Center for Security Studies

STRATEGIC TRENDS 2014

Key Developments in Global Affairs

CSS
ETH Zurich

ETH zürich

STRATEGIC TRENDS 2014 is also electronically available at:
www.css.ethz.ch/strategictrends

Editors STRATEGIC TRENDS 2014: Oliver Thränert, Martin Zapfe

Series Editor STRATEGIC TRENDS: Andreas Wenger

Contact:
Center for Security Studies
ETH Zurich
Haldeneggsteig 4, IFW
CH-8092 Zurich
Switzerland

This publication covers events up to 28 February 2014.

ISSN 1664-0667
ISBN 978-3-905696-43-1

Center for Security Studies

STRATEGIC TRENDS 2014

Key Developments in Global Affairs

Editors: Oliver Thränert, Martin Zapfe

Series Editor: Andreas Wenger

Authors: Lisa Watanabe, Jonas Grätz, Michael Haas, Prem Mahadevan, Martin Zapfe

CSS ETH Zurich

ETH zürich

Contents

Acknowledgments

Strategic Trends is an annual publication of the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich. It aims to offer a concise analysis of major developments in world affairs, with a primary focus on international security. Providing interpretations of key trends rather than a comprehensive survey of events, *Strategic Trends* targets a broad audience ranging from analysts to policy-makers, the media, academics, and the general public. *Strategic Trends 2014* is the fifth issue in the series.

The publication series is available for download on the website of the Center for Security Studies (www.css.ethz.ch/strategictrends).

We are of course thankful to the authors, Lisa Watanabe, Jonas Grätz, Michael Haas and Prem Mahadevan. In addition, our profound thanks go to Miriam Dahinden for graphic design and handling the layout as well as Livio Pigoni for assisting the authors and editors in collecting data and designing graphics – thank you both for the tireless support. Furthermore, we owe many thanks to Lorraine Traynor for editing the language and style of the manuscript, and to Sarah Schumacher for the thorough proofreading.

We hope you enjoy reading *Strategic Trends 2014* and find it a stimulating experience. Should you have any feedback, please do not hesitate to contact us at StrategicTrends@sipo.gess.ethz.ch.

With best regards from Zurich,

Dr. Oliver Thränert
Head of Think Tank at CSS

Dr. Martin Zapfe
Head of the Global Security Team

Strategic Trends 2014: Introduction

In preparing this volume of *Strategic Trends,* the CSS staff debated which developments would stand out in their importance for regional and global politics in 2014. The result was, at first, an agenda of five consciously non-related chapters highlighting critical but not interdependent trends.

However, while editing this volume, we came to realize that all of this year's chapters do reflect a shared diagnosis: that the role of what is commonly referred to as 'the West' is changing significantly. While that change may be temporary, its consequences are numerous. Thus the chapters of *Strategic Trends 2014* all describe aspects of the long expected shift in the geopolitical balance. This shift is different and far more evolved and complex than the well-established narrative of surging emerging nations, especially in Asia, gradually replacing Western influence in regions, markets, and policy issues. Since the cut-off date for research was 28 February 2014, the chapters do not take into account recent developments in the Ukrainian crisis, starting from the point where the Russian military took control of the Crimea and threatened other parts of Ukraine. Events since, however, have only underlined the analysis of *Strategic Trends 2014.*

Beyond a mere decline of Western influence, the chapters of this volume reflect a basic insecurity over the future direction of these geopolitical shifts. Long expected developments – the US increasingly disengaging at least from Europe, Europe itself struggling to live up to its geostrategic aspirations – that could provide a secure framework to interpret global events, are themselves in a state of unpredictable flux. Taken together, the five chapters in this volume of *Strategic Trends* highlight elements of a world in which the West is losing ground. As a result, the global order faces not necessarily decreasing stability, but increasing strategic insecurity.

In the first chapter, **Jonas Grätz** focuses on a resurgent Russia. He

depicts a regime under President Vladimir Putin that defines its foreign policy increasingly as a challenger of the West – meaning the US and its NATO allies. Moscow is playing the few cards it holds determinedly and skillfully to counter the West's agenda wherever it can. The conflict with Europe over Ukraine and the critical diplomatic role of Moscow on the Syrian war are only the most prominent examples of this. Russia, says Jonas Grätz, will continue in this confrontational state at least in the years to come, since an assertive foreign policy is a direct and logical result of domestic 'Putinism'.

