but so far it is all there is and the starting point for any other peace attempt in Ukraine.

Current Situation

The Minsk agreements did not stop the war although they did manage to keep it in a state of ambiguity and intermittent military activity that favoured the Kremlin's interests. The intensity of operations has dropped since late 2015. However, the use of heavy material and the development of important artillery duels have been frequent from both sides throughout the frontline. Ukraine does not control the border with Russia; hence the Kremlin has the freedom to intervene how it deems most appropriate, by infiltrating forces or contributing with its logistics and technical support as well as training. The presence of an important Russian military contingent permanently in the regions of the Russian Federation closest to Donbass represent important support for rebel forces that know that said military units will come to their rescue at any given time. However, actual rebel forces are highly divided into groups and would not survive without the Russian structuring element.

on safety matters and the military reform with the Ukrainian Minister of Defence, Stepan Poltorak, and the Chief of the General Staff, Victor Muzhenko. Major political decisions from Washington regarding Russia had still not been taken as a consequence of the rarefied atmosphere left by the entire subject of interferences from the Kremlin in the recent North American presidential elections.

The Russian Federation probably aspires to wear both the military force and Ukrainian economy while separatist forces consolidate with logic of fait accompli, with Moscow maintaining a limited commitment of its forces. War, on deviating and consuming and important human capital, resources and leader attention, prevents the critical reforms (political and economic) that Ukraine needs. Time plays in favour of the Kremlin and, in the event of a no-split peace agreement for Ukraine, it would have to integrate the rebel structures in Ukraine, which would give Moscow considerable influence on the fate of Ukraine.

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in 2014 not only altered the future of Eastern Europe, but also the evolution of military technology. The Donbass fields have become a laboratory in which opposing forces try new techniques, hacking methods and operational tactics that will define future battle fields worldwide.

The Russian Armed Forces through frequent handovers are using Ukraine to train their troops and to test equipment and operating procedures. If Syria is being the main testing ground for Russia in terms of air and naval forces, Ukraine is serving for improve the use of its artillery fire, experiment with better combat vehicles, sophisticated use of tactical UAVs and improve conventional ammunition.

Compared to the North American conventional superiority, Russians are developing effective counter-measures with the use of semi-professional forces capable of dispersing, hiding and mixing with the population, while reducing the impact of technology supremacy and forcing closer, on the ground combat. Excessive emphasis on precision was also proven wrong compared to the mass of artillery fire¹⁴.

The war is also being an example of hybrid strategy by both sides. Firstly, Moscow clearly moves in a broad spectrum of military and non-military options, ranging from classic diplomacy to propaganda, disinformation and covert actions of diverse nature, without going into the thorny issue of Russian interference in North American elections. Nor has there been a shortage of critical infrastructure sabotage, as well as cyber-attacks both in the strictly military scope and against elements that are key to the operation of the State and society. The experience gained in Ukraine combined with that from Georgia, Moldavia and in particular, Syria, is allowing it to extend

¹⁴ Tucker, Patrick, «Lessons from the Russian Front», Defense One, August 2017, p. 11.

its network of players as well as refine methods and gain highly qualified personnel.

An example of how cyber-war is evolving can be seen in the cyber-attack last 20 December 2016 in the Ukrainian energy sector. It was an operation that required major coordination and a complex cyber-attack with physical consequences that left 225,000 persons without electricity in a country stricken by war and in the middle of winter¹⁵. Now there is talk of cyber militias or *green man in the dark web* working for the interests of a State without compromising it and creating a very dangerous context of impunity. Although electronic war in terms of tactics and operations is not new, the combination and intensive use of it in the new cybernetic scenario is giving pro-Russians a major advantage over Ukrainians. So, for example, some cases have managed to override the electronic devices in the fuses of Ukrainian artillery projectiles, so they do not explode when they hit the ground¹⁶.

There has also been information about a group of hackers, known as Fancy Bear or APT28, working for the Russian government and that designed and used a malware called Попр-Д30 originally designed to improve Ukrainian cannon accuracy to locate the position of the cannons¹⁷.

The great Russian military advantage lays in the determination and continuity of the strategic direction that president Putin himself represents, as well as diversity of State and non-State actors involved, although this causes certain lack of unity of action, which favour the development of an increasingly diverse hybrid strategy that is difficult to counteract.

On the other part, the population has been the first victim in the Ukraine war due to systematic abuse of human rights on both sides and all kinds of pressure on civilians forcing them to take sides or support the cause, with numerous kidnapping and murders. The cost of the war in terms of human lives so far totals at least ten thousand deaths, both civilians and military, and the number of refugees and displaced persons totals one million seven hundred thousand distributed through Ukraine, Europe and Russia.

Its consequences on other European countries are also not negligible, bearing in mind the negative effect of combatants from Belarus, Moldavia and the Baltic countries taking part in the conflict as well as the Balkans, among others, who on returning to their countries promote radical nationalist sentiments and create a group of violent veterans and mercenaries that can be easily mobilised for other destabilising causes. The phenomenon of

¹⁵ LEYDEN, John, «Energy firm points to hackers after Kiev power outage», The Register, 21 December 2016.

¹⁶ Tucker, Patrick, «Lessons from the Russian Front», Defense One, August 2017, p. 11.

¹⁷ VOLZ, Dustin «Russian hackers tracked Ukrainian artillery units using Android implant», Reuters, 22 December 2016.

Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict

foreign combatants is also a means to extend criminal activities throughout Europe and, specifically, arms trafficking.

Role of external players

The Ukraine war has caused much concern in the West, as it entails the rupture of major consensus that peace and international coexistence after WWII were built on. The attempts of the US and EU to force the Russian Federation to revert the situation have been replicated by the Kremlin reinforcing its international position and a confrontation strategy to highlight its firm will not to cede to Western pressure, while always keeping an open door to understanding if considering the interests that Moscow believes to be essential.

The US and Europe have carried out a policy of escalating sanctions with an impact on the Russian economy but without any results. The energy issue limits the EU's freedom of action. Russia and the EU have a highly notable energy interdependence, hence the losses for both sides could be disproportionate in the event of a serious dispute involving the energy resources as a means of pressure. Energy resource exports are the main driver of Russian economy. The benefits derived from the sale of oil and gas represented 43% of the 2015 federal budget income. That same year, the EU bought from the Russian Federation almost 30% of crude and over 30% of the gas it imported. For Russia this meant almost 60% of its crude exports and 75% of gas¹⁸.

On the other hand, the differences between EU countries with regards to the Russian energy policy have a negative effect on building a common front to pressure the Russian Federation through this means. In addition, the Nord Stream gas pipeline that connect Russia directly to Germany, avoiding transit through Baltic countries, Poland and Ukraine (the most anti-Russian of all), mean that Germany and Nordic countries have a different approach to those.

With regards to Russia, after verifying that the Ukrainian and Crimean situation was under control and had not triggered large scale reactions in terms of security, it made a commitment to military intervention in Syria after September 2015. The Ukrainian subject had to be resolved in the Middle East deviating attention to another area where the interests at stake are far more important to Washington and European capitals. The Russian hope is to find a space of understanding to coordinate actions against the Islamic State (IS). From the perspective of the Kremlin, the recognition of the Russian Federation as a first order player in the international scene would represent

¹⁸ Country Analysis Brief: Russia, U.S. Energy Information Administration (eia), Available from: https://www.eia.gov/beta/international/analysis_includes/countries_long/Russia/rus-sia.pdf.

a complete change compared to prior years and the best way to defend what it believes is its essential area of influence.

Meanwhile, the Kremlin, thanks to the military success gained by the Syrian government against IS and the multiple opposing militias with the invaluable Russian military support, has obtained a privileged position to becoming an essential player in future peace talks. Furthermore, Russia is extending its diplomatic and strategic field of action to eastern Mediterranean. As a result and with the changes in geostrategic approach of the US Administration with regards to the Middle East, Putin is making sure the Ukrainian situation is entrenched and resolved in his favour or at least not be resolved, allowing such country to politically and strategically focus towards the West.

Putin is also taking advantage of the differences between Washington and Beijing, both on commercial affairs and with regards to the disputes in the Meridional and East China seas as well as the aggressive provocations of North Korea. With its policy turning towards China, Moscow is building a position that clearly challenges the US hegemonic position.

It all ended changing world order towards a complex and tense multipolarity in which the three great powers US, China and Russia dominate the strategic scenario above regional powers in a context of uncertainty, distrust and severe risks.

Conclusions and future perspectives

The existing relations between the West and Russia do not favour any of the parties and it would seem obvious that Putin is not willing to cede; instead he has opted for contained but systematic confrontation at all levels where NATO and EU countries show some kind of weakness. The distrust between the parties has increased continuously. Furthermore, NATO countries continue to pressure Moscow, but the lack of internal cohesion means results are not forthcoming. Brexit and the ensuing crisis in the heart of the EU as well as a the lack of definition of a clear US strategy with regards to Russia that is recognisable by European allies are preventing finding areas of understanding from which to tackle a solution for the mid to long term. Both parties have created justification with their own coherence but closed to other points of view.

Faced by an enormous number of serious challenges that can only be approached via international cooperation, climate change, nuclear proliferation, the expansion of jihadists terrorism, increased organised crime, cyber threats, uncontrolled migrations, increased inequality in the distribution of wealth, etc., East-West relations have slid along a path we could call "strategic numbness". Ukraine is the cornerstone, Ukrainians are the victims, and a well mortgaged future. We can go from the *End of History* to a *Never-ending Story*.

Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict

This new Cold War ersatz is preventing from dedicating the stabilisation and development efforts required by the South, and to make matters worse, IS is taking deep roots. It far more difficult there to find mediators and the number of players is so large, the context so complex and the interests so diverse that even making all possible efforts, the project is unfathomable.

While the cancer entrenches and attention is focused on other places, new tactics and military procedures are put into practice in the fields of East Ukraine. Russia is training and getting ready for what may come. It is bolstered by the success in the Middle East. Some have placed their hopes on the tensions and internal contradictions within the Russian Federation make it land or even crash. In this case, the cure could be worse than the illness; a destabilised Russia could remind us of the Balkan war on a Eurasian scale with out-of-control nuclear weapons. In any case, the Ukraine war requires a new approach.

Geopolitical indicators

| Ukraine | | |
|--|--|--|
| Semi-presidential Republic | Capital Kiev | |
| Population: 44,033,874 (July 2017) | | |
| Age structure | 0-14 15,8 % 15-20 9,9 % 25-54 44,3 % 55-64 13,8 % 65- 16,3 % | |
| Ethnicities: Ukrainians 67.5%, Russians 29.6%, Belarusian 0.6%, Moldavians 0.5%, Tartars 0.5%, Bulgarians 0.4%, Hungarians 0.4%, Romanians 0.3%, Poles 0.3%, Jews 0.2% | | |
| Language: Ukrainian 67.5%, Russian 29.6%, Tartar, Moldavian and Hungarian 2.9% | | |
| Religions: 2/3 Orthodox, Uniate Catholics 8-10%, Muslims 1%, Jews 1% | | |
| Population growth: -0.4 % Urban population: 69 % Life expectancy: 71.8 % Health expenditure: 7.1 % of GDP Education expenditure: 6% of GDP Literacy: 99.8 % Unemployment: 23 % Population below poverty threshold: 24.1 % | | |
| Size: 603,550 km ² | Occupied by pro-Russians: 43,133 km ² , (7.1 % of the territory) | |
| Coast: 2,782 km | Farmland: 71.2% | Forest: 16.8 % |
| GDP: \$93,260 million (2016 estimate) | | |
| GDP growth rate: 2.3 % | | GDP per capita: \$8,300 (2016 estimate) |
| GDP structure | Farming: 14.4 % Industry: 26,3 % Services: 59.3 % | |

Fuente: CIA *The world factbook*

Cronology

| Ukraine: an entrenched and poisoned conflict | |
|---|---|
| date | Event |
| 1922 | Incorporation of Ukraine into the USSR. |
| Aug-1991 | Failed coup attempt, the Ukraine declared its independence and decreed the suspension of the Communist party. |
| 1-Dec | Referendum on independence in Ukraine. |
| Nov-2013 | Demonstrations started in Maidan square. |
| 20-Feb-2014 | "Black Thursday", over 60 protesters and policemen died. |
| 27-Feb | Russian flag hoisted in Crimean Presidency and Parliament buildings. |
| 11-Mar | Crimean authorities declared their independence. |
| 16-Mar | Referendum for joining Russia in Crimea and Sevastopol. |
| 17-Mar | Putin signs decree incorporating Crimea and Sevastopol to the Russian federation. |
| 12-Apr | First armed conflict took place in Donbass |
| 25-May | Poroshenko won the elections in Ukraine. |
| 17-Jul | Malaysia Airlines Boeing was brought down. |
| 5-Sep | Minsk I Agreement. |
| 11-Feb-2015 | Minsk II Agreement. |
| Sep-2015 | Military intervention of the Russian Federation in Syria. |

Chapter three

Sinai: a time bomb about to go off?

Emilio Sánchez de Rojas Díez

Abstract

Following the repeated failures of the Islamic state in Syria and Iraq, and the lack of resolution in Libya, Sinai has become an alternative scenario. Sinai had experienced sporadic episodes of violence between 2004 and 2006. But it was after the revolts of 2011, and the overthrow of Mubarak when this violence erupts, as the numerous Salafist jihadist groups unite under the umbrella of Ansar Bayt al- Maqdis (ABM). On October 10, 2014, ABM renders the group plead to DAESH, becoming Wilayat Sinai with the consequent evolution in number and sophistication of the attacks.

Anti-terrorist operations have also evolved. What initially was an indiscriminate action in the time of Mubarak, happened to be actions focused in the north of Sinai, generally in response to attacks, important terrorists, and later the State takes the initiative and initiates in the last two years the preventive operations, which also extend to central Sinai. The action-reaction-action cycles are maintained and the operations are not decisive, proving Wilayat Sinai a great resilience, but the action of the army begins to make a dent, especially after the decay of DAESH, and begin the divisions in the group.

Keyword

Egypt, Sinai, Daesh, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis, Wilayat Sinai, Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad, Jabal Halal Rafah, El-Arish, Shaykh Zuweid

Introduction

...Once, Sinai was a land bridge.

The Sinai Peninsula, with its 61,200 km², is surrounded by the Gulfs of Suez and Eilat, and is topographically divided into a southern desert, metamorphic and magmatic, and a northern part which is sedimentary and sandy, being the continuation of the Israeli coastline to the east and reaching the Nile delta to the west¹. The traditional inhabitants of the Sinai are Bedouin tribes originating in the Arabian Peninsula, with the single exception of the Jubaleya tribe, descendants of warriors from the Balkans.

The Sinai Peninsula has never been fully integrated with Continental Egypt, and the nomads were allowed to conserve their own culture. Immersed in inter-tribal conflicts, the Bedouins would be spectators at the wars between Egypt and Israel, remaining outside the conflict, although both sides recruited some Bedouin members for intelligence and covert operations behind the front lines².

The Peninsula has become a “hot point”, with an expanding terrorist infrastructure, which may affect Egyptian-Israeli relations³. The current Sinai crisis is rooted in an implacable geography and a critical location in the heart of a problematic region. Captured by Israel in the six-day war in 1967, it was held by the Israelis until the Camp David Accords facilitated its return to Egypt⁴.

The Bedouins of Sinai

Some 70% of the population of the peninsula is made up of Bedouin tribes which have arrived during different historic periods, constantly reconfiguring their areas of influence. The Bedouin have an unwritten law, the “Orf”, and traditional rights of territorial usufruct. In the tribal assemblies—Majlis—decisions are taken by consensus. The sheikh bases his authority on his wealth, his inherited prestige, and his personal abilities⁵.

Between 1967 and 1982, the Sinai was controlled by Israel. In the words of Donna Stewart,

¹ Arensburg, B., et al. *Southern Sinai Bedouin tribes: preliminary communication on an anthropological survey 1979*, Bulletins and Minutes of the Paris Anthropological Society, XIIIth Series, Vol. 6 part 4, pp. 363-372

² Yaari, Ehud, *Sinai, A New Front*. 2012, The Washington Institute for Near East Policy, Policy Notes No. 9, pp. 1-20, (pp.1-2).

³ Yaari, Ehud, *Sinai: A New Front*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

⁴ Graham-Harrison, Emma. How Sinai became a magnet for terror. *The Guardian* [Online] 11-08-2015. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/nov/08/sinai-magnet-for-terror>

⁵ Arensburg, B., et al. *Ibid*

“The root of the Egyptian distrust of the Bedouins is the belief that they collaborated with Israel during that time (...). The positive view that many Bedouins hold of Israel, which provided health and education services when they occupied the Sinai, incites distrust and discrimination on the part of Egypt.”

Antecedents of the Conflict

From the defeat of 1967 to the Camp David Accords

Our point of departure is the six-day war and the loss of the Sinai on the part of Egypt in the year 1967.

When King Hussein of Jordan signed a mutual defense pact with Egypt on May 30th of 1967, Nasser proclaimed:

“The armies of Egypt, Jordan, Syria and Lebanon stand on the borders of Israel (...) to face the challenge; behind us stand the armies of Iraq, Algeria, Kuwait, Sudan and the entire Arab nation. They will surprise the world... the critical hour has arrived, we have arrived at the stage of serious action and not of declarations”⁶.

Fifty years after their fiasco, the Egyptians still wonder what they did wrong to suffer such a defeat⁷ (Mubasher, 2017). When the Egyptian army withdrew from Sinai, it abandoned 25,000 vehicles, and returned with a trauma which lasted until the 1973 war.

Sinai and Israel

“...the map was never again the same as on June 4, 1967. For us, this is a question of security and of principles (...). We shiver when we think of what might have awaited us in the circumstances of June 1967, if we had been defeated”⁸.

On May 14, 1967, Nasser ordered mobilization, and invoked the defense accord with Syria; on the 22nd, he prohibited Israeli maritime transport through the Gulf of Aqaba; war was inevitable and Israel waited for the opportune moment to attack. On June 5th, the Israeli air force attacked Egyptian airports and air bases⁹, destroying their planes, on the ground and unprotected. At the same time, it initiated an attack along the Egyptian, Jordanian and Syrian fronts. Egypt, which at that time had 100,000 men at its disposition in Sinai, decided to withdraw its troops, submerging the army in chaos¹⁰. When the

⁶ Sobel, Jerrold L. The Six-Day War: A Retrospective. [Online] 05-22-2017. http://www.americanthinker.com/articles/2017/05/the_sixday_was_a_retrospective_.html.

⁷ Mubasher, Abdou. The Road to Naksa. *Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1347*. [Online] 06 1-7, 2017. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/20630.aspx>.

⁸ Eban, Abba. *Die Sackgasse ist Arabisch*. [Interv.] Der Spiegel. 1105, 1969.

⁹ The time of attack, about 8 a.m., allowed maximization of the number of enemy planes on the ground, after their traditional first dawn reconnaissance.

¹⁰ Mubasher, Abdou. The road to Naksa, *Op. cit.*

cease fire was declared, on June 10th, Israel controlled East Jerusalem, the West Bank, the Golan Heights, the entire Sinai Peninsula and the Gaza Strip.

The military victory was not politically decisive, as there was no capitulation. Remembering that neither was there a peace after the victory in 1949, General Moshe Dyan stated at the mouth of the Gulf of Aqaba: "It is preferable to have Sharm el-Sheikh without peace, than peace without Sharm el-Sheikh"¹¹. The Israeli army occupied the peninsula for 15 years.

After the death of Nasser in 1970, Sadat opened new diplomatic channels with Washington, Israel's principal ally.

Sadat and the road to peace

The partial success in the 1973 war against Israel on Yom Kippur provided Sadat with the legitimacy to initiate economic liberalization, and avoid the collapse of the national economy¹². Sadat's most decisive actions were his journey to Jerusalem in November of 1977, and the signing of the Camp David Accords, which were opposed by the Moslem Brotherhood and the Islamic university groups¹³. Sadat would be assassinated on October 6th, 1989 by the terrorist group al Yijad¹⁴.



Figure 3.1 Anwar el-Sadat, Jimmy Carter and Menachen Begin at Camp David.

¹¹ Reynolds, Paul. Shifting sands: Israel and the Sinai. BBC. [Online] 10 08, 2004. http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/middle_east/3726650.stm.

¹² RAMIS FARAH, N. *Egypt's political economy*. Cairo, American University in Cairo Press, 2009, ISBN: 978 977 416 217 6. (pp. 76-7).

¹³ ABDALLA, A. *The Student Movement and National Politics in Egypt 1923-1973*. Cairo: The American University in Cairo Press, 2008.

¹⁴ RAMSIS FARAH *Ibid.*, (p. 79).

Some Israeli military leaders consider that the border with Egypt is not “a peaceful border” but rather “a somewhat peaceful border”¹⁵.

The peace accords allowed Egypt to recover the Sinai Peninsula, but with military restrictions.

After the return of Sinai to Egypt, the Mubarak government considered the Bedouin population to be Israeli collaborators, due to the positive opinion that many Bedouins held about Israel, resulting from the treatment they had received¹⁶.

From Salafism to terrorism: Al-Tawhid wal-Jihad

Sinai was a place where militants hid out, trained and conspired, but did not attack¹⁷. Initially, the Bedouins distrusted Salafism, an urban and hostile movement, which aimed to replace the tribal brotherhood with a religious one. The Sufis had been instrumental in the Islamic resurgence in the Sinai in the 1950's and 60's¹⁸.

At the beginning of the 1990's, the Salafists confronted the Sufi orders. This confrontation broke tribal unity and undermined Bedouin social structure¹⁹. The proximity with Gaza favored a contraband network which facilitated the movement of arms and terrorists. The areas of greatest threat were Raffah, El Arish and Jabal al-Halal²⁰.

Smuggling was a traditional activity, but in the mid-1990's, the tunnel industry appeared. Traffic increased following the withdrawal of Israel from Gaza in 2005, providing many Bedouins with an unprecedented prosperity. The “Toyotas” permitted the mobilization of hundreds of warriors in a short time, and the transformation of contraband networks into large-scale militias, mobile and well-equipped²¹.

Phases of Terrorism in the Sinai

In the 1980's and 90's, terrorism was centered in Cairo and Upper Egypt. This changed as of 2004²²:

- In the first phase, Al-Tawhid wa-l-jihad attacked in Dahab, Sharm El-Sheikh and Taba. Its founder, Khaled Musa'id, a dentist from al-Arish and a member of the al-Swaraka tribe, transformed an ideological current

¹⁵ Yaari, Ehud *Sinai: A New Front*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹⁶ Siboni, Gabi and Ben-Barak, Ram. *The Sinai Peninsula Threat Development and Response Concept*. Washington: INSS and Brookings, 2013, (p.3).

¹⁷ Graham-Harrison, Emma. How Sinai became a magnet for terror. *Op. cit.*

¹⁸ Pelham, Nicholas. *Sinai: The Buffer Erodes*. London: Chatham House, 2012.

¹⁹ Yaari, Ehud *Sinai: A New Front*, *Op. cit.*, (p.5).

²⁰ Siboni, Gabi and Ben-Barak, Ram. *Op. cit.*, (p.2).

²¹ *Ibid*, p.10.

²² Graham-Harrison, Emma. How Sinai became a magnet for terror. *Op. cit.*

into a structure, with a hierarchy and multiple cells. Musa'id died in a confrontation in September of 2005²³.

- The second phase is characterized by the proliferation of Salafist and jihadist organizations on both sides of the border at Rafa. Starting in 2007, dozens of tunnel contraband groups arose.
- In the third phase, these organizations joined under the umbrella of Ansar Beit Al-Maqdis (ABM), which for three years was the principal enemy of the Army and the police. Some branches were dissolved when the organization pledged allegiance to Daesh.
- The fourth phase was initiated when the pro-ISIS wing of ABM constituted the Wilayat Sinai. The organization failed in its attempt to establish an emirate in Sinai, despite many operations undertaken²⁴.

The attacks of 2004-2006

The tribes of the Egyptian border with Gaza—Sawarka, Rumaylat and Tarabeen—dominated the tunnel trade.

The Bedouins became more understanding of Hamas and hostile towards Israel, which was attempting to stop the contraband.²⁵

Al-Tawhid wal-jihad (monotheism and jihad) belongs to the first generation of Salafi-jihadist Bedouins, holding ideas imported by the students coming back from Universities in the Delta or Saudi Arabia. They settle in Raffa, Sheikh Zuweid and in Bir al-Abd in the northern Sinai, but threaten economic interests vital to Egypt.

Some 130 people died in attacks on the tourist areas of Taba, Ras al-Shaitán and Nuweiba (2004), Sharm al-Sheikh and Dahab (2006).

The government blamed the Sawarka and Tarabeen tribes and thousands of Bedouins were arrested and tortured²⁶.

Security forces played a key role, bringing about a fusion of Bedouin resistance members and Islamic militants through employing with each of these the same tactics of repression and collective punishment.

Human and organ trafficking

"In recent years, African immigrants fleeing from oppression in Eritrea and genocide in Sudan have headed to Israel across the Sinai desert (...) criminal bands of smugglers who work in Ethiopia, Sudan, Egypt and Israel have elaborated an intricate system of extortion" (Furst-Nicholson, 2011).

Hamdy Al-Azazy, director of the New Generation Foundation, explains: The refugees pay the Bedouin tribes in the border area between Sudan and Egypt nearly \$2,000 to be taken out.

Later, the smugglers sell them to the Sinai Bedouins, who blackmail the refugees and their families.

The Bedouin smugglers "harvest" the organs of those refugees who do not pay the great quantities of cash required. Al-Azazy describes:

"First they drug them and extract their organs, then they let them die and throw them into a deep, dry well with hundreds of bodies (...) mobile clinics from a private hospital in Cairo which uses advanced technology come to an area in Central Sinai and carry out physical examinations to choose the right ones, then they carry out the operation" (Pleitgen, Refugees face organ theft in the Sinai, 2011). The Bedouin tribe Al-Nakhalwa is implicated in organ traffic; to it belongs the trafficker in organs and human beings known as "the Sultan", who would be assassinated by Bedouins of the Al-Tiaha tribe (Pleitgen & Fadel Fahmy, CNN, 2011).

²³ Ashour, Omar. Jihadists and Post-jihadists in the Sinai. Brookings. [Online] 09 12, 2012. <https://www.brookings.edu/opinions/jihadists-and-post-jihadists-in-the-sinai/>.

²⁴ Eleiba, Ahmed. Who's the enemy? Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1255. [Online] 07 23, 2015. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/12839.aspx>.

²⁵ Yaari, Ehud, *Ibid*.

²⁶ Siboni, Gabi and Ben-Barak, Ram, *Op, cit* (p.3).

After the fall of Mubarak

The rise of tribal militias increased with the collapse of the Egyptian police forces during the 2011 revolution, when arms and munitions depots were sacked and a number of police stations were burned down.

2011-2014

“The situation is worsening in terms of security: there is a great quantity of weapons, heavy arms, machine guns. It is truly terrifying. I think we are moving towards a civil war here in Sinai”²⁷.

The lack of government control, which was limited to Jabal Halal, was extended after the 2011 revolution into the north of Sinai. In Rafa, residents erupted into police stations, sacking arms and equipment²⁸ (Pelham, 2012, p. 5).

At least 100 people, many police, died in the clashes of January and February of 2011.

Table 1 Militant groups in Sinai between 2010 and 2014²⁹:

| Name of Group | Leaders and other prominent members | Prime means of attack | Principal type of objective | Principal zones of attack |
|---|---|------------------------------|------------------------------------|---|
| Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis (Ansar Jerusalem) [ABM] | Ibrahim Aweida (m); Mohamed Ibrahim Freg (m); Shadi al-Menaei; KamalAllam | Bombs | Military, Security forces, Israel | Northern Sinai; Southern Sinai; Cairo; Eliat, Israel. |
| Tawhid Wal-Jihad in the Sinai Peninsula | Ahmed Hamdan Harb Malki (m); Khaled Massaad Salem; Hisham al-Saedni (m); Abu Munir(m) | Shootings | Police | Northern Sinai |
| Al-Qaeda in the Sinai Peninsula (AQSP)y Ansar al-Jihad | Ramzi Mahmoud al-Mowafi | Bombs | Gas pipelines | Northern Sinai |
| Muhammad Jamal Network [MJN] | Muhammad Jamal | | | |
| Ajnad Misr | Unknown | Bombs | Police | Cairo |
| Mujahideen Shura Council in the Environs of Jerusalem [MSC] | Hisham al-Saedni (m) | Granade-launchers | Israel | Eliat, Israel |
| Army of Islam [Jaysh al-Islam] | Mumtaz Dughmush | Bombs; ambushes | Religious; F. of Security | Northern Sinai, Alexandria |

²⁷ BBC. Egypt revolution leaves Sinai increasingly lawless. BBC. [Online] 06 01, 2011. <http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/programmes/newsnight/9501505.stm>.

²⁸ Pelham, Nicolas. *Sinai: The Buffer Erodes.*, Op. cit. (p.5).

²⁹ Dyer, Emily and Kessler, Oren. *Terror in the Sinai*. London: The Henry Jackson Society, 2014 (p.32).

Between 2011 and 2014 a number of violent groups arose (Table 1). ABM attracted surviving militants who sought revenge on the regime. ABM considered military and security facilities to be principal objectives and sought the recognition of Al-Qaeda Central³⁰ in order to gain legitimacy³¹. The Egyptian journalist *Sakina Fouad* characterized the Sinai as “a time bomb about to go off”³².

As Nitzan Nuriel remarks:

“Many jihadists released from prison (...) incorporate into the area years of experience, knowledge, courage and people who really have nothing to lose. Those militants carried arms sacked in countries ravaged by civil war like Libya and Yemen (...) today, if one wishes to buy a mortar, or a machine gun, or even a MANPAD³³, all you need is a few dollars. The threat level is much more dramatic than a year ago”³⁴.

ABM was capable of sustaining a prolonged struggle against the regime³⁵. It had at its disposition 1,000 combatants with high-level tactical and technological abilities, which explains the group’s complex operations, and was financed through arms smuggling and traffic in human beings³⁶. On July 29th, 200 Bedouins attacked a police station at al-Arish, demonstrating a growing confidence in their military capacity. Wadi Amr, and Jabal al-Halal became well-defended bases, and the Bedouins kidnapped Egyptian police and attacked the gas pipeline supplying Israel and Jordan³⁷.

President Mursi had promised to re-establish order in the northern zone of Sinai, and Israel supported military action against the presumed terrorists. For the first time since the 1973 war, Egypt sent planes and tanks to Sinai, and Israel deployed an aerial defense system. On August 5th, 16 border agents died in an attack, and General al-Sisi—the new Defense Minister—supervised the plans to neutralize the terrorist infrastructure³⁸.

In the attacks on August 18th of 2011, eight Israelis died and thirty-one were injured; the twelve terrorists were residents of Sinai. For the first time, militants from Sinai penetrated into Israel with explosive belts, or shot

³⁰ Ayman al-Zawahiri praised ABM for its operations against Israel in July of 2012, but did not explicitly name the group.

³¹ Al-Anani, KJhalil. The Resurgence of Militant Islamists in Egypt. *Middle East Institute* [Online] 02 14, 2014, <http://www.mei.edu/content/resurgence-militant-islamists-egypt>.

³² Yaari, Ehud. *Op. cit.*, p. 7.

³³ Portable anti-air missile.

³⁴ HERZLIYA. Former detainees, not recruits, stiffen Sinai jihad. *EgyptIndependent* [Online] 0915, 2011. <http://www.egyptindependent.com/former-detainees-not-recruits-stiffen-sinai-jihad/>.

³⁵ Al-Anani, Khalil. The resurgence of Militant Islamists in Egypt. *Op. cit.*

³⁶ At least two high-ranking leaders ran weapons contraband enterprises to finance and militarize the organization.

³⁷ Yaari, Ehud. *op. cit.*, pp. 7-8.

³⁸ Ghany, Mohammed Abd El. Egypt to send aircraft and tanks to Sinai first time since 1973. *RFI*. [Online] 08 20, 2012. <http://en.rfi.fr/africa/20120820-egypt-send-aircraft-and-tanks-sinai-first-time-1973>

against Israeli helicopters. A change from previous terrorist operations, centered on objectives in Sinai³⁹.

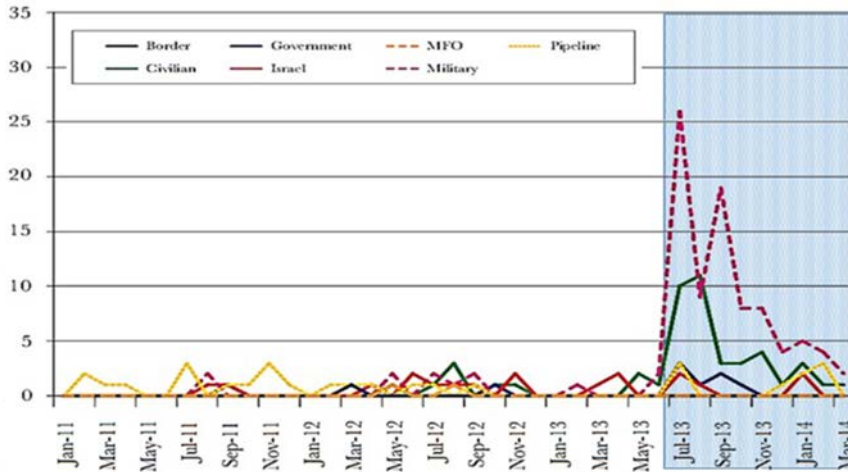


Ilustración 1 Desglose mes a mes de los objetivos de los grupos terroristas por tipo, 2011-2014. Fuente (Dyer & Kessler, 2014, pág. 30)

Figure 3.2. Breakdown by months of terrorist group objectives by type, 2011—2014. Source: (Dyer & Kessler, 2014, p. 30).

The deposing of President Morsi, and the repression against the Moslem Brotherhood, generated more violence in Sinai⁴⁰. The principal leaders of ABM were based south of Rafah. Al-Menaei, from the Sawarka tribe, considered the commander of the group, had strong ties to al-Tawid wa-l-jihad, also centered south of Rafah⁴¹.

The conflict in Syria impacted on the Sinai when Egyptian jihadists returned from Syria and joined ABM. These jihadists came back influenced by the division between Jabhat al-Nusra and ISIS. The latter faction would prove to be dominant.

Military operations and government responses up to 2014

Before the 2011 uprising, the government of Sinai was overseen by the Ministry of the Interior, the *Mukhabarat* (intelligence), and tribal leaders designated by the regime. The regime, which wished to maintain tranquility in the area without paying overmuch attention to the local population, did not act while the Sinai Bedouins and the inhabitants of Gaza established

³⁹ Yaari, Ehud, *Ibid*, p. 4.

⁴⁰ Dyer, Emily and Kessler, Oren, *Terror in the Sinai*. Op. cit. (p.5).

⁴¹ Dyer, Emily and Kessler, Oren, *Terror in the Sinai*, Op. cit. (pp. 32-4).

contraband routes. Following the attacks of 2004–2006, the police and the *Mukhabarat* changed their attitude: thousands of Bedouin were detained, hundreds tortured, and many imprisoned indefinitely⁴².

Government of the SCAF, 2011–2012

The police had been dissolved and security was the responsibility of the military. SCAF negotiated an agreement with Israel to increase its deployment in the peninsula. In July of 2011, a great number of Salafist jihadists paraded in Al Arish carrying black banners. “AQ in the Sinai Peninsula” announced its intention to create an emirate on the peninsula. Cairo initiated “Operation Eagle”: two brigades, tanks and Apache helicopters were deployed around Al Arish, Rafah and Shaykh Zuweid, in a demonstration of military force⁴³.

Morsi Government, 2012 – 2013

On August 5th of 2012, an attack on the headquarters at Rafah shook the military and the population. President Mohammed Morsi dismissed the Minister of Defense and named General al-Sisi in his place. “Operation Eagle II” began. In October of 2012, the greater part of the Sinai forces had been withdrawn. During the winter, the army intensified its campaign against contraband through the tunnels and in February of 2013 the army began to flood them⁴⁴.

Interim Post-Morsi Government, 2013

After the deposing of Morsi, terrorism in the Sinai reached a high point. The principal military offensives followed a single criteria: they were a response to an escalation of the violence. The car bomb which went off on July 24th in Arish before reaching its objective was an indicator of what the militants could do⁴⁵.

Another military offensive was initiated in September of 2013, following the assassination attempt on the Minister of the Interior. The armed forces deployed massive numbers of troops and sought out suspects door to door. Some days later, two car-bombs exploded and killed six soldiers in Rafah and ABM attacked the Security Directorate in al-Tor with the first car-bomb in southern Sinai since 2006⁴⁶.

⁴² Gold, Zack. *Security in the Sinai: Past, Present and Future*. The Hague: The International Centre for Counter-Terrorism – (ICCT), 2014, (pp. 11-2).

⁴³ Ibid. (p.12)

⁴⁴ Gold, Zack. *Security in the Sinai: Past, Present and Future*. *Op. cit.*, (p.12).

⁴⁵ Ibid. (p. 13).

⁴⁶ Ibid.

The government declared a State of Emergency in parts of the Sinai at the end of 2013 and cleared a zone between Sinai and Gaza, destroying tunnels and depriving the terrorists of routes for the replacement of weapons. For Israel, relations with Egypt had improved: "The Egyptians had taken measures to secure Sinai (...). We coordinated when dealing with activities near the border fence, to prevent potential terrorist attacks from extending into Israel"⁴⁷.

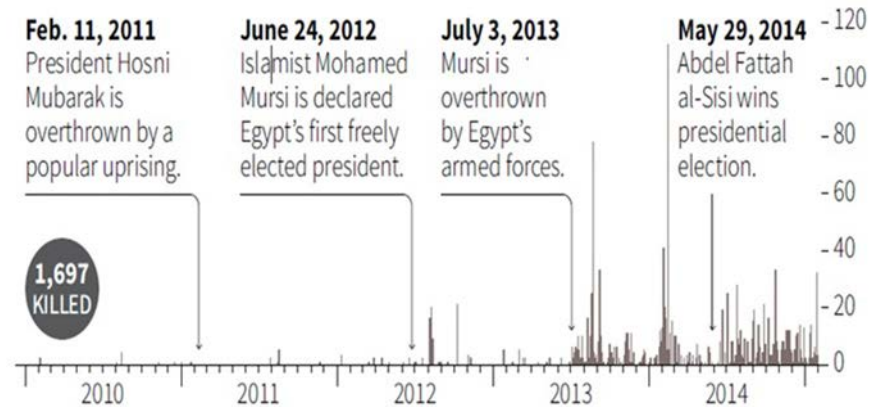


Ilustración 1 número de fallecidos en la península del Sinaí como resultado de ataques iniciados por militantes o fuerzas gubernamentales entre enero de 2010 y enero de 2015 fuente (Reuters, 2015)

Figure 3.3 Number of deaths on the Sinai Peninsula resulting from attacks initiated by militants or government forces between January of 2010 and January of 2015. Source: (Reuters, 2015).

The Egyptian Armed Forces re-initiated their operations in late January and early February of 2014. During the following weeks, the Army attacked the areas suspected of harboring militants in Al Arish, Rafah and Shaykh Zuweid using Apache helicopters⁴⁸. Although information had been received about the leaders, militants from the base lived mixed in with the population and were difficult to identify.

ABM had suffered violent repression on the part of the Army and on October 10th of 2014 pledged allegiance to ISIS⁴⁹. In the words of the writer Mohamad Sabry,

"There was only one umbrella group, Ansar Bayt al-Maqdis. It gathered all the jihadist militants on the Sinai and in all of Egypt and they dissolved under the umbrella of Ansar, which began to operate in 2011

⁴⁷

⁴⁸ Gold, Zack, *Ibid.*, (p. 14).

⁴⁹ KIRKPATRICK, DAVID D. Militant Group in Egypt Vows Loyalty to ISIS. *The New York Times*, [Online] 11 10, 2014. https://www.nytimes.com/2014/11/11/world/middleeast/egyptian-militant-group-pledges-loyalty-to-isis.html?_r=2.

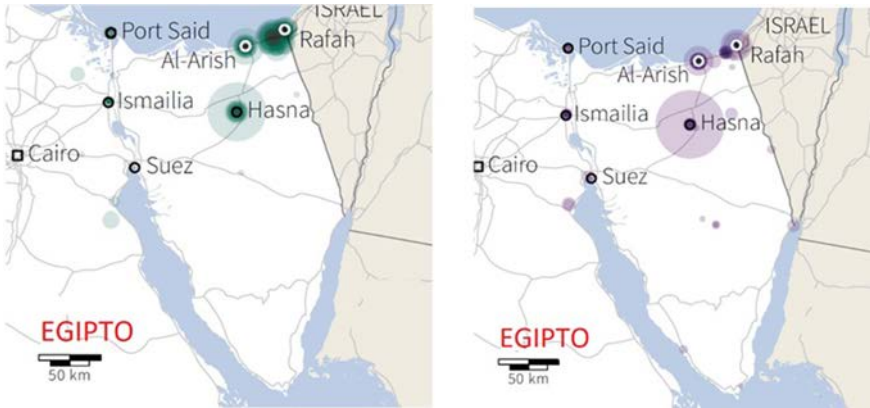


Figure 3.4 Deaths from Government operations (green) and from attacks by militants (purple) between January 2011 and January 2015. Source: (Reuters, 2015).

and pledged allegiance to ISIS in 2014, in order to be recognized as the strongest branch of the Islamic State outside of Syria and Iraq.”

2015 Wilayat Sinai (WS)

The attack of January 29, 2015 in the area of al-Arish – Shaykh Zuweid on military, police and civilian objectives, was carried out by armed groups formed by more than sixty terrorists. In this attack 32 people died; rockets and mortar fire were used as well as suicide attacks. Attacks were made simultaneously in Port Said and Alexandria⁵⁰ (Schweitzer, 2015, p.1).

But it is in the attack of ISIS on July 1st of 2015 in Shaykh Zuweid where an evolution may be appreciated in the capacity and objectives of Wilayat Sinai. Before the attack it carried on a campaign of assaults with improvised explosives in order to intimidate security personnel, serving as preparation for the attack⁵¹. The Army lost 17 men, 13 were injured and 100 terrorists were killed⁵².

This offensive demonstrated the interest of ISIS in establishing territorial control and expanding their caliphate into the Sinai, exploiting local grievances to gain legitimacy. ISIS intended to pivot towards the Sinai as the premier battle front in the Near East⁵³.

1 ISIS detonates 2 vehicles in Sheikh Zuweid *Security checkpoint attacked by ISIS

⁵⁰ Schweitzer, Yoram. Egypt's War in the Sinai Peninsula: A Struggle that Goes beyond Egypt. Tel Aviv: INSS Insight No. 661, 2015 (p.1).

⁵¹ Faruki, Yasmin, Gowell, Jenna and Hoffman, Laura. ISIS'S WILAYAT SINAI LAUNCHES LARGEST OFFENSIVE IN SHEIKH ZUWEID. ISW. [Online] 07 2, 2015.

⁵² Al-Ahram Weekly. Sinai under control. Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1253. [Online] 07 2-8, 2015. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/12721.aspx>.

⁵³ Fariki, Yasmin, Gowell, Jenna and Hoffman, Laura, Ibid.



- 1 ISIS detona dos vehículos en Sheikh Zuweid
 - 2 ISIS se atribuye el atentado suicida con coche bomba
 - 3 Ataques aéreos del ejercito egipcio
 - 4 ISIS sitia el acuartelamiento de la policía en Sheikh Zuweid
 - 5 Lucha entre militantes y fuerzas de seguridad en Sheikh Suweid y Rafah
- ◆ Control de seguridad atacado por ISIS
 - ◆ Control de seguridad bombardeado por ISIS
 - ◆ Posición exacta desconocida

Figure 3.5 Operation of ISIS in the Wilayat Sinai, July 1 2015.

- 2 ISIS claims suicide car-bombing * Security checkpoint bombed by ISIS
- 3 Egyptian Army aerial attacks * Exact position unknown
- 4 ISIS besieges Sheikh Zuweid police headquarters
- 5 Fight between militants and security forces in Sheikh Suweid and Rafah

On July 16, 2015 the group attacked an Egyptian warship off the coast of northern Sinai. The operation was indicative of the availability of resources, inaccessible to any local group⁵⁴.

This group also claimed responsibility for shooting down Metrojet Flight 9268 between Sharm el-Sheikh and St. Petersburg on 31 October 2015. It was the first time a bomb had been employed to down a commercial jet. The group possessed missiles, probably obtained in Libya after the collapse of the Gaddafi regime⁵⁵.



Figure 3.6

⁵⁴ Eleiba, Ahmed. Who's the enemy? Op. cit.

⁵⁵ Graham-Harrison, Emma. How Sinai became a magnet for terror. Op. cit.

Ninety-seven percent of the terrorists eliminated in Egypt in 2015 were members of WS (1,292) and 80% of the soldiers and police killed on active duty died in northern Sinai⁵⁶.

WS militants have awakened resentments with their attempts to control the local population. They have killed dozens of supposed spies, and threatened tribal leaders who are opposed to them. The economic impact of the attacks on tourists and international observers erode the sympathy of the inhabitants with the group⁵⁷.

Current situation of the conflict

Egypt continues to confront the insurgency in northern Sinai. Since its declaration of loyalty to the Islamic State, Wilayat Sinai (WS) has attacked the forces of the state and has claimed responsibility for the attacks on Coptic Christians⁵⁸.

2016

2016 began with antiterrorist operations and responses against the Army. The security forces would have hindered the terrorist operations if the latter had not received support from local civilians, especially in the areas of Al-Arish⁵⁹.

Assault in Al-Arish and response

Fifteen police and soldiers died on March 19th, in an attack on a police control point in the city of Al-Arish. WS claimed responsibility for the attack, which began with a suicide operation from a truck-bomb, following which the control point was assaulted and weapons taken. WS justified the attack as vengeance for the body-searching of Moslem women at military control points⁶⁰.

After this attack, operation "Martyr's Rights 3" began, which was carried out in Rafah and in Sheikh Zuweid, as well as in Wadi Omar, a principal terrorist communications route. The Army discovered underground

⁵⁶ Eleiba, Ahmed. Security successes in Sinai. Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1289 [Online] 03 31, 2016. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/15938.aspx>

⁵⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁸ Fuller, Braden. Emergency Rule and Insurgency in Egypt. ACLED. [Online] August 3, 2017, <http://www.crisis.acleddata.com/emergency-rule-and-insurgency-in-egypt/>.

⁵⁹ Eleiba, Ahmed. Security Successes in Sinai. *Op. cit.*

⁶⁰ DailyNews. 15 police officers, soldiers killed in Al-Arish attack. *DailyNews* [Online] 03 20, 2016. <https://dailynewsegypt.com/2016/03/20/15-police-officers-soldiers-killed-in-al-arish-attack/>.

materiel, munitions and food depots. The terrorists were using old as well as new methods: "The attack at Safa was very similar to the one at Karm Al-Qawadis"⁶¹.

WS received a series of reverses the first week of August, when the leader of the organization was eliminated and his communications system destroyed. But the great resilience of WS permitted its re-organization and re-armament⁶².



Figure 3.7 Political Violence in Egypt between 1997 and 2013 and between 2013 and 2016. Source ACLED.

The terrorist attack at Beir Al-Abd and its response

Twelve military officers and fifteen terrorists died on October 14th of 2016 when an armed group attacked an Army control point in northern Sinai. The attackers used 4x4 vehicles, prohibited in the zone since July of 2015⁶³. The following day aerial attacks were carried out against terrorist hideouts and arms depots. The objectives, selected based on intelligence, were coordinated with the local authorities⁶⁴.

The terrorist attack at Beir Al-Abd, for which WS claimed responsibility, was reminiscent of those at Karm Kawadis and Al-Safa. It was believed that with the elimination of Abu Doaa Al-Ansari, leader of ABM, WS would have become

⁶¹ Eleiba, Ahmed. Security successes in Sinai. *Op. cit.*

⁶² Eleiba, Ahmed. Sinai: a new focus. *Al-Aham weekly Issue 1316*. [Online] 10 20, 2016. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/176722.aspx>.

⁶³ Ahram Online. 12 Egyptian soldiers killed as militants attack North Sinai checkpoint: Army. *Ahram Online* [Online] 10 14, 2016. <http://English.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/245771/Egypt/0/Egyptian-soldiers-killed-as-militants-attack-Nort.aspx>.

⁶⁴ Ahram Online2. Egypt's army launches airstrikes on terrorist hideouts after N Sinai checkpoint attack. *Ahram Online* [Online] 10 15, 2016. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/NewsContent/1/0/245809/Egypt/0/Egypt%E2%80%99s-army-launches-airstrikes-on-terrorist-hide.aspx>.

weakened and the attacks would diminish⁶⁵. For the first time, WS launched an operation outside Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid or Arish. In spite of its decline, the group still maintained certain capabilities.

The attack opened a new operational front, which forced the deployment of additional forces; one of the indicators of success—keeping the organization corralled within the area Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid and Arish—seemed to have failed⁶⁶. (Eleiba, Sinai: A new focus, 2016). Para Ahmed Kamel⁶⁷.

“This means that the group had carried out vigilance and obtained intelligence in advance. They examined the terrain and carried out reconnaissance in the immediate surroundings. This involved two types of monitoring, one, of the group’s specialized equipment and the other, of persons outside it. These outsiders could be locals, but there is also a possibility that the security forces were infiltrated”⁶⁸.



Figure 3.8 Formation of one of the units participating in Operation “Right of the Martyrs” Including Special Operations and mechanized units.

Participating in the new campaign were special operations, the Second and Third armies, and the police, to “attack and capture terrorist and outlaw elements on the outskirts of towns, cities and residential zones in the north and center of Sinai”. It was the second integrated campaign launched

⁶⁵ Eleiba, Ahmed. Sinai: a new focus, *Op. cit.*

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷ Security Studies researcher at the Al-Aham Center for Political and Strategic Studies.

⁶⁸ Eleiba, Ahmed. Sinai: A new focus. *Ibid.*

by the Army with this purpose since Operation “Right of the Martyrs” in September 2015⁶⁹.

On November 19th 2016, WS executed Sheikh Suleiman Abu Haraz, one of the principal Sufi leaders of the Sinai. The terrorists had kidnapped the Sheikh, 89 years old, at his home, to the south of Al-Arish. Before beheading him, they dressed him in an orange outfit, emulating the executioners of Daesh.

2017

On February 8th, 2017, four rockets were launched from the Sinai towards the area of Eilat, in Israel. Three of them were intercepted by the “Dome of Iron” defense system, and another landed in an uninhabited area⁷⁰.

In March of 2017, the Armed Forces initiated an anti-terrorist operation called “Torrent 5” in the area of Jabal al-Halal, the “Tora Bora of Sinai”. Since the Second Army reinforced its presence in the north of Sinai, raising the pressure on the militants and restricting their operations, the militants have tried to expand these into Southern and Central Sinai⁷¹

The strategy of the Egyptian Army was to intensify the clean-up operations in the areas where terrorists of Wilayat Sinai were suspected to be stationed. The terrorists responded with assaults; two IED struck at APCM113, killing three officials and seven soldiers near Jabal Halal⁷².

The Egyptian Armed Forces had declared their total control over the al-Halal mountain after a six-day, two-phase operation:

- In the first phase, data is acquired about the area and the roads leading into it, and the terrorists’ meeting points.
- The second phase began with the blocking off of roads leading to the mountain, so as to subsequently control access and cut off supplies to the extremists⁷³.

General Mohammed Raafat, commander of the Third Army, explained the efforts to purge the area of Jabal Al-Halal:

“We began the encircling operation, including the routes of access to the zone, on February 12th. It went on for 6 days. The trapped terrorists reacted with vehicles and later with motorcycles. They also installed traps camouflaged within the zone to stop our troops from advancing”⁷⁴.

⁶⁹ Ahram Online 3, Egypt army launches major anti-terror campaign in Sinai. Ahram Online [Online] 10 16, 2016. <http://english.ahram.org.eg/Newscontent/1/64/245909/Egypt/politics-/Egypt-army-launches-major-antiterror-campaign-in-S.aspx>

⁷⁰ Shay, Shaul. Egypt’s Sweeping Operation in the “Tora Bora of Sinai”. *al-akhbar* [Online] 04 02, 2017. <http://englilsh.al-akhbar.com/node/11392>.

⁷¹ Ibid.

⁷² Ibid.

⁷³ Al-Masry Al-Youm, Sinai. Al-Masry Al-Youm. [Online] 04 2, 2017 <http://www.egyptindependant.com/army-gains-full-contol-al-halal-mountain-sinai/>.

⁷⁴ Eleiba, Ahmed. Counter-insurgency operations make gains in Sinai. *Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1339*. [Online]04 06, April 2017. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/20129.aspx>



Figure 3.9. Egyptian forces on Jabal al-Halal. Source: el-balad.com

The new forces went into the mountain, combed the area and advanced towards the terrorist hide-outs. Among the 4x4 vehicles used by the terrorists and located by the army, there were 2016 and 2017 models, and motorcycles for moving around on the paths on the mountain. The terrorists tried to flee, but after the cut-off of their supplies they ran out of ammunition, and many abandoned their weapons in the effort to escape⁷⁵.



Figure 3.10. Attacks on Christians between December 2016 and May 2017.

⁷⁵ Eleiba, Ahmed. Counter-insurgency operations. Op. cit.

“Tons of illegal drugs were discovered, together with areas on the mountain given over to the cultivation of marijuana and opium poppies. The profits from the sale of the hash and the opium to be refined into heroine represent a major source of financing”⁷⁶.

Recent attacks on Egyptian Christians

“Soft” objectives: The extermination of the Copts

Christians have been an objective, especially after the overthrow of Morsi in 2013. ISIS promised to “liberate” Cairo and threatened Christians⁷⁷. ISIS has claimed responsibility for the two explosions in Coptic churches on Palm Sunday, the first at that of Mar Girgis in the city of Tanta, where it killed 29 and wounded 71. A second explosion, three hours later, occurred at that of St. Mark’s in Alexandria. Pope Tawadros II was at that moment inside the church⁷⁸.



Figure 3.11. The Pope of the Coptic Orthodox Church, Tawadros II, heir to the seat of St. Mark.

These attacks were produced after months of aggression against the Coptic minority of Egypt. The church of St. Peter and St. Paul underwent a similar

⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Michaelson, Ruth. Isis claims responsibility for Coptic church bombings. *The Guardian* [Online] 04 09, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/apr/09/Egypt-coptic-church-bombing-death-toll-rises-tanta-cairo>.

⁷⁸ Ibid.

attack in December of 2016, when a suicide terrorist entered it, killing 29 persons. This was followed by attacks against the Christians of the Sinai Peninsula, which caused 250 to flee from al-Arish⁷⁹.

On April 10th, Al-Sisi declared a State of Emergency. In a subsequent attack, an armed group detained a convoy heading towards the monastery of St. Samuel, near Minya, killing 29 people, and wounding 20⁸⁰. ISIS defined Christians in Egypt as “our prime objective and favorite prey”⁸¹.

Return to hard objectives: the assault on El-Barth

On July 7, terrorists attacked the advanced outpost of a special operations force, the Red Battalion 103 (al-Saaka), in the town of El-Barth, to the south of Rafah. WS claimed responsibility for the attack⁸² (Mostafa, 2017). The militants killed 23 soldiers and wounded several dozen in the attack⁸³

The militants employed 24 SUV’s. An attacker rammed his vehicle against the control post; subsequently, dozens of masked militants on foot opened fire on the soldiers with machine guns for nearly half an hour. After the attack, the militants picked up all arms and munitions before fleeing the scene. The area surrounding the camp is a WS stronghold and recently has been witness to its combats against members of the tribes⁸⁴.

Recent operations represent an “attempt to maintain support and financing”, at risk after the blockade of Qatar. Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrein accuse Qatar of financing the extremists.

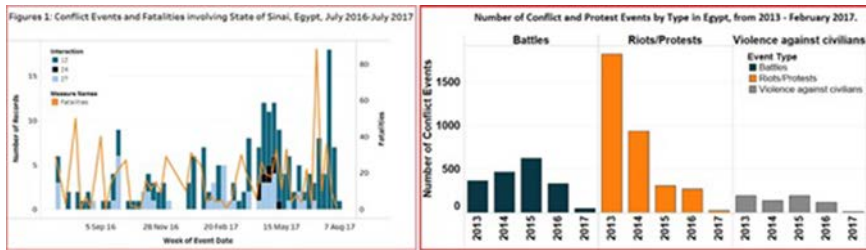


Figura 3.12.

⁷⁹ Michaelson, Ruth. Isis claims responsibility for Coptic church bombings. *Op. cit.*
⁸⁰ Michaelson, Ruth. Coptic Christians accuse Egyptian government of failing to protect them. *The Guardian* [Online] 05 28, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/28/Coptic-christians-accuse-egypt-government>
⁸¹ *Ibid.*
⁸² Mostafa, Amir. Terrorists in Sinai up their game. *Al-Monitor*. [Online] 07 24, 2017. <http://www.al-monitor.com/pulse/originals/2017/07/egypt-terrorist-attack-sinai-qualitative-operation-battalion.html>
⁸³ Associated Press. At least 23 Egyptian soldiers killed in attack on Sinai checkpoint. *The Guardian* [Online] 07 07, 2017. <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/07/egyptian-soldiers-killed-in-attack-on-sinai-checkpoint>.
⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

On July 16th, the Army began phase four of Operation “Martyr’s Right” as an immediate response to the July 7th attack, where the Army eliminated more than 40 of the attackers. Between the 17th and the 31st of July, another 46 terrorists were eliminated and 19 collaborators detained. Four preventive operations were begun, which destroyed 48 4x4 vehicles, 85 motorcycles, 62 hideouts, 11 arms and explosives depots and 11 bomb-factory workshops⁸⁵.

The task will continue until the following objectives have been achieved:

- Destroy the organizational structure of the terrorists, eliminate or capture their members and detain collaborators.
- Obtain intelligence and experience in the course of the operations in order to broaden preventive operations.
- Destroy the bases and strongholds used as platforms for carrying out operations, as well as hideouts and munitions caches, SUV’s and motorcycles, bomb-making materials and communications networks.
- Control principal and secondary roads into Rafah, Sheikh Zuweid, Arish and the surrounding towns, and block routes used by the terrorists.
- Obtain information which will frustrate any terrorist action⁸⁶.

Preventive operations represent another qualitative change in the battle, but the terrorist networks in the Sinai continue to obtain 4x4 vehicles which are used as car bombs. The priority is to discover how and from where these vehicles are introduced into the Sinai⁸⁷.

One of the Army’s principal difficulties has been the absence of precise and timely information about the location of WS forces. This problem may be resolved thanks to the errors of WS in their relations with the Bedouin tribes. In the last three years they have shot 300 Bedouins and beheaded another 200 for “collaborating” with the Army, in an attempt to impose submission on the tribes⁸⁸.

National Council for the Campaign against Terrorism and Extremism

On July 26th, President Al-Sisi issued a decree regulating the activities of the National Council for the Campaign against Terrorism and Extremism (NCCTE). The Council, which will be charged with mobilizing institutions and the public in order to combat terrorism and its causes, will be headed by

⁸⁵ Eleiba, Ahmad. Martyr’s Right 4. *Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1355*. [Online] 08 3, 2017. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/22090.aspx>.

⁸⁶ Eleiba, Ahmed. Martyr’s Right 4. *Op. cit.*

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ *Sinai Bedouin Aligning with Egypt against ISIS*. Yoni Ben Menachem, May 4, 2017, s.l. Jerusalem Center for Public Affairs, 05 04, 2017, Jerusalem Issue Briefs Vol. 17, No. 9.

the President⁸⁹. The presence of the Ministries of Education and Advanced Education on the Board:

“It means that there will be a major emphasis on education in order to counter extremism. It is very important to free schools and universities from extremist elements (...). Many of those implicated in terrorist operations are graduates of schools and universities affiliated with Al-Azhar”⁹⁰.

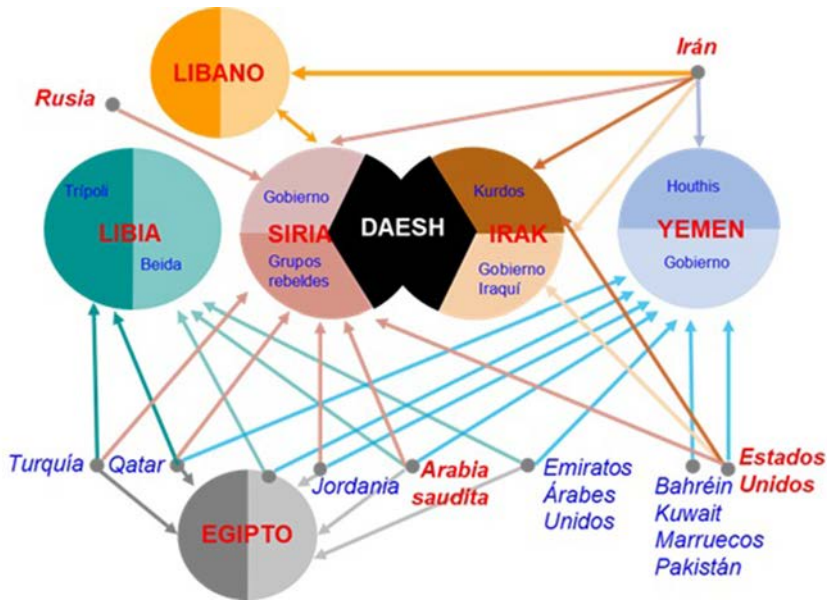


Figure 3.13 Regional and global actors in the Near East, wherein the complexity of relations may be observed. Source: The Economist.

External Actors

As may be inferred from the graph in illustration 11, geopolitics in the Near East is chaotic. In the case of the Sinai conflict, the Egyptian government is supported by Saudi Arabia, Jordan and the United Arab Emirates, but is opposed by Turkey as well as Qatar, which hermetically support the Moslem Brotherhood. These two latter countries have carried out active opposition in various ways.

Erdogan and his vision of Palestine

When Erdogan congratulated Netanyahu after his re-election on March 17th of 2015, he suggested two ideas to him: the first, to eliminate the Egyptian

⁸⁹ El-Din, Gamal Essam. New tool to battle terrorism. *Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1355*. [Online] 08 03, 2017. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/22085.aspx>.

⁹⁰ Ibid.

mediation in the question of Gaza and the Palestinian cause. The second, to adjust the frontier between Gaza and Sinai, taking advantage of the conditions of security in the Sinai to promote an exchange of territory wherein Gaza would be extended towards the Sinai and Egypt would gain territory in the Negev Desert⁹¹. In the opinion of General Mohammed Qashqoush, a specialist in national security at the Nasser Military Academy in Cairo,

"...Israel wanted to open the narrow border strip between Gaza and Egypt so as to export the problems of Gaza to Egypt. The United States tried to achieve the same objective through the Moslem Brotherhood. The government of the overthrown President Mohamed Morsi then granted Egyptian nationality to some 6,000 inhabitants, half of whom belonged to Hamas. We can only begin to imagine what would have happened if they had established a generation in Egypt, not only in demographic terms, but at all strategic levels⁹²".

Qatari media attack

Qatar's economic support for the terrorist groups in the Sinai and other zones is a fact defended by many experts. Qatar harbors a profound hatred for the Egyptian Army for having saved Egypt from the fate that befell other countries of the Arab spring. Mohamed Qashqoush, of the aforementioned Academy, justifies this:

"They want to create a terrorist sanctuary to the south of Egypt in the border zone of Al-Uweinat and the Aswan Dam. It is trying to buy the loyalty of the armed groups along this line with the aim of weakening the Egyptian Army and dividing their efforts at a time when they are concentrating on Sinai"⁹³.

In addition, the Egyptian Army underwent a media attack on the part of the Qatari television channel Al-Jazeera, which circulated the rumor that the Egyptian Air Force was supporting the Syrian regime in the battle of Aleppo⁹⁴. Hisham Al-Halabi, of the Nasser Military Academy, analyzed this:

"What Qatar is doing falls within the definition of psychological warfare. It is one of the tactics that come into play with the purpose of destroying countries from within. It engages in unconventional warfare such as cybernetic and technological warfare and even "electronic brigades" in order to spread negative propaganda or inflammatory information".

⁹¹ Al-Ahram Weekly. The Palestinian cause and Sinai. *Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1262*. [Online] 09 10.2015. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/13220.aspx>.

⁹² Eleiba, Ahmed, *Who's the enemy? Op. cit.*

⁹³ Ibid.

⁹⁴ Eleiba, Ahmed. Qatar's campaign against Egypt. *Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1322* [Online] 12 01, 2016. [Http://weekly.aham.org.eg/News/19035.aspx](http://weekly.aham.org.eg/News/19035.aspx).

Conclusions and perspectives for the future

The origin of terrorism in the Sinai is not owed to cultural particularities. It is the result of an imported ideology, fed by inefficient development policies, and indiscriminate responses on the part of the security forces and the Mukhabarat. The “encouragement of confidence” is social capital and a shared responsibility. The events in the Northwest of the Sinai could be an opportunity to maintain a single entity with an effective political future, with its two components of the Egyptian Nile Valley and Bedouins⁹⁵.

The geographical expansion of Islamist insurgency together with the rise in activity after the declaration of a State of Emergency implies that the government strategy of limiting political liberties and increasing repression has not been effective. The sustained levels of violence in Northern Sinai and the incapacity to smother or contain the insurgency suggest that the Egyptian authorities might consider alternatives for security.

The revolutionary dynamic of “action-reaction-action” has been present in the Sinai since 2004. The fall of Mubarak in 2011 and the deposing of Mursi in 2013 represent turning points in the growth of violence. The initiative has been in the hands of the terrorists between 2011 and 2014; the high point was reached in the year 2015, after integration into ISIS as Wilayat Sinai, with the terrorist attack on July 1st at Shaykh Zuweid. From 2016 on, the “action-reaction-action” dynamic continued, but with the initiative held by the Army and the security forces.

ISIS has suffered great losses in Iraq and Syria in recent months and has difficulties in recruiting new members. As a result, it has been identifying alternative locations such as Libya, Yemen and the Sinai Peninsula. An escalation of terrorist attacks in the Sinai cannot be dismissed, in response to the rise in anti-terrorist raids and to the events in Iraq and Syria following the liberation of Mosul and Raqqa.

There is an upsurge in the tribal movement against the Islamic militias in the Sinai. The problem in the Sinai is that, while some tribal members are accomplices of WS, others fight against them. The events in the Sinai may take a new turn towards an active alignment of the tribes with the government after a period in which they had remained on the margins of the fight against the “takfiris”. This change may be caused by the militant strategy of expanding into urban areas, where their conduct is causing growing aversion.

There is no expectation of an early end to the Sinai campaign, the attack at El-Barth on July 7th shows this, but the current dynamic gives rise to the belief that the problem may be solved in a question of years, rather than five-

⁹⁵ Shams, Ahmed. Sinai society: The Bedouin epicenter. *Al-Ahram Weekly Issue 1287*. [Online] 03 17, 2016. <http://weekly.ahram.org.eg/News/15791.aspx>.

year periods. Nonetheless, if the underlying causes of radicalization are not resolved and the Sinai is not efficiently integrated into the rest of Egypt, the probabilities of a re-emergence of the violence are very high.

The disparate role of regional actors is worrying, acting more as promoters than as neutralizers of the conflict, and is a reflection of the instability and uncertainty which reign in the Near East. Global actors such as the U.S., China or the EU have maintained a certain constructive ambiguity; Russia decidedly supports the al-Sisi government, especially after the attack on Metrojet Flight 9268. The change in tendency of the U.S. also seems evident following the triumph of President Trump, and favoring the regime of al-Sisi.

Chronology of the conflict and geopolitical indicators in the Sinai

| Year | Event |
|------|---|
| 1967 | Israel takes control of the Sinai from Egypt in the six-day war. |
| 1973 | The Yom Kippur War. |
| 1978 | The Camp David Accords. |
| 1982 | Israel withdraws from most of the Sinai. The FMO deploys. |
| 2004 | Tawhid wal Jihad attacks the Hilton in Taba. |
| 2005 | Tawhid wal Jihad attacks in Sharm el-Sheikh. |
| 2011 | 25th January: The revolution begins |
| | 5th January: First attack on the gas pipeline to Israel. |
| | 11th February: Mubarak stands down as President. |
| | 18th August: Transborder attack on Eilat, Israel. |
| | August 2011: "Operation Eagle" launched in the Sinai. |
| 2012 | 24th June: Mohamed Morsi elected President. |
| | 5th August: Egyptian troops ambushed at the border with Israel. |
| | August 2012: «Operation Sinai», launched after the attacks of August 5 th . |
| 2013 | 3rd July: Morsi and the Moslem Brotherhood withdrawn from power. |
| | 19 th August: Police ambushed in Rafah, Northern Sinai |
| | 20th November: VBIED attack on Egyptian soldiers. |
| | 24th December: Explosion at the Security Directorate in Daqaliya. |
| 2014 | 24th December: Attack on the Security Directorate in Cairo. |
| | 26th January: Mi-17 helicopter downed in Northern Sinai. |
| | 3rd February: Major offensive of the Egyptian army. |
| | 16 February: Bomb explosion under South Korean tourist bus in Taba. |
| | 22nd-24th February: Combined military operations. |
| | 24th October: Greatest attack since beginning of war. El-Sisi declares State of Emergency in the Sinai. |
| | 10th of November: ABM pledges allegiance to ISIS |

Sinai: a time bomb about to go off?

| | |
|--|---|
| 2015 | 29th January: WS militants launch a series of attacks against Army and police bases in Arish using car bombs and mortars. |
| | 6 th February: Security forces respond attacking WS. |
| | 2nd April: Attack on an Army control point. |
| | 3 rd April: The army launches an attack in response to the attack. |
| | 27th April: Members of the al-Tarabeen tribe launch an attack against ABM positions in Rafah. |
| | 16th May: Attack against three judges in Northern Sinai. |
| | 1st July: One of the largest attacks since 2011 launches against several Egyptian Army control posts and the police station at Sheikh Zuweid. |
| | Reinforcements from the Second Army Zone (Ismailia) deploy at Sheikh Zuweid, and F-16 combat planes attack the militants in the city. |
| | 16th July: Militants attack a Navy patrol boat with a missile. |
| | 8 th of September: The Army launches the first phase of the preventive Operation "Martyr's Rights", in Rafah, Arish and Sheikh Zuweid. |
| 31st October: Wilayat Sinai shoots down a Russian passenger plane in Sinai. | |
| 2016 | January: Second phase of Operation "Martyr's Rights" launched. |
| | 19th March: Attack on control post at Arish killed 15 police and soldiers, as vengeance for inspection procedures on women. |
| | April: Third phase of Operation "Martyr's Rights" begins. |
| | 4th August: ABM leader Abu Doaa Al-Ansari eliminated. |
| | 14th October: Terrorist attack at Beir al-Abd, 80 km. from Arish. |
| 19th November: WS executed Sheikh Suleiman Abu Haraz, one of the most outstanding Sufi leaders in the Sinai. | |
| 2017 | 9th January: An attack by several terrorists and a truck-bomb at a police control point in El-Arish: 31 dead and 22 wounded. |
| | 8th February: four rockets launched from Sinai towards Eilat. |
| | March: Antiterrorist operation "Torrent 5", in the area of Jabal al-Halal. |
| | On July 7th, WS attacks the forward outpost of Red Battalion 103, at the village of El-Barth, to the south of Rafah. |
| | 16th July: The army begins phase four of Operation "Martyr's Rights". |
| | 26th July: Decree regulating the activities of the new NCCTE Council. |

Chapter four

The Caucasus

José Luis Cabello Rodríguez

Abstract

The Caucasus is an area of forgotten conflicts. After the disappearance of the Soviet Union, the southern area saw the birth of three new states recognized by the international community, which started fighting among themselves almost immediately. Russia found itself involved in a series of revolts of nationalist origin in the northern area which have resulted in permanent Islamic insurgency. This has not prevented the military action they decided to undertake in Georgia when they felt their strategic interests were at risk.

Their possession of large reserves of petroleum and natural gas, plus various routes for the exportation of these, means that the interests of Russia, Turkey and Iran compete in the area, in peaceful fashion so far.

On the other hand, the conflicts in Iraq and Syria, in spite of their proximity, have eclipsed the interest of the major strategic actors in the region and of the United States. This seems to offer a strategic truce that could be an opportunity for economic and social development, as well as for the States to evolve into more democratic forms of government. However, this way forward is being impeded by internal conflicts and by authoritarian governmental structures that generate corruption and inefficiency in government.

Keywords

Abkhazia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, the Caucasus, Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh, South Ossetia, Russia.

Introduction

If there is a region in the world where the “Vengeance of Geography”, as Kaplan would say, is palpable, that is the Caucasus. Its location generates dynamics where powers to it are involved even if they would prefer to forget the region. That has been the history of the Caucasus which, after periods of oblivion, always re-emerges as one of the conflict areas on the border between Europe and Asia. Even in the minds of the ancient Greeks it was such an inhospitable and inaccessible place that they put Prometheus in it to would receive his punishment from the gods for providing fire to men. What could be a natural passage of communication between Central Asia and the Russian “Sea of Grass” is closed off by an area which extends as high as the Elbrus, and encloses the area between the Black and the Caspian Seas. Along with the Balkans, which separate the Slavic area from the Mediterranean south, and the Altai mountains that divide Siberia from China, the Caucasus determines the Russian geopolitics of manifest destiny towards the “Far East” (the Asian soul of Russia) which ends at Vladivostok, and creates the conditions of space as a buffer against invasions from the west as in 1812, 1915, and 1941.

This region, with rich natural resources which were barely exploited until the discovery of oil, and the need for it generated by technological development, at the end of the XIX century, has historically been a secondary scenario. The Russian, Turkish, and Persian Empires came to converge there, producing a chaotic mixture of peoples, religions, and languages. A scenario isolated from the wars among these powers, its wealth of energy turned it into the objective of a strategic axis of the German advance during 1941 and 1942 because of the importance that the acquisition of an energy base would have meant for Germany.

Although it had been the scenario, since the XIX century, of a constant struggle among the consecutive Russian powers and the autochthonous populations, the area languished, strategically speaking, in consecutive “secondary fronts” throughout the hot (the First World War) and cold (the Soviet-Western competition) conflicts. It was precisely the breakdown of Moscow’s power at the end of the XX century that meant an outbreak of a chronic yet contained instability.

Background of the conflict

At the end of the Second World War and when the two blocs that would engage in the Cold War were formed, the latter had only two main areas for physical contact: Central Europe and Central Asia. Although the main front was always the former, in the latter it was the Soviet territory which was in direct geographical contact, without the Central European buffer states, with the Turkey that belonged to NATO. Iran, though strongly influenced by

the United States and the United Kingdom, and which became a member of the CENTO, shared a border with the Soviets in the Caucasus and Central Asia which, due to its geographical characteristics, was more a place where intelligence vectors could be established than a threat in itself.

The experience of the two World Wars had taught Moscow that any enemy coalition would either sweep along the coast towards Crimea or create a front, though secondary, on the Turkish border. The conclusion was that the southern flank should be carefully watched but that it would always be more a distraction than a solution.

When all is said and done, the main objective in the south would be, as it had been since the days of the Czars, the search for an exit for the Russian fleet from the Black Sea to the Mediterranean, and this exit was on the coast opposite the Caucasus.

Thus, in the USSR's strategic concept, the Black Sea meant a confrontational area that extended from the coasts of their Romanian and Bulgarian allies to the forests in the Western Caucasus. Furthermore, the attitude of some Caucasian ethnic groups towards the German invasion (particularly in Georgia, Azerbaijan, Chechnya, and Ingushetia¹) had shown the Soviets the need to establish an internally stable space within the area at any cost.

Stability was sought through an intensive process of "Russification" which led to the deportation of entire ethnic groups, such as Chechens, and to the resettlement of the population of Slavic origin that would make up the local political elites and keep a feeling of unity in the complex Soviet political system. As with other religions, in this case a "de-Islamization" was carried out which did not turn out as expected.

The feelings of ethnic and religious identity continued to be deeply rooted in the indigenous populations, as a form of survival in the face of Moscow's erratic and violent policies.

The collapse of the Soviet Union brought, as on the western façade, the emergence of nationalism, which cohered into the independence of the areas where Russian influence was most controversial. Although Moscow continued to hold power in the north, with the exception of the temporary separation of Chechnya, the south experienced the birth of three new independent republics: Georgia, Armenia, and Azerbaijan.

The difficulties for an efficient transition to a market economy, the lack of political maturity, the difficulties of all types during the democratization period, and the efforts of external actors to rule the region ended up in widespread corruption, undemocratic governments, and an unstable political environment.

¹ <http://www.eurasia1945.com/acontecimientos/fascismo/el-caucaso-en-la-segunda-guerra-mundial/>.

Current situation of the conflict

If there is a fundamental actor to take into consideration in the Caucasus, that is Russia. All of the independent territories, whether they are internationally recognized or not, have previously been under Russian rule; and the rest of the region is still part of the Russian federal structure. Regarding military and economic capability, and geostrategic willpower, Russia casts a shadow over the entire area.

In general terms, Russian performance in the area has been based on the doctrine of “No interference in internal matters” (the methods for counter-terrorism in Chechnya should not be officially criticized by any other country), unless “Russian minorities” are affected by nationalist regimes, looking, at the same time, to undermine the territorial and population base of possible enclaves favorable to the west, as is the case of Georgia.

As of 2017, the situation is the one defined in the first years of the post-Soviet area. A northern Caucasus where Russian control is more or less effective, except for the presence of Islamic resistance movements that carry on an armed confrontation with Moscow, which Russia is still managing somewhat efficiently to this day, and a southern Caucasus where Moscow demands strategic control over the independent States, punishing any type of over-zealousness in relations with the West. A “Finlandization” of the area would be the final situation desired by Moscow.

The areas of the Caucasus

Russia

The Russian Caucasus is made up of the Republics of: Karachay-Cherkessia, Kabardino-Balkaria, North Ossetia, Ingushetia, Chechnya, and Dagestan, and Russia itself.

Russia demonstrated, through her actions in 2008, that it she is not willing to back down on the strategic gains she has attained. The creation of Abkhazia and North Ossetia as separate entities served as a warning of what would happen in Crimea regarding Ukraine, and the Georgian attempt to reverse the situation was met with a harsh response. Pro-Western pursuits are tolerated as long as they do not imply an economic or military level of integration that Moscow might consider unacceptable in their “proximate foreign” territories.

The situation in Russian territory regarding Islamic terrorism stems from a true and active presence which, though inconvenient, has so far resulted in a Russian capacity to maintain the political status. An exception is the case of Chechnya, where the support of the population for the insurgents derives from both wars which are the backdrop for the failed secessionist project, and from Russian repression after the victory in the second war, which meant



Figure 4.1 Map of the Caucasus²

the *de facto* administration through the clans loyal to Moscow; in the rest of the northern Caucasian republics, the Russian Administration remained in spite of terrorist actions.

It must not be forgotten that, though sporadic, the attacks in the heart of Russia by militants from the Caucasus are a reality, like the attack in the metro in Saint Petersburg in April of 2017.²

The situation of Russian superiority regarding the Islamic insurgency derives from two factors³. On the one hand from the iron-fisted policy against terrorism, which has led to the elimination of the consecutive “emirs” of the main terrorist organization in their territory, the “Imarat Kavkaz” (the Emirate of the Caucasus), loyal to al Qaeda, and on the other, the substantial number of radicalized personnel who have traveled to Syria and Iraq as volunteers to join the ranks of the Islamic State. In spite of this, the insurgency has shown a great capacity of resilience against Russian actions, and has survived both the campaigns in Chechnya, and the current police offensive throughout the Caucasus.

In the northern Caucasus as well as in the large cities (Moscow or Saint Petersburg), the action of Russian Security Forces has been, on occasions, disproportionately violent, and the radical nationalist organizations have

² http://www.lib.utexas.edu/maps/commonwealth/caucasus_region_1994.jpg.

³ Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Russia and the CIS. 15 June 2017

acted with a wide margin of impunity, which at the same time, stirs in non-Russian ethnic groups a feeling of racism and separation from any kind of common project with the rest of the Federation. For example, on the occasion of the Sochi Winter Olympics in January of 2014, the surge of “preventive” operations activated feelings of discrimination of the Muslim population in the north Caucasus⁴.

Since November of 2014, most of the chiefs of the “Emirate” have distanced themselves from it and have sworn loyalty to the Islamic State which, at the time, seemed to offer more opportunities for the future regarding the establishment of a State ruled by Sunni militant fundamentalism. This has meant the breakdown and later reorganization of the support and recruitment networks that the returnees from Syria and Iraq may help to reestablish.

It should be borne in mind that the struggle against “non-traditional” forms of the Islamic religion is affecting, not only to the Northern Caucasus, but also all Islamic minorities of the Federation: the regions of Tartar population, the Urals, Siberia, and the enormous Diaspora of Central Asian Muslims in the Moscow area, all of which may originate support nuclei for radical elements returning from the conflicts in the Middle East and Mesopotamia.



Fuente: Institute for the Study of War, junio de 2015.

Figure 4.2 Islamism in the North Caucasus. Source: Institute for the Study of War, June of 2015.

⁴ <http://www.forb.es.com/sites/annaborschhevskaya/2014/11/30/russias-ongoing-battle-with-radical-islam/#16ad64fb4b70>

In any case, the number of deaths due to activities related to terrorism and to actions against it has increased since 2015, which shows a process of absorption of Islamic State combatants who have returned and the corresponding increase in the response from Russian security forces. Chechnya and Dagestan are, and will possibly continue to be, the areas hardest hit. The possibility that the phenomenon of the returnees may turn into an increase of Islamic terrorism throughout Russian territory⁵ should not be ruled out either. As an example, Tatarstan, a pacific and multicultural Republic, far from the Caucasus, has already been pointed out as a possible area for the spread of jihadism where, beginning in 2014, there have already been attacks and arrests made⁶.

Georgia

After their Independence from the Soviet Union, the regions of Abkhazia in the northwest, and South Ossetia in the north, gained their independence from Georgia, keeping this *de facto* situation to the present day. From the point of view of the new entities, upon the dissolution of the Soviet Union, their affiliation with Georgia was revisable, and this they did with the approval of Moscow. The attempt at forced "Georgianization" by Tblisi was a major factor, which ended up intensifying the situation to the point of degeneration into violence.

The Georgian attempt to recover control of South Ossetia in 2008 resulted in categorical failure when the Russian peace troops took arms in favor of the Ossetians and the new Russian formations entered the conflict, and the Georgian offensive was quickly stifled. The fiasco resulted in additional ground loss in Abkhazia (the valley of the Kodori River), which celebrates the 9th of August of that year as the day of the total recovery of the Abkhazian territory from Armenian hands.

In the end, Russia, as well as Nicaragua, Venezuela, Nauru, Vanuatu and Tuvalu, recognized both republics as independent States. In any case, this independence is not recognized by the UN, and the recognition by Moscow, which encouraged the others, is interpreted as a "vengeance" for U.N. recognition of the independence of Kosovo from Serbia.

Since 2008, the military situation has remained quiet, given the lack of proportion between the support that the separatist republics have received from Russia and the timid support that Georgia has received from NATO in general and in particular from the United States.

⁵ http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/en/publications/cad/cad-all-issues/details.html?id=/n/o/9/3/no_93_political_islamr_93_political_isl.

⁶ <https://www.wforbes.com/sites/s/annaborshevska/2014/11/30/russias-ongoing-battle-with-radical-islam/2/#591ea2e66c99>.



Figure 4.3 Georgia and the separatist Republics of South Ossetia and Abkhazia⁷

The road for the two territories has been parallel. They are both moving slowly towards their integration into Russia, which has generously issued a Russian passport to most of the population, and has eliminated the borders “*de facto*”.⁷

The most significant aspect in the life of the country is only the internal political and economic process. The political situation in Georgia⁸ is a matter of debate between the two major parties, the Georgian Dream, SD, and the United National Movement; however, the parliamentary elections in 2016 showed a high degree of abstention, which illustrates the growing hostility towards a bipartisan model, and the lack of clear alternatives in the political arena.

Analyzing the voting segments, it can be observed that the voters with clearly decided options in the polls opted for pro-western attitudes, while those of the undecided voters usually had tendencies which, if not clearly pro-Russian, were more critical of a clear alignment of their country with the West.

⁷ <https://descubrirlahistoria.es/2015/06/las-guerras-del-siglo-xxi-abjasia-y-osetia-del-sur>.

⁸ http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/en/publications/cad/cad-all-issues/details.html?id=/n/o/8/9/no_89_parliamentary_elections_in_georgia.

However, the “Alliance of Patriots” party, clearly pro-Russian, surpassed by very little the 5% threshold of the votes needed in order to enter Parliament, and its influence (6 deputies) in the term that will continue until 2020 will be very scarce. It must be borne in mind that anti-Western feeling, though slowly, is growing, particularly among the ethnic minorities, mainly Armenians and Azerbaijanis (12% of the population altogether). In any case, the influence of anti-Western propaganda will not be felt in the short term⁹.

Economically¹⁰, Georgia is the sixth State by income level among the members of the former Soviet Union (the first five are Azerbaijan, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Russia, and Turkmenistan), and it is considered to be within the group of countries which has “high average income”, which is not much but does move them out of poverty, although the distribution of that income is very uneven. The economic sectors that have led to the increase of the GDP at an average pace of 5.6% have been the financial, real estate, small manufacturing, and tourist sectors, which are known for creating stable jobs with high salaries. Furthermore, the economy has not recovered totally from the upsets caused by the confrontation with Russia, as well as the global crisis in 2008-2009 and a new regional crisis in 2014-2015.

The outcome is that the appearance of an urban middle class is being set back and this damages the evolution of the country towards social structures comparable with the West. Besides, efforts to liberalize the economy, passing from a planned society to a society with more social insecurity, is at the origin of the increase in anti-Western feelings previously mentioned.

The south-western corner, the Autonomous Republic of Adjara, has provided a high number of jihadist combatants for the Islamic State. Likewise, the northeast area of Pankisi, close to Chechnya and with a Chechen population which settled in Georgia long ago, all belonging to the Nakh¹¹ ethnic group, is providing combatants for the Sunni radicalism beyond the Georgian border.

The Georgian nation’s identity as a Christian country pushed many Muslims to convert to the Orthodox religion to avoid economic discrimination and have access to better job opportunities and to rise in the social scale. However, this movement is reversing itself, increasing cultural self-esteem, and at the same time pushing young Muslim generations into a growing disaffection and a vision of Muslim combatants in far-away conflicts as heroes.

⁹ Ibidem

¹⁰ http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-securities-studies/en/publications/cad/cad-all-issues/details.html?id=/n/o/9/5/no_95_middle_classesnr_95_mittelklassen.

¹¹ <https://www.rferl.org/a/georgia-chechens-demand-action-to-stop-youth-joining-islamic-state/26943399.html>.

Armenia

From 1988 to 1994, a series of violent armed clashes occurred setting Armenia against Azerbaijan over the Nagorno-Karabakh area. When everything seemed to point to a situation impossible to resolve, but contained, on the night of the 2nd to the 3rd of April of 2016, open hostilities broke out again for four days; the confrontation was solved with a series of small, but tactically important, Azari gains.

Following this outbreak of hostilities with Azerbaijan¹², Armenian society lost a great deal of trust in their rulers regarding protection of the territory of Nagorno-Karabakh, which is reflected in the difficulties for the process of political change from a personal and Presidential power structure to a parliamentary system, having as its principal milestones the holding of parliamentary elections in 2017, which have not been deemed worthy of approval by the OSCE regarding their fairness, and other presidential elections in 2018.