While facing a determined Russia to its east, to the south the EU is in danger of missing a historic opportunity to shape critical developments. As **Lisa Watanabe** points out in the second chapter, countries from the Gulf States or Turkey are actively following a policy of increasing their strategic outreach in North Africa to shape the developments after the Arab Spring. So far the EU, with its fairly technical policy of conditionality, has failed to shape events and live up to its ambitions.

While Europe's agenda north of the Sahara is one of transformation through interaction, south of the vast desert European forces are increasingly conducting active military operations. The French interventions in Mali and the Central African Republic, followed up cautiously by EU-led missions, occurred in quick succession. This cast doubt on the expectation that calm would follow the withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2014. On the contrary, the US, and the West, may leave Afghanistan in 2014, but Afghanistan will not leave them. As **Prem Mahadevan** points out in the third chapter, strategy, operational schemes and tactical innovations that were developed during the last 13 years in Afghanistan and, to some extent, in Iraq have begun to proliferate. This 'talibanisation of insurgency' will influence any future resistance against Western forces, making any new intervention potentially costly.

However, Western nations themselves may face increasing hurdles even before beginning an operation. Strategic access to the global commons – sea, air, land, and cyberspace – will be ever more critical; without access, any power projection of intervening states is practically nullified. And as **Michael Haas** explains in the fourth chapter, intensive efforts by state and non-state actors worldwide increasingly aim to deny strategic access to militarily superior interventionists. Since major parts of the global political system rest on US military

preeminence, denied access for US forces in critical regions could significantly alter the global political balance. The US may not only lose its will to intervene, as is often argued; it may as well lose the mere capacity to do so, at least in some regions.

Yet does the US want to intervene abroad? **Martin Zapfe** argues in the fifth chapter that despite frequent reassurances by current US leaders, the long-term parameters of US foreign policy still point towards a gradual disengagement from critical parts of the world – and especially from Europe. While the personality of Barack Obama plays a critical role in understanding his policy decisions, even beyond his presidency, the US is more likely to stay in a prolonged phase of 'strategic pragmatism' than to return to global engagement. Three parameters – the aftershocks of the financial crisis, the public war weariness, and the shale energy boom – will constrain any future US government and increase the hurdles to intervention, requiring energetic US leadership to overcome those.

As is tradition in the *Strategic Trends* series, the chapters refrain from giving policy recommendations. It is up to the reader, from whatever country, to draw possible conclusions. What these five chapters for 2014 do is to acknowledge complexity and to highlight key developments. There is a good likelihood that 2014 will in hindsight be seen as another year of declining Western influence. Yet, the exact course of this year's events, of course, remains unchartered – and subject to critical decisions by European, US, and Asian policymakers.

CHAPTER 1

Russia as a challenger of the West

Jonas Grätz

Recent years have seen the rise of an uncompromising, confrontational Russia. Anti-Western and imperialist tenets have been strengthened. This development is driven by the regime's weakness, isolation, and insecurity. From Syria to Ukraine, Russia mostly acts as a spoiler, exploiting the West's divisions, while offering few solutions of its own. Despite its fragile power base, Russia's regime is here to stay for the foreseeable future. Western leaders will thus have to learn to cope with this new reality.

US President Barack Obama meets with Russian President Vladimir Putin during the G8 Summit at Lough Erne in Enniskillen, Northern Ireland, 17 June 2013

2013 was a very successful year for Russia's president, Vladimir Putin. Despite Russia's support for Syria's regime, Russia emerged as the white knight with its proposal to scrap Syria's chemical weapons. In Europe, Putin played hardball with the EU over Armenia and Ukraine. Hosting former US intelligence contractor Edward Snowden has won Putin sympathies with many in the West, while Snowden's revelations are eating away at transatlantic trust. Thus, while the Western world attempted to turn away from Russia and towards seemingly more pressing problems, Russia gave it a reminding pat.

Russia is thus back, though not necessarily as a responsible actor. It vows to build a 'multipolar world order'. Yet it is interested in multipolarity only insofar as it strengthens its own power. Moscow's designs of such an order do not go beyond corroding the power of the West and renewed imperial ambitions in its own region. The Kremlin makes its voice heard, yet it can offer few solutions for global or even regional problems. In advancing his goals, Putin is playing hard-nosed power politics, yet he has also sharpened Russia's subtler tools of influence and propaganda.

This chapter's argument is twofold. First, with the intention being to weaken the West, Russia plays power politics mostly well-tailored to its capabilities. Second, these ambitions are driven by domestic politics – the survival of the personalized regime that is 'Putinism'. While Putin does not face a credible domestic challenger, the advancement of democratic standards of governance in neighbouring states presents a threat to Putinism. To prolong and solidify his rule, he thus has to keep Western influence at bay. Foreign policy has become an even more important way of distracting attention from domestic problems in times of declining economic glory.

To analyse the tools, conduct, and limits of Russia's foreign policy towards the West, this chapter will first examine the domestic drivers of Russia's foreign policy. It goes on to look at the tools that Russia has at hand. Against this background, the chapter will look at how Russia conducts its foreign policy towards and against the West.

Understanding Putinism

Perhaps more than in other countries, Russia's foreign policy is a reflection of domestic forces. Society's atomization and corresponding lack of self-organization is the most important constant, giving extraordinary power to elites. In the 1990s, Russia under President Boris Yeltsin seemingly embraced capitalism and democracy, yet the power rested with elites and

not with the people. Privatization improved performance, but resulted in the creation of oligarchs, a new class of wealthy and powerful businessmen that had great influence on politics. Foreign policy was almost as discordant as domestic policy, since there were many power centres.

After taking power in 2000, Vladimir Putin undertook decisive steps to establish the regime of Putinism. In its core, it is a dense, relatively stable network of elites that holds centralized political and economic power and is represented by Putin as the ultimate arbiter.

Putin's power vertical

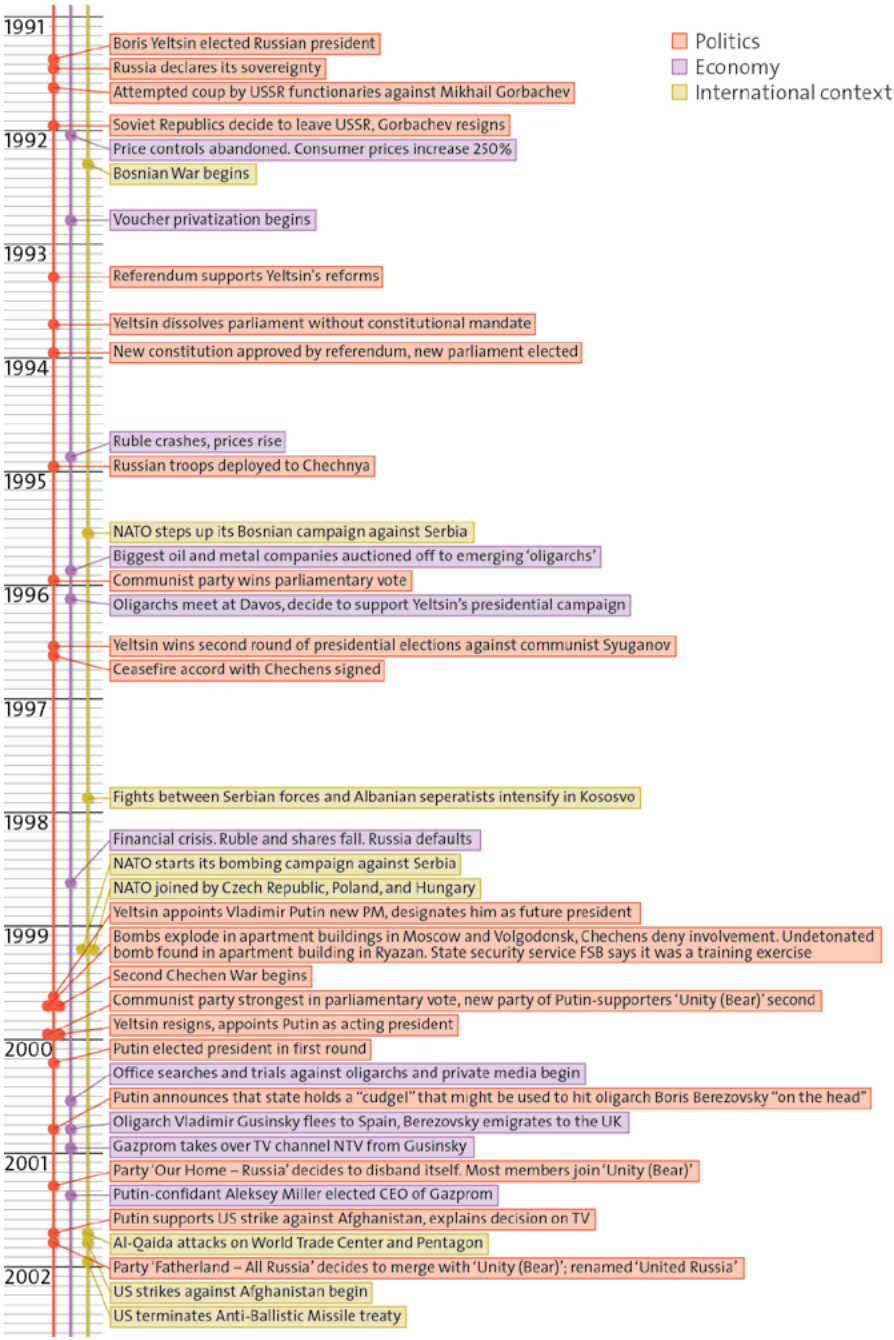
Putin swiftly moved to position himself at the apex of the political and economic system. Lifting his acquaintances from the former KGB and from Saint Petersburg into key political and economic positions, he could eliminate political and economic competition and established control over the media. He thereby reformulated the relationship between state and society and consequently between Russia and the world. In moving swiftly to neutralise Russia's multiple and discordant social forces of the Yeltsin era, Putin aimed to improve stability.