The case of the assault on a police station in the capital, Yerevan, in July of 2016 by members of the “Sasna Tser” group, who demanded the liberation of the opposition leader Jirari Sefilian, jailed on suspicion of preparing violent actions against Azerbaijan, and the resignation of President Serzh Sargsyan, demonstrated wide popular support for the assailants and the rejection of a speedy solution. This case was finally solved with the surrender and trial of the attackers, which is a demonstration of the level of the disenchantment previously mentioned.

The wave of patriotism that swept through Armenian society, bringing about a mass of volunteers supporting positions at Nagorno-Karabakh, suffered a bitter setback owing to the lack of professionalism on the part of their military commanders. The lack of an independent investigation, as all those carried out have been executed with no intervention by independent actors, and parliamentary commission sessions have been behind closed doors with the excuse of the upcoming 2017 elections is the origin of the social disenchantment and lack of trust towards their leaders by Armenian society. Until then, a tacit agreement had been established by which the population endured high levels of corruption in return for an effective “protection” against the Azeri threat.

Apart from the conflict, which is normally used as justification for any distressing situation, the truth is that Armenia is the Caucasian Republic that has experienced the least economic and social development since its independence, and possibly the one that is most closely dependent on Russia in the economic and energy sectors.

¹² <https://www.crisisgroup.org/europe-central-asia/caucasus/nagorno-karabakh-azerbaijan/244-nagorno-karabakhs-gathering-war-clouds>.

Inequality, irregularities in the payment of salaries, extra responsibilities and demands on the job, and the growing difficulties of reconciling professional life with family life are driving more and more people out of the middle class. Also the increasing automation of industrial processes and employment needs for which there is no training in the educational system are putting at risk the permanence within the middle class of a growing sector of it. All of this is originating a middle class that works and pays taxes, but does not feel committed to political decision-making, has no self-awareness, and is thinking of leaving the country as soon as possible¹³.

In addition, the country is suffering from a strong decrease in its population, 640,000 inhabitants since 1991, which is logically a worrisome issue in Yerevan, which launched, in July of 2017, a plan to reverse the situation; however, considering the economic situation, it is doubtful that the economic incentives will work. The problem is that Azerbaijan is indeed growing, mainly its male population, and the imbalance between these populations could be in the medium term a factor that may go against Armenian interests.

In order to try to mitigate negative economic and demographic consequences, the Armenian government is carrying out a civilian-military program of integration called "Concept of the Army Nation" with the objective of mobilizing the totality of the national capacities for security. Within Armenian society, voices have been raised in protest because they understand this program is going to create soldiers, not citizens, educating new generations without the ability to criticize the government.

Nagorno-Karabakh¹⁴

Since the end of hostilities in 1994, there has been created within the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the so-called "Minsk Group", co-directed by Russia, the United States and France, with the aim of leading a pacification process in the region. This process would result in an end to the conflict accepted by both parties. Their initiatives aimed towards that objective until the beginning of the first decade of the century, when they abandoned their attempts to obtain a general agreement, as having achieved technical understanding in specific sectors, and the maintenance of a channel for dialogue between Baku and Yerevan. Since 2008, Russia has adopted a leading role among the co-directors of the Group.

¹³ Ibidem footnote 5

¹⁴ Ibidem footnote 6.



Figure 4.4 The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict¹⁵

The attempts by the Group to maintain a policy of neutrality and objectivity have resulted in both parties losing trust in the Group and considering the structure useless.

The fiasco that the 2016 crisis meant for Armenian expectations has also had an impact on the society of the enclave. Although it is usually included in the rest of the Armenian population, the residents of Nagorno-Karabakh have their own identity within the Armenian world. Here the feelings of “society under siege” and vulnerability have resulted in a reinforcement of the feeling of peculiarity. If the Armenian population does not trust its leaders, the inhabitants of the enclave distrust the whole of Armenian society, and are uneasy about the fact that they may become, at any given moment, a bargaining chip in reaching a solution to the conflict in the long term, which would turn them into refugees in their own land or reduce what little hope they have of economic development.

To understand the evolution of the Caucasian scenario, one must keep in mind that for Russia, the Caucasus is part of its “sphere of priority interests”. Russia acts through its diplomats in Baku as well as in Yerevan, and is using the conflict to try to increase its presence, of whatever type, in the region; good proof of this is Russia’s offer to deploy a contingent of Russian intervention troops between Azeris and Armenians which would give them a privileged position to arbitrate a solution favorable to Russian interests. The lack of decisive initiatives by the West regarding this issue must also be added to the foregoing.

¹⁵ https://www.cidob.org/var/plain/storage/images/media2/new_site/fios_2015/imatges_2015/mapa_notia_161/2010695-1-esl-ES/mapa_notia_161_reference.png.

That Russia has very strong military ties to Armenia¹⁶ has not impeded the sale of Russian weapons to the Azaris, which has resulted in discontent in the streets of Armenia. In addition, there is a growing feeling in Armenia and in the enclave that Moscow intends to sponsor an arrangement that implies the return of a substantial part of the territory to Azeri control, as can be seen in the drafts presented to date by Russian diplomacy. In any case, Russia has already warned that in case of a large-scale conflict between Azaris and Armenians, she would intervene to “avoid ethnic cleansing”.

Azerbaijan

Independence brought with it an unexpected consequence for Azerbaijan. The autonomous Armenian-majority province of Nagorno-Karabakh voted for its secession and, almost automatically, received military support from their brothers in the new Armenian State, who had not only gained independence for the enclave but also conquered the territories needed to ensure a link with the Armenian mother country. Since then, almost daily violent incidents and clashes have been the tendency along the Line of Contact (LOC), which divides the military positions of both sides and constitutes a border which is not recognized, by Azerbaijan less than anyone, between Nagorno-Karabakh and Azerbaijan.

The brief hostilities in April of 2016 meant, for the first time, a victory, although limited, of the Azeri over the Armenians. Baku's government was able to show its population that their traditional enemy was not invincible and, for the first time, in the minds of everyone, population and government, the possibility appeared of a future military solution implying the reintegration of all the territories lost, or at least of those surrounding the Armenian-majority enclave which now ensure geographic continuity between Armenia and Nagorno-Karabakh, and whose occupation resulted in a flow of refugees into Azeri territory.

However, upon examining in detail the Azeri advances, these may be seen to have barely consisted of seizing the locations of Talish to the north and Lalatapa to the south, respectively, of the disputed area.

The origin of this “miracle” has stemmed largely from the economic surge of Azerbaijan in the last ten years thanks to hydrocarbons¹⁷, which allowed for substantial acquisition of weapons not only in Russia but also in Turkey, Israel, and Pakistan.

¹⁶ Armenia is the only one of the three South Caucasian countries that is still a member of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO), signed with Russia and other former Soviet republics, from which Georgia and Azerbaijan withdrew in 1999.

¹⁷ https://www.cidob.org/publicaciones/serie_de_publicacion/notes_internacionales/n1_162/la_persistente_fragilidad_del_caucaso_la_crisis_de_abril_de_nagorno_karabaj.



Figure 4.5 The red arrows indicate the areas recovered by Azerbaijan¹⁹

The fact that more than 90%¹⁸ of Azerbaijan's economy depends on oil exports should not be forgotten. An unexpected consequence of this "monoculture" has been that the world-wide price crisis has turned into a sudden and dramatic drop in income, which has meant that the government of Yerevan has had to face a serious social crisis as not being able to attend to the needs of the population, whose standard of living had maintained its level artificially thanks to the income from oil.

The solutions which the regime of President Aliyev (a family saga) has chosen have been to request a loan from the IMF, devalue the currency, and levy a tax

¹⁸ <http://bruegel.org/2015/11/the-impact-of-the-oil-price-shock-on-net-oil-exporters/>.

¹⁹ <http://blog.crisisgroup.org/eur/ope-centr-al-asia/2016/02/26/the-shifting-dangers-of-nagorno-karabakh/>.

of 20% on all foreign transactions. The aim of it all is to maintain a regime of subsidies that legitimizes the system in the eyes of the population and silences suspicions of corruption and electoral fraud²⁰. The most probable result will be greater dependence on Russia in every respect because of the lack of means to sustain strategic independence.

As Azerbaijan's society is of Muslim majority, although Shiite²¹, it is necessary to consider some issues regarding the possible existence of Islamic extremism in the heart of its society. As in other countries in the area, in Azerbaijan there have also been cases of radicalization and adhesion to the struggle of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq; but, although the government tries to make the struggle against the Movement of Islamic Unity seem a contribution towards the fight against terrorism, the truth is that it is using it as a smokescreen in the face of international opinion to combat any type of opposition to President Ilham Aliyev's regime²².

In fact, the arrests of Islamic militants and of members of the Islamic political opposition usually take place in parallel. Religious activities are supervised by the Muslim Council of the Caucasus which is *de facto* part of the State apparatus with any religious publication or activity needing approval from this organism.

The role of external actors

Four main external actors can be distinguished in the Caucasus: Russia, Turkey, Iran, and the United States. Russia is still categorically setting the agendas of State entities in the region, whether these are recognized or not. Turkey and Iran, after a period of determining influence, have been sidelined since the beginning of the XX century, and are now trying to recover some type of ability to set the course of the different States that emerged from Soviet disintegration. The role of the United States and of the West in general in the area, which has caused tensions and reactions on the part of Russia, must not be forgotten, and their absence or presence must always be taken into account.

Iran

Iran has always had a strategic interest in the Caucasus, especially in the southern area. At this moment, its interest is mainly economic, holding a very

²⁰ Ibidem footnote 8.

²¹ The proportion is approximately 65% Shiite and 35% Sunni, with a strong presence among the latter of disciples of the controversial Turkish Sheikh Fethullah Gulen, whose extradition Ankara has fruitlessly requested from Washington in relation to the attempted coup in 2016.

²² http://www.css.ethz.ch/content/specialinterest/gess/cis/center-for-security-studies/en/publications/cad/cad-all-issues/details.html?id=/n/o/9/3/no_93_political_islamnr_93_political_isl.

reduced capability of ideological and religious penetration, except possibly in the Shiite area of Azerbaijan.

Iran, with a varied ethnic composition, houses Caucasian minorities such as Azeri, Georgians, and Armenians, the Azeri being by far the most numerous (over 12 million), and Armenians the least, since following the Iranian revolution, the majority have emigrated, there being no more than 45,000 in Iran at present. In any case, these are influential communities, particularly Georgians and Armenians, famous for being hard-working and because of their economic ties abroad.

After the agreements with the international community which meant the end of the Sanctions Regime, one of the main problems in Iran has been finding export routes for their products that are safe and that cannot be intercepted at any given moment. At this time, their main fear is that the cooling of their relations with Turkey may hinder establishment of the incipient commercial channels with Europe which must perforce be by land.

A clear example is the search for an oil pipeline to take Iranian crude oil, recently incorporated again into the market, directly to their traditional customers in Europe. This would pass through two of the areas of solution used to evade the former embargoes: either through Georgia, the Northern Project, or through Azerbaijan, the Southern Project. The latter presents the best perspectives due to the facilities which the topography of the Azeri territory offers. In any case, considering the situation of Iranian finances, the first to obtain foreign financing to develop its branch will get the connection.

It must also be noted that Georgia is a growing destination for Iranian tourists, especially for the better-educated sectors of society who visit the Caucasian country in order to live in a less rigid environment than the one they find in their own country. But beyond tourism, Georgia is beginning to be used by Iran as a platform wherein to establish their industries and thus facilitate the entrance of their products into the EU, similar to the way in which Japan has used the United Kingdom to enter the European automobile market.

Turkey

Turkey's role in the Caucasus cannot be separated from its relationship with Moscow. The history of the region has mainly been, since the XVIII century, a struggle between these two States. The consequences of the First World War extend into the present with the case of the "Armenian Genocide" which poisons Turkey's relations with all the countries that recognize this and perpetuate the memory of the victims.

Turkey has a double interest in the Caucasus. On the one hand, part of the population belongs to the "Turkic Universe" that it wants to foster, as a way to increase cultural influence, and thus, politics in its vicinity, through a "zero problems" policy with its neighbors.

On the other, this is the area from which oil and gas from the Caspian Sea area flows through its territory, and provides it geo-economic relevance as an alternative to Russian hopes of exclusivity regarding the distribution of energy into Europe, particularly to the central region; coincidentally, this grants the country another weapon, other than the refugee question, with which to influence European policies towards it, especially at a moment when its integration into the EU seems to be at its lowest point, and criticism of the process to increase presidential powers and a supposed reduction of liberties is intensifying among many EU governments.

It must be borne in mind that the Gazprom contract with Ukraine for gas transport through its territory and into Central Europe ends in 2019, and that Moscow is not interested in renewing it, but rather the opposite; also that Turkey signed in August of 2016 the first agreements with Moscow for the construction of the TANAP, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline that will ensure the distribution of resources, hooking up with the Southern Oil Pipeline of the Caucasus through a more reliable country²³.



Figure 4.6 Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline Project.²⁴

Turkish policy towards the region is officially ruled by four principles²⁵. The first is the establishment of mechanisms for political dialogue at the highest level to reach solutions and to manage crises. The most relevant example is the creation of the institution “High-Level Strategic Cooperation Council” (HLSCC) which holds a series of periodic meetings at the highest level with the Chiefs of State of countries in the area, besides seeking

²³ <http://www.tanap.com/tanap-project/why-tanap/>

²⁴ <http://www.mbcruiser.com/es/es/comunicación/últimas-noticias/una-flota-de-cucharas-cribadoras-mb-trabajando-en-el-oleoducto-scp-del-cáucaso-del-sur.>

²⁵ <https://sam.gov.tr/the-relations-between-turkey-and-the-caucasus/>. Reflects the official Turkish point of view.

public forums to foster relations at a social level²⁶. The second principle is that of economic interdependence, within which are framed the efforts to develop economic projects for cooperation as well as to establish free-circulation agreements.

The third principle is that of generating policies that include all the actors in the region, and lastly, the fourth is co-existence in peace, diversity, and tolerance of differences. And above all, except for the inexplicable episode of bringing down the Russian fighter, the aim is to maintain cooperation and economic ties with Russia, for which the establishment of the four points mentioned above is always framed within a good neighbor policy towards Moscow, a fact which is notable in the different nature of the relations that Turkey has with south-Caucasian States.

Thus, the relations with Georgia²⁷ are very close, especially in the economic area, but any change of stance that may irritate Russia regarding Abkhazia and South Ossetia is avoided, particularly regarding Turkish participation in NATO programs to train and equip the Georgian army. For now, Ankara has only given discreet aid towards the reconstruction of the bases damaged during the confrontations.

The relationship with Armenia is very problematic and diplomatic relations between the two countries do not exist, with the border closed to commercial trade and to the passage of people, unlike the ties with Azerbaijan, which are very close and based on cultural and racial questions. Both countries benefit from their Muslim societies, the Turkish Sunni and the Azeri Shiite; both of these being very secular, this difference is not problematic. Turkey considers Baku their preferred partner in the area, always respecting Russian interests.

The United States

The United States has strategic interests, although not vital, in the area²⁸. The fact that the United States' main concern in the post-Soviet area was the control of nuclear weapons and that these were in southern Caucasian territory made this region of no essential interest.

Although initially the emergence of the three nations that form this area was greeted with the hope of creating new democracies that would be in the Western orbit, with more involvement of the United States than of the European Union, the truth is that in consecutive stages, these hopes have proved exaggerated and have been replaced by a depressing reality.

²⁶ A crystal-clear example is the Conference which took place in June of 2017 at the level of the Centers for Strategic Studies among those of Azerbaijan, Georgia and Turkey.

²⁷ <http://www.lse.ac.uk/IDEAS/publications/reports/pdf/SR007/caucasus.pdf>.

²⁸ <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/05/31/u.s.-policy-toward-south-caucasus-take-three-pub-70122>.

From this first approach, the next step was to avoid conflict in the area and to secure economic development as a way to increase influence in an area vital to the geo-economy of oil, both its production and its transport and which offered the possibility to flank the geographic monopoly of Russian supply to Eastern Europe. Lastly, 9/11 gave value to the area as one of those in which to defeat Islamic-based terrorism. At the same time, the United States shifted its focus from Azerbaijan to a firmer support of Georgia, which presented a definitely more reformist agenda.

Of the three countries, Armenia has adopted a prudent equilibrium between influences from Russia and from the West; Azerbaijan is outside the Western orbit and only Georgia is definitely aligned with a pro-Western policy, which brought upon it a war with Russia in 2008 which decisively marked the strategic evolution of the region and represented one of the turning points of the Russian stance against the "Color Revolutions" fostered by the United States, determining those geographic limits where Russia would not allow the establishment of territories associated with NATO.

These determining factors, authoritarianism and the risk of a more or less direct confrontation with Russia, have put the United States in a position without a clear "champion" in the area. This, along with the problems in other areas, such as Syria, Iraq, the competition with China, the distrust of Iran, and the North Korean challenge have diminished the interest of the United States in the area.

The only American interest in the area focuses at this time on creating, on a long term basis, stability and good neighbor conditions among all southern Caucasian States. If the final situation foreseen is not to the liking of Moscow (no integration of any State in structures like NATO and the maintenance of pro-Russian territorial advantages), a space of non-confrontation could be created, which would redound to the improvement of relations between the two countries.

Conclusions and perspective for the future

Although overshadowed by the conflict in Syria, there are still latent clashes in the Caucasus which, as shown in the last few years, could pass from a dormant state to a violent one in a short time, always depending on Russia's interests.

In fact, of the two conflicts that are still in a state of low intensity, it is predicted that the Armenian-Azeri conflict may present a new outbreak of open hostilities in the near future, given its antecedents. The other, in which Georgia confronts its secessionist regions, will likely remain in a state of tension with progressive cooling off, considering the inequality of the contenders. While Russia resolutely supports South Ossetia and Abkhazia, in a process of slow but likely integration, the return of those

territories to Georgian hands is more than unlikely, plus the fact that the majority of the population from both territories feels comfortable in its present situation protected under the umbrella of its powerful Mother Country.

Russia's power will not prevent its having problems with jihadist terrorism in the area and the spread of this by Muslim minorities from the Federation, not only because of the return of combatants from the conflicts in Syria and Iraq, but because of the treatment given to broad sectors of the Muslim population who are considered a threat, and who end up being pushed into radicalism.

The situation in the three independent Republics is as varied as their conflicts. Azerbaijan is the one that shows signs of economic development, in spite of the drop in oil prices. Its capacity to export through its infrastructure, present or under construction, via countries equally interested as are Turkey and Georgia, make Azerbaijan see the future relatively optimistically; in spite of its political development. Georgia is the Republic that manifests a greater tendency, always under close Russian watch, towards the Western world regarding its political structures, with long shadows of corruption. Armenia has the worst prospects for economic and social development, with a clear tendency toward authoritarian ways in its political evolution and an unstoppable tendency to fall into the Russian political orbit.

Regarding the territories with a non-recognized status internationally, Abkhazia, South Ossetia, and Nagorno-Karabakh, all present development totally derivative from their respective mentors, this being particularly obvious in the case of the latter, which obtains 60% of its income from Armenia; in no case is there a national currency, the Russian Ruble or the Armenian Dram being used. They also share a national character based on the ethnic model, with very homogenous populations, thus strengthening the bond with Russia and Armenia, respectively. With these characteristics, the medium-term integration into these States is the most likely end, in particular, of Abkhazia and South Ossetia, probably framed within a general reorganization of Russian borders along with the rebel areas in Ukraine.

None of the countries with interests in the area, except Russia, is willing to take action in the area except in a pacific way. Turkey and Iran are interested in the economic opportunities that the oil pipelines passing through the Caucasus present, but are not willing to get involved in regional conflicts, especially Iran, focused on improving its economic perspectives after the end of the sanctions, at least of those from the EU.

The United States and NATO will continue supporting the march towards the West by Georgia, but only as long as it does not mean a direct clash with Russia, which will still be, in the short and medium term, the country in the area whose commanding influence is indisputable.

The Caucasus. Geopolitical indicators

| | |
|--|---------------------------|
| ARMENIA | |
| Surface 29,743 Km ² | |
| GDP 26,300,000,000 \$ US | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 19.6 % |
| Industry 29.1 % | |
| Services 51.3 % | |
| GDP per capita 8,900 \$ US | |
| Rate GDP growth 2.2 % | |
| Trade relations (Exports): Russia: 15.2 % ; China 11.1 %; Germany 9.8 %; Iraq 8.8 %; Georgia 7.8 % Canada: 7.6 % ; Bulgaria 5.3 %; Iran 5.3 % | |
| Trade relations. (Imports): Russia 29.1%; China 9.7 %; Germany 6.2 %; Iran 6.1 %; Italy 4.6 %; Turkey 4.2 % | |
| Population 3,051,250 (2016) | |
| Age structure | 0-14 19 % |
| | 15-64 70.01 % |
| | Over 65 10.99 % |
| Growth rate of the population - 0.18 % | |
| Ethnic groups: Armenians 98.1 %; Kurds 1.1 % | |
| Religions: Apostolic Armenians 92.6 %, Evangelists 1 % | |
| Literacy rate of the population 99.7 % | |
| Population below poverty threshold 32 % (2013) | |
| GINI Index 31.5 % | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 0. 4 % (2016) | |

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| AZERBAIJAN | |
| Surface 86,600 Km ² | |
| GDP 165,300,000,000 \$ US | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 7.2 % |
| | Industry 49.6 % |
| | Services 43.3 % |
| GDP per capita 17,700 \$ US | |
| Rate GDP growth - 3.8 % | |
| Trade relations (Exports): Italy 19.7 %; Germany 10.7 %; France 7.7 %; Israel 7.2 % Czech Rep. 4.8 % ; Indonesia 4.2 % | |

| | |
|---|---------------|
| Trade relations (Imports): Russia 15.6 %; Turkey 12.7 %; USA 9.2 %; Germany 7.3 %; Italy 6.4 %; Japan 6.1 %; China 5.6 % | |
| Population 9,872,765 (2016) | |
| Age structure | 0-14 22.8 % |
| | 15-64 70.69 % |
| | Over 65 6.5 % |
| Growth rate of the population 0.92 % | |
| Ethnic groups Azeris 91.6 % ; Lezghins 2%; Russians 1.3 % ; Armenians 1.3 %; Tayiks 1.3 % | |
| Religions Muslims 96 %; Christians 3 % | |
| Literacy rate of the population 99.8 % | |
| Population below poverty threshold 4.9 % | |
| GINI Index 33.7 % | |
| Military expenditure % of the GDP. 5.61 % | |

| | |
|--|--------------------------|
| GEORGIA | |
| Surface 69,700 Km ² | |
| GDP 37,270,000,000 \$ US | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 9.2 % |
| | Industry 21.6 % |
| | Services 68.3 % |
| GDP per capita 10,100 \$ US | |
| Rate GDP growth 3.1 % | |
| Trade relations (Exports): Azerbaijan 10.9 %; Bulgaria 9.7 %; Turkey 8.4 %; Armenia 8.2 %; Russia 7.4 %; China 5.7 %; USA 4.7 % Uzbekistan 4.4 % | |
| Trade relations (Imports): Turkey 17.2 %; Russia 8.1 %; China 7.6 %; Azerbaijan 7 %; Ireland 5.9 %; Ukraine 5.9 %; Germany 5.6 % | |
| Population 4,928,052 (2016) | |
| Age structure | 0-14 17.91 % |
| | 15-64 66.31 % |
| | Over 65 15.77 % |
| Growth rate of the population - 0.55 % | |
| Ethnic groups Georgians 86.8 %; Azeris 6.3 %; Armenians 4.5 %; | |
| Religions Orthodox (official) 83.4 %; Muslims 10.7 % Apostolic Armenians 2.9 % | |
| Literacy rate of the population 99.8 % | |

| |
|---|
| Population below poverty threshold 9.2 % |
| GINI Index 40.1 (2014) |
| Military expenditure % of the GDP 2.23 % |

The Caucasus. Chronology of the conflict

| DATE | EVENTS |
|------|---|
| 1988 | Nagorno-Karabakh requests entry into the Soviet Socialist Republic of Armenia, denied by the Soviet Supreme of the USSR. Racial riots. |
| 1990 | The Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia declares the Independence of Georgia and its integration into the USSR. |
| 1990 | 23 August. The Supreme Soviet of Abkhazia declares its Independence from Georgia and incorporates itself into the USSR. u USSR USSR. |
| 1990 | 20 September. The independent Republic of South Ossetia is proclaimed. Georgia revokes the autonomy. |
| 1991 | May-June. Armenian civilians evicted from Nagorno-Karabakh by Soviet troops and Azeri police, and deported to Armenia. |
| 1991 | September. Independence of Armenia from the USSR, and of Nagorno-Karabakh from Azerbaijan. |
| 1991 | Beginning of combats between Ossetians and Georgians. |
| 1992 | May. Armenian forces from Nagorno-Karabakh control the "Lachin Corridor" which links it to the rest of the Armenian territory. |
| 1992 | 14 July. Dagonis agreement. End of hostilities in Ossetia. |
| 1992 | Georgian offensive which recovers almost all of Abkhazia. Abkhazian counteroffensive with 300,000 Georgian refugees. |
| 1994 | May. "Biskek Protocol". Armenian-Azeri ceasefire. |
| 1994 | New Constitution Abkhazia. Total independence. |
| 2004 | Georgia requests entrance into NATO. |
| 2006 | Referendum in favor of the unión with North Ossetia (Russian Federation). |
| 2008 | Failed Georgian invasion of Ossetia. |
| 2009 | July. Conversations in Moscow to solve the problem of Nagorno-Karabakh. |
| 2009 | Separation of the Orthodox churches of Georgia and Abkhazia. |
| 2009 | September. Recognition of Abkhazia and South Ossetia by Venezuela. |
| 2009 | December. Nauru recognizes Ossetia. Iranian offer to mediate in Nagorno-Karabakh. |
| 2010 | August. Deployment of Russian anti-air systems in Abkhazia. |
| 2011 | Strengthening of bonds between Georgia and Turkey. |

| | |
|-------------|---|
| 2013 | Armenia joins the Euro-Asian Economic Commission. |
| 2014 | August. Tension increases in Nagorno-Karabakh. Armed incidents with Armenian and Azeri casualties. Elections in Abkhazia, recognized only by Russia. |
| 2015 | September. Russia agrees with Armenia to supply military material. |
| DATE | EVENTS |
| 2016 | 2 – 3 April. Clashes in Nagorno-Karabakh with Armenian territorial losses. |
| 2016 | December. Economic rapprochement Armenia-Iran. |
| 2017 | January. Georgian rapprochement to Iran and China in the economic plenary meeting. |
| 2017 | February. The European Union liberalizes entrance requirements for Georgian citizens. 90 days without a visa for tourism or business, except to work. |

Chapter five

Iraqi Kurdistan

Miguel Ángel Ballesteros Martín

Abstract

Since 2011, the Middle East region has been shaken first by the Arab Spring and then by the conquests of the DAESH and the creation of the caliphate. In both Iraq and Syria, the Kurds are the ones who have best defended their own territory, which has meant that not a few countries, including the United States, have provided them with weapons and advice. This quasi-state treatment has led him to think that the authorities of the Government of the Iraqi Kurdistan Autonomous Region are facing an ideal time to pursue a process of independence without a legal basis to which the entire international community is opposed and poses the threat of a intervention by Turkey and Iraq, without ruling out that of Iran.

Keywords

Kurdistan, Kurdish referendum, Pesmergas, Irak.

Introduction

In the 2012 *Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts*, frigate captain Francisco Ruiz González wrote a chapter entitled “Turkish Kurdistan: an interminable conflict in a region in turmoil”¹. Many changes have occurred in the Middle East since then, specifically in Iraq and Syria where the ill-named Islamic State, Daesh, took advantage of the Syrian civil war and the inter-ethnic conflict in Iraq to conquer more than 282,000 km² of territory (equivalent to more than half of Spain) with a population of 8 million between 2013 and 2015. The advance of Daesh’s jihadi militias forced the Syrian and Iraqi Kurds to take up arms to defend their land from the jihadis’ attacks.

The need felt by much of the international community to halt the advance of Daesh’s jihadi militias and the courage shown by the Kurdish militias in defending Kurdish territory from Daesh’s attacks sparked sympathy for the Kurds. A few countries such as the United States and Germany decided to help them by supplying weapons to the Kurdish Peshmerga in Iraq and the Kurdish People’s Protection Units (YPG) in Syria.

The Kurds’ successes on the battlefield made them allies – circumstantial at least – of the US and the western countries. Iraqi Kurdistan’s newfound strength has spurred the realisation that the time has come to claim its independence from the Baghdad government.

Furthermore, the Ankara government’s obsession with putting an end to PKK’s safe havens in Syrian Kurdistan has led Turkey to distance itself from the US and the European countries for the sake of its own geostrategic interests.

These major changes in themselves justify examining the conflicts in Syrian and Iraqi Kurdistan, especially as the focus was on Turkish Kurdistan in the analysis carried out in 2012.

Geopolitical analysis of Kurdistan

Kurdistan – or the land of the Kurds – is a vast, inhomogeneous region whose sole distinguishing feature is that it is home to the Kurdish peoples.

Kurdistan spans an area of 392,000 km², larger than Germany but distributed among four countries: 190,000 km² in Turkey; 12,000 km² in Syria; 65,000 km² in Iraq; and 125,000 km² in Iran; and to a lesser extent in the republics of Armenia and Azerbaijan. The Taurus, Hakkari and Zagros mountains are thus natural borders of an area in which the Turkish, Arab and Caucasian cultures

¹ RUIZ GONZÁLEZ, Francisco: “El Kurdistán turco: conflicto inacabable en una región convulsa”, Chapter V, *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2012*, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Publicaciones Defensa, Madrid, 2013, pp.127-51. Available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_geopolitico_2012.pdf.

coexist alongside that of the Kurds. When we speak of Kurdistan, more than a geographical region it should be taken to mean the land that is home to the Kurdish peoples, and it is therefore important to analyse the human factor.

Human factor in Kurdistan

Kurdistan's population is at least 30 million, distributed as follows:

| | Total population | % of Kurdish population | Kurdish population (estim.) |
|--|------------------|-------------------------|-----------------------------|
| Turkey | 80,845,000 | 19 | 15,360,550 |
| Iraq | 39,192,000 | 17.5 | 6,858,600 |
| Syria | 18,028,000 | 9.5 | 1,712,660 |
| Iran | 82,021,000 | 7 | 5,741,470 |
| Armenia | 30,450,000 | 1.1 | 334,950 |
| Azerbaijan | 9,961,000 | 2 | 199,220 |
| Kurdish population (estim.) | | | 30,207,450 |
| Compiled by the author from The World Factbook 2017 | | | |

The above figures do not include the Kurdish diaspora, estimated at more than a million Kurds scattered throughout in Western Europe.

In Turkey and Iran the official censuses do not provide details of the ethnic breakdown of the population. In Iraq the most recent statistics for the Kurdish population date from 1957. All this makes it necessary to work with estimates – which pose difficulties, especially bearing mind the effects of the wars in recent years, among them compulsory or voluntary migrations, which led to major changes in the Kurdish population for three years, in both Syria and Iraq. Between 1990 and 1991, during the Second Gulf War, Saddam Hussein displaced hundreds of thousands of Kurds to southern Iraq. Iran granted asylum to more than a million Iraqis, chiefly Kurds.

According to José Antonio Zorrilla, Turgut Ozal, president of Turkey from 1987 to 1993, had previously implemented an open-door strategy allowing Kurdish people who identified as Kurds to pass over to Iraq, so that those only those who felt themselves to be Turks remained in Turkey².

Whatever the case, when not ravaged by war, the Kurdish population has been growing in each of the countries where these people are settled owing to their higher birth rate. The resulting higher percentages are securing them increasing political influence in those countries.

² ZORRILLA, José Antonio: "Los kurdos", Documento de Opinión 52/2014 del Insyituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. Available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opi-nion/2014/DIEEE052-2014_Kurdos_ULTimo_JAZorrilla.pdf.



Figure 5.1 Map of Kurdistan³.

What are the main characteristics of the Kurdish ethnic group?

Except in the cases of Iran and Armenia, religion is not a distinguishing factor, as most Kurds have been Sunni Muslims since the Arab conquest in the seventh century; perhaps the only difference is that most practice the Shaf'i rite³. Religion is transmitted by the "mollahs", who play an important social and cultural role in the villages. There are also some 100,000 Yazidis⁴ and 60,000 Christians; the latter generally enjoy an established social status.⁵

The language of the Kurds is derived from Avestan⁶, the language of Zoroastrianism. The two main dialects are Kurmanji and Sorani, though there is a third dialect, Zaza. Kurmanji is spoken by most of the people living the centre and northwest of Kurdistan, in Turkey. Sorani is spoken by a large percentage of the eastern population, the Kurds of Azerbaijan and Armenia, and 30 percent of the Kurds living in the south, especially in the Iraqi regions of Mosul and Erbil. Sorani has been recognised as the official

³ The Shaf'i are Sunni who practice orthodox Islam. They are followers of the Shaf'i school of jurisprudence founded by Mohamed Ibn Idriss As-Shafei (767-820), which is spread among the Middle East, South Asia and East Africa. The Shaf'i, Maliki, Hanafi and Hanbali rites make up the four orthodox Islamic rites and Shaf'i is followed by approximately 25 percent of Sunni Muslims.

⁴ The Yazidi profess a dualist faith tinged with occultism. The centre of their religious life is Iraq, where their emir lives. They believe in the primacy (even if mythically) of the Umayyad caliph Yazid, who had Ali's son Hussein and his small group of followers killed in Karbala in 680.

⁵ <https://decolonialatlas.wordpress.com/2017/03/16/kurdistan-in-kurdish/>.

⁶ The Avesta is the sacred book of Zoroastrianism. It is a compilation of all the surviving texts written in Avestan, an Indo-European language.

Kurdish language in Iraq and is taught in the schools of Iraqi Kurdistan and spoken in the provinces of Sulaymaniyah and Kirkuk and in Iranian Kurdistan: Kurmanji, Mahabad and Sanandaj. Throughout the northwest region of Kurdistan (Diyarbakir, Erzincan, Bingol, Elazig, Urfa and Dersim) the Kurds speak another dialect, Zaza. Approximately 60% of the population speak the Kurmanji dialect, 30% Sorani and the rest Zaza, each with its many subdialects. This gives an idea of the ethnic multiplicity of the Kurds.

In Turkey the Kurdish language is expressly forbidden by the Constitution⁷, though it has been tolerated since 1995 in exchange for belonging to the Customs Union with the EU. Similarly, paragraph 3 of Turkey's law no. 2932 of 19 October 1983 "Concerning Publications and Broadcasts in Languages other than Turkish" literally states that "*The mother tongue of all Turkish citizens is Turkish*". As for education, article 42.9 of the Constitution establishes that "*No other language other than Turkish shall be taught as a mother tongue to Turkish citizens at any institution of training or education*".

In Iraq the Kurdish population live chiefly in the governorates of Sulaymaniyah, Erbil, Dahuk (the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan) and Kirkuk, and there are also large Kurdish populations in Mosul, Diyala and Waset.

Fifty-five percent of Iraq's Kurdish population live in the countryside and the population density is 39.4 inhabitants/km² compared to 25.3 inhabitants/km² in Iraq as a whole.

In Iran most of the Iranian Kurds live near the Turkish and Iraqi borders. In the 1980s the guerrilla and the resulting crackdown drove many Kurds to flee Kurdistan and take refuge in Tehran. Iran's total Kurdish population is estimated to be in the region of 6 million and accounts for approximately 7 percent of the country's total population. Sixty-five percent live in villages and hamlets and the rest in towns and cities such as Mahabad, Sakiz, Sanandaj and Kermanshah.

Iran's Kurds are mainly opposed to the central government and identify solely as Kurds. This is due to the fact that they feel themselves to be an ethnic minority with a culture of their own, but also because most of them are Sunnis whereas the country is chiefly Shia.

In Syria we find Western Kurdistan, which is given the name of Rojava and in Syria is officially termed the Democratic Federation of North Syria. It is an autonomous region made up of the Canton of Afrin, the Canton of Jazira and the Canton of Kobani, as well as Shahba. It should be borne

⁷ The current Turkish Constitution was adopted on 7 November 1982 and amended in April 2017, when the country shifted from a parliamentary system established in 1924 by the founder of the Republic of Turkey, Mustafa Kemal Atatürk, to a presidential system promoted by Recep Tayyip Erdogan, the leader of the Justice and Development Party (AKP). Available at: http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/es/text.jsp?file_id=189924.

in mind that we are not talking about ethnically pure regions: Rojava, for example, also has a large Arab population.

When the Arab Springs triggered the uprising in Syria in 2011, the Syrian Kurds led by the Democratic Union Party (PYD), headed by its president Salih Muslim Muhammad, preferred to remain on the side-lines of the conflict without backing either of the parties to the conflict. At the time it was doubtful whether the Turkish armed forces could intervene in the conflict to defeat Bassar al-Assad's regime and, both the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and the PYD therefore chose to fight on the side of the Damascus regime.

But as the conflict progressed, in 2012 the fighting became widespread south of Rojava, forcing the Syrian Kurds to intervene in order to defend their own territory.

On 12 July 2012 the Democratic Union Party (PYD) and the Kurdish National Council (KNC) signed an agreement to set up the Kurdish Supreme Committee as the governing body for all the territories controlled by the Kurds. This caused them to clash with the Syrian and Iraqi governments.

In February 2013 the Kurdish factions began to involve themselves more in the Syrian war, coming down on the side of the Syrian opposition to al-Assad's government and the Syrian Free Army and signing political and military agreements with the opposition factions. The PYD organised the Kurdish People's Protection Units (YPG), a militia which in 2012 began fighting against the jihadis of the al-Nusra Front, al-Qaeda's branch in Syria, and the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (Daesh).

Natural resources

There is often talk of Kurdistan's wealth as a factor that could fuel the conflict in this part of the Middle East. Without wishing to play down the importance of these resources, we believe that they are not key to triggering a future conflict. Though if such a conflict breaks out, the territories with resources will, of course, be fought over.

Kurdistan's subsoil contains major oil reserves. Turkish Kurdistan boasts the Batman, Diyarbakir, Adhyayan and Bulgardag oilfields, while the Syrian part is home to the oil wells of Rumalan, Suadia and Alian, in Yazira. Iraqi Kurdistan also has large reserves, though most are located along the border with Iraqi Kurdistan such as Mosul, Kirkuk and also Khanaquine, which, despite belonging to the province of Diyala, is governed by the authorities of the Autonomous Region of Kurdistan. Twenty-five percent of Iraq's crude oil comes from this region.

Iranian Kurdistan supplies barely 10 percent of the crude oil sold by Iran and its main wells are those of Nafti Sah and Pahlā, to the west and south of Kermanshah respectively. However, there could be pockets of gas in this Kurdish region located near Tanga Bijar.

In November 2013, Turkey signed an agreement with the government of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan behind the Baghdad government's back to lay an oil pipeline capable of transporting oil from Iraqi Kurdistan to the Turkish port of Ceyhan in the Mediterranean making use of the Turkish oil pipelines. The agreement was signed in Ankara during a visit by the prime minister of Iraqi Kurdistan, Nechirvan Barzani. This decision was the Iraqi Kurdish government's response to that of Baghdad in connection with the disagreement over the distribution of oil revenues in the region, though the Kurdish ministry of resources claimed to be willing to transfer 83 percent of the revenues to Baghdad, the figure laid down in Iraqi legislation. What does the autonomous government of Iraqi Kurdistan stand to gain then if it transfers the percentage established by Iraqi law? What it gains is the precedent of signing an international agreement without the Baghdad government, a step along the path to independence⁸.

We should also take into account water resources. Important rivers that water the whole region have their sources in the Kurdish mountains: the Ceyhan, the Orontes, the Euphrates, the Tigris and others that carry large volumes of water such as the Murat and the Araxes in Turkey and the Sirwan and the Seymara in Iran. The fact that the sources of the region's two major rivers, the Tigris and the Euphrates, are in Anatolia ensures water for irrigation, hydroelectric power and the supplies for major cities in a region with few resources where water is highly valuable.

Following an idea devised by Kemal Ataturk, in the 1980s the Turks implemented the South East Anatolia Project known as GAP⁹. This macro project is aimed at regulating and harnessing the sources of the Euphrates and Tigris by building 22 reservoirs, 19 hydroelectric power plants with a 7,476-megawatt capacity, and many kilometres of irrigation channels for making two million hectares of fertile land cultivable. The project, for which the initial budget was 21.5 billion euros, should have ended in 2010, but it is still a long way from completion. It has swallowed up a considerable number of villages beneath the reservoirs but has also changed the economy of an area that was once arid and is now thriving. According to calculations, the GAP will ensure an annual production of 500,000 tons of cotton and 3 million tons of wheat.

The Ankara government regards the water policy as a form of fighting against Kurdish nationalism and even independentism in Turkey. This harnessing of the potential of the two largest rivers could also trigger a conflict between

⁸ Agencia EFE- "Un oleoducto turco llevará petróleo del Kurdistán iraquí hacia Europa, Es- tambul", press release 07/11/2013.

⁹ PÉREZ FERNÁNDEZ, David: "El problema kurdo en Turquía. Una cuestión de permanente actualidad", Universidad de Valladolid, Dialnet, 2013. Available at: file:///C:/Users/Miguel%20Angel/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/NFV6IRPN/Dialnet-El-ProblemaKurdoEnTurquia-2361406.pdf.

Turkey and Syria and Iraq, as it diminishes the volume of flow of the rivers that also give them life, though in the past it has been witnessed that water can spur cooperation and keep conflicts at bay.

There is another macro project under way in the region: the so-called “aqueduct of peace” that regulates the flow of the Seyhan and Ceyhan rivers across Syria and Jordan to Saudi Arabia in order to contribute to Middle East development, for which it is necessary to settle the Palestinian-Israeli conflict.

Political Kurdistan

Turkey enjoys considerable influence over the political scene in Iraqi Kurdistan and aspires to exercise a certain amount of control over Syrian Kurdistan. It is therefore essential to be aware of Turkey's geostrategy towards Kurdistan, which is influenced by its own domestic policy. Turkey's political parties rely unconditionally on fighting the “terrorists”, the concept with which they usually refer to the Kurdish problem. They likewise staunchly defend the principle of the “indivisible unity of the state with its territory and its nation”, which is cited in 22 different parts of the Constitution¹⁰.

One of the main Kurdish parties in Turkey is the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK). Founded in 1979, it called for the independence of Kurdistan, though in October 1992 it abandoned its separatist aims of a Kurdish state, favouring instead a federation with Turkey. Beginning in 1984 the PKK encouraged a guerrilla organisation and a National Liberation Front (ERNK) and organised a Kurdish Party in Exile that is based in Europe. This open conflict caused more than 25,000 deaths and the Turkish government responded by decreeing a state of emergency in 11 provinces of south and southwest Turkey.

1995 saw the establishment of the Free Women Movement of Kurdistan within the PKK, which triggered a revolution within the Kurdish revolution. The Turkish authorities attempted to weaken Kurdish unity by setting up the “village guards”, an armed Kurdish militia that was designed to combat the PKK and had no qualms about torturing and killing Turkish teachers who taught in the area.

2012 witnessed the start of a negotiation process known as the Imrali Process (referring to the Marmara island where Öcalan is imprisoned), which was strengthened in March 2013 when Öcalan issued a communiqué requesting a permanent ceasefire and that the PKK guerrilla fighters abandon Turkey. Many took refuge in Iraqi Kurdistan.

¹⁰ Turkish government: Constitution of 1982 amended in 2017. Available at: [http:// www.wipo.int/wipolex/es/text.jsp?file_id=189924](http://www.wipo.int/wipolex/es/text.jsp?file_id=189924)

At the time the PKK was receiving support chiefly from Syria, though also from Iran, Iraq and Hezbollah. This is the main reason for Ankara's enmity with Damascus.

The peace process looked doomed to fail, and in September 2014 the PKK accused Erdogan's government of tolerating and even conniving with the jihadi groups of the al-Nusra Front and Daesh by allowing fighters to cross the border and taking advantage of the sale of resources. The government also adopted a strategically distant approach to Daesh's attacks on Kobane as a means of putting an end to the Rojava Revolution begun in July 2012, which had resulted in a de facto autonomous Kurdish region in Syria that could amount to a safe haven by its border for the PKK in the long term.

On 23 September 2014, the US decided to bomb Daesh's positions in reaction to the siege to help the Kurds who were defending the city, though Turkey did not allow its bases to be used because the operation did not include attacks on al-Assad's army. This situation continued until mid-October, when the Turkish government reached an agreement with the Regional Government of Kurdistan to allow the passage of the Iraqi Kurdish militias, the Peshmerga, across Turkish territory in order to reinforce the Syrian Kurds in their defence of Kobane. Kobane was freed from Daesh in mid-January 2015.

The result of Turkey's policy towards the Kurds in Syria is that in the elections of 7 June the People's Democratic Party (HDP) succeeded in being represented on the Turkish National Assembly after securing 13 percent of the vote (the threshold for representation is 10 percent). The HDP is a pro-Kurdish left-wing party founded on 15 October 2012 as the political arm of the People's Democratic Congress.

At the end of June, the PKK accused Ankara of being responsible for an attack on 33 Kurds engaged in reconstruction tasks in Kobane and retaliated by murdering a Turkish soldier. Turkey responded immediately and its air force began air strikes on Syrian soil. It had decided to take on a bigger role in Syria.

Although it has not relinquished its aspirations of becoming a fully-fledged member of the EU, Turkey is reorienting its geostrategy towards the east, to land that once belonged to the Ottoman empire, abandoning the principles of Kemal Ataturk's Turkey. One such principle is the laicism of the Turkish state: President Erdogan is currently establishing a government with Islamist leanings. Turkey had 20,000 mosques in 1945, 72,000 in 1985 and has many more today¹¹.

It is carving out a position in the Middle East by seeking a prominent role in Syria's future alongside Iran and Russia, though this is bringing it into conflict with another aspirant to regional leadership, Saudi Arabia. It furthermore

¹¹ KAPLAN, Robert: *La venganza de la geografía*, RBA, Barcelona, 2013.

firmly supports Qatar as opposed to Egypt, Saudi Arabia, the Arab Emirates and Bahrein. It has also made significant overtures to Hamas, which places it close to the circle of the Muslim Brothers. All this geostrategy is designed to ensure control of its territory vis-à-vis the Kurdish nationalists and secure a certain amount of leadership in the Middle East.

It should be remembered that in Syria the main parties made up of Kurds are: the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which, despite operating only in Turkey, has significant influence over Syria's Kurdish population, especially in the Aleppo area; and the Democratic Party of Syrian Kurdistan, which in practice is a branch of the PDK of Iraq and enjoys particular support in the Yazira region at the border with Iraq and Turkey.

Iranian Kurdistan

The Kurds of Iranian Kurdistan have a low standard of living, coupled with a high level of unemployment and few hopes for a better future. The Iranian government needs to address the Kurdish problem in the provinces of western Azerbaijan, Kurdistan, Sanandaj, Kermanshah and Ilam, which are home to some six million Kurds.

The main Kurdish party in Iran is the Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) led by Abdullah Hassanzadeh. It belongs to the Socialist International and can be considered a democratic, progressive party to the left of traditional social democracy. Its motto is "Democracy for Iran, autonomy for Kurdistan". Its previous secretary-general, Sadec Sarfkandi, was assassinated in Berlin during a Kurdish congress. Suspicions initially fell on Turkey in view of the support lent by the PDKI to the PKK, but everything seems to indicate that it was the work of the Iranian secret services, who stood the most to gain from eliminating the leader of a movement that was increasingly opposed to the Iranian regime. The party generally supports the UPK, though it forms alliances with particular Iraqi factions depending on its interests of the moment to boost its significance, obtain advantages and, ultimately, to fight for survival as it is also at odds with the regime of the ayatollahs.

In addition to the PDKI, there are other Kurdish groups in Iran, such as the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK) made up of dissidents of the PDKI ; the Komala (Committee), with Marxist leanings; and the National Organisation led by sheikh Izidín Husseiní, a recognised Sunni religious authority of Iranian Kurdistan.

Iraqi Kurdistan

Since Iraq gained its independence in 1932, there have been periods of autonomy and understanding between the Baghdad government and the Iraqi Kurds, and periods of conflict and quarrels between them.

On 14 July 1958 General Abd el Kassem overthrew King Faisal II with the help of the Kurds, leading to the legalisation of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK) and a certain amount of autonomy which lasted until 1961 when the Baghdad government outlawed the PDK and newspapers in Kurdish. The PDK's reaction was immediate and one of its founders, Mustafa Barzani, established a militia to fight against the Iraqi government. The fighting stopped for a brief period in 1963 following the advent to the Iraqi presidency of General Abdel Salam Aref and the Baath party.

On 11 March 1970 the PDK and the Iraqi government signed an agreement establishing the creation of the Kurdish autonomous region, albeit without defining its boundaries, which were made conditional on a census to be drawn up. However, the Iraqi authorities took advantage of the transition period laid down in the agreement (1970-74) to displace the Kurdish people by force with the specific intention of not including Kirkuk in the autonomous region.

When the Kurds refused to sign the final agreement because it left the main oil-producing areas outside their "borders", in 1974 Baghdad unilaterally enacted the autonomy law. As a result, the fighting was resumed, this time with the support of Iran, and came to an end following the signing of the Algiers Accords of 1975 whereby Saddam Hussein agreed to share sovereignty of the Chat-el-Arab estuary that provides access to the Persian Gulf, once again using the Kurds as a bargaining chip.

Saddam Hussein's revenge against the Kurds was immediate and he began mass deportations and southward displacements of 500,000 Kurds.

In April 1979 Turks and Iraqis reached an agreement on taking joint action against the Kurds. The Islamic Republic of Iran, created that year, was opposed to the Kurds being granted autonomy; more liberal in matters of language, it was unyielding with respect to the political unity of the Muslim community and did not hesitate to use its forces against the Kurdish guerrilla fighters, calling them "Peshmerga" (those who face death).

During the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88) the PDK maintained its alliance with Tehran while the UPK attempted to negotiate with Baghdad in 1983. In 1987, seeking Saddam Hussein's imminent downfall, the whole Kurdish resistance movement of Iraq teamed up with the Iranian forces then operating on Iraqi territory, but the military situation turned in favour of Iraq. In 1988 Saddam Hussein wreaked vengeance on the Kurds for supporting Iran during the war by launching Operation Al-Anfal (The spoils of war) against the Kurds and on 16 March 1988 Iraq's air force carried out a strike ordered by Ali Hassan al-Majid, known as Chemical Ali, a cousin of Saddam Hussein, using aggressive chemicals on the Kurdish population of Halabja. Some 5,000 people were killed and 25,000 were injured in the attack.

The Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK), led by its founder's son, Massoud Barzani, is a centre-left party and enjoys greater grass-roots support,

especially in the rural part of Iraqi Kurdistan. It was initially funded by Iran until the Kurds refused to join the National Front of Iraq. It then received support from Syria, where it had a semi-official office, and reached an agreement with Turkey, whose government changed its traditional policy towards this minority, seeking in return to put a stop to the PKK's activities in its territory and to hinder its freedom of movement.

The Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (UPK), led by Jalal Talabani, split off from the PDK in 1976 and became more left wing. It enjoys considerable grass-roots support, chiefly in the cities of Erbil, Kirkuk and Sulaymaniyah, and also among intellectuals. It recognises the Kurdish people's right to self-determination, though, like the PDK, it initially advocated a federal state in Iraq with wide autonomy for Iraqi Kurdistan. It is on good terms with the European socialist parties and with the French and British governments. It was chiefly supported by Syria, where it was officially represented.

The Kurdistan Islamic Movement (MIK) was established in 1985 by Kurdish Sunni religious leaders encouraged by Iran and led by sheikh Othaman Abdulaziz. It operates in the Tehran area and is therefore closer to the UPK and at odds with the Iraqi government. It is in contact with the Islamic revolutionary movements of Afghanistan, Lebanon, Egypt and Pakistan. It has also received support from Saudi Arabia in recent years.

In addition to the PDK, the UPK (both hegemonic forces in Iraqi Kurdistan) and the MIK, there are other groups of lesser importance such as the Socialist Party, the Communist Party and the Party of God. The latter was recently established and, like the MIK, is partly funded by Saudi Arabia.

Following the end of the "Second Gulf War" (1991), Saddam Hussein's regime attempted to expel the rebel populations from Iraq and turn them into refugees with the potential to destabilise the neighbouring countries. As a result, in accordance with UN Security Council Resolution 688 of 5 April 1991, a "safe zone" was established in Iraq north of the 36th parallel, and the Iraqi army was banned from entering or flying over the area. To facilitate the return of nearly two million refugees, the resolution authorised the sending of a multinational force of 18,000 troops from the United States, Britain, France, the Netherlands, Italy, Belgium and Spain. Known as "Provide Comfort", it marked the start of the participation of armed units in humanitarian operations.

After the ground component withdrew from the operation, the security of the zone was maintained by air patrols north of the 36th parallel by US, French and British forces stationed in Turkey (Operations Provide Comfort II and Poised Hammer). Once again, this new situation aroused hopes that an autonomous Kurdish area in Iraq was possible. It was neither a state nor internationally recognised, but had democratic institutions, among them the Legislative Assembly, and a certain capacity for self-government in matters of education, culture, legislation and aid management, among others.

This humanitarian operation was not followed by political determination to provide the Kurdish population with the financial means to start up its economy and reconstruct its devastated country.

As a result, the Iraqi Kurds were left alone to cope in their territory which was landlocked, surrounded by hostile countries, subjected to the embargo decreed against Iraq and further isolated by the internal blockage imposed by the Baghdad government, which banned any energy resources from entering the Kurdish provinces.

Indeed, the Kurds are suffering the consequences of the tensions and rivalries of the countries in the area stemming from territorial disputes, the control of energy or water resources, ideological enmity or historical grievances. Turkey is at odds with Syria, Armenia and Iran; Syria with Iraq; and Iraq with Iran. Avoiding direct confrontation, each of the countries involved endeavours to support its adversary's Kurdish factions as a form of indirect aggression. This situation is further exacerbated by the interests of the United States, which seeks to establish a balance in a region of vital importance to its interests.

As in all the conflicts that have rocked the Middle East, underlying all of those mentioned above is a series of interrelated aspects that highlight the need for global solutions for the whole area and undermine the real efficiency of purely bilateral agreements.

In Iraq the Kurdish movement, far from coordinating with the rest of the Iraqi opposition, struggled to gain effective control of Kurdistan rather than trigger a revolution to put an end to Saddam Hussein. Accordingly, in November 1990 the attempt to create the National Front of Iraq failed owing to the Kurdish groups' refusal to join as it was led by the Shia, backed by Iran. Today most of the Kurdish political parties are grouped under the National Front of Kurdistan (FNK) in order to plan the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan.

The actors in the Iraqi Kurdish conflict

On 15 September 2017 the Parliament of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan met at the capital, Erbil, and passed the motion to hold a referendum on the region's independence 10 days later. The fact that 65 of the 111 MPs voted in favour indicates the clear division between the forces who represent Iraq's Kurdish population.

This decision was adopted without respecting the current legislation and was opposed by the Baghdad government and the international community, especially in the western countries which had warned the Kurds it was illegal to go ahead with it. As a circumstantial ally of the Kurds owing to the need to defeat Daesh in northern Iraq and Syria, the United States had sought alternatives but had failed to come up with a solution that satisfied the parties, and it finally rejected the unilateral referendum.

The Kurdish parties are divided over this challenge posed by the region's president, Masud Barzani, leader of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK). The Iraqi Kurdish parliament had not met for more than two years owing to the serious differences between the region's parties.

The decision to call a referendum on independence on 25 September 2017 pitted the parliament of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan against the Iraqi parliament in Baghdad.

The war has driven the population to adopt a more radical stance towards the Iraqi state as they have had to cope with terrorist attacks without the support of Iraq's armed forces owing to Iraq's military weakness in the struggle with Daesh during 2013 and 2014, in which it suffered significant defeats throughout the whole Sunni area of Iraq that enabled Daesh to conquer important cities such as Mosul, Fallujah, Tikrit and Ramadi, among others. This successful self-defence, coupled with the support provided by many important countries like Germany and the US in the form of weapons and advice, gave them a false sensation that they were being treated like a state not subject to the Baghdad government. This climate, together with the absence of the Iraqi state in their territory and, in particular, the absence of police and military forces under Baghdad's control, drove them to the conclusion that the time had come for them to launch an independence process that needed to be begun by holding a referendum on independence that would give rise to a year or two of talks with the Baghdad government in order to arrive at a negotiated solution as the only way of achieving their aim without entering into a war where the Kurds stand much to lose. They were forgetting that their independence would set a precedent and kindle independence movements in the Kurdish regions of Turkey, Iran, Syria and even Armenia and Azerbaijan, leading to a series of regional conflicts that would destabilise not only the whole of Kurdistan but even nearly all of the Middle East. Past experience of wars waged over ethnic borders has proven them to be a failure. The recent experiences of Kosovo and the crisis of the Great Lakes Region bear this out. In Europe initially religious conflicts and subsequently conflicts originating from nationalism were the cause of two world wars. But let us analyse the degree of representation enjoyed in the Kurdish and Iraqi parliaments.

The Parliament and the Kurdish Regional Government in Iraq

The government of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan is a coalition of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan and the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan (Kurdistan List). The Kurdistan Workers' Party holds one seat on the regional parliament of Kurdistan and is also part of the regional government, with one minister. This party belonged to the bloc of the Kurdistan Alliance in the 2010 elections to the Iraqi parliament, on which it is not represented.

The main opposition parties are the Gorran Movement (meaning change), better known simply as Gorran, whose leader is Omar Said Ali. This movement, which is very popular among young people, was founded in 2009 and is federalist and in favour of dialogue with the Baghdad government within the framework of the Iraqi constitution and the fight against political corruption. In the latest elections held in July 2009 it won 25 out of the 111 seats that make up the regional parliament, making it the second most popular party in the region after the Kurdistan List.

Gorran is a centre-left, social-liberal and nationalist party.

It is highly disapproving of the more traditional parties belonging to the regional government and criticises their conduct of politics and their lack of achievements in Iraq's parliament.

The Islamic Union of Kurdistan (KIU or Komal) belongs to the regional opposition and was against the referendum.

The referendum was approved by the Kurdish parliament in accordance with the electoral legislation adopted by the Kurds in 1992 and 2014 but contravening the Iraqi constitution of 2005, which is currently in force.

The Iraqi parliament in Baghdad

Gorran secured 9 out of a total of 325 seats – one per 100,000 inhabitants, as established in the constitution of 2005 – on the Iraqi parliament in the 7 March 2010 elections. The votes of Iraqis living abroad enjoy a special treatment. Although 16 seats were reserved for them, the protests of many leaders led to the agreement that their votes would be added to those cast in the city from which they had left Iraq and where they were registered according to their ration books; the number of seats was accordingly increased from 275 in 2005 to 325 in the latest elections. The ethnic minorities were granted seats as follows: five for the Iraqi Christians, one for the Yazidis, one for the Shabak people, and one for the Mandaeans.

The five seats reserved for the Christians were distributed as follows in the elections of 2010: two for the National Rafidain List (Assyrian Democratic Movement), two for the Chaldean Syriac Assyrian Popular Council, and one for the Democratic Uruk List (Iraqi Communist Party).

The Yaziri seat is held by the Yazidi Movement for Reform and Progress.

The Mandaeans' seat is held by Hareth Shanshal Sunaid and the seat reserved for the Shabaks is held by the Council of Free Shabaks.

On 12 September 2017, the Iraqi parliament got ahead of the Kurdish parliament and rejected the referendum, urging the prime minister, Haidar al-Abadi, to "*adopt all the necessary measures to prevent it*" so as to preserve Iraq's unity. The Kurdish parties in favour of the referendum left the session during the voting as a sign of protest.

Following the US invasion of Iraq in 2003, Iraq adopted a new constitution in 2005 which has strengthened the autonomy of the Kurdish region in northern Iraq in accordance with article 117: *"This Constitution shall approve the region of Kurdistan and its existing regional and federal authorities, at the time this constitution comes into force"*¹².

Article 126 states that *"The fundamental principles mentioned in Section One and the rights and liberties mentioned in Section Two of the Constitution may not be amended except after two successive electoral terms, with the approval of two-thirds of the Council of Representatives members, and the approval of the people in a general referendum and the ratification of the President of the Republic within seven days"*. Any essential amendment to the Constitution must therefore be put to the vote of all the Iraqi people in a referendum. This excludes the possibility of declaring the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan by means of a referendum in which only the Kurds vote. The principles enshrined in Iraq's constitution are the same as those established by 99 percent of the constitutions of all the developed countries.

Article 140 of the Iraqi constitution of 2005 establishes that *"The responsibility placed upon the executive branch of the Iraqi Transitional Government stipulated in Article 58 of the Transitional Administrative Law shall extend and continue to the executive authority elected in accordance with this constitution, provided that it completes (normalization and census and concludes with a referendum in Kirkuk and other disputed territories to determine the will of their citizens), in a period not to exceed (the thirty first of December two thousand and seven)"*¹³.

The High Committee for the Implementation of article 140 defines the territories under dispute as Arabised areas whose borders were modified between 17 July 1968 and 9 April 2003. The areas in question belong to four provinces (wilayas): Kirkuk, Erbil, Nineveh and Diyala, with a mainly Kurdish population or where the population is a mixture of Kurds and Arabs.

According to article 140 of the Constitution, on 4 April 2017, 26 of the 41 members of the council of the province of Kirkuk (north) voted in favour of holding a referendum to decide whether it wished to join the autonomous region of Kurdistan. This decision was undoubtedly greatly influenced by the fact that in 2014 Kirkuk, like many other Iraqi territories in southern Kurdistan, came under the control of the "Pershmerga", the Iraqi Kurdish militias, following the withdrawal of the Iraqi army, driven by the Islamic State (IS).

¹² Constitution of the Republic of Iraq. Article 117, *Revista de Estudios Internacionales Mediterráneos* - REIM - No. 3 - September-December 2007. Available at:///C:/Users/Miguel%20Angel/AppData/Local/Microsoft/Windows/INetCache/IE/X0KEA1SK/758-2067-1-PB.pdf.

¹³ *Ibid*, article 140.

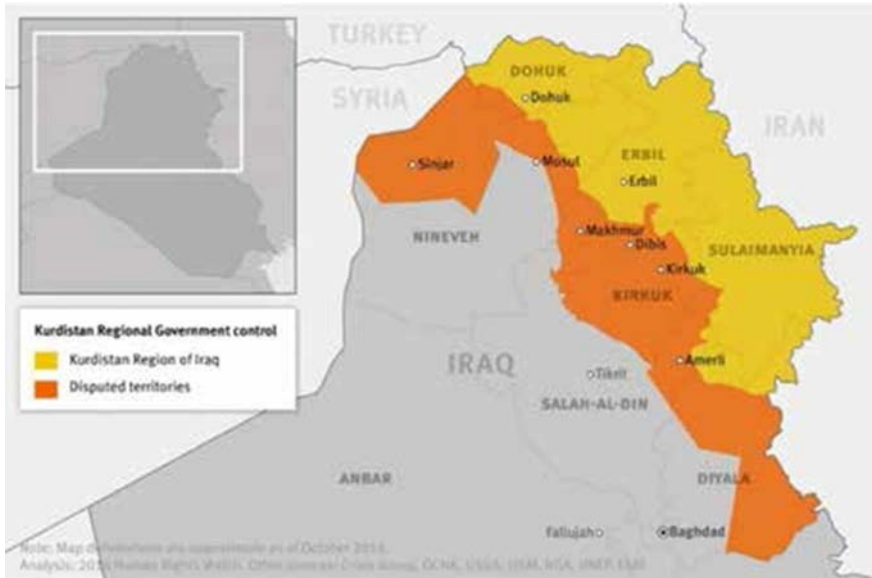


Figure 5.2. Iraqi Kurdistan and the disputed areas in Iraqi Kurdistan¹⁴.

The referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan

It should not be forgotten that on 24 July 1923 the Treaty of Lausanne was signed by the United Kingdom, France, Italy, Japan, Greece, Romania, Yugoslavia and Turkey agreeing on the division of Kurdish territory and establishing the current borders of the Turkey of Mustafa Kemal “Atatürk”. By signing this treaty the Turks relinquished their hopes of annexing the Mosul region; it also dashed the dreams of an independent Kurdistan envisaged in the Treaty of Sevres, which was never ratified and was based on the so-called “Wilson doctrine” of US President Woodrow Wilson, formally published on 8 January 1918 and laying the foundations for a new international order. It recognises colonised nations’ right to self-determination and, specifically in point 12, the independence of non-Turkish peoples subjugated by the Ottoman empire.

At any rate, the Kurdistan envisaged in the Treaty of Sevres as a reward for fighting on the side of the allies in the First World War amounted to less than one-third of the territory where the Kurds currently live.

¹⁴ https://www.google.es/search?biw=1280&bih=929&tbm=isch&sa=1&ei=Sab_Wf050-YGSU9T1mlgJ&q=zonas+en+disputa+kurdistan&oq=zonas+en+disputa+kurdistan&gs_l=psy-ab.3..272069.278379.0.278982.26.26.0.0.0.267.3786.8j5j10.23.0...0...1.1.64. psy-ab..3.13.2725...0j0i8i30k1j0i24k1.0.5vEwPGWaOll#imgc=9k8c46tfvkL-sM:&s- pf=1509926756046.

In 1937 Turkey, Iran, Iraq and Afghanistan signed the Saadabad Pact, which established a coordinated fight against the “armed bands” in the border regions, including the Kurds.

When the Second World War ended, the Soviets, who had occupied Iran together with the British, once again promised to back the autonomy of the Kurds and Azeris. Soviet support had been reinforcing the Kurdish nationalists who enjoyed de facto control of large areas of northern Iraq. In Mahabad (Soviet area) the Kurds founded the Komala association in 1942. After the Democratic Party of Azerbaijan gained power in Tabriz in November 1945, Komala was transformed into the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK). In January 1946 the Kurdish Autonomous Republic of Mahabad was proclaimed, with Qadi Muhammad as its leader. The distribution of the areas of influence among the allied powers, as established at the conferences of Yalta, Potsdam and Tehran, forced the Soviet troops to withdraw from Iran, abandoning the republic to its fate. Qadi Muhammad tried in vain to negotiate with Tehran and in December 1946 the Iranian army put an end to the Republic of Mahabad, laying waste to the Kurdish territory and triggering a mass exodus to the URSS.

Since then the Kurds had not had the chance to realise their dream of becoming an independent nation state, but their determined struggle against Daesh to defend their territory made them the best allies of the international coalition, especially the US, which found the Peshmerga militias to be a good replacement for the units Washington was unable to deploy on the ground. They saw this alliance and the military weakness shown by the Baghdad government as a major opportunity to push for independence.

As Shlomo Ben Ami, former Israeli foreign minister, states, *“The Kurds – key US allies in the fight against the IS – also want changes to the Middle Eastern map, though certainly not in the same way as Turkey. They want their own state, and to some extent, they even expect it, given their contributions to defeating the IS. Masoud Barzani, president of Iraq’s Kurdistan autonomous region, has announced that an independence referendum for Iraqi Kurds will be held in September”*¹⁵. He argues that *“For Turkey, preventing that outcome is a higher priority than defeating the IS or taking down Syrian President Bashar al-Assad’s regime. Mr. Erdogan worries that, if the Iraqi Kurds gain independence, they could inspire Turkey’s own Kurdish rebels, the Kurdistan Workers’ Party (PKK), to revive their decades-old fight for independence. The respect that the PKK-affiliated Syrian Kurdish militias have earned on the battlefield, Turkey fears, could legitimize the group internationally – hence Turkey’s attempts to suppress it”*.

¹⁵ Shlomo Ben Ami, “What’s next for the conflict in the Middle East?” *The Globe and Mail*, July 10 2017.

Shlomo goes on to conclude that *"Given these concerns, Turkish forces already deployed in northern Syria are likely to remain there even after the fall of Raqqa, to serve as a buffer between the Kurds there and those in Turkey. But, while Turkey's concerns about Kurdish resistance are not unfounded, the chances of actual Kurdish statehood remain slim, because such a state would be wedged between four countries – Iran, Iraq, Turkey and Syria – that bitterly oppose it"*¹⁶.

On 17 October 2016 the Iraqi army launched an offensive on Mosul with a 30,000-strong force. Many of the troops had been trained by Spanish forces at the "Gran Capitán" base belonging to the Iraqi army's training complex at Besmayah. Baghdad was concerned that the successful reconquest of the city, which took nearly nine months despite the numerical inferiority of Daesh's jihadi militias, should not be attributed to the Kurdish militias.

Prime minister Sunni Haider al-Abadi's announcement of the recapture of Mosul marked the loss of the most important and iconic city of the caliphate of the ill-named Islamic State.

The Trump administration stated that the referendum *"is distracting from efforts to defeat ISIS and stabilize the liberated areas"* and that *"holding the referendum in disputed areas is particularly provocative and destabilizing"*.

The Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation likewise stated that the referendum *"would exacerbate divides at a time when all Iraqis should join forces to defeat Daesh for good, restore stability and rebuild the country for the benefit of the whole population"*.

The EU asserted through Federica Mogherini that *"the European Union reiterates its support for Iraq's unity, sovereignty and territorial integrity. Unilateral actions, such as the proposed referendum, are counterproductive and must be avoided"*, adding that *"there are outstanding issues between Erbil and Baghdad that need to be resolved"*. It nonetheless pointed out that *"this should be done through a peaceful and constructive dialogue leading to a mutually agreed solution based on the full application of the provisions of the Iraqi Constitution"*¹⁷.

The UN stated its opposition, arguing that the referendum would undermine the efforts to combat Daesh and complicate the by no means simple post-conflict tasks, to which it is not advisable to add further uncertainty.

Despite the opposition, the referendum took place on 25 September with a turnout of del 72,16 percent and 92.73 percent of favourable votes. A total of 3,305,925 people voted despite there being no reliable census: it was not known how many Kurds lived in the disputed areas because the presence of the Iraqi state had disappeared from Kurdistan and these areas after they were conquered by Daesh.

¹⁶ Shlomo Ben Ami, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ EUROPA PRESS, agency news, 20 September 2017.

Barzani's Kurdish government regarded the referendum as a starting point for forcing negotiations with Baghdad, but his plan backfired and the consequences would not be as he planned.

The Iraqi parliament asked primeminister Haider al-Abadi, as head of the armed forces, to send troops to restore order and protect the population in the areas disputed between the central and regional governments, especially Kirkuk, the oil-rich province controlled by the Kurds since 2014. Within barely two days, by 18 October 2017 the Baghdad army had recovered all the disputed areas, forcing the Kurds to retreat to their strongholds. They thus lost a large portion of the land they controlled and, worse still, 120,000 Kurds were forced to leave the oil-rich areas that are vital to the feasibility of an independent Iraqi Kurdistan. This led Bafel Talabani, the son of the leader and founder of the Patriotic Union (UPK), to call for the Kurdish President Barzani's resignation. The outcome thus underlined the rift between the main parties, the PDK and the UPK. According to Bafel Talabani, an opportunity had arisen to negotiate an independence process with Baghdad provided the referendum was not held, but the decision to go ahead with the referendum had ruined the possibility¹⁸.

An Iraqi court issued an order of arrest against the president and two members of the Kurdistan Electoral Committee for organising the independence referendum, but it is unlikely they will be arrested and brought to justice given the absence of police and military forces of the Baghdad government in Kurdistan.

Both Turkey and Iran backed Iraq in adopting measures to press Iraqi Kurdistan, on whose air space Baghdad established restrictions for international flights.

As a result of this situation, on 1 November 2017 the Kurdish president Barzani handed in his resignation, stating that *"Iraq no longer believes in the Kurds' rights; it is using the independence referendum to attack as a pretext for attacking Kurdistan"*.

Conclusions

Following the recapture of the territories occupied by Daesh in Iraq, the daunting task remains of stabilising the country in accordance with a model that has yet to be decided. Some see the future Iraq as a territory divided into three areas: Kurdistan, the central Sunni area, and the Shia area. Such a solution seems unlikely to lend stability to the region – quite the opposite. The other option would be to maintain Iraq united but not make the same mistakes as in 2012. The Baghdad government needs to be one of national

¹⁸ Angeles Espinosa: Interview with Babel Talabani in *El País*, 23 October 2017. Available at: https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/10/22/actualidad/1508685790_200027.html.

concentration and must put the country's peace, unity and stability before any other concerns.

The post-war period in Iraq will be very complicated if we bear in mind that according to the UNHCR there are some 3.2 million displaced Iraqis scattered among 3,000 locations all over Iraq. Large parts of the cities where fighting took place are badly destroyed and time and financial assistance will be required to rebuild them, help the displaced people return and start the economy rolling.

But the biggest challenge will be to re-establish the coexistence of Sunni, Shia and Kurds, which was shattered after decades of clashes and reciprocal attacks. The temptation to divide the country into three territories for Shia, Sunni and Kurds would not solve the problem and would lead to greater confrontation in the areas where communities overlap and to ethnic cleansing operations across Iraq.

The resistance of Iraq's Kurdish militias, the Peshmerga, who succeeded in standing up to the jihadis using weapons supplied by a few European countries and above all the US, has granted them greater power in the region, and they have taken advantage of this to demand independence for Iraq's Kurdish region. In the medium and long term this could end up destabilising the whole of Kurdistan, which is divided among Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. The consequences of such a conflict would be unpredictable and it would have the potential to destabilise the whole region.

In view of the prospect of a Kurdish secession process that began with the referendum of 25 September, the international community has been, and must continue to be, categorical in its opposition.

Iran looks set to play an important role in the future of Iraq, as it enjoys significant influence on Iraq's Shia leaders, but it must avoid the temptation to transfer to Iraq its dispute with Saudi Arabia for regional leadership. Tehran announced it was closing its borders with Iraqi Kurdistan bearing in mind that "*the border agreements currently in force were reached with the Kurdish region as part of an integrated Iraq*".

Turkey is the country that has opposed the referendum most directly owing to the independence aspirations of its own Kurdish minority and it even carried out military manoeuvres at its own border with Iraqi Kurdistan. Although it described them as preparatory "against terrorist organisations", referring to the PKK, they were nonetheless a threat to the materialisation of Iraqi Kurdistan's independence. The Turkish prime minister, Binali Yildirim, announced on 22 September that Turkey could intervene militarily in Iraqi Kurdistan if this autonomous territory's ambitions constituted a threat to his country¹⁹.

¹⁹ AGENCIA EFE, News agency, 23 September 2017.

The Turkish army bombed the Turkish guerrilla's bases in northern Iraq, and its General Staff stated in a communiqué of 21 September 2017 that operations of this kind would continue.

It should not be forgotten that in July 2015 the PKK and the Turkish state broke a ceasefire that had lasted more than two and a half years during which negotiations on putting an end to the armed conflict were held, though ultimately to no avail.

To this should be added that Turkey and Iraq have engaged in military manoeuvres at the border to deter the Peshmerga.

Russia, for its part, remains silent in Iraq, whereas in Syria, to which it has deployed troops and aircraft, it is making sure that the Kurdish militias of the Syrian Democratic Forces (FSD) do not attack al-Assad's forces.

Israel regards the attempt at Kurdish secession as a means of weakening Iraq, Syria, Turkey and, potentially, Iran and therefore to an extent it does not regard secession as a bad thing.

It remains to be seen what the peacebuilding and post-conflict process will be like in Syria and the role Turkey, Iran and Saudi Arabia are going to play in the region. Whatever the case, it is vital that Iraqi Kurdistan be given a place in a stable Iraq to avoid the spread across the region of the effects of an independence process that would undoubtedly destabilise the Middle East, already one of the most turbulent areas of the world.

Iraqi Kurdistan. Geopolitical indicators

| | |
|---|--|
| Iraqi Kurdistan | |
| Autonomous region | Capital Erbil |
| Population: 6,858,600 (estimate), 17% of Iraq's population | |
| Distribution by age* | 0-14 years: 39.46% 15-24 years: 19.25% 25-54 years: 33.84% 55-64 years: 3.99% |
| Ethnic groups: Kurds and a Yazidi minority | |
| Language: Arabic, Kurdish (official languages) | |
| Religions: Sunni Islam, Yazidi 1% | |
| Urban population: 69.7 %* Life expectancy: 74.9 %* Health expenditure: 5.5 % of GDP* Literacy: 79.7 %* Unemployment: 20 % Population below poverty: 30 % | |
| Size: 65,000 km2 | |
| Provinces: Duhok, Erbil, Halabja and Sulaymaniyah Disputed areas: part of the provinces of Nineveh, Kirkuk and Diyala. | |

| | |
|--|---|
| Mainly agricultural territory | |
| GDP: 171,700 M\$ (2016 estimate*) | |
| GDP growth rate: 11 %* | |
| GDP structure* | Agriculture: 5.1 % Industry: 37.3 % Services: 57.7 % |
| Oil, chemicals, textiles, construction materials | |

*Data for Iraq as there is no specific data for Iraqi Kurdistan. (Source: The World Factbook 2017)

Chronology of the conflict

| DATE | EVENTS |
|----------------------|---|
| 24 July 1923 | Treaty of Lausanne establishing the division of Kurdish territory between Turkey, Syria, Iraq and Iran. |
| 3 Oct 1932 | Iraq gains its independence. |
| 1946 | Establishment of the Republic of Mahabad (Iran), lasting one year. |
| 1958 | Overthrow of King Faisal II in Iraq with the help of the Kurds and legalisation of the Democratic Party of Kurdistan (PDK) created by Mustafá Barzani. |
| 1961 | Bagdad bans the PDK. The Iraqi Kurds set up a militia, the Peshmerga, to fight against Baghdad. |
| 17 July 1968 | Coup d'état of the Baath party led by General Bakr |
| 11 March 1970 | The PDK and the Iraqi government agree to establish the Kurdish Autonomous Region, but fail to reach an agreement on the territorial borders of the region after four years of talks. |
| 1974 | Baghdad unilaterally enacts the autonomy law and the Kurds resume their attacks. |
| 1976 | Establishment of the Patriotic Union of Kurdistan, led by Jalal Talabani, as a more left-wing offshoot of the PDK. |
| 1978 | Establishment of the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) , which advocates Kurdistan's independence. |
| April 1979 | Turkey and Iraq agree to carry out joint actions against the Kurds. |

| DATE | EVENTS |
|----------------------|--|
| 1979 | Establishment of the Islamic Republic of Iran, which is opposed to granting autonomy to the Iranian Kurds. |
| 16 March 1988 | Iraqi air force drops aggressive chemicals on the Kurdish population of Halabja as a reprisal against the PDK for its alliance with Tehran during the Iran-Iraq war (1980-88). |
| 1991 | Saddam Hussein loses the Gulf War and the international coalition forces the creation of an autonomous area in Iraqi Kurdistan. |

| | |
|----------------------|--|
| 1992 | After elections the government of the Iraqi Kurdish area is divided among the PDK led by Masud Barzani, the founder's son, and the Patriotic Union (UPK) led by Jalal Talabani. |
| 1992 | PKK abandons separatism and advocates a federation with Turkey. |
| May 1994 | A struggle breaks out between UPK and PDK for control of Iraqi Kurdistan. |
| 1995 | Creation of the Free Women Movement of Kurdistan within PKK. |
| April 2003 | PDK and UPK establish an autonomous unified Kurdish government with its capital in Erbil. |
| 2005 | Adoption of the Iraqi Constitution recognising Iraqi Kurdistan to be a federal region. |
| 2009 | Elections to the parliament of Iraqi Kurdistan are won by the coalition of PDK and UPK (Kurdistan List) and Barzani is president of the Region. |
| 12 July 2012 | The Democratic Union Party (PYD) and Kurdish National Council (KNC) create the Syrian Kurdish Supreme Council on the initiative of Barzani in Iraqi Kurdistan. |
| Late 2012 | PYD sets up the Kurdish People's Protection Committees (YPG) and confronts the al-Nusra Front (al-Qaeda in Syria) and Daesh. |
| February 2013 | The Kurdish militias become involved in the Syrian war against al-Assad's government. |
| Nov 2013 | Turkey signs an agreement with the government of the Autonomous Region of Iraqi Kurdistan. |
| 2014 | The Kurdish Peshmerga halt the advance of Daesh in northern Iraq and seize the disputed territories in southern Iraqi Kurdistan. |
| 23 Sept. 2014 | The US decides to strike Daesh's posts in Kobane (Syria) to help the Syrian Kurds defending the city, though Turkey does not allow its bases to be used. |
| October 2014 | The Turkish government reaches an agreement with the Regional Government of Iraqi Kurdistan for the Kurdish militias, the Peshmerga, to pass through Turkish territory to strengthen the Syrian militias' defence of Kobane. |
| January 2015 | The Kurds free Kobane.(Syrian Kurdistan). |
| 7 June 2017 | President Barzani calls a referendum on the independence of Iraqi Kurdistan. |
| 12 Sept. 2017 | The Iraqi Parliament votes against the holding of the referendum in Iraqi Kurdistan |
| 25 Sept. 2017 | The independence referendum is held in Iraqi Kurdistan; 92 percent vote yes. |

| DATE | EVENTS |
|---------------------|--|
| 18 Oct. 2017 | The Iraqi armed forces recover disputed territories occupied by the Kurds in 2014. |
| 1 Nov. 2017 | Barzani resigns as president of Kurdistan. |

Chapter six

Iraq after the recovery of Mosul

Francisco José Berenguer Hernández

Abstract

The last year of the Iraq war had as its main milestone the struggle for Mosul. After the reconquest of this city, the Islamic State tries to defend its last territories without success. The distribution of power shares among the different Iraqi factions will determine the future of the country.

Keywords

Iraq, Mosul, Islamic State.

Introduction

Over the course of 2017 the current phase of the Iraq war has largely involved operations designed to seize Mosul from the Islamic State (IS), which has controlled this major city for years. Following its definitive recapture in July, the degree of destruction, the reign of terror imposed on the population by the jihadi group and the foreseeable serious difficulties of rebuilding the most basic infrastructure are clear indications of how complicated the task of returning the country to normal can be expected to be¹.

Although the part of Iraq under IS's control cannot be considered to have been completely liberated, the future military operations seem less complex than those already carried out and therefore the main uncertainty regarding the country's future relates more to the deep structural changes that are needed. These changes may lead to the partitioning of Iraq into various territories that belong to the state in name only.

A second cause for concern is the strong likelihood that the remnants of the Islamic State will shift from a pseudo-state to the classical insurgency² that has caused Iraq such harm.

Background to the conflict

Distant background

The distant background to this war has been examined in previous editions of this publication, though it is appropriate to stress the most significant aspects again, as today's attitude of immediacy and short-termism often makes the mistake of forgetting and even scorning the distant background factors, not realising that they are often the underlying cause of current conflicts.

The events stemming from the division of the initially unitary Muslim community (*fitna*), chiefly after the death of Ali in Küfa – AD 661³ – which triggered the birth of what is currently known as Sunnism, Shiism and Khawarijism, although remote, continue to be one of the main factors that account for the complexity of modern Iraq, even more than in the other Arab countries. The main cause of this situation is the relative balance between the two main confessions, Sunni and Shia. It might seem a contradiction,

¹ JALABI, Raya. "Residents are returning to Mosul — but ISIS is still a threat", *Military&Defense*, 9 August 2017.

² ECKEL, Mike. "Interview: Its 'Aura' Dented By Lost Foothold, Islamic State Still Poses Threat", Transcription of an interview with Professor Joshua Landis, on Radio Liberty, 10 July 2017.

³ CAHEN, Claude. *El Islam, vol.1 Desde los orígenes hasta el comienzo del Imperio otomano*, Historia Universal siglo XXI, siglo XXI. Editores, Madrid, 1992.

but in nations where one of the two communities is predominant, be it demographically as in Saudi Arabia or politically as in Bahrein, the ever-complex relations between the two are more stable and do not suffer from the ups and downs and alternations in the predominance of one over the other that has been witnessed in Iraq in past decades.

The geographical situation of Iraq, which borders on the large expanse of Shia Iran, further accentuates this complexity. It is no coincidence that the major Shia shrines of Najaf and Karbala are located in Iraq, and this adds to Iran's undeniable interest in influencing Iraq's policy⁴ to defend its historic interests in the area and explains its self-imposed protection of Iraq's Shia community, as well as of the safety of Iranian pilgrims who cross the border to visit these highly venerated shrines.

Mention should also be made of the regional consequences of the defeat and breakup of the Turkish Empire following the First World War, as Iraq's political borders stem from the Sevres⁵ and Sykes-Picot treaties, which settled the Turkish issue and reorganised the region politically, assigning to the new Iraq the boundaries which are still proving to be unrealistic and dysfunctional today, so many years on.

Iraq's history since its establishment as a "modern" state created in the image and likeness of western national-states poses a dilemma that is applicable to many other geopolitical realities. While this historical analysis leads us to conclude that the micro-partitioning of the territories and power has normally led to periods of violence and conflict, merging several of these small states into larger, more capable ones should lead to a decrease in these conflicts. And this has generally been the case, but provided that there has been a certain ethnic, political and religious homogeneity of the peoples united under the same flag to start off with.

Very much to the contrary, over the nineteenth and twentieth centuries the cycle of colonisation-decolonisation applied to peoples and territories chiefly in Africa and Asia has turned a blind eye to the abovementioned point of departure, resulting in multi-ethnic and multidenominational states which generally enjoyed little success. And Iraq is a good example of this reality, as disagreement and rivalry between the Sunni and Shia Arabs, Kurds and the various less numerically significant minorities (Assyrians, Christians, Yazidis, etc.) have historically been more frequent than harmonious coexistence, leading to the current civil war which has become almost endemic and whose end is not easy to predict.

⁴ JEDINIA, Mehdi. "Analysts: Tehran Sees Liberation of Mosul as Victory for Iraq and Iran", VOA News, 15 July 2017.

⁵ CAHEN, Claude. *El Islam, vol.2. Desde la caída de Constantinopla hasta nuestros días*, Historia Universal siglo XXI, siglo XXI. Editores, Madrid, 1992.

Recent background

The abovementioned distant background factors, coupled with the different groups that make up the artificially homogenous "Iraqis", are clearly reflected in the course of events since the founding and establishment in the country of the Baath party. Despite the party's pan-Arab socialist, lay and nationalist ideology, it led to the brutal dictatorship of Saddam Hussein, one of the pillars of which was the supremacy that the Sunni Arabs exercised over the rest of the country's ethnic and religious groups with extreme violence, such as the attacks on Kurdish population centres in the north of the country using conventional and chemical weapons. The best known was the attack on Halabja using nerve and mustard gas in 1988⁶.

Apart from the dictator's megalomania, one of the reasons for Saddam Hussein's foreign actions – the war against Iran and the invasion of Kuwait – was the need to boost the feeling of national unity by means of the well-known method of identifying foreign enemies to intensify his citizens' loyalty.

But the result of this policy was contrary to the intended aim, because the many casualties suffered in these wars and the destruction of housing and infrastructure, together with the devastating effect the international sanctions imposed after the First Gulf War had on the people, merely added to the long list of grievances suffered by a good many Iranians. They identified the members of the Hussein clan and the high-ranking officials of the regime as a caste who enjoyed privileges and riches at the expense of the rest of the country. This accusation was largely extended to the Sunni Arabs belonging to the party, those in senior government posts and the commanders of the security forces.

As on so many other occasions, only war could change a situation in which one of the sides had a firm grip on practically all the levers of power and handled them with extreme violence if necessary. Indeed, the status established by Hussein's dictatorship was shattered by the invasion of Iraq in 2003.

The destruction of the regime and the major mistake made by the occupying forces of completely dismantling Iraq's power structures and mechanisms – something that the United States did not even do following the occupation of national socialist Germany in the spring of 1945 – led those who had hitherto been oppressed to consider the time had come to settle accounts with their oppressors.

The advent of democracy to a country initially administered by the international community has been artificially imposed on a tangled web of

⁶ FERNÁNDEZ, Miguel. OROSA, Pablo L. "Halabja, el día en el que Sadam Husein usó armas químicas", *El Mundo*, 16 March 2013.

problems, rivalries and settling of accounts. As a result, the parliamentary alliances formed since 2003 with varying degrees of intensity have been chiefly aimed at empowering the ethnic or religious communities most disadvantaged by the previous regime⁷.

The transition was thus more a process of purging the institutions of people who supported the regime or had simply been granted a post during it. The gaps were immediately filled by sympathisers with the new government, especially supporters of the Shia Kurdish majority allies in Parliament⁸. Both the government of the previous prime minister, al-Maliki, and the subsequent government of al-Abadi – more influenced by an international community alarmed by recent developments – have proved incapable of orchestrating a transition that is pragmatic and, even if not fair, at least acceptable to the population as a whole. The process might have been conducted with certain guarantees of security and prosperity had it been carried out before 2011 while the American forces were still in Iraq.

A dramatic consequence of this chain of errors is the current armed resistance to the measures adopted by the government. This insurgency movement has transcended the local environment and become involved with the contemporary Salafi revolutionary movement and its violent jihadism, bringing Iraqi affairs to the forefront of the international community's attention and concern.

Indeed, the resistance movement and its high-intensity insurgency led by elements of Saddam Hussein's defeated regime found a perfect ally in the abovementioned international jihadism, which soon identified Iraq as an ideal theatre for continuing its activities.

Therefore, even if it might initially be thought to go against nature, the alliance between the ousted members of the Baath party and the international jihadists has had a multiplying effect on the emergence of Daesh or the self-styled Islamic State in Iraq. Its longstanding resistance in Syria and Iraq and its many branches in other parts of the world beyond its territorial hardcore, which reached its maximum extension in 2014, is no doubt due to the symbiosis and complementarity of strengths and weakness, potentialities and knowledge provided by both religious fanatics and professionals from among the leadership of the Baath.

This resistance has begun to crumble irreversibly since the summer 2016 campaign, which reached a height during the battle of Mosul. The fighting had ended in August 2017 at the time of writing⁹.

⁷ CORRAL HERNÁNDEZ, David. "Irak, diez años después", IEEEE, Madrid, 12 March 2013.

⁸ FUENTE COBO, Ignacio. "La inacabable guerra de Iraq", IEEEE, Madrid, 2 July 2014.

⁹ GEORGE, Susannah. "Iraqi prime minister declares 'total victory' in Mosul over ISIS", *Military Times*, 10 July 2017.

Current situation of the conflict

As predicted in the previous edition of the *Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts*, the strategy designed and implemented by the international community has been yielding results over the past year. Since the initiative was snatched from IS, land has been recovered and population centres steadily freed, considerably reducing the area in the hands of IS and returning control to the Iraqi government or allied militias¹⁰.

During this period the availability of Iraqi military units and security forces who are reasonably reliable in combat has increased as a result of the continuation and intensification of the training of these troops by international forces. This key course of action undertaken as part of the allied strategy has been one of the cornerstones of the latter, though, as expected, it took a long time for it to have a noticeable effect on developments.

What is more, the experience gained by the Iraqi units, chiefly in the battles of Ramadi and Fallujah¹¹ waged in cities of a certain size albeit with considerable difficulties, enabled these units to cut their teeth by dealing with situations similar to those that arose in Mosul months later on a larger scale.

Nor should we forget the cumulative effect of the constant action of the air forces, which, as pointed out in previous editions, have found more numerous and profitable targets owing to the constant contact of the jihadi militias with the pro-government forces. Although tactical, these targets have been intensely defeated with the effect of considerably reducing both the number of IS fighters and their arsenals of weapons and vehicles¹². Only the entrenchment of the last resistance in city centres and the use of civilians as human shields hindered the decisive action of the aviation, leading to the unfortunate but inevitable deaths of citizens in these air strikes.

Mosul, the Iraqi Stalingrad

As predicted, over the course of the war an unmistakable sense of the conventional military defeat of IS arose, but it was still necessary to win back Mosul. As well as being a large city with significant resources before it fell into the hands of IS, it had acquired a unique significance and symbolism. Indeed, it was there that the jihadi leader al-Baghdadi proclaimed himself Caliph Ibrahim in July 2014, when the Islamic State was at its height of power.

¹⁰ DE YOUNG, Karen. "Under Trump, gains against ISIS have 'dramatically accelerated'", *The Washington Post*, 4 August 2017.

¹¹ BERENGUER HERNÁNDEZ, Francisco José. "Faluya, nudo gordiano del Estado Islámico". IEEE, Madrid, 9 June 2016.

¹² DETTMER, Jamie. "IS Fighters in Disarray in Iraq Due to Air Power, says US General", VOA News, 24 July 2017.

Mosul thus acquired the status of seat of the caliphate and, as such, its political and religious capital. Therefore, over and above its demographic and economic significance, the city became essential to both sides, either to be held onto or reconquered. The background to the abovementioned fighting in Ramadi and Fallujah, together with this special significance, indicated that the major city in northern Iraq would witness the hardest battle of this entire phase of Iraq's civil war.



Figure 6.1. Complete destruction of several districts of Mosul¹³.

The city had been controlled by IS since more than two years before the start of the offensive and both the surrounding districts and the historical part had been greatly fortified. In addition, the string of defeats and losses of territory suffered by IS had led many of its militias to flock to this last stronghold on Iraqi soil.

First phase

After a few months of preparations and grouping the pro-government forces together following the earlier battles, chiefly in the centre of the country, the

¹³ PATEL, Jugal K. WALLACE, Tim, "Before and After Satellite Images of Mosul Reveal the Devastation after the Islamic State Was Forced Out", *The New York Times*, 15 July 2017.

offensive against Mosul began on 17 October 2016¹⁴. Earlier operations in the previous weeks had enabled them to seize various surrounding cities to set up bases from which to attack the city and boost their security, avoiding attacks by small groups of jihadis once they had established themselves in the city's outskirts.

Despite the hugely disproportionate force ratio – estimated at 10 to 1 against IS – the city was not approached concentrically but only from the east, north and south in order to leave the jihadis an apparent escape route.

The existence of this corridor leading to other territories controlled by IS, located between Mosul and the Syrian border, triggered fierce disagreement between the various actors on the government side. One of the initial aims of the attack was apparently to surround the city, but many were in favour of providing the jihadis with an escape route in the hope of avoiding having to face a defence that would be not only fanatical but, with no chance of survival, even more determined, at least in theory¹⁵.

Whatever the case, more than 100,000 men belonging chiefly to the Iraqi army – both regular troops and special operations – *as well as* Peshmerga, Kurds and local militias, both Sunni and Shia, were joined by special troops from some of the western countries who led the International Coalition¹⁶. The operations consisted of an attack on the neighbourhoods located to the east of the Tigris as the main effort, sustained by an attack from the south by smaller groups of troops and the advance of the Kurds from the northeast to the north of the city.

After only two weeks of fighting, the Iraqi special forces were the first to reach the residential areas to the east of the city centre.

This fact, together with the advances in the south and north, indicated that the battle would soon be over following a concentric attack on the heart of the old city, which would even coincide with the presidential elections in the United States. But this optimism was short-lived owing to a variety of circumstances.

Firstly, jihadi resistance in the city had increased hugely. As the battle of Mosul had been on the cards for years, the city was riddled with tunnels, blockhouses and covered ways that enabled IS to move its few remaining troops rapidly and fairly safely, and even carry out minor local counterattacks effectively. In addition to the traditional IEDs, IS employed many devices installed in vehicles that were completely filled with explosives. With these

¹⁴ "Mosul: What the Decade's Largest Battle Says about the Future of War", *Defense One*, 6 July 2017

¹⁵ ARRAF, Jane, "Despite Victory Over ISIS, Some Fighting Continues In Mosul", interview with a representative of Amnesty International, 11 July 2017.

¹⁶ "Mosul: What the Decade's Largest Battle Says About the Future of War", *Defense One*, 6 July 2017.

large and highly destructive IEDs the jihadis attempted to make up for their shortage of artillery. They placed these super IEDs at the government troops' foreseeable entry routes and were soon using five daily, with considerable success.

Although they soon became one of the main targets for the allied air strikes, the dozens of laboratories located in the city centre continued to prepare new consignments of these booby-trap vehicles, which were positioned in advance in strategic locations as the operations progressed.

These vehicles were soon joined by the usual suicide attacks carried out by people on foot or in vehicles, many of them children. This growing trend reached a height in the struggle to capture IS's last stronghold in the city in the spring of 2017.

IS even prepared a small fleet of armed boats, confident of being able to hinder the crossing of the river from the east to the old part of the city on the west.

Lastly, as an interesting tactical innovation, IS began using commercial drones as offensive weapons, equipping them with 40-mm grenades and other small explosives. Also built in labs located in the heart of the city, they are the first documented case of the use of armed drones by a non-state actor¹⁷.

Ultimately, as was only to be expected, IS was prepared to defend its capital with all the means at its disposal and utmost determination as it had had plenty of time to prepare its defence. Being in control of a large stretch of land had provided it with access to a host of resources and its defence of Mosul therefore resembled less that of an insurgency group and more that of a conventional state¹⁸. Although this circumstance had been pointed out by several analysts, it had clearly been underestimated by the governmental planners of the operations, resulting in nearly 5,000 casualties and the destruction of dozens of vehicles during the first month of fighting in Mosul.

Secondly, the government offensive did not advance at the expected pace. IS's strong defence caused very significant losses and unexpectedly hindered the progress of several of the forces in the city. As a result, whereas in the east IS was driven towards the inner districts of the city, the attack from the south and north was practically limited to the last pocket in the city centre and focused on separating the besieged jihadis from their colleagues in Tal Afar, the closest stronghold along the road to Syria.

¹⁷ Interesting statistics on the allied air attacks directed both at booby-trap vehicles and boats and drones can be found at Defense One, [http:// www.defenseone.com/feature/mosul-largest-battle-decade-future-of-war/#day-one](http://www.defenseone.com/feature/mosul-largest-battle-decade-future-of-war/#day-one).

¹⁸ BERENQUER HERNÁNDEZ, Francisco José. "La guerra contra el Estado Islámico y el factor tiempo", IEEE, Madrid, 17 March 2017.

Therefore, although surrounded, IS's militiamen were able to concentrate their depleted forces on the fighting in the east of the city. In the rest of the pocket they merely watched the enemy forces, who were highly reluctant to enter into combat building by building under the conditions dictated by the defensive positions adopted by IS.

With this *modus operandi* the Kurds, for example, were making the most of occupying large stretches of land further west of their traditional areas, avoiding being weakened by the substantial losses fighting in the urban areas would have otherwise caused them. Once again, the lack of uniformity of the government side was hindering the progress of the operations, as the interests and pace of the operations desired by the US-led Coalition, the Baghdad government, the Shia militias controlled by Iran and the Kurdish militias proved to be different if not clashing at times¹⁹.

Another good example of these circumstances is the outrages committed against the "liberated" Sunni population by the Shia militias, which led to fiercer resistance in many places and increased Sunni support for the Islamic State's cause, weakening the control over the rural area around the city, chiefly to the west, between Mosul and Tal Afar.

To sum up, the operation to recapture Mosul was characterised by excessive initial optimism – possibly influenced by the local political situation in the United States – and very divergent interests of the heterogeneous contingent taking part in the offensive. Added to this, they had to contend with the exceptional defensive skills of the highly motivated jihadi militiamen fighting under ideal defensive conditions, as they had had several years to prepare for the battle²⁰.

All this led to an operational pause following the final expulsion of IS from the districts located to the east of the Tigris in January 2017, after three months of very harsh combat.

Second phase

The pause in question was not used only to give the worst-affected units a rest. The relative failure – chiefly with respect to the pace of the operations and excessive time taken to attain the successive objectives – seemed to require a period of reflection and analysis of the mistakes made. The conclusions needed to be used to make freeing the west part of the city simpler and less costly – chiefly the old part which, as in so many historical cities of the Middle East, was a labyrinth of winding alleyways that facilitated its defence.

¹⁹ Reuters, "Iran, Iraq Sign Accord to Boost Military Cooperation", 23 July 2017.

²⁰ BERENGUER HERNÁNDEZ, Francisco José. "La guerra contra el Estado Islámico y el factor tiempo", IEEE, Madrid, 17 March 2017.

The main conclusion reached recognised that IS's defensive capabilities had been underestimated. As IS had mistakenly been regarded more as an insurgency contingent than as an army – or at least as a militia closer in its capabilities to a regular army than to a classic urban guerrilla – the forces initially used to attack the city's eastern districts had almost exclusively been trained and equipped for counter-terrorist operations. These elite Iraqi forces, the now famous "Golden Knights", who had performed notably in the previous battles in central Iraq²¹, accounted for the lion's share of inner-city operations, whereas the rest of the various contingents, regular or militias, had merely maintained the urban perimeter and the siege on the city.

This significant numerical superiority over the jihadis was thus undermined and the latter were often superior in their well-directed counterattacks, shielded by their tunnels and covered ways. In addition, the allied air strikes had to be considerably limited owing to the expected tactics of using the civilian population – whom IS deterred from leaving the combat zone by executing non-combatants – as human shields. Therefore, despite the Iraqi's troops experience and determination, progress was as slow as it was costly.

It was not until the last weeks of fighting on the east bank of the Tigris that regular Iraqi units and police were brought into combat. Thenceforward the defence was frequently overwhelmed by the simultaneous attacks carried out in different vectors and along various routes leading to the river and this considerably speeded up the government troops' advance.

Despite the obviousness of this circumstance, it should not be forgotten that many of the Iraqi troops still lacked confidence at the start of the battle. This may have conditioned the plan of attack, but it soon became evident that a single main effort along a single route was enabling IS to concentrate its defensive resources – conventional and non-conventional – and accordingly to cause the attacking forces multiple casualties and frequently halt their advance.

March 2017 at last saw the start of the attack on the western districts, hindered by the disabling of the bridges over the Tigris but helped by the valuable experience gained in the eastern neighbourhoods. In addition, IS's loss of much of the city limited its resources and the number of labs where it produced the various types of IEDs and drones. This made it easier for allied intelligence to obtain useful information for the use of the artillery and air support.

The latter would be a determining factor, as vehicles equipped with heavy weapons could not be driven around the narrow streets of the old part of the city and in most cases the foot infantry would not be able to rely on the

²¹ BERENQUER HERNÁNDEZ, Francisco José. "Faluya, nudo gordiano del Estado islámico", IEEE, Madrid, 9 June 2017.

effective support of the heavy weapons of the armoured vehicles, resulting in the feared scenario of fighting building by building and floor by floor.

Complicated enough as it was, the battlefield continued to be inhabited by dozens of thousands of civilians, who were forced to remain by IS. The inevitable collateral damage against the population was, unfortunately and predictably, part of the defence strategy of IS, which continued to use its powerful media apparatus to draw the international community's attention to the civilian casualties with the hope of undermining the Alliance's determination and cohesion²².

A good example of these actions is the air strike of 17 March on the al-Jadida neighbourhood targeted at jihadi snipers on the roof of a building. The strike caused the building to collapse, killing the approximately 100 civilians inside. As a result the air strikes were reduced considerably, despite the massive use of guided ammunition, much to the detriment of ground operations.

Even so, after several weeks of fighting, jihadi resistance was confined to a narrow perimeter around the mosque of al-Nuri, the heart of the city and a symbol of the fleeting existence of the pseudo-Islamic State, as it was there that Daesh's leader al-Baghdadi had proclaimed himself caliph.

The destruction of the medieval mosque by the jihadis themselves on 21 June proved two things. The first is the huge symbolic significance it held for them, as they were not going to allow it to fall into enemy hands. The second is that this desperate act marked the realisation of the end of their effective resistance in Mosul²³.

After quashing isolated pockets of resistance, on 10 July 2017 Iraq's prime minister al-Abadi announced that the city had been fully freed after nearly nine months of fighting, proving how wrong the optimistic calculations of October 2016 had been as they had reckoned that the city could be taken in a month.

Operations after the recovery of Mosul

Developments in the campaign during the rest of the summer of 2017 up to the time of writing this article²⁴ have drawn attention to the decisive fatigue of the jihadi militias. The following milestone in their staunch defence of the small territory they still controlled in Iraq was Tal Afar, a city with approximately 200,000 inhabitants at the start of the war, located 70km west of Mosul and close to the Syrian border.

²² GEORGE, Susannah. "Civilians flee as strikes pound last of Islamic State-held Mosul", *Military Times*, 2 July 2017.

²³ MCCAUSLAND, Phil. "Iraqi Prime Minister Declares End of ISIS Caliphate in Iraq", NBC News, 29 June 2017.

²⁴ 5 September 2017.

As is usual in the area, the core of the city is a citadel which, albeit on a smaller scale, was conducive to a resistance that was similar to that put up by IS in Mosul and has so far been characteristic of the campaign.

This time, however, the circumstances changed. Indeed, the usual group of pro-government forces took only 11 days to seize control of the city, in contrast to Mosul and other previously liberated cities, even though the Tal Afar area had been one of the strongest supporters of Daesh since the start of IS in Iraq. There were several reasons for this.

Firstly, the jihadi militiamen were surrounded months before the start of the attack. While the battle of Mosul was being waged, given the evident need for IS to retreat towards the Syrian border after being expelled from the city, the planners of the campaign foresaw the importance of Tal Afar as the next stronghold of IS resistance and proceeded to isolate it, thereby preventing the arrival of reinforcements and supplies for months.

The second likely cause was Islamic State's decision to conduct a tactical withdrawal to ensure the survival of a certain number of combatants who could fight elsewhere. This was undoubtedly possible in a city that was under siege for months following the decision, at least by the allied forces, to allow the jihadi militiamen to leave. In this respect reports are contradictory, as in contrast to declarations such as those of General Aridhi claiming that there was no agreement with the government forces, others state the opposite. Indeed, another high-ranking Iraqi officer, General al-Jobori – commander-in-chief on the ground in Tal Afar – spoke of an agreement between the jihadi militiamen and the Kurdish Peshmerga responsible for holding the front line to the north of the liberated city²⁵.

The third factor was the few civilians left in the city – unlike in Mosul – by the time the attack was launched. Regardless of the reason why IS allowed so many of the settlers to leave – possibly because of their greater ideological sympathies mentioned above – the fact is that the absence of a large number of civilians made it possible to use heavy fire, both artillery and air strikes, more extensively and intensively.

Following the fall of Mosul and Tal Afar, IS's control over parts of Iraq could only be doomed to extinction, as in Syria. Nevertheless, battles remain to be fought.

It currently seems that the next major operation will be against Hawija, south of Mosul and near Kirkuk, and that the process will continue with the strongholds of Qaim and Shirqat and other minor ones²⁶ – unless Daesh's pseudo-state structure completely crumbles following the fall of Raqqa

²⁵ ARANGO, Tim. "ISIS Loses Another City to U.S.-backed Iraqi Forces". *The New York Times*, 31 August 2017.

²⁶ NIQASH, "Where ISIS In Iraq Will Make Its Last Stand—or Its Comeback," 28 July 2017.

in Syria in the foreseeable near future and its surviving leaders choose to implement a classical strategy of insurgency thereafter.

Daesh's not only apparent but very real weakness in this phase of the conflict should not, however, lead us to think that it is incapable of acting, as proven by the car-bomb and suicide attacks in Iraq and even in other parts of the world that have been either directed or inspired by the apparently languishing IS²⁷.

All this leads to the conclusion that an acceptable situation of peace and security in Iraq is not going to be achieved in the short term and that, in some way or another, the phase about to end will be followed by a new stage in the long drawn-out civil war in the country.

Role of the external actors

The contents of this section differ very little from what has been described in earlier versions as, save for tactical issues and details, the role of the external actors in this war has remained the same in terms of strategies adopted and degree of involvement.

United States

The United States' role in the war as leader of the Coalition has continued to be essential owing to its heavy involvement in planning the operations and the participation of its air and ground forces in the fighting.

Very conscious of its hasty and probably mistaken withdrawal from the country in December 2011, the Obama administration found itself forced to help al-Maliki's tottering government during the height of IS's power in the summer of 2014. Iraq's request, initially in an exclusively bilateral framework, led to immediate US military intervention, which was soon joined by initiatives to form a major coalition to combat jihadi terrorism as a whole and more specifically IS²⁸.

Although the Baghdad government has the growing support of Iran, both directly and through the Iraqi Shia militias, there is no doubt that US support has been essential – initially to shore it up and subsequently to give impetus to the moral and military recovery that led to a spate of military victories by the pro-government forces, especially in 2016 and 2017.

²⁷ JOSCELYN, Thomas. "Islamic State's Khorasan 'province' assaults Iraqi embassy in Kabul" *FDD's Long War Journal*, 31 July 2017.

²⁸ BERENGUER HERNÁNDEZ, Francisco José. "El Estado islámico como oportunidad", IEEE, Madrid, 16 September 2014.

This US support, despite the initial doubts and the imposition of a number of requirements on the Iraqi government, has not ceased to grow.

In this respect the start of a new political cycle and advent of Donald Trump as the new president at the end of 2016 have barely changed things, even though the election campaign raised serious doubts about the new strategy the United States might follow.

As could not be otherwise given the brutal encounter with reality that the transition from candidate to president always entails, President Trump has maintained and even increased America's efforts in Iraq and the determination with which they are carried out. In this connection the role to be played by the world's leading diplomatic and military power continues to be essential in the global war on terrorism, whatever its name and connotations at each moment.

The foregoing does not, however, clarify the leading role America will play in the immediate future in an Iraq freed of IS's conventional military action but very possibly involved in a conflict with the remaining insurgency, as well as beset by the current serious internal contradictions.

The continued presence of US troops in the country after the present stage of the war is questionable and questioned both in Iraq and in the United States. The growing influence of Iran and the evident hostility of much of the population, even of the factions currently aligned with the US troops and protected and supported by the US air force, are hindrances to this continuation²⁹. Furthermore, after a certain time, the resilience shown by the jihadi insurgency in Iraq and the extreme difficulty of governing the country properly, especially under the current circumstances, may require US support to be sustained for a certain amount of time. Current developments in Afghanistan may be an indication of the future of Iraq.

Iran

As pointed out in previous editions, it is becoming increasingly evident that Iran's strategy of involvement in the Iraqi and Syrian wars is proving to be successful. Its influence in both places has even increased over the past year in which, particularly in Iraq, the various pro-Iranian forces have taken part in all the most significant battles³⁰.

Using both its own forces and Shia militias, chiefly Iraqi, but also relying on the participation of thousands of foreign Shia fighters transferred to the theatre of operations, Iran has succeeded in filling the strategic gap left by

²⁹ O'CONNOR, Tom. "Iran and Iraq military unite against 'Terrorism,' creating potential problems for U.S.", *NEWSWEEK*, 24 July 2017.

³⁰ DARAGAH, Borzou. "Inside Iran's Mission to Dominate the Middle East", *BuzzFeed News*, 30 July 2017.

the US's withdrawal from the country in 2011 and the highly limited western military intervention following the creation of the Coalition in 2014. As a result the Tehran regime has established and maintained a solid territorial bridge that extends through Iraq and Syria from the Iranian borders to the Mediterranean, achieving what has been one of the main goals of its foreign policy for decades.

This evident strengthening of Iran's determination and capabilities will undoubtedly have future consequences both on its status as regional leader vis-à-vis the Sunni Gulf monarchies and on its rivalry with Israel and even on possible subsequent developments in its nuclear programme.

Turkey

The evolution of Turkey's situation with respect to the regional conflict under way has followed different patterns from those cited in relation to Iran. Much of Turkey's energy over the past year has gone into solving the consequences of the attempted coup d'état in Turkey in the summer of 2016. As a result, despite specific interventions in the Iraq and Syrian wards, Turkish influence on both can be considered to have waned.

In contrast, the Kurdish community's aspirations have continued to be strengthened chiefly by the unavoidable and prominent role of the Kurdish militias on either side of the Syrian-Iraqi border. The provision of materiel and supplies to these militias and their growing role in the territory is contributing significantly to this strengthening³¹.

Circumstances such as the unilateral referendum that is due to take place soon, announced by the Iraqi Kurdish authority, and the leading role of the Peshmerga in the fighting – on a par with that of the militias of the People's Protection Units (YPG) in Syria – suggest that, once IS is banished from both countries, the Kurdish issue is going to be one of the biggest stumbling blocks to achieving a politically stable situation in the region.

Failure to achieve a political union of the Kurdish communities in Syria, Iraq and Turkey is the main potential hindrance to achieving Kurdish objectives, as well as the dubious long-term efficiency of changing the borders, as is proven daily by the situation of South Sudan. What there is no doubt about is that Turkey – which, it should be remembered, always considers the Kurdish issue the main problem in this region, will vehemently attempt to foster and encourage discrepancies between the various Kurdish factions as much as possible in order to protect its own national and regional interests.

³¹ SNOW, Shawn. "Kurdish fighters display heavy firepower in show of force to Turkey", Military Times, 7 August 2017.

Russian Federation

Russia, like Iran, has maintained a steady, determined course of action in the region both before and after the start of its military intervention in Syria. It has therefore not directly involved itself in Iraq and instead allows Iran – which is very intensely involved in the country – to further the interests it partially shares with Iran.

As pointed out in the previous edition, it is undeniable that the punishment inflicted on the IS militias by Russia in Syria enormously weakened the military capabilities of IS, and that this has had highly positive repercussions in Iraq, contributing to the successes achieved in 2016 and 2017.

In other words, drawing a parallel with the military situation of Germany in the First and Second World Wars, IS's need to deal with two important enemies simultaneously on two different fronts proved decisive in its imminent military defeat.

Arab countries

Beyond diplomatic gestures, the involvement of the Arab countries in solving the Iraqi and Syrian wars can only be described as insufficient and disappointing – even in the important field of taking in war refugees. In this aspect, with the aid of the international community, only Lebanon and Jordan have contributed decisively to alleviating the effects of the wars, with sacrifices that other regional actors are not prepared to make.

European Union

As on other occasions, until the cessation of fighting allows it to focus its action on the tasks of reconstruction, the return of refugees, disarming the militias and enforcing international justice, in which it possesses vast, proven experience and skills, the EU's involvement is greatly limited. This is not true of some of the European nations that are members of the Coalition, among them Spain, which continues to take part in training Iraqi troops both at the Gran Capitán Spanish base at Bismayah and through the Mobile Training Teams (MTTs), which accompany these troops in their areas of operations, but without taking part in them directly.

Conclusions and prospects

The final outcome of the situation in Iraq following the end of the “conventional” fighting with the IS militias is an unknown factor, especially if we try to imagine the post-conflict period after a certain amount of time. What is certain is that a number of factors will not precisely contribute to

affording the country greater stability than it enjoyed before the emergence of IS.

The main factor is probably that the significant influence of the different ethnic and religious groups over their traditional territories has not been lessened by the conflict; on the contrary, it has increased. Therefore, whereas the status of defeated faction seems inseparable from the Sunni Arab community, the role played in the war by the Shia Arabs and Kurds places them in a position of greater power and predominance than they previously enjoyed.

Indeed, as its leaders are already pointing out, the Kurdish community seems to believe the time has come to create a state of its own. Furthermore, strengthened by the advantage secured by Iran not only locally in Iraq but in the regional environment too, the Shia community seems to be reaffirming its predominance, and not only numerically, in Iraq in the immediate future³².

All this, together with the effect of the outrages which the various militias and even regular government forces are reported to be committing as "revenge", principally against the Sunni community³³, could result in an atmosphere conducive to the continuation of the conflict in new phases. Of these, the insurgency against the government and its main support on the ground seems largely assured, though initially, following the military defeat, we may witness a temporary period of relative calm, as occurred in Afghanistan after the defeat of the Taliban in 2001 and 2002.

The continued presence of foreign troops, particularly American, could be another risk factor, as they are not welcomed by much of the population, either Sunni or Shia. What is more, it does not seem likely that a repetition, albeit on a much smaller scale, of the events in which they were involved following the invasion of 2003, would go down well with US society. Therefore, the prolonged presence of international forces to provide security and stability is by no means assured.

In contrast, increased Iranian influence could push Iraq into greater isolation from the Arab world and a situation of permanent tension in its immediate environment, especially with respect to the Gulf monarchies.

As stated in previous editions, a new, more balanced start in political and institutional relations between the various groups, possibly based on preestablished and agreed shares of power, could be conducive to progress in the medium and long term towards permanent stabilisation³⁴. But this does not appear to be an easy task, and it seems unlikely that the long period

³² GEORGE, Susannah. "After Mosul victory, Iraq mulls future of Shiite militias," *Military Times*, 24 July 2017.

³³ Reuters. "U.S.-trained Iraqi army unit committed war crimes in Mosul: HRW", 27 July 2017.

³⁴ PENNINGTON, Joseph " Iraq's democracy shows resiliency", *USA Today*, 17 July 2017.

Iraq after the recovery of Mosul

IS dominated large swathes of Iraqi territory will lead to a more united, more homogeneous country with greater national cohesion.

On the contrary, together with the destruction of the country's human capital, much of its ethnic and social diversity and historical and artistic heritage, it has perhaps denied Iraq its future viability.

Geopolitical indicators of Iraq

| | | |
|------------------------------------|-------------|---|
| Area | | 438,317 km ² (59th) |
| GDP | | 544,100 M\$ (37th) |
| Structure GDP/Active population | Agriculture | Structure GDP/Active population |
| | Industry | |
| | Services | |
| GDP per capita | | US\$15,500 (104th) |
| GDP growth rate | | 2.4% (128th) |
| Unemployment rate | | 16% (156th) |
| Trade relations (Exports): | | China 22.6% India 21.1% South Korea 11.2% USA 7.8% |
| Trade relations (Imports): | | Turkey 20.7 % Syria 19.6 % China 19.2 % USA 4.8 % |
| Crude oil production | | 3.36 million barrels per day (7th) |
| Population | | 37,056,169 (37th) |
| Rate of urbanisation | | 69.5 % (3.1 % annual increase) |
| Age structure | 0-14 | 40.25 % |
| | 15-64 | 56.42 % |
| | Over 65 | 3.33 % |
| Population growth rate | | 2.93 % (9th) |
| Ethnic groups | | Arabs 75–80%, Kurds 15–20%, Assyrians and others 5% |
| Religions | | Muslims (Shia 60–65%, Sunni 32–37%), Christians 3% |
| Population literacy rate | | 79.7 % |

| | |
|-----------------------------------|-------------|
| Population below the poverty line | 25 % |
| Internally displaced people | 1.3 million |
| Military expenditure. % of GDP | 8.7 % (2nd) |

Chronology of the conflict

| DATE | EVENTS |
|--------------------------|---|
| January 661 | Ali is murdered in Kufa |
| 10/10/680 | Battle of Kerbala. Death of al-Hussayn |
| 23/05/1916 | Sykes-Picot Treaty |
| 10/08/1920 | Treaty of Sevres |
| 16/07/1979 | Saddam Hussein is president of Iraq |
| 22/09/1980 to 20/08/1988 | Iran-Iraq war |
| 02/08/1990 | Iraq occupies Kuwait |
| 02/08/1990 to 28/02/1991 | First Gulf War |
| 20/03/2003 to 01/05/2003 | Invasion of Iraq. Start of the insurgency |
| 18/12/2011 | US withdrawal from Iraq |
| late 2013 to early 2014 | Daesh enters Iraq. Conquest of Ramadi and Fallujah |
| 09/06/2014 | Daesh captures Mosul |
| 29/06/2014 | Proclamation of the Caliphate and the Islamic State |
| 08/08/2014 | The US begins air strikes against IS |
| August/September 2014 | The US-led international coalition against the Islamic State is established |
| 28/12/2016 | Recovery of Ramadi |
| 26/06/2016 | Recovery of Fallujah |
| August/September 2016 | Start of the offensive to retake Mosul |
| July 2017 | Recovery of Mosul |
| September 2017 | Recovery of Tal Afar |

Chapter seven

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

Ignacio Fuente Cobo

Abstract

Yemen is a country torn by a war that has been running for more than three years facing Huthi rebels and their allies against troops loyal to President Hadi backed by an Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia. In a context of widespread chaos, Yemen has followed a progressive process of political, social, religious and military deterioration to become a paradigmatic example of a failed state in which, in the face of international indifference, a silent war is going on with catastrophic consequences for international security and for its own population suffering from a humanitarian emergency. In circumstances where neither side seems to be in a position to win the war militarily, the only way to stop hostilities, to alleviate the suffering of the population and to avoid the fragmentation of the country among the different contenders, is a political solution based on the integration and participation in the power of all, Sunni and Shi'ite.

Keywords

Yemen, Huthies, Saudi Arabia, Iran, Hadi, terrorism.

Introduction

To speak of Yemen is to do so about a Muslim country in the south of the Arab Peninsula between Asia and Africa, and whose orientation towards the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden allows this country to control the strategic Bab el Mandeb Strait, which is vital for the supply of hydrocarbons from the United States and Europe, and where between three and four million barrels of oil circulate every day¹.

Yemen has been in a state of crisis practically since it was founded as a modern state in 1990, although since February of 2014 it has been in the midst of a war that is developing on at least three levels. The first one refers to the civilian conflict that has brought into conflict, for almost two decades, the Houthis, a political party associated with the religious group of the Zaidis, of Shiite confession but with peculiar characteristics (they are Quintimanians as opposed to the majority of the Shiites who are Duodecimanians), and their fellow Muslims of Sunni confession supported by Saudi Arabia.

The second level is related to the existing intense rivalry between the two countries that compete for the leadership of the Muslim world: on the one hand, Saudi Arabia has adopted the extreme vision of the Muslim religion of the Sunni confession which is Wahabbism; and on the other, Iran, the self-proclaimed flagbearer of the Shiite cause in the world since the revolution of the Ayatollahs in 1979. Yemen would be one more chapter in the struggle between the two geopolitical standpoints, developing into what is euphemistically called "a proxy war"².

A third level would have a more global character and would be represented by the interests of the great powers, mainly the United States, whose aim would be to maintain stability in a critical area for international energy security, as well as to combat a jihadist terrorism which has made Yemen one of its main areas of activity³, and a place from where opportunistic terrorist groups like al Qaeda in the Arabic Peninsula (AQAP) or the different factions of Daesh⁴ plan and organize attacks in the West. The power vacuum that has been produced within the country has allowed al Qaeda to spread its base

¹ RYAN Patrick W: «The Yemen Crisis and the Bab el-Mandeb Maritime Chokepoint», Saudi-US Relations Service (SUSIS), 14 April 2015, <http://susris.com/2015/04/14/the-bab-el-mandeb-maritime-chokepoint/>.

² «The percolating proxy war in Yemen». Strategic Comments. Volume: 2017. Edition number: 2. London. 02.02.2017. International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS).

³ Almost half of the people imprisoned by the United States after the 2001 attacks were of Yemeni nationality. GOURDIN Patrice: «Yemen in crisis». Geopolitical Analysis Essay. La Revue Géopolitique. 07.10.2011. <http://www.diploweb.com/Le-Yemen-en-crise-Essai-d-analyse.html>.

⁴ Such as the Followers of the Islamic State in Yemen or Mujahadins of Yemen, both allied since 2014 with the central headquarters of the Islamic State and whose assaults aim at the victory of the Black Pavilion in any of the eight provinces of the Caliphate which

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

inside Yemen, thus recruiting new combatants and providing public services to try to become more acceptable to the local population. For its part, Daesh, whose activity began on 31 May of 2015 with four car bomb attacks, causing thirty-one deaths in two Shiite mosques in the capital, Sana'a, and in the residence of a Houti leader, has been able to maintain an incipient but very active presence, carrying out attacks against military and police objectives in the south.

To these three dimensions, there could be added a fourth one, represented by the humanitarian catastrophe of the conflict and whose main victims are the civilian population. In a country of 27.4 million inhabitants, the war has resulted, up to April of 2017, in over 50,000 dead or wounded and 3 million displaced people, in addition to the 10 million Yemenis who need humanitarian aid, while more than half of the health centers in the country offer no services and more than 20,000 cases are suspected to be cholera⁵.

What are the origins of the conflict?

Until 1990, Yemen was actually formed by two countries: The Democratic Republic of South Yemen, independent from British power since 1967 and which had adopted a Socialist regime aligned with the Soviet Union, and the Arab Republic of North Yemen, independent since the end of the First World War and which, in the form of a Shiite Iman-ruled State, had been ruled by the Zaidi for more than 1,000 years, until the ousting of this clerical regime in 1962⁶. The end of the Cold War and the return of profoundly anti-Socialist Yemeni combatants from Afghanistan beginning in 1988, created the proper conditions for the unification of the two countries into a single State, an objective that was attained in 1990, thus resulting in the new unified Yemen, under the authority of the until then President of North Yemen, Ali Abdallah Saleh, with Sana'a as the capital of the new State⁷.

However, more than a union between equals it was an absorption of the South by the North, which is why the discrepancies regarding the sharing of power which remained in the hands of the North produced deep discontent in the South, a region which had enjoyed in the Socialist era good services, few inequalities and little corruption, and whose population considered the unification a sort of occupation. The result was a popular uprising in 1994 stifled violently, which resulted in the emergence of a separatist movement, active since 2006, although deeply divided.

the terrorist group intends to implant in Yemen (Private Company IntelCenter Bacground@, 15/11/2015). <https://intelcenter.com/maps/is-affiliates-map.html#gs.u12Hr8Q>.

⁵ HAMASAEED Sarhang: «Beneath the Saudi-Iran Proxy War in Yemen». United States Institute for Peace. 04.19.2017. <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/04/beneath-saudi-iran-proxy-war-yemen-part-1>.

⁶ DRESCH, Paul: A History of Modern Yemen. Cambridge University Press. 2000. P. 115.

⁷ «1978, Ali Abdallah Saleh named as president of YAR». Yemen Profile, BBC, 26.10.2013.

Saleh ruled following a client-based policy founded mainly on four points⁸: on the one hand, the creation of a strong security structure controlled by members of his family, of his clan, or of his own Sanhan tribe. On the other, the mobilization in his favor of the powerful tribal confederation of the Hashid, from which part of the Sanhan would be formed. In third place, the establishment of a political party called the People's General Congress, totally controlled by himself and which he used for popular mobilization and to win the elections. Finally, the employment of the "divide and conquer" tactic, making use of the deep ethnic and political dissensions within Yemeni society for his own benefit. This group of measures worked reasonably well during the 80's and 90's, riding on the economic boon provided by oil income, but at the time of the 2011 revolution, they proved ineffective.

The support given by President Saleh to the Islah party ("Yemeni Congregation for Reform") since the moment of the unification must be placed within the policy of division as a way to execute his power. The Islah party was none other than the Yemeni branch of the Muslim Brotherhood—a brotherhood introduced into the country in the sixties by the teachers expelled from Egypt and Syria—, which had been joined by a group of Salafists educated in Saudi Arabia from where they had to leave due to their political opposition to the Saudi monarchy regarding the presence of American troops in the Arabic Peninsula⁹. Saleh saw in the radical Muslims who were part of Islah a way of counteracting the influence of the Yemeni Socialist Party, very active in the south, in spite of the fact that they competed with their own political party, the People's General Congress¹⁰.

But the excessive prominence obtained by the Sunni Islamists from the Saleh in the political and social life in Yemen resulted, as an unwanted derivative, in a reaction from the Shiite population of Zaidi confession, predominantly in the North, which started to organize itself politically and to protest against what was considered to be a situation of grievance.

Thus, if the origin of the war in Yemen must be sought in the failure of the transition process which began in 2011 during the "Arab Springs"¹¹, and whose aim was to end the authoritarian government of President Ali Abdalah

⁸ BREHONY Noel: «The current situation in Yemen: causes and consequences». Expert analysis. Norwegian Peace-building Resource Centre. 04.11.2015. <http://noref.no/Regions/Middle-East-and-North-Africa/The-Gulf/Publications/The-current-situation-in-Yemen-causes-and-consequences>.

⁹ PHILBRICK YADAV Stacey: «Yemen's Muslim Brotherhood and the perils of power sharing». Rethinking Political Islam Series. Project on the US Relations at the Islamic World at Brookings. Brookings Institution. 2015. PP. 2-5.

¹⁰ CAMPBELL Leslie: «Yemen: The Tribal Islamists». Wilson Center. 04.2015. <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/yemen-the-tribal-islamists>.

¹¹ ROBERTS Adam: «The Arab spring: why did things go so badly wrong?». The Guardian. 15.01.2016. <https://www.theguardian.com/commentisfree/2016/jan/15/arab-spring-badly-wrong-five-years-on-people-power>.

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

Saleh, the underlying causes of the present situation in Yemen are to be found in the type of regime which President Saleh built upon taking power in the Arab Republic of Yemen in 1978 and, in particular, since the unification of North and South Yemen under his regime in 1991.

Who are the Houthis?

42% Zaidis exist in Yemen. The Zaidi is a branch of Shiite Islam which is almost exclusive to the country and whose origin goes back to the Prophet Mohammed. It was this religious minority which ruled the country for 1,000 years under an Iman-based political regime, until it was ousted in 1962 after a Republican revolution. The disappearance of rule by Iman and the loss of power by the Zaidi families meant a greater secularization of the different political regimes, as well as a greater marginalization of the Zaidis who began to be considered a kind of "fifth column"¹². The State, in the hands of the Sunnis, decided in the decade of the nineteen-eighties to do away with the religious preponderance of Zaidism in the area, ousting the clerics from their mosques and replacing them with Salafist Sunnis, characterized by their violent sermons against what they consider a heresy to be abolished, which caused the emergence of a feeling of grievance and oppression within this religious community¹³.

However, and with a view to avoiding the excessive power of the Sunni parties, Saleh supported the Zaidis, allowing them to emerge again to speak out about the concerns of the Shiite population, and facilitated the creation of political parties which would address their concerns. Thus, at the beginning of the nineties a group of Zaidi dignitaries created the "young believers" led by the brothers

Mohamed and Hussein Al-Huzi and based on a moderate religious ideology that preached tolerance and had a broad vision of Yemeni society¹⁴. During the years that followed they created summer camps and youth clubs, mainly in the province of Sa'ada where they were in the majority, in which a "Zaidi Renaissance" was fostered. Its religious education was based on the Lebanese experience and followed the teachings of the Lebanese Shiite scholar Mohamed Hussein Fadhalallah and the Secretary General of the Lebanese party Hezbola, Hassan Nasrallah¹⁵.

¹² AL-MUSLIMI Farea: «How Sunni-Shia Sectarianism Is Poisoning Yemen». Carnegie Middle East Center.10.12.2015. <http://carnegie-mec.org/diwan/62375>.

¹³ MOLINA Pablo: Who are the Huzi? El Medio.02.24.24.02.2015. <http://elmed.io/quienes-son-los-huzis/>.

¹⁴ SALMONI Barak A., LOIDOLT Bryce, WELLS Madeleine: «Regime and Periphery in Northern Yemen: The Huthi Phenomenon». RAND. 2010. http://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/monographs/2010/RAND_MG962.pdf. Also, «Yemen's Abd-al-Malik al-Houthi». BBC. 03.10.2014. <http://www.bbc.co.uk/monitoring/yemens-abd-almalik-alhouthi>.

¹⁵ Ibidem

It did not take long for this Shiite organization, known as Ansar Allah (God's Party) or, more popularly, as Huthis, to become a political organization, very efficient among the popular masses and with political postulates that progressively drifted apart from the moderates of traditional Zaidism, to the point of reaching a confrontation with Saleh—although he himself was also of Zaidi origin—, whom they accused of ostracizing them and of giving excessive power to the Salafists.

This resulted in six “mini wars” (they could better be called military campaigns) that took place between 2004 and 2010 with ever-increasing range, to the point where the last one involved armed forces from Saudi Arabia¹⁶. Although the Huthis lost all of them, Saleh's policy of preventing the emergence of any force that could contest his power, starting with the army, prevented their destruction. On the other hand, these military campaigns provided the Huthis with weapons, organization and military capabilities so that when the revolution in 2011 took place, the Huthi militias had become an efficient military force capable of confronting the regular Yemeni army successfully.

From an ideological point of view, the Huthis gradually approximated themselves to the values of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the point that many of them became Duodecimain Shiites, adopting religious practices such as the procession of the Ashura which had not previously existed in Yemen. Likewise, following the example of Hezbolah, the Zaidis produced their own religious ideology of a “revivalist”¹⁷ type, in which they considered Saudi Arabia, due to its intolerant view of Shiites, as their principal enemy. Their opposition to any western interference in Middle Eastern affairs caused the slogans “death to America, death to Israel, a curse on Jews”¹⁸, to become common in mosques and political assemblies, in clear contradiction with traditional Zaidism which had been characterized in the sixties for its protection of Jews.

In this sense, one could speak of “Shiitization” of Zaidism to the point where the construction of a Zaidi State, which would become similar to the Islamic Republic of Iran, became its political objective. Nevertheless, since taking power in February of 2015 these postulates have been modified, a certain insecurity becoming noticeable in their policies, including a will to rule alone. It now seems that they would prefer, as can be seen in their behavior

¹⁶ AL BATATI, Saeed: «Who are the Houthis in Yemen?» Al Jazeera. 08.21.2014, <https://web.archive.org/web/20140823035209/http://www.aljazeera.com/news/middleeast/2014/08/yemen-houthis-hadi-protests-201482132719818986.html>.

¹⁷ WORTH Robert F. Yemen, «The Houthi Enigma», The New York Review of Books, 30 de marzo de 2015, <http://www.nybooks.com/blogs/nyrblog/2015/mar/30/yemen-houthi-enigma/>.

¹⁸ “Yemen, in a state of expectation as thousands support the Hutis.” Infomation. com.23.01.2015. http://www.lainformacion.com/disturbios-conflictos-y-gue-rra/crisis/yemen-en-estado-de-espera-mientras-miles-de-personas-apoyan-a-los-huties_2PrvaJx6kGAF6itCehCoc1/.

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

becoming similar to that of Hezbollah in Lebanon¹⁹, to become “a State within a State”, executing power but without the responsibility of governing.

What are the reasons that explain the swift takeover of power by the Houthis?

The first reason is that it was the Houthis who, beginning in the summer of 2014, placed themselves at the head of the demonstrations, mainly in Sana'a, which were called in order to fight against corruption and the increase in the price of fuels, and this gave them notable popularity and social support. The Houthis represented themselves as advocates of the values of the 2011 revolution which resulted in the ousting of President Saleh, although it was the Islah Islamists who bore the brunt of the protests. For the Houthis, the replacement of Saleh by President Hadi meant “more of the same,” as he was a person who, as former Yemeni President for almost 20 years, was part of the former regime which they wanted to get rid of²⁰.

On the other hand, they were the principal opponents of the Islah party, a party that seemed to be the winner of the revolts that followed the 2011 revolutions and whose political aim sought the Islamization of Yemen, following the model of the Muslim Brotherhood²¹. The opposition to these objectives by the Houthis won the support of social sectors which opposed any attempt to Islamize the country, and of former President Saleh who, following his classic policy of “divide and conquer”, saw in them a new possibility to regain power.

Thus, yesterday's enemy who had fought against them so fiercely during the six “mini wars” in the first decade of this century, became a circumstantial tactical ally, in addition to which, the military forces who were still loyal to the ousted president and were led by family and members of their own tribe, went over to the support of the Houthi party²². This complicity with the Houthi militias by part of the army, mainly by the former Republican guard and the very well-trained special forces, explains how it was possible for the Houthi militias, very skillful in irregular combat but incapable of defeating conventional military forces, to seize the capital, Sana'a, so quickly

¹⁹ LEVINSON Roxana: «The Hezbollah model spreads throughout the Middle East». Report on the Middle East by AJN. <http://agenciaajn.com/reporte-medio-orient-aj-10/>.

²⁰ MINOUI Delphine: «Le Yémen est devenu le terrain d'une guerre par procuration entre Riyad et Téhéran». Le Figaro. 05.04.2015. <http://www.lefigaro.fr/international/2015/04/05/010030150405ARTFIG00058-le-yemen-est-devenu-le-terrain-d-une-guerre-par-procuration-entre-riyad-et-teheran.php>.

²¹ Houthis take over. But are they the Ansar?». The Economist. 27.09.2014. <http://www.economist.com/news/middle-east-and-africa/21620284-are-they-ansar-houthis-take-over>.

²² ALAKWAA Loai: «The Houthi-Saleh Alliance of Convenience». International Policy Digest. 11.05.2017. <https://intpolicydigest.org/2017/05/11/houthi-saleh-alliance-convenience/>.

and force President Hadi to sign a political agreement to strengthen their representation within the National Dialogue Conference.

All things considered, the Houthis were able to carry out a masterly coup d'état efficiently using their limited military resources and their operating experience, plus the advantages that the alliance with President Saleh, certainly circumstantial but nevertheless timely, provided them with.

Why did the negotiations for a political agreement fail?

Two years after the beginning of the 2011 revolution, the possibility that Yemen would head towards a civil war created an opportunity for the international community and for the principal Yemeni leaders to reach an agreement to carry out a political transition based on three elements: the resignation of President Saleh and his replacement by Vice-president Hadi through a clean election process, the formation of a coalition government, and the drawing-up of a new constitution that would include the aspirations of all. The result was the so-called National Dialogue Conference whose meetings began on 18 March 2013 and ended on 21 January 2014, four months later than planned, and whose aim was to discuss the challenges that Yemen had to confront²³. The Conference was an element of the Gulf Cooperation Agreement which granted former President Ali Abdullah Saleh immunity in exchange for the transfer of power to his Vice-president Abdu Rabu Mansour Hadi.

Although the Conference produced over 1,800 recommendations and was able to draw-up a new Constitution, it nonetheless did not prevent Yemen's situation, in the summer of 2014, from reaching a point of no return. The reasons for this failure must be attributed to the following factors²⁴: on the one hand, Saleh was allowed to remain in Yemen as leader of the General Popular Congress; thus, the enforcement of sanctions imposed by the United Nations was avoided. This was considered a betrayal by the population who had carried out the demonstrations leading to the 2011 revolution.

On the other hand, the army and the security structures were not reformed, nor were measures taken to prevent Saleh from continuing to be loyal to the elite troops. Likewise, the Houthis and the representatives of the national movement that still existed in the south of the country were excluded from the coalition government and they were not granted sufficient representation in the Conference. The Houthis felt underrepresented in comparison with their adversaries, the Islah Salafists, and they opposed the federal system

²³ COMINS MARTÍNEZ Jorge: «Yemen in the context of the Arab revolts: from the crisis of the system to the national dialogue». Opinion Document, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies (IEEE). 08.21.2013. http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2013/DIEEE077-2013_Yemen_RevueltasArabes_JorgeComins.pdf.

²⁴ BREHONY Noel. *Op. cit.*

that the new Constitution recommended, in which dividing the country into six administrative regions was planned²⁵. In the new distribution, the Houthis saw their territory reduced to the provinces of Sa'ada and Hadja in the north, which did not satisfy their territorial ambitions, particularly because an exit to the Red Sea was not contemplated, an aspiration that the Houthi movement could not waive.

On the other hand, and perhaps not deliberately, the power of Islah was strengthened, which, in response, led former President Saleh and the Houthis, bitter enemies until then, to collaborate in order to counteract the predominance of the Salafists. The result was that the Houthis took advantage of the political vacuum in the country and of the weakness of the Army to rapidly become a movement with national perspective. This resulted in their cause ceasing to be pacific and a product of a local crisis, or simply a question of identity or marginalization, to gradually become an armed conflict²⁶.

With the armed advance and the occupation of Sana'a, the capital, by the Houthis, supported by a significant part of the army, they were in control of the situation, becoming the true government of the country. The alliance with Saleh spurred them on to venture towards the south, further than their traditional area of action, occupying Taif, the third most important city and reaching²⁷ Aden, the capital of the south, on 25 March 2015, with which they threatened the strategic Bab el Mandeb Strait²⁸. Thus, Yemen gradually slid into civil war.

If, during the initial moments of euphoria encouraged by their military success, the Houthis thought they could proclaim their control over the whole of Yemen, they soon changed their mind, adopting a more realistic position. They shortly opted to place themselves in a position of strength that would allow them to negotiate advantageously with other political forces, mainly with secessionist movements from the south, a new distribution of power in which they would keep control. The idea was to adopt a similar strategy to that of Hezbollah in Lebanon, which would allow them to have control of the situation, even though the government was nominally in the hands of others.

²⁵ SHARMA Swati: «Here is what's happening in Yemen». The Washington Post. 22.01.2015. <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/worldviews/wp/2015/01/20/whats-happening-in-yemens-potential-coup/>.

²⁶ SIALI Mohamed: "The revolution of the Huzis in Yemen: Revolution or Mission by Proxy" Foundation Al Fanar. 10.10.2014. <http://www.fundacionalfanar.org/la-revolucion-de-los-huzies-en-yemen-revolucion-o-mision-por-delegacion/>.

²⁷ «Yemen: the Houthi militias seize control of the Taëz airport». RFI. 22.03.2015.

²⁸ «KeywaterwayunderthreatasHouthimilitiamenadvance». SaudiGazette.24.03.2015.<http://www.saudigazette.com.sa/index.cfm?method=home.regcon&contentid=20150325238084>.

Whatever happened to the Yemeni army?

One of the most important questions about the situation in Yemen refers to the actions of the army, an institution which, for decades, had been the principal political actor and guarantor of the existence of the country as a State²⁹. It was the army that ended the Iman-based regime in North Yemen in 1962, unified both Yemens in 1990, violently prevented the secession of the south of the country in 1994, and carried out six successful campaigns against the Houthi insurgency between 2004 and 2010, as well as several anti-terrorist operations against al Qaeda in the Arab Peninsula. Also, the army played a decisive role in the political life of the country, removing the first two presidents from power and defining the presidency of practically all their successors.

In the face of this traditional situation of military predominance, the scant role of the army in the development of the events that took place after the 2011 revolution is surprising. The explanation would have to be sought in the internal struggles that took place at its heart as a result of political rivalries, and which would have turned an efficient military tool into an institution incapable of responding to the challenges of the country, to the point where its air space was left under the control of Saudi Arabia and its bases under the control of the Houthi rebels, or bombarded by military forces of the Arab coalition.

During the consecutive governments of Saleh, who was a North-Yemeni officer in the beginning, the army grew exponentially from 3,000 in 1978 to 66,700 soldiers in 2011, as it also underwent a great modernization³⁰. In order to maintain control of this army and avoid any type of coup d'état, Saleh put his family and prominent members of his own tribe at the head of the principal units, creating parallel command structures directly linked to the presidency. The way to ensure the loyalty of the military commands was to corrupt them, allowing them to get involved in illegal activities such as trafficking with food, fuels, and other merchandise, exporting weapons to countries under embargo like Sudan, or bribery of tribes through the delivery of light weapons.

The result was the generalization of the phenomenon of "phantom soldiers"—soldiers who exist on paper on the payroll but who do not appear in the barracks, and whose salaries are handed over to the commanders—a phenomenon which has come to be seen in Afghanistan—as well as very low levels of military training and morale. Only those units which were most involved in the military campaigns against the Houthis in the first decade of

²⁹ GAUB Florence: «Whatever happened to Yemen's army?» European Union Institute for Security Studies. April 2015. http://www.iss.europa.eu/uploads/media/Brief_9_Yemen.pdf.

³⁰ DIXON Jeffrey, REID SARKEES Meredith: «A Guide to Intra-state Wars. An Examination of Civil Wars. 1816.2016». SAGE Publications Inc. Los Angeles. 2016. P. 420.

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

this century, mainly the 1st Armored Division led by General Ali Mohsen al-Ahmar, maintained a reasonable level of military capability.

The situation worsened beginning in 2000 when Saleh put his son Ahmed Ali at the head of the Republican Guard which became the best equipped and trained unit of the Yemeni army. This movement brought him into conflict with General Mohsen, who was from the same Sanhan tribe but not of the same clan as Saleh, and was considered his prospective successor. Therefore, when the protests broke out in 2011, Mohsen took the part of the demonstrators, a movement followed by other high-ranking commanders in what may be considered as a determining factor in the downfall of President Saleh. This internal struggle within the power structures was followed by another, this one inter-tribal, between the supporters of Saleh and of Mohsen, and which spread, from 2011 on, throughout the powerful confederation of the Hashid, part of which was formed by the Sanhan tribe common to both.

The access to power in 2012 of President Hadi, a former officer in the army of Southern Yemen, did not serve to improve the situation and the purges he carried out among the rank and file of the military in order to do away with the supporters of Saleh only served to increase internal division. The nominal dissolution of the rival military units, the 1st Armored Division and the Republican Guard, and the naming of General Mohsen as his special advisor and of Saleh's son Ahmed Ali as ambassador to the UAR, was no impediment to the two of them continuing to be strongly attached to their units of origin.

Under these circumstances, both the southern secessionists, excluded from the Armed Forces since the rising of 1994, and the Houthis in the north stayed out of these internal struggles within the military structures, taking advantage of the vacuum to advance their positions. With part of the army remaining loyal to former president Saleh, allied to the Houthis, and with the 1st Armored Division much weakened as a consequence of purges and lack of morale, when the Houthi advance on the capital took place in the fall of 2014, there was no efficient military force capable of standing up to them. Thus did the Houthi militia, engorged by the military elements loyal to Saleh and reinforced by captured military equipment, turn itself into the new Yemeni regular Army.

Why did Saudi Arabia intervene at the head of a coalition of Arab countries?

The traditional hostility of Saudi Arabia towards Yemen dates back to the time of the founding of the two States when, in 1912, Saudi Arabia took over the border region of Assir, which was followed in 1934 by the occupation of Najran and Jizan, lands which formed part of the historic territory of the Zaidi Iman-based regime. Since then, Saudi Arabia has employed its resources

and its influence to ensure that Yemen, a country nearly as populous as Saudi Arabia itself, is maintained as a country weak enough not to represent a threat to the Saudi monarchy, but strong enough to preserve its own internal stability. Saudi support for the uprisings of the Sunni separatists of the south and the financing of the Islamist party Islah, very active among the turbulent tribes in the north, must be understood within this policy of the weakening of the structures of Yemen, the consequences of which lie at the base of the anti-Saudi sentiment widely disseminated throughout the country.

Riyadh played a major role, if a passive one, between 2011 and January of 2015 when newly-crowned King Salman gave Yemen top priority as a theater of operations in its particular regional confrontation with Iran. Other countries, such as the United Arab Emirates, have also played a fundamental role in events in Yemen, despite the differences they hold with the Riyadh government as to the road to be followed.

But it was the taking of Aden, entrance gateway to the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, a critical point of passage for transport of hydrocarbons setting out from the Arabian Peninsula towards Western markets, which was considered as an unacceptable provocation. The idea of having an ally of Shiite Iran at this strategic point of passage was considered to be the last straw, giving rise to military intervention by a coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia and which included Egypt, Morocco, Jordan, Sudan, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Bahrein³¹: in an operation very descriptively designated as "Decisive Storm".

In order to carry it out, the Saudis thought that they had all the legal and political coverage necessary: a legitimate President, Hadi, recognized by the international community, who was asking them for help; anti-Houthi demonstrations in the large cities; broad-based international support, mainly from the United States, but also from France, the United Kingdom and from the Arab countries; and even a certain domestic justification. The Saudi kingdom held in its memory the clashes with the Houthis inside its territory in the year 2009 when it ended by losing terrain, to which may be added the fear of seeing its own Shiite minority tempted to carry out a popular uprising against the authorities of the Kingdom.

The intervention of Saudi Arabia and other Arab countries has proven the will on the part of the Arab monarchies to "cleanse Yemen of riff-raff", as graphically expressed by Prince Mohammed Bin Zayed, crown Prince of Abu Dhabi, the largest of the United Arab Emirates³². Thus, Yemen has turned into what has come to be called a "proxy war" between Riyadh and Teheran, whose

³¹ «Egypt, Jordan, Sudan and Pakistan ready for ground offensive in Yemen: report». The globe and mail. 26.03.2015.

³² ESPINOSA Angeles, "Qatar sends 1,000 soldiers to fight the Houthi in Yemen", El Pais, 07th September 2015, http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/09/07/actualidad/1441639514_082583.html.

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen



Figure 7.1 (Components of the coalition of attack on Yemen. Source: Al Arabiya).

objective is to halt the advance of what the Saudis characterize as the “allied forces of Iran”³³, reinstating President Hadi at the head of the government in Sana’a. The military involvement of Riyadh was meant to send a clear message to the Islamic Republic of Iran to the effect that the Saudi Kingdom would not permit the spread into new countries of the interventionism which the Iranians had come to practice in Syria, Iraq, and Lebanon.

The problem for Saudi Arabia was not so much the decision to intervene as the way to go about intervention. The Saudi preference for the use of air power, leaving intervention on the ground to their local allies and the feeble military forces of the other Gulf monarchies, demonstrated how little inclined the Saudis were to commit their troops to ground operations in which they had no guarantee of victory³⁴. In a terrain as densely mountainous as Yemen, Saudi military forces ran the risk of suffering a high casualty rate, and even that their own soldiers could end up fraternizing with the local Sunni combatants and turning upon their own authorities.

The consequence of this lack of military commitment has been the spread into Yemen of the so-called Salman doctrine, which advocates Saudi intervention in Middle Eastern countries, but in indirect fashion, which in the case of Yemen has translated into an aerial campaign of uncertain effect which has cast a harsh light upon the limits and weaknesses of Saudi military power.

³³ ESPINOSA Angeles: “Saudi Arabia leads Arab military operation in Yemen”. El Pais. 26.03.2015. http://internacional.elpais.com/internacional/2015/03/26/actuali-dad/1427327690_787380.html.

³⁴ «Saudi warplanes bomb Houthi positions in Yemen», Al Arabiya. 25th March 2015. <http://english.alarabiya.net/en/News/middle-east/2015/03/26/GCC-states-to-repel-Houthi-aggression-in-Yemen-statement.html>.

The advance of the Houthi militias and of allied combatants, supporters of President Saleh, into the four southern provinces of Aden, Lahij, Abyan and Dhala in spite of the Saudi bombardments demonstrates that air power is insufficient on its own to reverse the military situation, unless it is accompanied by a large-scale ground operation. In addition, the “collateral damage” to Yemeni infrastructure and the civilian population has considerably reduced international support for the cause of the Arab coalition, which is charged with serious violations of international law, without having achieved a reduction in the will of the Houthi alliance with Saleh to continue the conflict.

The limitations of military operations based on air power brought about the official end to the bombing campaign on April 21, this being replaced by the so-called “Operation Restore Hope”, conceived as a combination of political, diplomatic and military efforts whose aim would be to put an end to the war³⁵. Even so, aerial attacks continue against Houthi objectives, as does ground combat³⁶.

The inability to re-take the capital city of Sana’a after more than two years of uninterrupted warfare indicates the impossibility of a definitive military victory for the Arab coalition. In fact, even should the capital fall into its hands, this would not mean the end of hostilities, since for that to occur, it would be necessary to defeat the Houthis on their own ground, something which is beyond the military competence of the Saudis and their allies.

What role is Iran playing in Yemen?

Iran has been the great beneficiary of the strategic changes which have been produced in the Middle East since the beginning of this century. The United States military interventions in Afghanistan (2001) and Iraq (2003), the wars in Syria and Iraq, and the nuclear accords of July 2015 have provided it with a level of great influence in the region. Currently Iran maintains friendly governments in Beirut, Damascus, Baghdad and, since 2015, in Sana’a as well.

In the geopolitical game taking place in the Middle East, in which Saudi Arabia presents itself as the defender of the Sunni cause and, as such, defender of the governmental positions of ex-President Hadi, while Teheran has taken the part of the Houthi movement, which it considers to be included within the Shiite international, Yemen plays a complimentary role to Syria and Iraq, given that it permits Iran to maintain a second front on Saudi Arabia’s rearguard area, at the same time that it threatens the strategic Straits of Babel Mandeb. A final outcome in Yemen favorable to Iran’s intentions would

³⁵ BROWNING Noah, «Saudis end air campaign in Yemen, seek political solution», Reuters, 22nd April 2015, <http://www.reuters.com/article/2015/04/22/us-yemen-security-idUSKBN0NC2LD20150422>.

³⁶ «Saudi-led coalition launches airstrikes throughout Yemen: residents». Reuters. 23.04.2015. <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-yemen-security-idUSKBN0NC2LD20150423>.

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

promote the spread of the Shiite uprising to other states on the Arabian Peninsula such as would be the case of Bahrein, and even into the interior of Saudi Arabia, in whose East province, of Shiite majority, are located the greater part of the Saudi oilfields.

In this regard, the conflict in Yemen is strategic for Saudi Arabia, but only marginal for Teheran, which in case of a Houthi defeat would suffer only limited losses, while even if it does not achieve victory and the war is prolonged indefinitely, the result of a Saudi Arabia “bogged down” in Yemen would mean a major gain for Iran at relatively little cost. From the Iranian point of view, Yemen would have become a key piece in the chess game being played out in the Middle East, in which an eventual victory would permit it to incline the balance of power in its favor.

In order to achieve this, Iran would use a strategy of indirect intervention similar to that employed by Hezbollah in Lebanon; that is, using its instrument of foreign projection, the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in support of the Houthi movement but without involving itself directly in military operations. This support would take the shape fundamentally of the provision of instructors, arms and financial resources which would have increased in recent times in an attempt to forestall a firmer policy on the part of the new North American administration regarding the Houthi militias.

The consequences of this increase in Iranian support have been devastating for the forces of the coalition led by Saudi Arabia. Thus, in January of 2017, a Saudi frigate was put out of commission near the port of Hodeidah on the Red Sea by a missile launched by Houthi forces, just as occurred with a coastguard vessel destroyed near Mocha in the Straits of Bab el Mandeb when hit by a mine. There have also been observed recently a certain abundance on the ground of the efficient Kornet anti-tank missiles of Russian origin, as well as of UAV's (drones) loaded with explosives and used by the Houthis against high-value objectives such as the radar and launchers of the Saudi Patriot anti-air batteries. There has even been observed the presence on the ground of Afghan and Shiite Arab instructors and specialists who would have fought in Syria within the Iranian Al Quds forces.

All of this indicates that Iran would be using the same tactic of undercover penetration tested in Lebanon in 2008 and in Syria in 2014 and which was followed in the latter case by a more direct intervention a year later. It is not a question of turning the Houthi movement into a new Hezbollah, among other things because Teheran does not need to do so in order to surround the Saudis and expand its influence and projection of power in the region. For that purpose, it suffices them to bring to bear a kind of non-conventional pressure by means of a greater supply of sophisticated equipment to the Houthis. But it does need to send a clear signal that it is willing to increase the strategic bet on Yemen, a country it considers key to the future of the Shiite cause in the Arab world.

What is the position of the United States in Yemen?

The United States is, together with Iran and Saudi Arabia, the principal actor upon Yemen, a country it considers key in the struggle against jihadist terrorism, and to which the North Americans have been dedicating major economic and military aid, to stabilize the government and reinforce its security forces. During the Obama presidency, drone attacks against terrorist cells together with cooperation with Yemeni authorities constituted the principal axis of North American counter-terrorist strategy in Yemen, where support for the regime was considered, in the so-called "Obama doctrine", as the only viable option³⁷. As stated by Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter in April of 2015, "It is always easier to carry out counter-terrorist actions when a stable government exists"³⁸. Nonetheless, North American efforts were in great part wasted and their effects against AQIM terrorism limited, in spite of the physical elimination of many Al Qaeda leaders in hiding in the country³⁹.

The Houthi offensive and the taking of Sana'a, the capital, together with the fall of the Saleh government which had been favorable to the North American positions, altered the anti-terrorist strategy of the United States as presented by President Obama as a model for the fight against Islamist terrorism. This doctrine advocated the end of North American military intervention in the Middle East, a region it considered "peopled by free-rider allies determined to involve the U.S. in their minor disputes, nourished by avarice, tribalism and sectarianism"⁴⁰ replacing them with a greater support for friendly governments capable of solving for themselves their own domestic problems.

With the Houthi advance and the spread of war throughout the country, the North American anti-terrorist forces lost a great part of the intelligence information about AQAP positions which Yemeni security forces had provided, and found themselves obliged to dismantle the drone-launching bases which they held in the country. At the same time, political control of a great part of the useful territory of the country by the Houthis, a group whose enmity with the United States constitutes one of its principal ideological foundations, weakened the position of the United States in this vital area of the Arabian Peninsula.

³⁷ SHARP Jeremy M, «Yemen: Background and U.S. Relations», Congressional Research Service, 11th February 2015, <https://www.fas.org/spp/crs/mideast/RL34170.pdf>.

³⁸ COOPER Helene and SCHMITT Eric: «Al Qaeda is Capitalizing on Yemen's Disorder, U.S. Warns». The New York Times. 08.04.2015.

³⁹ PHILLIPS Sarah: «Assisting Al Qaeda. How U.S. Strategy Could Empower AQAP in Yemen». Foreign Affairs. 30.10.2015.

⁴⁰ OAKFORD Samuel and SALISBURY Peter. «Yemen: The Graveyard of the Obama Doctrine». The Atlantic. 26.09.2016. <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/ archive/2016/09/yemen-saudi-arabia-obama-riyadh/501365/>.

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

Neither did the nuclear accord with Iran in July of 2015 contribute to improving the North American strategic position, the accord being understood by the Gulf monarchies as a betrayal of the traditional alliance which the United States had maintained through them since the end of the Second World War. In their perception, the agreement granted Iran, within a context of regional competition, unacceptable advantages.

For all these reasons, it is not surprising that Washington decided to support the military intervention in Yemen by the Arab coalition led by Saudi Arabia, as a way of demonstrating its will to preserve the strategic alliance with the Saudi monarchy, even though this meant the end of the Obama doctrine. This support, which has increased over the course of the war, has been centered on the fields of intelligence, aerial reconnaissance and also on the supply of equipment and munitions⁴¹.

In any case, and from the North American perspective, Yemen, a country where Washington has great influence due to its political and military relations with the Gulf monarchies, is viewed as a minor conflict in comparison with those in Syria or Iraq, where the level of violence is much more elevated. On the contrary, Yemen is basically a problem of local rivalries which have degenerated into a civil conflict and created an abandoned terrain where jihadist terrorists, mainly Al Qaeda and to a lesser extent Daesh, may prosper.

It is a case only of a problem of negotiating interests and of reconciling wills, meaning that resolving it should be relatively simple. What Washington does not seem willing to do is to commit the same errors it made in Syria, where its inaction created a strategic vacuum which was occupied by other powers such as Russia, Iran and even Turkey, and used to advance their interests in the region.

The new North American administration of President Trump seems to have wagered on a more decided support for the coalition led by Saudi Arabia in a war which has stalled and that is strategically incomprehensible. In this way, the United States would adopt the Saudi attitude regarding terrorism, which diverts any blame from the Kingdom and redirects it towards Iran⁴².

The signing of the recent sales agreement of arms to Saudi Arabia in May of 2017 for a value of 100 billion dollars (including 150 Abrams combat vehicles) seems directed at sending a clear signal to partners and to adversaries to the effect that the United States is again a trustworthy ally willing to support the monarchies of the Gulf despite the fact that there is no direct evidence

⁴¹ HELENE COOPER AND ERIC SCHMITT. Ibidem. Also see: Angeles Espinosa, Saudi Arabia Leads an Arab military operation in Yemen, El Pais, 26/03/2015, http://internacional.el-pais.com/internacional/2015/03/26/actualidad/1427327690_787380.html.

⁴² ZAKARIA Fareed: «How Saudi Arabia played Donald Trump». The Washington Post. 25.05.2017. https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/saudi-arabia-just-played-donald-trump/2017/05/25/d0932702-4184-11e7-8c25-44d09ff5a4a8_story.html?utm_term=.86e33748acef.

of a large-scale Iranian interference in support of the Houthis. With this, the American administration seems to have recovered the geopolitical outlook of the Bush administration, including the belief that it can alter the current status quo and shape events in the Middle East in accord with its interests, even though this means supporting a reckless military intervention in an unprotected country on the part of a coalition of Arab countries whose regimes the North American president despises. When all is said and done, if Yemen is going to continue to be a *shit show*⁴³ whatever the U.S. does, why destroy a relationship with the Saudis which is often disagreeable but nonetheless necessary, if the outcome will be the same?

Conclusions and perspectives for the future: Can the Yemen war be ended?

At the time that the writing of this document is being concluded, the military situation continues to be uncertain, although the coalition of Arab countries led by Saudi Arabia has had major tactical successes in the south of the country, including the taking of the port of Mocha, permitting it to consolidate its position in the critical zone of the Straits of Bab el Mandeb, at the same time depriving the Houthis of a major entranceway for supplies.

Nonetheless, the aerial attacks are not producing all the effects foreseen, and the 10,000 soldiers who form a ground intervention force seem insufficient to guarantee control of the areas currently in the hands of the Arab coalition. To continue operations with the final objective of re-taking the capital, Sana'a, would demand previously taking the strategic port of Hodeidah on the Red Sea, the only major port still in the hands of the Houthis and of those loyal to former President Ali Abdula Saleh. But this demands a substantial increase of forces and a greater rhythm of operations. It would also be necessary to avoid the production of a vacuum of security in the territories controlled by the coalition which might benefit and increase the visibility of the jihadist groups which profit from the lack of State control in the territories where they operate, mainly in the east of the country.

In any case, it may be said that despite the gravity of the conflict, Yemen has not yet reached the levels of sectarianism and violence seen in Syria and Iraq, and it is possible that, given the foregoing antecedents of negotiating capacity which characterizes Yemeni society, it may be possible to achieve participation of the parties in political conversations to reach an agreement, as long as the right formula is found to accomplish this.

With regard to this option, however, the right dose of skepticism is needed. The most likely outcome is that the internal situation in the country will continue to deteriorate, with an increase in combat in a greater number

⁴³ OAKFORD Samuel and SALISBURY Peter. *Op. Cit.*

Keys to an understanding of the conflict in Yemen

of places and with a growing degree of outside intervention nourishing the potential for the propagation of violence⁴⁴. It is even possible that the Houthi rebels may be successful in extending it into Saudi Arabia—a country with which it shares a practically uncontrollable border 1,459 kilometers in length—with actions such as that which occurred on 5th May 2015, when for the first time they entered Saudi territory and attacked the town of Najran, causing the death of at least two civilians and capturing five Saudi soldiers⁴⁵.

Meanwhile, the country is submerged in a humanitarian situation which may be classified as “apocalyptic”, with a balance of 19 million people, that is to say 60% of the population, in a state of nutritional insecurity, of whom three million women and children are diagnosed as in a state of acute malnutrition, while more than half of the health centers in the country are out of service and there are more than 20,000 cases of suspected cholera⁴⁶.

In a context of broad confrontation within the Middle East which stains Yemen as well, and whose causes have not been sufficiently dealt with, the regional geopolitical tendencies do not precisely help to solve the problem. The uprisings in the Arab world in these recent years and the intensification of the rivalry between Iran and Saudi Arabia mean that the various parties are loath to negotiate. As a result, the great challenge existing at the time of dealing with any type of negotiation is to find a path which permits a gradual de-escalation of the conflict, even if violence is maintained in other countries of the Middle East.

It is precisely this sectarian violence which should be the incentive for the different factions to restrict their actions, in the knowledge that they all have a great deal to lose. The experience of these years indicates that sectarian wars conducted by local actors have produced very few winners. A political agreement is a much less costly way to obtain advantages for everyone at a reasonable price. Military de-escalation should constitute the first step and necessary condition in order to be able to initiate political conversations tending to achieve an accord between the parties. Here the countries of the Council on Gulf Cooperation and particularly Saudi Arabia, which is facing an intervention of doubtful outcome, would have a very important role to play. As much could be said of Iran, the only regional power with the capacity to oblige the Houthis to accept a negotiated solution. Oman, a country which shares borders with Saudi Arabia and Yemen, maintains

⁴⁴ «Crisis Group Middle East Briefing N°45», International Crisis Group, 27th March 2015, p. 8, <http://www.crisisgroup.org/en/regions/middle-east-north-africa/iraq-iran-gulf/yemen/b045-yemen-at-war.aspx>.

⁴⁵ «Report: Saudi Arabia's border with Yemen attacked», Al Jazeera, 5th May 2015, <http://www.aljazeera.com/news/2015/05/cloneofcoalition-considers-yemen-humanitari-an-tr-150505130815877.html>.

⁴⁶ “Yemen: three years of conflict and an apocalyptic humanitarian toll”. Young Africa. 22.03.2017. <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/419894/politique/yemen-trois-ans-de-conflit-bilan-humanitaire-apocalyptique/>.

good relations with Iran, and has not taken part in the conflict, could be utilized as a mediator.

To sum up, it is most likely that no-one will win the war militarily, but rather that it will go on indefinitely, at least as long as both parties believe that they can win it and yet neither is in condition to do so. While the alliance led by the Houthis understands that the current territorial situation is favorable to them, and the coalition led by Saudi Arabia thinks, to the contrary, that the military situation benefits them, the war will go on. In the current context of a war which Saudi Arabia is not winning but that the Houthis are not either, the only way to halt hostilities and avoid a fragmentation of the country among the contenders must lead through a political solution, based on the integration and participation in power of all parties, Sunnis and Shiites.

Only in this way could re-establishment take place of the conditions of security and political stability needed to prevent opportunist groups of jihadist character like Al Qaeda or the Islamic State, which compete for the leadership of terrorism in the country⁴⁷, from taking advantage of the current situation of chaos to extend their criminal activity. It is the only way to prevent the combination of regional conflict, sectarian violence, humanitarian catastrophe, collapse of the State and the primacy of the militias from consolidating Yemen as a failed State, turned into a chronic threat to regional stability and to international security. This option is possible, but for it to happen it is necessary that the Yemenis and their neighbors choose it.

⁴⁷ "Struggle between Al Qaeda and the Islamic State in Yemen"; La Vanguardia Internacional, 18.06.2015, <http://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20150618/544332378066/estado-islamico-al-qaeda-yemen-retando.html>. Also see: "ISIS gaining ground in Yemen, competing with al Qaeda". CNN, 21.01.2015. <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/01/21/politics/isis-gaining-ground-in-yemen/>.

Chapter eight

Somalia: increased threats to security

Blanca Palacián De Inza

Abstract

In Somalia we encounter many risks and threats to security, such as armed conflict, the presence of terrorist groups, organized crime, economic instability, migratory flows, vulnerability of maritime space, emergencies, and natural and man-made disasters, as well as the vulnerability of critical infrastructures and essential services. We also face other factors, such as drought or poverty, which can worsen these.

While it is true that the situation in Somalia has improved considerably in recent years, especially in terms of security and the tasks of state reconstruction, there is still a long way to go in such an extremely complex panorama with so many fronts still open

Keywords

Somalia, Horn of Africa, al Shabaab, terrorism, drought, famine.

Introduction

The Federal Republic of Somalia is located in East Africa, specifically in the region called the Horn of Africa due to its peculiar shape. Somalia shares borders with Kenya to the south and southwest, Ethiopia to the west, and Djibouti to the north.



Figure 8.1 Administrative map of Somalia. Source: OCHA.

Somalia, with a surface area similar to Spain's – 637,700 km² – is located where the Red Sea and the Indian Ocean meet in the Gulf of Aden, across from the Arab Peninsula, which gives the country an outstanding strategic significance as these waters are a required path for maritime transport within in the Suez Canal and the Indian Ocean.

Although the census of the population of the country dates back to 1975, it is estimated that it is presently 10 million people (a quarter of the people that live in Spain). The ethnic near-homogeneity of the Somali population is an extraordinary case on the continent. Thus, the Somali ethnic group, of Cusita origin, is the most numerous, although Bantu and Arab minorities live in the south of the country.

People of Somali origin are also found in neighboring countries due to historical settlements as well as to movements caused by the conflicts and humanitarian crises that Somalia has gone and is going through. It is estimated that over one million Somalis live as refugees in neighboring countries.



Figure 8.2. Risks and threats. Source: National Security Strategy: a shared project, 2013.

Most of the risks and threats to security in Somalia are mentioned in the *Estrategia de Seguridad Nacional española*¹ (Spanish National Security Strategy). Therefore, in this country in the Horn of Africa we find armed conflicts, the presence of terrorist groups, organized crime, economic instability, migratory flows, vulnerability in the maritime space, continuous emergencies and natural and human catastrophes, as well as the vulnerability of critical infrastructures and essential services.

Likewise, along with these risks and threats, there are other elements that could increase them, generate new ones, or worsen their effects. Among these potentiators, we find the weakness of the State and its institutions, poverty, inequality, ideological extremisms, and climate change.

With this range of risks, threats, and potentiators, we therefore find ourselves faced with a country which, in spite of having improved its security conditions in recent years, it finds itself in a difficult situation with regard to guaranteeing the well-being of its citizens, which is the final purpose of human security².

From among all these problems, the most urgent in the last quarter of 2017, the date of this article, is the high risk of starvation for millions of Somalis. The drought and lack of resilience in the country for this type of phenomena has caused, according to the report on Somalia of the World Food Program (WFP) in May 2017³, the number of people who need humanitarian aid to reach 6.7 million (almost 70% of the total population). In spite of the humanitarian work that has been done and of the rains from April to June, which have increased the availability of pasture and water in most of Somalia, the outlook is not very promising and there is still high risk of famine in this country.

Beginning with some brief notes regarding the background of the current situation the country is facing, the different risks and threats affecting it will be analyzed, plus some disrupting elements that increase them and make their solution more difficult. Also considered will be the different external actors who have intervened in Somalia, participating in international missions or on private initiatives. Finally, based on

¹ GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN. PRESIDENCY OF THE GOVERNMENT. «National Security Strategy: a shared project», 2013. Pp. 21-38. 12 risks and threats that singularly affect Spain, which can perfectly be extrapolated to any other country or region, are described in this document. These are: armed conflicts, terrorism, cyber-threats, organized crime, economic and financial instability, vulnerability of the energy, the proliferation of weapons of mass destruction, irregular migration flows, espionage, emergencies and catastrophes, the vulnerability of the maritime space and of critical infrastructures and essential services.

² BALLESTEROS, Miguel Ángel. «In search of a National Security Strategy». Ministry of Defense, 2016, p. 109. «(...) human security is an integrating concept in which the list of threats is long, but most of them can be grouped into seven main categories: economic security, food security, healthcare security, environmental security, personal security, security for the community, political security».

³ UNITED NATIONS. WORLD FOOD PROGRAM. «WFP Somalia Drought Response Situation Report #5», 06/28/2017.

the issues dealt with, we will reach conclusions and will sketch out a prospective with a view towards the coming years.

Background of the conflict

Present-day Somalia is heir to the colonial era, during which the British, French, and Italians exercised their dominance. In 1960, the union of what was Italian Somalia and of the British Protectorate of Somaliland formed the current territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia. For its part, what was called French Somaliland obtained its independence, becoming another country: Djibouti.

From 1960 to 1969, the country was ruled by the political party called the Somali Youth League. After the assassination of its leader, Abdirashid Ali Shermarke, and the resulting coup d'état, a period of autocracy began headed by Mohamed Siad Barre. His government, described by Alexis Dieth "ethnic African colonialism"⁴, which refers to the fact that an ethnic group manages power as an occupying power would, prepared the ground for an abrupt change of government and for the rivalry among clans and groups that still persists. In 1991, after the ousting of Barre, and the rupture of the coalition that took power, a civil war broke out in the country which is considered to this day still ongoing and which involved Ethiopia from 2006 to 2009. It is calculated that more than 28,000 people have lost their lives in this conflict⁵.

Armed conflict

The ongoing conflict in Somalia is considered an extension of the above-mentioned civil war, and specifically of the period from 2006 to 2009, the main actors in which were Islamic militia groups, on the one hand, and the Armed Forces of Ethiopia and the Transitional Federal Government of Somalia, on the other.

The Islamic militia *Harakat al Shabaab al Mujahideen*, which means "Movement of the Young Combatants for Islam", better known as *al Shabaab*, was born at the beginning of the 2000's decade as a consequence of another violent organization created in the eighties called *al Itihaad al Islamiya* or "Islamic Union"⁶. During its first years, *al Shabaab* operated within the armed movement called the Islamic Courts Union.

⁴ Quoted by Ignacio Gutiérrez de Terán Gómez-Benita, «Somalia today and the death of the state: the consolidation of a historical failure», *Relaciones Internacionales*, n° 18, October 2011. GERI – UAM, p.16.

⁵ INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES. Armed Conflict Database. Date viewed: July 2017.

⁶ DE LA CORTE, Luis. «Al Shabaab in the Horn of Africa», Research document 05/2015, IIEE, p. 4.

This militia, called the Islamic Courts Union (ICU) controlled, in 2006, a large part of the south of the country. It was defeated that same year by the Somali government with the help of Ethiopia. However, some of its members joined the al Shabaab militia again.

Al Shabaab began and has evolved as a jihadist Salafist militia whose priority is to “Islamize” Somalia and which sympathizes with the jihad world project proposed by Bin Laden and by his successor Al Zawahiri, whose guidelines it still states that it supports⁷.

In answer to the threat of this new armed group, the Armed Forces of neighboring countries such as Kenya, Ethiopia, Djibouti, Burundi, Uganda, and Sierra Leone, among others, under the umbrella of the African Union, have been participating in the mission known as AMISOM (African Union Mission to Somalia). The harassment from the troops that belong to this mission, along with the efforts from the Somali army and some militias, have achieved significant progress in their attempt to neutralize this armed group⁸.

Politics and the building of the State

In 2006, a transition government was established until 2012 when, hand in hand with a still valid interim Constitution⁹, the Parliament appointed Hassan Sheikh Mohammad as President. In 2017, his mandate ended and was replaced by Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, known by the nickname of “Farmajo”. This government is composed of 26 ministers, of which 6 are women¹⁰. It is the government with the highest participation of women in the history of Somalia.

Somali women find many socio-economic and religious barriers to their participation in politics. In spite of it, some of them have stepped forward and it is expected that it will be gradually less difficult for them to have access to education, employment opportunities, or their participation in the country's institutions. This slow change towards women's participation will have a bearing on a greater national reconciliation and stability because 50% of a country's population cannot be excluded from uniting and rebuilding it. There are abundant academic studies and empirical proof which show

⁷ Ibidem.

⁸ Ibidem.

⁹ Dated September 2017.

¹⁰ Maryan Aweys Jama (Ministry of Ports and Maritime Transport), Khadra Ahmed Duale (Ministry of Industry and Trade) Deeqa Yasin Haji Yuusuf (Ministry of Women and Human Rights), Fawziya Abiikar Nuur (Ministry of Public Health), Khadija Mohamed Diiriye (Ministry for Youth and Sports) and Maryam Qassim Axmed (Ministry of Humanitarian and Disaster Management). Source: GOVERNMENT OF SPAIN. Ministry of Foreign Affairs. Office for Diplomatic Information «Somalia», Country index, April 2017.

that women's empowerment and gender equality are directly related to development, stability, and peace¹¹.

Somalia was constituted as a federal State. Somaliland, to the north of the country, which was the British Somaliland, unilaterally declared its independence from what was Italian Somaliland in 1991. This independence has not been recognized by the international community but nonetheless enjoys relative stability with formally democratic institutions. It did not share the fortunes of Jubaland, a region which also wanted to break away from Somalia in 1998, but whose independence ended a year later. Other areas did not pursue independence but they have been able to constitute a federal region of the country. Thus, presently Somalia is formed by the States of Somaliland and Puntland, and by the interim administrations of Galmudug or Central Somalia, Hirshabelle, South West State of Somalia, and Jubaland.