Putin put his paradigm down in a newspaper article published on New Year's Eve of 1999. The Russian idea should be some combination of patriotism, "great power-ness" (*derzhavnost*), statism, and solidarity rather than individualism. But his key proposition was that no political campaigns should be allowed to destroy this "nascent consensus". Thus he had to rein in rival power centres at any cost in order to turn Russia into a strategic actor again.

To solve problems, Putin relied on personalized power and on command-and-control rather than on institution-building and markets. This corresponds with much of Russia's economic reality. Reliance on point-specific natural resources favours economic centralization, as do the remnants of Soviet industry. With Russia's relatively primitive economy, disciplining the oligarchs had little short-term cost, while bringing immediate dividends in terms of political power, higher tax revenue, personal wealth, and public support.

Putinism worked reasonably well during the 2000s, owing to Putin's strong tactical skills and benevolent external conditions. It was able to stabilize Russia and to ensure rapid growth. Sharply rising oil prices were the key in this respect. Fixed investment kept rising, as did pensions and wages. In large cities, a wealthy class emerged. Macroeconomic management was

Key events in Russian politics and economy




2003
Chechen terrorists capture the 'Nord Ost' theatre in Moscow; Russian forces use poison gas, 123 die
US and British armed forces attack Iraq
'Oligarch' Mikhail Khodorkovsky arrested on charges of tax fraud
'Rose Revolution' in Georgia: Eduard Shevadnadze steps down
United Russia wins parliamentary elections
Putin reelected as president in first round
2004
Seven new members join NATO
Ten new members join the EU
Igor Sechin, one of the presidential administration's deputies, elected head of board of Rosneft state oil company
Khodorkovsky's oil company Yukos impounded against tax charges
Chechen terrorists take 1200 hostages at Beslan school, over 400 people die in freeing attempt
2005
'Orange Revolution': Protestors take to the street in Ukraine after falsified presidential elections
Parliament adopts laws authorizing president to directly nominate governors, raises threshold for establishing political parties
Rosneft acquires Yukos' main production asset
New oil pipeline from Eastern Siberia to the Pacific approved
2006
Russia repays all ist debts towards the IMF
Gazprom signs agreement with German energy companies to build a gas pipeline through the Baltic Sea, takes over oil company Sibneft from Roman Abramovich
Russia reduces gas deliveries towards Ukraine after pricing spat, exports to EU fall
After environmental charges have been brought, Gazprom takes over majority in Sakhalin-II project from Shell, Mitsui, Mitsubishi
2007
Gazprom and ENI agree to construct the South Stream gas pipeline through the Black Sea
United Russia wins parliamentary elections with absolute majority
2008
United Russia nominates Dmitri Medvedev presidential candidate, Putin supports the move
Medvedev elected president, Putin becomes prime minister
Kosovo declares independence
Germany, France and other states derail US plan to offer NATO membership to Georgia and Ukraine
Russian troops invade Georgia, Russia recognizes Abkhazia and South Ossetia
2009
Global financial crisis begins
Gazprom suspends gas deliveries to Ukraine for over two weeks, severe gas shortfalls in the EU
Rosneft and China ink agreement to build oil pipeline to China, supply oil for 20 years
Albania and Croatia join NATO
Russia, Kazakhstan, and Belarus found a Customs Union
2010
Oil pipeline to China opens
2011
'Arab spring' begins
Nord Stream gas pipeline through Baltic Sea opens
United Russia wins parliamentary elections
About 100,000 people protest in Moscow for fair elections and more political competition
2012
Mass protests both for and against Putin take place in Moscow
Putin emerges as clear winner of the presidential elections with 63% in the first round
Russia joins the WTO
Rosneft takes over private oil producer TNK-BP
2013
Armenian president Serzh Sargsyan pledges to join Customs Union and future Eurasian Union
Khodorkovsky pardoned by Putin, exiled from Russia
Ukraine signs economic partnership agreements with Russia, mass protests in Kyiv and western Ukraine
2014
Russia hosts the Winter Olympics in Sochi
Ukrainian President Yanukovych flees to Russia, new government appointed, "self-defence forces" capture Crimea