One of the most important tasks pending for Somalia's stability is trust-building and reconciliation. A federal country is unsustainable without both of them, and presently, distrust among the federal entities towards the central government is very high as it is perceived that the distribution of international aid benefits, in a special way, the capital, Mogadiscio¹².

For this reason, in order to achieve governability of the federal State, it is essential to reach "(...) a political agreement regarding the division of powers between the federal Government and the federal States, the allocation of incomes, and the management of natural resources, as well as the definition of the pending statute of the region of Banadir, where Mogadiscio is located"¹³.

Drought

Somalia is an arid country where the desert is expanding. Periodically, drought punishes this region of the planet where extreme cases stand out which have caused famines in 1974, 1980, 2010-2011, and at present. The most important economic sector is the primary one, and thus these natural crises, added to the continual armed conflict, cause the subsistence of the population to depend on international aid and the remittances of money sent by expatriates, who are also referred to as "the Diaspora" .

¹¹ It is recognized as such, for example, by the Millenium Development or the UN Security Council Resolution 1325.

¹² MARANGIO, Rosella. «Somalia: A Long Road Ahead». Istituto Affari Internazionali. 10/04/2016.

¹³ UNITED NATIONS. Security Council. «Report from the Secretary General on Somalia», S/2017/751, 5 September 2017. p. 2.

Religion

From the religious point of view, Somalia is a homogenous country, with a clear option in favor of Islam and Islamic laws, which have traditionally had a Sufi interpretation. Thus, Article 2 of the Provisional Constitution of 2012¹⁴ establishes that Islam is the religion of the State, and that no law may be promulgated if is not in accordance with the principles of the *Sharia*. Article 17 establishes that every person is free to practice his own religion, although the same article and also article 2 establish that no other religion than Islam may be propagated.

The clearly destabilizing element related to the creed is the existence of violent extremism, demonstrated by the activity of the terrorist group Al Shabaab, as will be seen below.

Fragility of the State

In the Fragile States Index¹⁵ of 2017, elaborated by Fund for Peace¹⁶ using social, economic, and political indicators, Somalia ranks as the second most fragile State in the world after South Sudan.

For over two decades Somalia has been the paradigm of a Failed State. Presently, in an attempt to recognize the advances achieved and the capability for improvement, the reference to its weakness is expressed in the different indexes that analyze these vulnerabilities¹⁷ as a Fragile State. If we consider the Weberian elements that define the State --the physical control of territory, and the monopoly of the legitimate use of strength --we can see how, in the light of what has been said until now, the state apparatus of Somalia does not have those elements¹⁸. This is why Somalia is considered a fragile or weak State. Along the same lines, and according to the OECD, this state fragility must be understood as a situation of higher exposition to risk combined with a low-capacity for mitigating or absorbing it. This situation of vulnerability could lead to violence, conflict, chronic underdevelopment, and a prolonged political crisis¹⁹, elements which we clearly find in the analysis of Somalia.

¹⁴ FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF SOMALIA. «Provisional Constitution», 8/01/2012.

¹⁵ En 2014, this publication became known as "Fragile States Index" instead of "Failed States Index".

¹⁶ FUND FOR PEACE. «Fragile States Index», 2017.

¹⁷ OECD and Fund for Peace.

¹⁸ INFANTE, Irene. «Somalia, between the paradigm of a failed state and the convening of elections». Atalayar, 3/16/2016.

¹⁹ Website of the OECD (oecd.org). Date of consultation: September 2017.

Clans

In spite of the religious, linguistic, and ethnic homogeneity of Somalia, it is quite a divided country due to the existence of clans. Four main clans can be listed (Dir, Isaq, Hawiye, and Darod), which are in turn subdivided into sub-clans, and whose dynamics of alliance or enmity are in continual flux.

Belonging to one clan or another is vital. These clans grant protection and exert traditional justice and, in many cases, are also in charge of local administration. Thus, for example, the sub-group Haarti (which belongs to the Darod clan) promoted the semi-autonomy of Puntland, and the Isaq clan that of Somaliland²⁰. They both enjoy relative stability, particularly Somaliland which, without significant external aid, has improved access to education, drinking water, and basic healthcare services²¹.

Regarding domestic politics, the clans also play an outstanding role because, so far, they are the channels of indirect representation for voting given the absence of universal democratic processes. The formula used for parliamentary representation is called "formula 4.5" and means that four seats are for the four major clans and half a seat is for the minority clans.

Therefore, the basing of identity upon membership in a clan is one of most important social and political factors in Somalia. Ignoring it represents a major weakness on the part of the central State and, in turn, this very weakness is what strengthens the clans as it is a void that they occupy. However, this does not mean that the clan organization is the cause of the State's fragility, but rather an inherent characteristic of Somalia which must be integrated into its own constitution; otherwise, it will only be an insurmountable obstacle.

Only the construction of a government in line with the traditional existing structures will be able to grant it the legitimacy that it needs²²; or at least of an essential part of it. The other part should stem from the elimination of corruption, as well as from good governance.

Present Situation of the Conflict

In general terms, it can be said that the conditions of security in the country have significantly improved in the last decade. Nevertheless, the situation is still quite delicate. Currently, the two major threats to security in Somalia, though not the only ones, are jihadism and the drought. As we will see, the

²⁰ KAPLAN, Seth. «Somalia's Complex Clan Dynamics», *Fragile States*, 01/10/2012.

²¹ HARSCH, Michael F., MEDUNA, Maximilian M. and KRUG, Teresa. «As the U.S. gets more involved in Somalia, beware these three fallacies», *The Washington Post*, 7/18/2017.

²² MOHAMED ALI, Fuad. «The Somali clan system: a road map to political stability in Somalia». Thesis. University of Texas. 2016, p. 15.

combination of both of them could mean a window of opportunity for the terrorists.

Al Shabaab

The existence of the terrorist group al Shabaab is considered the biggest threat to peace in Somalia. Although the deployment of the African Union mission AMISOM has caused it to lose ground, this group still controls broad rural areas in the center and the south of the country. It is calculated that it has membership varying between 7,000 and 9,000 members²³. Due to the harassment from the military that it has suffered in recent years, it has had to adapt and change its tactics from being an insurgent group that controls and rules over a territory – which even reached the capital, Mogadiscio – to becoming a terrorist organization that depends on guerrilla warfare tactics²⁴. In fact, in 2017 most of the attacks perpetrated by this group have made use of placing of improvised explosive artifacts, which in turn entails a higher number of civilian victims.

But in addition, Al Shabaab has claimed responsibility for bombings in the capital and in the center and south of Somalia, as well as in neighboring countries, emphasizing the attack on the Westgate in Nairobi in 2013. It is likewise responsible for the direct assassination of Somali peace activists, foreign volunteer workers, people of importance from civilian society or journalists, and indirectly, of many fellow countrymen by blocking international aid during the famine in 2011²⁵.

The weakening of this terrorist group is due not only to military harassment, but also to internal disputes, desertion, and surrenders. Of the latter, it is worth mentioning the surrender and turning himself in to the authorities of one of its founding leaders, Mukhtar Robow in August of 2017²⁶. Besides, although it is still affiliated to Al Qaeda, many of its members, including some of its leaders, are more in favor of offering their loyalty to the self-proclaimed Islamic State. These differences of opinion show that al Shabaab is not a centralized group with unified aims and a single agenda²⁷. Nevertheless, in spite of the existence of a small faction loyal to the Islamic State, it is

²³ COUNCIL ON FOREIGN RELATIONS. Global Conflict Tracker. Date of consultation: September 2017.

²⁴ JONES, Seth G., LIEPMAN, Andrew M., and CHANDLER, Nathan. «Counterterrorism and Counterinsurgency in Somalia: Assessing the Campaign against Al Shabaab», RAND Corporation, 2016, p. 32.

²⁵ NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER. Counterterrorism Guide. Date of consultation: September 2017.

²⁶ «Al-Shabab's Mukhtar Robow surrenders to government», Al Jazeera, 8/13/2017.

²⁷ NATIONAL COUNTERTERRORISM CENTER. Counterterrorism Guide. Date of consultation: September 2017.

Al Qaeda which is the dominant group in Somalia in particular, as it is in Africa in general²⁸.

Until now, the military option has been almost the only one applied in the fight against terrorism. The new Somali government, however, understands that another way to end this blight is to keep young people from joining this group. In this regard, the government is undertaking actions leading to the creation of new educational and job opportunities for a young generation that, in many cases, joins the terrorist fight as they do not find other options of survival. Along these lines, the United Nations has 18 programs dedicated to the young. Seven of those programs foster technical, academic, and professional training to increase their job opportunities²⁹. Furthermore, local police activities have been put into practice to encourage trust between youngsters and security forces, and with the support of the UN mission, UNSOM, a weekly campaign on radio has been set up to encourage desertion of young people recruited by al Shabaab³⁰.

This is why one of the strongest reasons for concern is that the drought and the risk of famine in the country increase risk in the conflict, thus bringing about a situation in which necessity leads the footsteps of young Somalis towards this terrorist group. And what is an even more serious concern is preventing al Shabaab, through the distribution of food and water, from gaining loyalties by taking advantage of the situation of serious food insecurity that people are going through most seriously in the center and south of the country.

In addition, the fact is that al Shabaab has a new "humanitarian" strategy that represents an about-face in comparison to its response to the famine in 2011, when it stopped the distribution of aid and refused to help the local populations under its control. At that moment, it carried out aid operations unilaterally, along with attacking humanitarian personnel and cutting off distribution channels in an attempt to strengthen its authority in rural populations located in areas under its control, to the detriment of government and international authority³¹.

An even more worrying issue, if possible, than the recruitment of young people, is that of the recruitment of children who, according to the UN Secretary General, Antonio Guterres, are used in combat when even as young as 9 years old. In addition, they are used to transport explosives and weapons, or to carry out actions of espionage³².

²⁸ JARLE HANSEN, Stig. «The Islamic State is losing in Africa». Foreign Policy, 12/13/2016.

²⁹ UNITED NATIONS. SECURITY COUNCIL. *Op. cit.* p. 13.

³⁰ Ibidem. p. 12.

³¹ INDERMUEHLE, Jordan. «Map Update: Al Shabaab's Humanitarian Response», Critical Threats, 06/07/2017.

³² «Guterres: Thousands of child soldiers fight in Somalia», Al Jazeera, 1/20/2017.

Al Shabaab is not the only organization with minors within its ranks. The Somali National Army also uses them, on the orders of the Transitional Federal Government and its tactical ally Ahlu Sunna Wal Jama (ASWJ), as denounced in the 2016 report of the UN Secretary General on childhood and armed conflict³³.

It is clear that, when terrorist groups feel harassed and weakened, they make greater use of children. The same is happening with the Daesh³⁴ or with Boko Haram³⁵. And this phenomenon is not only a great danger for children, but also a great threat to the future, among other reasons because situations are not always re-directed well, nor are their specific needs taken into account in the programs of disarmament, demobilization, and reinsertion, and also because, in some cases, they are only seen as threats to security and not as victims, which is why they do not even receive rehabilitation or reinsertion³⁶.

“The Islamic State” in Somalia

As previously mentioned, there is a faction of al Shabaab that abandoned this group to join the so-called Islamic State, which is denominated Islamic State Somalia (ISS). This group has control of Qandala, to the north of the country, thanks to the fact that it exploits the disputes among clans in this area, and the marginalization they feel directed towards them by the government of Puntland³⁷.

Other types of violence

Although al Shabaab is the main threat to security in Somalia, violence is not exclusively theirs. In many areas, the rivalries among clans, the fight for resources – in particular for water and pastureland –, or the disputes over borders have increased in 2017³⁸. On the other hand, piracy, a phenomenon that had lost strength in the Horn of Africa, seems to be re-awakening.

Piracy in the waters of Somalia had its highest peak between 2008 and 2012. With measures such as the beginning of international operations of maritime surveillance like Operation Atalanta-EU NAVFOR or the hiring of private security on the ships themselves, this criminal phenomenon suffered

³³ UNITED NATIONS. Report by the Secretary General. Children and armed conflicts. A/70/836-S/2016/360. 4/20/2016.

³⁴ PALACIÁN DE INZA, Blanca. «The Daesh Cubs». Analysis document of the IEEEE, 26/2015.

³⁵ PALACIÁN DE INZA, Blanca. «Boko Haram: using girls as weapons». Analysis document of the IEEEE, 07/2015.

³⁶ O'NEILL, Siobhan. «Disengaging Children in Violent Extremist Contexts», United Nations University, Center for Policy Research, 10/29/2015.

³⁷ YUSUF, Zakaria and KHALIF, Abdul. «The Islamic State Threat in Somalia's Puntland State», International Crisis Group, 11/17/2016.

³⁸ UNITED NATIONS. SECURITY COUNCIL. *Op. cit.* p. 6.



Figure 9.3. Geographic location of Qandala. Source: Google Maps.

a serious decline This calm has brought about a relaxation of security measures, both private and those in the hands of security organizations (NATO's operation Ocean Shield ended in December 2016), which is not going unnoticed by those who live off the piracy business and kidnapping. Thus, in March 2017 there began what seems to be a stage of rebirth of piracy with the hijacking of the commercial ship *Aris 13*³⁹.

This comeback of piracy is also reflected in the fact that what is often cited as the root of piracy in Somalia has not been stopped: illegal fishing by foreign ships, which the Somali fishermen claim is the cause that leads them to take arms to protect their coastline⁴⁰.

Drought and the risk of famine

According to the report of the Secretary General of the United Nations on the situation of Somalia, of 5 September 2017, the number of people who need assistance increased reaching 6.7 million, including 3.2 million people who need urgent vital assistance⁴¹. Furthermore, from November 2017 until

³⁹ FREEMAN, Colin. «Somali pirates hijack first commercial ship in five years», The Telegraph, 3/14/2017.

⁴⁰ PATINKIN, Jason. «Somali Pirates Are Back In Business», Foreign Policy, 04/09/2017.

⁴¹ UNITED NATIONS. SECURITY COUNCIL. *Op. Cit.* p. 13.

September 2017, over 766,000 internally displaced people were recorded, and over 7,000 people have sought refuge in Kenya and Ethiopia.

Nevertheless, thanks to the rains during the so-called *Gu* season, from March to May, the situation has improved in many parts of the country, particularly in Somaliland and in some areas of Puntland. However, in other regions, the rains were not as heavy as usual so that the risk of famine due to the lack of food, to malnutrition and illnesses (especially cholera) is still high⁴². This is why it is estimated that food security in many parts of the country will not improve in 2017, while in others (Galgaduud, gedo, Mudug, Shabelle Dhexe, and Shabelle Hoose), the situation may yet worsen⁴³.

As an aggravating factor of this extremely delicate situation, the humanitarian actors are suffering an increase in the attacks from armed groups against them and their facilities. In many areas, there are also many access difficulties due to the lack of infrastructures, but also to the collection of illegal taxes, or simply because al Shabaab hinders their entrance. If we keep in mind that safe access is an essential prerequisite in order to achieve effectiveness in humanitarian actions⁴⁴, the difficulties mentioned above are of vital importance for both humanitarian workers and the people who need assistance.

For all these reasons, risk continues. Although the rains have mitigated the situation and that, in the words of Peter de Clercq, Deputy Special Representative of the Secretary General for the United Nations Assistance Mission for Somalia, "famine has been avoided in Somalia⁴⁵", it is estimated⁴⁶ that over 3 million people – 25% of the Somali population --, will find themselves in a "crisis" or "emergency"⁴⁷ situation in the month of December 2017.

It is true that the situation in Somalia has considerably improved in recent years, especially in terms of security and in the task of rebuilding the State. The end of the transition period and the adoption of the provisional Constitution have represented two big steps in this regard. However, there is still a long way to go with transcendental landmarks pending achievement, such as the revision of the said Constitution, which is already under way; the delimitation of borders between regions; holding democratic elections with universal voting; a more equitable distribution of resources; resilience

⁴² WORLD FOOD PROGRAM. Somalia: Drought Response Situation Report #4, 24 May 2017.

⁴³ UNITED NATIONS. SECURITY COUNCIL. *Op. Cit.* p. 14.

⁴⁴ FUENTENEbro, María. «Humanitarian challenges in terrorist contexts», in PAYÁ SANTOS, Claudio Augusto and TOMÉ BERMEJO, Fernando (dirs.), «Terrorism as a challenge to world security», Aranzadi, 2017, p. 42.

⁴⁵ RELIEFWEB. «United Nations salutes humanitarian workers for averting famine in Somalia», 8/18/2017.

⁴⁶ FAO. FSNAU-FEWS NET 2017 Post Gu Technical Release Final - 31 Aug 2017.

⁴⁷ The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) identifies 5 phases of insecurity: None/Minimum, Acute, Crisis, Emergency y Humanitarian catastrophe/Famine.

to face climate change, and the end of terrorism. Likewise, the legitimacy of the government is still a pending issue, particularly if we keep in mind that in the Corruptions Perception Index of 2016 elaborated by Transparency International⁴⁸, Somalia ranks in position 176; in other words, it is estimated that its population is, out of the entire world, the one that has the highest perception that its government and institutions are corrupt.

The Role of External Actors

The role of the external actors that have worked, are working, or have intervened in any way in Somalia is very important, especially to alleviate emergency situations. However, it would prove ambitious and would stand outside of the aims and physical limitations of this document to analyze the work of the great many national and international non-governmental organizations and international aid agencies that are committed to this country. Nevertheless, acknowledging such dangerous and necessary work is a must.

In this section we will briefly review the operations and missions of the supranational organizations dedicated in a special way, though not exclusively, to complementing the work of the NGOs and aid agencies trying to bring security to the country.

The African Union

The African Union has been deployed in the country since 2007 with the AMISOM (African Union Mission in Somalia), supported by the UN and the European Union. It is a mission of the so-called Peace Support Operations, and as such, it is a multidimensional mission with a broad mandate that, among others, includes the following objectives⁴⁹:

- To provide security in order to allow the development of the political process, as well as efforts for stabilization, reconciliation, and the construction of peace.
- To allow the gradual transfer of responsibilities for the security of AMISOM to the Somali security forces.
- To contribute to the security of humanitarian aid.

The countries that contribute with military forces and police are: Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and Sierra Leone. It is estimated that this mission will have ended at the end of 2020. Until then, the training and transfer of skills to the Somali Armed Forces is one of the most important

⁴⁸ Available on the website: <https://www.transparency.org>

⁴⁹ To see the full AMISOM mandate, go to: <http://amisom-au.org/amisom-mandate/>.

jobs, and also a difficult one due to the high level of corruption and scarce legitimacy that the Somali army has in some regions⁵⁰.

The United Nations

Besides the above-mentioned support to AMISOM, the United Nations has contributed in the country, since 2013, with UNSOM (United Nations Assistance Mission in Somalia), with the mandate to facilitate political advice to the federal government and to AMISOM, in, among other areas, that of the construction of peace and of the State, the improvement of governability, the reform of the security sector, and the coordination of aid from international donors.

On the other hand, several United Nations agencies like the FAO, UNICEF, WHO, and UNHCR, among others, are working in Somalia.

The European Union

The European Union finances the operation of the African Union AMISOM, and it is one of the major donors of the UNSOM mission. However, it has also participated in the training and education of the Somali army through the EUTM Somalia (European Union Training Mission) since 2010. In addition, it participates in maritime security with operation EUNAVFOR ATALANTA against piracy. Along the same lines, through Mission EUCAP Nestor Horn of Africa, which began in 2012, it works towards the development of regional maritime capacity.

The EU also provides humanitarian aid and aid to development, and contributes with other actors such as the World Food Program, of which it is the major donor and whose freighters are also escorted by Operation Atalanta⁵¹.

NATO

Besides its support to the African Union mission AMISOM contributing in air and maritime transport, the "Ocean Shield" Operation has been NATO's contribution to the fight against piracy in the Gulf of Aden and the Horn of Africa. This mission finished at the end of 2016.

⁵⁰ OKIROR, Samuel. «Countdown to AMISOM withdrawal: Is Somalia ready?» IRIN, 02/28/2017.

⁵¹ FERRO RODRÍGUEZ, Joaquín. «Security and development: the intervention of the European Union in Somalia». Opinion Document 29/2012. IEEE. p.7.

Spain

In Somalia, fifteen Spanish contingents contribute to the mission with advice to the Somali Armed Forces, EUTM-Somalia. Spain also participates in Operation Atalanta. As of this date, at the close of writing of this chapter, the Maritime Action Ship *Tornado* is deployed with an air unit SH 60B on board. For its part, a P-3M Orion aircraft for maritime patrolling is operating in the ORION detachment, with about 55 soldiers among its contingent⁵².

The United States

On March 30th, President Donald Trump declared⁵³ Somalia an “Area of Active Hostility”, which grants the American military a greater capacity to launch attacks⁵⁴. It is a term which the Obama Administration had already used to identify those places where war has not yet been declared, but where American troops may operate with greater freedom. It is a name particularly pertinent to operations that involve unmanned aircraft attacks, and it is also used when special operations are authorized⁵⁵.

Conclusions and Perspective for the Future

In Somalia, in spite of international efforts, many risks and threats coexist, along with potentiating factors for them. From among them, the following should be mentioned: violence – at the hands, mainly but not exclusively, of the terrorist group al Shabaab; the weakness and lack of cohesion of the State; and the impact of climate change and its results, hunger, as the great destabilizer and as an emergency that hinders the adoption of measures that improve resilience in the medium term.

Therefore, Farmajo’s government has great challenges before it, such as the improvement of governability hand in hand with reconciliation, the fight against corruption, and the inclusion of traditional clan structures – as is successfully taking place in Somaliland –; the eradication of violence, particularly but not exclusively of the jihadist type; and the improvement of resilience of the population in the face of drought. In the words of the Director of Health and Nutrition of UNICEF in Puntland, Saboor Ahmad Bahrami, “Drought means the rain failed. But famine means the system has

⁵² InformationinthewebsiteoftheEMAD:<http://www.emad.mde.es/MOPS/060-Yibuti-ATALANTA/>.

⁵³ MCLEARY, Paul. «Trump expands war authorities to target militants in Somalia». *Foreign Policy*, 3/30/2017.

⁵⁴ ALLEN-EBRAHIMIAN, Bethany. «US to send troops to Somalia amid blowback». *Foreign Policy*, 4/14/2017

⁵⁵ SHINKMAN, Paul. «Areas of Active Hostilities: Trump’s Troubling Increases to Obama’s Wars», *US News*, 5/16/2017.

failed”⁵⁶. The major difficulty that the country must face, with the abundant international aid, is to combine the urgent palliative measures with work and investments in the medium term.

It is estimated that the emergency related to food insecurity will continue in the Horn of Africa in 2018. Therefore, better humanitarian access is needed in Somalia and also urgent and sustainable aid to mitigate the high level of acute malnutrition and loss of lives. However, this life-threatening emergency should not be the only focus of attention, considering the amount of risks and threats the country is suffering from, and work must continue in other areas to favor greater stability. Along these lines, Somalia will shortly hold elections, and in the medium term, the country is working towards strengthening its institutions, both of which conditions being necessary to start down the road towards development.

In the immediate future, Somalia will hold its postponed parliamentary elections in the last quarter of 2017. Al Shabaab has called on its followers to assassinate clan elders, civil servants, and members of parliament who participate in the elections, and to attack the places where voting takes place. Despite this threat, the country must continue its political process towards a gradually more inclusive and stable model.

Through the National Development Plan (2017-2019), work continues in Somalia with the aim, on a mid-term basis, of strengthening the structures of the State, in particular, of the security forces and of the judicial system. The cohesion of the former and the combination of the architecture of the central justice with the traditional systems are considered essential challenges on the road to strengthening the State. Reconciliation, recovery of trust in the institutions, non-denial of traditional systems, reduction of inequalities, the end of generalized corruption,are all essential elements to obtain peace, and without which the current activity for the military neutralization of armed groups will be an incomplete job that will not give the country the minimum stability necessary for its development.

⁵⁶ STEERS, Julia. «On the edge: Somalia's new president inherits a country on the brink of disaster and famine» VICE, 02/27/2017.

Somalia: increased threats to security

Geopolitical indicators of Somalia

| | |
|--|--|
| Surface: 637,700 km ² | |
| GDP: 5,923 billion \$ (est. 2015) | |
| GDP Structure: | Agriculture: 60.2% Industry: 7.4% Services: 32.5% (est. 2013) |
| Per capita GDP: 400 \$ (est. 2016) | |
| GDP growth rate: 3.7% (est. 2016) | |
| Exports: 819 million \$ (est. 2014) | UAE 36.1% Oman 33.4% Yemen 15.5% (2015) |
| | Principal goods: Cattle, bananas, fur, fish, wood charcoal, scrap |
| Imports: 3,482 billion \$ (est. 2014) | Oman 17.1%, Djibouti 17%, India 15%, China 10.7%, Kenya 5.5%, Pakistan 4% (2015) |
| | Principal goods: manufacturing, oil products, food, construction materials, qat |
| Population: 11,031 billion 386 million (est. 2017) | |
| Age structure: | 0 -14 43.15% |
| | 14-54 50,47% |
| | 54- 6.21% |
| Growth rate of the population: 2% (est. 2017) | |
| Ethnic groups: | Somali 85%, Bantu and other non-Somali groups 15% (including 30,000 Arabs) |
| Religions: | Sunni Muslims (official religion) |
| Literacy rate: no data | |
| Population under poverty threshold: no data | |
| Communications and information systems: (est. 2016) | 62 mobile phones per 100 inhabitants (est. 2016.) |
| Military expenditure: no data | |

| DATE | EVENTS |
|-----------|---|
| 1860s | France establishes French Somaliland. |
| 1887 | The British establish the British Protectorate of Somaliland. |
| 1889 | Italy establishes a protectorate in the central area of Somalia. |
| 1960 | The Italian and British protectorates obtain their independence and, together, create the current territory of the Federal Republic of Somalia. |
| 1974 | Drought. Famine. |
| 1977 | French Somaliland gains independence as Djibouti independiza como Yibuti. |
| 1980 | Drought. Famine. |
| 1969-1991 | Autocracy of Mohamed Siad Barre. |
| 1991 | Somaliland unilaterally declares its independence. |
| 1991 | Civil war. |
| 2000 | Al Shabaab is formed in the first decade. |
| 2008 | EU Operation EUNAVFOR Atalanta starts. |
| 2008-2016 | NATO Ocean Shield Operation. |
| 2010 | EUTM Somalia Mission of the EU starts. |
| 2012 | EUCAP Nestor Mission of the EU starts. |
| 2017 | AMISOM Mission of the AU starts. |
| 2006-2012 | Federal Government of Transition. |
| 2008-2012 | High period of piracy in Somali waters. |
| 2012 | Provisional Constitution. |
| 2013 | UN UNSOM Mission. |
| 2010-2011 | Drought. Famine. |
| 2017 | Government of Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed "Farmajo". |
| 2017 | Drought. High risk of famine. |

Chapter nine

Niger: epicenter of conflicts

Juan Alberto Mora Tebas

Abstract

Due to its strategic position, located at the junction of the Sahel, Central Africa and Western Africa, in the heart of the strip of Sahelo-Saharan region, Niger offers a number of advantages that make it an indispensable ally in the fight against terrorism in this region. But its fragile stability is threatened not only by conflicts in neighbouring countries, but also by an important humanitarian and economic crisis, this is aggravated by one of the greater population growth, o in the world.

Keywords

Niger. Crisis.Conflict.Terrorism.

Introduction

Niger is particularly important due to its strategic position; at the crossroads of the Sahel, Central Africa and Western Africa, in the heart of the Sahelo-Saharan strip. Furthermore, Niger offers a series of advantages that make it an essential ally in the fight against terrorism since many jihadist groups that are present in this region of Africa operate throughout its territory. Besides the threat of terrorism, Sub-Saharan immigrants use this area as a pathway to reach Europe. Thus, in order to control and to be able to carry out operations to dismantle *banditerrorist* groups, some allied Western countries are setting up military bases within Niger's borders.

The civil war in Libya in 2011, the crisis in Mali in 2012, and the recent intensification of military confrontations between government forces and Boko Haram in the north of Nigeria affect Niger. Ideas, weapons, and combatants circulate through its vast permeable borders. Nevertheless, Niger, which may seem fragile, is still an island of stability in spite of being surrounded by countries with strong security crises. It's Western and regional allies seek to contain the growing threats they perceive, particularly from violent extremist groups¹.

Niger is in a fragile and insecure environment, at the center of a triangle of conflicts (Mali-Libya-Nigeria) where some instability factors are endemic (demographic growth, poverty, humanitarian crises, weak governance, coups d'état,...) having had major influence during certain periods, and which have been joined, or are being joined, by some new factors (terrorism, religious extremism, etc.) In order to analyze those factors, it is a good idea to begin by giving an introduction to its recent history.

Historical and political background of interest

Having been colonized by France at the end of the XIX century, Niger proclaimed its independence from the mother country in 1960. Since then, the country has experienced four coups d'état, the last one in 2010, and several attempts, the last one in December of 2015; droughts and the subsequent food crises, the last one being in 2005; clashes between the Tuaregs and the army, and wide social protests from students and workers, are part of Niger's agitated recent history.

¹ International Crisis Group. 2013. «Niger: Another Weak Link in the Sahel?» Africa Report N°208 | 19 September 2013. Brussels (Belgium): International Crisis Group, 19 September.

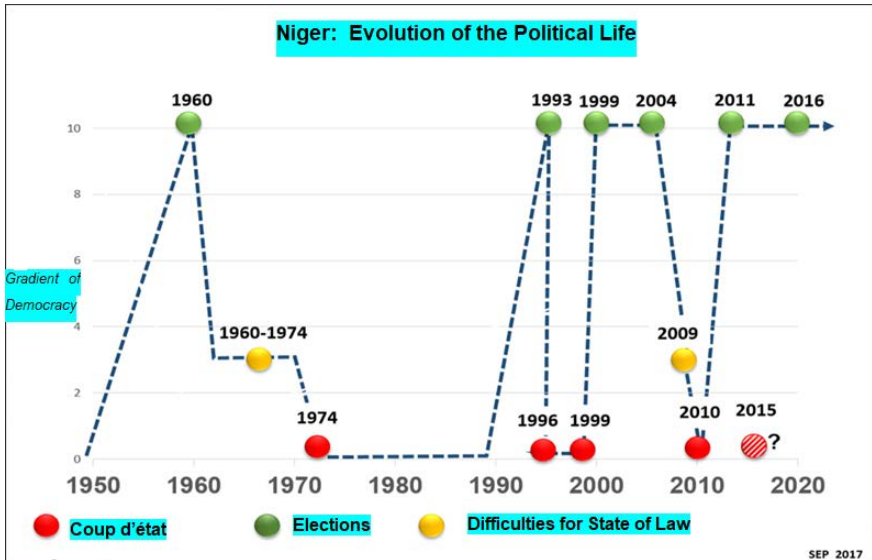


Figure 9.1 Evolution of Political Life.

First Republic (1960-1974)

After the proclamation of independence (3 August 1960), Hamani Diori, who was elected as its first President, established a single-party (MNSD-Nassara²) dictatorship, and ruled until 1974 when he was ousted by a coup d'état led by the Army Chief of Staff, Lieutenant Colonel Seyni Kountché. Diori was incarcerated by the new government from 1974 to 1980, and was then under house arrest until 1987.

First Military Dictatorship, National Sovereign Conference and Second Republic (1974-1992)

A military dictatorship followed, first headed by Seyni Kountché (until his death in 1987), and then by Ali Seibu, Chief of Defense. At the beginning of the nineties, student agitation and the assault by the Tuaregs in Tchintabaraden³ led to a National Sovereign Conference (29 July to 23 November 1991), which marked a crucial moment in Niger's post-independence era,

² MNSD-Nassara: *Mouvement National pour la Société du Développement (National Movement for the Development Society)*.

³ On 7 May 1990, young Tuaregs tried to free some people who had been detained during previous demonstrations. They attacked a police station, seizing long weapons and killing a gendarme and his brother. The army retaliated by bombarding the population which resulted in between 700 and 1,500 victims. <http://www.rfi.fr/hebdo/20160415-afrique-touareg-rebellions-niger-mali-algerie-burkina-faso-histoire>.

the military regime finally being dismantled, leaving Seibout without major effective power, and returning democracy with the call for elections.

The transition government (Second Republic) drew up a new Constitution which eliminated the single-party system from the Constitution of 1989. The new Constitution was adopted by referendum on 26 December 1992.

Third Republic (1993-1996)

On 27 March 1993, Mahamane Ousmane from the Social Democratic Convention became President in the first multi-party presidential elections in the country. In the meantime, a Tuareg rebellion which had begun in the northern region of the country in the decade of 1990 grew in strength until a cease-fire accord was signed in 1995. Ousmane's presidency was characterized by political unrest, with four changes of government, and having legislative elections advanced to 1995.

Second Military Dictatorship, Fourth Republic, Third Military Dictatorship (1997-1999)

On 27 January 1996, Ousmane was ousted by a military coup led by Colonel Ibrahim Baré Maïnassara, Chief of the Army, who proclaimed himself Chief of the National Salvation Council, suspending the Constitution and forbidding political parties. After the suspension of financial aid from the United States and France, Maïnassara called for new elections (Fourth Republic) in July, which he won under more than questionable circumstances, including the house arrest of the candidates from the opposition. The Maïnassara Administration was not welcomed and, in April 1999, he was shot at the airport in Niamey, apparently by the Presidential Guard.

After this coup d'état, a nine-month transition government was established, led by Major Daouda Malam Wanké and the National Reconciliation Council (CRN – *Conseil de Réconciliation Nationale*). A new Constitution was drawn up for the Fifth Republic, which included an amnesty for the authors of the coups d'état in 1996 and 1994, being approved in a referendum in July 1999. Wanké's government kept its promise to call elections, turning power over to the president-elect, Mamadou Tandja, in December of 1999⁴.

Fifth Republic. Constitutional Crisis. Sixth Republic (1999-2009)

At the beginning of the XXI century the petitions for approval of the Islamic Law (Sharia) increased, which were the origin of several conflicts between Islamic activists and Nigeriens who were not in favor of the strict religious

⁴ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Niger/The-economy#ref516877>.

code. On 24 July 2004 the first municipal elections in the history of Niger were held to elect local representatives, who until then had been appointed by the government. These elections were followed by the presidential elections. President Tandja Mamadou was reelected for a second term, thus becoming the first President of the Republic to win consecutive elections without being ousted by a military coup.

Between 2007 and 2008, the second Tuareg rebellion took place in the north of Niger, worsening the economic perspectives at a moment of limited political progress. The political environment worsened the following year when President Tandja, who should have resigned from office in December of 2009 after the constitutional limit of two terms, brought up the idea of a third mandate in the period before the presidential elections of 2009, which caused confrontation between the president and the other State powers.

Tandja's aim was to extend his term to three more years, during which time a new Constitution would be drawn up, thus turning the country from a semi-presidential republic to a full presidential republic, invoking his economic achievements to justify the need for his continuation in power. Tandja requested a referendum to change the Constitution and permit the extension of three years for his mandate, which the National Assembly refused to approve. He then took his petition for a referendum to the Constitutional Tribunal, but the tribunal passed a non-binding sentence on 26 May, declaring the referendum unconstitutional if it was not approved by the National Assembly; later on, Tandja dissolved this legislative body.

At the beginning of June, Tandja set up a committee to draw up a new Constitution which would include the extension of his mandate to three years, and eliminate the limits of Presidential terms. On June 5, a presidential decree established that the referendum on this new Constitution would be held on 4 August.

Tandja's actions provoked a general dissatisfaction in the country and in the international community. There were strikes and demonstrations to protest against the referendum. A coalition of most of the political parties and civil groups, self-proclaimed Front for the Defense of Democracy (FDD), contested the presidential decree before the Constitutional Tribunal, which declared it null once again, if the dissolved National Assembly did not approve it. This decision, unlike the previous one, was judicially binding. Tandja requested that the Constitutional Tribunal annul this sentence, but, instead, the Tribunal confirmed it on 26 June. The following day, Tandja replied by announcing that he had assumed exceptional powers and that he intended to rule by decree. Three days later, he dissolved the Constitutional Tribunal.

Tandja was not affected by the growing criticism regarding his actions nor the accusations of being anti-democratic, nor the pressures from international donors (some of whom threatened to suspend financial aid unless democracy was restored). The referendum was held on 4 August, despite the fact that the

opposition leaders encouraged the voters to boycott it. The new Constitution was adopted with 92.5% of the votes and 68% participation, according to official results. The adoption of the new Constitution established the Sixth Republic with a presidential system, suspending the 1999 Constitution, and establishing a provisional three-year government with Tandjia Mamadou as president. Elections were held on 20 October to replace the National Assembly that Tandja had dissolved in May. The elections were boycotted by the opposition, and were also the target of international criticism. During the previous days, the Economic Community of West African States (CEDEAO / ECOWAS) exhorted Tandja to postpone the elections until after conversations were held with the opposition; the elections were held as planned, thus the CEDEAO suspended its affiliation with Niger, reporting that Tandja's party, MNSD, was winning the majority of the seats⁵. Political and social instability rocketed before, during, and after the referendum, and, ultimately, led to a coup d'état in 2010, which ended the short existence of the Sixth Republic.

Fourth Military Dictatorship, Seventh Republic (2010 – present)

In spite of the apparent electoral victories, Tandja and his actions continued being unpopular for the majority of Nigeriens, and on 18 February 2010 he was ousted by a coup d'état. A military junta headed by Captain Salou Djibo was established. The Supreme Council for the Restoration of Democracy, led by Djibo, carried out a one-year transition plan which entailed the suspension of the Constitution, the dissolution of all the State institutions, and the restoration of democracy. On 23 February, the junta designated former minister Mahamadou Danda as Prime Minister, appointing a transition government of 20 members on 1 March. A new constitution which limited the presidential powers that Tandja had introduced in 2009 was approved by the voters in October 2010.

The junta called for presidential and legislative elections on 31 January 2011. The Nigerien Party for Democracy and Socialism – Tarayya (*Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme-Tarayya*, PNDS), an opposition party, obtained full majority in the National Assembly with 39 seats; followed by the MNSD with 26 seats. No presidential candidate obtained full majority, and a second round was scheduled for 12 March with two candidates, Mahamadou Issoufou, a long-time opposition leader since and chief of the ranks of the PNDS, who had received 36% of the votes, and Seyni Oumarou, leader of the MNSD and former Prime Minister, who received 23% of the votes. Issoufou won in the second round, with nearly 58% of the votes. His taking of office on 7 April 2011 as first President of the Seventh Republic, brought the country back to civil power. The pacific transition to democracy was followed by the resumption of foreign aid, which had been frozen after the coup d'état.

⁵ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Niger/The-economy#ref516877>.

The Islamic militant groups became more active in the region after Issoufou took office, and the attacks from these groups inside Niger turned into an even greater concern. Although there were isolated incidents by al-Qaeda in the Islamic Magreb (AQIM) and by smaller groups, the most noteworthy was the threat from Boko Haram, which had its bases in neighboring Nigeria, and which had been terrorizing that country for years before launching attacks on bordering countries. In 2015, it launched its first attack in the south of the country. Niger joined other countries in the region to fight against this group and it soon saw advances in that front. Niger also made an effort to welcome tens of thousands of refugees coming from the north of Nigeria, who had fled Boko Haram and who settled in the south of Niger.

In the meantime, a large demonstration of citizens who were upset by the lack of advances in the improvement of their life conditions under Issoufou took place in Niamey in December 2013; it was the first show of discontent since he had reached power. Some people also protested the censorship in the media and the alleged corruption of the government. Prominent opposition leaders such as Oumarou and former prime minister Hama Amadou supported the claims of the population.

A coup d'état attempt took place on 18 December 2015 while President Mahamadou Issoufou was returning to Niamey after the celebrations marking the 57th Anniversary of the Republic, which were held in Maradi (in the center of the country)⁶. Issoufou declared that the government had frustrated a coup d'état, incarcerating several Army officers. Some opposition leaders, however, questioned these declarations and accused Issoufou of trying to create a drama before the presidential and legislative elections scheduled for February 2016. Issoufou was, once again, the candidate for the PNDS-Tarayya⁷ along with 14 other presidential candidates, the most important being Amadou from MODEN-FA⁸, Ourmarou from MNSD-Nassara⁹, and former president Ousmane from MNRD¹⁰. Amadou had the merit of carrying out his campaign from his prison cell, where he was incarcerated in November of 2015 after being accused of being implied in a child-trafficking network, which he denied. Although the Court of Appeals did not release him on bail, the Constitutional Tribunal cleared his way to be able run for president.

The elections were held on 21 February 2016. Issoufou was the most voted-for candidate with 48% of the votes. Since he did not win by over 50% of the votes, and nor did his closest rival, Amadou, with 17%, a second round was called for March. The PNDS had more legislative seats than any other party but did not have enough to reach the full majority in the National Assembly.

⁶ AFP «Niger : 9 militaires arrêtés après un coup d'État déjoué».

⁷ PNDS: *Parti Nigérien pour la Démocratie et le Socialisme*.

⁸ MODEN-FA: *Mouvement Démocratique Nigérien pour une Fédération Africaine*.

⁹ MNSD-Nassara: *Mouvement National pour la Société du Développement*.

¹⁰ MNRD : *Mouvement Nigérien pour le Renouveau Démocratique*.

Before the second round, the *Coalition pour l'alternance* (COPA; *Coalition for the Alternative*), the opposition coalition to which Amadou's party belonged, declared that it wanted to boycott the elections, claiming there were irregularities in the election process. Furthermore, Amadou had to travel abroad to receive medical treatment before the elections. As expected, Issoufou easily won the elections of 20 March 2026, with 92.5% of the votes, thus renewing his mandate for five more years.

Niger seemed to slowly advance in the transition to democracy after the 2010 coup d'état. Issoufou's main rival, COPA 2016, refused to recognize Issoufou's victory, denouncing the government's manipulation of the figure of the participation in the election, which it alleged was around a trifling 10%¹¹.

In 2011, the Nigeriens had put their hopes on the program "Renaissance", Issoufou's electoral flagship promise at the time, he committed himself to economic development, to the end of food insecurity, and to transparency to wipe out corruption and impunity. However, as the threat from jihadist extremism rose, the government moved its promise to the back burner in favor of security¹². Thus, if the Nigerien Defense expenditure was of nearly 60 million Dollars in 2008, it was estimated at over 166 million Dollars in 2016; in other words, it had tripled in eight years¹³.

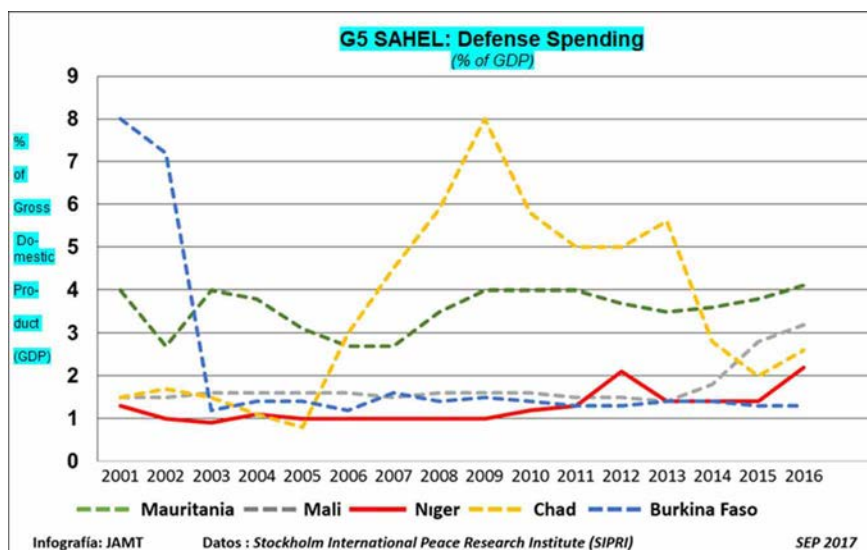


Figure 9.2. G5 Sahel: Defense Spending (% of GDP).

¹¹ SIMON, Graciela. 2017. «Niger's challenges in the Sahel-Saharan area: Regional dynamics, global impact». Analysis GESI, 11/2017. Granada: Grupo de Estudios de Seguridad Internacional (GESI) (*International Security Study Group*) –University of Granada, 15 February.p.2.

¹² Ibidem.

¹³ *Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI)* « ».

Instability Factors

The Armed Forces

As in the rest of the Sahel countries, the Nigerien Armed Forces have always played an important role in the political life of the country. The spectrum of their interference in political life has been a constant in the history of Niger since its independence (1960), and it has not disappeared (see Figure 1).

Since the end of the first Tuareg conflict in 1965, the Armed Forces have had a large number of former Tuareg guerrilla members, who were admitted into the Armed Forces in accordance with the conditions for demobilization of the forces as per the peace agreement. In order to confront the insurgencies in the desert, the Government created two special units: The Meharist Brigade (a unit equipped with dromedaries) and the Saharan Security Forces¹⁴. The absence of a well-defined foreign enemy means that there is no clear distinction between the missions of the Army and those of the paramilitary forces depending from the Ministry of the Interior. Their troops include 14,200 members as follows:

- *Ground forces (6,000 members)*

They are designed to carry out long-range mobile operations within their vast territory, so they lack heavy equipment (tanks and infantry tanks). In spite of this, they are still relatively efficient in carrying out their main duties: counterinsurgency operations (COIN) in the interior of the desert, particularly keeping in mind the many threats and the immensity of the territory¹⁵.

- *Air Force (300 members)*

The Nigerien Air Force is a small organization initially dedicated to transport, and it has started extending its duties and inventory, reassuming the air reconnaissance (ISR¹⁶) role, and acquiring combat skills for the first time in 2013. In order to control its scarcely populated vast territory and porous borders, surveillance aircraft are essential. In fact, it has acquired a *Beechcraft King Air 3500* that it had adapted to ISR missions in 2014. At the end of October 2015, Niger also received two *Cessna 208B Grand Caravan* aircrafts, similarly adapted¹⁷.

- *Paramilitary Forces Gendarmerie (5,400 members)*

They are in charge of keeping order on roads and in rural areas; they also give support to the army in their missions. They are organized into detachments that deploy in each one of the 7 departments.

¹⁴ *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - West Africa Niger*, p. 1.

¹⁵ *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - West Africa Niger*, p.1.

¹⁶ *ISR: Intelligence, Surveillance and Reconnaissance*.

¹⁷ *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - West Africa Niger*, p. 1.

- *Republican Guard (2,500 members).*

Its task is to complement the regular army in its missions of interior security. It deploys in 4 detachments: Agadez, Maradi, Niamey, and Zinder.

With less than half of the population of Spain, and a surface area equivalent to 2.5 times that of Spain, its Armed Forces are one tenth of those of Spain (122,000 members), and its minimal security forces, with a ratio of about 40 policemen per 100,000 inhabitants, the Spanish ratio being over 300 policemen per 100,000 inhabitants¹⁸.

Intercommunity Conflicts: Cattle breeders Farmers

The violent conflicts between cattle breeders (nomad shepherds of the *Fulani* ethnic group) from the north, and the sedentary farming communities in the central and southern areas are gradually more recurrent in Niger. In April 2015, the Nigerien government expelled 250 *Fulani* shepherds from the area of Biri (in the SW)¹⁹.

These clashes are potentially more dangerous than the Boko Haram insurgency in the northwest that caused over 2,500 deaths in neighboring Nigeria during 2016. Since their number increases every year, they should be considered a threat to the security and stability of the country²⁰.

In the region of Zinder (al Sur, on the border with Nigeria), a program financed by the French Development Agency (AFD in its French acronym – *Agence Française de Développement*) regarding new wells for livestock, has skillfully combined the effective and joint application of the legal texts with the traditional rural code, regarding the regulations for watering programs and decentralization. It was based on social agreements among the parties involved²¹.

Refugees and Displaced Persons

The conflict with Boko Haram in Nigeria has led to the displacement of over 300,000 refugees, displaced persons, and repatriates in the region of Diffa. Their urgent needs are food, healthcare, water, sanitary conditions, and

¹⁸ "Civil Guard and National Police alone 145,000) *The Military Balance, 2017*.

¹⁹ «How Niger state tackles Fulani and farmers' crisis», *Sahel Standard* (Abuja), 11 May 2015.

²⁰ MARTY André «L'élevage pastoral au Sahel : entre menaces réelles et atouts incontestables». March 24 of 2015. Institute Français de Relations Internationales – IFRI (www.ifri.org).

²¹ MARTY André «L'élevage pastoral au Sahel : entre menaces réelles et atouts incontestables». 24 March 2015. Institute Français de Relations Internationales – IFRI (French Institute of Foreign Affairs) (www.ifri.org).

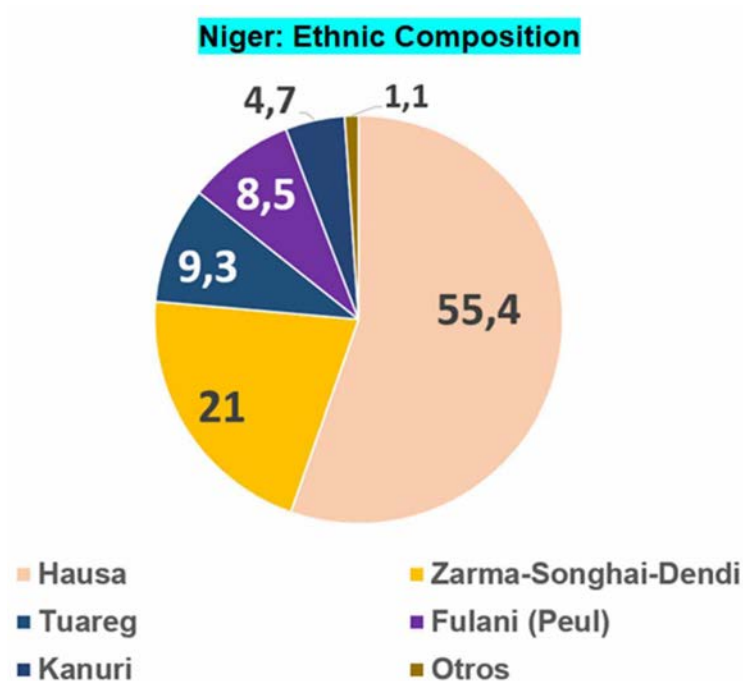
shelter. Access to the needy, particularly to those who live in camps near Lake Chad, is still a challenge due to restrictions on security as well as those that the state of emergency implies. The conflict in Mali also has consequences in Niger which houses 55,892 Malian refugees²².

Poverty

With nearly half the population below the threshold of poverty, social inequality is one of the main sources of discontent among the citizens. According to the United Nations, Niger is the poorest country in the world, at position 187 in the Human Development Index (HDI) and, thus, the second to the last in the world classification elaborated in 2016, only just before the Central African Republic (CAR).

Social cohesion

Ethnic groups



Infografía: JAMT

Datos: *Encyclopedia Britannica* 2017

SEP 2017

Figure 9.3. Ethnic composition of Niger.

²² http://ec.europa.eu/echo/where/sub-saharan-africa/niger_en.

The ethnic groups correspond to the five main linguistic groups:

- *Hausa*: This is the largest group and it represents over half of the population. The *Hausa* occupy the central area in the south of Niger, although the majority live in Nigeria.
- *Songhai*. They live along the Niger River where they are absorbing the *Kurtey* and *Wogo* peoples. Most of the *Songhai*, however, live in Mali. The *Zarma* live on the left bank of the Niger River, in close contact with the *Mauri* and the *Arewa*.
- *Fulani (Peul)*. They are dispersed throughout the whole country, as they are mostly nomads; they are also scattered throughout West Africa.
- *Tuareg*. They are nomads also, and they are divided into three sub-groups: The *Lullemmiden* from the region of Azaouak in the west, the *Asben (Kel Aïr)* in the region of Aïr, and the *Itesen (Kel Geres)* in the south and in the west of Aïr. The Tuaregs are also in Algeria and Mali.
- *Kanuri*. They live west of Zinder, and are divided into numerous sub-groups: *Manga*, *Dogara (Dagara)*, *Mober*, *Buduma*, and *Kanembu*; they are also found in Chad, Cameroon, and Nigeria.

Besides the *Teda*, nomads in the region of Tibesti who are an important minority, the rest of the population is made up of Arabs, Black Africans from other countries, and Europeans, mostly French.

Religious affiliations

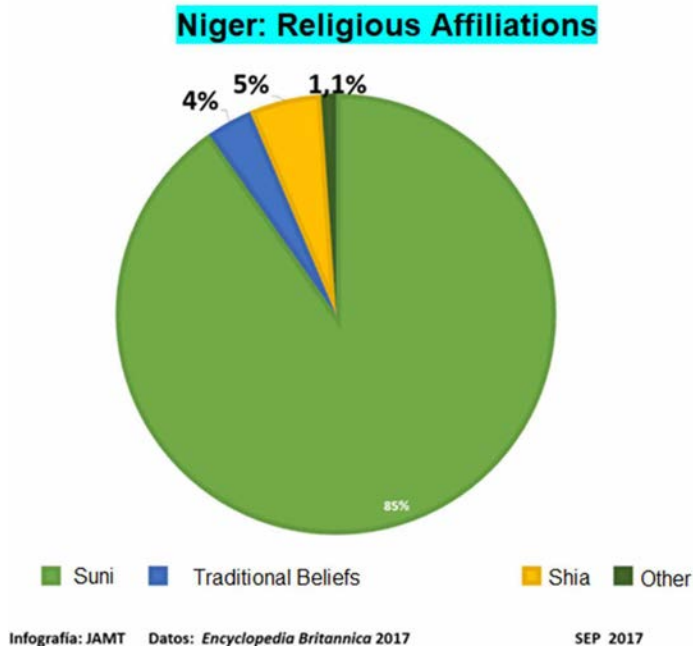


Figure 9.4 Religious Affiliations in Niger.

Approximately 85% of the population belongs to the Sunni branch of Islam. In spite of the fact that a group of the *Hausa (Annaawaa)* has always refused to accept Islam, so also have the *Woodaabe (Fulani)* group, who are different from the other *Fulani* for this reason), although Islam is still the majority religion of the *Hausa* and the *Fulani*.

Christianity (Catholicism and Protestantism) is still an urban-area religion, particularly in Niamey. There are several Christian missions among the *Songhai* and the *Arewa*. The traditional animist religions of Black Africans are still strongly evident²³.

This Moslem majority should unite society, but as has been seen, there are, besides the Shiite, some minority tribes that do not accept it.

Border Litigation

Niger shares borders with 7 countries: Libya (342 km), Algeria (951 km), Mali (838 km), Burkina Faso (622 km), Benin (277 km), Nigeria (1,608 km), and Chad (1,196 km), and in spite of that, it has no serious problems with any of them. The few border conflicts have been resolved by international arbitration, the most recent being in May 2015.

Benin

In 1960, when Niger and Benin gained their independence from France, the border was challenged, being the scenario of sporadic clashes since then.

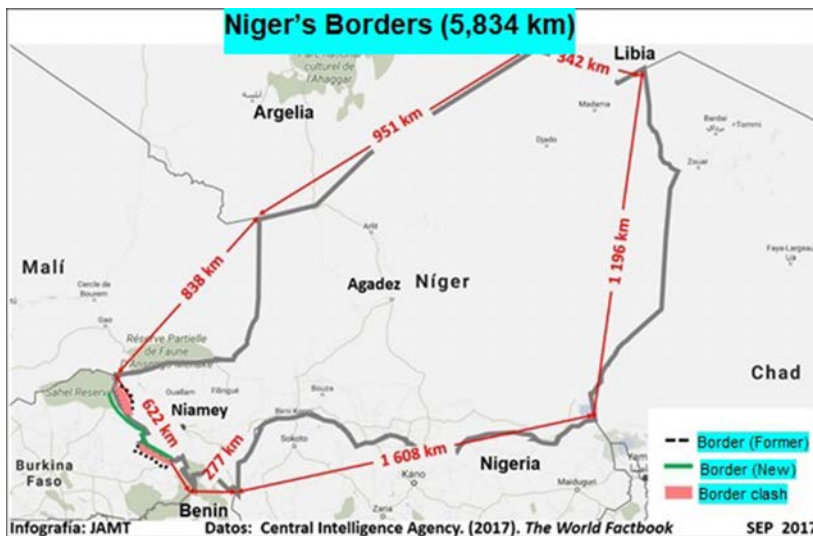


Figure 9.5: Niger's Borders.

²³ <https://www.britannica.com/place/Niger>.

On 12 July 2005, the United Nations International Court of Justice (ICJ), main judicial organization to solve litigations among States, awarded Lete, the largest island on the Niger River, and 15 more islands to Niger, and the property of the remaining 9 to Benin, also redrawing the borders between the two countries on the Niger and Mekrou Rivers.

Burkina Faso

In April 2013 the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague ordered a new demarcation of the border between Niger and Burkina Faso, which affected a territory which had been in legal dispute since independence (1960) and under investigation by the ICJ since 2012. The territory in dispute, mainly populated by nomad tribes, has a surface area of 786 square kilometers and extends along 375 km of the 622 km border common to both countries.

In May 2015, the governments of Burkina Faso and Niger announced the application of the decision by the ICJ which both States readily accepted. In accordance with the sentence, Burkina Faso obtained 14 cities that belonged to the neighboring State, while Niger received four²⁴.

Terrorism

Niger occupies 16th place in the *Global-Terrorism-Index-2016*²⁵. It is also affected by the collateral effects of the regional conflicts in Mali and Libya, and of Boko Haram's insurgency in the north of Nigeria. Since 2012, it has tried to increase the capabilities of its army and border patrols in order to make its borders safe. The operations to fight terrorism launched in October and November of 2015 by the Malian security forces near the borders of Burkina Faso and Niger will probably push the jihadists towards the interior of Niger in search of more isolated bases.

On the other hand, the risk of jihadist attacks is intensifying due to the increase in cooperation by the government with French regional anti-terrorist operations (*Barkhane*), as well as its intervention in Nigeria as part of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF)²⁶ against Boko Haram. Niger's decision to hand over a member of the Malian group, Ansar Dine, accused of

²⁴ AFP. «Burkina Faso and Niger exchange 18 towns to settle border dispute». *The Guardian* 8 May 2015.

²⁵ *The Institute for Economics & Peace*. <http://economicsandpeace.org/>.

²⁶ MORA TEBAS, J. (2017) «G5 Sahel: La Fuerza [antiterrorista] Conjunta (FC-G5S)» (Joint Anti-terrorist Force) Opinion article 37/2017, 19 July 2017, see Annex: The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF).

destroying historical monuments in Timbuktu, to the International Criminal Court²⁷, raises the risk of reprisals against the State by the Malian Islamists.

The instability in Mali has spread beyond Nigerien borders and currently, it is believed that AQMI as well as MUJAO are present in practically the entire Nigerien territory, with fatal consequences. Determined to avoid the spread of jihadists, and being a military ally of the west, especially of Paris and Washington, Niger has become a target of both terrorist groups²⁸.

In 2016, the principal active terrorist groups in Niger were²⁹:

- a) Boko Haram (BH),
- b) Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM),
- c) DAESH/IS,
- d) Movement for the Unity and Jihad in West Africa (MUJAO, in its French acronym)
- e) Ansar al Dine
- f) Macina Liberation Front

BH and the terrorists from the Daesh franchise in West Africa repeatedly crossed the border of Nigeria to launch several attacks on the region of al Sur. The terrorists also crossed the Mali border to attack security forces and civilians in the regions of Tillabery and Tahoua in the northwest.

Regarding Daesh, it is increasing and extending its presence in the country. Not in vain, the French secret services have already warned its government of a new tendency among jihadists emerging in France: The preference of Libya over Syria or Iraq to join Daesh ranks. The new jihadists who have left Europe are being joined by those who were already in Syria or Iraq, whose territory they are leaving to go to Libya, mostly due to the setbacks the Islamic State is suffering.³⁰

On the border with Libya, the main problem for Niger is the Libyan region of Fezzan (to the southwest of Libya), converted into a transit area for all types of illegal trafficking, and of tribal disputes between the Tuaregs and the Tubus for control of these routes and of oil fields. Thus, the Minister of the Interior of Niger went to France and to the United States to request an

²⁷ On 26 September 2015, Ahmad Al Mahdi Al Faqi (Abu Tourab), was turned over to the International Court of Justice (ICJ) by the Nigerien authorities, as per an arrest warrant ICJ of 18 September 2015. He is accused of war crimes allegedly committed in Timbuktu (Mali) between 30 June 2012 and 10 July 2012, deliberately leading attacks against buildings dedicated to religion or historical monuments. This is the first case taken before the ICJ for the destruction of buildings dedicated to religion and to historical monuments. <https://www.icc-cpi.int/legalAidConsultations?name=pr1154>.

²⁸ United States Department of State. 2017. «Country Reports on Terrorism 2016-Niger». Washington: Department of State, July, p. 45.

²⁹ Ibidem.

³⁰ (SIMON, 2017), p. 3.

intervention in this southeastern region of Libya, claiming that “the south of Libya is a breeding ground for terrorists”. (Jeune Afrique, 2014)³¹.

The Islamic State in the Great Sahara (ISGS) is the main threat, with the demise of Boko Haram whom many consider already dismantled. It has nourished itself with young Nigeriens who, after being immobilized by the French Operation *Serval* (January 2013 to July 2014), have resumed their activities under the leadership of Abu Walid Al-Sahraoui, former leader of the MUJAO which is the combating group in the western region of the country³².

Counterterrorism

With foreign aid, the Nigerien military continued increasing their capacity to patrol, obtain information, and forbid freedom of movement to the terrorists in the north of the country³³. The Nigerien inter-institutional organization against terrorism is the Central Service for the Fight against Terrorism (SCLCT), which includes an independent operation cell in the capital of the region of Diffa, where most of the terrorist attacks take place.

Throughout 2016, the SCLCT detained over 1,400 suspects (including 70 minors) with charges that included planning of terrorist actions, association with a terrorist organization, recruitment, and financing terrorism. Most of them are under judicial investigation³⁴.

Niger continues to receive assistance for the counter-terrorist fight from several international partners, including the United States, the European Union, France, and the United Nations.

On the southern flank, on February of 2015, the Nigerien government declared a State of Emergency in the southeastern region of Diffa as a result of a series of attacks and assassinations against civilian objectives by the Nigerian terrorist group Boko Haram (see details in the Chronology Annex at the end of this chapter). Also, Niamey deployed 3,000 soldiers, backed up by another 2,000 Chadians.

Deradicalization

Although Niger does not have a national action plan for Countering Violent Extremism (CVE), its strategy against violent extremism is included in the Strategy for Development and Security in Sahel-Saharan area (SDSS), directed towards improving security through access to economic opportunities and to employment, in particular for youngsters; access

³¹ (SIMON, 2017).

³² Interview of the Minister of the Interior, Mohamed Bazoum. *Le Monde Afrique* (15 September 2017).

³³ (United States Department of State, 2017), p. 45.

³⁴ (United States Department of State, 2017) Chapter 2. Country Reports: Africa.

to basic social services; good political management at the local and community authorities level; and the reintegration of the forced repatriates from Algeria, Ivory Coast, Libya, and Nigeria. The SDSS was created five years ago, with the support of the United States Agency for International Development, and it has collaborated in reducing the risk of instability and increasing resilience to violent extremism through activities such as strengthening moderate voices; not allowing messages from extremists on radio, social networks, and civic education; and working with those religious leaders who encourage religious tolerance and the pacific solution of conflicts³⁵.

At the end of 2016, an amnesty process for Boko Haram reformed terrorists was started. Up to 150 former militants have been taken into a camp where the deradicalization process takes place. They start with a religious education program through which it will hopefully be possible to teach them an Islam that can bring them out of their blindness³⁶.

Judicial Aspect

Niger's law criminalizes terrorist actions in accordance with international instruments against terrorism. The security and judicial services are very active in the detection, deterrence, and prevention of terrorism; nevertheless, the lack of sufficient troops, financing, and equipment make their task more difficult. The investigations against terrorism in Niger are mainly the responsibility of the SCLCT (Central Service for the Fight Against Terrorism), made up of representatives from the three security forces: National Police, National Guard, and the Gendarmerie³⁷.

Border Porosity

Niger's wide borders (over 5,800 km) and the extensive areas of arid land make border security a real threat, particularly in the north, along the borders with Algeria, Libya, and Mali. These borders are very difficult to patrol, and they are exploited by traffickers. Niger has tried to improve its border security by increasing the number of border control posts, and it has requested the aid of its allies to build and equip these facilities.

Governance/Rule of Law

The lack of good governance and the consequent absence of the application of the Rule of Law are causes for destabilization. As has been happening in

³⁵ (United States Department of State, 2017).

³⁶ Interview to the Ministry of the Interior, Mohamed Bazoum. *Le Monde Afrique* (15 September 2017).

³⁷ (Secretary General (SG) of the United Nations, 2017), p. 5.

the neighboring States, corruption and the lack of transparency discredit the government. In addition, there is the vast size of the country.

In a context of the political instability and weakness of its institutions, according to most international indicators of governability, along with the systemic levels of corruption permeating all levels of society in Niger –although in practice, companies and citizens report less experience of corruption than in other countries in the region– Niger occupies position 101 out of 174 countries regarding transparency. Corruption adopts many forms, which go from petty and bureaucratic corruption to political corruption, and the enormous lack of training and resources plus the abuse of power by police and security forces are areas of serious concern, which are undermining domestic stability in a context of volatile insecurity.

Issoufou's government assumes the commitment to face the challenges of generalized corruption as a priority. New institutions against corruption have been created; a telephone number has been made available to receive reports of corruption, and the Constitutions of 2010 include the declaration of personal property by government civil servants, and greater transparency in handling natural resources. However, the credibility of this commitment is currently subject to questioning due to recent events, including the purchase of luxury jets by a member of the government and the constant reports of corruption against the government's top-ranking ministers³⁸.

Regional and International Cooperation on Defense and Security

Community of Sahel-Saharan States (CEN-SAD)

The CEN-SAD was created in 1998, and since then, it has grown to include 27 members in order to achieve economic integration through a free-trade and customs union area. Securing these objectives is unlikely, since several of its members are part of other free trade and monetary union agreements: Niger was one of its founders along with Burkina Faso, Chad, Libya, Mali, Niger and Sudan.

Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS/CEDEAO - Communauté Économique des États de l'Afrique de l'Ouest)

ECOWAS was created in 1975 by 15 countries in West Africa, with the aim of promoting regional economic integration, including a free trade area, which, to this date, is still under negotiation. The member States signed a non-aggression and mutual defense Protocol; at the same time, the organization also sent peacekeeping forces in response to the constitutional crises of its members.

³⁸ CHÊNE, Marie (2017) «Overview of corruption in Niger». Transparency International.

Niger is a member of the ECOWAS Standby Force (ESF), one of the five regional brigades established by the AU as an *African Standby Force* (ASF).

G5-Sahel

In 2014, Niger joined Chad, Mali, Mauritania, and Burkina Faso to create the G5-Sahel with the aim of combating terrorism and trafficking of human beings. In its first meeting (Uagadugu, Burkina Faso, 1 November 2015), the Chiefs of Defense of the G5-Sahel and France signed the Rules of Procedure of the Military Association for Cross-border Cooperation (PMCT³⁹).

During the first meeting of the Managing Committee of the Program of the UNODC for the Sahel (Dakar, Senegal, 12-13 April 2015) the representatives of the G5-Sahel and of other countries in the Sahel and the Maghreb agreed to focus on the foreign terrorist combatants, the treatment of children connected with terrorist groups, crimes related to wild flora and fauna and forest crimes, trafficking of cultural goods, trade in human beings and illegal trafficking of migrants.

Multinational Joint Task Force

The Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) is an offensive mechanism for stabilization whose objective is to combat Boko Haram and other terrorist groups that operate in the surroundings of Lake Chad. Its creation with the present-day structure was decided at an extraordinary Summit of the Heads of State and Government of the Lake Chad Basin Commission (LCBC), and Benin, (Niamey, Niger, 7 October 2014). On 25 November 2014, the Peace and Security Council (PSC) of the African Union (AU) fully backed its activation. However, it was not until 29 January of 2015 when the PSC formally authorized the deployment of the MNJTF for a period of 12 months; the mandate was renewed on 14 January 2016.

The regional military offensive, led by the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) and the national armies of Cameroon, Chad, Niger, and Nigeria have achieved remarkable progress in the fight against Boko Haram. However, the MNJTF is still facing the same financial difficulties that hindered the beginning of its operations, among them everything related to the exchange of information, logistic issues (particularly medical evacuation), and equipment⁴⁰.

The European Union

France

On Niger's request, Paris decided to give support with a DLAO (*Détachement de Liaison et d'Appui Opérationnel* in its French acronym – *Liaison and*

³⁹ PMCT: *Partenariat Militaire de Coopération Transfrontalière*.

⁴⁰ United Nations Secretary General (SG). 2017. «Report from SG on the activities in the region of the Lake Chad Basin» S/2017/764. New York: United Nations, 7 de September, p. 1.

Operational Assistance Detachment) in Tallabéri (Western region). This is a group of between 50 and 80 Special Operations men with the capability to pilot aircrafts in air-ground attack missions.

The French force *Barkhane* (about 4,000 soldiers) deployed in the five countries in the Sahel. In addition, it has 4 *Mirage 2000* fighters and 5 *Reaper* drones, tasked with obtaining information. The French soldiers are also stationed in Madama (to the north next to the border with Libya), and in Diffa (in the southeast).

The United States

In November 2005, Niger was declared one of the 23 candidate States (13 of which were in Africa) to receive an increase in development aid from the *US Millennium Challenge Account*, due to the application of satisfactory political and economic measures⁴¹. This fund finances programs to reduce poverty.

The United States considers Niger a strategic ally from a military point of view, within its program against terrorists in the Sahel, which has been active since 2005. It also supports the proposals of US AFRICOM to increase and make the most of capabilities, and to create a Gendarmerie of Border Security and an Antiterrorist Company.

Security Governance Initiative (SGI)

This initiative from the American presidency emerged on 6 August 2014, to offer to six countries a greater rapprochement to the principle of assistance to the security: Ghana, Kenya, Mali, Niger, Nigeria, and Tunisia. It focuses on security institutions (military and civilian), and on the ministerial functions that provide state control of the security industry. The SGI programs are different in every country. The initial expenditure was 65 Million Dollars⁴².

The United States is about to finish an air base in Agadez which will be the largest in the Sahel⁴³.

Germany

In 2016, Niger and Germany concluded negotiations to establish a German base for medical support to aid operations in Niamey, and an air-transport military base to support the UN military mission (MINUSMA)⁴⁴.

⁴¹ *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment - West Africa*. Abril 2016, p. 7.

⁴² <https://obamawhitehouse.archives.gov/the-press-office/2014/08/06/fact-sheet-security-governance-initiative>.

⁴³ <http://sahel-intelligence.com/9144-lutte-antiterroriste-la-ministre-allemande-de-la-defense-au-niger.html>.

⁴⁴ <http://www.jeuneafrique.com/362997/politique/niger-lallemagne-va-construire-base-militaire-appui-a-minusma-mali/>.

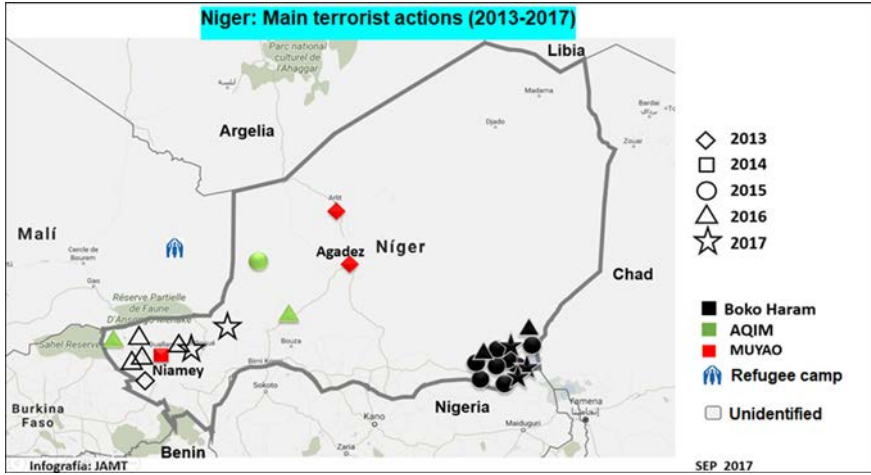


Figure 9.6 Main Terrorist Actions in Niger.

NIGER: GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS

| | |
|---|------------|
| Surface area (km ²) ⁽¹⁾ | 1,267,000 |
| Population (est. 2017) ⁽²⁾ | 21,477,000 |
| Growth rate (Annual % of the population 2005) ⁽¹⁾ | 3.9 |
| Infant mortality rate (per 1,000 inhabitants) ⁽²⁾ | 103.6 |
| Life expectancy (est. 2015) ⁽¹⁾ | 60.5 |
| GDP (2016; millions of Dollars) ⁽³⁾ | 20,670 |
| Annual rate (%) GDP growth (2015) ⁽³⁾ | 3.5 |
| Per capita income (Dollars) ⁽³⁾ | 370 |
| Defense Budget (Millions of Dollars, 2016) ⁽⁴⁾ | 98,577 |
| GDP % on Defense (2012) ⁽⁴⁾ | 2.2 |

(1) Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation. Country file.

(2) United Nations. World Population Prospects: 2017 Revision. p. 20.

(3) World Bank.

(4) SIPRI Military Expenditure Database.

Annex I

| NIGER (NER) : MAIN TERRORIST ACTIONS | | |
|---|---|--|
| DATE | DESCRIPTION | TROOPS |
| 2 0 1 3 | | |
| 23 MAY | First Attack with VIED in Niger At 5:30 h., a vehicle loaded with explosives (VIED) exploded next to barracks in Agadez (central region). Both attacks coincided with the decision of the Nigerien government to participate with troops in the United States mission in Mali (MINUSMA). | 23 d. <i>(1 civilian, 18 soldiers, and 4 kamikazes)</i> |
| | At the same hour, another car bomb (VIED) exploded in the mine at SOMAÏ (Société des mines de l'Air), exploited by the French group Areva in Arlit (250 km north of Agadez). The group Mouvement pour l'unicité et le jihad en Afrique de l'Ouest (MUJAO) claimed responsibility for both attacks, as did the group Signataires par le sang of the Algerian Mokhtar Belmokhtar. | 15 w. <i>(civil workers)</i> |
| 01 JUN | An unidentified armed group assaulted the civil prison of Niamey, freeing 22 detainees, most of them from Boko Haram. | |
| 2 0 1 4 | | |
| 30 OCT | An armed group attacked the prison of Ouallam (100 km north of Niamey), freeing many prisoners. The MUJAO later claimed it. | 2 d. <i>(wardens)</i> |
| 19 NOV | In the afternoon, the terrorists, after sabotaging the telephone network, attacked the town of Bani Bangou (on the border with Mali). Responsibility was later claimed by the MUJAO . | 1 d. and 2 w. |
| 2 0 1 5 | | |
| 6 FEB | First Boko Haram (BH) attack in Niger BH terrorists attacked the cities of Diffa and Bosso (Region of Diffa). A civilian was killed. | 1 d. <i>(civilian)</i> |
| 8-9 FEB | During the night, Boko Haram launched an assault, repelled by the Nigerien troops, on the prison of Diffa. The transfer to Niamey of about 30 prisoners, presumably jihadists, was being organized. An explosion preceded the attack. | 6 d. and ? w. |
| 25 ABR | At dawn, at the moment of the first prayer of the day, when the soldiers were performing their ablutions, Boko Haram attacked a military post (about 100 men) on the island of Karamga (Lake Chad). | 74 d. <i>(46 Nigerien soldiers and 28 civilians)</i> |
| 17-18 JUN | Boko Haram carried out attacks on the towns of Lamana et Ngoumao (a commune of Gueskérou, region of Diffa, to the southeast). | 38 d. <i>(civilians)</i> |
| 25 SEP | About 10 Boko Haram terrorists attacked the small village of N'Gourtouwa (Region of Diffa). | 15 d. <i>(civilians)</i> |
| 04 OCT | At 9 in the morning, 4 Boko Haram militiamen walked into 2 locations near the city of Diffa and detonated their explosive belts. | 10 d. <i>(1 gendarme, 5 civilians, and 4 kamikazes)</i> |
| 06 OCT | At 14:22 hrs., a group, possibly belonging to Al-Quaïda au Maghreb Islamique (AQMI) , of about 40 attackers (3 vehicles and a motorcycle) assaulted a Malian refugee camp in the region of Tasara (180 km. from the border with Mali). | 22 d. <i>(14 guards, 5 gendarmes, and 3 soldiers)</i> 5 w. <i>(soldiers)</i> |
| 27 OCT | Boko Haram terrorists attacked the small town of Ala (region of Diffa). | 13 d. <i>(civilians)</i> |

Niger: epicenter of conflicts

| 2 0 1 6 | | |
|---|---|--|
| 17 MAR | Armed men attacked a market in Dolbel (in the border with Burkina Faso). The attack was attributed to AQMI . | 3 d. <i>(gendarmes)</i> |
| 03 JUN | At sunset, close to 19:30 h.(the moment of prayer), hundreds of Boko Haram militants arriving in vehicles strongly armed and preceded by reconnaissance elements on motorcycles, carried out a massive attack on a military post in Bosso (next to the border with Nigeria). | 26 d. (24 Nigeriens and 2 Nigerians) and 112 w. (soldiers) |
| 16 JUN | Boko Haram terrorists attacked the security post in the small town of Ngagam (region of Diffa), subsequently carrying out looting of grain. | 7 d. <i>(gendarmes)</i> |
| 10 SEP | Unknown assailants attacked the refugee camp of Tabareybarey (region of Tillabéry). | 2 d. (civilians) |
| 06 OCT | A group of some 40 armed men assaulted a security post in the refugee camp of Tazalit (region of Tahoua). The assailants, who had accomplices among the refugees, belonged to communities in Gatia (region of Kidal, Mali), and would have left from a base located in Ilamawan (60 km. west of Midal, region of Tahoua). | 22 d. <i>(gendarmes, soldiers, and guards)</i> |
| 14 OCT | At about 21:00 h., armed men on a 4 x 4 kidnapped Jeffery Woodke (American and working for an NGO) in the locality of Abalak (region of Tahoua, 350 km. northwest of Niamey). The authorities attributed it to the MUJAO group. | 2 d. (national guard and warden) |
| 17 OCT | Strongly armed terrorists attacked the high-security prison of Koutoukalé (50 km. northwest of Niamey), considered the most secure in the country and where the most dangerous prisoners are, mainly jihadists. | |
| 08 NOV | In the early morning, assailants on motorcycles, escorted by a vehicle with a heavy machine gun, attacked military and police posts with rockets in the small town of Bani Bangou (20 km. from the border with Mali). Since the beginning of the conflict in Mali, this small town has been attacked by the MUJAO several times. | 5 d. (soldiers) |
| 2 0 1 7 | | |
| 22 FEB | At approximately 16:00 h., a military patrol was attacked by terrorist elements in Tilwa (region of Ouallam) Tillabéri. | 16 d. and 18 w. |
| 5 MAR | Unidentified armed men launched an attack against a detachment of the Gendarmerie in the area of Wanzarbé (to the southeast of the region of Tillabéri). | 5 d. <i>(gendarmes)</i> |
| 10 ABR | Boko Haram carried out a major attack against a post of the defense and security forces near Gueskerou (region of Diffa). | 13 d. (soldiers and civilians), 57 d. (terrorists) |
| 24? MAY | Attack against a police post in Abala (region of Tillabéri). | 3 d. (1 civilian and 2 policemen) |
| 01 JUN | Shortly after 19:00 h., a group of strongly armed men on four-wheel-drive vehicles, attacked a military post in Abala (region of Tillabéri), scenario of frequent jihadist attacks. | 6 d. (4 national guards and 2 gendarmes) |
| 28 JUN | Attack by two suicidal women against the refugee camp of Kabelawa (region of Diffa). It was attributed to Boko Haram . | 2 d. and 11 w. |
| 02 JUL | Around 20:00 h., several Boko Haram terrorists carried out an attack on Ngalewa (near Kabaléwa, north of Diffa). | 9 d. and 39 kidnapped |
| d: dead ; w: wounded Elaborated by the author. Sources: US Department of State <i>Country Reports on Terrorism 2016</i> and international press (<i>Le Monde, Jeune Afrique, ...</i>). | | |

Chapter ten

Nigeria, catalogue of conflicts

Jose María Santé Abal

Abstract

Nigeria, the first sub-Saharan economy, has a notable relevance for both Europe and Spain. But Nigeria is also an amalgam of armed conflicts stemming from social conflicts that effectively dissolve the possibility of attracting foreign investment. This work analyzes historical circumstances in the amalgamation of Nigeria as a country built on nothing, as well as the conclusions obtained in the research carried out by the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE) on the phenomenon of armed conflicts in Nigeria and the conditions that surround them.

Keywords

Nigeria, armed conflicts, Nigerian history.

Introduction

One of the principal challenges resulting from the decision to include a chapter dedicated to Nigeria in the Geopolitical Panorama of Conflicts 2017 was that of encompassing, within a space as reduced as that of this chapter, the immensity of the problem or problems affecting Nigeria from the point of view of her conflicts. The temptation would have been to include a chapter on each conflict, but turbulent current reality left no space for such profusion. The solution adopted was to initiate a research project whose results would progressively appear in successive analysis papers made available on the Website of the Spanish Institute for Strategic Studies (IEEE in its Spanish abbreviation), and which then appear in the IEEE Bulletin (Bie³), subsequently published by the Sub-directorate for Publications of the Ministry of Defense.

The final aim of this research was to collect the conclusions in the chapter dedicated to these effects in the Geopolitical Panorama of Conflicts 2017. Within this project there was also included the work which this author was presenting in parallel form in the publication of another research project dedicated to violence on the planet's seas, led by Admiral del Pozo, and which would be published on the Website of the IEEE under the title "Violent Seas"¹, specifically, contained in a chapter on Nigerian piracy in the Gulf of Guinea.

As a result, the chapter herein presented contains not only a historical introduction to the origins of Nigeria as a nation, permitting us to learn of its relation to the situation currently pertaining in the country, but, as well, the conclusions reached in the analysis carried out on its conflicts in particular, published in the series of IEEE analysis documents under the generic title, "Nigeria, Catalogue of Conflicts". As is logical, following the outline of presentation proper to this paper, not forgotten will be the realization of a short analysis of the possible external actors who may influence, in one way or another, the development of these conflicts, before presenting the final conclusions of the research.

Nigeria, a country located in the heart of the Gulf of Guinea, has been, since 2014, the prime sub-Saharan economy with regard to its GDP. It has a surface of 910,768 km² and a population of 186 million, nearly double the surface of Spain and about 4 times its population. Mountainous terrain is scarce in the country, and its topography could be described starting from the mango groves on the coast, very abundant in the area of the delta of the Niger River, from which the terrain turns into hills and table-lands which evolve into broad savannah plains in the north of the country. The only mountainous area is located in the northwest of the country, although the

¹ SANTÉ José M^º, "Gulf of Guinea: Nigerian Piracy") in DEL POZO, Fernando (Dir.) *et al*, *Violent Seas, Working Document of the IEEE 07/2017*, Oct. 2017.

heights this reaches are not of great altitude.² The jungles are concentrated along the coastline, on the banks of the Niger and in the northeast of the country, coinciding with that mountainous topography³. The Niger delta is a marshy area, full of mango groves, whose rich biodiversity is coming under heavy pressure from pollution.

Nigeria is a food importer, as its own production is insufficient⁴. A country which was once a food exporter is today an importer, due to the low productivity of a sector which employs 70% of the working population and represents 17% of the GDP⁵. The distribution of electricity in the country only reaches 45% of the population⁶ and the land communication infrastructure is extremely deficient⁷. Despite the foregoing, Nigeria generates a huge volume of trade across its borders with neighboring countries⁸, more than 60% of it outside the control of Customs. The level of diversification in the Nigerian economy is very low, with a 70% dependence on petroleum production⁹ and enormous limitations which hinder the proper exploitation of the benefits of an oil and gas production¹⁰ appropriate for an OPEC member country¹¹. Significantly, Nigeria is the world's tenth nation in terms of proven reserves of crude and ninth in natural gas¹². At the present time, Nigeria's economy has been in recession for nearly two years¹³, and the conclusions of analysts

² JANE'S "Nigeria-Geography", *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment-Central Africa*, IHS, 26 Aug. 2016, available at: <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1305554> [viewed: 08 Sept. 2017], p.1.

³ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴ *Ibid.*, *op. Cit.*, p.3.

⁵ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS—FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, "Country Profile: Nigeria", Library of Congress, July 2008, available at <https://www.loc.gov/rr/frd/cs/profiles/Nigeria.pdf> [viewed: 12 Sept. 2017], p. 12. According to data from the CIA WorldFactbook reflected in the table of geopolitical indicators of this chapter, the percentage of GDP corresponding to agriculture would be 21%. CIA, "Nigeria", *TheWorldFactbook*, *Central Intelligence Agency*, 10 Nov. 2016. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> [Viewed: 08 Sept.2017]

⁶ CIA, "Nigeria", *op. cit.*

⁷ JANE'S "Nigeria-Infrastructure". *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central Africa*, IHS, 14 Oct. 2016, available at: <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302610> [Viewed: 08 Sept. 2017], p.1.

⁸ HOFFMAN LeenaKoni and MELLY Paul, "Nigeria's Booming Borders. The Drivers and Consequences of Unrecorded Trade", Executive summary, Chatham House, Dec. 2015, available at:<https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/20151207NigeriaBoomingBordersKoniHoffmanMellyExecSum.pdf>[Viewed: 08 Sept. 2017], p.1.

⁹ ROUTLEDGE, "Nigeria's security under Buhari", *Strategic Comments*, Vol.22, N° 6. Routledge, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/13567888.2016.1229389, ISSN: 1356-7888 (Online), p.iii.

¹⁰ CIA, *op. cit.*

¹¹ Acronym in its English-language abbreviation, Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS-FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

¹² CIA, *op. cit.*

¹³ THE WORLD BANK, "GDP per capita growth (annual %)", World Bank, 2017, available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?locations=NG> [viewed: 4 Sept. 2017].

at IHS Jane's and the CIA as to a possible recovery are not as optimistic as those of the Nigerian government itself, due to the structural problems of this economy, infrastructure deficiencies, and the lack of diversification¹⁴. In the years 2005 and 2006, Nigeria had already undergone processes of cancellation of debt in view of the asphyxiating pressure of the latter¹⁵.

The Nigerian population is distributed among nearly 250 ethnic groups, although those predominant are the Hausa-Fulani (29%) who dwell in the north of the country, the Yoruba (21%) who occupy the southwest, the Igbo (18%) and the Ijaw (10%), these latter being predominant in the southeast¹⁶. Fifty per cent of the population is Moslem and forty percent Christian¹⁷. Barely 60% of the population over the age of 15 is literate¹⁸, and approximately 70% of the population lives in extreme poverty¹⁹. Bertelsmann Stiftung estimates at nearly 80% of the population those living on less than 2 dollars a day²⁰. The greatest poverty in the country is concentrated in the north, where the majority religion is Islam and the predominant ethnic group is the Hausa-Fulani²¹. In contrast to this rural and poor north stand the Nigerian macro-cities, where greater development is seen in the high index of mobile telephone users²², a noteworthy cinema industry²³, and the capacity to develop its own satellite²⁴.