carried out in a very professional way. When the 2008 economic crisis hit Russia, the impact was worse than in other emerging economies, but it did not plunge Russia into a crisis.

However, investments in the future fell short. Putinism runs counter to the creation of an effective state, hollowing out formal state institutions and keeping economic forces under political control. Putin could not provide effective healthcare, modernize the economy, or invest in much-needed infrastructure. The share of oil and gas in exports only kept growing. Capital flight remains high, and the same is true of the notorious 'brain drain'. By the end of the 2000s, Putin was keeping power at the expense of domestic development, forcing him to change his strategy for legitimation.

Legitimation: anxiety and conservatism

All in all, Putin does not need to resort to high levels of coercion to stay in power. As long as the economy grew rapidly, economic success supported Putin's regime. However, as Putinism brought decreasing returns towards the end of the 2000s, the strategy for gaining support was increasingly built on anxiety. Whereas in 2007 "Putin's plan" was still deemed sufficient to inspire hope in the country's future, "we have something to lose" would become the defensive rallying slogan of Putin's supporters by 2012. And it worked. "Stability" and the corresponding fear of economic downturn and political chaos is still Putin's most important currency of specific support, while the opposition faltered.

In Russia's collective memory the 1990s became synonymous with this instability. Not least because of Putinism's control over TV, this period is now being remembered solely as a period of chaos and the "deepest downfall" of the country. Analysis of the ills of Soviet power has taken a back seat. To foster the idea that Russia is on the right track, Putin succeeded in discrediting the West as a potential development model as well.

Correspondingly, in his third term Putin began to formulate a more coherent 'conservative' ideology to win support among the poorer, traditionally-minded electorate. In Putin's view, as the West shuns its Christian values, Russia will emerge as their new home. The idea is mainly backward-oriented and hence has no devices to cope with the reality of the world's current interconnectedness and its problems. Yet it connects with the longing of society for reduced complexity in times of rapid global change.

To deflect attention from domestic issues, the US was resurrected as Russia's

main enemy in the public perception. Anti-Americanism is cheap to craft, as it connects easily with the prevalent categories and perceptions of the Russian population and since the US's global presence provides an ideal target. Words had to be connected with deeds where power resources allowed. Russian foreign policy became increasingly anti-Western and imperialist in its neighbourhood.

The foreign policy toolbox

Vladimir Putin's Russia has only few foreign policy tools at hand, yet it uses them exceptionally well. These tools include the opportunity to shape global political developments via nuclear and conventional military power, energy and economic attraction, propaganda, and covert action. Each of these factors will be examined in turn.

The UN Security Council is still commonly regarded as the main arbiter deciding on the legitimacy of coercive measures in the international system. This reality is elevating Russia to the status of a global power. Alongside the US, Russia has clearly emerged as the most important actor in the Security Council. The other permanent members are either allies of the US or chose to take a low profile, such as China. Since it puts Russia on an equal footing with economically and militarily stronger states, or even above them, Moscow has a keen interest in preserving its status in the Security Council. This also exposes the Kremlin's calls for a "multipolar world order" as self-serving, since Russia fiercely opposes reform of the Security Council.

Military power

Russia is the only state in the world that possesses a credible nuclear second-strike capability against the US. It spends an estimated 40 % of its defence budget on its about 1800 strategic nuclear weapons, which are being constantly modernized. Most important, nuclear weapons convey status. They allow Russia to speak to the US in the language of "strategic stability". Furthermore, the deterrence potential is considerable, as Russia reserves the right to use its nuclear weapons also against a conventional attack. Yet as long as the US keeps its nuclear arsenal at par with Russia and does not revert to isolationism, Russia's nukes will stay a blunt tool.

The Kremlin has thus increasingly focused on its conventional forces, especially after the war against Georgia. Whereas the armed forces were not a priority during the 2000s, Putin significantly increased funding in his third term. He embarked on a military reform that is intended to put an end to the Soviet model of a standing army and instead provide for flexible

and integrated forces. The reform is giving first results in terms of improving flexibility and interoperability and is transforming the military into a state of permanent readiness. At a slow rate, new equipment is being introduced, especially in the navy and concerning offensive and defensive missile systems. Drills have become more frequent. This has improved the capability to fight local and regional wars. Nevertheless, demographics and education will remain a continuing challenge, as will equipment.

Internationally, the country's military-industrial complex remains an important tool for Russian influence, as its exports contribute to technological dependence. Russia is the world's second-largest weapons exporter, being able to provide relatively good technology at a low cost. It has also begun to sweeten arms deals with credits. Of course, countries can pick and choose on the global arms market, but investment in Soviet or Russian technology often comes with considerable path dependency, which only the largest players can break.

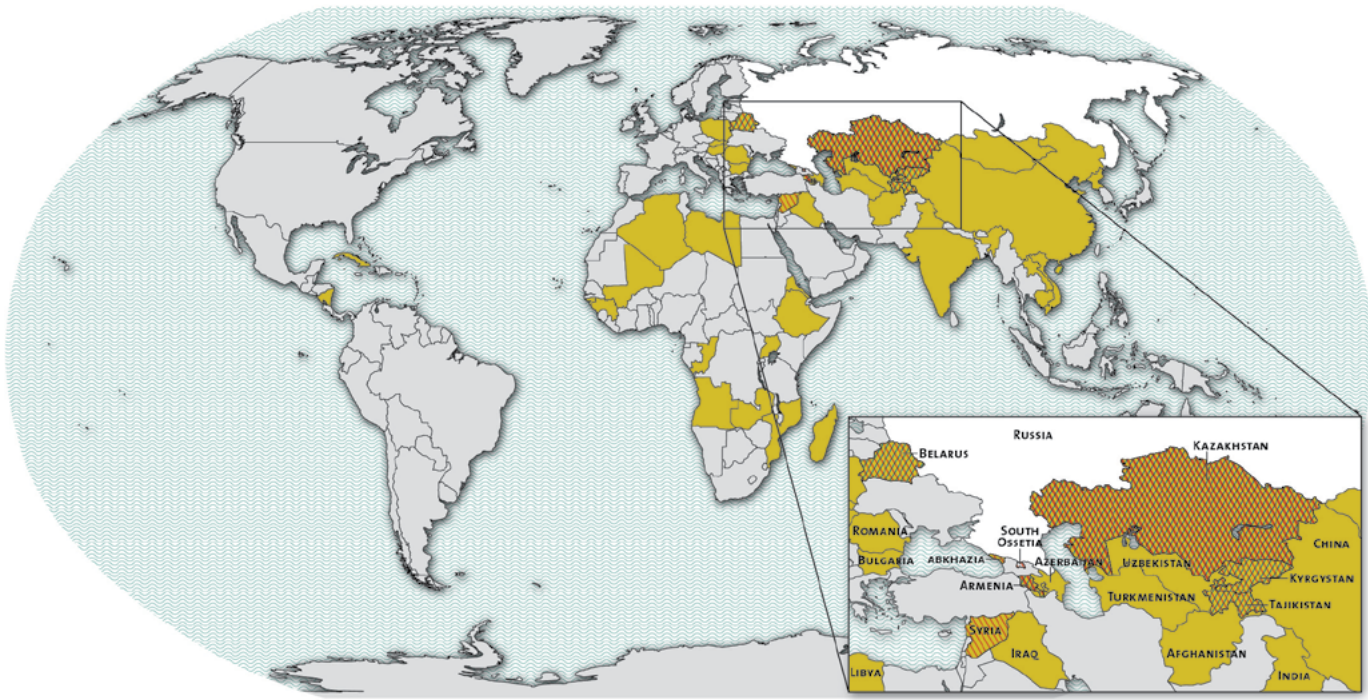
Energy

Energy is the key to Russia's economic power. Russia hosts the world's largest reserves of natural gas and the eighth-largest oil reserves, with much more to be discovered. Directly, energy resources provide about half of Russia's federal budget, while contributing more than two thirds of export revenue. Between 2003 and 2008, the effects of a rising oil price contributed half of Russia's GDP growth. Most of Russia's exports go to the EU, which imports about one third of the gas and even more of the oil it consumes from Russia.