The country is divided into 36 Federal states, in 12 of which the application of the Sharia has been legalized²⁵. The President of the country is the Head of State and of the Government; and the legislative body, organized into two chambers, is subject to popular suffrage, as is the Presidency. The judicial system holds an apparent independence from the other powers²⁶. Both

¹⁴ JANE'S "Nigeria-Economy". *Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central Africa*, HIS, 14 Oct. 2016. Available at: <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302622> [Viewed: 12 Sept. 2017], p. 1 and CIA, *op. cit.*

¹⁵ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 15.

¹⁶ CIA, *op. cit.*

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁹ *Ibid.*

²⁰ BERTELSMANN STIFTUNG, "Nigeria Country Report", BTI 2016, Gütersloh, BertelsmannStiftung, 2016, available at https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/files/BTI/Downloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI_2016.Nigeria.pdf [viewed 8 Sept. 2017], p. 12.

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

²² CIA, *op. cit.*

²³ VAL CUBERO Alejandra, "Nollywood. The millionaire home video industry in Nigeria." *El País, Ediciones El País*, 14 Feb. 2014, available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2014/afrika/afrika-no-es-un-pais/1392361200_139236.html [viewed: 08 Sept. 2017].

²⁴ BOLANOS MARTÍNEZ Jorge, "Nigeria and the Gulf of Guinea: Uncertain protagonists of insecurity in Africa", Chapter IX in BALLESTEROS Miguel Angel *et al.*, *Panorama Geopolítico de los conflictos 2012, IEEE*, MADRID, Ministerio de Defensa, 2013, ISBN 978-84-9781-790-5, available at: [http://iee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama geopolitico 2012.pdf](http://iee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_geopolitico_2012.pdf) [viewed: 08 Sept. 2017], p. 235.

²⁵ CIA, *op. cit.*

²⁶ *Ibid.*

the judicial system and the Administration are highly ineffective²⁷ and are subject to corrupt practices²⁸, which affect every aspect of life in the country.

Antecedents of the conflict. History of Nigeria.

Although, following the general format of this paper, the title of this section could lead to the thought that it deals with only one conflict, nothing could be further from the truth. Nigeria, just as the title of this chapter indicates, is truly a catalogue of conflicts.

Throughout this section, an attempt will be made to present the historic antecedents which aid in understanding why Nigeria is as it is and why what happens in Nigeria, happens. In any case, we should not go too far back in history, for Nigeria is barely a sexagenarian as a State²⁹ and the principal events influencing its conformation as such are confined to contemporary history.

Nonetheless, an attempt will be made to reflect, throughout this section, all those historical elements which may be related to the character of the Nigerians and to their current tendencies.

Although up to 250 different ethnicities co-exist in Nigeria, the predominant ethnicity in the north is the Hausa-Fulani, as indicated in the Introduction. The Hausa and the Fulani are not the same, despite the fact that traditionally they are usually grouped as a single ethnicity³⁰. The Hausa appear for the first time in History as an ethnic group towards the XII century, a time during which they founded up to seven city-States in the north of Nigeria, increasing their influence in the region progressively until the XVII century³¹.

Another local-majority ethnic group in the State of Borno is the Kanuri, who had settled in the region of Lake Chad around the XI century, founding the Kingdom of Borno³².

The third local-majority group in the northern zone of Nigeria is the Fulani, originally from Senegal, who entered progressively both into Hausa territory, around the XIII century, and into the Kingdom of Borno around the XV century. The Fulani were fundamentally herdsman, but their integration into these

²⁷ BERTELSMANN STIFTUNG, *op. cit.* pp. 6, 8.

²⁸ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

²⁹ Nigeria achieved its independence in 1960. LIBRARY OF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

³⁰ CRISIS GROUP, "Northern Nigeria: Background to conflict", *Africa Report N° 168*, International Crisis Group, 20 Dec. 2010, available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/northern-nigeria-background-conflict> [viewed 09 Sept. 2017], p. 2.

³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

³² *Ibid.*, p. 2.

territories ran parallel to their entrance into the Administrations in several different royal dynasties³³.

The Yoruba settled on the savannahs, or grasslands, found between the territories inhabited by the Hausa and the coast. Between the XI and XV centuries, the kingdom of Ife, located astride the savannah and the coastal jungle, is the reference for this ethnic group³⁴. Subsequently, it would be the Oyo Kingdom which in the XVI century would come to occupy the predominant place among the Yoruba, extending across the savannah between the Niger River and the territory where Togo is situated today³⁵. Contemporary with the Kingdom of Oya was the development of that of Benin, within the same strip of land but in the coastal jungles³⁶, leaving the "mother" city, Ife, between the two territories³⁷.

According to the chronicles of the explorer William B. Baikie³⁸, the Igbo ethnic group was found in the main, in the southwest, principally on the east bank of the Niger River. This ethnicity, whom some anthropologists relate to the Jews, lacked social stratification and was not organized into kingdoms, but dwelt in cities organized in accordance with patrilineal systems³⁹.

Between the XI and the XVII centuries, Islam was peacefully introduced by clergy and merchants into the territory of the Kingdom of Borno and the Hausa-Fulani city-States, and their kings progressively converted to Islam. At the beginning of the XIX century, a Fulani clergyman, Shehu Usman dan Fodio, led a jihadist movement which had as its objective the purification of Islamic practices in the region. With the support of Fulani nomads and of Hausas clashing with the despotic and corrupt system then in power in the various kingdoms, he managed to subjugate them and replace their monarchies with Fulani emirs, creating the Caliphate of Sokoto in 1809 upon the former Hausa kingdoms. Only the kingdom of Borno managed to resist. In this way, the Caliphate created a single cultural identity fusing Hausa and Fulani customs under the mantle of Islam in the majority of the territories in the north of Nigeria. In any case, neither was co-existence in the Caliphate peaceful⁴⁰.

³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 2-3.

³⁴ GASCOIGNE Bamber, "History of Nigeria", History World, available at: <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=plt> [viewed: 13 Sept. 2017].

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ OPENMIND FOUNDATION, "Nigerian History at a Glance", available at: http://www.openmindfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Nigerian_History_at_a_glance.pdf [Viewed: 13 Sept. 2017], p. 2.

³⁸ BAIKIE William B. "Narrative of an Exploring Voyage", London, Bradbury and Evans printers, 1856, available at https://ia600303.us.archive.org/4/items/narrativeofexplo00baik/narraativeofexplo00baik_bw.pdf [viewed: 13 Sept. 2017], p. 307.

³⁹ OPENMIND FOUNDATION, *op. cit.*, pp. 2-3.

⁴⁰ The information contained in this paragraph was taken from CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.* pp. 3-4.

Colonization

As has been possible to deduce, a Nigeria did not exist previous to the British. Not even the British administration managed to influence the indigenous population inhabiting this land to achieve recognition of a single political community⁴¹.

In 1861 the British, who since the beginning of the century had been exploring the territories of present-day Nigeria, and patrolling their waters to fight against the slave trade, annexed Lagos as a British colony. By then, British pressure on the slave trade was beginning to bear some fruit with the substitution of this trade by that of palm oil⁴². Commercial efforts towards the interior would bring with them the first contact with the Caliphate on the part of the Royal Niger Company, which had been granted an exclusive Royal Charter for trade on the Niger River and the Benue, its tributary. From then on, and until its dissolution in 1899, this company would be tasked with maintaining control of the region⁴³. The Conference of Berlin recognized British rights over the present-day territory of Nigeria in 1884. In 1893, it would be the territories of the delta region of the Niger which would fall under a British protectorate⁴⁴. Facing pressure from the French and Germans posted on the edges of the Nigerian territory, the British took the first steps towards the constitution of the Protectorates of the south, towards the end of the century, and of the north of Nigeria subsequently⁴⁵. At the beginning of the XX century, British troops under the command of Frederick Lugard appeared in the northern region, negotiating with some emirates and subjugating those who resisted, with the aim of integrating them into a Protectorate⁴⁶. In 1906 the conquest had been completed and both the Kingdom of Borno and the Caliphate of Sokoto had come to make up the Protectorate of the north of Nigeria⁴⁷.

Unlike what would happen in the south of Nigeria, where the conquest would last until 1909 with the Igbos playing the leading role in the final struggles⁴⁸, the British, following the conquest of the north of Nigeria, were very careful not to interfere in the social structures, the religion or the culture of the

⁴¹ AYUA Ignatius-Akaayar and DAKAS Dakas J.C., "Federal Republic of Nigeria", *Forum of Federations*, available at: http://www.forumfed.org/libdocs/Global_Dialogue/Book_1/BK1-C08-ng-AyuaDakas-en.pdf [viewed 12 Sept. 2017].

⁴² GASCOIGNE Bamber, *op. cit.*

⁴³ BOURNE, Richard, *Nigeria. A new History of a turbulent Century*, London, Zed Books, 2015, ISBN 978-1-78032-907-9, pp. 6-9.

⁴⁴ GASCOIGNE Bamber, *op. cit.*

⁴⁵ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DEVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 3.

⁴⁶ BOURSE Richard, *op. cit.*, p.3.

⁴⁷ GASCOIGNE Bamber, *op. cit.*

⁴⁸ BOURNE, Richard, *op. cit.*, p. 11.

region, although they introduced significant changes of a political, judicial and cultural nature⁴⁹.

In this way, the aristocracies were removed from control, giving way to a new political class, and the judicial power was separated from the control of the emirs and the Caliph, including the Islamic judges. But while the British Empire limited the power of the emirs, at the same time it based itself on them in order to exercise what might be called indirect administration. This system functioned relatively well where there already existed a previous powerful emirate administration, but produced the opposite effect in other areas with less implantation of the emirate, in which there coincided concentrations of ethnic minorities. The reinforcement of the British Administration indirectly, through the Hausi-Fulani majority, meant a greater imposition of the system on these areas, which reacted in rebellious fashion, even embracing Christianity as a way of reaffirming their own identity. Although the British had limited the advance of Christian missionaries and their schools into the territories formerly controlled by the Caliphate, as stated above, the said territories did not possess a clear delimitation. In areas of a Hausa-Fulani majority, the British encouraged a policy of non-intermarriage, or if preferred, of differentiation⁵⁰.

The independence that this form of administration gave to the emirs was notable. They were able to maintain their own fiscal system and only had the obligation to turn over a part of their funds to the British Administration. The north of Nigeria, with a greater population and land surface, produced less income for the Crown than did the south of the territory⁵¹.

At the same time, within the Hausa-Fulani community, there existed two majority brotherhoods which disputed power: Quadiriyya and Tijaniyya. During the colonial period, the brotherhood which was held by the aristocracy was the former. It would attempt to come to an understanding with the colonizers in order to maintain its hierarchical position, which would impel the Tijaniyya to initiate an approach to the political leaders who were in opposition to this aristocracy and against the Westernization which British colonization represented⁵².

On the other hand, the persistence of the memory of the Caliphate and its cultural stamp gave rise to a feeling of pride and heritage which bestowed upon the majority community of the region, the Hausa-Fulani, a feeling of cohesion, reinforced by the special treatment that the British were giving to this region⁵³. As seen above, the way in which the British imposed their

⁴⁹ CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.* pp. 4-5.

⁵⁰ The information contained in this paragraph was taken from CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, pp. 4-5.

⁵¹ BOURNE, Richard, *op. cit.*, pp. 12, 37.

⁵² *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁵³ *Ibid*, p. 4.

administration sowed the seeds of some elements of friction which normally appear in political rhetoric related to Nigerian social conflicts: ethnic-religious confrontation, confrontation regarding the Western system, confrontation against the governing elites and reaffirmation of the Hausa-Fulani majority.

Although the British respected the co-existence of the Sharia with the judicial system they had imposed, little by little they set about limiting its range, circumscribing it to civil jurisprudence, and at the local level. Shortly before independence, the government of the northern region, heir to the emirate governments, agreed to the establishment of a Sharia Court of Appeals with jurisdiction only over the Moslems⁵⁴.

One of the greatest problems, if not the most serious in the long term, which drags down the north of Nigeria is that of formal education (regulated). The levels of literacy of this region are today the lowest in the country and the numbers worsen as one moves further north. To the chronic difficulties in the region for access to a Western education is added the fact that many parents choose a Koranic education for their sons due to considering that this includes moral principles which the former lacks. One of the problems that this decision carries with it is the lack of preparation of the young for entry into the labor market, since Koranic education lacks the foundations of such preparation⁵⁵. To this must be added the problems related to the abuses and the criminality that this type of unregulated education carries with it both in Nigeria⁵⁶ and in many other countries of Central and West Africa as well⁵⁷. But the origin of the discrepancy in quality of education in the north and in the south is not only marked by the religious difference of the majorities, as may be deduced from the foregoing, but rather that the differences in colonial administration between the two areas also had a fundamental weight in this.

Throughout the colonial period, the territorial administration of Nigeria was modified on several occasions, which is symptomatic of the problems of the British in giving a certain harmony or sense to the said organization⁵⁸. In spite of the difference between the north and the south in the way in which the British Administration was imposed, in 1914 both Protectorates were fused into a single one, with no consultation of its population about this⁵⁹. The pressure brought to bear by the Germans and the French on both sides of the

⁵⁴ *Ibid*, p. 5.

⁵⁵ *Ibid*, p.10.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 10.

⁵⁷ For more information, a reading is recommended of RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ Patricia and DIEZ ALCALDE Jesus, "The "False Koranic Schools and the tragedy of infantile exploitation in Central and West Africa", *IEEE Opinion Document* 48/2017, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, May 4 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2017/DIEEE048-2017_Falsas Escuelas Coreanicas Talibes P. Rguez-JDA.pdf [viewed: 12 Sept. 2017].

⁵⁸ GASCOIGNE Bamber, *Op. cit.*

⁵⁹ OPENMIND FOUNDATION, *op. cit.*, p. 5.

Nigerian territory forced this decision, which may be described as strategic⁶⁰. At the end of the colonial period, Nigeria was divided administratively into three regions, North, East, and West⁶¹, these last two being the heirs of the former region of the south, the first territory under a British protectorate. The tensions among the regions began to appear following World War II, becoming ever more evident as the colony received greater autonomy⁶², which makes it obvious that there would never have been a Nigeria without the firm intention of the British⁶³. But at the same time, the successive Constitutions that the British bestowed upon the colony strengthened the regional system⁶⁴.

From independence to the Constitution of 1999

Nigeria's independence was reached in 1960, the territory being divided into the three colonial administrative regions: North, East, and West. In each one of them a different party was dominant, being dominated in turn by the ethnic majority of the region, and which would compete for the central Administration⁶⁵. The political battle was based on the firm belief that the winner would impose his ethnic criterion on the rest⁶⁶.

The winning party in the struggle for central control was the one dominant in the north, directed by the Hausa-Fulani elite, the few who had had access to a Westernized education in the north. It was led by the Sultan of Sokoto and its political objective was the unification of the peoples of the north in order to achieve greater influence in the country with regard to the other two regions, that is to say, with regard to the rich Nigerian south, promoting Islam as the element of unification and of preservation of cultural identity. But its hegemony, its partiality in favor of the north and its imposition upon the minorities of the mid-Nigerian belt gave rise to a coup d'état directed at separating its party from power in Nigeria in 1966⁶⁷.

This coup was the spark which touched off the violent clashes between Christian and Moslem communities in the following years, especially between Igbos and Hausa-Fulani, giving rise to the secession of Biafra in the year 1967⁶⁸. The secession of Biafra was a step forward for the Igbos⁶⁹ which

⁶⁰ BOURNE Richard, *op. cit.*, p.13.

⁶¹ AYUA IgnatiusAkaayar and DAKAS Dakas J.C., *op. cit.*

⁶² GASCOIGNE Bamber, *op. cit.*

⁶³ BOURNE Richard, *op. cit.*, pp. 4, 79.

⁶⁴ BOURNE Richard, *op. cit.*, pp. xiv-xv.

⁶⁵ AYUA IgnatiusAkaayar and DAKAS Dakas J.C., *op. cit.*

⁶⁶ Read BOURNE Richard, *op. cit.*, pp. 78-79.

⁶⁷ The information contained in this paragraph is taken from CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 7.

⁶⁸ *Ibid*, p.8.

⁶⁹ LIBRARY IOF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

probably represented a dead-end street for the rest of the Nigerians, since in its territory were found the country's main petroleum fields⁷⁰.

That same year, the Northern region would be divided into 6 States (19 in the Constitution of 1999) in a dividing effort which would affect the whole territory, with the aim of mining the capacity for influence at a State level of the majority ethnicities, and thus protect the minorities⁷¹. The civil war of Biafra would end in 1970 with, according to estimates, between 1 and 3 million deaths among the Igbo population and around 3 million refugees and displaced persons⁷².

In the decades of the 70's and 80's, the Nigerian economy began to transform itself. From a rural model it turned into a model of heavy dependence on petroleum. The cotton sector underwent a dramatic fall which affected the textile industry of the north of the country, which would combine with other measures of industrial and economic disincentives, as well as the lack in electric energy, to strike deeply at the already poor economy of the country's north⁷³.

From the beginning of independence, assassination began to be an integral part of Nigerian politics, and impunity its faithful companion. Violent practices form part of electoral periods and the elimination of opponents as a result of these, also⁷⁴.

Another very helpful element in Nigeria for the elimination of political competition has been corruption⁷⁵. This practice and the progressive fragmentation of States have combined to produce a devastating effect from the point of view of inter-ethnic competition, upon serving as a trampoline to favor the minorities of the States integrating them and which became majorities in the States into which they were divided⁷⁶. In this state of things, those prejudiced by the corrupt political practices had no problem

⁷⁰ ROBERTS Martin, "Biafran support likely to remain limited but detention of secessionist leader will continue driving violent Nigerian protests", *Jane's IHS*, 13 January 2016, available at <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/jiwk34240-jiwk-2016>. [Viewed: 14 June 2017], p. 2.

⁷¹ CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 8.

⁷² LIBRARY OF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 4.

⁷³ The information contained in this paragraph was taken from CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, pp. 9-10.

⁷⁴ RAFIU OlaopaOlawale, OWOLABI Akinola and FOLASAYO Salaam Najeem, "The Nigerian state, political assassination and democratic consolidation: A historical exploration", *African Journal of Political Science and International Relations* Vol. 3 (2), Apr. 2009, available at <http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379787191-Rafiu%20et%20al.pdf> [Viewed: 12 Sept. 2017]. ISSN 1996-0832, pp. 158-159.

⁷⁵ AYUA IgnatiusAkaayar and DAKAS Dakas J.C., *op. cit.*

⁷⁶ For more information about the effects of federal atomization in Nigeria the reading is recommended of CRISIS GROUP "Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment", *CrisisGroupAfricaReport n° 119*, International Crisis Group, 25 Oct. 2006, available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/119-nigeria-s-faltering-federal-experiment.pdf> [Viewed: 12 Sept. 2017].

in admitting the successive coups d'état which seemed to wish to guarantee fairer practices. International pressure usually produced the opposite effect, favoring democratic advances in such a way that periods of military regime succeeded each other with up to three different democratic constitutions⁷⁷.

Since the Constitution of 1999

In 1999, President Obasanjo favored the creation of a new Constitution and the holding of elections. This new Constitution, with the atomization of States which it represented for Nigeria in general and for the Northern region in particular, represented a heavy loss of influence of the latter and a multiplication of the quantity of persons with access to the resources of the State, stimulating ethnic confrontations for access to these. In the mid-Nigerian belt, where the ethnic mix and the atomization of States permitted minorities to become majorities, the supremacy of the Hausa-Fulani block was brought into question, favoring inter-community ethnic-religious confrontation. To this must be added a growing participation of the clergy in the political debate, accentuating the religious version of the conflict⁷⁸. It may be stated that present-day Nigeria is characterized by the presence of a social discourse of the difference ever more accentuated.

The enormous dearth of qualified personnel, fruit of the limitations on formal education in the north of the country, was combined with other insufficiencies, increasingly acute, of investment, foreign and domestic, in the area. The failure of the rural economy produced migratory movements towards the great cities of the north which, incapable of absorbing the workforce due to the aforementioned limitations, has created a huge mass of unskilled unemployed⁷⁹. To all of the foregoing must be added the problems caused by the policy of indigenization, guaranteed by the Constitution which, combined with the progressive federal atomization taking place since independence, favors the ethnic majorities settled in the federal States over the immigrants coming from other States⁸⁰.

And if, to all of the elements described in the preceding paragraphs is added the gradual increase of the interference of religion in the political rhetoric of this period, with its corresponding quota of polarization of the latter⁸¹, an idea is easily grasped of the enormous risk existing within the multi-ethnic communities of the mid-Nigerian belt for a sharpening of the social conflicts on the basis of a political rhetoric which with great facility may mobilize major

⁷⁷ AYUA IgnatiusAkaayar and DAKAS Dakas J.C., *op. cit.*

⁷⁸ The information contained in this paragraph was taken from CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 9.

⁷⁹ *Ibid*, p. 11.

⁸⁰ *Ibid*, p. i.

⁸¹ *Ibid*, p.13.

groups of people to have recourse to violence⁸². The thousands of deaths as a consequence of protests by the Christians in Kaduna in the year 2000 regarding the possible reintroduction of the Sharia⁸³, are only one example of events which, as of today, may almost be classified as "habitual" due to the frequency with which they occur⁸⁴.

The stereotyped image of Nigeria is that of a north, poor, with no resources, illiterate and Moslem, as opposed to a south, rich, Westernized and Christian⁸⁵. There is no doubt that this, which forms part of the social discourse in Nigeria, does not favor the deactivation of social conflict in areas of the country where ethnic communities vie for resources⁸⁶. In addition, within the Moslem community itself, differences arise which carry with them problems of the favoring of elites which the British administration carried out during the colonial period in the north of the country. El-Zakzaky's Islamic Movement, considered a Shiite organization, which is increasing its adepts at a great rate⁸⁷, is probably an example of the consequences of the shaping of the Nigerian State in the north of the country during the British administration. The favorable reception of the imposition of the Sharia in the Moslem community of the 12 States in which it was adopted, also seems to be due to the social perception of the state of corruption of the governing elites in the north of the country⁸⁸.

And the fact is that corruption is a problem which has been present in Nigeria since independence, no matter who was governing⁸⁹. The origins of this date back to a colonial era in which the Nigerian civil servants themselves, even then, were trying to benefit themselves economically from their activities, setting the bases so that, once far from the control of the British, the Public

⁸² *Ibid*, p. 22. For more information on the role of political rhetoric in the evolution of social conflict towards violence, reading is recommended of SANTÉ José M^a, *Social conflicts: Towards the evaluation of risk*, Madrid, Ministry of Defense, 2017, ISBN: 978-84-9091-276-8, pp. 27-69.

⁸³ CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.* P. 13.

⁸⁴ For more information on the conflicts in the mid-Nigerian belt a reading is recommended of SANTÉ José M^a and ONOFRIO M^a Angel, "Nigeria, Catalogue of conflicts. The mid-Nigerian belt", *IEEE analysis document 41/2017*, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, 8 Aug. 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA41-

⁸⁵ CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 13.

⁸⁶ See CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 21.

⁸⁷ For more information reading is recommended of SANTÉ Jose M^a and BUSSANDRI Alberto, "Nigeria, catalogue of conflicts. The Nigerian Shiites and the conflict of Biafra" *.IEEE Analysis Document 54/2017*, 25 Sept. 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/ficheros/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA54-2017_Nigeria-Biafra-Chiitas_JMSA_Bussandri.pdf [Viewed: 26 Sept. 2017], pp. 10-12.

⁸⁸ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS –FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

⁸⁹ OGBEIDI Michel M., "Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria Since 1960: A Socio-economic Analysis", *Journal of Nigeria Studies Vol. 1, n^a 2*, Autumn 2012, available at: http://www.unh.edu/nigerianstudies/articles/Issue2/Political_leadership.pdf [Viewed: 15 Sept. 2017], p. 3.

Administration underwent a generalized sacking with total impunity⁹⁰. Although the majority of the changes of government, civil or military, were made with a promise to combat this blight, only on limited occasions has there been a real effort along these lines, the driving forces behind such efforts being rapidly deposed and the guilty set at liberty⁹¹.

The 12 States of the north of Nigeria in which the Sharia was reintroduced at the beginning of this century hold close to 53 million inhabitants⁹². The Sharia had been excluded from the Nigerian legal system in 1967 but the question came back into debate in all of the pre-Constitutional debates. With the Constitution of 1999, several Governors of the States of the north brought pressure to bear to achieve the return of the Sharia⁹³. The agreements reached permitted the application of the Sharia as a civil code, not criminal, through voluntary submission on the part of the Moslem population who desired this in place of the general civil code and with the Federal appeals Court as the superior organ, among whose judges there must always be three experts in Islamic justice⁹⁴. The country's extensive corruption, affecting as well the courts of justice, explains to a certain extent the popularity of the Islamic courts in the States of the north⁹⁵.

Current situation of conflict. Conditions in Nigeria

As explained in the introduction to this chapter, throughout this year of 2017, the IEEF has carried out exhaustive research on the phenomenon of the armed Nigerian conflicts deriving from social conflicts. This research was divided into two phases: the first dedicated to the study of Nigeria in general, with the aim of determining elements present in its society which have favored or are favoring the evolution of social conflicts into violence; and the second, dedicated to the analysis of the most important Nigerian conflicts with the aim of determining the influence of the said elements in the future of each one of these conflicts, in an individual manner.

The results of the first phase were published as IEEF analysis documents in March and October of 2017. The results of the second phase were published in another four IEEF analysis documents during the months of May, August and September of this same year, as well as in the chapter dedicated to Nigerian piracy in the working paper "Violent Seas", directed by Admiral Del Pozo and published in the month of October 2017.

⁹⁰ *Ibid*, p. 6.

⁹¹ Generals Ironsi, 1966; Murtala, 1975; and Buhari, 1983-85. *Ibid*, pp. 7-9.

⁹² CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. i.

⁹³ *Ibid*, pp. 15-16.

⁹⁴ AYUA Ignatius Akaayar and DAKAS Dakas J.C., *op. cit*

⁹⁵ LIBRARY OF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, *op. cit.*, p. 18.

In this section, the results obtained in the second phase of the research will be examined, to attempt to reach conclusions as to the impact that conditions present in Nigerian society are having or have had on the evolution into violence of the social conflicts present in Nigeria.

In the Niger delta conflict, analysis permits the conclusion that the Nigerian economic situation and the underdevelopment of the region are present among the conditions which surround the conflict. Equally, the lack of legitimacy of the State, mined by a galloping corruption very much present in the region and by highly inappropriate behavior by the Armed and Security Forces, has a definite impact on the rupture of the social contract. The capacity of action of the State in the exercise of the legitimate monopoly of violence is very limited as well, and the presence of militias, not only insurgents, but rather linked to politicians and influential persons at a local or regional level, is very common. Light arms are easy to obtain, and the processes of demobilization, disarming and reintegration of the insurgent militias has failed, thus potentiating the piracy in the waters of the Gulf of Guinea. There is a social discourse present in the Delta society of rejection towards petroleum activity, which is causing enormous pollution, having a major impact on the traditional economy of the region. This discourse, as well as the unjust sharing of the profits from the petroleum industry among the States of the country and the links of this to corruption, is incorporated into the political rhetoric of the dissident groups. At the same time, all of these discourses are strongly linked to the ethnic difference⁹⁶.

Poor management of resources, together with the endemic corruption on the part of politicians and the ethnic and cultural diversity between the Moslem north and the Christian south, generate an enormous economic and social breach between the two areas. The social contract, also broken in this part of the territory, favors the lack of legitimacy of the State and the need to belong to the group, normally identified with one's own ethnicity. The performance of the Armed and Security Forces, not exempt from corruption and disproportionate action, do not contribute to an improvement in this area, and their means and preparation do not seem to be at the level of the challenge presented by Boko Haram. The political jihadist discourse has found an echo in the social discourse of rejection of a corrupt State, which represents Western values and is associated with the ethnicities of the southern region of the country. Social discourse of the difference is very powerful and is brazenly employed by the jihadist political rhetoric. Reforms undertaken in the Armed Forces are being reflected in advances in control of the territorial expansion of Boko Haram with regard to its challenge to

⁹⁶ Recommended reading is SANTÉ José M^a and ROMERO DEL HOMBREBUENO Miguel, "Nigeria, catalogue of conflicts: The Niger Delta insurgency", *IEEE Analysis Document 27/2017*, 31 May 2017, available at: <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs.analisis/2017/DIEEEA27-2017 Nigeria ElencoConflictos JMSA-MiguelRomero.pdf> [Viewed: 15 Sept. 2017] and SANTÉ José M^a, "Gulf of Guinea. Nigerian Piracy", *op. cit.*

State action, which demonstrates the undeniable role of the exercise of the legitimate monopoly on violence on the part of the State in the control of the latter in the first instance. But if the remaining conditions are not addressed surely and soon, the problem will lie latent until the next outbreak of violence⁹⁷.

The mid-Nigerian belt, an enormous territory which lies between the 12 Moslem-majority States of the north and the Christian-majority States of the south, is an area of ethnic and religious mixture not exempt from clashes of great violence between its communities. In this territory, ethno-religious confrontation is constant, based on a strong social discourse of the difference and on legislation which shelters the corruption linked to access to power and to resources. Political rhetoric effectively incorporates the said social discourse because the absence of legitimacy and of capacity for action of the State implies that the guarantees of survival shift into membership in the group and the hegemony of the latter over the other ethnic groups. Ethnic militias are used not only as a way to defend the group, but, as well, to assault the others, and as the armed instruments of the politicians, in the face of the passivity of the Armed and Security Forces. The efforts of the current central Administration in harmonizing these militias and obliging them to work together and with the State Forces are producing positive fruit, but just as occurs in the conflict in the country's northeast, this will only achieve a partial pacification unless efforts are made to modify other conditions surrounding the conflict. For example, a Constitutional change designed to eliminate the advantages guaranteeing their own Magna Carta to the natives of each State and which strengthen the need to belong to the group, seems a major step previous to any effort at modification of the social discourse of the difference. Likewise, working to strengthen the social defensive mechanisms themselves, as opposed to recourse to violence based on psycho-cultural dispositions, represents another fundamental element in the resolution of this conflict⁹⁸.

The social conflict of Biafran separatism, reactivated in recent years on the basis of claims formulated during the secession and civil war in this territory in 1967, has a strong ethnic component. Every element present in Nigerian society and favoring the drift into armed conflict in the foregoing cases, is present in this conflict, with a single exception: social discourse in the Igbo ethnicity rejects violence as a solution to the conflict, which is causing political rhetoric itself to reject this option as well⁹⁹.

⁹⁷ Recommended Reading is SANTÉ José M^a and CRESPO Juan Carlos, "Nigeria, Catalogue of Conflicts": The challenge of Boko Haram", *IEEE Analysis document 50/2017*, 12 Sept. 2017, available at: [http://www.ieee.es/Galerías/ficheros/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA50-2017/Nigeria Boko Haram JMSA_Crespo.pdf](http://www.ieee.es/Galerías/ficheros/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA50-2017/Nigeria%20Boko%20Haram%20JMSA_Crespo.pdf) [Viewed: 15 Sept. 2017].

⁹⁸ Recommended reading is SANTÉ José M^a and ONOFRIO M^a Angel, *op. cit.*

⁹⁹ Recommended Reading is SANTÉ José M^a and BUSSANDRI Alberto, *op. cit.*

Another Nigerian social conflict which has also failed to evolve into violence, in the face of conditions similar to the rest, is that of the Shiite community. The need to be socially inclusive in order to gain adepts and the impossibility of access to power due to its minority character mean that it is neither productive nor pertinent for the political agents themselves to include violence as a recourse in their own discourse. In this way, the absence of defense mechanisms from society itself in its psycho-social dispositions is balanced by the uselessness of the incitement to violence of political rhetoric¹⁰⁰.

The role of external actors

Recent years have been characterized by the search for support among the Christian and Moslem communities of other countries on the continent, and even outside it. North American Evangelical communities work supporting Evangelical activity in Nigeria, at the same time as countries like Saudi Arabia, Sudan or Iran contribute economically to the expansion of Islam¹⁰¹. In the latter case, this is linked to the supposedly Shiite movement of El-Zakzaki¹⁰². Everything seems to point to the fact that in no few cases, some religious leaders exaggerate their discourse of difference with the aim of increasing their collection of international funds, but it also seems clear that on a number of occasions this financial support has come from the international networks propagating the violence¹⁰³.

In the Niger Delta conflict there does not seem to be outside influence. The need for stability in the exploitation of petroleum is giving rise to collaboration among the countries with economic interests in the area, always at the request of the Nigerian government¹⁰⁴.

In the conflict in the northeast of Nigeria, instigated by Boko Haram, the major external actors have been the jihadist terrorist organizations with global aspirations. Al Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb (AQIM) at its outset, and later Daesh, maintained major contacts with Boko Haram, but in both cases, they have ended by deteriorating into splinter groups due to indiscriminate attacks on the population at the direction of their leader, Abu Bakr Sekau¹⁰⁵. Outside

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹ CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁰² For more information, recommended Reading is SANTÉ Jose M^a and BUSSANDRI Alberto, *op. cit.*, p. 14.

¹⁰³ CRISIS GROUP, 2010, *op. cit.*, p. 23.

¹⁰⁴ SANTE José M^a and ROMERO DEL HOMBREBUENO Miguel, *op.cit.*, p. 22.

¹⁰⁵ Read ECHEVERRÍA, Carlos, "Consequences of the nth schism of Boko Haram for the future of the terrorist group", *Militant groups of radical ideology and violent character. Area of sub-Saharan Africa. IEEE Research Document n° 03/2017*, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerías/ficheros/docs_investig/2017/DIEEINV03-

collaboration with the Nigerian government on the part of foreign agents has been, in this conflict as well, at the request of the government itself. Initially these were with security contractors¹⁰⁶ and later with specific support from certain Western nations¹⁰⁷. Finally, the establishment of the Multinational Joint Task Force (MNJTF) between the Lake Chad basin countries and Benin, with agreement for the intervention of the Force irrespective of its flag in the territories of the affected countries, has had positive results, as it has left the terrorists without sanctuaries¹⁰⁸.

Although during the Biafran war there was a certain interventionism led by the U.S., the United Kingdom and France, the situation has changed a great deal today. The Biafran social conflict awakens no curiosity in the media and its international repercussions are very limited¹⁰⁹.

Conclusions and a Perspective on the Future

The history of the constituting of Nigeria as a State in the contemporary era on the basis of differing ethnic communities which had neither a desire nor a concept of what Nigeria as a nation represents today, and as a continuation of a peculiar process of colonization which established notable differences between the north and the south of Nigeria, has had a fundamental weight in the generation of social conflicts in a country which has failed, in its transition into independence, to guarantee the fundamental element which gives sense to a society as a nation, which is the security of the citizen. The economic problems and those of inequality, the lack of legitimacy of the State aggravated by large-scale corruption and its inability to exercise the legitimate monopoly on violence, nourish the need for belonging of a society which is, as well, unprepared to face up to its own conflicts without recourse to violence. The social discourse of the difference, anchored in the

¹⁰⁶ *International Ltd. STTEP – Special Tasks, Training, Equipment and Protection* was contracted by the government of Goodluck Johnatan to train Nigerian units and lead them in the fight against Boko Haram, as is explained in the reference document written by the President of the company himself. Its contract was to terminate at the end of President Johnatan's mandate, and as may be inferred from the said document, it is possible that its presence may have been contrary to North American interests. BARLOW Eeben, "The Rise, Fall and Rise Again of Boko Haram", *Harvard International Review*, 1 Feb. 2017, available at <http://hir.harvard.edu/artucke/?a=14477> [Viewed: 15 June 2017].

¹⁰⁷ For example, in August of 2017, Reuters published a news story according to which the Nigerian government had requested the purchase of material from the United Kingdom for the fight against Boko Haram, in which there is mention not only of the efforts of the British Army to train Nigerian troops but also other purchases carried out in the U.S. with this same purpose. MCKAY Hannah, "Nigeria asks Britain for gear to fight Islamists – Johnson", *Lagos, Reuters*, 29 –Aug. 2017, available at: <https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKCN1BC469-0ZATP> [Viewed: 15 Sept. 2017].

¹⁰⁸ SANTÉ José M^a and CRESPO, Juan Carlos, *op. cit.*, pp. 19-21.

¹⁰⁹ SANTÉ José M^a and BUSSANDRI Alberto, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-14.

same history of the constitution of the Nigerian State and the fears of the communities which form it of being dominated by the others, is so rooted in the population that political rhetoric not only is unable to resist the temptation of recourse to it in order to achieve its ends but has the necessity of doing so.

The conclusions reached in the first phase of the research into the conflicts of Nigeria permit us to declare that conditions observed to be present in each one of the individual armed conflicts are so as well in Nigerian society as a whole¹¹⁰. Analysis of the conclusions reached in the second phase lead us to state that only alterations in these conditions which invalidate the use of recourse to violence in political rhetoric precisely as happened in the Biafran conflict or in that of the Nigerian Shiites, permit avoidance of the evolution of the social conflicts into violence.

Overcoming the deficiencies in the capacity for action of the State to exercise the legitimate monopoly on violence has a short-term impact on the decrease of the armed conflicts. The rejection of violence in the social discourse may make recourse to it by the political rhetoric, and proposals to use it as a solution to the conflict, more difficult, as happens in the conflict of Biafra. The simple fact that political leaders do not consider it to be in their interests may achieve the same effect. But working on a single element is not a guarantee when the remaining conditions which normally favor the evolution of social conflicts into armed conflicts are present in the society. It is necessary to draw up a long-term plan to set about deactivating the said conditions one by one, until elimination is achieved of all of them, in order to be able to consider a society to be free from risk of conflicts¹¹¹.

The terrible consequences of the conflict in the northeast led by Boko Haram are not only associated with violence against the population, but threaten to give rise to an even more devastating impact such as is the current famine now being caused by the limitation on agricultural production and on surface communication which the conflict is producing, just as humanitarian organizations have been announcing since the beginning of the year 2017¹¹².

¹¹⁰ Recommended reading is SANTÉ, José M^a "Nigeria, catalogue of conflicts. Diagnostic of a society (II)", *IEEE Analysis Document*, 10 Oct. 2017.

¹¹¹ In the Geopolitical Panorama of Conflicts 2015, Blanca Palacián, IEEE analyst, came to similar conclusions. PALACIÁN Blanca, "Nigeria: domestic terrorism?", in BALLESTEROS Miguel A. (Dir.) et al., *Geopolitical Panorama of Conflicts 2015*, Madrid, Ministry of Defense, 2016, available at: <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama Geopolitico Conflictos 2015pdf> [Viewed 15 Sept. 2017], p. 348.

¹¹² See, for example, REUTERS/EP, "Nearly half a million children, at risk of suffering malnutrition in the east of Nigeria", Mایدiguri, Europa Press, 16 Feb. 2017, available at: <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-casi-medio-millon-ninos-riesgo-sufrir-desnutrición-nigeria-20170216141144.html> [Viewed: 12 Sept. 2017] or JURADO Ángeles, "Nigeria is a full-blown emergency", El País, 17 Feb. 2017, available at: <http://elpais.com/elpais/2017/02/15/planeta futuro/1487185399 740371.html> [Viewed: 12 Sept. 2017].

And the fact is that in every armed conflict, the consequences are much more devastating and prolonged in time than what is broadcast to us on the news, and the worst of it is that the majority of its victims are not combatants. This is why it is worth the effort to work, and to do so unceasingly, to try to learn the conditions favoring the conflict and fight to eliminate them.

The current Nigerian executive has initiated the long march towards elimination of these conditions, but the question which arises is whether the Nigerians themselves will continue fueling this effort or whether, on the contrary, they will turn their backs on it in the future. Normality seems to surround the activity of the Nigerian Executive under the leadership of vice-President Osimbajo during the prolonged absences due to illness of President Buhari since the beginning of 2017¹¹³. Despite the fact that the international press seems to reflect this idea, analysts at IHS Jane's advise of the risk of outbreaks of violence with regard to the possible substitution of President Buhari in the future¹¹⁴. Possibly what matters is not whether he is called Buhari, Osimbajo or something else, what is most important is that whoever is President, he be disposed to continue with the reforms necessary to modify the conditions favoring armed conflict in Nigeria, and along these lines be supported by an international community which to date has tried to stand beside the Nigerian government without interfering and lending its support only upon request.

Nigeria is of great significance for Spain and the EU, and will be even more so if armed conflicts are not given free rein throughout this country¹¹⁵. This should be argument enough for the mobilization of European machinery in support of those reforms which must give rise to a stable country, where economic development reaches its entire population.

¹¹³ Information published in the press since then points in this direction. See for example ONUAH Felix and LEASING Ulf, "Buhari's sickleave re-energizes Nigeria's presidency", Reuters, 1 Mar. 2017, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-politics-buharis-sick-leave-re-energizes-nigerias-presidency-idUSKBN16726E> [Viewed: 12 Sept. 2017].

¹¹⁴ ROBERTS Martin, "Succession concerns over Nigerian president's prolonged absence fuel sectarian and geopolitical rivalry, raising death and injury risks", HIS Jane's, 16 June 2017, available at: <http://www.janes.com/article/71501/succession-concerns-over-nigerian-president-s-prolonged-absence-fuel-sectarian-and-geopolitical-rivalry-raising-death-and-injury-risks> [Viewed: 12 Ssept. 2017].

¹¹⁵ One example of the growing importance of Nigeria for Europe is the gas pipeline through Morocco, a none-too-easy undertaking in a country where the gas and oil pipelines are the objective of insurgent militias. REUTERS, "Nigeria and Moroccosign gas pipeline dealto link AfricatoEurope", Reuters, 3 Dec. 2016, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/nigeria-pipeline-morocco/nigeria-and-morocco-sign-gas-pipeline-deal-to-link-africa-to-europe-idUSL8N1DY007> [Viewed: 15 Sept. 2017].

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS | |
|---|--|
| Total surface: 923,768 Km ² | |
| GDP: 406 billion \$ (est. 2016) | |
| GDP structure: (est. 2016) | Agriculture: 21.1 % |
| | Industry: 19.4 % |
| | Services: 59.5% |
| GDP per capita: 5,900 \$ (est. 2016) | |
| GDP growth rate: -1.5 (est. 2016) | |
| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS -NIGERIA | |
| Exports: 33,270 million \$ (est. 2016) | India 17%, The Netherlands 8.9 %, Spain 8.5 %, Brazil 8.5 %, South Africa 5.6 %, France 5.4 %, Japan 4.7 %, Ivory Coast 4.3 %, Ghana 4.2% (2015) |
| | Principal goods: Oil and derivatives 95 %, cocoa and rubber (2012 est.) |
| Imports: 36,400 million \$ (est. 2015) | China 25.9 %, USA 6.5 %, The Netherlands 6.1%, India 4.3 % (2015) |
| | Principal goods: Machinery, chemical products, transport equipment, manufactured products, food and cattle. |
| Population: 194,632 million (July 2017 est.) | |
| Age structure: (est. 2017) | 0 -14 42.54 % |
| | 14-54 50.35 % |
| | 54- 7.10 % |
| Growth rate of the population: 2.4 % (est. 20175) | |
| Ethnic groups: over 250 ethnic groups. | Hausa-Fulani 29 %, Yoruba 21%, Igbo 18 %, Ijaw 10 %, Kanuri 4 %, Ibio 3.5 %, Tiv 2.5 %, etc. |
| Religions: | Muslims 50 %, Christians 40 %, indigenous beliefs 10 %. |
| Literacy rate: 59.6 % (est. 2015) | |
| Population below the threshold of poverty: 70 % (est. 2010) | |
| Communications and information systems: (est. 2016) | Less than 1 fixed telephone line per 100 inhabitants as against 83 mobile phones. |
| Military expenditure: 0.43 % of GDP (2016) | |

Created by the author

Source: CIA, «Nigeria», *op. cit.*

| CHRONOLOGY OF THE CONFLICT | |
|----------------------------|--|
| HISTORY OF NIGERIA | |
| DATE | EVENTS |
| 1809 | Creation of the Sokoto caliphate. |
| 1861 | The British annex Lagos as a British colony. |

| CHRONOLOGY OF THE CONFLICT | |
|----------------------------|---|
| HISTORY OF NIGERIA | |
| 1884 | The Berlin conference recognizes the rights of the British Crown over the territories of Nigeria. |
| 1893 | The British Protectorate of the South of Nigeria is founded. |
| 1906 | The British end the conquest of the north of Nigeria and the protectorate corresponding to the region is created. |
| 1914 | The only protectorate of Nigeria is created merging the north and south protectorates. |
| 1946 | Richards Constitution. Promotes regionalism but not elections. |
| 1951 | Macpherson Constitution. Promotes regionalism and introduces elections. |
| 1954 | Lyttleton Constitution. Authorizes the constitution of regional governments. |
| 1956 | Oil is found in Nigeria. |
| 1960 | Independence of Nigeria. |
| 1966 | Coup d'état. A period of a military government starts, during which several military coups take place. |
| 1967-1970 | Civil war in Biafra. |
| 1971 | Nigeria becomes a member of the OPEP. |
| 1979 | New Constitution and civil government guaranteed by General Olesegun Obasanjo. |
| 1983 | New coup d'état and beginning of a new period of military government during which several coups will take place. |
| 1986 | Nigeria becomes a member of the Organization of the Islamic Conference. |
| 1992 | Nigeria recognizes the State of Israel. |
| 1993 | Coup d'état which severs the expectations of a democratic transition. Dictatorship of General Abacha. |
| 1999 | Abacha dies. New Constitution and civilian government. Obasanjo is elected President. |
| 2006 | Yar'Adua is elected President. |
| 2010 | Yar'Adua dies and is substituted by his Vice President, Goodluck Johnathan. |
| 2011 | Goodluck Johnathan is elected President. |
| 2015 | Muhammadu Buhari is elected President. |

Bibliography

- AYUA Ignatius Akaayar and DAKAS Dakas J.C., *Federal Republic of Nigeria*, Forum of Federations, available at http://www.forumfed.org/libdocs/Global_Dialogue/Book_1/BK1-C08-ng-AyuaDakas-en.pdf [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- BAIKIE William B. «*Narrative of an Exploring Voyage*», London, Bradbury and Evans printers, 1856, available at: https://ia600303.us.archive.org/4/items/narrativeofexplo00baik/narrativeofexplo00baik_bw.pdf [Accessed: 13 Sep. 2017].
- BARLOW Eeben, «*The Rise, Fall and Rise Again of Boko Haram*», *Harvard International Review*, 1 Feb. 2017, available at <http://hir.harvard.edu/article/?a=14477> [Accessed: 15 Jun. 2017].
- BERTELSMANN STIFTUNG, «Nigeria Country Report», *BTI 2016*, Gütersloh, Bertelsmann Stiftung, 2016, available at https://www.bti-project.org/fileadmin/fiwnloads/Reports/2016/pdf/BTI_2016_Nigeria.pdf [Accessed: 08 Sep. 2017].
- BOLAÑOS MARTÍNEZ Jorge, «*Nigeria y el Golfo de Guinea: Inciertos protagonistas de la Inseguridad en África*», Chapter IX in BALLESTEROS Miguel Ángel et al., *Geopolitical Panorama of Conflicts 2012*, IIEE, Madrid, Ministry of Defense, 2013, ISBN 978-84-9781-790-5, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Panorama_geo-politico_2012.pdf [Accessed: 08 Sep. 2017].
- BOURNE Richard, *Nigeria. A new History of a turbulent Century*, London, Zed Books, 2015, ISBN 978-1-78032-907-9.
- CIA, «*Nigeria*», *The World Factbook. Central Intelligence Agency*, 10 Nov. 2016. Available at: <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/ni.html> [Accessed: 08 Sep. 2017].
- CRISIS GROUP «*Nigeria's Faltering Federal Experiment*», *Crisis Group Africa Report* n.º 119, International Crisis Group, 25 Oct. 2006, available at: <https://d2071andvip0wj.cloudfront.net/119-nigeria-s-faltering-federal-experiment.pdf> [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- CRISIS GROUP, «*Northern Nigeria: Background to conflict*», *Africa Report* Nº 168, International Crisis Group, 20 Dec. 2010, available at: <https://www.crisisgroup.org/africa/west-africa/nigeria/northern-nigeria-background-conflict> [Accessed: 09 Sep. 2017].
- EICHEVERRÍA Carlos, «*Consecuencias de la enésima escisión de Boko Haram para el futuro del grupo terrorista*», *Grupos militantes de ideología radical y carácter violento. Área del África Subsahariana*, Research Document of the IIEE n.º 03/2017, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_investig/2017/DIEEINV03-_Escision_BokoHaram_CEcheverria.pdf [Accessed: 30 May. 2017].

- GASCOIGNE Bamber, «*History of Nigeria*», History World, available at: <http://www.historyworld.net/wrldhis/PlainTextHistories.asp?ParagraphID=plt> [Accessed: 13 Sep. 2017].
- HOFFMANN Leena Koni and MELLY Paul, «*Nigeria's Booming Borders. The Drivers and Consequences of Unrecorded Trade*», Executive Summary, Chatham House, Dec. 2015, available at: <https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/publications/research/20151207NigeriaBoomingBordersKoniHoffmannMellyExecSum.pdf> [Accessed: 08 Sep. 2017].
- JANE'S «*Nigeria-Economy*». Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central Africa, IHS, 14 Oct. 2016. Available at: <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302622> [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- JANE'S «*Nigeria-Geography*», Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central Africa, IHS, 26 ago. 2016, available at: <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1305554> [Accessed: 08 Sep. 2017].
- JANE'S «*Nigeria-Infrastructure*». Jane's Sentinel Security Assessment – Central Africa, IHS, 14 Oct. 2016, available at: <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/1302610> [Accessed: 08 Sep. 2017].
- JURADO Ángeles, «*Nigeria es una emergencia con todas las de la ley*», El País, 17 Feb. 2017, available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2017/02/15/planeta_futuro/1487185399_740371.html [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- LIBRARY OF CONGRESS – FEDERAL RESEARCH DIVISION, «*Country Profile: Nigeria*», Library of Congress, Jul. 2008, available at: <https://www.loc.gov/frd/cs/profiles/Nigeria.pdf> [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- MCKAY Hannah, «*Nigeria asks Britain for gear to fight Islamists – Johnson*», Lagos, Reuters, 29 Aug. 2017, available at: <https://af.reuters.com/article/topNews/idAFKCN1BC469-OZATP> [Accessed: 15 Sep. 2017].
- OGBEIDI Michel M., «*Political Leadership and Corruption in Nigeria Since 1960: A Socio-economic Analysis*», Journal of Nigeria Studies Vol.1, nº 2, Fall 2012, available at: http://www.unh.edu/nigerianstudies/articles/Issue2/Political_leadership.pdf [Accessed: 15 Sep. 2017].
- ONUAH Felix and LEASSING Ulf, «*Buhari's sick leave re-energizes Nigeria's presidency*», Reuters, 1 Mar. 2017, available at: <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-nigeria-politics/buharis-sick-leave-re-energizes-nigerias-presidency-idUSKBN16726E> [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- OPENMIND FOUNDATION, «*Nigerian history at a glance*», available at: http://www.openmindfoundation.com/wp-content/uploads/2011/08/Nigerian_history_at_a_glance.pdf [Accessed: 13 Sep. 2017].
- PALACIÁN Blanca, «*Nigeria: terrorismo ¿doméstico?*», in BALLESTEROS Miguel A. (Dir.) et al., *Geopolitical Panorama of Conflicts 2015*, Madrid, Ministry of Defense, 2016, available at: http://www.iecee.es/Galerias/fio/panoramas/Panorama_Geopolitico_Confl.pdf [Accessed: 15 Sep. 2017].

- RAFIU Olaopa Olawale, OWOLABI Akinola y FOLASAYO Salaam Najeem, «*The Nigerian state, political assassination and democratic consolidation: A historical exploration*», African Journal of Political Science and International Relations Vol. 3 (2), Apr. 2009, available at: http://www.academicjournals.org/article/article1379787191_Rafiu%20et%20al.pdf [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017], ISSN 1996-0832.
- REUTERS/EP, «*Casi medio millón de niños, en riesgo de sufrir desnutrición en el este de Nigeria*», Maidiguri, Europa Press, 16 Feb. 2017, available at: <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-casi-me-dio-millon-ninos-riesgo-sufrir-desnutricion-nigeria-20170216141144.html> [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- ROBERTS Martin, «*Biafran support likely to remain limited but detention of secessionist leader will continue driving violent Nigerian protests*», Jane's IHS, 13 January 2016, available at: <https://janes.ihs.com/Janes/Display/jiwk34240-jiwk-2016> [Accessed: 14 Jun. 2017].
- ROBERTS Martin, «*Succession concerns over Nigerian president's prolonged absence fuel sectarian and geopolitical rivalry, raising death and injury risks*», IHS Jane's, 16 Jun. 2017, available at <http://www.janes.com/article/71501/succession-concerns-over-nigerian-president-s-prolonged-absence-fuel-sectarian-and-geopolitical-rivalry-raising-death-and-injury-risks> [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- RODRÍGUEZ GONZÁLEZ Patricia and DÍEZ ALCALDE Jesús, «*Las "falsas Escuelas Coránicas" y la tragedia de la explotación infantil en África Central y Occidental*», Opinion Document of the IEEE 48/2017, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, 4 May. 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fio/docs_opinion/2017/DIEEE048-2017_Falsas_EscuelasCoranicas_Talibes_P.Rguez-JDA.pdf [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- ROUTLEDGE, «*Nigeria's security under Buhari*», Strategic Comments, Vol 22, Nº 6. Routledge, 2016, DOI: 10.1080/13567888.2016.1229389, ISSN: 1356-7888 (Online).
- SANTÉ José M^a, *Conflictos sociales: Hacia la evaluación de riesgo*, Madrid, Ministry of Defense, 2017, ISBN: 978-84-9091-276-8.
- SANTÉ José M^a, «*Golfo de Guinea. Piratería Nigeriana*» en DEL POZO Fernando (Dir.) *et al.*, Mares violentos, Documento de Trabajo del IEEE 07/2017, Oct. 2017.
- SANTÉ José M^a «*Nigeria, elenco de conflictos. Diagnóstico de sociedad (II)*», Analysis Document of the IEEE, 10 Oct. 2017.
- SANTÉ José M^a and BUSSANDRI Alberto, «*Nigeria, elenco de conflictos. Los chiitas nigerianos y el conflicto de Biafra*», Analysis Document of the IEEE 54/2017, 25 Sep. 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA54-2017_Nigeria-Biafra-Chiitas_JMSA_Bussandri.pdf [Accessed: 26 Sep. 2017].

- SANTÉ José M^a and CRESPO Juan Carlos, «*Nigeria, elenco de conflictos. El de-safío de Boko Haram*», Analysis Document of the IEEE 50/2017, 12 Sep. 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA50-2017_Nigeria_BokoHaram_JMSA_Crespo.pdf [Accessed: 15 Sep. 2017].
- SANTÉ José M^a and ONOFRIO M^a Ángel, «*Nigeria, elenco de conflictos. El cinturón medio nigeriano*», Analysis Document of the IEEE 41/2017, Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies, 8 Aug. 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA41-2017_Cinturon_medio_nigeriano_JMSA-MAngelOnofrio.pdf [Accessed: 12 Sep. 2017].
- SANTÉ José M^a and ROMERO DEL HOMBREBUENO Miguel, «*Nigeria, elenco de conflictos: La insurgencia en el Delta del Níger*», Analysis Document of the IEEE 27/2017, 31 May 2017, available at: http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2017/DIEEEA27-2017_Nigeria_ElencoConflictos_JMSA-MiguelRomero.pdf [Accessed: 15 Sep. 2017].
- THE WORLD BANK, «*GDP per capita growth (annual %)*», World Bank, 2017, available at: <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/NY.GDP.PCAP.KD.ZG?locations=NG> [Accessed: 4 Sep. 2017].
- VAL CUBERO Alejandra, «*Nollywood. La industria millonaria del home video en Nigeria*», El País, Ediciones El País, 14 Feb. 2014, available at: https://elpais.com/elpais/2014/02/14/africa_no_es_un_pais/1392361200_139236.html [Accessed: 08 Sep. 2017].

Chapter eleven

The kashmir conflict

Josefa Izquierdo Alberca

Abstract

Amid all the territorial conflicts, Kashmir stands out for involving two nuclear powers. Pakistan and India have claimed it as theirs since the independence of these two States in 1947 and the legacy of decolonization has been entrenched a disagreement over the territorial limits of both States that has made the border between these two countries one of the most militarized of the world.

Keywords

Kashmir, territorial conflict, India, Pakistan.

Introduction

Kashmir, more than a territorial conflict

Disputes affect 17% of the 309 land frontiers in the world and 39 countries are involved in legal action over archipelagos and islands¹. Kashmir stands out among these because two nuclear powers are involved in the conflict. Pakistan and India have both claimed Kashmir as their own ever since these two States became independent in 1947 and the legacy of decolonisation has been fraught with disagreement about the territorial boundaries of two States that has made the frontier between them one of the most highly militarised zones in the world (India alone has between 200,000 and 400,000 troops deployed in Kashmir, which amounts to 1 soldier for every 10 inhabitants).

Two nations are confronted whipped up by a fervent nationalism, and globalisation has been unable to offer solutions in the face of the obstinacy of those involved: one State with a Hindu majority, albeit secular, and the other Muslim, separated by a frontier with crowded cities. What the countries that are disputing this region defend goes far beyond a mere territorial disagreement. Even if we assume that the territory is the main element that defines the State and controlling this has been the traditional reason for the confrontation, the conflict has lingered on into the 21st Century because of the mistrust and suspicion of both nations that, after a long period of tension and *détente*, diplomatic rapprochement and attacks, has turned this dilemma into a symbol for the construction of their respective national identities. The fact that Kashmir lies in a zone that is a religious and ethnic melting pot accounts for its diversity and complexity. Throughout its history it formed part of the Kushan Empire and after the Emperor Ashoka, founder of Srinagar, Kashmir was Hindu, Buddhist and as from the 16th Century, Muslim. The mutual influences are evident and still patent: the Kashmiris sing koranic verses in a way that is similar to Hindu practices.

Kashmir's position has made this region a stepping stone that joins Central Asia with the Indian Subcontinent and, thus, a confluence of ethnic groups, religions and languages. As Robert Kaplan has written so memorably, the geographical boundaries of India are not consistent with the physical frontiers of the Subcontinent, and of all the countries bordering States (Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal) Pakistan is the one that poses the threat of Muslim invasion that the north-west has feared throughout its history. It is the symbolic remnant of the Muslim domination over medieval India, the only land frontier that has always been prepared for war is Northwest India,

¹ David, Charles-Philippe. *War and Peace*. Editorial Mondadori, Barcelona 2002, p. 171, quoted by Federico Aznar in *Polemological questions associated with the territory*, Page 3. Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. Analysis Document. Available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2014/DIEEEA01_2014_CausasPolemologicasTerritorio_FAFM.pdf.

even though «when the Indians look at the maps of the Subcontinent, they see Afghanistan and Pak, in the northwest, just the same way as they see Nepal, Bhutan and Bangladesh, in the northeast, all as part of India's sphere of influence, seeing Iran, the Persian Gulf, the former Soviet Union Republics of Central Asia and Myanmar as twilight zones. From New Delhi's perspective, to do so any other way, would be to ignore the history and geography lessons that have been learnt»².

However, apart from the historical, religious and territorial implications, what lies at the heart of the conflict is the water resources crisis and, specifically, the crisis concerning the waters of the River Indus. In fact, the altitude and proximity of this region to the Himalayas has made it a strategic point for controlling the water, which has always played a major part in the dispute. Kashmir is a river basin that would provide a solution for Pakistan's water problems, and one that would not leave a densely populated country like India indifferent.

In spite of the fact that the two countries reached an agreement in 1960 about using the rivers that flow through the region, by signing the Indus Waters Treaty, the water question has become vital for Pakistan, especially since 2007, when India began to construct dams and implemented hydroelectric projects to harness the Rivers Jehlum, Chanab and Sindh, tributaries of the Indus, whose waters were allocated to Pakistan in the 1960 Indus Waters Treaty³. Pakistan's fear that it would be denied access to the waters of the Indus Basin is deeply-ingrained in the minds of many Pakistanis, and quite rightly so in view of their dependence on the resources for irrigation and human consumption. Therefore, any discussion that takes place in the future, must have the waters of the River Indus on the agenda.

After 70 years of conflict, a poor economic situation, a cultural crisis of identity, repression of its political leaders, an oppressive military presence and abuse committed against civilians, the Kashmiris themselves have emerged as a third group in the conflict. Suspected of being disloyal by New Delhi, they have found their rights curtailed with regard to having a democratic process and having their representatives freely elected. Furthermore, the sector in favour of integrating with Pakistan has been losing support in view of the increase in the number of groups of Jihadist former combatants from countries like Afghanistan, Pakistan or Sudan⁴.

² KAPLAN, Robert. *The Vengeance of Geography. Robert D. Kaplan. How maps condition the destiny of nations*. Barcelona: RBA, 2014. Pages 304 and consecutive.

³ Indus Water Treaty 1960. Ministry of Water Resources. Available at <http://wrmin.nic.in/forms/list.aspx?lid=1202>. Date of reference 03.07.2017.

⁴ UNIVERSITAT AUTÒNOMA DE BARCELONA. FUNDACIÓ SOLIDARITAT. *Kashmir*. Available at <http://www.solidaritat.ub.edu/observatori/esp/dossiers/Kashmir/Kashmir.htm>. Date of reference 03.07.2017.

What is Kashmir like?

Kashmir is a valley in the north of the Indian Subcontinent covering a surface area of 222.236 km², surrounded by mountains, that borders on Afghanistan to the north and China to the east. To the west it has frontiers with the Pakistani provinces of Punjab and Azad Kashmir. Although Kashmir traditionally meant the southern valley of the westernmost part of the Himalayas, the current territorial distribution splits the geographical region between India, Pakistan and China.

At present, two-thirds of the territory, the centre and south, the richest part is under Indian control and covers 138,430 km². The zone is inhabited by 10.1 million people and contains the cities of Ladakh, close to Tibetan culture and the Srinagar Valley, historical centre of the former Princely State.

The climate conditions are such that during the winter Jammu is the capital of the State, whereas Srinagar is the capital in summer. The official name of the State is Jammu. Kashmir and Jammu together, form part of the Federal Republic of India as one of the country's 29 States. The leading figure is the Governor, appointed by the President of India for a period of 5 years. It has a Legislative Assembly that is dissolved every 5 years and a Legislative Council, which has no dissolution deadline. Article 370 of the Indian Constitution grants the territories of Jammu and Kashmir a special status that renders it impossible for the Parliament in New Delhi to pass laws without the consent of this State's Legislative Assembly.

The north-western third of Kashmir, 84,160 km² is occupied by Pakistan, and includes the Kashmir Azad Region, covering a surface area of 13,297 km² with 4.5 million inhabitants, whose capital is Muzaffarabad and what were formerly known as the Northern Areas, now Gilgit Baltistan, whose capital is Gilgit. Kashmir Azad is an unusual zone, as it is the only one in the whole of Pakistan with a population that is ethnically Kashmiri and, despite being under the administrative control of Pakistan, does not form part of the country according to the Constitution. It has its own President, Prime Minister, Supreme Court, legislative power and its own flag. As is the case with Gilgit Baltistan, this region has no parliamentary representation either in Pakistan's National Assembly or in the Senate.

The different way in which the geographical territories of Kashmir are incorporated into the States of Pakistan and in India also marks the process of consolidation of the two countries and reminds us, in the words of Andres Gonzalez Martin, that «Pakistan is not a State that has completed the closure of its frontier, which causes instability within and beyond the country»⁵

⁵ GONZÁLEZ MARTÍN, Andrés. «Evolution of the Pakistan conflict. An uncertain future» in Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. Geopolitical Panorama of the conflicts 2013. Madrid: Ministry of Defence, 2013. P. 278.



Figure 11.1 (Plane mad - Image: Kashmir map.svg, CC BY-SA 3.0, <https://commons.wikimedia.org/w/index.php?curid=6499479>).

and explains the tension with which Pakistan perceives the impossibility of incorporating this zone that it disputes with India.

The population of Jammu and Kashmir is mainly Muslim, although this State also has large communities of Buddhists, Hindus and Sikhs. In the southern part of Jammu, close to the Indian States of Haryana and Punjab, Hindus make up 65% of the population, Muslims account for 31% and Sikhs constitute the remaining 4%, whereas in Ladakh, about 46% are Buddhists. Muslims constitute 67% of the total population; Hindus make up around 30%, Buddhists 1% and Sikhs 2%.

Since the partition, Kashmir has been a failed symbol of the identity of two new nations. For India, it has been an example of a secular Government encompassing all religions. For Pakistan, it is the only State with a Muslim majority governed by a Hindu. The identity clash has not been resolved peacefully, and on three occasions the two countries have gone to war over Kashmir (in 1947, 1965 and 1999). However, in fact, revolts, attacks and repression have never ceased in Kashmir since the conflict broke out. The number of victims has now reached 42,000 and has been a constant climate of insecurity that prevents the region from developing.

The conflicts involving religion, national identity and the environmental threat are now further complicated by the presence of Islamic terrorism. And it must not be forgotten that the north-eastern region of Aksai Chin and the Shaksgam Valley are occupied by China and claimed by India.

In this context, public opinion on both sides remains in a permanent state of agitation. The Pakistanis regard the valley as an inheritance that has been stolen from them while at the same time they see the Kashmiris enjoying greater freedom than they do. India considers that this region has fallen into the hands of ungrateful traitors to tradition, especially under the government of the Nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). After the violence abated in 2001, it seems to have been intensifying day by day, there being more than 400 victims in 2016.

The conflict is still going on and no new fresh solutions have been put forward. Surveys show that to inhabitants of the valley are not keen on complete integration into either of the States. Meanwhile, the region continues to be caught up in a never-ending vicious circle of violence-repression-violence.

It all started after the partition

The British Empire granted independence to India and Pakistan in 1947 by dividing them on the basis of the principle of religious majorities in the new independent States. Pakistan, was thus split into East Pakistan—now Bangladesh—and West Pakistan (which comprises Baluchistan, Sindh, the Northern Areas—now Gilgit Baltistan—and other territories resulting from the Mountbatten Plan) which was to administrate the provinces with a Muslim majority. India was to administrate the provinces and principalities with a Hindu majority. The exodus, destruction, deportations and hostilities caused by the division of the Subcontinent led to one of the most dramatic human crises in the second half of the 20th Century.

Making the most of the extremely weak position of the Maharaja, brought about by the invasion organised by Pakistan, India managed to incorporate Jammu and Kashmir into its dominion by getting the Maharaja to sign the Instrument of Accession on 26th October 1947⁶, triggering off the First Indo-Pakistani War. Although it only lasted a year, it caused the United Nations to

⁶ The most exhaustive and contextualised study of this conflict in the Spanish language is the one conducted by Enrique Silvela Diaz-Criado and Felix Vacas Fernandez, which I am using in this historic introduction, in *The conflict between India and Pakistan*. Madrid: Ministry of Defence, 2006.

The chapter by CARO BEJARANO is essential for obtaining a more global perspective, together with the work by Maria Jose whose work I am following in «Indian Subcontinent: the long conflict of Kashmir» in the Geopolitical Panorama of the conflicts 2011. INSTITUTO ESPAÑOL DE ESTUDIOS ESTRATÉGICOS. Madrid: Ministry of Defence, 2011, Pages 193-216.

appear on the scene. Several UN Security Council Resolutions were made, which together with observers⁷ deployed in situ ordered the withdrawal of Pakistani troops and a reduction of Indian forces to a minimum, with a view to holding a self-determination referendum in the region. After the Ceasefire Line was established—without significant variations since the 1965 and 1971 Wars, when it came to be known as the Line of Control—in 1950 the Indian Constitution granted special status to the Jammu and Kashmir Region, as was stipulated in the Hari Singh Instrument of Accession. The Line of Control established the current division⁸ and determined the positions and demands of the two States:

Pakistan claims all of Jammu and Kashmir arguing that most of the inhabitants are Muslims. It also states that the Accession Agreement signed by the Maharaja is not valid. However, India also claims that Jammu and Kashmir belong entirely to that country, basically arguing that the Accession Agreement is legally binding. Whatever the case may be, both States accepted, at least formally, that the instrument for settling the controversy should be the referendum proposed by the Security Council, thereby recognising that it was not so much a legal matter concerning which of the two States had the better credentials for asserting jurisdiction over the territory, but rather that the will of the region's inhabitants was the principle factor to be taken into account when settling the conflict and that the referendum was the main instrument chosen by the Security Council when it came to dealing with the controversy pacifically. Yet as we know, no referendum has ever been held⁹.

The second Indo-Pakistani War broke out in 1965 and within the context of the Cold War. India, after its defeat by China in 1962, embarked on a process of increasing its arms and modernising its Armed Forces while at the same time endeavouring to consolidate the State politically. As from 1963 it began to increasingly incorporate the Kashmir territories into the Indian Union. Resentment towards India was mistakenly interpreted as being pro-Pakistani, in the belief that the inhabitants of Kashmir, mainly Muslim, would see Pakistan in a favourable light. Pakistan also believed that it would be able to count on China's support, because the latter had already clashed with India in 1962 not only over the control of Aksai Chin but also over the State of Arunachal Pradesh. So Pakistan carried out what came to be known as «Operation Gibraltar», infiltrating irregular forces. However, they not only

⁷ The United Nations began one of its first ever operations with this intervention: United Nations Military Observer Group in India and Pakistan, UNIMOGIP which is still there today. <http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/missions/unmogip/>.

⁸ As was pointed out in the Introduction, Pakistan controls the extensive mountainous and sparsely populated zone called Gilgit-Baltistan, (previously known as the Northern Areas) and a narrow strip of Jammu, bordering on the Pakistani Punjab, referred to by Pakistan as Azad (Free). India possessed the northern zone of Ladakh bordering on China, as well as the central zones, more fertile and densely populated, of the Kashmir Valley and most of Jammu.

⁹ Vacas, *op. cit.*, Page 30.

failed to receive the expected support but were also reported to the Indian Authorities¹⁰. The blatant involvement of Pakistan, whose troops passed the ceasefire line imposed by the United Nations, ended in a mandatory ceasefire on 23rd September. The war had ended in stalemate with both sides controlling part of enemy territory, but no town of importance. Pressure exerted by the USSR forced a Peace Conference to be held in Tashkent, in January 1966, which led to the acceptance of a return to the situation prior to the war. Although neither country achieved its aim, the consequences of this second conflict were to consolidate the annexing of the territories by India.

The USA showed no interest in the political question in Southern Asia, where none of the allies seemed reliable, and the USSR came to occupy the void by supporting India in order to counterbalance China's influence in Islamabad, thereby putting an end to Pakistan's opportunity.

Although the second war proved to be more costly in terms of casualties than the 1947-48 war and both sides lost more than 3,000, six years later the two countries once again took up arms and clashed in a third Indo-Pakistani War. However, this time it was not over Kashmir, but over Bangladesh, when in 1971, Pakistan took a series of reprisals for the support India gave to the Bangladeshi independence and the birth of a Muslim State that was to break away from West Pakistan. All of this once again plunged the Indian Subcontinent into another refugee crisis in which more than 9 million people travelled from one part of the Subcontinent to another¹¹.

The Simla Agreement put an end to two weeks of confrontation, a line of control being set identical to the 1949 Agreement ceasefire line and the independence of Bangladesh was established. Once again, Pakistan felt that it had lost out while India's superiority was being reinforced.

In 1974, the nuclear arms race got under way between these two traditional neighbours and enemies. The dismemberment of the USSR was to bring about considerable changes in India's international relations, because it lost a powerful ally yet failed to win over the confidence of the USA. New and armed opposition groups then emerged, in favour of integration into Pakistan, while others clamoured for the independence of a unified Kashmir consisting of all the territories then under the control of India and Pakistan, i.e., a united Kashmir. This was the time when groups such as the Al Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front-JKLF, Hizb-ul-Mujahideen, Lashkar-e-Taiba and Harkat-ul-mujahideen appeared, i.e., independent and Islamic groups, many of them made up of guerrillas who had come from armed militias operating in Afghanistan, Iraq or Sudan¹².

¹⁰ Vacas, *op. cit.*, Pages 54 and following.

¹¹ IZQUIERDO ALBERCA, M^a José. «Bangladesh, a vulnerable country at risk of radicalisation». In Geopolitical Panorama of the conflicts 2016. INSTITUTO ESPAÑOL DE ESTUDIOS ESTRATÉGICOS. Madrid: Ministry of Defence, 2016, Pages 371-393.

¹² CARO, *op. cit.*, p. 203.

Islamic fundamentalism rears its head

Towards the end of 1989, the pro-Pakistani groups led by Hiz-ul-Muyaidin (God's Fighters) confronted the independentists, grouped into the Hurriyat (Freedom) alliance, which was spearheaded by the Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front. All of these groups also in opposition to the New Delhi Government, while accusing Pakistan of financing and training Islamic terrorist groups that were acting along the Line of Control. Furthermore, in 1998 India conducted at least five nuclear tests, to which Pakistan responded with another five. The Afghanistan War enhanced Pakistan's role, which was benefitted by considerable aid from the USA. The conflict between India and Pakistan thus entered a new phase, in which Islamic terrorism and the support that Pakistan gave to radical groups in Afghanistan led to the Government in Islamabad being discredited and brought about the country's gradual isolation.

In 1999, Pervez Musharraf, supported by radical Islamic groups, initiated a military offensive near the region of Kargil, crossed the Line of Control and occupied strategically important zones, in what came to be known as the Kargil War, which concluded with a victory for India that forced the invaders to retreat without bombardments, which was received with considerable international recognition. The Lahore Declaration closed this episode with a commitment to create a security and trust zone and to develop cooperation policies between the two countries.

The attempt to negotiate during the Agra Summit in 2001 brought to light the conflict of interests: for India, an end to transfrontier terrorism from Pakistan was a prerequisite to any peace dialogue, but in territorial terms, India was not prepared to go any further than the 1972 Simla Agreement, which amounted to institutionalising the ceasefire line or Line of Control as a permanent frontier. The approach made by the Pakistan delegation was quite the opposite: any détente and cooperation between the two countries was conditioned by dialogue with a view to solving the dispute. Pakistan wished to change the territorial *status quo* affecting Jammu and Kashmir, and to obtain at least the independence of the Kashmir Valley¹³.

In 2001, there was a terrorist attack against the Legislative Assembly of the Indian Parliament. New Delhi accused Lashkar-e-Taiba and Jaish-e-Mohammed of being responsible for the attack and deployed one million troops on both sides of the frontier. After the September 11 attacks, Pakistan became a US ally in the fight against Islamic terrorism. Between 2004 and 2008, there were a few signs that appeared to herald a period of improved relations, such as the renewal of the peace talks during the annual summit of the South Asian

¹³ BORREGUERO, Eva. «Evolution of the negotiation process by Eva Borreguero in Kashmir: Towards a definitive reconciliation?» ANALISIS REAL INSTITUTO ELCANO., 2005, n.º 118. Available at <http://www.radical.es/historico/informacion.php?iinfo=3889>.

Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)¹⁴ in 2004 in Islamabad. A joint declaration by Musharraf and Vajpayee was fruit of this Summit, which was to mark a milestone in the normalisation of relations. Musharraf undertook not to let any group or armed faction use territory under Pakistani control to support terrorist activities (this also included the part of Kashmir under Pakistani Administration). The declaration in itself amounted to a breakthrough because it implicitly admitted what had previously been denied, i.e. that tactical support had been given to terrorist groups operating in Kashmir. The two leaders also agreed to take reiterate the peace, security and economic development objectives, which were the same targets that Sharif and Vajpayee¹⁵ had agreed to five years earlier. They also took further measures, such as reopening the offices of the consuls in Bombay and Karachi; a bilateral ceasefire agreement; the opening up of a bus route connecting the Indian and Pakistani zones, which had been isolated from each other for decades, and the meeting between the representatives of the two countries at the 14th Summit of the «countries of the non-aligned movement» in Cuba.

A year later, during the 5th International Peace Conference on Kashmir in 2005, the Pakistani representatives expressed their unease about the fact that India had erected a fence all the way along the Line of Control (LoC) and about India's plans to construct the Baghlihar Dam and the Kishangana Hydroelectric Power Plant —accusing India of having altered the Indus Waters Treaty that regulated communal water resources—, the violation of human rights in Kashmir and a lack of response from the Indian Authorities to the Pakistani proposals.

In spite of this, the Pakistani Ambassador, Riaz Khokar, former Minister of Foreign Affairs, stated that after the nuclearisation of the Subcontinent, war was no longer a viable option and the Pakistani Minister for Kashmiri Affairs, Faisal Hayat Khan, stated that for Pakistan the conflict was not territorial, but a question of national and humanitarian sovereignty. The conflict thus appeared to be redefining itself, to the extent that territorial claims were taking a back seat.

However, Islamic terrorism re-emerged with the 2008 attacks on the hotels in Bombay, where 173 people were killed, just a few weeks before the meeting between the Foreign Secretaries of India and Pakistan. Once again, India accused Pakistan of helping the terrorists of Lashkar-e-Taiba.

The Spiral of Violence

Since June 2008, the social and political situation in Jammu and Kashmir has not only not improved, but the confrontations between the population and the

¹⁴ South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

¹⁵ Apud BORREGUERO.

Indian Security Forces have intensified; this, coupled with the proliferation and scattering of armed groups has submerged the region into a sort of vicious circle of violence-repression-violence, which particularly affects the civil population. There have been four cycles of rioting:

The first one occurred in June 2008 because of the major protests after the State Government transferred 40 hectares of forest land to the Shri Amarnath Sanctuary Board¹⁶ to provide with accommodation, the Hindu pilgrims who annually visit one of the most important Hindu shrines.

The Cave in Amarnath is a famous sanctuary devoted to Lord Shiva, over five thousand years old that represents Kashmir's syncretism and where the altitude has been conducive to the presence of a stalagmite that represents Shiva. The difficulties involved in the pilgrimage and the significance that this place has for the Kashmiris is recreated, with irony and surprise, by the Nobel Prize Winner V.S. Naipaul in *An Area of Darkness*¹⁷.

The Shri Amarnath pilgrims have been exposed to attacks since 1993. In 2000, 30 people were killed in a massive attack on pilgrims in the City of Pahalgma. The most recent took place in July 2017 when the pilgrims' buses were attacked in spite of protection being organised that even included the Indo-Tibetan Border Police¹⁸.

The second incident to cause waves of violence was the Shopian Case, a case that was to reflect another blot on Indian society: the rape and murder of women.

In 2009, in the Shopian district of Jammu and Kashmir, two women disappeared on the way to their house. The following day, their corpses were found one kilometre away. They had been raped and murdered. The villagers alleged that the security forces had been responsible and the local police rejected the accusations claiming that the women appeared to have drowned in a stream¹⁹. The protest turned violent and the Administration imposed a curfew that lasted for 47 days. Finally, the turbulence in the summer of 2010, after the attacks perpetrated by the Indian Army to prevent an alleged infiltration throughout the Line of Control, which it was later demonstrated that it was none other than civilians at the military camp with a promise of working as porters for the Army. During the protests over the deaths of the three civilians, the police killed a 17-year old while he was playing cricket. Several violent protest matches ensued in the valley

¹⁶ BBC, «Land protests shut down Kashmir». Available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/world/south_asia/7474682.stm. Date of reference 04.07.2017.

¹⁷ V.S. Naipaul. *An Area of Darkness*. Barcelona: Debate, 1964.

¹⁸ INDIAN EXPRESS, «A long, up-and-down journey». Available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/explained/amarnath-yatra-terror-attack-jk-militant-pilgrims-shrine-story-4748059/>. Date of reference. 21.07.2017.

¹⁹ The information about this case is contained at http://www.kashmirlibrary.org/kashmir_timeline/kashmir_files/Shopian_rape_and_murder_case.htm.

in response to this death, and another child died in one of them, giving rise to a wave of protests that this time cost the lives of 110 civilians; 537 were injured and more than 3,000 members of the security Forces were also injured.

The final massive riot took place in 2016 when Burhan Wani, Commander of Hizbul Mujahad, fell to the Indian Security Forces. In a matter of hours, the ten districts in the region where there was a Muslim majority rose up in violent protests that were severely repressed by the Indian Government.

The cycle of protest-repression-protest thus repeats itself in the context of an extremely fragile peace where even the slightest incident can cause anger, causing uprisings and setting of waves of violence and repressing with alarming regularity.

Current Situation

Terrorist Groups: dispersed and with increasingly young leaders

Ever since 1989, the year in which the only armed rebel group was recorded, the JKLF (Jammu and Kashmir Liberation Front), the proliferation of armed groups has grown incessantly. In 1990, when the fighting intensified, over 40 groups could already be discerned, and now there are more than 150, united by a desire to get rid of the Indian Government. The main difference between them lies in those which are in favour of forming part of Pakistan and those that propose that Kashmir be completely independent of the two States that split it into two parts. Since the 1990s, veterans from the war in Afghanistan have been crossing the Line of Control, wishing to join forces with the Kashmir insurgents in their Jihad against the Government of Delhi. According to the Department of Peace and Conflict Research at the University of Uppsala, it is these particular groups that are most reluctant to accept any initiative aimed at finding a peaceful solution to the conflict. Some of these groups are clearly terrorists, such as Jaamiat-e-Islami and the regional organisation of Lashkar-e-Tayyaba (Army of the Righteous). It has also been alleged that there are links between certain groups such as Hizb-ul-Mujahideen (Party of the Warriors of God), Pasdaran-e-Inqilab-e-Islami (Guardians of the Islamic Revolution), Harkat-ul-Ansar (Helper Movement), Jaish-e-Mohammed (Army of Mohammed and Al Qaeda), but this has not been confirmed. Although many of those who join these militant groups are known to have come from Pakistan and Afghanistan, others are inhabitants of Jammu and Kashmir.

The two most deadly groups in 2015 were Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), responsible for 22 deaths in 2015 and Hizbul Mujahedeen, responsible for 30 deaths in 2013. Both groups also operate in Pakistan, Afghanistan and Bangladesh²⁰.

²⁰ Global terrorism index 2016. Available at <http://economicsandpeace.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/11/Global-Terrorism-Index-2016.2.pdf>. Date of reference. 01.09.2017.

In 2014, Global Islamic Media Front, an information network affiliated to Al Qaeda announced the creation of a new cell, Ansar Ghawzat-Ul-Hind, and asked «the brotherhood» to declare Jihad against the Indian Authorities. Although they do not appear to have much support among the Muslim population of this country, the third largest in the world, a change can be seen that aims to divert interest from nationalist independence towards the imposition of radical Islam. That was what was requested by Burhan Wani, the leader whose death cost more than 100 lives, who, demanded a «caliphate in Kashmir». Over 50,000 people attended his funeral. The reactivation and legitimisation of militant Islamism in Kashmir is largely attributed to the 22-year old Wani. He was born into an upper class Kashmiri family, with a high level of education, and unlike the militants of the past, did not conceal his identity, playing the role of an active militant on the social networks.

Wani was succeeded by Sabzar Bhat, considered to be an effective recruiter of young people on the social networks. His death in 2017 caused serious confrontations, the interruption of telecommunications in the region and the death of another youth during the curfew imposed by the police.

His successor, Musa, 23 years old, is the principal figure in a new generation of militants that have made use of the social networks and the growing disappointment among the Kashmiris. His intention is to revitalise the insurgency against Indian control in the region. Stepping up the propaganda, he stated in April «I can see that many people in Kashmir are involved in a nationalist war, which is forbidden by Islam»²¹. The struggle in the region «must not be for the good of Kashmir», he added. «It must be only for Islam so that Sharia Law is imposed here». He thus distanced himself from the separatist movement of the 1970s to align himself with ideals of Al-Qaeda. Musa is one of a new generation of anti-India combatants, few in number, according to police estimates, but who receive great support from the public and whose deeds and opinions are extensively shared on the social networks²².

A few days after the clashes at Bani's funeral in September 2016, another major incident occurred: the Uri attack. It was carried out by four alleged members of the Afzal Guru Squadron against an Indian Army camp. The squadron belonged to the Jaish-e-Mohammad Jihadist group. It was the second action of this kind to be undertaken in two years. The first one, in 2014, cost the lives of 10 members of the Security Forces and the second one left a death toll of 18 in this old camp crossed by the Muzaffarabad Highway.

²¹ THE GUARDIAN, «Kashmir militant leader announced as head of Al Qaida linked cell Zakir Musa». Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/jul/27/kashmir-militant-leader-announced-as-head-of-new-al-qaida-linked-cell-zakir-musa>. Date of reference 27.07.17.

²² THE GUARDIAN, «Kashmir conflict shifts with top militant vowing fight is for an Islamic state». Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/22/kashmir-conflict-shifts-top-militant-fight-islam-independence-zakir-musa>. Date of reference 27.07.17

India responded not only with «surgical strikes» against seven terrorist camps on the frontier with Pakistan, but also carried out a wave of civilian arrests causing the protest to spread, considerable international alarm and a series of accusations against the Indian Security Forces for using theft and crop-burning as a way of punishing the civilian population²³, not to mention accusations of torture, rape, secret detentions and extrajudicial executions. The violence affected soldiers and civilians in a vicious circle. In May 2017, the Indian Army accused Pakistan of killing two of its soldiers and mutilating their bodies²⁴. A few days later, the Indian Army found itself having to defend some of its soldiers who had used a civilian as a human shield by tying him to a 4x4 vehicle for hours²⁵. In this conflict, security forces, armed forces and armed groups were all involved in a spiral of reciprocal violence and violence against the civilian population.

The cost of the violence

The Jammu Kashmir State Government published the cost of the violence in 2016²⁶, where the authorities regret their inability to stop the violence, and denounced the loss of lives and goods, the interruption of economic activities, the telecommunications services for long periods, as well as the effects that the curfews and restrictions had on the lives of the ten districts in the Valley.

The general estimates of economic losses caused by the disturbances only for the period between July and November 2016, amount to over 16,000 million rupees (around \$US 250,720,000.00) for that 5-month period, from 8th July 2016 until 30th November 2016, apart from the huge increase in expenditure associated with security.

In addition to health care, education is another human asset affected by the political situation. In 2016, according to the aforementioned report, it was only possible for children to go to school for 4 months and there was a sharp reduction in academic activity.

The official figures yielded by this long conflict between 1989 and 2016 is 40,000 victims²⁷, although other sources indicate a higher number, around

²³ THE WIRE, Learning From Kashmir's Summer of 2016. Available at <https://thewire.in/73572/kashmir-dispute-takeways/>. Date of reference. 20.05.2017.

²⁴ THE GUARDIAN, Kashmir attacks: Indian soldiers mutilated and police shot dead Indian army accuses Pakistan of unprovoked attack on troops as militants kill five officers and two staff in bank raid. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/02/kashmir-attacks-kill-indian-soldiers-and-police-officers>. Date of reference. 20.05.2017.

²⁵ The Guardian, India army chief defends soldiers who tied man to vehicle and used him as a human shield. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/may/29/india-army-chief-kashmir-protests-man-tied-to-vehicle>. Date of reference 10.06.2017

²⁶ 2016 Economic Survey. Jammu & Kashmir Government. Available at <http://ecostatjknic.in/ecosurvey/Economic%20Survey%202016%20PDF.pdf>.

²⁷ UPPSALA CONFLICT PROGRAM. Available at <http://www.ucdp.uu.se/>.

70,000²⁸, which include a large number of missing persons. The Association of Parents of Disappeared Persons (APDP) have been reporting the detention and disappearance of people and, although in some cases the Authorities admit that they were mistaken arrests, the youngest persons, especially if they are boys, fail to appear.

In 2011 mass graves were found containing more than 2,000 unidentified bodies, which India considered to be Pakistani insurgents, together with 500 cadavers of Kashmiri civilians who were regarded as missing. The State Commission on Human Rights admitted these figures, but the exhumation of bodies was halted. The Jammu Kashmir Coalition of Civil Society (JKCCS) is sure that many of the missing persons were kidnapped, executed and buried by the Indian forces. In just five of the 22 districts in Jammu Kashmir and in the zone near the border with Pakistan, the local human rights groups have identified 7,000 graves. The accusations are levelled against the Indian Security Forces, protected by the AFSPA, a controversial law that grants them extensive powers when terrorist actions are suspected and that enables them to by-pass the Civil Courts. Bodies such as HRW or Amnesty International have reported the arbitrary detentions and disappearances²⁹.

Radicalism, violence and a lack of security form part of everyday life in Kashmir, just like in many parts of India, making a mockery of the Ghandi-style pacifist cliché.

Data such as the staggering figures concerning sexual abuse against women, which have risen by 1,250 % until 2013, the year when 33,707 official cases were reported³⁰ or, in a different area, the serious episodes of violence this summer when guru Ram Rahim was arrested³¹, tried for rape and that left 38 dead and 200 injured, or the attacks on pilgrims, bear witness to a society immersed in radicalism, violence and the cave.

In other cases, it is the lack of response from the State and the legal institutions that leaves citizens as the helpless victims of the conflict between

²⁸ EL MUNDO, «Kashmir's tombs of the unknown». Available at <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2017/07/03/5958c72ee2704eb57c8b4589.html>. Date of reference 20.07.2017.

²⁹ HUMAN RIGHT WATCH, India: Investigate Use of Lethal Force in Kashmir. Available at <https://www.hrw.org/news/2016/07/12/india-investigate-use-lethal-force-kashmir>.

³⁰ EUROPAPRESS, In India, the largest democracy in the world, there is a rape every 22 minutes. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-india-mayor-democracia-mundo-registra-violacion-cada-22-minutos-20140906125153.html>. Date of reference 02.04.2016.

³¹ EL PAIS, Guru Ram Rahim Singh, sent to prison for 20 years for raping two followers. Available at https://elpais.com/internacional/2017/08/28/actualidad/1503917083_468072.html. Date of reference 28.08.2017.

Pakistan and India. That is the case with the fishermen³² who inadvertently enter the territorial waters of another country. They are arrested, their vessels are seized and they do not receive any response or guarantees from the State. Widows cannot remarry or recover their property on behalf of their husbands³³. At present, Pakistan has 493 Indian fishermen in custody. The ones who were released in May 2017 had served prison sentences in Pakistan for breaking international maritime law. It is the underprivileged who suffer most from the slow and protracted bureaucracy. So it is hardly surprising when citizens do not feel protected by the State, that they seek protection from gurus, saints or false promises of national liberation. The weak obtain a false sense of dignity, security and safety.

The role of the external actors

Not only India and Pakistan, but also China and Afghanistan play a major role in the Kashmir conflict.

China is the most important and is the potential stabilising agent in the region. However, so far New Delhi has rejected Peking's offer to reduce the tension in the region.

India has been involved in a frontier dispute with China over the Kashmiri region of Aksai Chin, where it claims that Peking is occupying 38,000 km of Indian territory. By contrast, in 2017 the Chinese Government requires India to «rectify errors»³⁴ and withdraw its troops from a mountain pass in Sikkim, which connects India with several Buddhist and Hindu pilgrimage sites and that was the scene of clashes between China and India in 1967.

Since 1980, China's policy towards the region has tended to be more impartial and the country has refused to support the Indian proposal to issue a joint declaration against terrorism, which Beijing considers to be an Indian strategy to isolate Pakistan internationally. Nevertheless, after the Kargil conflict in 1999, China urged the two countries to adhere to the Line of Control and go back to the Spirit of Lahore, indicating its preference for maintaining the *status quo* throughout the LoC. China also gave its support to the international forces to prevent a war after the attack on the Indian Parliament in 2001. In the area of trade relations, it is trying to balance up with New Delhi, so trade between China and India in 2015 reached \$US

³² THE WIRE, As Another Fisherman Dies Across the Border, India and Pakistan Need to Work on Their Priorities. Available at <https://thewire.in/159559/india-pakistan-border-fisherman-death/>.

³³ EL MUNDO, *op.cit.*

³⁴ EUROPAPRESS, China insists that India rectifies errors and withdraws troops from Sikkim territory. Available at <http://www.europapress.es/internacional/noticia-china-exige-india-corrija-errores-retire-tropas-territorio-sikkim-20170706061045.html>. Date of reference 06.07.2017.

71,600 million and exceeded the equivalent figures with Pakistan that same year. When the Indian Prime Minister visited China in 2015 on one occasion, 21 trade agreements were signed for a total of \$US 22,000 million³⁵.

At present, with the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (hereinafter CPEC), Beijing exerts a greater influence on Islamabad's policy than Washington³⁶ and Kashmir could benefit from its position in this initiative. The CPEC, an essential part of China's Silk Route and Belt Initiative, is a combination of projects that range from road network, an optical fibre cable project, railway lines, a deep-sea port, coal mines and solar farms, which joins the two countries via the Gilgit Baltistan Region in Kashmir and about which India has already protested.

Following the ancient Silk Route, which runs from the Himalayas in the northern frontier between Pakistan and China as far as the Arabian Sea, this corridor was presented in 2015 when Xi Jinping visited Islamabad and announced an investment plan involving \$US 46,000 million, i.e. 20% of Pakistan's economic production.

The resurrection of this ancient route, which passes through all the provinces in Pakistan, places value on the trade relations and could also provide a solution for the region. With less importance being attached to the SAARC, this new route, whose key project is the port of Gwadar, could be vital for Pakistan's future, and may also be an excellent economic opportunity for India. Opening the frontier in Kashmir, will not only serve as a gateway and provide economic benefits, but could also give relief to the inhabitants and redefine the conflict focusing on economic development rather than territorial claims. Furthermore, and as has been pointed out by Javaid Bhat, Professor at the University of Srinagar, this would once again place Kashmir in its traditional and historic role of connector. However, audaciousness and political conviction are necessary to break the traditional mould of confrontation between the two neighbouring powers³⁷.

During the 2016 BRICS Summit, China did not allow India to mention the terrorist groups coming from Pakistan in the declaration, even though the Summit was held just weeks after the Uri attack. Nevertheless, it is significant that at the 2017 Summit³⁸, reference was clearly made to these terrorist groups more than 17 times, which points to a slight change in the Chinese Executive's current perspective.

³⁵ EMOL.ECONOMIA. China and India sign a trade agreement for US\$ 22,000 million. Available at <http://www.emol.com/noticias/economia/2015/05/16/717202/china-e-india-firman-un-acuerdo-comercial-por-us-22000-millones.html>. Date of reference 18.05.2015.

³⁶ UNITED STATES INSTITUTE OF PEACE, China's Kashmir Policies and Crisis Management in South Asia. Available at <https://www.usip.org/publications/2017/02/chinas-kashmir-policies-and-crisis-management-south-asia>. Date of reference 18.08.2017.

³⁷ DAILY TIMES, Linking Kashmir with CPEC. Available at <http://dailytimes.com.pk/opinion/22-Dec-16/linking-kashmir-with-cpec>. Date of reference 05.05.2017.

³⁸ BRICS 2017. Available at https://www.brics2017.org/English/Documents/Summit/201709/t20170908_2021.html.

The importance of Afghanistan

Several different wars are going on in Afghanistan, some of which date back to long before 2001. One of these, with a lower profile, is the result of the Cold War projection between Pakistan and India on Afghan soil, and that is made easier by the terrain in Afghanistan. Jammu and Kashmir not only has frontiers with Afghanistan but also strong historic and cultural ties. As indicated by Kaplan³⁹, the frontier separating Pakistan from Afghanistan is largely a mirage. Today, just as in the past, tens of thousands of Pashtuns go over the border every week without showing identity documents and hundreds of jingle trucks cross the frontier every day without being searched. All of this goes to show not only the lack of control, but also the artificial nature of the Afghan and Pakistani States.

Pakistan, considered to be the most dangerous place in the world because of its link with sectarian violence, non-sectarian violence, religious, nationalist and ethnic violence, considers Afghanistan to be its strategic rear-guard in the event of a conflict with India and wishes to guarantee its hegemony there. Furthermore, India has become involved in this theatre of operations, lending its support to the Kabul Government to counterbalance the China-Pakistan influence, while at the same time supporting irredentism in Baluchistan, the frontier province under Pakistani Administration. Since the Taliban were overthrown in 2001, India-Afghanistan relations have been cordial and strategic. India is the first country with which Afghanistan signed a Strategic Association Agreement, in October 2011 and has invested almost \$US 2 thousand million, making it the fifth biggest donor after the USA, UK, Japan and Germany. In the security sector, New Delhi has given training in India, to Afghan security personnel and, together with aid for developing infrastructures, has provided humanitarian assistance, including food, as well as giving grants to young Afghans to study in India.

Yet, when in December 2013 the Afghan President sought military equipment, New Delhi was reluctant, in order to prevent a violent response from Pakistan.

In a speech given at the 2014 BRICS Summit, the Indian Prime Minister, Narendra Modi, once again confirmed India's commitment to Afghanistan using the following words: «India will carry on helping Afghanistan to increase its capacity to govern, to be secure and for economic development».⁴⁰

During his visit to India in December 2013, Karzai had asked for greater cooperation in defence and security between Kabul and New Delhi. However,

³⁹ KAPLAN, Robert. South Asia's Geography of Conflict, in Centre for a new American Security. September 2010. Available at <https://www.cnas.org/publications/reports/south-asias-geography-of-conflict>.

⁴⁰ NDTV. PM Narendra Modi's Full Statement at BRICS Summit. Available at <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/pm-narendra-modis-full-statement-at-brics-summit-588814>. Date of reference 09.09.2017.

India has not responded to Karzai's request although it has been cautious regarding any transaction with Kabul that involves defence, and has focused on the development of infrastructures, creating capacity and trade, without a solid defence relationship with Afghanistan⁴¹.

Furthermore, India rejected US mediation in its confrontation with Pakistan, as it did with the Chinese proposal, arguing that it is a bilateral matter. «Our position did not change, the differences with Islamabad must be analysed bilaterally and in a terrorism-free atmosphere », stated the spokesman for the Indian Ministry of External Affairs, Gopal Baglay. «Of course we hope that the international community applies the mechanisms and mandates concerning terrorism that emanate from our neighbour, which is the greatest threat to peace and stability in the region». These statements clearly express New Delhi's systematic refusal to allow third parties to mediate in the Kashmir conflict, thereby preventing the confrontation from becoming internationalised.

If the USA continues to be committed to Afghanistan, Trump's Government will have to take a harder line against Pakistan. However, the current Secretary of Defense, James Mattis, who was sent to Pakistan in 2012 by President Obama, has indicated that relations with Pakistan will remain unchanged⁴².

The EU has stayed out of the conflict and merely condemns the attacks, such as the one near Uri, warning that terrorism is a global threat, but without making any specific reference to the Kashmir conflict at the Summit in March 2016 or in subsequent meetings⁴³.

In 2017, the first and best-organised joint visit of members of the European Parliament was made to India, underlining the great importance that the European Union attaches to the Strategic Association with India. It comprised three parliamentary delegations (the Foreign Affairs Committee, the Domestic Market & Consumer Protection Committee and the Standing Committee on Relations with India) David McAllister, leader of the delegation, described the «conflict» in Jammu and Kashmir as «very sensitive» and stressed both Indian suffering from terrorism, and the need deal with the reports of human rights violations in the region, in response to Pakistan's repeated attempts to internationalise the question of Kashmir since last year⁴⁴.

He reprimanded India for blocking the financing of several NGOs and announced that the panel was working on a report concerning the EU's

⁴¹ STIMSON CENTER. Pakistan, India, and China after the U.S. Drawdown from Afghanistan. Available at <https://www.stimson.org/content/pakistan-india-and-china-after-us-drawdown-afghanistan-visiting-fellow-report>. Date of reference 03.05.2017.

⁴² INDIA TIMES, American lens on Modi. Available at <http://www.newsindiatimes.com/american-lens-on-modi>. Date of reference 03.05.2017.

⁴³ https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/4010/eu-india-relations-fact-sheet_en.

⁴⁴ <http://kashmirreader.com/2017/02/23/kashmir-conflict-sensitive-says-eu/>.

political ties with India, focusing on human rights, and that the report would be completed before the planned EU-India Summit.

Conclusions and Prospects

The positions of the two countries involved have not undergone any changes in the seventy years that this conflict has lasted, and there are those who think that peace talks are an approach that has proved to be useless⁴⁵. Pakistan considers that the solution lies in the decision that the Kashmiris adopt and supports independence in the hope that the Muslim majority will accept joining Pakistan. However, the Government in Islamabad is also capable of supporting the terrorist groups in favour of independence, while at the same time opting for the demilitarisation of the territory and for international mediation.

Whereas, New Delhi, while recognising the harm that the violence is causing to development in the region, falls back on the Instrument of Accession 1947, considering that Jammu and Kashmir are just another State forming part of the Indian Union and does not seem prepared to accept a self-determination referendum. So far, it has been adopting the «carrot and stick» approach: on the one hand, a hard line with military operations that have triggered accusations of human rights violations, and, at the same time, it has managed to achieve ceasefire agreements with the insurgent groups and peace talks. India also appears to have stopped laying a claim to the zone administrated by Pakistan and the area governed by China. In its role as candidate for being a major centre of power in Asia and more interested in counterbalancing the ascent of China, it regards this conflict as a drain on its resources that it would rather invest in its own ascent in the world scenario.

For Pakistan, the weight of the Army and its reluctance to accept India's military superiority, always prepared to review the status quo, has become an obstruction that prevents political concessions. All of this means that the asymmetries in the political strategies of the two countries are divergent.

Apart from the civilian victims, the worst effects of the military confrontation are felt by Kashmir's natural resources, which are rapidly running out. The very high level of militarisation in the zone (there appear to be over 600,000 Indian soldiers and more than 100,000 Pakistan troops) causes great environmental pressure and a considerable increase in deforestation⁴⁶ in a region that is still underdeveloped.

⁴⁵ CARNEGIE SOUTH ASIA, Are India-Pakistan Peace Talks Worth a Damn? Available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/09/20/are-india-pakistan-peace-talks-worth-damn-pub-73145>. Date of reference 22.09.2017.

⁴⁶ Manzoor Ahmed Abbasi & Muqem ul Islam «Towards the Resolution of the Kashmir Dispute: Potential Areas of Economic Cooperation and Dividends». In *The Dialogue*, 2014,

The Prime Minister Modi has taken well into account the importance of water in this conflict. This politician showed his special talent for finding effective slogans during the September 2016 meeting of the Indus Waters Treaty, when he stated that «blood and water cannot flow together»⁴⁷. Insinuating that water could be exchanged for peace if Pakistan put a stop to the anti-India militants, he initiated the approval of the projects in Sawalkote, Kwar, Pakal Dul, Bursar and Kirthai I & II, which had been languishing for years. Although Pakistan protests, resorting to a supposed violation of the Indus Waters Treaty, the truth of the matter is that the extent of the rejection has gradually been toned down and New Delhi claims «We have hardly developed one sixth of the potential hydroelectric capacity in the State over the past 50 years»⁴⁸. The impact on the power relations in the region may be great, because the cumulative effect of these projects could enable India to store enough water to limit supplies to Pakistan at vital times in the growth period».

Being aware of the population's opinion can be crucial, yet there does not seem to be a uniform reply. Gaddafi's son, Dr. Saiful Islam, conducted a survey in September and October 2009 to find out the reactions of the inhabitants on either side of the Line of Control, the scenarios of the greatest episodes of violence⁴⁹. The starting point for the survey was the assumption that Kashmir's opinion forms the basis for the future policy in the region, peace, stability and greater global security. One of the questions asked concerned the degree of importance attached to the dispute. In Azad Kashmir (territory under Pakistani administration) an overwhelming 75% considered the dispute to be personally very important, and 82% stated likewise in Jammu Kashmir (territory under Indian administration).

When asked.... What do you think the main problem is for the population these days? A large majority of the respondents (81%) considered that unemployment was the most important problem affecting the Kashmiris (this was the case with 66% of the respondents in Azad Kashmir and 87% in Jammu Kashmir); Government corruption was the answer given by 22% in Azad Kashmir and 68% in Jammu Kashmir; human rights abuses were given as the answer by 19% in Azad Kashmir and 43% in Jammu Kashmir; poverty

vol. IX, N° 2.

⁴⁷ INDIAN EXPRESS, Modi at Indus Water Treaty meeting. Available at <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/indus-water-treaty-blood-and-water-cant-flow-together-pm-modi-pakistan-uri-attack/>. Date of reference 01.09.2017.

⁴⁸ THE GUARDIAN, India fast-tracks Kashmir hydro projects that could affect Pakistan water supplies. Available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2017/mar/16/india-fast-tracks-kashmir-hydro-projects-that-could-affect-pakistan-water-supplies>. Consultation Date 07.08.2017.

⁴⁹ The study findings have been published by BRADNOCK, Robert W. Kashmir: Paths to Peace. Available at https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/files/chathamhouse/public/Research/Asia/0510pp_kashmir.pdf. The complete set of tables can be queried at the Ipsos Mori website, <http://www.ipsos-mori.com/>.

and a lack of economic development was the reply coming from 42% in Azad Kashmir and 45% in Jammu Kashmir.

When asked about the proposal of independence for the whole, more than 4 out of every 10, 43% of the total adult population, said they would vote in favour of independence for all Kashmir, 44% in Azad Kashmir and 43% in Jammu Kashmir, in such a way that a preference for independence was fairly uniform in the Pakistani districts, but was very unevenly distributed in Jammu Kashmir. Setting aside any potential biased interest in the study, it seems clear that the economic and social problems are the deciding factor for the inhabitants and that the plebiscite options do not appear to be a solution for the majority, not even in the territories controlled by Pakistan, where they tend to defend independence and, finally, there is no majority where this is concerned.

In the Kashmir governed by India, New Delhi faces opposition from the Muslim majority. Pakistan -discredited and even though it has suffered more terrorist attacks than India- still allows militant groups such as Lashkar e-Taiba and Jaish e-Mohammed to use its territory as a sanctuary from which to carry out attacks against India.

If the USA continues to cut down on its military aid to Pakistan and the new government in Washington establishes even closer ties with India to offset the power of China, the economic corridor to the Arabian Sea may be conducive to a solution for Kashmir and connectivity and economic cooperation might curb nationalism and religious radicalism, obstructionists and limiters when it comes to resolving this long conflict. Any fresh approach to the conflict must replace the maximalist territorial claims that have merely led to an impasse. The asymmetries in the strategies of both countries make it possible to solve the problem that constitutes a risk, not only to the inhabitants of Kashmir, but also to peace and prosperity in the region.

Kashmir data tables⁵⁰

| Indian State of Jammu Kashmir | | | | |
|-------------------------------|---|-------------------------|----------------------|--------|
| Capitals | • Srinagar (March-October) • Jammu (October-March) | | | |
| Administration | Jammu, Kashmir Valley and Ladakh | | | |
| Population: | | Men | Women | |
| Rural | | 4,333,583 | 4,774,477 | |
| Urban | | 1,561,057 | 1,866,185 | |
| TOTAL: 12,541,302 | | 5,900,640 | 6,640,662 | |
| Population Density | 124 per km ² | | | |
| Total Surface Area | 138.430 km ² | | | |
| GDP 2016-17 | \$US 14,345,000 | | | |
| Economy | Services 57,00 % Agriculture 15,89 % Industry 27,11 % | | | |
| Economic Growth | 7.79 % in 2014-15. | | | |
| Religious Groups | Muslims: 67 % Hindus: 30 % Sikhs: 2 % Buddhists: 1 % | | | |
| Languages | Urdu Kashmiri Dogri Hindi Punjabi and Ladakhi | | | |
| Literacy | | Men | Women | Total |
| | | 86.80% | 56.40% | 67.20% |
| Primary Education | | Boys 98% | 90% | |
| Living conditions | Electricity 85,1 % | Running water 63,9 % | Sanitation 51,2 % | |
| Employment | Agriculture 64 % Services 25 % Manufacturing 11 % | | | |

Sources:

- Data based on CENSUS 2011 of INDIA. <http://censusindia.gov.in/>.
- PRS Legislative Research at http://www.prsindia.org/administrator/uploads/general/1464866443_Jammu%20and%20Kashmir%20Budget%20Analysis%202016-17.pdf.

⁵⁰ I have compiled different data about the region, without aiming to make them uniform, given that they come from heterogeneous official reports published on official Indian and Pakistani website.

| | | |
|-------------------------------|---|--|
| Official Name. Administration | Azad Jammu Kashmir. Autonomous State. | Gilgit-Baltistan. ³ Autonomous Territory. |
| Capitals | Muzaffarabad | Gilgit |
| Surface Area | 13,297 km ² | 72,971 km ² |
| Population | 4,567,982 | 1,800 million (in 2015) |
| Population Density | 300/km ² | 18/km ² |
| Annual Birth Rate | 2,41% | 2,56 % |
| Annual Unemployment Rate | 14,4 % | |
| Languages | Kashmiri Punjabi Urdu and Pahari. | Urdu Pashto Shina Balti Wakhi and Burushaski |
| Religious Groups | Muslims: 95 % Hindus: 4 % | |
| Literacy | 74 % | Men: 70 % Women: 50 % |
| Infant Mortality Rate | 58 per thousand | 92 per thousand |
| Maternal Mortality Rate | 201 per thousand | 450-500 per thousand |
| Income per Capita | \$US 1,512 | |
| Annual Economic Growth | | 2,56 % (2013) |
| GDP | | \$US 844 million |

Sources:

- Government of AJ&K, at <http://www.ajk.gov.pk/qStatus.php>
- GILGIT-BALTISTAN AT A GLANCE 2013 STATISTICAL CELL Planning and Development Department Government of Gilgit-Baltistan at <http://gilgitbaltistan.gov.pk/DownloadFiles/GBFinancilCurve.pdf>.

Conflict chronology

| | |
|----------------------------|---|
| 1846 | The Princely State of Kashmir is founded. |
| 1935 | Proclamation of the Government of India Act. |
| 1947 | India and Pakistan come into existence. First Indo-Pakistani confrontation over Kashmir. |
| 1949 | UN intervention. Kashmir is divided between India and Pakistan, with an agreed ceasefire line. |
| 1950 | Non-denominational Indian Constitution. |
| 1956 | Islamic Constitution in Pakistan. |
| 1957 | Jammu and Kashmir ratify their adhesion as a State in the Dominion of India. |
| 1962 | China defeats India in a short war over the Aksai Chin area. |
| 1965 | 2nd Indo-Pakistani War. Jammu Kashmir Liberation Front is formed to create an independent State by unifying the Kashmir administrated by India and the Kashmir administrated by Pakistan |
| 1971 | 3 rd armed conflict between India and Pakistan. |
| 1972 | Simla Agreement, ceasefire and Line of Control set. Bangladesh comes into existence, separate from Pakistan. |
| 1974 | India informs about its first nuclear bomb. |
| 1984 | The Indian Army annexes the Siachen Glacier region. |
| 1990 | Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT) is formed. It is an Islamic terrorist group that defends the independence of Jammu and Kashmir. |
| 1980-90 | Kashmir Insurrection: discontent over Indian domination boils over into armed resistance, mass protests and an increase in the number of militant groups backed by Pakistan. 10,000 dead. |
| 1999 | India and Pakistan are involved in a brief conflict after the militants cross the Line of Control in the district administrated by Kargil India. |
| 2008 | India and Pakistan open the first trade route across the Line of Control in 60 years. |
| 2010 | Demonstrations against India in the Kashmir administrated by India. Over 100 young people die. |
| 2015 | Election victory in Jammu and Kashmir for the BJP, nationalist, in coalition with the Muslim Popular Democratic Party. |
| 2016 January | Death of the minister for the State of Jammu and Kashmir, Mufti Mohammad Sayeed. |
| April | Mehbooba Mufti is elected as the first female Prime Minister of Jammu and Kashmir. |
| July | The death of the militant Burhan Wani leads to 30 deaths and a curfew. |
| 18 th September | Armed militants kill 19 soldiers at the Uri Base. A few hours later, 4 militants are assassinated in a shoot-out with the Indian Army. |
| 29 th September | 2 Pakistani soldiers die after a confrontation with Indian troops at the de facto frontier in Kashmir. |
| October | India positions over 10,000 people around the disputed frontier zone in Kashmir. |
| 14 th November | 7 Pakistani soldiers die in an exchange of shots between Pakistani and Indian forces at the Line of Control. |

| | |
|---------------------------|---|
| 15 th November | India blames Pakistan for the «furtive mortal attack» against soldiers in Kashmir. Raja Farooq Haider, Prime Minister of Azad Jammu y Kashmir, states that Pakistan has moved 8,000 people to «safer zones» after the «Indian bombardments». |
| 14 th November | 7 dead on the Pakistani Line of Control at Bhimber. |
| 2017 April | 6 dead from Kashmiri police fire during protests. |
| May | Mutilated bodies of Indian soldiers found. |
| 10 th July | 7 Hindu pilgrims die in attacks near a sacred temple. |
| 26 th August | 7 dead in clashes with Indian security forces. |

Chapter twelve

Mexico at the crossroads. Ten years of war against drug trafficking

María Luisa Pastor Gómez

Organised crime seeks territorial control; it'll be an all-out war because it's no longer possible to live with the trafficker. There's no going back; it's them or us.

Felipe Calderon

Abstract

After a decade of military confrontation with drug traffickers, Mexico has been able to seize 90 billion euros worth of drugs, at Mexican prices, numerous weapons have been seized and major criminal organizations have lost their main leaders. On the negative side, this struggle has substantially increased the level of violence, criminal organizations have become atomized and have expanded their criminal list; in addition to drugs the list includes also kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking and theft of fuel, and it hampers the work of the authorities, erodes the image of the Army and causes greater danger to the population.

Keywords

Mexico, drug trafficking, Zetas, Jalisco, Sinaloa, Golfo, EE.UU, Colombia, Medellín, Cali.

Introduction

President Felipe Calderon declared war on drug trafficking 10 years ago yet since then the violence has increased substantially. However, the drug trafficking problem affecting the Land of the Aztecs is not new. It goes back over half a century and is deeply-rooted in certain sectors of society. The drug traffickers have corrupted the institutions, especially local ones, because drug trafficking does not have the capacity to control the National State, and also the legal system, the law enforcement agencies and, in general, everything that could stand in the way of organised crime and its desire for profit.

The biggest, most sophisticated and violent criminal organisations in the Western Hemisphere have set up their headquarters in the country and the key lies in Mexico's proximity to the USA, the largest economy in the world and the main market —together with Europe— for drugs. Mexico is a mountainous country that shares 3,141 km of frontier with its powerful neighbour to the North. It receives a great deal of illegal merchandise from the countries to the South, either across its undermanned frontier with Guatemala or via its extensive coastlines on the Pacific Ocean or the Caribbean, for which criminal gangs have opened up numerous contraband routes. The gangs handle a wide variety of goods, arms or human beings, as well as drugs.

As J. Villalobos¹ pointed out, because of its geographical position, Mexico has «much greater media impact and geopolitical importance than Colombia, Venezuela or Brazil»; it has become not only the main point of entry for illegal goods and immigrants, but also an outlet, point of reception and transit for all kinds of arms manufactured in the USA, especially since George W. Bush abolished the provision that banned the sale of automatic and assault weapons in the USA, without there being any cause for optimism that the new Donald Trump Administration is going to make any modifications where this matter is concerned. In fact, «Trump has already spoken out clearly in favour of the amendment that enables US citizens to possess arms, which will do a great disservice to the transit of illegal arms to Mexico»².

The Foundations of the Conflict

Until the turn of the century, Mexican political leaders were mainly preoccupied with matters of an economic nature, such as the North American

¹ VILLALOBOS, Joaquin, «Twelve Myths about the War on Drug Trafficking», Revista Nueva Sociedad (NUSO), Mexico 2015.

² FERNANDEZ SÁNCHEZ, María, «Drug Trafficking in Mexico, the Story of a Political Failure», The World Order in the 21st Century, 9th January 2017, available at <http://elordenmundial.com/2017/01/09/narcotrafico-mexico-historia-fracaso-politico/>.

Free Trade Agreement (NAFTA), in force since 1st January 1994, or of a socio-political kind, such as the Zapatist uprising in 1994 and its consequences, or the problems arising from the effort to democratise the country. At that point in time, organised crime, and in particular drug trafficking, were not then regarded as a national security and only came to threaten the sovereignty of the State when it became financially strong.

Mexico was governed continuously by the *Partido Revolucionario Institucional* (PRI) for 71 years. This long stay in power coupled with the weakness of the institutions opened the floodgates to corruption, which has since then filtered through to politicians, civil servants, Police or the Armed Forces, who either through fear or because of their precarious economic situation caused by their low salaries, are conniving with organised crime or have even deserted from the Army or Police Force to join the ranks of the drug traffickers. This circumstance aggravates the danger, owing to the high level training that these groups have and the highly sophisticated nature of the arms to which the drug trafficker have access, in view of their enormous illegal profits.

As the new century dawned the main Opposition Party came to power, headed by the leader of the Partido de Accion Nacional (PAN), Vicente Fox (2000-2006), which brought to an end the aforementioned period of control and coexistence between the members of the PRI and the drug traffickers. There was even a certain degree of understanding, as long as their behaviour fell within the bounds of the «tolerable» and they did not overstep the mark. The PAN's new way of doing politics, which heightened over the next six years (2006-2012) under the Presidency of Felipe Calderon, a member of the same party, modified the security agenda in Mexico, given that the new President considered the fight against organised crime to be his top priority.

Felipe Calderon took over the Presidency on 1st December 2006 with a promise to put an end to the drug cartels and 10 days later he embarked upon a direct confrontation with drug trafficking known as the «War on Drugs». The new Head of State opted for a military strategy to combat criminal organisations, so he involved the Army, increased the Government's security expenditure by 50% and strengthened the Federal Ministry of Public Security & Safety and the Federal Police.

Calderon initiated his own particular fight against drug trafficking by putting into operation «Operation Michoacan», on 11th December, which amounted to the State's undeclared war on organised crime. It was also the start of one of the darkest periods in Mexico's history, because it triggered off a spiral of violence that, after one decade, has caused more than 150,000 deaths, 27,000 missing persons and 35,000 displaced persons, according to the data provided by the Ministry of the Interior, the Ministry of Public Security & Safety and the National Human Rights Commission.

When the PRI came back to power in 2012, there was no change for the better. President Enrique Peña Nieto took over a very difficult situation and

undertook to change the war strategy, concentrating less on capturing the drug bosses and focusing more on dealing with the underlying problems, such as corruption and the weakness of the security institutions. Throughout his first four years in office, the high number of victims remained more or less the same, as can be deduced from the figures provided by the Attorney General of the Republic (PGR), which recorded 28,515 murders linked to organised crime. The sad reality is that in the past decade, Mexico's murder rate rose from 9.5 per 100,000 inhabitants in 2005 to 16 murders per 100,000 inhabitants in 2016, when the world average is 7 murders per 100,000 inhabitants. That is to say, the rate in Mexico stands at more than double the world average.

According to R. Benitez³:

The so-called «War on Drug Trafficking» in Mexico falls within the category of asymmetrical warfare, low-intensity wars, irregular wars, wars without frontiers. It is clearly a transnational conflict, which has made Mexico an extremely dangerous country, where criminals and drug bosses fight for control over territory and the drug-trafficking routes to the USA.

Drug trafficking poses a challenge that exceeds the capacities of the country's security forces and constitutes a threat to the sovereignty of the State. Furthermore, its networks run from Argentina to Canada and even to Europe. Those involved deal with illegal substances, contraband, arms and people, and launder their profits through moneychangers, regional and local banks and economic projects and activities. Their arms, training and tactics have become more sophisticated as the Mexican Government forces have intensified their efforts to confront them. All of this tends to suggest that the confrontation is not only Mexican but also a question of regional security. Therefore, the strategies should be multinational, in view of the fact that no single country can face alone this blight, whose tentacles are spreading all the time, obtaining greater power and skill, and intimidation through the mass media.

In this respect it must be stressed that in recent times Mexico has been facing another serious problem that affects the security of the communication professionals and freedom of expression in the country. It is the murder and kidnapping of journalists in the course of their duty. In the last six years 56 reporters have been murdered and a further 12 are missing, and there was another murdered on 3rd March. Media facilities are also frequently the target of attacks, and it would seem that no measures at all are taken against the perpetrators.

³ BENITEZ MANAUT, Raul, «Mexico 2010. Organised Crime, National Security and Geopolitics», published in the *Mexican Security & Defence Atlas, 2012*, Collective for the Analysis of Security with Democracy (CASEDE).

Background to the conflict

The origins of the Mexican cartels go back to the years immediately after the 2nd World War, when a drug consumption market became established in the USA. To begin with, this market involved marijuana and opium poppies to make heroin, which were mainly grown in the State of Sinaloa during the 1960s. However, drug trafficking in Mexico increased especially as a result of the dismantling of the two major cartels in Colombia, the Medellin Cartel and the Cali Cartel, which had emerged in the 1970s and 80s, swelled by the profits coming from the growing demand for cocaine in the USA.

During those decades, as B. Bagley⁴ points out, the Colombian cartels controlled the export of cocaine from the Andes to the USA. Both criminal organisations began their contraband activities by air, importing the basic «base» or «pasta»⁵ clandestinely from the Alto Huallaga Region, in Peru (where 65% of the world coca production came from) and from the Chapare Region, in Bolivia (where 25% was produced), to Colombia. Once it was there, the cartels refined the product and transferred it either by sea or air across the Caribbean to the South of Florida, from where it would subsequently be distributed and commercialised on the US market.

This bridge with the Andes established by the Colombian would later be cut by the actions carried out by the Peruvian President Alberto Fujimori in the 90s to destroy this route, although they would later be questioned for infringing on human rights. To cut their business losses, the Colombian cartels modified their strategy and started the large-scale cultivation of coca in the eastern plains and in the Amazon Basin Region, in Eastern and Southern Colombia.

In the first half of the 80s, the Medellin and Cali Cartels had achieved a predominant position in the trading of cocaine and were unquestionably richer and more powerful than the Mexican criminal gangs, which at that time were only involved in the production and smuggling of marijuana and heroin, and marketing these in the USA.

However, during that same period the USA began to take action. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan set up the South Florida Task Force with a view to putting a stop to the Colombian cocaine traffic across the Caribbean. He put Vice-President George H. W. Bush at the head of this group. By 1985, the Florida had managed to considerably reduce the flow via this route. At the same time, the net tightened at the other end, because Belisario Betancourt's Government pursued the cartels after they had assassinated the Colombian Minister of Justice, an action that has been ordered by Pablo Escobar, the

⁴ BAGLEY, Bruce, «The Colombia-Mexico-United States Connection, *Mexican Security & Defence Atlas 2009*»; CASEDE.

⁵ Extract from the leaves of the coca bush. If this coca paste is purified cocaine is produced (base cocaine and cocaine chlorohydrate).

boss of the Medellín Cartel. Under pressure from the Government in Bogotá, the Colombian traffickers temporarily fled to Panama, where they found a wonderful ally in the form of General Manuel Antonio Noriega. With the support of the Panamanian dictator, the Caribbean cocaine trafficking route was transferred via Panama to the Central American isthmus and to Mexico, prior to its shipment to the USA.

The Central American route lost importance when President George H. W. Bush invaded Panama in December 1989 and captured Noriega, thus cutting off this option to the drug traffickers. Furthermore, on the one hand, as from 1990, Peace Agreements were signed with Nicaragua, El Salvador and eventually, with Guatemala, in 1996, as a result of which the beginning of State control over the Central American isthmus was re-established, leading to an increase in the importance of the connection between the Cartels and Mexico. On the other hand, the Colombian Authorities, backed by the USA, tightened the net around the Medellín and Cali Cartels. First of all, Colombia put the Medellín Cartel out of action, after pursuing Escobar and killing him as he fled, in December 1993, and then did likewise with the Cali Cartel, in 1995, when its two main bosses surrendered, which heralded the end of the period of dominance of these two large groups in Colombia.

Main drug trafficking routes in Latin American and the Caribbean

As Bagley⁶ indicated, the gap left by the Medellín and Cali Cartels was rapidly filled by a proliferation of «small cartels». It is calculated that there were up to 300 by 2000, and they were obliged to make concessions, both in the production area and the coca commercialisation area. On the one hand, these small groups transferred control over the coca growing and processing in the rural zones of Colombia to the FARC guerrillas and to the paramilitary organisation Autodefensas Unidas de Colombia (AUC), and on the other hand, they found themselves having to forge relations and trading alliances with criminal organisations beyond Colombia, thereby creating new areas and opportunities for the Mexicans, who «enthusiastically» increased their power, achieving a dominant position throughout the hemisphere.

The Rise of the Mexican Groups

The Mexican groups had started their drug business by trafficking with marijuana and opium poppies. Towards the end of the 1970s, the families branched out and began to deal with cocaine. Ever since, they have proliferated throughout the country, it no being estimated that there is at least one drug-trafficking cartel in more than half the Mexican States.

⁶ BAGLEY, *op.cit.*



Figure 12.1 Source: Congressional Research Service. Latin America and the Caribbean: Illicit Drug Trafficking and U.S. Counterdrug Programs, Washington 12th May 2012, available at <http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/row/R41215.pdf>. Drug Trafficking Routes; Major Producers.

Initially, the Colombian producers paid a set rate to the civil servants in Central America and Mexico, as well as to criminal organisations in return for their support in transporting the drugs. However, the Mexican organisations were soon to demand a greater share from the operations and «instead of receiving steep rates as payments they began to demand half of each shipment of cocaine, giving the small Colombian cartels a guarantee that the other half would be delivered to the USA. Under these new terms, the Mexican organisations obtained very lucrative profits and became increasingly powerful and violent»⁷.

⁷ Ibid.

At the beginning of the 80s, the drug business in Mexico was basically split between two main organisations, the Guadalajara Cartel and the Gulf Cartel, which entered into negotiations with the Medellín Cartel and the Cali Cartel, respectively. The leaders of the Guadalajara Cartel, Miguel Angel Félix Gallardo, Rafael Caro Quintero, and Ernesto Fonseca Carrillo, alias «El Neto», would appear to have been the ones that established, in collaboration with the con the Medellín Cartel, the drug-trafficking patterns that are still followed at the present time: shifting cocaine by air and sea to Central America and Mexico and taking it into the USA by land.

The then powerful Guadalajara Cartel signed its own «death warrant» as an organisation in February 1985, after it had ordered the kidnapping of the undercover agent from the Drug Enforcement Agency (DEA), Enrique Camarena, who they later tortured and murdered. The USA reacted and exerted strong pressure on Miguel de la Madrid's Government, demanding that it acted against that Cartel. He was compelled to arrest the two leaders of that criminal organisation, Caro Quintero and Fonseca Carrillo. The main leader, Felix Gallardo, was subsequently arrested in 1989, while President Carlos Salinas de Gortari was in office.

The Guadalajara Cartel later split into three organisations that shared out the business and the drug services on a geographically basis. The Sinaloa Cartel, the major one, emerged from this arrangement, under the leadership of the well-known trafficker Joaquin Guzman Loera, alias «El Chapo», considered for 7 years by the magazine Forbes, to be one of the richest and most powerful men in the world; the Tijuana Cartel, Lower California Cartel, or the Arellano Felix Family Cartel, to control the export of marijuana, cocaine and heroin to the biggest market in the world, the State of California; and the Juarez Cartel, or Millennium Cartel, which achieved great power under the management of Amado Carrillo Sources, known as the «*Señor de los Cielos*» because he constructed a major air fleet to transport Colombian cocaine to the USA, which involved flying low over a frontier that had no radar in the desert.

The Cartel run by the Beltran Leyva brothers must be added to those three organisations, —Tijuana, Juarez and Sinaloa—. They started out as hired assassins for the «*Señor de los Cielos*», and expanded into the State of Jalisco, were together they formed what came to be known as «*La Federacion*», a temporary alliance fruit of common interests. It lasted for several years and became very powerful. All of this happened before 11th September 2001. As from that date, the product has had to enter the USA by land, despite the much greater control over the frontier that the US Authorities implemented as part of the war on terrorism.

The origins of the Gulf Cartel date back to 1984, when Juan Garcia Abrego took over the marijuana and heroin business that he had inherited from a close relative. He entered into negotiations with the Colombian drug traffickers

and reached an agreement with the Cali Cartel. Abrego was arrested and deported to the USA in 1996 and was succeeded by Osiel Cardenas Guillen at the head of the Mexican organization, it being the latter who developed the Cartel's military wing, one of the countries bloodiest legacies.

In 1997, Osiel Cárdenas, alias «*El Mata Amigos*», decided to strengthen his personal security by attracting 31 members of the Army, non-commissioned officers and some lieutenants from the Army Special Forces. He tripled their previous salaries and created a new paramilitary group that went under the name of Los Zetas, in reference to the name that the deserters used to identify themselves by radio when they formed part of the Government Forces.

Los Zetas achieved fame not only because of the utilisation and technology of their latest-generation communication equipment and arms, but also because they used military discipline to plan their operations and take control of territory, which they held onto by force, and because of the way they compiled intelligence. The DEA described them as the most advanced, sophisticated and violent paramilitary group, in view of the fact that they changed the rules of the game in the Mexican underworld, using military tactics and macabre shows of force, which included decapitating members of the families that rivalled the Cartel.

«Los Zetas» broke away from the Gulf Cartel, set up an independent organisation and declared an all-out war on that Cartel. Los Zetas also trained a new group of traffickers in the State of Michoacan on the East Coast, called the Familia Michoacana, which opened up a new line in the narcotics trade and the sale of pseudoephedrine, whose precursors had arrived from China via the Pacific ports. The new group was soon to surpass its former masters.

While President Vicente Fox was in office (2000-2006) new organisations appeared. These powerful mafias control the markets that sell cocaine, heroin and ephedrine in over three hundred cities in the USA and the fights between them have raised the number of homicides in Mexico to hitherto unknown figures.

In his first three years as President, Fox managed to weaken the Juarez and Tijuana Cartels, partly because the transition from the PRI to the PAN brought about a change in the traditional bribery patterns between politicians and the major cartels, but he did not manage to remove them completely. Furthermore, fresh opportunities arose for the rival gangs that sought to expand their participation in the cocaine trade. These included the Sinaloa Cartel and the Gulf Cartel, which established new smuggling routes throughout the coastlines of the Pacific and the Gulf and engaged in bloody battles to gain control over key sites near the US frontier. Both of them managed to replace the Tijuana Cartel and the Juarez Cartel in 2003.

How the Mexican Cartels have Evolved

As soon as he came to power, President Vicente Calderon (2006-2012) deployed 6,500 soldiers in the State of Michoacan, on the Pacific Coast, in order to eradicate the most prominent gang there, the Familia Michoacana. The upshot was an intensification of the violence arising from the fight between the State and organised crime, which led the Governor to place his trust more in troops to combat drug trafficking adopting the military option. In fact, both Vicente Fox's Government and later, Felipe Calderon's Government established as their priority, stopping the drug traffickers' operations in Mexico using more Army and Police, better intelligence equipment, improved training and new laws that equipped the legal system with more tools to prepare cases against the traffickers.

DRUG ROUTES -- MEXICO



Figure 12.2. Drug routes in Mexico.

The militarisation of the war against drugs had several effects. On the one hand, it caused an arms race and a struggle between the criminal organisations and the Government's security machinery, and on the other hand, a struggle between the criminal organisations themselves, with the consequent intensification of violence, aggravating the domestic situation.

In some cases, the assassination or imprisonment of the leaders of criminal organisations carried out by the Government Forces enabled those empowered to do so, to renew their leaderships, but this also gave other rival organisations an opportunity to try and expand their «businesses»

cashing in on their opponents weakness or instability. In other cases, leaving some cartels without leaders caused them to splinter, fragmenting into more violent gangs, branching out into new activities and the forging of new alliances of convenience between groups generally of a temporary nature.

While Calderon was in office, new cartels emerged such as the Beltran Leyva Organisation (OBL), which under the control of Arturo Beltran Leyva «El Barbas» and Hector Beltran Leyva, «El H», broke away from the Sinaloa Cartel in 2008. The fight between the drug traffickers got worse. Under the control of Arturo Beltran Leyva, alias «El Jefe de Jefes», the Sinaloa Cartel formed small gangs and «special forces» to combat Los Zetas.

Terror inevitably increased at the same rate as the drug traffickers' interests grew. Soon, not only Los Zetas but also the Familia Michoacana were to take an interest in other illegal business activities, such as kidnapping, extortion and piracy.

In 2011, the Gulf Cartel was affected by further splintering, in such a way that a new gang emerged to add further to the dismemberment that had already taken place with Los Zetas and the Familia Michoacana. This new group appeared on the scene after the apparent death of the head of the Familia Michoacana, Nazario Moreno González, alias «El Chayo». The new organisation decided to call itself the Caballeros Templarios and was led by the charismatic Servando Gómez Martínez, nicknamed «La Tuta», who used the social networks to raise his profile.

The criminal gangs also diversified their illegal activities to include kidnapping, extortion, human trafficking and arms trafficking. «Organised crime has branched out to the extent that it is involved in no less than 23 types of economic offences, which has meant that Mexico now has the third largest underground economy in the world, after China and Russia»⁸.

Current State of the Conflict

When the PRI returned to govern the nation in 2012, and with a view to reducing the levels of violence, President Peña Nieto proposed that the head-on strategy in the «war on drugs» adopted by the previous PAN Governments be abandoned. According to Miguel Angel Osorio Chong, current Minister of the Interior, not only would they capture the cartel leaders, but also the main operators.

The truth is that Peña Nieto is now in the final stage of his term of office and it is estimated that he could end it with violence statistics similar to those in the Calderon era. None of the ten national security proposals that the President

⁸ PAULLIER, Juan. «10 years of war on drug trafficking: the Mexican political class is the mother and father of organised violence in Mexico», BBC Mundo, City of Mexico, 15th December 2016.

mooted two months after the disappearance of 43 students in Ayotzinapa, in Guerrero, in November 2014, have been passed by the Lower Chamber. The only measure to have prospered is the creation of an emergency telephone number, 911, which does not require parliamentary approval⁹.

At present, there would appear to be 8 criminal organisations and 43 armed wings, the most notable ones being the Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel (CJNG), founded by Nemesio Oseguera Ramos, alias «El Mencho» and the already known Sinaloa Cartel. The two are involved in an all-out war in several states, fighting over territorial control.

1. The *Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel* has been associated with the use of extreme violence, given that after it first appeared, in 2011, the murder rate in Jalisco increased considerably. Its original mission was to combat Los Zetas in the State of Veracruz, which it performed under the name of «Los Matazetas». This group would appear to be heavily armed, with sophisticated machine guns and grenade launchers. Thanks to alliances with long-established cartels in decline, such as the Arellano Félix Clan or the Beltran Leyva Clan, it is managing to take control over highly-coveted positions from its former ally¹⁰, the Sinaloa Clan. As C. Flores¹¹ points out.

Considerable tactical similarities can be seen between the violent activities carried out by CJNG and Los Zetas. The types of arms, the organised and large-scale response, aimed at driving cities made with urban combat tactics to prevent their leaders from being captured or to avenge their death or arrest, their ability to effectively coordinate territorial hegemony by causing violence, the use of elements of a military nature and organisation, together with their proven capacity to confront the forces of the State, are just some of the factors which demonstrate that this group is equipped with armed structures that are well trained in military tactics. Strictly speaking, there is nothing new about this: the Anti-Zetas or Mata-Zetas, an organisation that was a forerunner of the CJNG, also had individuals among its members who had belonged to the Rural Defence Militias in Military Zone 43, such as Juan Jose «El Abuelo» Farias Alvarez.

According to Insight Crime, the CJNG is expanding fairly rapidly. Until 2016, it operated in 14 States, almost half the national territory, and also had contacts abroad with several countries: Colombia, Peru, Bolivia, Central America, USA, Canada and Australia. At present, it

⁹ FERNÁNDEZ SÁNCHEZ, María, *op.cit.*

¹⁰ MONTERO VIEIRA, Jose Ignacio, «The Mexican Armed Forces as a springboard in the fight against organised crime», Opinion Document, IEEA, 25th May 2017, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2017/DIEEE057-2017_FAS_Mexico_MonteroVieira.pdf

¹¹ FLORES PÉREZ, Carlos, «Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel: elements to be considered regarding the reorganisation of drug-trafficking organisations in Mexico», *Mexican Security & Defence Atlas 2016*, CASEDE.

seems to be endeavouring to oust the Sinaloa Cartel, which would make sense given that, according to the DEA, the Jalisco Nueva Generacion Cartel is an offshoot of the Sinaloa Cartel, and as the well-known saying goes, «There's nothing worse than a chip off the old block».

2. The second most powerful group in the country right now is the Sinaloa Cartel. Although this organisation has lost certain capacity after the detention of its key leaders and the extradition of its Capo Guzman to the USA, it still dominates the routes leading to its northern neighbour.

On the Mexican market, «the Sinaloa Cartel pioneered the production, export and distribution of methamphetamines, not to mention its historic role in cocaine trafficking and its predominant position in the production of marijuana and opium poppies»¹². According to the DEA, the Sinaloa organisation is an international consortium that operates through alliances in 54 countries, where it is involved in drug trafficking, money laundering, forging documents, control over routes and smuggling illegal merchandise»¹³.

Despite its global nature and the dominant position that the DEA considers this group to have, there are three changing factors that point to the exhaustion of the stability of the predominant coalition and a transition that heralds a fresh wave of violence. The first is the weakening of the triad Guzman-Zambada-Esparragoza that has led the group since the outset and that gives the Cartel its stability; the second is the generational take-over and, the third, is the increase in competition, because as has already been mentioned, the CJNG is emerging as the predominant group of the future, especially after the arrests of Guzman Loera, «El Chapo».

The rest of the cartels have lost power, but are still making their presence felt. Some of them, after having lost strength or splintering —the case of the Juarez Cartel and the Tijuana Cartel— have reappeared as small gangs to succeed them, such as the «Guerreros Unidos», which broke away from the Beltran Leyva Organisation.

These smaller groups lack the international contacts to for drug trafficking on a large scale and depend increasingly on other illegal activities, such as drug dealing on a local scale, kidnapping, extortion and other sources of income that are relatively new, such as mining and petrol theft, which makes the security forces' tasks rather more difficult, as they now have to watch a larger number of gangs that are smaller in size, and thus more

¹² RODRÍGUEZ ULLOA, Carlos, «Sinaloa: end of the hegemony and epicentre of the war that is beginning», in *Mexican Security & Defence Atlas 2016*.

¹³ Ibid.

Role of the External Actors

Drug trafficking is a global problem because of the transnational relationship between production, trade and consumption. Therefore, Mexico will never be able to put an end to this scourge by itself. The country will need to collaborate closely with other States and they will all have to coordinate policies. Collaboration with the USA is considered essential in this case.

Historically, Mexico has been reluctant to accept US aid for military assistance and during the Cold War, for example, the country systematically refused to sign cooperation agreements involving these matters. The USA appears to show a degree of mistrust towards Mexico ever since the assassination of the DEA Agent E. Camarena, in 1985. This state of affairs was further aggravated in 1997, when the close links between Jesus Gutierrez Rebollo —Mexico's anti-drug leader and Army General— with drug trafficking organisations came to light, especially his ties with the Juarez Cartel¹⁴. Nevertheless, towards the end of the 1990s and especially in the 21st Century, Mexico felt the need to have new equipment and training to cope effectively with drug trafficking and to modernise its Armed Forces¹⁵.

Along general lines, after the 11th September Latin America was largely forgotten where US foreign policy priorities were concerned; cooperation with the region then became focused on the fight against drugs, as it was realised that dealing with the world drug problem had to be a shared responsibility. «When he was President-Elect, Calderon paid a visit to the USA and called urgently on Mexico's northern neighbour for help; this led to an extensive cooperation programme being drawn up against organised crime. It was called the Merida Initiative»¹⁶. The Initiative was signed and came into force as from December 2008, as a multiannual programme concentrating on providing the Governments of Mexico, Central America the Dominican Republic and Haiti with a multi-annual schedule to help them to confront criminal organisations.

As part of the development of this Merida Initiative, Mexico moved to Colombia as the main receiver of military aid in the hemisphere. Initially, approval was given to \$US 1,400 million to be delivered throughout a 3-year period, the final stage ending in 2010. In 2008, US aid to Mexico amounted to approximately \$US 440 million, while \$US 395 million were allocated to

¹⁴ OLSON, Eric, L. and RODRÍGUEZ, Ximena, «Mexico-United States Security: Shared Responsibility», in *Mexican Security & Defence Atlas 2016*.

¹⁵ BENÍTEZ MANAUT, Raúl: «National Security and Political Transition 1994-2000», in *Foro Internacional*.

¹⁶ BENÍTEZ MANAUT, Raúl, «Mexico 2010. Organised Crime, National Security & Geopolitics», published in the *Mexican Security & Defence Atlas, 2012*, CASEDE.

Colombia; in 2009, Mexico received \$US 672 million whereas Colombia only received 400 million¹⁷.

During the first years of the development of the Merida Initiative, «the emphasis was placed on equipment and training the security forces responsible for combating organised crime, especially on the reception of aircraft used for transport, surveillance and searching; equipping laboratories for analysis, transferring equipment for the non-intrusive detection of illegal substances and materials. The second stage dwelt more on the deficiencies detected in the Mexican Legal System and on the need to make reforms, as well as on the need to professionalise the police force. With a view to the latter, training and skills courses were given and crime prevention programmes were established. Furthermore, the general infrastructure of the Courts and Prisons was improved and updated, all within the framework of this initiative»¹⁸.

«The final stage of the application of the resources stemming from the Initiative, was greatly influenced by the protection of human rights, together with the construction of secure and effective frontiers, in the same way as the need was seen to help the communities seriously affected by the violence caused by organised crime. As a result of the above, in 2008 the US Congress temporarily blocked some of the resources that were to be handed over to Mexico, conditioning their delivery to respect for human rights»¹⁹.

According to P. Mata, the Merida Initiative Resources that were supplied to Mexico by the US Government in the form of equipment and training for the various institutions responsible for law enforcement, were distributed in the following way²⁰ (in \$US millions).

| YEAR | 2007 | 2008 | 2009 | 2010 | 2011 | 2012 | 2013 | 2014 | 2015 | 2016 | 2017 |
|--------------|------------|------------|------|------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|------------|------------|
| TOTAL | 400 | 300 | 420 | 450 | 178.2 | 281.8 | 227.4 | 194.2 | 143.6 | 139 | 129 |

The Merida Initiative not only emphasised drug trafficking, it also had personnel assigned to curtailing gunrunning from the USA to its southern neighbours. It is estimated that around 2,000 firearms from the USA cross the border into Mexico every day.

¹⁷ Dolia Estévez, «War Means War. Mexico replaces Colombia as Latin America's top receiver of military aid to combat drug trafficking», Poder, 29th January 2010, P. 2., apud, Benitez Manaut.

¹⁸ MENDOZA CORTÉS, Alma Paloma, «Mexican Army Operations against drug trafficking, review and update», Journal «Politics & Strategy» N° 128, 2016, Academia Nacional de Estudios Políticos y Estratégicos de Chile (ANEPE).

¹⁹ MATA CERVANTES, Pedro «And the Merida Initiative?» Instituto de Investigaciones Estratégicas de la Armada de Mexico (CESNAV), Mexico, 04.11.2016.

²⁰ Ibid.

In 2013, John Kerry, Obama's Vice President, gave the recently appointed President of Mexico, E. Peña Nieto, assurance that he could still rely upon the collaboration of Mexico's northern neighbour to fight more effectively against organised crime and drug trafficking. In order to achieve this, the USA was prepared to relaunch the «Merida Initiative», which sought to eradicate those blights with US aid.

Kerry's declaration was endorsed that same year by President Barack Obama and both he and his Mexican counterpart analysed, during the meetings that they held in Mexico City, the feasibility of increasing and deepening bilateral cooperation in security matters, going beyond the Merida Initiative. By contrast, the future for this agreement is uncertain, because Donald Trump has stated to different media and in several forums, his intention to limit international agreements and concentrate more on his country's domestic affairs. Some analysts even consider that Trump could try to divert funds from this Initiative to pay for the construction of his now famous Wall.

In spite of the importance of bilateral cooperation in security matters, this has gradually decreased, especially where the Anti-Narcotics Program is concerned, but all is not lost, given that, as E. Olson and X. Rodríguez have indicated, «a top-level dialogue is being constructed whose agenda goes well beyond mere economic support. A decision was taken by both the Obama Administration and the Peña Nieto Administration to expand the cooperation agenda via the Bilateral Security Cooperation Group. To quote the Minister of the Interior, this group is the main Mexico-USA top-level forum for strengthening the strategy in matters that are common to them»²¹.

Conclusions and Prospects

Latin America has many dilemmas and the mafias and drugs are challenges that the region in general and Mexico in particular, have to «wage war on». Mexico has constantly been at war with drug trafficking especially over the past decade and the country's value as a route for introducing drugs into the USA is at the heart of the problem, together with the thousands of millions of dollars generated by this illegal activity, plus the fact that Mexico has become a country for the passage and reception of large amounts of arms coming from the USA.

In recent years the cartels have been indulging in an "arms race". Although the arms are used more for intimidation than fighting, the result is territorial domination, which means that many Mexicans fall victims to their authority. All of this amounts to a clear threat to the sovereignty of the State and puts the whole society in danger. At a Local Administration level, for example, by cashing in on the financial and political weakness of the municipalities located

²¹ OLSON *et al.*, *op.cit.*

in rural areas, criminal organisations have managed to finance election campaigns for years, paving the way for one variable: la «narcopolitics».

All of this taking place within a framework of corruption, impunity from the legal system, the ineffectiveness of investigations, low remuneration and a lack of police training, has made the economic situation of millions of Mexicans delicate. The situation has been further complicated by the sharp increase in the murders of journalists that have occurred in recent times. In fact, Mexico has become one of the most dangerous countries in the world for journalists. Since 2000, 104 journalists have been murdered and a further 25 are missing and believed to be dead. On the list of the most deadly countries in the world to be a reporter, Mexico lies between Afghanistan, a country devastated by war, and Somalia, which is classified as a Failed State. Last year, 11 Mexican journalists were murdered, the highest annual figure this century.

The solution to the drug trafficking conflict is very complicated, as can be seen from the lack of success obtained so far in this struggle. By contrast, the cartels have multiplied, become more sophisticated, expanded throughout most of the country and become more fragmented. Some of them are no longer transnational because they have lost the ability to act in that capacity, and they now operate locally and have branched out into other illegal activities in order to obtain more income, which constitutes a greater risk to the population.

As J. Villalobos²² points out:

«There is no peaceful way of facing up to the cartels. It is not possible to coexist or negotiate with organised crime, and if it is not confronted, it grows. If the epicentre of the conflict is the value of the drug route, it is essential to limit the value of the route as much as possible, reducing to a minimum their advantages and opportunities for the criminal gangs that use them. This can only be done by the use of force, because praying will not help. The important thing is not stopping the drugs from reaching their destination, but dismantling cartels, gangs and criminal structures in order to restore the rule of law and peace to the citizens. All of this requires time and will mean casualties. It is only to be expected that violence has increased when the Government has intervened and confronted the cartels.

Violence is a means used by organised crime to defend its "business", to intimidate and control territory and to dominate the routes so that other criminal gangs cannot use them. Their natural enemy is other cartels, it is not an ultimate resort against the State. (...) If action is not taken to exert the State's authority throughout the country, there is a risk that Mexico will be split into a lot of criminal territories and that the State will become just

²² VILLALOBOS, Joaquín, «Mexico's War», Journal NEXOS, August 2010, available at <http://www.nexos.com.mx/?p=13890>.

another territory, like Guatemala. The cartels do not confront the State, what they try to do is corrupt it with money or neutralise it with intimidation. The country is dealing with criminals who are not seeking power but who are motivated by greed, who wish to get rich through drug trafficking, so they would rather bribe the police and politicians than kill them».

During the PRI's long period of office, the different Governments tried to put an end to drug trafficking and organised crime by negotiating with the main cartels, without completely renouncing repression, but it was a policy that did not work. When Fox and Calderon reached the Presidency the strategy changed completely. The PAN's Heads of State severed relations between politicians and the drug cartels, which then fought among themselves, and then the Government took a hard line, brought the Army out to fight the drug traffickers and the gangs. However, the number of victims of the violence began to increase, yet the problem of drug trafficking and gangs remained. Furthermore, the fact that the Army was being involved in this fight considerably weakened the institution, both in terms of effort and in the negative effect on its image as a result of the excesses that inevitably occur at times in this war on crime.

The strategy of removing the leaders of the organisations, but without managing to annihilate the organisations themselves, has also caused many of the cartels to splinter, and such a proliferation of smaller groups complicates the security forces' tasks, because they now have to monitor a larger number of gangs that are smaller and thus more difficult to control. Along general lines, the criminal groups are fairly proactive and can rapidly change their drug routes, their *modus operandi* and the efficient methods they use to conceal the merchandise. Furthermore, and as indicated in the report prepared in 2017 by the United Nations²³ «the trading models are changing and making use of the new technologies, which is altering the nature of the trade in illegal substances and the types of agents participating in that trade, which is giving rise to the setting up of horizontal and less structured networks and is causing smaller gangs to acquire greater prominence».

What is more, organised crime has increased its range of criminal activities and entered other sectors, so that fewer organisations are now involved exclusively with drug trafficking, although the drug market, especially the cocaine and synthetic substance market, is not only holding its own but seems to be prospering. In fact, the aforementioned UNODC Report²⁴ indicates that «the data concerning the production, trafficking and consumption of drugs suggests that there is a global expansion in the cocaine market all over the world. After a prolonged decline, there has been an upsurge in coca cultivation. Between 2013 and 2015 there was a 30% increase, mainly as a result of the rise in the number of coca bushes recorded in Colombia. There

²³ World Drug Report 2017, United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC).

²⁴ Ibid.

has also been an increase in the consumption of cocaine in the two main markets, North America and Europe, which is not very good news either for Mexico or for the new Government that is voted in after the 2018 General Elections.

On the positive side, the Mexican Authorities have, during this period, managed to reduce the groups' capacity to operate, and have thus weakened them. «A lot of marijuana and cocaine worth 90 thousand million Euros has been seized; this figure has been calculated at the estimated value of the Euro in Mexico, (if it were in the USA, the amount would be much greater). About 200,000 firearms have also been confiscated, of which three-quarters are high-calibre weapons, not to mention 162,000 land and maritime vehicles and 607 aircraft. Finally, no less than 5,000 clandestine runways have been put out of action²⁵, so there is some cause for hope.

The eradication of drug trafficking in Mexico could turn into a social outcry. According to the findings in a recent survey prepared by the US *Pew Research Center*, the Mexicans are very pessimistic and 85 % of the population are not satisfied with the current situation in the country. The survey has found that the greatest causes for concern are corruption in the political classes, drug-related violence and crime²⁶, and the next government will have to take this into account. What will be required in the future is political willpower, an attack on the traffickers' financial structure, which remains intact, resembling crime multinationals rather than groups of criminals, as well as the involvement and collaboration of the international community, factors without which victory over drug trafficking does not seem to be possible.

| | |
|---|------------------------------------|
| GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS | |
| Surface Area 1,972,550 Km ² | |
| GDP 257,222 million Euros | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 3.7% |
| | Industry 33.1% |
| | Services 63.2% (est. 2016). |
| GDP per capita \$US 8,541 | |
| GDP growth rate 2.3 % | |
| Trade Relations | |
| (Exports): 373,930 \$US million | |
| Trade Relations | |
| (Imports): 387.064 \$US million | |

²⁵ MONTERO VIEIRA, *op.cit.*

²⁶ VILLEGAS, Paulina, «A survey indicates that 85% of Mexicans have a negative opinion about the USA», *The New York Times*, 14th September 2017.

Mexico at the crossroads. Ten years of war against drug...

| | |
|---|--------------------|
| Population 129,163 million inhabitants | |
| Age Brackets | 0-14 27% |
| | 15-59 45% |
| | Over 60 10% |
| Population growth rate 1.4% | |
| Life expectancy 77.4 years | |
| Ethnic groups 60-70% Mixed Race; 21% Amerindian; others 10 % | |
| Religions 88% Catholic, 5.2% Protestant and Evangelical | |
| Literacy rate 94.5% | |
| Population living in poverty 46.2 % (55,3 million) | |
| Population living in extreme poverty 9.5 % | |
| GINI Index 0.502 (2014) | |
| Military Expenditure. % of the GDP. 0.58% (2016) | |

Sources: UN 2017, Ministry of Foreign Affairs & Cooperation Country File.

| CONFLICT CHRONOLOGY | |
|----------------------------|--|
| CHAP. XIII | Mexico at the Crossroads. Ten Years of War on Drug-Trafficking |
| DATE | EVENTS |
| 1960 | Growing marijuana and opium poppy crops begins in Mexico. |
| 1970-80 | The Colombian Medellin Cartel and Cali Cartel groups are at their peak, marketing the drug that is grown in the Andes (Peru and Bolivia). The Mexican cartels start to traffic with cocaine. |
| 1982 | The US President, Ronald Reagan, sets up the <i>South Florida Task Force</i> , under the command of the Vice President George H. W. Bush. |
| 1984 | The Medellin Cartel led by Pablo Escobar, assassinates the Colombian Minister of Justice, Rodrigo Lara Bonilla. President Belisario Betancourt clamps down on the drug smugglers. They flee to Panama and join forces with General Noriega. The Gulf Cartel emerges in Mexico, headed by Juan Garcia Abrego. |
| 1985 | The <i>South Florida Task Force</i> manages to reduce the flow of cocaine via the Florida route and the Colombian smugglers transfer the drug route to Panama and Central America. In Mexico, the Guadalajara Cartel assassinates the DEA Agent Enrique Camarena. The USA applies pressure on President Miguel de la Madrid to make him arrest its leaders and the Cartel splits into 3 (the Sinaloa Cartel, the Tijuana Cartel and the Juarez Cartel). |
| 1989 | President Bush invades Panama. Noriega is captured and drug trafficking through Panama is stopped. |
| 1990 | The President of Peru, Alberto Fujimori, cuts the link between Columbian traffickers and the producers in the Andean Zona. Peace agreements start to be signed in Nicaragua, and later in El Salvador and Guatemala; State control is resumed in the Central American isthmus. |
| 1993 | Enrique Escobar is murdered and the Medellin Cartel crumbles. |

| | |
|------|---|
| 1995 | The two main Heads of the Cali Cartel surrender, marking the end of the predominance of the two major Colombian cartels. |
| 1996 | Garcia Abrego, leader of the Gulf Cartel is deported to the USA. His successor is Osiel Cárdenas, «El Mata Amigos», who forms a paramilitary group, «Los Zetas» with Army deserters. Los Zetas later splinter and a third new group emerges, La Familia Michoacana. |
| 1997 | The links that General Gutierrez Rebollo has with the Mexican Juarez Cartel come to light. |
| 2000 | The Mexican Cartel boom begins. The PRI's period of office comes to an end after 71 years of hegemony. PAN wins the elections and Vicente Fox's Government (2000-2006) takes over. |
| 2006 | The Government of Vicente Calderon begins. He declares war on drug trafficking and embarks on «Operation Michoacan». |
| 2008 | The Merida Initiative is signed between USA, Mexico, Central America, Dominican Republic and Haiti. |
| 2011 | There is a split in the la Familia Michoacana group, giving rise to the Los Caballeros Templarios Clan. The Jalisco Nueva Generacion (CJNG) Cartel appears, originally to combat Los Zetas. |
| 2012 | The PRI gets back into power under the Presidency of Enrique Peña Nieto. |
| 2013 | President Obama gives guarantees that the Merida Initiative is going to last in time. |
| 2017 | Donald Trump becomes US President. Bilateral relations deteriorate. |

Chapter thirteen

Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare: terrorism, separatism and extremism

José Ignacio García Sánchez

Indeed, the question now becomes whether the dominant Hans, who comprise more than 90 percent of China's population and live mainly in the arable cradle of China, are able to permanently keep the Tibetans, Uighur Turks, and Inner Mongolians who live on the periphery under control, with the minimum degree of unrest. The ultimate fate of the Chinese state will hinge on this fact, especially as China undergoes economic and social disruptions.¹

Abstract

The third edition of the *Geopolitical Conflict Panorama*, published in 2013,² addressed the domestic challenges the geopolitical giant needed to tackle in pursuing the "Chinese dream of peaceful development":

- The survival of the system – with a legitimacy based on revolutionary credit, the moral superiority of the party and economic results – is threatened by a reality of 170 million poor, corruption, nepotism and social inequalities.
- The historical Tibetan and Uighur nationalities, characterised by their strong religious sentiment and considerable geographical marginality, are torn between cultural singularity and the colonising homogenisation of the Han majority.
- The reunification of Taiwan, the inalienable goal enshrined in its constitution, which pits it directly against the world's leading geopolitical power, the United States.

¹ KAPLAN, Robert D., *The Revenge of Geography: What the Map Tells Us About Coming Conflicts and the Battle Against Fate*, Random House Publishing Group, 2012, p. 195.

² http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/panorama_geopolitico_2013.pdf.

In this edition we will analyse the situation in the Xinjiang Autonomous Region³ at a time when the world faces the challenge of unrepentant Islamic radicalism but governments all over the world are unclear as to how to incorporate it into the channels of civilised protest.

Keywords

Geopolitics, conflict, China, Xinjiang, Tibet, Uighur, Islamism, extremism, separatism, terrorism.

³ We will use the vernacular form Xinjiang, which we also used in 2013.

Introduction

«On the issues concerning China's territorial sovereignty and maritime rights and interests, some neighboring countries are taking actions that complicate or exacerbate the situation [...]. The threats posed by "three forces," namely, terrorism, separatism and extremism, are on the rise. The "Taiwan independence" separatist forces and their activities are still the biggest threat to the peaceful development of cross-Straits relations. Serious natural disasters, security accidents and public health incidents keep occurring⁴».

«(...), China faces a formidable task to maintain political security and social stability. Separatist forces for "East Turkistan independence" and "Tibet independence" have inflicted serious damage, particularly with escalating violent terrorist activities by 'East Turkistan independence' forces. Besides, anti-China forces have never given up their attempt to instigate a "color revolution" in this country. Consequently, China faces more challenges in terms of national security and social stability⁵».

China can be considered a culturally very homogenous state, as nearly 92 percent of the population are Han. The remaining 8 percent belong to 56 different groups that are recognised by the Chinese government. However, this 8 percent amounts to more than 100 million people. In addition, some of these groups live in outlying regions where they are in contact with the original cultures such as the Mongols, Tibetans, Koreans and Turkmen. Another characteristic of this marginality is the size of the territory these minorities occupy. More than 60 percent of the current territory of the People's Republic of China (PRC),⁶ the outer continental periphery, is populated by these minorities, who make up the origin of Chinese culture. This peripheral position also deprives them of the benefits of the thriving economy driven by the so-called "Golden Coast".

Their marginality led Saul Bernard Cohen to write in the epilogue of the third edition of *Geopolitics* that:

In all likelihood, the Golden Coast would not break away from north and interior continental China as an independent state but would be a quasi-independent one in *confederation* with the rest of China. *Confederation* could also be the path taken by Taiwan. In both cases [a unified Korean peninsula and Taiwan], a "*Hong Kong Plus*" model might be the vehicle whereby they *could* enjoy economic and a modicum of political Independence [...].

⁴ Council of State of the People's Republic of China, *The Diversified Employment of China's Armed Forces*, Beijing, April 2013, p. 2.

⁵ Council of State of the People's Republic of China, *China's Military Strategy*, May 2015, p. 3.

⁶ FRAVEL, Taylor M., *Strong Borders, Secure Nation, Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*, Princeton University Press, New Jersey, 2008, p. 45.

Whether or not a division of China takes place, *Tibet and Xinjiang* are likely to become quasi *states*, if not *independent* ones.⁷

Examining the distinctive features of these two autonomous regions more closely, it is necessary to refer to the deeply religious nature of the two majority groups that populate them. Although not unique, as both Buddhism and Islam are present among the Chinese population,⁸ religion is used as an argument due to its differentiating power and as a determining factor in the demands for greater political and economic autonomy.

In the case of Islam, these demands are having a markedly destabilising effect. Islamic radicalism is currently the paradigm of the three forces that represent evil in Chinese security thinking: terrorism, separatism and extremism. China's president, Xi Jinping, recently gave evidence of this at the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation summit held in Astana, Kazakhstan, on 9 June: "Recent acts of terrorism show that the fight against 'the three evil forces' – terrorism, separatism and extremism – remains a long and arduous task". He also pointed out that "without security there would be no development to speak of". Along the same lines, he stated in a speech at the opening ceremony of the Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation that "we should intensify counterterrorism efforts, address both the symptoms and root causes, and strive to eradicate poverty, backwardness and social injustice. [...] Development is the master key to solving all problems".

Background to the conflict

«Withdrawal of American and Soviet power from Indochina has enabled China to extend the new continental-maritime East Asian geostrategic realm southward to include the Indochinese states of Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos and eastern Myanmar.⁹ These constitute a separate geopolitical region within the East Asian realm. The boundaries of the East Asian realm are forged by China's reach to other parts of Asia. Tibet and Xinjian afford contact with South and Central Asia. In the northeast Pa-

⁷ COHEN, Saul Bernard, *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*, third edition (2015). Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers Inc., p. 454.

⁸ According to the *CIA World Factbook*, the percentages of the main religions in China are: Buddhists 18.2%, Christians 5.1 % and Muslims 1.8%. In relation to the latter, in addition to the Uighurs, the Hui minority, who also descend from the Turks, practice Islam, though they are much more integrated into Chinese culture as they share the same customs and language. They currently number about 11 million, slightly more than the Uighurs.

⁹ Saul Bernard Cohen speaks of three global strategic realms as the highest hierarchy in the geopolitical structure: "maritime", the most developed; the commercial axis that combines the Atlantic and Pacific oceans, with the United States at its centre of gravity; the "Eurasian Continental", with Russia as its "heartland"; and the "Maritime-Continental of the Far East".

Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare:....



Figure 13.1. Map of Xinjiang.

cific, where the maritime, Eurasian, and East Asian realms meet, North Korea is part of East Asia. A reunified Korean Peninsula, however, could become either a gateway among the three realms or a compression zone¹⁰».

The Uighur Autonomous Region of Xinjiang (see graph 1),¹¹ as it is officially known, occupies China's northwest corner and its area is slightly more than three times that of Spain (1,646,900 km²). It is the largest division in China. It has borders with eight countries: Mongolia, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirghizstan, Tajikistan, Afghanistan, Pakistan and India. Within China it borders with the autonomous region of Tibet and the provinces of Qinghai and Gansu.

It has firm agreements with the bordering countries on the demarcation lines of all its external frontiers except India, with which it is still engaged in a dispute over some territories. According to M. Taylor Fravel in *Strong Borders, Secure Nation, Cooperation and Conflict in China's Territorial Disputes*,¹² the agreements took shape in pace with the vicissitudes of China's internal political situation, in much the same way as its trade drive and phases of isolation. Two key dates can be pinpointed in the signing of

¹⁰ Ibid, COHEN, *Geopolitics*, p. 43.

¹¹ Stratfor 2013.

¹² Ibid. FRAVEL, Taylor M., *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, p. 7.

border agreements: the failure of Mao's "Great Leap Forward" in the spring of 1962; and the revolts which ended with the action of the Chinese army in Tiananmen Square on 4 June 1989. Also, as a unique characteristic, these agreements are kinder on the theoretically weaker nations,¹³ and, in contrast, much harsher and sometimes violent towards the stronger countries like Russia, the former Soviet Union and India.

The territories disputed with India relate to three sectors, one of which, the west, is in the southernmost part of Xinjiang. It spans 37,244 km² which have never been delimited and, depending on each country's claims, ought to be demarcated by the Kunlun mountains (India), or the Karakorum range (China). But despite being a practically uninhabited region, it has two special characteristics that make it unique: its closeness to the conflictive Kashmir region and the very important Karakorum highway – the friendship highway – the highest in the world, which connects the capitals of Xinjiang, Pakistan and Tibet: Urumqi, Islamabad and Lhasa, respectively. Built in 1956, it played a fundamental role in quashing the revolt of 1959¹⁴ in Tibet, owing above all to the insurgents' control of the eastern towns, which made it necessary to send reinforcements to the People's Liberation Army troops from the west.

The region known as Xiju – in the west – which came to be called Xinjiang (new border) following its formal annexation to the Chinese state by the Qing dynasty in the eighteenth century, has a tortuous relief reaching a maximum height of 7,439 metres and 154 metres below sea level in its

¹³ Fravel ends his study with three main ideas:

"1. - China has never been very predisposed to use force in its territorial disputes, being one of the states least inclined to initiate a conflict. 2. - Most of the territorial compromises reached have their explanation in internal threats to the security of the regime. 3. - China follows a negative model in the harshness of its claims, using force when she faces powerful opponents who could weaken its position, or when it controls little or none of the territory it is claiming." GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ, Ignacio, *China y su vecindario próximo. La prueba de fuego del desarrollo pacífico*, Ministerio de Defensa, Madrid, November 2014, p. 381, [Included in the *Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2014*. Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos. English version: http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/panoramas/Geopolitical_Panorama2014.pdf].

With respect to the countries bordering on Xinjiang, the Chinese authorities have signed the following agreements or bilateral treaties with: Afghanistan, to which they have granted 100% of its claims over a stretch of land of around 7.381 km²; Tajikistan, 96% of 28,430 km²; Kirghizstan, 68% of 3,656 km²; Kazakhstan, 66% of 2,420 km²; Mongolia, 65% of 16,808 km²; Pakistan, 40% of 8,806 km² (though in this case China was granted the 37,244 km² of Aksai Chin, in the Kashmir region disputed with India); and Russia, 48% of 1,000 km².

¹⁴ The Tibetan revolt of 1959 is the greatest challenge to the authority of the Chinese Communist Party, followed possibly by the student demonstrations that preceded the events in Tiananmen Square. Between 23,000 and 87,000 rebels took part in the revolt and seized control of 13% of Chinese territory. The revolt was backed by India and the CIA. The latter supplied more than 600 tonnes of supplies and material from December 1957 to the spring of 1962 in 37 incursions, as well as training and infiltrating 10 units of Tibetans to direct the insurgency. Ibid. FRAVEL, Taylor M., *Strong Borders, Secure Nation*, pp. 71 and 81.

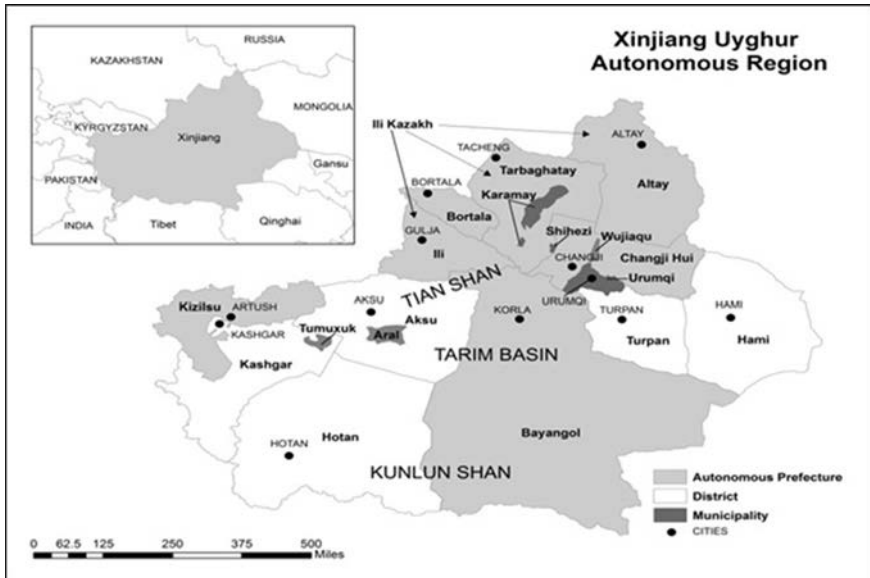


Figure 13.2. Xinjiang Uighur.

deepest depression. It is crossed from east to west by three mountain chains. The Altay mountains in the north constitute a natural border with Mongolia and Russia. In the centre the Tian Shan chain occupies a quarter of its area and divides it into two basins, Jungar in the north, where its capital, Urumqi, is, and Tarim in the south, with its main population centre in Kashgar. In the south the Kunlun chain and the Karakorum mountains link up with the central chain, forming the natural border with the western and southern neighbours. The Jungar basin, spanning 380,000 km², is a triangle that is open on the east and west sides, and is surrounded by a ring of oases at the foot of the mountains, while the centre is dominated by steppe land and desert. The Tarim basin occupies half of the region, 1,370 km from east to west, and 560 km from north to south; its central part, spanning 320,000 km², is dominated by the Takla Makan desert.

According to the census of 2010, Xinjiang had a population of 21,820,000 – 18.2% more than the 18,460,000 recorded in the 2000 census.¹⁵ The population distribution is marked by the region's relief (see graph 2),¹⁶ and three perfectly differentiated areas can be distinguished: the north with 46.56% of the population, the south with 47.96% and the east with 5.48%:

¹⁵ The percentage per ethnic group is: Uighur 45.84%, Han 40.84%, Kazakh 6.50%, Hui 4.51% and the rest 2.67%. <https://cpianalysis.org/2016/03/07/spatial-results-of-the-2010-census-in-xinjiang/>

¹⁶ Ibid, 2 and 3.

- The north basin, Jungar, which has a Kazakh majority, has experienced the greatest growth, driven especially by the migration of Han Chinese to the central area attracted by thriving trade, the vitality of its towns and cities and improved transport connections. The population is located chiefly on the foothills of the mountain chains of the north (Kazakhs) and south (Han).
- The south basin, Tarim, where the population (above all Uyghur) is concentrated in the westernmost part around the cities of Aksu and Kashgar, which have more than 450,000 inhabitants each. The main city centres are in the northern basin, however: the capital, Urumqi, with more than 3,000,000 inhabitants, Shihezi with 600,000, Korla with 500,000 (in the central chain but in the south parts with a Han majority) and Ghulja with 450,000.

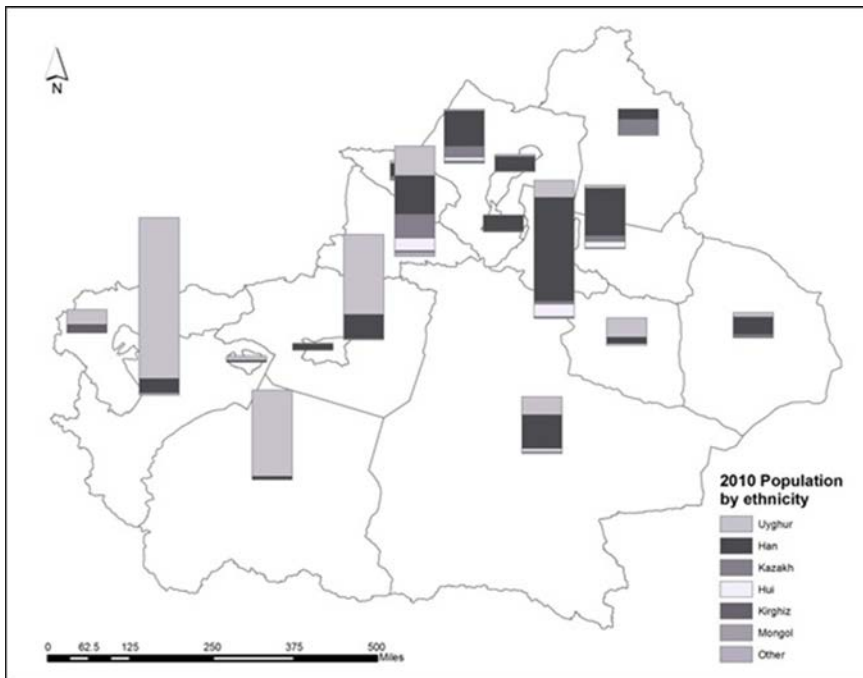


Figure 13.3. Population by ethnicity.

History has shown that the Chinese civilisation, which is more than 5,000 years old, has upheld a different concept compared to the rest of the civilisations since its origins in the rich flatlands of the north: harmony. Its fulfilment resides in the legitimation of good governance enshrined in the *Mandate of Heaven*, which embodies the magnificence of a perfectly regulated, stable, clean and transparent universe. The system which governs it must accordingly be exemplary in its behaviour, spotless in its conduct, upright in

both personal and public affairs, and effective and efficient in achieving its aim, which is none other than harmony.

«Understandably, the Confucian tradition¹⁷ had no place for the ideas of conquest, expansion, and imperial rule over subject peoples that were driving forces in, for example, Roman and Ottoman Turkish history. Emperors who seemed to enjoy war and conquest too much were usually opposed by their officials and/or condemned by history [...], while emperors who decisively moved from war to peace [...] were correspondingly praised. Nor [...] was there any prospect of commerce-driven overseas colonial expansion [...] had Confucian values permitted such activity¹⁸».

But the history of China, imbued with a deeply Confucian sense, cannot be understood without the complex system of cultures which have evolved in a continuous cycle of influences – sometimes centrifugal, sometimes centripetal – that go into making a homogenous yet heterogeneous whole in a diverse and unique universe.

«Chinese history featured many periods of civil war, interregnum, and chaos. After each collapse, the Chinese state reconstituted itself as if by some immutable law of nature [...]. The famous opening of *The Romance of the Three Kingdoms*, a fourteenth-century epic novel treasured by centuries of Chinese [...], evokes this continuous rhythm: “The empire, long divided, must unite; long united, must divide. Thus it has ever been.” Each period of disunity was viewed as an aberration [...]. The fundamental precepts of Chinese culture endured, tested by the strain of periodic calamity¹⁹».

There are good examples of Chinese civilisation's permeability, amalgamation and readiness to integrate, such as the Turkish migrations in northern China which started in AD 310 and constitute the Turkish-Chinese dynasties of the north, separated by the river Yangtze from the eminently Chinese dynasties of the south. This period allowed Turkoman culture to penetrate, and become integrated into, Chinese society, backed by Buddhism, a harmonious factor. The period extended to 581 – bearing a certain parallel with the division of the Roman Empire – and facilitated the reunification of the empire under the Sui dynasty.²⁰

¹⁷ The teachings of Confucius (551-479) during the period of the warlords pursue the original historical ideal of harmony and exemplarity symbolised by the first dynasties: Xia (2100 BC), Shang (1500 BC) and especially Zhou (1045 BC).

¹⁸ DREYER, Edward L., “Continuity and Change”, in *A Military History of China*, edited by David A. Graff and Robin Higham, University Press of Kentucky, 2012, p. 23.

¹⁹ KISSINGER, Henry (2011). *On China*. New York, the Penguin Press, p. 6.

²⁰ One of the leaders of the northern clan, Yang Jian, a Turkish-Chinese warlord, first succeeded in unifying the northern dynasties and subsequently – through military and civil actions, among them marriages and the patronage of Buddhism – reunified the Chinese state under the Sui dynasty.

Although the dynasty did not succeed in remaining for a long period of time, from 581 to 618, it undertook one of the projects that strengthened this social integration, the Grand Canal (see graph 3),²¹ which linked Beijing, the northern capital, with Nanjing, that of the south. In addition, it gave rise to one of the great Chinese dynasties, the Tang, 618-906, which witnessed spectacular economic development. This period also saw a substantial rise in the trade route known as the "Silk Road" (see graph 3), which connected its capital, Sian – the largest city of the period with more than two million inhabitants – with Central Asia, Europe and the Mediterranean world.

Another classic example of this comprehensive concept of civilisation is the so-called rebellion of An Lushan, commander in chief of the Beijing protection forces of Uighur origin and right-hand man of the Emperor Xuanzong. Accused by the court of sleeping with the emperor's favourite concubine, Yang Guifei, he was summoned to the capital. The Uighur chief headed for Sian with all his forces, forcing the emperor to abdicate in favour of his son.

Xinjiang was thus a logical port for the expansion and interrelations of Chinese civilisation with Central Asia and the Mediterranean, driven by the attraction the major cultural centres of the world have always exerted. In this connection, the region's bonds suffered the effects of the vicissitudes of the two civilisations that shared it, Chinese and Turkmen, and subsequently became part of Islam,²² and was influenced by the Soviet experiment. As a dependent entity it did not formally join the Chinese administrative system until 1884. At this point it became a province with its current name and, with the support of the Soviet Union, enjoyed a few short-lived periods of independence as the Republic of East Turkestan, while the Chinese civil war was being waged between the nationalists of Chiang Kai Shek and the communists of Mao Zedong.

When the People's Republic of China was proclaimed on 1 October 1949, the Chinese Communist Party found itself faced with the task of strengthening the borders of a decaying state following a process of decline²³ in the so-called "century of humiliation".

²¹ https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/resources/cia-maps-publications/map-downloads/china_physiography.jpg/image.jpg

²² "Sinic [...] distinct Chinese civilization dating back to at least 1500 BC and perhaps to a thousand years earlier [...]. While Confucianism is a major component of Chinese civilization, Chinese civilization is more than Confucianism and also transcends China as a political entity [...], appropriately describes the common culture of China and the Chinese communities [...] *Islamic* [...]. Originating in the Arabian peninsula in the seventh century AD, Islam rapidly spread across North Africa and the Iberian peninsula and also eastward into central Asia, the Subcontinent, and Southeast Asia. As a result, many distinct cultures or subcivilizations exist within Islam, including Arab, Turkic, Persian, and Malay." HUNTINGTON, Samuel P., *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of the World Order*, (2003 edition). New York, Simon & Schuster, p. 45.

²³ "1840 marked the start of a period of progressive decline and loss of territorial control until the proclamation of the republic in 1912, of which Taiwan (Republic of China, with its

«The ensuing catastrophes [after the first opium war of 1839 1842] are viewed with considerable dismay in a contemporary China, as part of an infamous "century of humiliation" that ended only by the reunification of the country under an assertively nationalist form of Communism. At the same time, the era of China's hobbling stands in many ways as a testimony to its remarkable abilities to surmount strains that might break other societies²⁴».

Current conflict situation

«The evolution of religions in Xinjiang went through four stages: the stage of primitive religion, the formation stage for the coexistence of a variety of religions with Buddhism as the major one, the evolution stage for the coexistence of many religions with Islam and Buddhism as the two major ones, and the development stage for the coexistence of a variety of religions with Islam as the major one [...] In the late ninth and early 10th centuries, Islam was introduced into southern Xinjiang [...] In the early 11th century the Kara-Khanid Khanate conquered Khotan and imposed Islam in that region. Thereafter, Islam dominated southern Xinjiang while Buddhism dominated northern Xinjiang, the two coexisting. [...] The rulers of the Eastern Chagatai Khanate in the mid-14th century spread Islam to the northern edge of the Tarim Basin, Turpan Basin and Hami area by warlike and other compulsory means. By the early 16th century many religions coexisted in Xinjiang, with Islam as the predominant one. Zoroastrianism, Manichaeism and Nestorianism gradually disappeared, although Buddhism and Taoism clung on. In the early 17th century the Oirat Mongols accepted Tibetan Buddhism. Beginning in the 18th century, Protestantism, Catholicism and the Eastern Orthodox church were introduced into Xinjiang one by one. A pattern featuring coexistence of multiple religions, with Islam as the principal one, continues today in Xinjiang.²⁵ [...] History shows that wars

capital in Taipei) considers itself an heir. And it was on 1 October 1941, after the triumph of the Communist revolution, when the People's Republic of China (PRC) was proclaimed in Beijing. Another key date in the shift from humiliation to national pride is that of the founding of the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) on 1 July 1921." GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ, Ignacio José, "El poder militar chino: el dragón alza el vuelo", in *Araucaria Revista Iberoamericana de Filosofía y Humanidades*, year 18, no. 35. First half of 2016, p. 279.

²⁴ KISSINGER, Henry, *On China*, The Penguin Press, New York, 2011, p. 58.

²⁵ "Xinjiang now has 24,800 venues for religious activities, including mosques, churches, lamaseries and temples, with 29,300 clerical personnel. Among these, 24,400 mosques have 29,000 clerical personnel; 59 Buddhist temples have 280 clerical personnel; one Taoist temple has one cleric; 227 Protestant churches (meeting grounds) have 26 clerical personnel; 26 Catholic churches (meeting grounds) have 27 clerical personnel; and three Orthodox churches (meeting grounds) have one cleric. There are eight religious colleges, including the Xinjiang Islamic Institute and Xinjiang Islamic School. There are also 112 religious organizations, among which, at the autonomous region level, there are two organizations, namely, an Islamic association with a committee for Islamic affairs, and a Buddhist association; [at a provincial and local level there are 102 Islamic associations, 5

between different religions and disputes between different sects of the same religion deprive people of the free choice of religion²⁶».

Today the question of Xinjiang is centred chiefly on the global challenge of Islam-influenced radical, violent fundamentalism. "Religious extremism is the common enemy of all humanity", stresses the White Paper on religious freedom in Xinjiang. Therefore it is the obligation of everyone, especially believers, to combat policies for fighting radicalisation. In this respect, owing to the restrictions on public freedoms and human rights, the Chinese Communist Party, despite the considerations of lack of formal democracy and the resulting complaints, especially from the West, has much greater legitimacy for addressing integration and cultural homogenisation policies and for strengthening the state structures. In another context these policies might possibly be considered authoritarian.

The restrictions recently imposed on the most evident symbols of Islam are underpinned by awareness of the global terrorist threat and are based on the principles of religious freedom (see graph 4) and the state's obligation to protect normal religious activities. Nobody can use religion to take part in activities that disturb the public order, are detrimental to citizens' health or interfere with the state education system.²⁷

The international community currently supports the fight against the three main enemies of the Chinese government: separatism, terrorism and radical extremism, which, according to the Communist party, attempt to oppose the objectives enshrined in the constitution:

The People's Republic of China is a unitary multi-national state built up jointly by the people of all its nationalities. Socialist relations of equality, unity and mutual assistance have been established among them and will continue to be strengthened. In the struggle to safeguard the unity of the nationalities, it is necessary to combat big-nation chauvinism, mainly Han chauvinism, and also necessary to combat local-national chauvinism. The state does its utmost to promote the common prosperity of all nationalities in the country.

According to the Freedom House report, Islam in China, as in the rest of the world, is on the rise and, as in the rest of the world and as in Sunni rites, it has two models of conduct, though both are equally subject to the rigours of the policies aimed at stemming the development of radicalism. The Chinese constitution defends freedom of worship, but the Communist Party maintains atheism, not laicism, as a principle of the state. Wang Zuoan, head of religious matters, recently wrote that "Party members should not have

Buddhist associations and 3 protestant associations]." White Paper, *Freedom of Religious Belief in Xinjiang*, Council of State, Beijing, 2 June 2016, p. 6.

²⁶ Ibid, pp. 2, 3.

²⁷ A Freedom House Special Report, *The Battle for China's Spirit: Religious Revival, Repression, and Resistance under Xi Jinping*, February 2017, p. 9.

religious beliefs, which is a red line for all members [...]. Party members should be firm Marxist atheists”.²⁸

And so, while Hui Muslims²⁹ are perfectly integrated into Chinese culture and society and practice their religion without political scrutiny, in the case of the Uighurs, religion is used to distinguish them from traditional Chinese culture and to keep alive the flame of an independent east Turkestan. The aim appears to be to create a fundamentalist state and join in the global jihad by teaming up with either al-Qaeda or Daesh.

Along these lines, the Turkestan Islamic Party (TIP), which became affiliated with al-Qaeda in 2001, joined the Caliphate along with other Uzbek movements in 2013 in view of the rise of Daesh. According to *The Diplomat*,³⁰ in 2016 it had some 2,000 fighters in Syria belonging to Jabhat al-Nusra, which was renamed Jabhat Fath al-Sham under the emir Abu Muhammad al-Julani. This membership ensures them a high social profile and propaganda, which is targeted chiefly at the most depressed and radicalised sectors of their own country. Though also, by opposing the Chinese Communist Party's policies more visibly, their messages are resonating with larger sectors of the population such as human rights advocates and anti-communist groups.

In this sense the Beijing authorities' new policy of firmness is part of a growing international awareness of combating the spread of Islamic radicalism and the most violent forms of jihadist terrorism. As *The New York Times* reported on 20 February, more than 10,000 police and members of the military police belonging to the People's Army (see graph 5)³¹ staged shows of force in the most important cities of Xinjiang. Previously, in August 2016, Chen Quanguo, a senior party official close to Xi Jinping, took over the leadership of the Communist Party in the region after having been at the helm of the autonomous region of Tibet since 15 November 2011. This was the first time the same person had been responsible for both autonomous regions and was also a means of ensuring him a seat on the politburo at the nineteenth party congress.

Two major challenges loom on the horizon: the first is the defeat of Daesh and the return of the jihadi fighters. According to Reuters,³² which reports statements made by the Syrian ambassador in China, there could be as many as 5,000 fighters of Uighur origin currently in various terrorist groups in Syria and Iraq. And the threat could be real or propagandistic, but various videos have already announced the intention to “return to China and shed blood

²⁸ <http://www.globaltimes.cn/content/1056944.shtml>.

²⁹ They are mostly *hui*, descended from Arab and Persian traders, though there are also Uzbeks, Kazakhs and Tajiks.

³⁰ <http://thediplomat.com/2016/08/chinas-nightmare-xinjiang-jihadists-go-global/>.

³¹ http://news.ts.cn/content/2017-02/18/content_12522423.htm.

³² <http://www.reuters.com/article/uk-mideast-crisis-syria-china-idUSKBN1840UP>.

like rivers”.³³ The second challenge is to make Xinjiang a “golden gate” to strike a balance with the “golden coast” and make China’s geopolitical – and also continental and maritime – vision a reality. It is on this that President Xi Jinping’s major “One Belt, One Road” project hinges, providing an alternative route making it possible to avoid the Strait of Malacca.

Role of external actors

«The SCO is not a military bloc but will continue to strengthen mechanisms for eradicating terrorist activity³⁴».

A paradigmatic example of China’s vision of how to solve the conflict with the Uighur minority in the Xinjiang region and the role of external actors is the statement made by secretary-general Rashid Alimov of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on the entry into force,³⁵ following eight years of negotiations, of an agreement on harmonising the road transport of goods not only between members of the organisation but with Europe too, connecting the Pacific with the Atlantic through two continents. The agreement also includes the Indian subcontinent after India and Pakistan joined at the organisation’s recent meeting in Astana, the capital of Kazakhstan.

The organisation originates from the “Shanghai Five” mechanism,³⁶ a historical agreement on confidence building in the military field in border areas. China, the promoter of the agreement, Russia, Kazakhstan, Kirgizstan and Tajikistan signed it on 26 April 1996. Its spirit soon transcended the field of security to cooperation and development in order to address the three aspects of the security threat in Xinjiang: terrorism, separatism and extremism. In June 2001 the founding declaration of the SCO was signed with Uzbekistan. It is a constantly expanding organisation³⁷ that currently encompasses about half of the world’s population and accounts for a quarter

³³ <http://www.newsweek.com/isis-fighters-chinas-uighur-minority-vow-shed-blood-home-562948>.

³⁴ Words spoken by the secretary-general of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, Rashid Alimov, at the Security and Cooperation Forum organised by the OSCE [Organisation for Security and Cooperation in Europe] in Vienna: <http://eng.sectsc.org/news/20170510/266888.html>.

³⁵ The agreement entered into force on 20 January 2017, and it was signed at Dushanbe, the capital of Tajikistan, on 12 September 2014, based on the idea of entering into multilateral agreements on transport discussed at Bishkek, the capital of Kirgizstan, on 20 November 2002 at the first meeting of transport ministers of the SCO. At the second meeting held in St Petersburg on 10 September 2003 a group of experts was set up in Urumqi, the capital of Xinjiang, and began working in June 2004.

³⁶ http://spanish.xinhuanet.com/2016-04/15/c_135279524.htm.

³⁷ The next candidate is Iran. According to a Kremlin spokesperson, all the prerequisites have been formalised and its membership will most likely be confirmed at the forthcoming summits. Afghanistan, Belarus and Mongolia have observer status. <https://www.rt.com/news/391556-sco-india-pakistan-membership-astana/>.

of its wealth. It is therefore not surprising that it should have two permanent structures as well as the highest decision-making body, the Council of Heads of State, which meets yearly: the permanent Secretariat, based in Beijing; and the Executive Committee of the Regional Antiterrorist Structure based in Tashkent, the capital of Uzbekistan (SCO RATS).³⁸

As is only to be expected, terrorism is one of the fundamental issues discussed at the latest summit. The organisation aims to establish a convention on the prevention of radicalism and a set of agreements on fighting terrorism. President Putin warned of Daesh's intention to destabilise Central Asia and southern Russia from Afghanistan, by infiltrating more than 10,000 terrorists. The director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS, Yevgeny Sysoyev, reported the dismantling of 16 possible attacks and the imprisonment of more than 100 suspected terrorists.

Another of the main actors on Xinjiang's conflict stage is Turkey and its president, Recep Tayyip Erdogan, especially after the failed coup d'état attempt and the constitutional reform. As Istanbul's mayor, the man who is now the Turkish president opened a new park³⁹ in the Blue Mosque district named after the president of the first Republic of East Turkestan, Isa Yusuf Alpetkin (1901-1995).⁴⁰ Inside it was a public memorial in honour of the martyrs who gave their lives to achieve independence, and he spoke in defence of pan-Turkism during the opening ceremony, stressing that "east Turkestan is only home to Turkish peoples but is also the cradle of their history, civilisation and culture. The martyrs of east Turkestan are our own martyrs. [...] Its culture is currently being systematically absorbed by Chinese culture".

This view clashes head-on with the interests of China and its possible attitude to the Kurdish problem. Turkey, at the heart of the most volatile geopolitical region in the short and medium term, will undoubtedly see its most vital interests affected by a complicated post-conflict situation. It is a region gripped by the hitherto unseen terror of a terrorist group, Daesh, empowered by the internal contradictions chiefly of two states, Syria and Iraq, which nonetheless spread across the whole area.

Given this state of affairs, with a pressing need for economic investments, China's position will have an increasingly decisive effect on its security and development, not to mention the important international intervention to combat the terrorist organisation Daesh. An important issue for Turkey will be China's position with respect to the demands of the Kurdish people.

³⁸ The secretary-general and director of the Executive Committee of the SCO RATS are appointed by the Council of Heads of State for a three-year period. Rashid Alimov (Tajikistan) and Yevgeny Sysoyev (Russia) currently hold the posts.

³⁹ Eastern Turkestan Information Bulletin Vol. 5 No. 4 (August 1995) http://caccp.freedomsherald.org/et/etib/etib5_4.html#4.

⁴⁰ The Republic of East Turkestan, with the support of the extinct Soviet Union, was short-lived, lasting from 12 November 1933 to 6 February 1934, with Kashgar as its capital.

Following its policy of peaceful development and non-interference in other countries' internal problems, China has strengthened its trade relations by opening a consulate general in Erbil, the capital of Iraqi Kurdistan.⁴¹

Another of the major actors on the complicated stage of the Xinjiang conflict is less tangible as it is a subjective perception of how the Chinese Communist Party is handling it. Socialism with Chinese characteristics and the single-party system continue to be questioned owing to the deficit in democratic values and the consequent lack of freedom. It is doubtful whether the economic success of its authorities, peace and social stability, and the proclaimed target of peaceful development are sufficient to earn the support of the West. The United States and Europe will continue to back the fight against the three demons – terrorism, separatism and extremism – but their support for Beijing's policies will depend above all on their societies' sensitivities to claims.⁴²

Conclusions and outlook

«Zigong asked about governance. The Master answered: "Development, security and legitimacy, these are the three keys." Zigong again asked: "If it were necessary to endanger one of them, which would be the first?" "Security", answered the Master. Zigong continued: "If it were necessary to endanger another, which would it be?" "Development", replied the master, adding that "since the beginning of time everyone has faced death, but society cannot be sustained if it does not trust the ruler's word"⁴³».

The governance conflict in Xinjiang is universal, its two most characteristic features being globality and locality; and they are both part of the same phenomenon that is a conglomerate of multifaceted relations and therefore complex,⁴⁴ and for the time being there is no apparent solution.

⁴¹ <http://www.kurdistan24.net/en/news/28d5fe44-71f6-4069-9f02-f9ff5e379691/Chinese-Consul-General--relations-with-KRG-expanding>.

⁴² See organisations affiliated with the World Uyghur Congress.

⁴³ The Analects of Confucius. The citation is a free translation compiled by the author from three sources: *Arca de la Sabiduría*; *Eno, Robert, 2015 v.2.2*; *LaFleur, Robert André*, Books that matter, *The Great Courses*, Chantilly, Virginia, 2016.

⁴⁴ It is interesting to note the distinction Joshua Cooper Ramos draws in *The Seventh Sense: Power, Fortune, and Survival in the Age of Network* between two concepts: complicated and complex. Whereas the Real Academia de la Lengua Española (RAE) defines them respectively as "composed of a large number of pieces" and "that which is composed of diverse elements", Cooper Ramos establishes a simple distinction in *The Seventh Sense*: however "complicated" (tangled, difficult to understand according to the RAE) a problem is, it is predictable and controllable; however, if a system is complex (set or combination of two or more things that make up a whole according to the RAE), relations between them create uncertainty, evolve towards something new, and sometimes change unexpectedly and unpredictably.

Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare:....

It is global because its characteristics are global, and repeated all over the world, which is pervaded by a growing phenomenon of the political awakening of the people⁴⁵ with an increasing desire for peace. Such a unique and irreplaceable environment of security and development⁴⁶ based on the three pillars of justice, freedom and legitimacy and in a context of respect for the universal declaration of human rights is a supreme good, the ultimate aim of both aspects of life, personal and social, united in a single cause, that of dignity and respect.

At the same time, like all conflicts, it is located in, and focused on, a single point in geography and history and this gives it its own, unrepeatable characteristics. But this identity is not only shaped in relation to the rest of the conflicts with the same characteristics found in other parts of the world but is unique in itself owing to the historical ties and the social and economic environment in which its actors live, in addition to the circumstances and vicissitudes it progressively accumulates like a major repository of hopes, dreams, misgivings and realities.⁴⁷

Xinjiang ought to constitute what Bernard Cohen calls a "gateway",⁴⁸ offering continuous and stable transit in one of the most unstable geopolitical areas where the continental vectors of the three strategic realms converge.⁴⁹

⁴⁵ BRZEZINSKI, Zbigniew, *Strategic Vision: America and the Crisis of Global Power*, Basic Books, New York, 2012, p. 26.

⁴⁶ United Nations General Assembly, report of the Secretary-General, *In Larger Freedom, Towards Development, Security and Human Rights for All*, 21 March 2005: "In an increasingly interconnected world, progress in the areas of development, security and human rights must go hand in hand. There will be no development without security and no security without development. And both development and security also depend on respect for human rights and the rule of law", p. 61.

⁴⁷ GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ, Ignacio José, *La seguridad humana y la «razón histórica»: de la justificación a la regresión, pasando por el estado de hibernación*, Boletín IEEE no.3, Ministerio de Defensa, Madrid, December 2016, p. 110.

⁴⁸ "Gateway states and regions [...] play a novel role in linking different parts of the world by facilitating the exchange of peoples, goods, and ideas. [...] The characteristics [...] vary in detail but not in the overall context of their strategic economic locations or in the adaptability of their inhabitants to economic opportunities. They are distinct *politically and culturally* and may often have separate languages or religions, as well as relatively high degrees of education and favorable access to external areas by land or sea [...]. The emergence of gateways helps to convert former barrier boundaries to borders of accommodation." COHEN, Saul Bernard. *Geopolitics: The Geography of International Relations*. Second edition (2009). Maryland, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc., p. 35.

⁴⁹ For the purpose of the meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization on 9 June 2017, the Chinese president strengthened his commitment to a more prosperous, secure and stable world based on international cooperation to reinforce the three key concepts of governance. An all-out war on "the three forces of evil", impetus to international trade, development as "the master key to solving all problems", and the creation of a human community who share the future and in which mutual confidence prevails, "building a shared house of security, stability, development and prosperity [...]. Unemployment and poverty are the main causes of global terrorism."

The political and religious positions of the extremist minorities, especially Uighur and Tibetan, could spark a disproportionate reaction from Beijing and give rise to a cycle of violence.⁵⁰ However, the foreseeable position of the western governments⁵¹ would trigger friction leading to a resurgence of the most radical nationalist factions within the Chinese Communist Party and a consequent shift towards a more populist and aggressive China.

Ethnic and religious minorities do not have sufficient domestic capabilities or external support to challenge the current status quo. Therefore, there is constant media and testimonial pressure, such as from Human Rights Watch⁵² and the Uyghur World Congress,⁵³ for Beijing to achieve greater openness and respect for cultural identities and, if necessary, grant greater autonomy.

Even so, from the western viewpoint China constantly suffers from ups and downs in its legitimacy as a result of its concept of a single-party state. Despite the disrepute of the liberal democracy's institutions following the financial crisis triggered by the collapse of Lehman Brothers on 14 September 2008 and the corruption that is constantly coming to light in all its structures, the situation remains unchanged. In this context nationalist and populist and markedly antisystem parties are springing up and this is giving the Chinese government more room for manoeuvre.

⁵⁰ For example, in the EU the aim of the counterterrorism strategy is to fight against terrorism all over the world, but respecting human rights and improving security based on four basic pillar: prevent, a key aspect being the EU's strategy for combating radicalisation and recruitment of terrorists; protect, with particular emphasis on vulnerabilities and a more restrictive legislation, for example the regulation of the use of passenger name records (PNR); pursue, undermining planning capabilities, and new controls for money laundering and tracing the funding of terrorism; and respond, with resilience as a key concept. <http://www.consilium.europa.eu/es/policies/fight-against-terrorism/>. Accessed 4 August 2017. These policies for preventing radicalisation are being widely adopted and all the countries where the Muslim religion is present have published policies for preventing the marginalisation and radicalisation of their faithful. In this regard the Chinese government has introduced new regulations, such as the possibility of confiscating passports, the use of GPS tracking in cars, the prohibition on choosing certain names and certain symbols in public, and greater control over education. <http://edition.cnn.com/2017/03/31/asia/china-xinjiang-new-rules/index.html>. Accessed on 4 August 2017.

⁵¹ See the recent comments made on 19 April 2017 by the high representative for CFSP (Common Foreign and Security Policy) and vice-president of the European Commission, Federica Mogherini, at the 7th EU-China High-Level Strategic Dialogue. https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage_en/24821/Remarks%20by%20the%20High%20Representative%20Mogherini%20following%20the%207th%20EU-China%20Strategic%20Dialogue. Accessed on 4 August 2017.

⁵² Letter to the EU High Representative ahead of her visit to China. 14 April 2017. <https://www.hrw.org/news/2017/04/14/letter-eu-high-representative-ahead-her-visit-china>. Press release from HRW: China-EU summit should make rights a priority. 29 May 2017. <https://www.amnesty.nl/actueel/press-release-from-human-rights-watch-china-eu-summit-should-make-rights-a-priority> Accessed on 8 August 2017.

⁵³ [Press release] Human rights must factor into dialogue during Li Keqiang visit to Berlin and Brussels. 30 May 2017. <http://www.uyghurcongress.org/en/?p=31684> Accessed on 8 August 2017.

Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare:....

Timeline

| CONFLICT TIMELINE | |
|-------------------------------|---|
| CHAPTER xx | Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare: terrorism, separatism and extremism |
| DATE | EVENTS |
| 500,000 BC | First remains of hominid fossils |
| 10,000 BC | Rice cultivation in Jiangxi |
| 2100 BC | Xia dynasty in the Yellow River valley |
| 1500 BC | Shang dynasty in the north plateau |
| 1045 BC | Zhou dynasty |
| 722-481 BC | Spring and autumn period |
| 551-479 BC | Confucius's lifetime |
| 480-221 BC | Period of the warlords |
| 221-6 BC | Qin dynasty |
| 202 BC-AD 220 | Han dynasty |
| AD 100 | First Buddhist temple in China |
| AD 220-80 | Period of the three kingdoms |
| AD 310 | Turkic migrations in northern China |
| 581-618 | Sui dynasty. Construction of the "Grand Canal" |
| 618-906 | Tang dynasty. Creation of the "Silk Road" |
| 755-763 | Rebellion of An Lushan, Uighur military chief |
| 845 | Buddhism is officially suppressed |
| 900 | Islam is introduced to southern Xinjiang |
| 907-960 | Period of the five dynasties |
| 960-1127 | Song dynasty in the north |
| 1127-1279 | Song dynasty in the south |
| 1260-1369 | Yuan Mongol dynasty |
| 1272-1290 | Marco Polo in China |
| 1350 | Spread of Islam in Xinjiang |
| 1368-1644 | Ming dynasty |
| 1405-1435 | Exploratory voyages of the Ming dynasty |
| 1600 | Islam is the predominant religion in Xinjiang |
| 1644-1911 Qing dynasty | 1839-1842. First opium war |
| | 1884. Xinjiang joins the Chinese administrative system |
| | 1894-1897 Chinese-Japanese war |
| | 1899-1900 Boxer rebellion |
| 1912 (January 1) | Proclamation of the Chinese Republic |
| 1921 (July) | Founding of the Chinese Communist Party |
| 1931 (September 18) | Japanese invasion of Manchuria |
| 1934 (October) 1935 (October) | The long march |
| 1945 | End of the war against Japan |
| 1949 (October 1) | Proclamation of the People's Republic of China |
| 1954 (June 28) | China, India and Myanmar establish the Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence |

| | |
|---|--|
| 1956 | Construction of the Karakorum highway. "The Friendship Highway". The highest in the world |
| 1957 (December) | Uprising in the autonomous region of Tibet |
| 1962 (spring) | "The great leap forward" |
| 1960 | Myanmar. Border treaty |
| 1961 | Nepal. Border treaty |
| 1962 | North Korea. Border treaty Mongolia. Border treaty India. Border conflict |
| 1963 | Afghanistan. Border treaty |
| 1965 | Pakistan. Border protocol |
| 1966-1969 | "The cultural revolution" |
| 1970 | China. First claim over the Diaoyu/Senkaku islands |
| 1974 (January) | Occupation of the whole Paracel islands |
| 1976 | Death of Mao Zedong |
| 1975 (October 21) | Mao's words: "within 100 years we are going to want and fight for Taiwan" |
| 1976 (September 9) | Death of Mao Zedong |
| 1978 (August 12) | Japan. Peace and friendship treaty |
| 1978-1994 | Leadership of Den Xiaoping |
| 1979 | USA. Recognition of the People's Republic of China in Beijing. China. Invasion of Vietnam |
| 1980-1984 | Vietnam. Border conflicts |
| 1988 | India recognises China's sovereignty over the autonomous region of Tibet |
| 1988 (March 14) | First dispute with Vietnam over the Spratly islands |
| 1989 (June 4) | End of the Tiananmen Square uprising. The Chinese army intervenes |
| 1991 | Laos. Border treaty |
| 1993 (November 12) - 1934 (February 6) | Republic of East Turkestan |
| 1994 | China. Occupation of the seventh of the Spratly Islands |
| 1996 (April 26) | Signing of the Shanghai Five agreement |
| 1998 | Bhutan. Agreement on maintaining the status quo Kazakhstan. Supplementary agreement to the 1994 border agreement Kirgizstan. Supplementary agreement to the 1996 border agreement |
| 1999 | Russia. Border protocol Vietnam. Border treaty |
| 2001 | The Turkestan Islamic Party becomes affiliated with al-Qaeda |
| 2001 (June) | Signing of the declaration on the establishment of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization |
| 2002 | Tajikistan. Supplementary agreement to the 1999 border agreement |
| 2005 | India. Agreement in principle on borders |
| 2008 | The European Union and Great Britain recognise Chinese sovereignty over the autonomous region of Tibet |

Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare:....

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| 2012 (November) | 18th Chinese Communist Party Congress |
| 2013 | The Turkestan Islamic Party joins Daesh |
| 2013 (November 21) | 16th meeting of Chinese-EU leaders |
| 2013 (November 23) | Establishment of a new area of aerial identification in the Chinese South Sea |
| 2013 (March 14) | Appointment of Xi Jinping as the new Chinese president |
| 2014 (July 15) | BRICS. Establishment of the Development Bank |
| 2014 (August 20) | Russia-China. Agreement on natural gas supplies |
| 2016 (August) | Chen Quanguo is appointed leader of the Chinese Communist Party in Xinjiang |
| 2017 (June 7-10) | 17th Shanghai Cooperation Organization summit |

Geopolitical Indicators

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (AFGHANISTAN) | |
|--|------------------------|
| Total surface 652,230 km ² (42 nd country in the world) | |
| GDP 64.08 billion \$ (103 rd country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 22% |
| | Industry 22% |
| | Services 56% |
| GDP per capita 1,900 \$ (207 th country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 2% (133 rd country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (AFGHANISTAN) | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 658 million \$ (168 th country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 7,004 billion \$ (108 th country in the world) | |
| Population 34,124,811 (39 th country in the world) | |
| Age structure (208 th country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average Afghanistan: 18.6- | 0-14 40.92% |
| | 15-64 56.49% |
| | Over 65 2.59% |
| Population growth rate 2.4% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups: Pashtuns, Tajiks, Hazāra, Uzbeks, others (including in a lesser number Balochs, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arabs, Gujar, Brahui, Qizilbash, Aimaq, Pashai, and Kyrgyz. | |
| Religions Muslim (99.7%) (Sunni 84.7% - 89.7%; Shiite 10-15%), other (0.3%) | |
| Population growth rate 38.2% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population under threshold of poverty: 35.8% | |
| GINI Index 0.25-0.29 (15 th country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 0.89% –World average: 2.22%– | |

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (CHINA) | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Total surface 9,598,960 km ² (5 th country in the world) | |
| GDP 21.29 trillion \$ (1 st country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 8.6% |
| | Industry 39.8% |
| | Services 51.6% |
| GDP per capita 15,400 \$ (106 th country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 6.7% (14 th country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 2,098 trillion \$ (1 st country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 1,587 trillion \$ (2 nd country in the world) | |
| Population 1,379,302,771 (1 st country in the world) | |
| Age structure (67 th country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average China: 37.1- | 0-14 17.15% |
| | 15-64 72.04% |
| | Over 65 10.81% |
| Population growth rate 0.4% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups: Han (91.6%), Zhuang (1.3%), Hui, Manchu, Lugu, Miao, Yi, Mongol, Dong, Buyel, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazakh and Dai (7.1%) | |
| Religions: Buddhists (18.2%), Christians (5.1%), Muslims (1.8%), Popular religions (21.9%), Hindus (less than 0.1%), Jewish (less than 0.1%) and others (0.7%) | |
| Population literacy rate 96.4% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (CHINA) | |
| Population under poverty threshold 3.3% | |
| GINI Index 46.5 (30 th country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP. 1.9% (40 th country in the world) –World average: 2.22%– | |

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (INDIA) | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Total surface 3,287,263 km ² (8 th country in the world) | |
| GDP 8,662 trillion \$ (4 th country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 16,5% |
| | Industry 29,8% |
| | Services 45.4% |
| GDP per capita 6,600 \$ (160 th country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$ – | |
| GDP growth rate 6.8% (12 th country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 262.3 billion \$ (19 th country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 381 billion \$ (12 th country in the world) | |
| Population 1,281,935,911 (2 nd country in the world) | |

Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare:....

| | |
|---|----------------------|
| Age structure (140 th country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average India: 27.6- | 0-14 27.34% |
| | 15-64 66,43% |
| | Over 65 6.24% |
| Population growth rate 1.2% –World average: 1.06– | |
| Ethnic groups Indo-Aryan (72%), Dravidian (25%), Mongoloid and others (3%) | |
| Religions: Hindu (79.8%), Muslim (14.2%), Christian (2.3%), Sikh (1.7), others and without specification (2%) | |
| Population literacy rate 71.2% –World average: 86.2% – | |
| Population under poverty threshold: 21.9% | |
| GINI Index 35.2 (93 rd country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 2.47% (31 st country in the world) –World average: 2.22%– | |

| | |
|---|-------------------------|
| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (KAZAKHSTAN) | |
| Total surface 2,724,900 km ² (10 th country in the world) | |
| GDP 451.3 billion \$ (42 nd country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 4,6% |
| | Industry 31,8% |
| | Services 57,9% |
| GDP per capita 25,100 \$ (77 th country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 1.1% (170 th country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 35.28 billion \$ (52 nd country in the world) | |

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (KAZAKHSTAN) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 24.5 billion \$ (67 th country in the world) | |
| Population 18,556,698 (62 nd country in the world) | |
| Age structure (113 rd country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average Kazakhstan: 30.3- | 0-14 25.91% |
| | 15-64 66.44% |
| | Over 65 7.65% |
| Population growth rate 1% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Kazakh (63.1%), Russian (23.7%), Uzbek (2.9%), Ukrainians (2.1%), Uighur (1.4%), Tartars (1.3%), Germans (1.1%), others (4.4%) | |
| Religions Muslim (70.2%), Christian (26.2%) (mainly Russian Orthodox), others (0.2%), Atheism (2.8%), without specification (0.5%) | |
| Population literacy rate 99.8% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population under poverty threshold 2.7% | |
| GINI Index 26.3 (141 st country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 0.82% (81 st country in the world) –World average: 2.22%– | |

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (KYRGYZTAN) | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Total surface 199,951 km ² (88 th country in the world) | |
| GDP 21.5 billion \$ (142 nd country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 17.9% |
| | Industry 25.9% |
| | Services 56.2% |
| GDP per capita 3,500 \$ (184 th country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 3.8% (71 st country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 1,453 billion \$ (145 th country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 3,146 billion \$ (138 th country in the world) | |
| Population 5,789,122 (114 th country in the world) | |
| Age structure (148 th country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average Kyrgyztan: 26.2- | 0-14 30.3% |
| | 15-64 64.43% |
| | Over 65 5.27% |
| Population growth rate 1.1% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Kyrgyz (70.9%), Uzbek (14.4%), Russian (7.7%), Dungan (1.1%), others (5.9%) (including Uighurs, Tajiks, Turks, Kazakhs, Tartars, Ukrainians, Koreans, Germans) | |
| Religions Muslims (75%), Russian Orthodox (20%), others (5%) | |
| Population literacy rate 99.5% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population under poverty threshold 31.1% | |
| GINI Index 33.4 (107 th country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 3.15% –World average: 2.22%– | |

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (MONGOLIA) | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Total surface 1,564,116 km ² | |
| GDP 37 billion \$ (120 th country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 14.6% |
| | Industry 35.1% |
| | Services 50.3% |
| GDP per capita 12,300 \$ (124 th country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 1% (175 th country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 4,319 billion \$ (111 th country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 3,003 billion \$ (142 nd country in the world) | |
| Population 3,068,243 (135 th country in the world) | |
| Age structure (134 th country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average Mongolia: 27.9- | 0-14 26.95% |
| | 15-64 68.76% |
| | Over 65 4.29% |
| Population growth rate 1.2% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups: Khalkh (81.9%), Kazakh (3.8%), Dorvod (2.7%), Bayad (2.1%), Buriat-Buritates (1.7%), Zakhchin (1.2%), Dariganga (1%), Uriankhai (1%), others (4.6%) | |
| Religions Buddhists (53%), Muslims (3%), Chamans (2.9%), Christians (2.2%), others (0.4%), none (38.6%) | |
| Population literacy rate 98.4% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population under poverty threshold 21.6% | |
| GINI Index 36.5 (85 th country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP. 0.92% (90 th country in the world) –World average: 2.22%– | |

Xinjiang. The dragon faced with its worst nightmare:....

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (PJISTAN) | |
|---|------------------------|
| Total surface 796,095 km ² (37 th country in the world) | |
| GDP 988.2 billion \$ (26 th country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 25% |
| | Industry 19,2% |
| | Services 55.6% |
| GDP per capita 5.100 \$ (171 st country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 4.7% (44 th country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 20.96 billion \$ (66 th country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 38.25 billion \$ (55 th country in the world) | |
| Population 204,924,861 6 th country in the world) | |

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (PAKISTÁN) | |
|---|----------------------|
| Age structure (167 th country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average Pakistan: 23.4- | 0-14 31.36% |
| | 15-64 64,16% |
| | Over 65 4.48% |
| Population growth rate 1.4% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Punjabi (48%), Pashtun (Patan) (15.4%), Sindhi (14.1%), Sariaki (8.4%), Muhajirs (7.6%), Baloch (3.6%), others (6.3%) | |
| Religions Muslim (official) (96.4%) (Sunni 85-90%; Shiite 10-15%), others (including Christian and Hindu) (3.6%) | |
| Population literacy rate 57.9% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population under poverty threshold 29.5% | |
| GINI Index 30.7 (231 st country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 3.56% (21 st country in the world) –World average: 2.22%– | |

| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (RUSSIA) | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Total surface 17,098,242 km ² (1 st country in the world) | |
| GDP 3,751 trillion \$ | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 4,7% |
| | Industry 33,1% |
| | Services 62.2% |
| GDP per capita 26.500 \$ (72 nd country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate -0.6% –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 285.5 billion \$ (17 th country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 182.3 billion \$ (23 rd country in the world) | |
| Population 142,257,519 (9 th country in the world) | |
| Age structure (53 rd country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average Russia: 39.3- | 0-14 17.12% |
| | 15-64 68,61% |
| | Over 65 14.28% |
| Population growth rate -0.1% –World average: 1.06%– | |

| |
|---|
| Ethnic groups Russian (77.7%), Tartar (3.7), Ukrainian (1.4%), Baskir (1.1%), Chuvash (1%), Chechen (1%), others (10.2%), without specification (3.9%) |
| Religions Russian Orthodox (15-20%), Muslim (10-15%), Christian and others (2%) |
| Population literacy rate 99.7% –World average: 86.2%– |
| Population under poverty threshold 13.3% |
| GINI Index 41.2 (54 th country in the world) –World average: 37.9– |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 5.4% (16 th country in the world) –World average: 2.22%– |

| | |
|---|--------------------------|
| TABLE OF GEOPOLITICAL INDICATORS (TAJIKISTAN) | |
| Total surface 144,100 km ² (97 th country in the world) | |
| GDP 26.03 billion \$ (135 th country in the world) | |
| GDP Structure | Agriculture 20,7% |
| | Industry 15,1% |
| | Services 62,2% |
| GDP per capita 3,000 \$ (193 rd country in the world) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 6.9% (11 th country in the world) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 898.7 million \$ (161 st country in the world) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 3,031 billion \$ (140 th country in the world) | |
| Population 8,468,555 (96 th country in the world) | |
| Age structure (159 th country in the world) -World average: 30.1- -Average Tajikistan: 24.2- | 0-14 32.33% |
| | 15-64 64.35% |
| | Over 65 3.32% |
| Population growth rate 1.6% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Tajik (84.3%), Uzbek (13.8%) (including Lakai, Kongrat, Katagan, Barlos, Yuz), others (2%) (including Kyrgyz, Russian, Turkmen, Tartar, Arab) | |
| Religions Muslim Sunni (85%), Muslim Shiite (5%), others (10%) | |
| Population literacy rate 99.8% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population under poverty threshold 31.5% | |
| GINI Index 32.6 (110 th country in the world) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military expenditure. % of the GDP 1.22% –World average: 2.22%– | |

Tables of Imports and Exports

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| CHINA | Exports: \$2,098 trillion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 1 Exports – partners: US 18.2%, Hong Kong 13.8%, Japan 6.1%, South Korea 4.5% (2016) Imports: \$1.587 trillion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 2 Imports – partners: South Korea 10%, Japan 9.2%, US 8.5%, Germany 5.4%, Australia 4.4% (2016) |
| MONGOLIA | Exports: \$4,319 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 111 Exports – partners: China 84.1%, UK 6.8% (2016) Imports: \$3,003 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 142 Imports – partners: China 33.2%, Russia 25.6%, South Korea 8.6%, Japan 7% (2016) |
| RUSSIA | Exports: \$285.5 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 17 Exports – partners: Netherlands 10.5%, China 10.3%, Germany 7.8%, Turkey 5%, Italy 4.4%, Belarus 4.3% (2016) Imports: \$182.3 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 23 Imports – partners: China 21.6%, Germany 11%, US 6.3%, France 4.8%, Italy 4.4%, Belarus 4.3% (2016) |
| KAZAKHSTAN | Exports: \$35.28 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 52 Exports – partners: Italy 20.3%, China 11.5%, Russia 9.5%, Netherlands 8.9%, Switzerland 7.3%, France 4.9% (2016) Imports: \$24.5 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 67 Imports – partners: Russia 36.2%, China 14.5%, Germany 5.7%, US 5.1% (2016) |
| KYRGYZSTAN | Exports: \$1.453 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 145 Exports – partners: Switzerland 44.9%, Kazakhstan 10.5%, Russia 10.1%, Uzbekistan 8.7%, Turkey 6.2%, China 5.5% (2016) Imports: \$3.146 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 138 Imports – partners: China 37.8%, Russia 20.7%, Kazakhstan 16.4%, Turkey 4.9% (2016) |
| INDIA | Exports: \$262.3 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 19 Exports – partners: US 16%, UAE 11.7%, Hong Kong 5.1% (2016) Imports: \$381 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 12 Imports – partners: China 17%, US 5.8%, UAE 5.4%, Saudi Arabia 5.2%, Switzerland 4.2% (2016) |
| TAJIKISTAN | Exports: \$898.7 million (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 161 Exports – partners: Turkey 27.8%, Russia 15.6%, China 14.7%, Switzerland 9.8%, Iran 6.5%, Algeria 6.5%, Italy 5.8% (2016) Imports: \$3.031 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 140 Imports – partners: Russia 31.2%, China 13.9%, Kazakhstan 12.8%, Uzbekistan 5.2%, Iran 5.1% (2016) |
| AFGHANISTAN | Exports: \$658 million (2014 est.) note: not including illicit exports or re-exports, country comparison to the world: 168 Exports – partners: Pakistan 46.3%, India 37.6% (2016) Imports: \$7.004 billion (2014 est.) country comparison to the world: 108 Imports – partners: Iran 19.3%, Pakistan 18.3%, China 16.7%, Kazakhstan 9.5%, Uzbekistan 6.1%, Turkmenistan 5.4%, Malaysia 4% (2016) |
| PAKISTAN | Exports: \$20.96 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 66 Exports – partners: US 16.3%, China 7.6%, UK 7.4%, Afghanistan 6.5%, Germany 5.7% (2016) Imports: \$38.25 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 55 Imports – partners: China 29.1%, UAE 13.2%, Indonesia 4.4%, US 4.3%, Japan 4.2% (2016) |

Chapter fourteen

The Korean peninsula: the neverending conflict

Francisco Márquez de la Rubia

"An army of deer led by a lion is much more
fearsome than an army of lions led by a deer"
(Plutarch)

"Let us determinedly crush the military provocations and war conspiracies of the
bellicose USA and South Korea!" (one of the messages printed on a poster on the
roof terrace of a building in Pyongyang in an image disseminated by the North Korean
regime)

Abstract

In recent months, the permanent crisis that has arisen from the situation of "non-active war" between the two republics of the Korean peninsula for more than 70 years has increased to unprecedented levels of tension in danger not already peace in the area but have resulted in a clear threat to world peace. The technological advances of the Democratic Republic of North Korea (RDCN) missile program and its challenging and continuing tests, the ineffectiveness of the repeated international sanctions imposed by the United Nations Security Council on RDCN, the new American administration decided to abandon "strategic patience", the change of government in the Republic of Korea (ROC), as well as the indispensable role in any scenario of the People's Republic of China and also of the new Russian Federation of Putin ... all these factors have transformed the reality of the Korean crisis in 2017 and still have no clear end.

For North Korea, the fundamental calculation has not changed. The survival of the regime is paramount, and its nu-clear deterrent capacity is its most powerful guarantee. For these very reasons, it is unlikely that there will be a pre-emptive strike by the North, since it is still in obvious military disadvantage and that the end result of any nuclear aggression would surely include the fall of the regime.

In this chapter we address all these facts and raise different and possible evolutions of the conflict.

Keywords

Geopolitics, Conflict, Korea, North Korea, Kim-Jong-un, Nuclear Weapon, Missiles, USA, China, Sanctions.

Introduction

The area has posed a serious problem to world peace since the start of the Korean War (1950-53). It would be inappropriate for a publication on current affairs like the *Geopolitical Overview of Conflicts* to list in this chapter all the background events since the 1950s that have led to the present situation. In addition, some have been dealt with previously by the Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (IEEE) in depth in specific studies such as those by Naval Commander Ignacio García Sánchez¹ and analyst Blanca Palacián.² It is recommended that readers refer to them for the historical context of the question as they will find the information necessary for a full understanding of the conflict. The technical aspect – the nuclear issue – has also been dealt with by IEEE in an exhaustive article published by the head of the Nuclear Department of the Escuela Militar Defensa NBC Commander Marcos Gómez Casal.³

I will therefore discuss the situation of the Korean crisis throughout 2017 until the second half of September, the date we had to end our analysis due to publication deadlines.

Background to the conflict

2017: Twelve months of “missile crisis”

During the nearly six years the North Korean leader Kim Jong-un has been in power, his regime has shown many signs of what its aims are with respect to military capability. His grandfather Kim Il-sung and his father Kim Jong-il fired 36 missiles throughout their long periods at the helm of the communist nation; the current ruler of the Kim dynasty has already conducted 82 tests of his own (very different in range and capability from those of his predecessors). This is quite a challenge and has caused regional tension to mount to levels not registered for years.

Over the course of 2016, Pyongyang launched 24 projectiles and raised all the alarms with its two nuclear tests. The advent of Donald Trump to the White House (January 2017) seemed to bring a moment of respite to the region and there were no more launches for several months. However,

¹ <http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/2010/DIEEEI06-2010-60AniversarioGuerradeCorea.pdf>. GARCÍA SÁNCHEZ, Ignacio José, *Coresa: el sueño de una península reunificada y desnuclearizada*, Panorama Geopolítico de los Conflictos 2011, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Ministerio de Defensa, Madrid, noviembre 2011, pp. 287-10.

² http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2013/DIEEEA23-.2013_ClavesConflicto_PeninsulaCoreana_IJGS.pdf.

³ http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_informativos/2010/DIEEEI27.

³ http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_marco/2016/DIEEEM17-2016_CoreaNorte_Nuclear_GomezCasal.pdf.

the climate soon became strained with an escalation of accusations and threats between the leaders of the US and North Korea. So far this year the DPRK has fired a total of 21 missiles in 14 launches that attest to the rapid progress its missile programme is making.

The first of these tests took place on 12 February 2017 during the visit paid by the Japanese prime minister, Shinzo Abe, to the then newly sworn-in US president. It was a medium-range KN-15 ballistic missile capable of carrying a nuclear warhead and powered by a solid-fuel engine. According to the commander of the US Strategic Command, General John Hyten, this marked a “significant advance”. Three weeks later, on 6 March, Pyongyang launched four medium-range missiles that flew for about 1,000 kilometres before falling into the Sea of Japan. This new challenge led South Korea to decide to bring forward the deployment of the controversial US THAAD missile defence system throughout its territory – which has been a major source of significant friction with its huge neighbour China and powerful Russian neighbour since its announcement and still is today. Later on, between 21 March and 28 April, the hermetic Asian country recorded as many as four failed attempted launches. During this interval China’s president, Xi Jinping, met with his US counterpart in Florida to discuss the North Korean issue and even managed (only for a few weeks) to achieve a rapprochement between the two largest economies in the world.

PRUEBAS DE MISILES NORCOREANAS 1985-2017

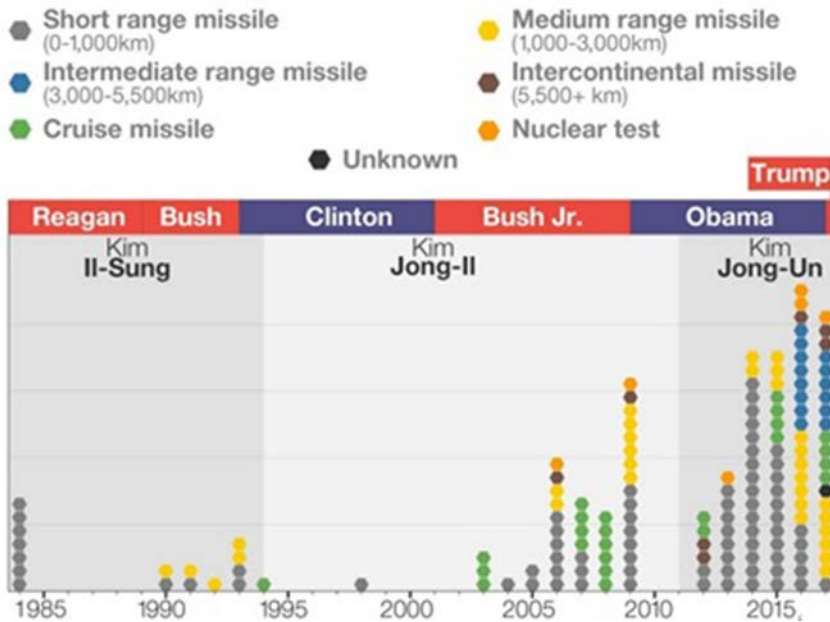


Figure 15.1 North Korean missile tests 1985-2017.

The Korean peninsula: the neverending conflict

The second half of May, the month in which South Korea welcomed its new president, also witnessed a large number of tests. On the 14th, Kim Jong-un gave orders for an intermediate-range missile (KN-17) to be fired. It travelled nearly 800 kilometres before falling into the sea – this time closer to Russia than any other country. The following week a medium-range missile flew 500 kilometres before splashing down in Japanese waters, and on the 29th a third missile travelled some 450 kilometres, falling in an area close the previous one.

Current situation of the conflict

A “hot” summer

However, the crisis reached a peak in the summer when the DPRK, for the first time in its history, successfully fired two intercontinental missiles which, it is believed, could reach certain parts of the US, and a further nuclear test was confirmed to have been conducted on 3 September.

The first of these tests took place on 4 July, America’s Independence Day, when a missile (Hwasong-14) reached a height of 2,800 kilometres and travelled 933 kilometres before falling into the sea. Pyongyang’s possession of this weapon (something that President Trump promised would never happen) was a milestone for the country, which proved it had a powerful weapon that affects the force calculation of the parties and shifts the possible balance of negotiation power even more.

On 28 July, Pyongyang responded to Tokyo’s imposition of further sanctions by launching another intercontinental missile, which this time attained a distance of 998 kilometres. The success of this test sparked a spectacular escalation of tension between the US and North Korea, including threats of military attacks.

Although the tension appeared to have eased towards the end of August, the launch of three medium-range rockets at the end of the month and the launch of a missile that flew over Japanese territory for the first time since 2009 again led swords to be drawn and the US to state that “all options are on the table”.

The situation is radically different from that of January 2016, when Pyongyang first claimed to have tested a hydrogen bomb (also known as thermonuclear bomb) more powerful than a conventional nuclear bomb. The test was far from successful: the device yielded an explosion of between 10 and 15 kilotons (one kiloton is equivalent to a ton of TNT), far from the 100 kilotons of a standard hydrogen bomb. However, the North Korean regime did not cease in its efforts and, as stated, it tested another H-bomb – its sixth nuclear test – on 3 September 2017, this time reaching 100 kilotons. This estimation of the force of the blast does not come from North Korea – which

could be thought to have exaggerated it for propagandistic motives – but from the government of its southern neighbour, the country most seriously affected by the threat. Pyongyang celebrated the test as a “complete success”. The test caused two earthquakes with their epicentre in the northwest of the country, in Hamgyong province: the first scored 6.3 points on the Richter scale compared to the 4.9 points recorded by the earlier test conducted in January 2016.

The Comprehensive Nuclear Test-Ban-Treaty Organization (CTBTO) stated in a communiqué that “the event seems to have been larger than the one our system recorded in September last year [...]. If confirmed as a nuclear test, this act would indicate that the DPRK’s nuclear programme is advancing rapidly”.⁴ This rapid progress referred not only to the power of the explosion in terms of kilotons but above all to its portability: the hydrogen bomb tested was smaller in size and could be loaded into intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs with a range of over 5,000 kilometres).

In the past missile range has always been the main problem faced by North Korean engineers working on the development programme, but in July 2017 the regime carried out two tests which marked huge progress. In the second, the missile travelled nearly 1,000 kilometres in about 40 minutes according to the Pentagon and attained a height of 3,700 kilometres. These results made a difference and, above all, signified a new array of offensive possibilities.

The question that remains to be settled is the reliability and resistance of these missiles. In the second test carried out in July, the re-entry vehicle disintegrated at a height of several kilometres, and its remains fell into the sea 250 kilometres north of the Japanese island of Hokkaido. Making dubious progress in this regard, the missiles tested on 28 August, supposedly belonging to the intermediate-range Hwasong-12 (KN-17) series, split into three pieces during flight and completed 2,700 kilometres, much less than their 4,000-kilometre range. The technical data indicates that Pyongyang needs to continue with its programme for developing operational long-range missiles.

If we carefully examine the reports by specialised bodies on the technical characteristics and results of the latest missile tests, two questions arise, which in turn lead us to venture hypotheses on the development, scope and future of North Korea’s nuclear programme: what was the need and point of having them fly over Japan?

This test would have had two primary objectives. Firstly, Kim Jong-un probably wished to gauge the international community’s response to

⁴ <https://www.ctbto.org/press-centre/press-releases/2017/ctbto-executive-secretary-lassina-zerbo-on-the-unusual-seismic-event-detected-in-the-democratic-peoples-republic-of-korea/>.

Estimated Range of Select North Korean Missiles

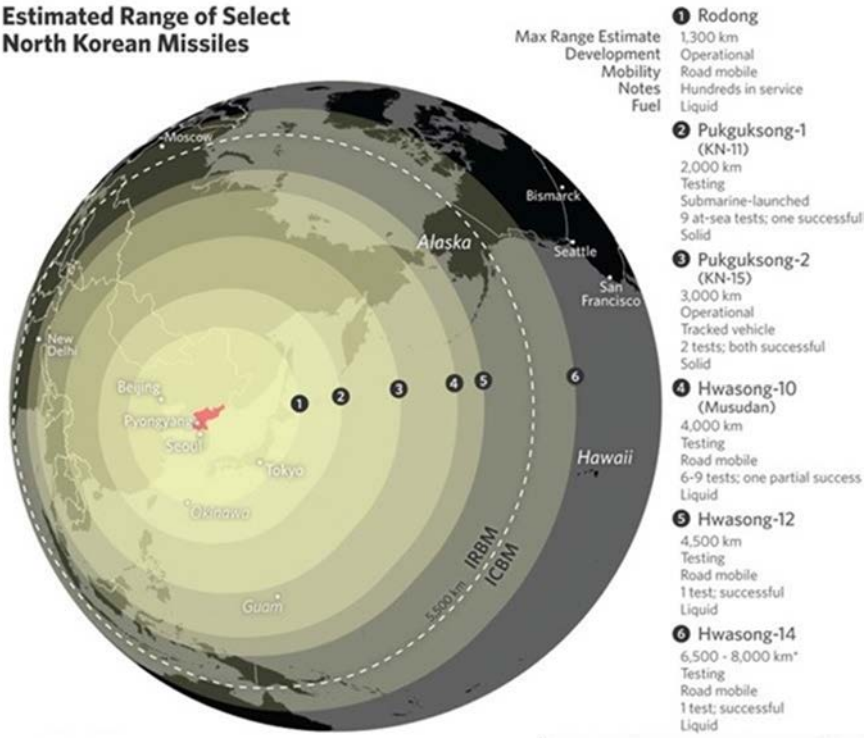


Figure 14.2.

the overflight of Japanese territory. Although North Korea had twice previously attempted to launch a satellite over Japan, the Hwasong-12 is the first ballistic missile to overfly the island. If the United States is judged to react mildly (in Pyongyang's view), North Korea might consider that future test flights would be accepted.

Secondly, the test would have been intended to assess the performance and reliability of the missile under operational conditions. Before the Hwasong-12 and intercontinental-range Hwasong-14 missiles can be deployed and declared operational, engineers need to be able to demonstrate that they are reliable when flown to maximum range. So far the two missiles have been launched on flight paths that reach high altitudes, ensuring that the mock nuclear warheads splash down in the sea. Tests simulating conditions and criteria are necessary, but in a final stage it is essential to launch tests that replicate the real conditions a missile requires in combat. The latest missiles launched are starting to meet this requirement and therefore mark a before and an after in the series of tests. An important line has been crossed.

Is North Korea testing new propulsion elements?

The flight of the Hwasong-12 ended with the simulated warhead splashing down in the ocean some 2,700 km from the launch site – well below its maximum range. The North Korean engineers could have shut down the engine of the Hwasong-12 before it reached its maximum capacity, resulting in a shorter flight. Turning the engine off approximately five seconds earlier would yield a range and apogee (maximum height) that match the reported values. Or perhaps the payload mass of the first test was considerably lighter than that of North Korea's nuclear warhead, allowing the missile to achieve a much higher altitude and exaggerating the maximum range when the missile is flown on a standard flight path.

For example, if the May flight carried a payload of 250 kg, and the most recent test fitted the Hwasong-12 with one of 1,250 kg, the range is reduced to about 2,700 km, with a peak altitude of roughly 550 km.

A different hypothesis – which is even more alarming to the technical departments which have studied the latest tests – is that the missile tests included a small post-boost vehicle (PBV) to provide extra boost to the payload after the main stage is discarded. This new element could be a modification of engines based on the Soviet RD-250 (acquired through non-conventional channels to prevent the imposition of sanctions). The hypothesis is consistent with the observations (among others) of the specialist watchdog institute 38North, which identified the existence of fuel supply ports located beneath the Hwasong-12's re-entry vehicle.⁵ There are logical reasons for using a PBV. In addition to increasing the range, it can be used to adjust the speed of the payload after switching off the engine. The ICBMs used by the US, Russia, France and China employ PBVs to achieve greater precision.

The presence of a PBV in the Hwasong-12 is merely a hypothesis for the time being; although it is impossible to know for certain if the most recent test and its 2,700-km flight was the result of a failed PBV, its use in North Korean long-range missiles is very worrying. It is a further sign that Pyongyang is taking very serious steps towards the development and launch of missiles with a nuclear capability that could reach the continental part of the United States and the US military bases in the Pacific Ocean. Even so, the experts agree that North Korea still has much work to be done – perhaps a year or two – before the technology and systems are sufficiently finetuned to pose a credible threat to the United States. This data is essential and is undoubtedly proving to be a fundamental factor in America's reaction and the de facto prolongation of "strategic patience". But it now seems that the time available for preventing the North Koreans from acquiring the ability to threaten the United States is considerably shorter.

⁵ <http://www.38north.org/2017/09/punggye090517/>.

Role of the external actors

South Korea (ROK)

Three months after President Moon came to power, the government of the ROK announced its definite approval of the US armed forces' deployment of four missile launchers of the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system (THAAD) at a base in South Korea. This involves deploying all those envisaged earlier in accordance with the US government during President Park's mandate.

This put an end to the initial hesitance of the new South Korean executive, which appeared to be heeding the opposition voiced by people living in the deployment areas, as well as environmental activists. The reluctance of the new South Korean government and its earlier decision to postpone full deployment were viewed as a gesture of goodwill towards China (thereby boosting its essential role of intermediary with the DPRK) and evidently towards its northern neighbour. Nothing of this seems to have been any use for the time being. Six THAAD missile launchers are currently deployed.

In addition, the ULCHI (Ulchi Freedom Guardian) exercises have been carried out since the last days of August. They are the main annual exercises in the area: a ten-day military drill which involved 17,500 US soldiers and 50,000 South Korean soldiers in 2017 (as well as various contingents from seven other nations). This exercise has been conducted for the past 41 years and simulates defending South Korea from a hypothetical invasion by its northern neighbour. North Korea has traditionally condemned the exercises, describing them as a "provocation", and this year was no exception. This time North Korea's state news agency KCNA described Ulchi Freedom Guardian as an exercise designed to trigger a nuclear war on the Korean peninsula at any cost.⁶

China also criticises the exercises annually and this year it also decried their untimeliness. The spokesman for the ministry of foreign relations, Hua Chunying, described them as being of little use to easing the current tensions and the relevant efforts made by all the parties to promote peace talks. He added that the situation of the peninsula was "highly complex and delicate" and that South Korea and the United States should not "add fuel to the fire".

But, in a gesture that, by any reckoning, was designed to be evident even though tension with North Korea was at its highest for decades, the US reduced its participation with respect to 2016: 17,500 US soldiers took part in the 2017 drill compared to 25,000 the previous year.

⁶ <https://koreas.liveuamap.com/en/2017/14-august-north-korea-kcna-statement-regarding-upcoming-joint>.

According to public opinion and South Korean media, there is increasing support for the country boosting its response capability, either by developing its own nuclear weapons or by reintroducing US tactical nuclear arms that were withdrawn 26 years ago. It is unlikely that its Chinese or Russian neighbours will accept such an option. Japan, where support for nuclearisation is still scant but growing, faces a similar dilemma.

US

America's official stance has remained unchanged over the years. In 1994, the United States and North Korea reached an agreement in principle on a route map for denuclearising the Korean peninsula. In 2013, the United States proposed multilateral talks on the nuclear issue. Several rounds of six-party talks have been held since then: the last was in 2009. Although the DPRK has sometimes stated that it might agree to relative denuclearisation, this does not appear to be its real opinion until its ballistic potential is attained. The United States has repeatedly demanded that North Korea adopt concrete, irreversible denuclearisation measures to comply with the Joint Statement of the Six-Party Talks of 2005; comply with international law, including resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013) and 2270 (2016); put a stop to provocative behaviour; and take measures to improve relations with its neighbours. It has systematically reacted to North Korea's breaches of legislation by promoting the adoption of increasingly harsh sanctions.⁷

North Korea's ballistic missile tests, followed by verbal threats to the island of Guam, which is US territory, led American military representatives to publicly state that the US is capable of combating any North Korean action and that, once again, all options were on the table. The verbal escalation continued throughout September (the time of writing): President Donald Trump threatened to unleash huge reprisals if North Korea attacked US forces or territories or those of its allies. But, after each breach, it has reacted by strengthening its military presence and attempting to step up the international sanctions.

The United States has a large military presence in the West Pacific which has been progressively increasing with the heightening of the tension with North Korea in recent years and with the reality of an increasingly assertive China.

There are currently 25,500 military in South Korea, more than 7,000 military and civilians in South Korea, and a further 55,000 in Japan, chiefly belonging to the air force, navy and marines. They have six B-1 Lancer bombers in rotation at the Anderson airbase, from which they would probably play an important role in any potential conflict with North Korea.

⁷ <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/Documents/nkorea.pdf>.

The Korean peninsula: the neverending conflict

The carrier strike group USS Theodore Roosevelt and two amphibious assault vessels are currently deployed to the Pacific, together with dozens of destroyers, warships, submarines and support vessels.

The 90th Combat Squadron composed of F-22 Raptor fighters was deployed to Australia in February to conduct training exercises with the Australian royal air force and has been there since then in Australian installations.

The island of Guam has been equipped with Terminal High Altitude Area Defense system batteries since 2013 to defend against ballistic missiles. The US army has built installations on the island for up to 4,000 more marines in 2021. Most of these units would be re-stationed from South Korea and Japan.

People's Republic of China

In August, Beijing started up “new” naval practices in the Yellow Sea area (west of the Korean peninsula) in what clearly appears to be a signal sent to both North Korea and the US. For this purpose, the naval authorities decreed the closure of an area of nearly 57,000 kilometres and two of the country's main ports. These are the second manoeuvres of this kind that the Chinese navy has carried out over the past two weeks in a clear sign of the rising military tension the region is witnessing.

During the first week of September the Chinese army also conducted major rocket-launching exercises in the northern province of Inner Mongolia explicitly targeting the THAAD missile shield deployed by the US in South Korea.

Beijing reluctantly notes the movements of arms in the area and believes that the US is largely using the friction with the PDRK to rearm its allies South Korea and Japan, further heightening the tension.

If the voices calling for tactical nuclear weapons in South Korea and Japan (and in the US) were to have their way, China would no doubt not stand idly by in the event of what it would consider an unacceptable security risk.

The Russian Federation

Russia has been under international scrutiny in its relations with North Korea because it has traditionally adopted a slacker attitude towards Pyongyang than Washington. Most of Russia's exports to North Korea are oil, coal and refined products. Bilateral trade between the two countries has decreased over the past four years from 112.7 million dollars in 2013 to 76.9 million dollars in 2016, according to the statistics of the Russian Federal Customs Service.⁸ However, Russian trade with North Korea increased in the first quarter of 2017 to 31.4 million dollars in year-on-year terms.

⁸ <http://eng.customs.ru>.

In early August the US government imposed unilateral sanctions on Russian companies and individuals for allegedly supporting Pyongyang's weapons programmes and supplying oil outside the official circuits.

The Russian government has reacted angrily to these sanctions at a time of diplomatic tension between the two nations. According to the latest data, there was an objective increase in exports to North Korea owing mainly to oil derivatives. But oil exports did not violate the UN sanction agreements until the imposition of the last package of sanctions (UNSC resolution 2375) of 11 September.⁹

In contrast, Russian government representatives claim that Moscow is faithfully implementing the regime of international sanctions against North Korea and has even stopped a few bilateral projects, as proven by the fact that Pyongyang is paying an economic price for its missile programme. A joint project between the two countries is a rail link from the Russian border city of Khasan to Rajin in Korea.¹⁰ It has been operating since 2013, but well below its potential, it seems. The connection could operate at a capacity of 4 million tons per year according to official sources, but it only transports around 1.5 million tons of coal per year.

The UN sanctions also ban states from increasing the current number of North Korean workers employed in their territory. More than 20,000 North Korean workers are employed in Russia. They mainly work in wood manufacture and construction.

Russia's stance towards the North Korean crisis seems to be increasingly close to China's unofficial position. Russia does not wish for a unified Korean peninsula belonging to the western sphere of influence. And while it is not unaware of the dangers of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of the North Korean regime, it believes that for the time being it is not realistic to aim for the denuclearisation of Pyongyang as a prior requisite for negotiations. It likewise observes the arms race in the area with deep mistrust owing in particular to the moves made by the US, but also to the consequent steps taken by other regional powers such as China and Japan.

⁹ UNSC resolution 2375 "14. Decides that all Member States shall prohibit the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer to the DPRK, through their territories or by their nationals, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, and whether or not originating in their territories, of all refined petroleum products, decides that the DPRK shall not procure such products, decides that this provision shall not apply with respect to procurement by the DPRK or the direct or indirect supply, sale or transfer to the DPRK, through their territories or by their nationals, or using their flag vessels or aircraft, and whether or not originating in their territories, of refined petroleum products in the amount of up to 500,000 barrels during an initial period of three months beginning on 1 October 2017 and ending on 31 December 2017, and refined petroleum products in the amount of up to 2,000,000 barrels per year during a period of twelve months beginning on 1 January 2018 and annually thereafter".

¹⁰ <http://euroferroviarios.net/index.php?module=Web-Noticias&func=display&mid=22792>.

**TRABAJADORES
NORCOREANOS EN EL
EXTRANJERO**
2016

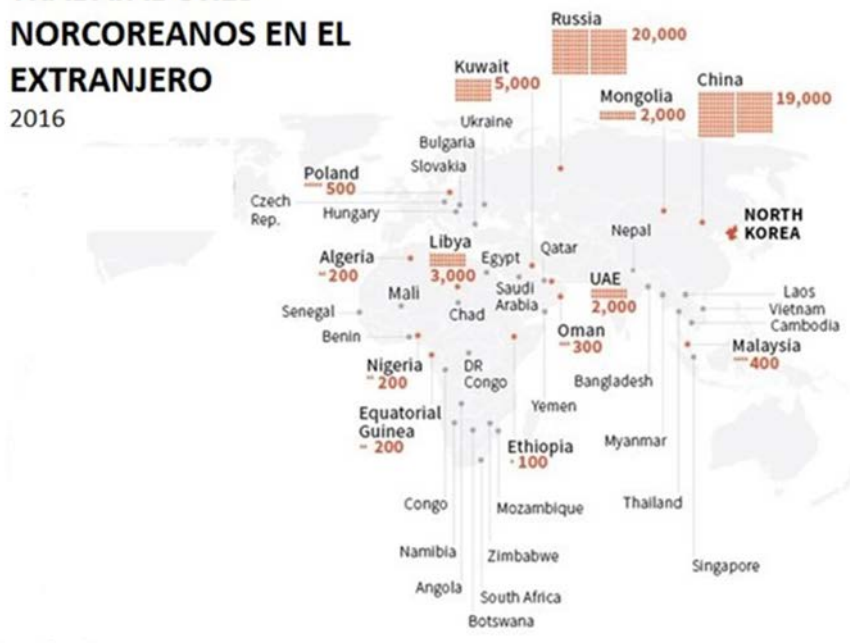


Figure 14.3.

During the BRICS summit in Beijing on 5 September, the Russian president Vladimir Putin clearly expressed Russia's stance that diplomacy and not "military hysteria" was the only means of settling the North Korean crisis and that any subsequent sanction would again prove "senseless and a dead end"¹¹.

Conclusions and outlook

Dead-end diplomacy

Following the escalation witnessed in the summer and as a result of the North Korean challenges, the United States launched a proposal for new sanctions¹² against North Korea, which were unanimously approved (and were therefore voted for by China) by the Security Council on 11 September.¹³

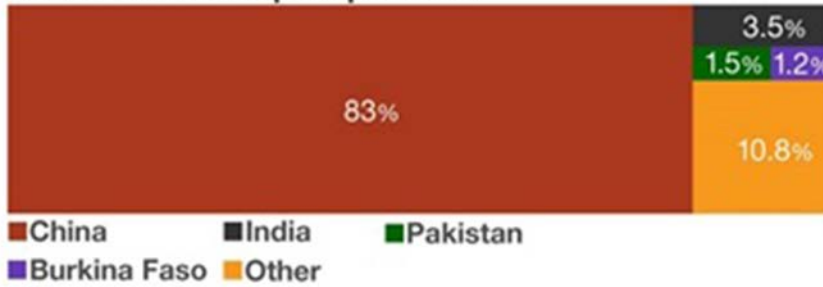
¹¹ <https://www.rt.com/news/402020-putin-russia-speaks-brics/>.

¹² <https://www.treasury.gov/resource-center/sanctions/Programs/pages/nkorea.aspx>.

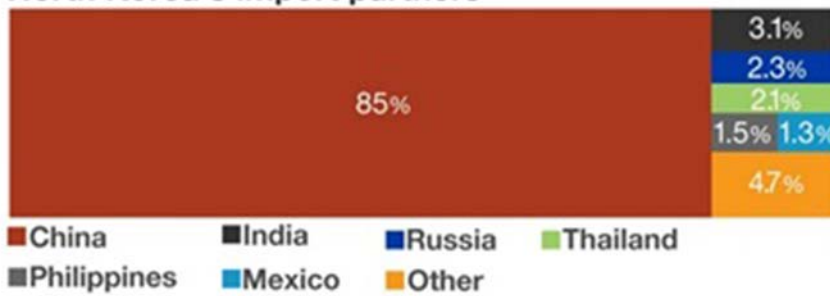
¹³ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12983.doc.htm>.

SOCIOS COMERCIALES DE COREA DEL NORTE

North Korea's export partners



North Korea's import partners



Source: Observatory of Economic Complexity

Figure 14.4 North Korea's trading partners.

The resolution adopted (UNSCR 2375) limits the quantity of oil North Korea can import.¹⁴ It also limits refined products. In practice it seeks to apply a progressive embargo that can be stepped up instead of a total and immediate blockade. This is the compromise with China, which is the only country that supplies energy to it. The final resolution furthermore includes a ban on natural gas liquids and condensates. The Security Council has added a person to the blacklist: Pak Yong-Sik, who is suspected of directing the ballistic industry.

According to the US, the measures adopted will curb North Korea's revenues by 800 million dollars annually with the embargo on textile exports. The oil supplied to North Korea will also be reduced by 30% and refined products by 55%.

¹⁴ <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/2375>

The new resolution 2375 focuses on the countries that are keeping Kim Jong-un's regime alive. This is the main novelty and the step which had not been taken in previous packages of sanctions against the regime: it targets not only the country's exports but also its strategic imports.

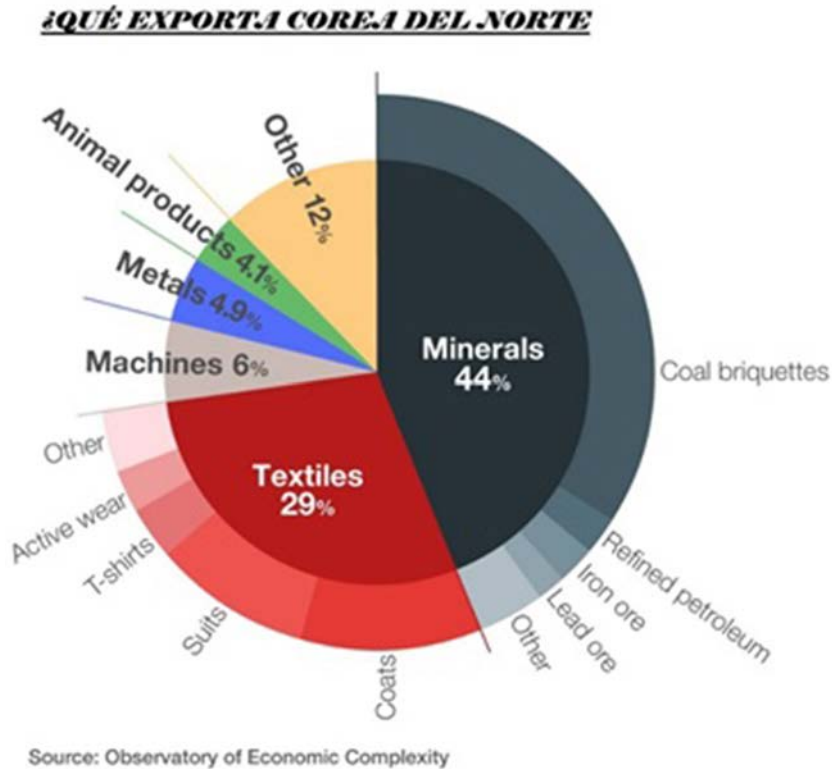


Figure 14.5 North Korea's exports.

But it will not be easy to impose sanctions on the countries from which the PDRK imports. North Korea conducts 74% of its foreign trade with the second largest world power, China, followed, in order of importance, by India (a major US ally) and Russia.¹⁵ The question is whether, if it came to it, Washington would be prepared to impose economic sanctions on Beijing as Kim Jong-un's economic lifeline. For it is necessary to realise that economic relations between the two Asian countries are based not on commercial but on political reasons. The clearest proof of this is that North Korea's main exports to China are coal bricks – the sort used for barbecues. It does not seem logical that China, which is the biggest coal producer in the world and

¹⁵ http://stat.wto.org/CountryProfiles/KR_e.htm.

the country with the third largest reserves of this mineral, should need to import this product from North Korea.

The problem of Donald Trump's government, like that of its predecessors, is that it cannot afford not to address the fact that North Korea is economically dependent on China. Without Beijing, or with a reluctant Beijing, Pyongyang would not last very long. But it is in China's interests for North Korea to act a buffer state against Japan and South Korea, two of the United States' allies. That is why it has chosen to tolerate Kim Jong-un's "rebellions", such as the latest nuclear test carried out in September, precisely on the day China's President Xi Jinping was holding the BRICS summit (between the group of emerging powers made up of Brazil, Russia, India, South Africa and China itself), to which it had furthermore invited Mexico, Thailand, Egypt, Kenya and Tajikistan. It seems to be worth its while to maintain this buffer state even if it poses a nuclear threat to the whole area (so far under control) vis-à-vis a Korea unified under the umbrella of the West. The Russian Federation does not appear to disagree with this approach.

The "suspension for suspension" approach

Indeed, the Security Council meeting in early September was marked by a very harsh exchange of words between US ambassador Haley and the Chinese ambassador Liu Jieyi.¹⁶ This verbal showdown reveals the underlying issue. Liu blamed North Korea for the crisis, but stated that "China will never tolerate chaos and war on the [Korean] peninsula" and, together with the Russian ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, proposed "suspension for suspension": in other words, North Korea's commitment to suspend its nuclear and missile tests in exchange for the United States and South Korea not carrying out further joint military manoeuvres. Haley's response was to describe the idea as "insulting". As if that were not enough, Nebenzia told the press that "the resolutions designed to punish only North Korea have not worked".

However, the proposal was not new. In March 2017, the Chinese government spokesman Hua urged all the parties to focus on more "constructive actions" such as accepting China's "suspension for suspension" proposal. The solution called for North Korea to stop all missile tests in exchange for the US and South Korea stopping all military exercises. Pyongyang welcomed the plan, while Washington and Seoul rejected it. US military experts then described the agreement as overwhelmingly advantageous for North Korea, as it would succeed in continuing with its own military exercises and be better prepared for an offensive or defensive war.

¹⁶ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12978.doc.htm>.

The Korean peninsula: the neverending conflict

Diplomatic stances do not appear to be shifting an inch and the tension is still mounting. As Donald Trump's former chief political advisor Steve Bannon stated, "there's no military solution here, they got us". Bannon's statements have been ignored by the US defence and state secretaries, Rex Tillerson and James Mattis, who continue to demand that North Korea carry out a complete, irreversible and verifiable denuclearisation. It is an option which, despite following the official lines of the US, does not appear at all realistic.

The tougher sanctions approach

United Nations Resolution 2371,¹⁷ sponsored by the US, aims to cut North Korea's exports by one-third in the toughest and widest-ranging package of sanctions imposed to date.¹⁸ These measures are the seventh round of international punishments to be imposed on the Asian country for violating previous resolutions, increasing its nuclear arsenal and continuing with missile tests.

The resolution accuses North Korea of "massive diversion of its scarce resources toward its development of nuclear weapons and a number of expensive ballistic missile programmes", when a nearly a quarter of its population suffers from chronic malnutrition.

The US Administration still appears to opt for attempting to encourage international consensus on stricter sanctions and for not continuing along the path embarked on by US President Donald Trump of criticising China's commercial practices and calling for reprisals for this conduct. This fact, which many analysts continue to consider inevitable, would be the first step towards a foreseeable financial clash between the two superpowers.

The package of sanctions could reduce North Korea's income by a billion dollars by banning all coal, iron, lead, fish and seafood exports according to UN sources.

Coal earned Pyongyang nearly 1.2 billion dollars last year according to Washington's calculations, before the United Nations limited its sales to a maximum of 400 million annually. In 2017 the fish and seafood trade, estimated at 295 million dollars, was set to become the communist nation's star export product.

The sanctions also include a ban on granting additional permits to North Korean workers, new joint ventures with companies from the country and investments in such firms.

¹⁷ <http://unscr.com/files/2017/02371.pdf>.

¹⁸ In UNSC resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013), 2270 (2016), 2321 (2016), 2356 (2017).

The sending of labour to other nations has become an additional source of foreign-currency revenues for Pyongyang. Although the real figure for 2015 is unknown, the United Nations special rapporteur on human rights in North Korea, Marzuki Darusman, reckoned that this activity (which affects some 50,000 workers) amounted to annual revenues of between 1.2 and 2.3 billion dollars for Pyongyang.¹⁹

In contrast, UNSC resolution 2371²⁰ does not include fuel exports to North Korea, a ban on which would certainly have an immediate impact on the regime. In fact, it continues to reflect a compromise between the US and China on several issues. It is very notable that it does not include a reduction in shipments of Chinese oil to North Korea, as Bonnie Glaser of the Center for Strategic and International Studies points out.²¹ Anticipating this hypothetical decision, North Korea's official news agency, the regime's mouthpiece, stated on 5 September that the "US sanctions never work on DPRK" and that "the nuclear deterrent of the DPRK is so valuable that it will never abandon it, no matter what pressure, ultimatum and temptation it faces". In other words, it once again reaffirmed the North Korean government's official stance.²²

The nuclear test of September has led the United States to submit (as of 10 September 2017 the text is not known) a new draft resolution to the UN Security Council on the DPRK (it would be the eighth). This draft is expected to envisage sanctions and measures which, among others, would include the possibility of US naval and air force vessels intercepting and searching North Korean ships in international waters. Although it seems unlikely that China and Russia will support measures of this kind, in the event that they did, regional tension could mount even more in a situation that would greatly recall the Cuban missile crisis of 1962, when President John F. Kennedy gave orders for a blockade on the island of Cuba. The draft resolution is also expected to propose a ban on oil exports to the DPRK, a measure to which China has been opposed in the past.²³

Escalation of the diplomatic crisis and ways to steer it back on track

The events of the past months have given rise to a tense and fraught atmosphere worthy of being described as pre-war. The most significant steps in the escalation attest to this: North Korea's threat to launch missiles over the American island of Guam was followed by an alarming statement by President Donald Trump that North Korea would face "fire and fury like the

¹⁹ http://www.abc.es/internacional/abci-corea-norte-exporta-trabajos-forzados-mundo-legion-50000-emigrantes-201510291327_noticia.html.

²⁰ <http://unscr.com/files/2017/02371.pdf>.

²¹ <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2017/08/05/59860f7246163f5b718b462b.html>.

²² http://www.rodong.rep.kp/en/index.php?strPageID=SF01_02_01&newsID=2017-09-07-0003.

²³ Edward Fishman, Peter Harrell and Elizabeth Rosenberg, "A Blueprint for New Sanctions on North Korea", Center for New American Security, July 2017.

world has never seen". As the logic of the self-assertion of force intensifies, the risks of an error of calculation and interpretation rise inexorably. If we furthermore consider that the DPRK is in the hands of a tyrannical leader who is not subject to the control of a democratic regime or known internal limits when it comes to using nuclear power, and that the new US administration has not precisely been an example of restraint – dialectic at least – during its first months in office, it is only logical that the world should observe the events with concern and that the Koreans' neighbours should share the unease.

Amid the rhetorical escalation, a few US civil servants attempted to establish a sense of moderation. Speaking in California on 10 August, the defence secretary James Mattis repeated that the United States was seeking a diplomatic solution to the clash, echoing the words of the secretary of state Rex Tillerson, who had stated the previous week that the United States did not wish for a change of regime in Pyongyang. The two leaders teamed up to jointly write an editorial column in the *Wall Street Journal* in this connection.²⁴ The chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Joseph Dunford, stated on 15 August that the clash should be settled "without a war".²⁵

In other words, if we look beyond President Trump's tweets, we find evidence that the US wishes to find a solution to the current crisis. It is not possible to carry out a similar analysis in the DPRK. The regime's officials are forced to speak with a single voice that of the supreme leader, Kim Jong-un, and that voice has repeatedly chosen to respond to the majority of forms of international pressure with truly worrying actions that have triggered considerable tension.

However, in its own way, North Korea has also sent out certain signals that the analysts with the most experience in Korea are interpreting as a wish to keep the situation on the Korean peninsula under control. Like the US government, Pyongyang has been showing two faces simultaneously. This causes confusion, but could also convey a certain calm. A possible example is the release of a Canadian shepherd, Lim Hyeon-soo, on 10 August 2017.²⁶ Lim's release suggests that, despite North Korea's extreme bellicosity, the regime neither wishes for nor is planning on war or on losing control of the situation. Instead it is intending to divide overall opinion and to keep the world interested in guessing its intentions. For Pyongyang, foreign captives have always been a sort of bargaining chip. They are normally not released in exchange for anything. By allowing the shepherd Lim to be freed, the regime transmitted a gesture of goodwill that contrasted with the official rhetoric. North Korea's implicit message is that it is attempting to prevent the events from getting out of hand. The release of a prisoner amid extremely

²⁴ <https://www.wsj.com/articles/were-holding-pyongyang-to-account-1502660253>.

²⁵ <http://m.korea.net/spanish/NewsFocus/Policies/view?articleId=148518&page=3>.

²⁶ <https://www.amnesty.org/es/documents/asa24/6918/2017/es/>.

inflammatory words and actions is scant cause for consolation, but it may be a sign that the international community ought to attempt to explore new paths.

History tends to repeat itself and in the constant crisis of the Korean peninsula a storm is always followed by a period of calm. For example, in April 2013, when North Korea closed the Kaesong industrial complex unilaterally in reprisal for the joint US-ROK drills,²⁷ an agreement was finally reached and the complex, which was run jointly with South Korea, returned to operation in mid-September. Similarly, following a tense and complicated summer in 2014, three high-ranking officials of North Korea made an unexpected appearance at the 17th Asian Games in Incheon, South Korea, in early October. The visit gave rise to the highest-level inter-Korean talks conducted to date during the term of the former president Park Geun-hye. Even though history does not always repeat itself and the PDRK, once it has perfected its missile systems, may no longer be willing to subordinate the pace of its tests to political calculations when it is so close to the finishing line... everything is still possible.

As for seeking moderation, the main role falls to South Korea. Seoul, headed by President Moon and his negotiating skills,²⁸ seems to firmly believe that furious statements are no substitute for analysis and gauging times. This has been its traditional strategy for the successive crises. We should not be surprised by this attitude. The tragedy and suffering that could be unleashed by a wrong move by either of the parties would affect South Korea disproportionately. That is why its government's strategy combines deterrence with Asian patience. This includes the fact that, much to the surprise of many western analysts, so far (September 2017) inter-Korean negotiations in progress on a number of issues have not been interrupted, including exchanges in taekwondo and the remote possibility of North Korea taking part in the Winter Olympics of 2018, to be held in Pyongyang in South Korea at the beginning of next year. Washington does not appear to take a very favourable view of the supposedly soft attitude of the current South Korean president, just as South Koreans are beginning to get nervous at President Trump's furious statements issued without consulting his Asian partners. And both Pyongyang and Beijing are taking advantage of this possible disharmony.

Ultimately, a solid alliance between the US and the Republic of Korea,²⁹ and the joint message that they are willing and able to defend themselves, is

²⁷ <http://www.rtve.es/noticias/20130408/corea-del-sur-estudia-movimientos-del-norte-si-planeara-prueba-nuclear/633000.shtml>.

²⁸ <http://time.com/4766618/moon-jae-in-the-negotiator/>.

²⁹ <https://www.cbsnews.com/news/analysis-pyongyangs-view-of-the-north-korea-u-s-crisis/>.

The Korean peninsula: the neverending conflict

essential to avoid any dangerous error of calculation in Pyongyang.³⁰ But deterrence alone is insufficient. Certainly, it has not been sufficient so far. When the tension eases they should actively seek new paths of dialogue with South Korea and back issues such as commitments between the two Koreas in sports or on matters that are apparently of lesser importance but entail mutual relations. For its part, Kim Jong-un's regime should show a certain degree of responsibility and accept the small steps forward Seoul has publicly offered.

Beijing cannot remain on the sidelines vis-à-vis Pyongyang

Growing tension on the Korean peninsula was the focus of the security and defence summit of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations in which the diplomatic chiefs of many of the world's leading powers took part, including the US and Russia. They all condemned Pyongyang for intensifying its nuclear programme and for the recent intercontinental missile launch tests. This puts extra pressure on China to exert its full influence.

On the last two occasions Beijing has supported the harsh economic sanctions approved by the UN Security Council in August³¹ and September³² to force North Korea to resume the negotiations that have been at a standstill for several years. But Washington fears that the Chinese government will continue to show a traditionally lax attitude towards its troublesome eastern neighbour.

It is true that relations between Beijing and Pyongyang have deteriorated over the past months because Kim Jong-un has gone too far. But China wants to prevent the regime collapsing in order to avoid having to deal with hundreds of thousands of Korean refugees arriving as well as destabilising the regional status quo by placing an ally of Washington at its border. At any rate, China is responsible to the world and must exercise its role of power. It cannot continue to look the other way while tension rockets in Korea.

The current situation in North Korea beyond the missile programme

The UN reports do not describe a very encouraging situation in the DPRK. The devastating floods and worst droughts experienced in the last 16 years look set to reduce its agricultural production by one-third.³³ Two out of every five inhabitants suffer from malnutrition and 70% depend on the state distribution system for survival. Daily rations have been reduced to 400 grams – less than the government target of 572 grams. The United Nations

³⁰ <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2017/09/02/59aa2eca468aeb1a7b8b45fd.html>.

³¹ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12945.doc.htm>.

³² <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12983.doc.htm>.

³³ http://www.nkeconwatch.com/nk-uploads/GDP_of_North_Korea_in_2016_f-1.pdf.

has approved a 6.3-million-dollar aid package to make up for the shortage of rice, corn, potatoes and other staple foods. The situation has not been so alarming since the famines of the 90s killed a million people, 5% of the population.

A few analysts with access to domestic sources claim³⁴ that the cuts have extended to the pampered military establishment and that its 1.2 million soldiers are physically unfit for combat. North Korea allocated one-quarter of its GDP, by far the highest percentage in the world, to defence between 2004 and 2014. Although the country recorded a spectacular 3.9% GDP growth in 2016, according to the Bank of Korea (BOK),³⁵ the bank bases its figures on indications given the absence of official data and experts distrust its estimates, stating that 1% or 1.5% would be more realistic.

When he came to power in 2011 following his father's death, Kim Jong-un announced that his priority was his people's prosperity, and this sounded like a major novelty. Food self-sufficiency is indispensable now that the sanctions are strangling international trade. Achieving it would be "*like a hydrogen bomb that can intimidate enemies trying to suffocate North Korea through various sanctions and threats*", stated in July the daily newspaper *Rodong Sinmun*,³⁶ the government's main mouthpiece. Pyongyang has attempted to use a broad variety of methods and incentives for getting livestock breeders and farmers to solve their chronic production deficits. It is an arduous task because natural disasters are coupled with the mountainous relief of 70% of the territory, which reduces the cultivable area. The five-year plan approved in May 2017 introduces improvements in farming that are designed to double grain production in 2030.

Kim Jong-un has linked his legitimacy to improving the quality of life of his people and encouraging incipient reforms that inevitably recall those of Deng Xiaoping, but he furthermore seems to be genuinely more concerned than his predecessors with the people's wellbeing. He has granted more room for manoeuvre to the markets and much of the population is involved in them. North Korea continues to be a very poor country: inequalities have increased, yet all the analyses predict that the new sanctions will limit the incipient growth, and if China plays an active part in them it is highly likely that the economy will relapse into its chronic problems in 2017.

But there is another means of analysing this data. Whatever the real consequences are, North Korea is calculating that the potential benefits obtained from its missile tests and the general development of nuclear weapons are greater than the possible costs and disadvantages.

³⁴ <http://www.38north.org/2017/09/jbaron090717/>.

³⁵ http://www.nkeconwatch.com/nk-uploads/GDP_of_North_Korea_in_2016_f-1.pdf.

³⁶ <http://www.rodong.rep.kp/en/>.

The Korean peninsula: the neverending conflict

This calculation takes two factors into account: first, that North Korea (as commented earlier) has made economic progress in recent years, particularly since Kim Jong-un came to power, and even in years of harsh sanctions. In all these years the accumulated sanctions have been the harshest the international community has witnessed;³⁷ however, its economic development has been much more conditioned by domestic policy decisions than by international sanctions.

We are not talking about a growth miracle, but the country is undoubtedly in much better shape than it was 11 years ago and light years away from the famine of the 1990s. Food insecurity prevails, but the country has not experienced widespread famine since then, owing largely to the larger role private production and trade enjoy in the economic system.

Secondly – and there is a connection – North Korea probably has many channels for trade and funding that are not commonly known but play a very significant role in its economy. The fact is that the regime has adapted to using “nonconventional” channels and means for acquiring very substantial quantities of supplies needed for its society to function. It is an economic system where nonconventional (and often illicit) trade channels are not the exception but play an essential role in economic management.³⁸ That is not to say that sanctions do not or cannot work. Rather, it shows to what extent nonconventional methods are institutionalised in economic management. Everything in the DPRK is “risky business” and people have learned to live with this. The UN reports are highly revealing in this regard.³⁹

A few sectors of North Korea’s government are most likely increasingly satisfied with the ICBM tests. But in the upper echelons of the leadership strategic calculations are probably that, even with harsher sanctions like September’s, North Korea is likely to be capable of continuing with an economic strategy similar to that pursued until now. Perhaps we might call it North Korea’s “strategic patience”: to continue with its international economic relations at a minimum, with little concern about the impact of lack of growth on the population’s means of subsistence, while expecting that recognition as a nuclear power will guarantee the regime’s survival... only time will tell whether the latest round of sanctions in strategic sectors such as oil supplies will modify these calculations.

An approach to the possible evolution of the situation

The possibility of resuming talks on the Korean peninsula is growing weaker by the day. Washington is calling for greater isolation of the North Korean

³⁷ Resolutions 1718 (2006), 1874 (2009), 2087 (2013), 2094 (2013), 2270 (2016), 2321 (2016), and 2356 (2017).

³⁸ <https://c4ads.org/risky-business/>.

³⁹ <https://fas.org/irp/eprint/scr1874.pdf>.

government, the sanctions are being toughened, increased arms sales to South Korea and Japan has been announced and strategic systems are being deployed in and around the Korean peninsula... Even the South Korean government has stated that talks may have to wait, as North Korea's latest nuclear test and ballistic missile launches are threatening to upset the security balance in East Asia.⁴⁰

Beijing, for its part, is continuing with its traditional policy of calling for dialogue between the parties, though it has also involved itself in imposing harsher sanctions on Pyongyang.⁴¹ What is most important, China stresses, is for the United States and North Korea to sit down and talk, whether multilaterally, trilaterally, bilaterally or in any other format. From Beijing's point of view, dialogue is the only means of easing the tension in Korea, whereas excessive sanctions or coercive tactics are largely inefficient, if not counterproductive.

It is obvious that Washington and Beijing differ as to how to tackle the possible talks with North Korea. Washington views talks as a means to an end – in this case the denuclearisation of North Korea. Negotiations are only worthwhile if they annul Pyongyang's weapons programmes. However, in two and a half decades of talks each step taken has ended without effective implementation and meanwhile North Korea has boosted its nuclear and missile launch capabilities slowly but surely. As a result, the US administration considers dialogue to be a method of pacification or even a surrender. By negotiating with Pyongyang, Washington has "allowed" North Korea to become a nuclear state and to use this status against it.

And the circle continues to feed back into itself: Pyongyang is carrying out more and more nuclear and ballistic tests, Seoul and Washington are conducting military exercises, President Trump is tweeting threats and the rest of the world is alarmed by the possible consequences. Talks with Kim Jong-un seem unthinkable. This stalemate preventing any progress towards détente is mainly due to the fact that each side is clinging to a stereotyped view of the other, as the Danish academics Geir Helgesen and Hatla Thelle of the Nordic Institute of Asian Studies remind us in their article "Dialogue with North Korea?"⁴²

With such a vision of the world, the threats of some and the international condemnation of North Korea's actions are ineffective. Hegelsen and Thelle are in favour of using Kissinger's method of ping-pong diplomacy that was employed for the West's relations with China last century:⁴³

⁴⁰ <http://www.38north.org/2017/08/jdelury082917/>.

⁴¹ https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/china-bans-north-korea-iron-lead-coal-imports-as-part-of-un-sanctions/2017/08/14/a0ce4cb0-80ca-11e7-82a4-920da1aeb507_story.html?utm_term=.3c14490c9fd2.

⁴² <https://rauli.cbs.dk/index.php/cjas/article/view/4599/5031>.

⁴³ <http://www.history.com/news/ping-pong-diplomacy>.

forget about geostrategy and begin with other points to get the debate started on “easy” issues. This approach requires the West to take a more pragmatic and more proactive attitude, avoiding giving priority to human rights or nuclear trade and progressing in supplying food and energy. Despite recognising that China’s human-rights record in particular is not desirable, scholars are convinced that such a method could relieve the North Korean people’s suffering and start a virtuous circle of talks.

A large-scale diplomatic effort is needed

Military pressure and sanctions alone will merely pave the way for errors of calculation and even a possible war if other “soft power” components are ignored or improperly used. Stabilising the Korean nuclear issue requires large doses of multilateral diplomacy and only the United States has the ability to lead such efforts. This primordial effort cannot be “outsourced” to China. The US should be a leading actor in the military sphere and also in the diplomatic field. Diplomacy should be played on a chessboard at a variety of speeds and with different players and combinations:

- US-ROK and US-Japan: they should create a strong front on possible deployments of the deterrence forces and on a strategy of sanctions in the United Nations. President Trump’s government appears to be heavily involved in this option. The military exercises should continue, but their composition and duration will be an important issue in possible future negotiations.
- US-China: This is a key relationship. Both administrations should establish ongoing bilateral talks on Korea. Washington will have to resort to Chinese assistance both for the sanctions that put pressure on Pyongyang and for encouraging the necessary negotiations. China is the gateway to establishing a feasible diplomatic channel between the DPRK and the United States. Realistically, Washington cannot expect the pressure to be successful without political dialogue and Beijing cannot expect this dialogue to begin without putting real pressure on Pyongyang.
- UN Security Council: The sanctions on Iraq failed when the five permanent members (P5) of the UNSC failed to remain united. The Trump administration should involve itself in maintaining the unity of the P5 by passing resolutions 2371⁴⁴ and 2375.⁴⁵ Unity is key to ensuring that the pressure works and to forcing political negotiations.

“Six Party Talks”: (US, ROK, PDRK, China, Russia and Japan): This forum will have to be revived at some point and suitable political agreements and a framework for tackling the issue need to be put in place. North

⁴⁴ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12945.doc.htm>.

⁴⁵ <https://www.un.org/press/en/2017/sc12983.doc.htm>.

Korea took part, and was comfortable, in this forum. It is a suitable framework for resuming talks.

- A direct channel between the US and the DPRK: except during President George W. Bush's second term, this channel has always existed in some way or another. The United States should attempt to revive a channel for bilateral talks that is as discreet as possible but encourages possible communication at especially tense moments.

Ideally Washington ought to become more involved in diplomacy. It could be based on the "suspension for suspension" proposal promoted by China and Russia, exploring possible variations. It could even envisage talks on a peace treaty formally putting an end to the Korean War. If the crisis were to intensify, the US administration should seek at least to open up channels of communication with Pyongyang before unleashing the conflict.

Although it seems logical for the White House not to formally accept the possibility of North Korea being a nuclear state, the world has in fact been living with a North Korea with nuclear weapons for several years. In view of the ineffectiveness of the strategies pursued to date, it would be advisable for the diplomatic process to start as soon as possible. The longer the wait, the closer the DPRK will be to having reliable ICBM with nuclear weapons capable of striking the American continent. Once this is a fait accompli, North Korea will be in a stronger position and denuclearisation will be even more difficult to achieve.

Orchestrating these diplomatic efforts will be one of the most complex challenges the international community has faced in the past 50 years.

Chapter fifteen

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world order?

Pedro Sánchez Herráez

Abstract

The world order, conformed by the new world reality, contemplates new disputes, sometimes centered by the control of “small seas” and of rocks of almost insignificant size, that are fought by a growing group of powers, some new ones and others not so much, in a new regional challenge with readings in global code.

Keywords

Ojotsk Sea, Sea of Japan, China Seas, disputed islands, world order, Pacific, Far East.

Introduction

The Far East seas: new players on the global stage?

Much has been said and written about the Pacific and the rise of Asia¹, with some remarkable data and figures coming to light, such as the fact that 60% of the world population resides in the Asia-Pacific region, and this area accounts for more than a third of global GDP, while South Korea, China and Japan (in that order) are responsible for 90% of world ship building in terms of tonnage²... data on a scale that is hard to assimilate and interpret with ease.

This chapter will not attempt to analyse the whole Asia Pacific region, with an ocean that extends over more than 165 million Km²³, and with its strategies of major and medium sized powers (and those of the other countries of its coastal regions or otherwise implicated in the area), nor is it a question of establishing or comprehensively evaluating the activities carried out in the “first island chain” (a line formed by the archipelago linking Japan and the Philippines) or the “second island chains” (extending from the Aleutians to New Guinea by way of Guam, recently threatened with attack by North Korea⁴), but instead, while not leaving aside the major strategic approaches that always underlie any analysis, we propose to highlight how small movements in small areas, through issues which at first sight might appear minor questions, in actual fact test the will of nations in achieving their goals, showing how questions that the public consider to be of little interest are actually extremely important, and how the actions or inactions of some of those involved can have a much greater bearing on events than was originally thought.

In their endeavours to attain global dominance, for millennia, nations have as a general rule fought to gain access to the oceans, and in doing so they have striven to outdo their rivals; the good fortune of some, and the misfortune of others have been influenced by a number of geographical

¹ By way of example, AZNAR Federico, «Reflexiones en torno a la seguridad de Asia Pacífico», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento de Análisis 12/2013, 27 February 2013, available at http://www.ieee.es/en/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2013/DIEEA12-2013_ReflexionesSeguridadAsiaPacífico_FAFM.pdf; VV.AA., «El auge de Asia: implicaciones estratégicas», Cuadernos de Estrategia n.º 143, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos e Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado, Madrid, 2010, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/cuadernos/CE_143_Asia.pdf. NOTE: all the links indicated in this document were updated and available on 15 September 2017.

² Statista, «Largest shipbuilding nations in 2016, based on completions in gross tonnage», 2017, available at <https://www.statista.com/statistics/263895/shipbuilding-nations-worldwide-by-cgt/>.

³ By way of comparison the Mediterranean covers approximately 2.5 million Km².

⁴ El Mundo, «North Korea threatens North America with attacking US bases in Guam and the Pentagon warns: “Pyongyang would lose”», 09 August 2017, available at <http://www.elmundo.es/internacional/2017/08/09/598ad366268e3e4f068b46a1.html>.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

and human issues etc. which led to the existence of what have become known as thalassocracies, countries whose power derives mainly from their dominion of the oceans (for example, England, Japan and United States) as opposed to telurocracies, those powers that concentrated more on territorial domain, with Russia and China being classic exponents of this category. As an illustration of the disputes between these countries – which almost always tend to acquire global connotations – it is sufficient to recall the 19th century “Great Game” in which England and Russia were competitors, or the containment policy between the United States and the Soviet Union during the Cold War, examples of the reality experienced to a greater or lesser degree in the region.

The “reconstruction” of the world order that has come about since the fall of the USSR which relinquished its role as super power along with its demise, and the rise of new powers, which previously had only been “emerging”, some of which have now become fully developed” as in the case of China, and which are struggling to gain a foothold, that is, their own “place in the sun”, is reshaping the areas of power and influence on the planet on a day to day basis, and this inevitably leads to clashes and disputes.

With this confluence of powers and major global interests within the immense expanse of the area that is the Far East and the Pacific... within the framework of these astronomical magnitudes, “minor” seas⁵ can be found, close to the coasts, along with islands and atolls, sometimes so small that they could be overlooked or might seem insignificant, yet this is in no way the case⁶.

Those “minor” seas which are virtually enclosed, and have scant entry and exit points, are extremely advantageous if they cease to belong to “one country”; the wealth of resources in those seas, fishing, hydrocarbons, minerals etc. and obtaining a considerable degree of security for the coastlines and trade routes are among many of the key aspects in attempting to gain an advantageous foothold in the region, and consequently, given the growing importance of the area, the planet.

And as a result, the numerous small points of friction, bilateral or multilateral differences, are capable of lighting the fuse to the powder keg that this zone is fast becoming, and which hitherto had been seen rather as a remote outpost of the world. It suffices to check out the rapid rearmament of many of

⁵ Although this extension will be detailed subsequently, this represents an attempt to highlight the relatively reduced dimensions compared to the vastness of the Pacific of which these areas are a part.

⁶ It is sufficient to consider that the sovereignty of an island provides an exclusive economic zone within a radius of 200 nautical miles (over 270 kilometres). More information in United Nations, “United Nations Convention on maritime law” drafted in 1982, in force since 1994 available at http://www.un.org/depts/los/convention_agreements/texts/unclos/convemar_es.pdf.

these nations⁷ –or to simply follow the daily headlines in the press to confirm this reality.

Given the enormous complexity of the area and the vastness of its regions and interests, this chapter will focus on Russia and the Okhotsk sea, Japan, and the sea of Japan, and China and the East and South China seas; the presence of the United States in the area will be considered, given its considerable global power, and with a brief look at the Korean peninsula as a dysfunctional element of the area, in view of the nuclear escalation, leaving to other analysts the task of a more extensive analysis of other direct players with interests and differences in the aforementioned seas such as Vietnam Indonesia etc.

Background to the conflict

Area of growing importance for world order. Is it out of order?

Although each one of these seas has its own particular characteristics, it could be said as a general rule that in these areas there have been since time immemorial clashes between a regional thalassocracy (Japan) with two continental powers, Russia and China, both of whom have different and opposing aspirations and visions in respect of the ocean, in addition to the intervention in the area of the contemporary global thalassocracy par excellence, the United States for a period spanning most of the 20th century. The conflict between these two thalassocracies led, as an example of the bellicose apotheosis, to the Pacific campaign during the Second World War which also witnessed in this same area the launch of the first nuclear weapons in the history of armed conflict.

And in particular, and considered from a broad historical perspective, the Russo- Japanese war of 1904-1905 at the dawn of the last century provides a clear example of the clash of two powers aspiring to control the area, as Port Arthur in Chinese territory was crucial to Russia, because, unlike the port of Vladivostok (which in Russian means “power over the east”) it remained unfrozen all year round, and could thus be navigated at all times.

This confrontation, like many other issues relating to the interests at play in this zero-sum game, was not only a conflict that had been brewing for some time as a result of the clear antagonism between two expansive powers, but it was settled in an aggressive clash that had a considerable effect on the region and which culminated in the triumphant Japanese victory which had

⁷ Revista Española de Defensa, «El tablero de Asia Pacífico», November 2014, p. 50; AZNAR Federico, «Desorden y rearme en Asia Pacífico», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento de Análisis 02/2013, 09 January 2013, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2013/DIEEEA02-2013_Desorden_RearmeAsiaPacífico_FAFM.pdf.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

a significant impact at the time, and which led many analysts to question whether whether this was just another colonial war or could in fact be considered more as “World War Zero”⁸.

This led to recognition of Japan as a power to be reckoned with and additionally had a profound impact, because it was the first time that an Asian nation had overcome a Western power; and this reality was further reinforced during the First World War (1914-1918) when Japan confronted Germany⁹.

Japanese expansionism, always in the interests of seeking raw materials and increasing Japan's sphere of influence, ended with its military defeat in the Second World War in 1945, and with the United States' now permanent and significant presence in the area through a network of bases and deployment of the most powerful army on the planet, in addition to entering into a good number of alliances and treaties with various nations in the area.

With the backdrop of the Cold War, and conflict with the USSR, the containment policy essentially concerned the “first island chain” as this comprised the eastern perimeter of the four seas under consideration, with the Japanese archipelago as the central nucleus of the chain.

Within this framework, the Okhotsk sea and its naval bases were crucial outlets to open waters for Soviet ballistic submarines¹⁰; Japan was becoming an economic power, albeit with powerful constitutional restriction of its Armed forces, and its defence entrusted to US control; in the meantime China remained as a “sleeping giant” although it was active on the continent (frontier disputes with the USSR, Korean war etc.) and there was ongoing conflict with Taiwan¹¹ as a considerable national aggravation and a potential element of conflict in these seas.

Through the Treaty of San Francisco in 1951¹², among other issues, Japanese sovereignty was ended in some territories and islands (Kurul, Spratly, etc.) and others were placed under fiduciary administration which would revert in 1972.

⁸ KOWNER Rotem, «The impact of the Russo-Japanese war», Routledge, Nueva York, 2007, p. 1. The same thesis is propounded in VV.AA., «The Russo-japanese war in global perspective: World War Zero», 2 volumes, Koninklijke Brill NV, Leiden, 2007.

⁹ SERRANO Ruben, «La Primera Guerra Mundial en el Pacífico: operaciones navales y terrestres en el Lejano Oriente, 1914-1918», Platea Ediciones, Madrid, 2016.

¹⁰ ACHARYA Amitav, «The United States Versus the USSR in the Pacific: Trends in the Military Balance», Contemporary Southeast Asia, Institute of Southeast Asian Studies. 9 (4), March 1988, p. 293.

¹¹ BBC World, «China vs. Taiwan: the 80 year old dispute that divides the largest country in Asia», 14 June 2017, available at http://www.bbc.com/mundo/noticias/2015/11/151106_china_taiwan_rencuentro_xi_jinping_ma_ying_jeou_historia_aw.

¹² «Treaty of Peace with Japan» (with two declarations), San Francisco, 08 September 1951, available at <https://treaties.un.org/doc/publication/unts/volume%20136/volu-me-136-i-1832-english.pdf>.

The status quo has been basically maintained, and although hostility exists, it is mainly due to the consequences of the Second World War, or processes of decolonisation, and subsequently, the disintegration of the USSR, whilst not forgetting conflicts linked to ethnic or religious questions, rather than disputes in these seas. However, some ambiguity in the terms of the treaty of San Francisco concerning which specific islands in the archipelagos were expressly mentioned in that treaty, and in other cases, which nation would assume sovereignty following their return, will have repercussions in this current expansive stage.

Classic Chinese expansionism, in its millenarian style, has had a strong defensive terrestrial component – protection of the Han population – which led to occupation of areas to be used as a “buffer zone” (Tibet, *Xinjiang* Mongolia) in order to ensure distances and obstacles – high mountains, vast deserts etc. — around the nucleus in question.

This approach reached its maximum expression in construction of the “Great Wall of China”, the longest defensive construction on the planet, created to protect the country from invasions, a wall that is an example of the nature and the Chinese cosmovision, a country with age-old culture and customs and with a strong nationalist sentiment and, as its name indicates, which perceives itself as a central country, i.e. the centre of the world.

Having secured the channels of external terrestrial penetration, the potential threat to the Han was endogenous; the coastal zones, given their greater capacity for trading and wealth, rapidly achieved higher standards of living and wealth than the interior regions which could lead to this enormous country with its huge population developing at different speeds, and therefore making it likely that the enormous population would split and grow exponentially. Perhaps for this reason, after the great naval expeditions of the 15th century, China tended to look inwards on itself and became isolated from the sea.

This negative perception of the sea was reiterated during the so-called “century of humiliation” which extended from 1839 (when the opium war began) to 1949 (birth of Mao Tse Tung’s Popular Republic of China throughout continental China); the arrival of foreign powers from the coasts was perceived – with some objective arguments and other more questionable reasoning- as a real attempt at destabilising the country; the solution, always from the perspective of a specific cosmovision, was to radically eliminate the arrival of any ideas and resources coming from the outside by way of the sea¹³. And this situation was to continue with Mao in power (1983-1976). However, and by way of illustration of the changes and new paradigms of the current world, China’s exponential economic growth in the final years of

¹³ Stratford, «The geopolitics of China: A great power enclosed», 25 March 2012, available at <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/geopolitics-china-great-power-enclosed>.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

the 20th century and its role as “world factory” required the Chinese dragon to increase the input of resources– basically raw materials and energy – and its output –manufactured goods – was mainly transported by sea. China could no longer turn its back on the ocean ...however at the same time it had opened up a new flank, through which “new invasions” could penetrate.

Asia in general has risen with great force, the Asiatic tigers (South Korea, Taiwan, Singapore) have all experienced exponential economic growth. While Russia is no longer the USSR, it nevertheless aspires to recovery of its super power status, Japan hands the baton to China as second world economic power and is increasingly finding it difficult to leave the military defence of its interests to the United States, and it is broadening its concept of “self-defence,” while Washington, in view of these emerging powers, their growing demand for resources and sphere of influence at a global level in an area which already seems compartmentalised under parameters inherited from the Cold War, “is turning towards Asia”.

The “world order” is groaning at the seams, when the global power, regional powers, emerging powers and communications lines that affect the whole planet converge in these relatively small seas, continental powers are aspiring to become naval powers and are disputing islands and atolls, which seem to have no apparent significance.... In this new expansive phase, the attempt to assume control of those disputed territories both through diplomatic means and on occasion impelled by events, –all of which is backed by a war machine and an increasingly powerful and intense rhetoric¹⁴– unquestionably reflects a new paradigm in the reconfiguration of world order. Could a third world war begin because of a crack in the middle of a “small” Asian sea? with the main players countries that until recently were definitely seen neither as contenders, or as “expansive countries” or even as naval powers?

Current conflict

New battlefields: small seas and remote islands

The Okhotsk Sea... the Russian sea and the Arctic’s anteroom?

Russia’s determination, as the continental power par excellence, to seek access to open waters has always been a constant in Russian geopolitics¹⁵,

¹⁴ In the surrounding nations two years ago the percentage of the population concerned by the territorial claims of China oscillated between 45% of Malaysia to 91% of Philippines, with an 83% of Japan and Vietnam or 78% of South Korea. PEW Research Center, «How Asia-Pacific publics see each other and their national leaders», 02 September 2015, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2015/09/02/how-asia-pacific-publics-see-each-other-and-their-national-leaders/>.

¹⁵ See in this regard SÁNCHEZ HERRÁEZ Pedro, «Marco geopolítico de Rusia: constantes históricas, dinámica y visión en el siglo XXI» en VV.AA., Cuaderno de Estrategia n.º 178, «Rusia bajo el liderazgo de Putin; la nueva estrategia rusa a la búsqueda de su liderazgo

the advance westwards to the Atlantic and eastwards towards the Pacific, in an ongoing endeavour over centuries, has largely marked strategic Russian lines of action and the nation's cosmivision.

Furthermore, Russia, which for centuries has had its centre of gravity firmly entrenched in the European zone, is now attempting to empower its Asian and eastern zones, in the light of Asia's growing importance in the world balance of power, and it is recovering to some extent, should it ever have neglected it, its discourse of Eurasianism, its dual European and Asiatic reality; thus among other matters, it is increasingly maintaining its relations with China both in the light of the new geopolitical reality of the Chinese dragon and by way of response to the sanctions suffered as a result of the conflict with the Ukraine and Crimea.

Consequently, within the framework of growing cooperation and with its powerful and modern defence industry, Russia is supplying equipment and materials to many Asian nations¹⁶, presenting this collaboration (in particular with that of China) as "strategic" and as an alternative to North American hegemony¹⁷.

In this environment the Okhotsk sea - perennially important for the Russians - and which actually takes its name from the first Russian settlement in the Far East despite Japan's frustrated efforts to change the name to "North Sea",_ has acquired new specific weight, notwithstanding its relatively small size¹⁸, in addition to being the base for its Pacific Fleet, it enables, through Russia's control of the Kuril islands - some of which are in dispute with Japan - Russian ships, and in particular submarines, to sail into the Pacific from the scant outlets available in this practically enclosed sea¹⁹.

Except for the island of Hokkaido which is under Japanese sovereignty, all the other territories that surround this sea are under Russian sovereignty, which led the former USSR to claim the sea as territorial waters and to declare it a

regional y el reforzamiento como actor global», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Madrid, 2015, chapter one, pp. 15-77, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fiche-ro/cuadernos/CE_178.pdf.

¹⁶ Sputnik, «Indonesia quiere comprar ochocazas SU-35 a Rusia» 04 August 2017 available at <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/defensa/201708041071312178-defensa-armas-ffaa-moscu-yakarta/>.

¹⁷ CALVO ALBERO José Luis, «La seguridad regional: factores de estabilización en inestabilización», in VV.AA., «El auge de Asia: implicaciones estratégicas», Cuadernos de Estrategia n.º 143, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos e Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado, Madrid, 2010, p. 208, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/cuadernos/CE_143_Asia.pdf.

¹⁸ The Ojotsk sea extends over approximately 1.5 million Km²; by way of comparison the Mediterranean extends over 2.5 million Km².

¹⁹ 19 Sputniknews, «Aniversario: la Flota del Pacífico rusa, siempre alerta ante el avance enemigo», 21 April 2017, available at <https://mundo.sputniknews.com/defensa/201704211068567680-armada-rusia-lejano-orientel/>.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

closed sea, prohibiting entry of foreign vessels and creating tense situations during the Cold War²⁰.

This sovereignty claim endures, using the continental platform as an argument. In 2015, what is now the Russian Federation obtained, with United Nations intervention, recognition of sovereignty over more than 50,000 km² of that sea²¹, and according closed access to other nationalities²² - among other issues it prevented access to a rich fishing water for Chinese and Japanese vessels, increasing competition for this valuable resource in other areas which were already saturated and in dispute.

In addition to the wealth of the area- cooperation with Norway is already in operation for the extraction of hydrocarbons²³ - and Russia's centuries-old interest in this sea, there is a solid reason for the claims made in this zone, namely the Arctic. With global warming and the growth of technology, the exploitation of the proven wealth and potential of the Arctic, together with the possibilities of navigating the area²⁴ - vessels could carry out the trip from China to Europe in 35 days instead of 48 - this formerly "negative zone" has become extremely interesting and is being claimed, at least in certain areas by Russia, United States and Canada.

Therefore, not only is the Okhotsk sea and its various disputes directly important for Russia, but it is also significant at a regional and global level; furthermore, the Russian approach is being studied by China - not to mention other nations - with a view to claims on the South China sea, alleging the same Russian arguments... therefore the provisions adopted regarding this chilly little sea will have repercussions, not only on these waters, but possibly over the Arctic and other areas of the planet. There is a much that weighs in the balance in this regard.

The Sea of Japan, sea of the country of the (re) rising sun?

²⁰ SONTAG Sherry, DREW Christopher, «Blind Man's Bluff: The Untold Story of American Submarine Espionage». Harper Collins, New York, 2000.

²¹ Russia Beyond the Headlines, «Russia gains 52,000 square kilometres by fixing its border in the Okhotsk sea», 22 August 2015, available at https://es.rbth.com/noticias/2015/08/22/rusia-gana-52000-kilometros-cuadrados-al-fijar-su-frontera-en-mar-de-okhotsk_391715.

²² GOBLE Paul, «Moscow closes Okhotsk sea to outsiders», Eurasia Daily Monitor Volumen 1 Issue 79, 29 de abril de 2014, disponible en <https://jamestown.org/program/moscow-closes-okhotsk-sea-to-outsiders/>.

²³ NATO Association of Canada, «Oil exploitation begins in the sea of Okhotsk as Russia and Norway continue to cooperate», 08 de julio de 2016, disponible <http://natoassociation.ca/oil-exploration-begins-in-the-sea-of-okhotsk-as-russia-and-norway-continue-to-cooperate/>.

²⁴ DEL POZO Fernando, «Navegación y explotación del ártico en las nuevas condiciones climáticas», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento de Opinión 22/2015, 25 de febrero de 2015, disponible en http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2015/DIEEO22-2015_Artico-CambioClimatico_F.delPozo.pdf.

The "Sea of Japan" (known as the "East Sea" by the Koreans, and also the "Oriental Sea" or "Korean Sea") occupies an area of just under a million square kilometres and is almost completely enclosed on the east by the Japanese archipelago, while to the West, the Korean peninsula and Russia basically form its other coastline; the outlet to other seas is exclusively through five shallow straits which could condition its possibilities of access and freedom to navigate.

Japan, an archipelago formed by 4 main islands and over 6,800 islands and atolls, was and is a nation committed to the sea²⁵, the thalassocracy par excellence in the region. Following its defeat in the Second World War, it suffered severe restrictions on its military capacity²⁶, although it does possess some "self-defence forces".

However, within the framework of conflict in the area and in the new reshaping of global powers, Japan does not wish to take a back seat and is determined to maintain or possibly increase its status; and this aim is inextricably linked to possession of a military tool which will be able to support this position and safeguard the interests of the country, in an increasingly complex and conflictive environment, and with perceptions of mutual hostility, particularly with regard to China²⁷.

In addition to the Senkaku islands (Diaoyu in Chinese) administered by Japan and which China is claiming, Japan has another dispute with Russia over the four southernmost islands in the Kuril archipelago (in Japanese this means "Archipelago of a thousand islands") it is also in dispute with South Korea for the Liancourt Rocks (Dokdo for Koreans and Taekshima for the Japanese), a conflict in which tensions have risen several times, notably in 2008 when South Korea withdrew its ambassador from Japan²⁸; and it holds that it was the first territory occupied in 1905 when Japan began its expansion in the peninsula - which makes it especially symbolic - whereas Japan maintains an official opposing position²⁹.

²⁵ Stratfor, «The geopolitics of Japan: an island power adrift», 18 March 2012, available at <https://worldview.stratfor.com/article/geopolitics-japan-island-power-adrift>.

²⁶ *Article 9 of the Japanese Constitution: «Aspiring sincerely to an international peace based on justice and order, the Japanese people forever renounce war as a sovereign right of the nation and the threat or use of force as means of settling international disputes. In order to accomplish the aim of the preceding paragraph, land, sea, and air forces, as well as other war potential, will never be maintained. The right of belligerency of the state will not be recognized».* Prime Minister of Japan and his Cabinet, «The Constitution of Japan», 1947, available at http://japan.kantei.go.jp/constitution_and_government_of_japan/constitution_e.html.

²⁷ PEW Research Center, «Hostile neighbors: China vs. Japan», 13 September 2016, available at <http://www.pewglobal.org/2016/09/13/hostile-neighbors-china-vs-japan/>.

²⁸ The New York Times, «South Korea recalls ambassador to Japan», 14 July 2008, available at <http://www.nytimes.com/2008/07/14/world/asia/14iht-15korea.14476081.html?mcubz=1>.

²⁹ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Japanese territory, «Takeshima», available at <http://www.mofa.go.jp/region/asia-paci/takeshima/index.html>.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

Furthermore, two islands that rise a few dozen centimetres above sea level and which have a surface area of less than 10 m², known as Okino-torishima - for which concrete protections have been built so that erosion will not submerge the rocks³⁰, and a new artificial island has been built - have led to claims on its status as an island, as this concerns the potential concession of an exclusive economic area in its environs, which has caused problems and tensions with China.

Therefore, Japan has modified its military and strategic doctrine to a considerable extent³¹; moreover, China, Russia and North Korea have raised a number of issues and disputes for Tokyo that have led to formulation of a new interpretation of its Constitution in the sense of contemplating self-defence with a broader perspective.

Consequently, it is geographically redistributing its military forces and is providing new materials (including destroyers with flight decks or helicopters³², in actual fact, undercover aircraft carriers) as part of the reinforcement, and increasing its capacity and roles in the area³³.

Japan is making great strides in recovering its naval and military capacities.

China Seas: The New Great Wall of a renewed great power?

The 1996 crisis in the Taiwan strait marks a before and after for China³⁴, as it brought home the fact that it could not face up to the US navy. Once again, a great country like China, always conscious of its history, perceives a vulnerability from the outside; this growing influx of goods by sea, the umbilical cord that connects China to the rest of the planet, may be strangulated at any time as it runs through areas and zones controlled by China, which do not even have a navy worthy of consideration, with capacity that barely extends beyond guarding its extensive coastlines to some degree.

Nationalist calls have been made to recover the ancient glory and grandeur³⁵ and a renewed power is being launched to (re)discover the sea as a way of ensuring its interests; from the Arabian Sea to the South China sea, passing

³⁰ The Guardian, «Japan to spend millions on tiny islands 1000 miles south of Tokyo», 03 February 2016, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2016/feb/03/japan-spend-billions-yen-tiny-okinotori-islands-1000-miles-south-of-tokyo>.

³¹ Revista Española de Defensa, «El tablero de Asia Pacífico», November 2014, pp. 52-53.

³² 32 Center for International Maritime Security, «Japan's Izumo-class helicopter destroyer: and aircraft carrier in disguise?», 11 April 2016, available at <http://cimsec.org/japans-izumo-class-helicopter-destroyer-aircraft-carrier-disguise/24130>.

³³ Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, Japan's Security Policy, 06 April 2016, available at http://www.mofa.go.jp/fp/nsp/page1we_000081.html.

³⁴ El País, «¿Guerra en el Mar de China?», 15 March 1996, available at https://elpais.com/diario/1996/03/15/internacional/826844406_850215.html.

³⁵ MATSUMURAMasahiro, «Taiwán: perder aliados para ganar la guerra», Esglobal, 05 May 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/taiwan-perder-aliados-ganar-la-guerra/>.

through the Indian Ocean, it is creating a series of bases and points of support in the so-called "String of pearls strategy"³⁶.

Furthermore, the "China seas" the Oriental or East - 1.2 million km² - and above all, the South China sea - 3.5 million km² - have become an area of basic interest for this nation: the wealth in these seas, together with commercial trading in their waters, - a tenth portion of world fishing, more than a third of world trade³⁷, mineral resources...- whoever controls this sea controls access between Europe, Middle East, South Asia and the Pacific³⁸.

These seas are beginning to become a source of dispute and conflict³⁹ especially the South China sea, which by analogy is becoming known as the "Chinese Caribbean"⁴⁰ and in which the ancient nation is acting as if it were an internal lake, claiming 90% of its surface area⁴¹.

China has several disputes ongoing. In the East China sea with Japan and Taiwan for the Diaoyu islands (Senkaku in Japanese), over which Japan exercises control; in the South China sea, with almost all the countries that have a coastline, where in addition to the "conflict par excellence" with Taiwan, claimed as an integral part of its territory, there are also claims on the Natuna islands - south of the Spratly islands - and with Malaysia and Indonesia, where there have been conflicts with Chinese fishing vessels; and Indonesia has shown its willingness to reinforce its military presence⁴², and to change the name of the sea to the "North Natuna Sea" within the area of its exclusive economic zone⁴³.

³⁶ RUIZ DOMÍNGUEZ Fernando, «China: de la estrategia del cinturón a la del collar de perlas», Documento Marco 01/2017, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, 03 January 2017, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_marco/2017/DIEEEM01-2017_China_Estrategia_CollarPerlas_RuizDominguez.pdf.

³⁷ RÍOS Xulio, «La crisis en los mares de China: implicaciones geopolíticas y en materia de seguridad», 2012, available at <http://www.igadi.org/web/analiseopinion/las-crisis-en-los-mares-de-china-implicaciones-geopoliticas-y-en-materia-de-seguridad>.

³⁸ 38 HAYTON Bill, «The South China Sea: The Struggle for power in Asia», TJ International Ltd, Cornwall, 2014.

³⁹ 39 LABORIE Mario, «Tensiones en el mar de China meridional», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento de Análisis 33/2012, 30 de julio de 2012, disponible en http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_analisis/2012/DIEEEA33-2012_TensionesMar-China_MLI.pdf; una página curiosa sobre estas disputas puede consultarse en <https://southseaconversations.wordpress.com/2012/04/13/scarborough-shoal-a-photo-tour/>.

⁴⁰ 40 KAPLAN Robert D., «The Asia's Cauldron: The South China Sea and the end of a stable Pacific», Random House, Nueva York, 2015, chapter II, pp. 32-50.

⁴¹ 41 SUÁREZ SIPMAN Marcos, «Deriva de Filipinas en un mar proceloso», Esglobal, 30 December 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/deriva-filipinas-mar-proceloso/>.

⁴² La Vanguardia, «Indonesiareforzarápresenciamilitarlas Natuna», 27 September 2016, disponible en <http://www.lavanguardia.com/internacional/20160927/41607268183/indonesia-reforzara-la-presencia-militar-en-las-islas-natuna.html>.

⁴³ HAYTON Bill, «The South China Sea: Indonesia renames part of maritime economic zone in defiance of Beijing», 15 July 2015, available at <http://www.abc.net.au/news/2017-07-15/south-china-sea-territory-renamed-by-indonesia/8711346>.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

Close to the Malacca strait - one of the "world's compulsory points of transit" China is also in dispute with Vietnam for the Paracel islands occupied by Beijing in different phases (1974, 1988 and 1991) based on the «battle for the Paracel islands» against Vietnam in 1974⁴⁴, with dozens of deaths and vessels sunk, as well as the Spratly islands⁴⁵ (in Chinese Nansha meaning "southern sands") which Vietnam, China and Taiwan are all claiming in whole, the Philippines and Malaysia are claiming a part and Brunei, the only nation that has not occupied any island in the archipelago, is nevertheless claiming jurisdiction rather than sovereignty⁴⁶.

Then as now, in line with ancient customs of protecting territory it is best to build a wall... albeit one based on defensive fortifications in islands and atolls. The New Great Wall over the sea had to be built as a result on "Chinese territory", just as in the past, to stave off "invasions".

The new Great Wall of China

The so called "Cow's tongue" (or dash line) consisting of a series of points over islands and atolls in the south China sea, which have variously numbered from 11 to the current 9 and which covers 90% of the waters claimed by this nation, for the majority of its population are simply territorial waters⁴⁷.

Therefore, there is a perception of the right to use the islands and atolls there – despite the fact that they are disputed – in order to erect defensive fortifications which will protect that part "of China" and consequently the erection of said "Wall" is not an imperialist aggressive attitude, but rather a defensive measure in line with a centuries old view, nurtured during recent decades with a discourse that was strongly "non-interventionist". And the Chinese military strategy includes as one of its basic components, the principle of "Active Defence"⁴⁸, which is closely related to this perception.

The amalgamation of this, together with other factors – such as the Chinese navy's reduced capacity compared to the United States and the increase of

⁴⁴ YOSHIHARA Toshi, «The 1974 Paracels sea battle, a campaign appraisal», Naval War Colleague Review, Spring 2016, volume 69 n.º 2, available at <https://www.usnwc.edu/ge-tattachment/7b5ec8a0-cc48-4d9b-b558-a4f1cf92e7b8/The1974ParacelsSeaBattle.aspx>.

⁴⁵ CIA, The World factbook, «Spratly Islands», 26 July 2017, available at <https://www.cia.gov/library/publications/the-world-factbook/geos/pg.html>.

⁴⁶ SANDS Gary, «Brunei, silent claimant in the south China sea», Foreign Policy Association, 28 April 2016, available at <https://foreignpolicyblogs.com/2016/04/28/brunei-silent-claimant-south-china-sea/>.

⁴⁷ BEECH Hannah, «Just where exactly did China get the South China Sea nine-dash line from?», Time, 19 de julio de 2016, disponible en <http://time.com/4412191/nine-dash-line-9-south-china-sea/>.

⁴⁸ «Strategic Guidelines of Active Defense», China's Military Strategy, Epígrafe III, en USNI News, «Document: China's Military Strategy» 26 de mayo de 2015, available at <https://news.usni.org/2015/05/26/document-chinas-military-strategy>.

other nations – led to proposal of an anti-access and negation strategy in the area (A2/AD)⁴⁹.

In the light of the United States or other rivals' projection capacity, and given the threat of "invasion", the defensive fortification, the New Great Wall, supported by other components (submarines, anti-aircraft ballistic missiles⁵⁰, etc.) China aims to create a set of capacities which will help to inhibit "invaders" moving in the area and if the need arises, prevent their freedom of action within the zone⁵¹.

However, beyond these purely defensive mechanisms, the fact is that growing Chinese naval capacity, and in particular its expeditionary force, means that the number of options that can be deployed have increased the possibility of both blockading Taiwan or resolving the territorial disputes in the South and East China seas⁵².

The traditional mentality of ignoring the importance of the sea is being abandoned, and China is developing a military naval force in alignment with its interests⁵³; thus it is estimated that by 2020⁵⁴ the Chinese navy may be bigger than the US navy⁵⁵ - although their capability differs, especially in terms of air craft carriers, as the USA has 11 and China only 1, and they differ in terms of the existing gap in technological developments. However, in any case it has passed from trying to be a "blue water navy" to actually becoming a "blue water navy"⁵⁶.

⁴⁹ KUMAR SINGH, Prashant, «Anti-Access /Area Denial (A2/AD): A Digression, in Changing contexts of Chinese military strategy and doctrine», IDSA Monograph Series n.º 49, March 2016, pp. 117-119, available at <http://www.idsa.in/system/files/monograph/monograph49.pdf>.

⁵⁰ In this regard LOCKIE Alex, «Meet the US's answer to China's "carrier killer" missile», Business Insider Military & Defense, 21 July 2016, available in <http://www.businessinsider.com/us-answer-carrier-killer-missile-2016-7>.

⁵¹ US Navy War Collegue, «Anti-Access and Area Denial, (A2AD), Presentation», available <https://www.usnwc.edu/getattachment/3e3ba751-8674-4175-9672-404d967f4355/8---A2AD.aspx>; CHRISTOPHER J. McCarthy, «Anti-Access Area Denial: the evolution of modern warfare», US Navy War College, 2010, available <https://www.usnwc.edu/Lucent/OpenPdf.aspx?id=95>.

⁵² US-China Economic and Security Review Commission, «2016 Report to Congress», Executive summary, p. 12, available at https://www.uscc.gov/sites/default/files/annual_reports/Executive%20Summary%202016.pdf.

⁵³ USNI News, «Document: China's Military Strategy» 26 May 2015, available at <https://news.usni.org/2015/05/26/document-chinas-military-strategy>.

⁵⁴ OSBORN, Kris, «The Chinese Navy will be bigger than America's by 2020», Business Insider, 13 December 2014, available at <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-chinese-navy-will-be-bigger-than-americas-by-2020-2014-12>.

⁵⁵ PHARIS, William D.J., «China's pursuit of a blue-water Navy», Marine Corps Combat Development Command, Quantico, Virginia, 2009, available at <https://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=698075>.

⁵⁶ WORTZEL, Larry, citado en Osborn, Kris, «The chinese Navy will be bigger than America's by 2020», ep.grafe «Chinese naval power», Business Insider, 13 december 2014, available at <http://www.businessinsider.com/the-chinese-navy-will-be-bigger-than-americas-by-2020-2014-12>.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

In 2016, The Permanent Court of Arbitration in the Hague⁵⁷ indicated that there is no legal basis for China's claims on the 9 point line, although China failed to acknowledge the resolution⁵⁸.

Despite this ruling and the fact that in the short term the possibility of a classic armed conflict is not expected, China's actions can be considered within the concept of hybrid war, as from the construction of artificial islands in the South China sea to the use of fishing vessels, it all adds to the claims of sovereignty, while not quite crossing the red lines that would give rise to open hostility⁵⁹.

In any case the dragon has also awakened in a new environment from which it has been distanced by millennia. And it has done so with force and determination.

Role of external players

A region where tensions are growing

The increase in military deployment⁶⁰ throughout the region not only reflects an increase in relative preoccupations with security, but it is also an example of the growing economic power of nations in the region, the changes in their strategic cultures- the result of past conflicts and also the perception of danger associated with military weakness, in addition to a feeling of strategic uncertainty deriving from the way the region is currently being reshuffled and reorganised⁶¹.

Korean Peninsula: Is this an exponentialised factor of disorder?

Since 1948 the Korean peninsula has been divided by the 48th parallel into two completely different and conflicting states, North and South Korea.

⁵⁷ Permanent Arbitration court of teh Hague, «In the matter of the South China Arbitration», PCA case n° 2013-19, 12 July 2016, available at <https://pca-cpa.org/wp-con- tent/uploads/sites/175/2016/07/PH-CN-20160712-Award.pdf>.

⁵⁸ An analysis can be found in this regard in CORRAL HERNÁNDEZ David, «Mar de China, el Tribunal de la Haya falla contra Pekín», Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos, Documento de Opinión 105/2916, 14 October 2016, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/docs_opinion/2016/DIEEE0105-2016_MarChina_DavidCorral.pdf.

⁵⁹ The Military Balance, «Chapter six: Asia», international Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017, pp. 244-245, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/04597222.2017.1271212?needAccess=true>.

⁶⁰ SWAINEMicaelD, «CreatingastableAsia.AnagendaforaU.S.-Chinabalanceofpower», Carnegie EndowmentforInternationalPeace, Mas-sachusetts, 2016, available at <http://carnegieendowment.org/2016/10/26/creating-stable-asia-agenda-for-u.s.-china-balance-of-power-pub-64943>.

⁶¹ The Military Balance, «Chapter six: Asia», international Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017, p. 237, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/04597222.2017.1271212?needAccess=true>.

However, apart from this basic difference – which has been complicated by North Korea's military nuclear programme – South Korea, as well as maintaining the necessary military capacity to address the North Korean naval threat⁶², remains attentive to the new Japanese concept of self defence⁶³ which, together with the intention to become a blue-water navy by 2020⁶⁴ has led to an increased naval and air force capacity⁶⁵.

Furthermore, in 2016, South Korea authorised deployment of the US System Terminal High Altitude Area Defense (THAAD), an anti-missile defence system, which created concerns in China, as it considered that not only was this capacity aimed at threats from North Korea but also against Chinese arms systems and national interests⁶⁶, indicating that these could reduce its nuclear deterrent capacity⁶⁷ and that this deployment could destroy any further economic and political relations between both nations⁶⁸.

In addition to the disputes already mentioned, there is also one with China (and to a lesser degree with Japan) for the "Roca Socrota –o Suyan o leodo-", a rock located 4.6 metres below sea level in the East China sea. South Korea has built a small facility in the area, although it holds that it is not laying any claim to territorial rights; but since establishment of the Chinese Air Defence Identification Zone in 2013 which covers the area surrounding the rock, tensions have been rising⁶⁹.

North Korea, a nation which has been progressively acquiring missile and nuclear arms capacity beyond international control, has its only ally in China, although it is an alliance that is becoming increasingly complicated for Beijing. However, a possible collapse of this nation could end by uniting

⁶² MAJUMDAR, Dave, «How dangerous is North Korea's Navy?» The National Interest, 19 April 2017, available at <http://nationalinterest.org/blog/the-buzz/how-dangerous-north-korea-s-navy-20258>.

⁶³ GLOSSERMAN Brad, «Respond and restraint: deterrence and reassurance in Northeast Asia», Pacific Forum CSIS, Issues & Insights, volumen 14 n.º 16, p. V, Maui, Hawaii, 2014, available at https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/issuessinsights_vol14no16english_0.pdf.

⁶⁴ HYUNMingi, «South Korea's blue water ambitions», The Diplomat, 18 November 2010, available at <http://thediplomat.com/2010/11/south-korea-s-blue-water-ambitions/?allpages=yes>.

⁶⁵ The Military Balance, «Chapter six: Asia», International Institute for Strategic Studies, 2017, pp. 244-245, available at <http://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/04597222.2017.1271212?needAccess=true>.

⁶⁶ Reuters, «China cites concerns on U.S. missile defense system in South Korea», 25 February 2016, available at <https://www.reuters.com/article/us-usa-china-north-korea-idUSKCN0VY2C9>.

⁶⁷ The New York Times, «Why U.S. antimissile system in South Korea worries China?», 11 March 2011, available at <https://www.nytimes.com/2017/03/11/world/asia/us-south-korea-thaad-antimissile-system-china.html>.

⁶⁸ BIN Li, «The security dilemma and THAAD deployment in the ROK», 06 March 2017, China and US Focus, available at <http://www.chinausfocus.com/foreign-policy/2017/0306/14759.html>.

⁶⁹ GlobalSecurity.org, «leodo/Suyan Rock/Socotra Rock», 16 December 2013, available at <http://www.globalsecurity.org/military/world/war/socotra-rock.htm>.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

the peninsula under the aegis of the present South Korea, which could mean deployment of US troops⁷⁰ on the Chinese border⁷¹,

USA Resident power?

As far back as 2008 the Secretary of Defence Robert Gates, in Singapore indicated that the United States had played many roles - in Asia, that of ally, partner, friend and resident power⁷².

As the 2012 US strategic guide indicates, the security and economic interests of the USA are inextricably linked to the entire coastline and waters of the Pacific and Indian oceans, creating a changing amalgam of opportunities and challenges that required the USA to rebalance its forces in the Asia -Pacific zone⁷³; in fact it is indicated that by 2020, the US navy and air force will have deployed 60% of its effective forces in the region⁷⁴.

The precautionary presence of USA is less costly and risky than encouraging China's neighbours to draw up their own defensive front⁷⁵; therefore the existence of US bases in Japan is essential for that presence to contribute to the defence of the land of the rising sun, although the situation - Japan's dependence on USA for its defence and the existence of military bases in its territory - is becoming increasingly complicated⁷⁶.

The Filipino presidency of Duterte, who came to power in 2016, appears to be siding with China, something which could eventually fracture the traditional status quo in the region⁷⁷, changing the situation, as new relations of forces and power are sought in the zone.

⁷⁰ The Guardian, «What is the US military's presence near north Korea?» 09 August 2017, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/us-news/2017/aug/09/what-is-the-us-militarys-presence-in-south-east-asia>.

⁷¹ MÁRDENO Gabriela, «China y la incómoda Corea del norte», Esglobal, 12 October 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/china-la-incomoda-corea-del-norte/>.

⁷² US department of Defense, «Secretary of Defense Speech», Singaporeur, 31 May 2008, available at <http://archive.defense.gov/Speeches/Speech.aspx?SpeechID=1253>.

⁷³ Department of Defense United States of America, «Sustaining Global Leadership: Priorities for 21st century», January 2012, p. 2, available at http://archive.defense.gov/news/Defense_Strategic_Guidance.pdf.

⁷⁴ Revista Española de Defensa, «El tablero de Asia Pacífico», November 2014, pp. 51-53.

⁷⁵ HADDICK Robert, «Fire on the water: China, America and the future of the Pacific», naval Institute Press, Annapolis, 2014.

⁷⁶ CALVO ALBERO José Luis, «La seguridad regional: factores de estabilización en inestabilización», in VV.AA., «El auge de Asia: implicaciones estratégicas», Cuadernos de Estrategia n.º 143, Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos e Instituto Universitario General Gutiérrez Mellado, Madrid, 2010, p. 214, available at http://www.ieee.es/Galerias/fichero/cuadernos/CE_143_Asia.pdf.

⁷⁷ SUÁREZ SIPMAN Marcos, «Deriva de Filipinas en un mar proceloso», Esglobal, 30 December 2016, available at <https://www.esglobal.org/deriva-filipinas-mar-proceloso/>.

And whereas China is perceived as an increasingly aggressive player, it may also be that USA has lost (particularly during the Obama era) its capacity for deterrent and power, with Washington losing the battle of perceptions⁷⁸.

The aforementioned deployment of an antimissile system in South Korea, patrolling of the South China Sea, support for Taiwan ..., all are actions that may be designed to combat that increasing perception which has obviously annoyed China⁷⁹.

As a result the US shift towards Asia may be read and interpreted in several ways: from the perspective of whether the USA is ready to put in place the resources and willingness to address a capacity of growing coercion in the region, to whether it responds to a "new model of relations between major powers" with China, or the intention to increase economic and security links with the countries that receive or perceive pressure from China, which this nation sees as a new source of contention⁸⁰.

Europe and Spain: Near yet far

Global maritime trade is a system, as in a globalised world everything is interconnected, this system provides a genuine example of that reality, and as such can only function properly if there is a strong and essential commitment by all involved to maintain that system, therefore, this zone is clearly of interest to NATO and its members⁸¹, and equally to the European Union.

Obviously, Europe's role in this zone should concentrate on areas other than deployment or the presence of major military exercises: from maintaining security in some neighbouring areas of the region, avoiding safety vacuums in the area, advising on activities such as counter-terrorism and combating piracy, providing reasonable added value that will increase security in this part of the world⁸² without abandoning its strategic priorities.

In a measure similar to that which in Seoul in October 2014 the NATO Deputy Secretary General recalled regarding the interests of the Alliance are also

⁷⁸ 78 COSSA Ralph y GLOSSERMAN Brad, «A tale of two tales: competing narratives in the Asia Pacific region», Pacific Forum CSIS, Honolulu, Hawaii, 2014, available at: <https://www.csis.org/analysis/pacnet-84-tale-two-tales-competing-narratives-asia-pacific>.

⁷⁹ Reuters, «China military criticizes "wrong" U.S. moves on Taiwan, South China Sea», 17 August 2017, available at <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-china-usa-dunford-idUSKCN1AX0EF>.

⁸⁰ GREEN, Michael J. y COOPER Zack, «Asian perceptions of the rebalance», 2014, Center for Strategic and International Studies, available at https://csis-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/legacy_files/files/publication/141117_Green_Cooper.pdf.

⁸¹ VV.AA., «NATO and Asia-Pacific», NATO Defense Colleague, NDC Forum Papers Series n.º 25, Roma, 2016, p. xxiv.

⁸² WEBBER Marc, «The perils of a NATO rebalance to the Asia-Pacific», en «NATO and Asia-Pacific», NATO Defense College, NDC Forum Papers Series n.º 25, Roma, 2016, p. 100.

found throughout Asia⁸³, it is feasible to do so for member countries, as is the case of Spain.

Although the region is practically in the Antipodes, the issues relating to global trade wholly affect Spain which would definitely suffer the consequences should conflict arise in the zone. And a direct result of the current increase in naval capacity in the regions and Asia Pacific is the sale of Spanish vessels to several countries, which has led to powerful industrialised economic repercussions in a sector in which Spain has always had a prominent role.

In any case, the events unfolding in that remote part of the world will produce effects that will reverberate throughout the planet. There is no question about it.

Conclusions and perspectives for the future

Is a new conflict inevitable?

Despite the fact that throughout this document some of the most significant issues have been raised in respect of the matter more with a view to their presentation rather than providing an in-depth analysis, it would nevertheless be appropriate to make some sort of final reflection on the matter.

Great lines of maritime communication, areas rich in resources, security of territories and interests... these and other significant issues are currently in the balance as so often they have been in the past.

The belligerent rhetoric and extreme and ultra nationalist sentiments are growing... and for everyone, from those directly involved to the rest of the planet, there are increasing concerns for the possible outcome in this regard. However, this is not exactly a new phenomenon.

To these "classic" issues, it is necessary to add the repositioning of the global power structure, with the emergence of new regional and global powers seeking to ensure their interests and sphere of influence, creating a new world order, perhaps with increased multipolarity, and as in any reshaping, this is not without risks, because the forces at play for those involved could be enormous if a red line is crossed, and the effects could be devastating. And that goes for everyone.

However, given that those red lines could take the form of a rock in the middle of the ocean, or the control of minor seas within the immensity that is the Pacific ocean, and which has been instigated by powers that for centuries have traditionally held territorial control and which have decided to become, or to jeopardise other, thalassocracies is a (relatively) new phenomenon.

⁸³ NATO, «New Research Division Publication: NATO and Asia Pacific», NATO Defense College, available at <http://www.ndc.nato.int/news/news.php?icode=915>.

The reminder of that new reality, the failure to perceive the current situation as a zero sum game by the nations that are directly implicated, and the prioritised consideration of common interests, in addition to the need to address global threats, could reach a crossroads where it would be possible to de-escalate to some extent the armed tension in the zone.

If this cannot be achieved, a scenario of increasing conflict and armed confrontation, more or less limited, would appear to be practically inevitable.

It is to be hoped that the latter scenario will not come to pass.

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

Chronology of the conflict

| DATE: | EVENTS |
|-------------------|--|
| 19th century | Great game |
| 1894 -1895 | First Sino-Japanese war |
| 1904 -1905 | Russo-Japanese War |
| 1932 | First naval forces in the Russian Far East predecessors of the Russian Pacific Fleet |
| 1937 | Second Sino-Japanese war |
| 1941 | Japan attacks the US air base at Pearl Harbour; both countries enter the II World War. |
| 1945 | The II World War ends, Japan surrenders and is occupied by the Allies; the Korean peninsula is divided |
| 1949 | The Chinese civil war comes to an end, Taiwan is politically separated from the continent |
| 1950 -1953 | Korean War |
| 1951 | San Francisco Peace Treaty between the Allied Forces and Japan |
| 1974 | Battle for the Paracel Islands between China and Vietnam |
| 1988 | Armed Conflict between China and Vietnam in the Paracel Islands |
| 1945 -1989 | Cold War Soviet Union contention |
| 1991 | Armed Conflict between China and Vietnam in the Paracel Islands |
| 1992 | First South Korean protest against the name "Japanese Sea" |
| 1996 | Taiwan Crisis intervention of US aircraft carrier "Nimitz" |
| 2006 | North Korea makes its first nuclear test |
| 2007 | China shoots down its own satellite in orbit with a missile |

| DATE: | EVENTS |
|-------------|---|
| 2009 | Entry into active service of the first "destroyer with flight deck" in the Japanese Naval Defence Forces. |
| 2010 | China overtakes Japan as second world economic power |
| 2011 | USA makes a "strategic shift" towards Asia |
| 2013 | Chinese president announces new Silk Route initiative |
| 2014 | Indonesia reinforces its military presence in the Natuna islands |
| 2015 | Japanese parliament increases cases of employment of the Defence Forces |
| 2016 | Rodrigo Roa Duterte is elected as President of the Philippines; he begins Anti US rhetoric |
| 2016 | It is agreed to deploy US anti-missile system in South Korea |
| 2017 | North Korea threatens to attack the US air base in Guam |
| 2017 | North Korea - apparently tries out a hydrogen bomb for the first time |

The tables below indicate data for 2017 unless expressly stated otherwise. CIA Source, *The World factbook*.

Geopolitical indicators

| | | Russia | China |
|---|--------------------|------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| Extension (Km²) | | 17,098,242 | 9,596,960 |
| GDP in thousand million dollars | | 1,263 | 10.730 (2016 est.) |
| GDP structure | Agriculture | 4.7 % | 8.9 % |
| | Industry | 33.1 % | 42.7 % |
| | Services | 62.2% (2016 est.) | 48.4 % |
| GDP per capita (dollars) | | 26.100 (2016 est.) | 14.600 (2016 est.) |
| GDP growth rate | | -0,6% (2016 est.) | 6,7% (2016 est.) |
| Exports: in thousand million dollars | | 285.5 (2016 est.) | 2.098 (2016 est.) |
| Imports in thousand million dollars | | 182.3 (2016 est.) | 1.576 (2016 est.) |
| Population | | 142.355.415 (July 2016 est.) | 1.373.541.278 (July 2016 est.) |
| Age structure | 0 -14 | 16.94 % | 17.01 % |
| | 15 -64 | 69.14 % | 72.64 % |
| | Over 65 | 13.92 % | 10.35% (2016 est.) |

| | | Russia | China |
|---|--|--|--|
| Population growth rate | | -0.06% (July 2016 est.) | 0.43% (July 2016 est.) |
| Ethnic groups | | Russians 77.7%, Tatars 3.7%, Ukrainians 1.4% Bashkir 1,1%, Chuvash 1%, Chechen 1%, Others 10.2% Unspecified 3.9%. Note: the 2010 Russian census lists almost 200 ethnic groups (2016 est.) | Han 91.6%, Zhuan 1.3%, others 7.1% Note: the Chinese government officially recognises 56 ethnic groups (2010 est.) |
| Religions | | Russian orthodox 15-20%, Muslim- 10-15%, Others Christians 2% (2006 est.) | Buddhists 18,2%, Christians 5,1%, Muslims 1,8%, Folk 21,9%, 52,2% with no declared religion, remainder other religions |
| Languages | | Russian (official) 85,7%, Tatar 3,2%, Chechen 1%, others 10,1% (2010 est.) | Chinese Mandarin (official), Putonghua, Yue, Wu, others (no numerical data) |
| Literacy rate for the population | | 99.7 % | 96.4 % |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold | | 13.3% (2015 est.) | 3.3% (2016 est.) In 2011 China set a new limit in order to place the poverty threshold at 400 dollars |
| Military costs % GDP | | 5.4 % (2016) | 1.9 % (2016) |

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

| | North Korea | South Korea | |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|
| Extension (Km²) | 120,538 | 99,720 | |
| GDP in thousand million dollars | 28 (2013 est.) | 1,411 (2016 est.) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture | 21.8 % | 2.2 % |
| | Industry | 46.2 % | 38.6 % |
| | Services | 32.2 % (2015 est.) | 59.2 % (2016 est.) |
| GDP per capita (dollars) | 1,700 (2015 est.) | 37,900 (2016 est.) | |
| GDP growth rate | -1.1 % (2015 est.) | 2.8 % (2016 est.) | |
| Exports: in thousand million dollars | 4.152 (2015 est.) | 511.8 (2016 est.) | |

| | North Korea | South Korea | |
|---|--|--|---------------------|
| Exports: in thousand million dollars | 4.819 (2015 est.) | 391.3 (2016 est.) | |
| Population | 25,115,311 (July 2016 est.) | 50,924,172 (July 2016 est.) | |
| Age structure | 0 -14 | 20.97 % | 13.45 % |
| | 15 -64 | 69.29 % | 73.02 % |
| | Over 65 | 9.74 % | 13.53 % (2016 est.) |
| Literacy rate for the population | 0.53 % (2015 est.) | 0.53 % (2016 est.) | |
| Ethnic groups | Extremely homogeneous, small community of Chinese and Japanese | Homogeneous | |
| Religions | Traditionally Buddhists and Confucianists some Christians and other religious affiliations | Protestants 19.7%, Buddhists 15.5%, Catholics 7.9%, none 56.9% (2015 est.) | |
| Languages | Korean | Korean, English (widely studied in secondary and advanced education) | |
| Literacy rate for the population | 100 % | | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold | NA % | 12.5 % (2015 est.) | |
| Military costs % GDP | | 2.3 % (2016) | |

| | United States | Japan | |
|---|---------------------------------|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| Surface area (Km²) | 9,833,517 | 377,915 | |
| GDP in thousand million dollars | 18,560 (2016 est.) | 4,730 (2016 est.) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture | 1.1 % | 1.2 % |
| | Industry | 19.4 % | 27.7 % |
| | Services | 79.5 % (2016 est.) | 71.1 % (2016 est.) |
| GDP per capita (dollars) | 57,300 (2016 est.) | 38,900 (2016 est.) | |
| GDP growth rate | 1.6 % (2016 est.) | 0.5 % (2016 est.) | |
| Exports: in thousand million dollars | 1,471 (2016 est.) | 641.4 (2016 est.) | |
| Exports: in thousand million dollars | 2,205 (2016 est.) | 629.8 (2016 est.) | |
| Population | 323,995,528 (July 2016 est.) | 126,702,133 (July 2016 est.) | |

| | | United States | Japan |
|---|----------------|---|---|
| Age structure | 0 -14 | 18.84 % | 12.97 % |
| | 15 -64 | 65.91 % | 59.75 % |
| | Over 65 | 15.25 % (2016 est.) | 27.28 % (2016 est.) |
| Literacy rate for the population | | 0.81 % (2016 est.) | -0.19 % (2016 est.) |
| Ethnic groups | | White 72.4 % Black 12.6% Asiatic 4,8 % Amerindian 0.9% Hawaiians and Pacific Islanders 0.2% Others 6.2% Two or more races 2.9% Hispanics are included in different races, totalling 16.3% (2010 est.) | Japanese 98.5 % Koreans 0.5 % Chinese 0.4 % Others 0.6 % |
| Religions | | Protestants 46.5 % Catholics 20.8%, Mormons 1.6% Jehovah's Witnesses 0.8% Other Christians 0.9 % Jews 1.9 % Muslims 0.9%. Buddhists 0.7 %. Hindus 0.7 % Others 1.8 % No religion 22.8% Do not know no reply 0.6% (2014 est.) | Shintoists 79.2% Buddhists 66.8 %, Christians 1.5%, Others 7.1% (the total is greater than 100 % due to the fact that many people practise both Shintoism and Buddhism, 2012 est.) |
| Languages | | English 79 % Spanish 13 % Other Indo-European languages 3.7% Asiatic and Pacific Islands 3.4% Others 1% (2015 est.) | Japanese |
| Literacy rate for the population | | | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold | | 15.1% (2010 est.) | 16.1% (2013 est.) |
| Military costs % GDP | | 3.29 % (2016) | 0.93 % (2016) |

| AFGHANISTAN | |
|---|------------------------|
| Surface area 652,230 km ² (42nd country in the world) | |
| GDP 64.08 billion \$ (103rd country in the world) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 22% |
| | Industry 22% |
| | Services 56% |
| GDP per capita 1,900 \$ (207th country in the world ranking) –World average: 16.300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 2% (133rd country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 658 million \$ (168th country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 7.004 billion \$ (108th country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 34,124,811 (39th country in the world ranking) | |

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

| | |
|--|----------------------|
| Age structure (208th country in the world ranking) -World average: 30.1 -Afghanistan average: 18.6 | 0-14 40.92% |
| | 15-64 56.49% |
| | Over 65 2.59% |
| Population growth rate 2.4% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups: Pashtun, Tajik, Hazara, Uzbek, others (including but at lower levels Baloch, Turkmen, Nuristani, Pamiri, Arab, Gujjar, Brahui, Kizilbash, Aimak, Pashai and Kirghiz) | |
| Religions: Muslim (99.7%) (Sunní 84.7% - 89.7%; Shiíte 10-15%), others (0.3%) | |
| Population literacy rate 38.2% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold: 33.8% | |
| GINI index 0.25-0.29 (15th country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 | |
| Military costs % of the GDP 0.89% –World average: 2.22%– | |

| CHINA | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Surface area: 9,598,960 km ² (5th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP: 21.29 trillion \$ (1st country in the world) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 8.6% |
| | Industry 39.8% |
| | Services 51.6% |
| GDP per capita: 15.400 \$ (106th country in the world ranking) –World average: 16,300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate: 6.7% (14rd country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 2,098 trillion \$ (1st country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 1,587 trillion \$ (2nd country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 1,379,302,771 (1st country in the world ranking) | |

| CHINA | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Age structure (67th country in the world ranking) -World average: 30.1 -Media China: 37.1 | 0-14 17.15% |
| | 15-64 72.04% |
| | Over 65 10.81% |
| Population growth rate 0.4% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups: Han (91.6%), Zhuang (1.3%), Hui, Manchu, Iugur, Miao, Yi, Mongol, Dong, Buyel, Yao, Bai, Korean, Hani, Li, Kazakh and Dai (7 %) | |
| Religions: Buddhist (18.2%), Christian (5.1%), Muslim (1.8%), popular religions (21.9%), Hindu (less than 0.1%), Jewish (less than 0.1%) and others (0.7%) | |
| Population literacy rate 96.4% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold: 3.3 % | |
| GINI index 46.5-0.29 (30th country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 _ | |
| Military spending % GDP 1.9% (40th country in the world ranking) –World average: 2.22%– | |

INDIA

Surface area: 3,287,263 km² (8th country in the world ranking)

GDP 8,662 trillion \$ (4th country in the world ranking)

| | |
|----------------------|--------------------------|
| GDP structure | Agriculture 16.5% |
| | Industry 29.8% |
| | Services 45.4% |

GDP per capita 6,600 \$ (160th country in the world ranking) –World average: 16,300 \$ –

GDP growth rate 6.8% (12th country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%–

Trade relations

(Exports): 262.3 billion \$ (19th country in the world ranking)

Trade relations

(Imports): 381 billion \$ (12th country in the world ranking)

Population 1,281,935,911 (2nd country in the world ranking)

Age structure (140th country of 0-14 27.34% world

- World average: 30.1-**15-64** 66.43%

- Media India: 27.6- **Over 65** 6.24%

Population growth rate 1.2% –World average: 1.06 _

Ethnic groups Indo-aria (72%), Dravidic (25%), Mongoloid and others (3%)

Religions Hindu (79.8%), Muslim (14.2%), Christian (2.3%), Sikh (1.7), unspecified others 2%

Population literacy rate 71.2% –World average: 86.2%

Population beneath the poverty threshold 21.9%

GINI index 35.2-0.29 (90th country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 _

Military spending % of GDP 2.47% (31st country in the world ranking) –World average: 2.22%–

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

| KAZAKHSTAN | |
|---|-------------------------|
| Surface area 2,724,900 km ² (10th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP 451.3 billion \$ (42nd country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 4.6% |
| | Industry 31.8% |
| | Services 57.9% |
| GDP per capita 25,100 \$ (77 th country in the world ranking) –World average: 16.300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 1.1% (170th country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations | |
| (Exports): 35.28 billion \$ (52nd country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations | |
| (Imports): 24.5 billion \$ (67th country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 18,556,698 (62nd country in the world ranking) | |
| Age structure (113th country in the world ranking) –World average: 30.1 Kazakhstan average: 30.3 | 0-14 25.91% |
| | 15-64 66.44% |
| | Over 65 7.65% |
| Population growth rate 1% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Kazakh (Qazaq) (63.1%), Russian (23.7%), Uzbek (2.9%), Ukrainian (2.1%), Uyghur (1.4%), Tatar (1.3%), Germanic (1.1%), others (4.4%) | |
| Religions Muslim (70.2%), Christian (26.2%) (Mainly Russian Orthodox), others (0.2%), atheist (2.8%), unspecified (0.5%) | |
| Population literacy rate 99.8% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold: 2.7% | |
| GINI index 26.3 (141st country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 _ | |
| Military spending % of GDP 0.82% (81st country in the world ranking) –World average: 2.22%– 2.22%– | |

| KIRGHIZSTAN | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Surface area 199,951 km ² (10th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP 21.5 billion \$ (142nd country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 17.9% |
| | Industry 25.9% |
| | Services 56.2% |
| GDP per capita 3,500 \$ (184th country in the world ranking) –World average: 16.300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 3.8% (71st country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations | |
| (Exports): 1.453 billion \$ (145th country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations | |
| (Imports): 3.146 billion \$ (138th country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 5,789,122 (114th country in the world ranking) | |

| KIRGHIZSTAN | |
|---|----------------------|
| Age structure (148th country in the world ranking) -World average: 30.1 Kirghistan Average 26.2 | 0-14 30,3% |
| | 15-64 64.43% |
| | Over 65 5.27% |
| Population growth rate 1.1% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Kirghiz (70.9%), Uzbek (14.4%), Russian (7.7%), Dungan (1,1%), others (5.9%) (includes Uyghur, Tajik, Turkish, Kazakh, Tatar, Ukrainian, Korean, Germanic) | |
| Religions Muslim (75%), Russian orthodox (20%), others (5%) | |
| Population literacy rate 99.5% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold 31.1% | |
| GINI index 33.4 (107th country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 _ | |
| Military spending % of the GDP 3.15% –World average: 2.22%– | |

| MONGOLIA | |
|--|--------------------------|
| Surface area 1.564,116 km ² | |
| GDP 37 billion \$ (120th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 14.6% |
| | Industry 35.1% |
| | Services 50.3% |
| GDP per capita 12,300 \$ (124th country in the world ranking) –World average: 16.300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 1% (175th country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 4.319 billion \$ (111st country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 3.003 billion \$ (142nd country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 3,068,243 (135th country in the world ranking) | |
| Age structure (134th country in the world ranking) -World average: 30.1 Mongolia average: 27.9 | 0-14 26,95% |
| | 15-64 68.76% |
| | Over 65 4.29% |
| Population growth rate 1.2% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Khalkh (81.9%), Kazakh (3.8%), Dorvod (2.7%), Bayad (2.1%), Buryat-Buryats (1.7%), Zakhchin (1.2%), Dariganga (1%), Uriankhai (1%), others (4.6%) | |
| Religions Buddhist (53%), Muslim (3%), Shamanism (2.9%), Christian (2,2%), others (0.4%), none (38.6%) | |
| Population literacy rate 98.4% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold 21.6% | |
| GINI index 36.5 (85th country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 _ | |
| Military spending % GDP 0.92% (90th country in the world ranking) –World average: 2.22%– | |

The Far East Seas: a paradigm for setting up a new world...

| PAKISTAN | |
|---|------------------------|
| Surface area 796,095 km ² (37th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP 988.2 billion \$ (26th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 25% |
| | Industry 19.2% |
| | Services 55.6% |
| GDP per capita 5,100 \$ (117th country in the world ranking) –World average: 16.300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 4.7% (44th country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 20.96 billion \$ (142nd country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 38.25 billion \$ (55th country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 204,924,861 (6th country in the world ranking) | |
| Age structure (167th country in the world ranking) –World average: 30.1 Pakistan average: 23.4 | 0-14 31.36% |
| | 15-64 64.16% |
| | Over 65 4.48% |
| Population growth rate 1.4% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Punjabi (48%), Pashtun (Pathan) (15.4%), Sindhi (14.1%), Sariaki (8.4%), Muhajirs (7.6%), Baloch (3.6%), others (6.3%) | |
| Religions Muslim (official) (96.4%) (Sunni 85-90%; Shiite 10-15%), others (includes Christian and Hindu) (3.6%) | |
| Population literacy rate 57.9% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold 29.5% | |
| GINI index 30.7 (231st country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 _ | |
| Military spending % of GDP 3.56% (21st country in the world ranking) –World average: 2.22%– | |

| RUSSIA | |
|--|-------------------------|
| Surface area 17,098,242 km ² (1st country in the world ranking) | |
| PIB 3,751 trillion \$ | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 4.7% |
| | Industry 33.1% |
| | Services 62.2% |
| GDP per capita 26,500 \$ (72nd country in the world ranking) –World average: 16.300 \$– | |
| Population growth rate -0.6% –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 285.5 billion \$ (17th country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 182.3 billion \$ (23rd country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 142,257,519 (9th country in the world ranking) | |

| RUSSIA | |
|---|-----------------------|
| Age structure (53rd country in the world ranking) -World average: 30.1 Russia average: 39.3 | 0-14 17,12% |
| | 15-64 68.61% |
| | Over 65 14.28% |
| Population growth rate -0.1% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups (77.7%), Tatar (3.7), Ukrainian (1.4%), Baskir (1.1%), Chuvasio (1%), Chechen (1%), others (10.2%), unspecified (3.9%) | |
| Religions Russian orthodox Russian orthodox (15-20%), Muslim (10-15%), Christian and others (2%) | |
| Population literacy rate 99.7% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold 13.3% | |
| GINI index 41.2-0.29 (54th country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9– | |
| Military spending % of GDP 5.4% (16th country in the world ranking) –World average: 2.22%– | |

| TAJIKISTAN | |
|---|--------------------------|
| Surface area 144,100 km ² (97th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP 26.03 billion \$ (135th country in the world ranking) | |
| GDP structure | Agriculture 20.7% |
| | Industry 15.1% |
| | Services 62.2% |
| GDP per capita 26,500 \$ (193rd country in the world ranking) –World average: 16.300 \$– | |
| GDP growth rate 6.9% (11th country in the world ranking) –World average: 3%– | |
| Trade relations (Exports): 898.7 trillion \$ (161st country in the world ranking) | |
| Trade relations (Imports): 3.031 billion \$ (140th country in the world ranking) | |
| Population 8,468,555 (96th country in the world ranking) | |
| Age structure (159th country in the world ranking) -World average: 30.1 Tajikistan Average: 24.2 | 0-14 32,33% |
| | 15-64 64.35% |
| | Over 65 3.32% |
| Population growth rate 1.6% –World average: 1.06%– | |
| Ethnic groups Tajik (84.3%), Uzbek (13.8%) (Includes Lakai, Kongrat, Katagan, Barlos, Yuz), others (2%) (includes Kirgiz, Russian, Turkomen, Tatar, Arab) | |
| Religions Muslim (85%), Russian orthodox (5%), others (10%) | |
| Population literacy rate 99.8% –World average: 86.2%– | |
| Population beneath the poverty threshold 31.5% | |
| GINI index 32.6- (110th country in the world ranking) –World average: 37.9 _ | |
| Military spending % of the GDP 1.22% –World average: 2.22%– | |

Import and Export tables

| | |
|--------------------|---|
| CHINA | Exports: \$2.098 trillion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 1 Exports – partners: US 18.2%, Hong Kong 13.8% , Japan 6.1%, South Korea 4.5% (2016) Amounts \$2.098 trillion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 2 Exports – partners: South Korea 10%, Japan 9.2%, US 8.5%, Germany 5.4%, Australia 4.4% (2016) |
| MONGOLIA | Exports: \$4,319 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 111 Exports – partners: China 84.1% , UK 6.8% (2016) Imports: \$ 3,003 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 142 Imports – partners: China 33.2% , Russia 25.6% , South Korea 8.6%, Japan 7% (2016) |
| RUSSIA | Exports: \$ 285.5 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 17 Exports – partners: Netherlands 10.5%, China 10.3% , Germany 7.8%, Turkey 5%, Italy 4.4%, Belarus 4.3% (2016) Imports: \$ 182.3 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 23 Exports – partners: China 21.6% , Germany 11%, US 6.3%, France 4.8%, Italy 4.4%, Belarus 4.3% (2016) |
| KAZAKHSTAN | Exports: \$ 35.28 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 52 Exports – partners: Italy 20.3%, China 11.5% , Russia 9.5% , Netherlands 8.9%, Switzerland 7.3%, France 4.9% (2016) Imports: \$ 35.28 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 67 Imports – partners: Russia 36.2% , China 14.5% , Germany 5.7%, US 5.1% (2016) |
| KIRGHIZTAN | Exports: \$ 1,453 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 145 Exports – partners: Switzerland 44.9%, Kazakhstan 10.5% , Russia 10.1% , Uzbekistan 8.7%, Turkey 6.2%, China 5.5% (2016) Imports: \$ 3,146 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 138 Imports – partners: China 37.8% , Russia 20.7% , South Korea 16.4%, Japan 4.9% (2016) |
| INDIA | Exports: \$ 262.3 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 19 Exports – partners: US 16%, UAE 11.7%, Hong Kong 5.1% (2016) Imports: \$ 381 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 12 Imports – partners: China 17% , US 5.8%, UAE 5.4%, Saudi Arabia 5.2%, Switzerland 4.2% (2016) |
| TAJIKISTAN | Exports: \$898.7 million (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 161 Exports – partners: Turkey 27.8%, Russia 15.6% , China 14.7% , Switzerland 9.8%, Iran 6.5%, Algeria 6.5%, Italy 5.8% (2016) Imports: \$ 381 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 140 Exports – partners: Russia 31.2% , China 13.9% , Kazakhstan 12.8% , Uzbekistan 5.2%, Iran 5.1% (2016) |
| AFGHANISTAN | Exports: \$658 million (2014 est.) note: not including illicit exports or re ex- ports country comparison to the world: 168 1 Exports – partners: Pakistan 46.3% , India 37.6% (2016) Imports: \$ 381 billion (2014 est.) country comparison to the world: 108 Exports – partners: Iran 19.3% , Pakistan 18.3% , China 16.7% , Kazakhstan 9.5% , Uzbekistan 6.1%, Turkmenistan 5.4%, Malaysia 4% (2016) |
| PAKISTAN | Exports: \$ 20.96 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 66 Exports – partners: US 16.3%, China 7.6% , UK 7.4%, Afghanistan 6.5%, Germany 5.7% (2016) Imports: \$ 38.25 billion (2016 est.) country comparison to the world: 55 Exports – partners: China 29.1% , U.A.E. 13.2%, Indonesia 4.4%, US 4.3%, Japan 4.2% (2016) |

Work group composition

- Coordinator:** **Ms. María José Izquierdo Alberca**
Main Analyst at the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.
- Members:**
- Mr. Miguel Ángel Ballesteros Martín**
Brigadier general.
Director of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.
- Mr. Ignacio José García Sánchez**
Ship's captain.
2nd Director of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.
- Mr. Emilio Sánchez de Rojas Díez**
Army Colonel.
Principal Analyst at the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.
- Mr. Juan Alberto Mora Tebas**
Army Colonel.
Principal Analyst at the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.
- Mr. Ignacio Fuente Cobo**
Army Colonel.
Principal Analyst of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.
- Mr. José Pardo de Santayana y Gómez de Olea**
Army Colonel.
Main Analyst of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.

Composition of the working group

Mr. José Luis Cabello Rodríguez

Army Colonel.

Armed Forces Academy.

Mr. Pedro Sánchez Herráez

Army Colonel.

Head of Infantry Regiment «Isabel la Católica» n° 29.

Mr. Francisco José Berenguer Hernández

Air Force Colonel.

Head of Cuatro Vientos Air Base.

Mr. José María Santé Abal

Air Force Lieutenant Colonel.

Principal Analyst of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.

Mr. Francisco Márquez de la Rubia

Land Army lieutenant colonel.

Principal Analyst of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.

Mr. Jesús Díez Alcalde

Land Army lieutenant colonel.

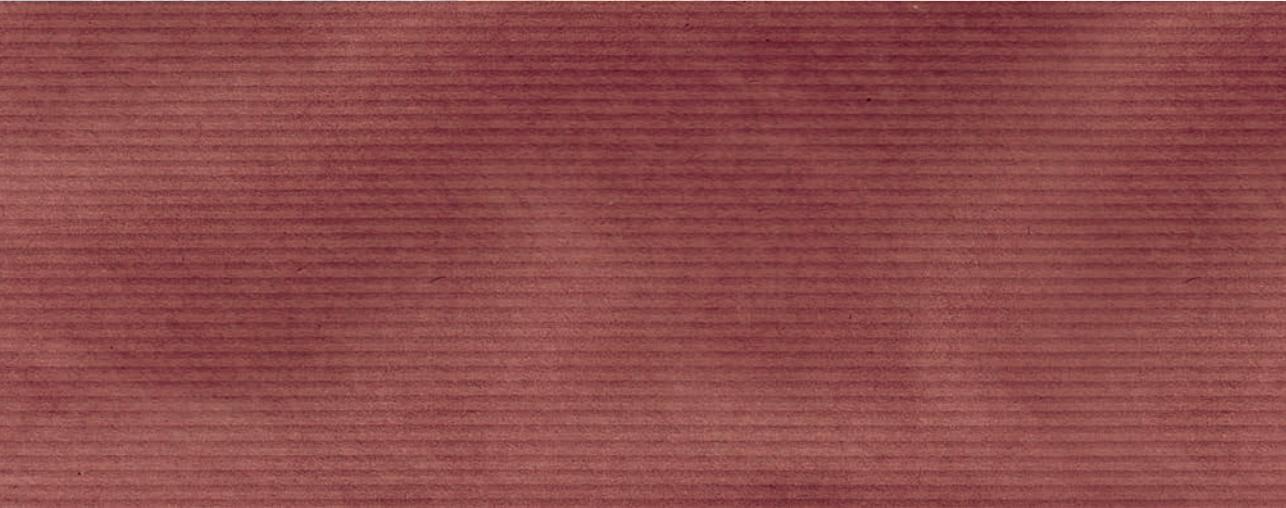
EU MILREP representative.

Ms. María Luisa Pastor Gómez

Technical member of the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.

Ms. Blanca Palacián de Inza

Principal Analyst at the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies.



GOBIERNO
DE ESPAÑA

MINISTERIO
DE DEFENSA

SECRETARÍA
GENERAL
TÉCNICA

SUBDIRECCIÓN GENERAL
DE PUBLICACIONES
Y PATRIMONIO CULTURAL