On top of the attraction of its energy resources, Russia's advantage is that it can act *en bloc* as a strategic actor, opening the possibility for divide-and-influence tactics. Putin controls both Russian energy giants and the access to hydrocarbon investment in Russia. Directing his companies to invest abroad while he controls access to supplies and investments at home allows Putin to foreclose supply alternatives and extract concessions from countries and businesses. His message has been clear: integration of the energy value chain – yes, but only on the Kremlin's terms.

Gas supply has been more important for Putin than oil. Especially if there are no supply alternatives, profit and geopolitical influence go together smoothly. Even so, the balance has recently been tilting towards the latter. In a bid to increase Russia's clout over Ukraine and in the Balkans, Putin not only opted for constructing costly

Russia's defence and economic partners



Transferred arms 1980–2012
- Less than 50%
- More than 50%

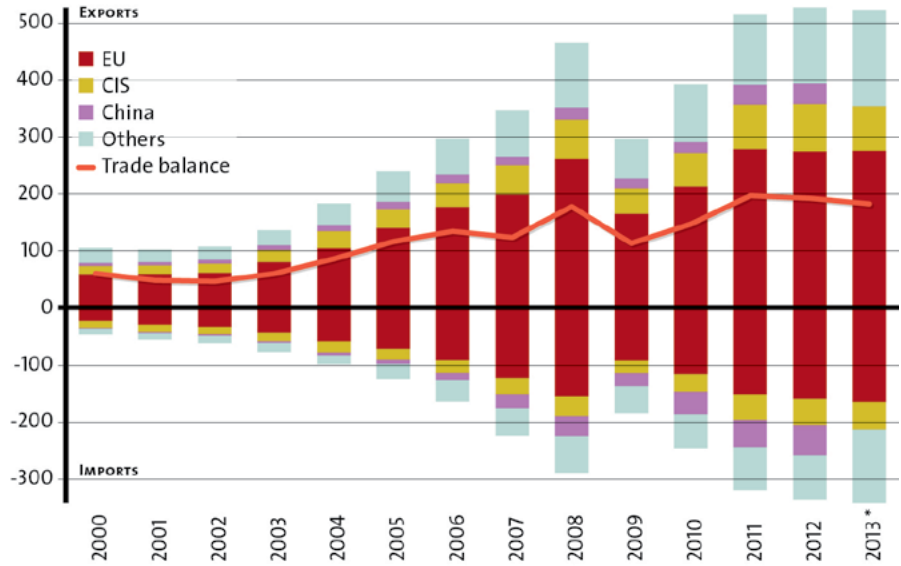
Customs Union status
- Member
- Candidate

Formalized defence ties
- CSTO member or bilateral defence treaty

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfers Database

Russia's trade geography

in US$ billion



* Estimate, others includes China
Sources: Central Bank of Russia, UN Comtrade, Eurostat

new pipelines, but he also offered lower gas prices as a carrot.

The ultimate energy weapon – stopping deliveries – can be relatively costly, as the role of hydrocarbon exports in Russia's economy and state budget is paramount. Yet this might not deter Putin from using it, which became clear in 2006 and 2009, when deliveries to Ukraine were stopped. And diversification of imports, despite all efforts, can be difficult. The knowledge that Putin is ready to use this weapon serves as a credible, disciplining threat to those dependent on Russian energy supplies.

Economic attraction and integration

Russia has gained in economic attraction, since its market for goods and cheap labour has grown rapidly during the 2000s. With over eleven million immigrants, Russia is the world's second largest recipient of migration, mostly from poor countries in Central Asia. Economic distress in many parts of Europe and the post-Soviet space has helped to uphold the Kremlin's clout. Opening up and shutting down market opportunities has thus developed into a potent foreign policy tool for the Kremlin. Even though Russia became a member of

the WTO, the latter is too slow and clumsy to blunt this vital tool.

Taking advantage of this economic pull and its energy resources, Moscow launched the 'Customs Union of Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Russia' in 2010. It emerged as Russia's main vehicle in the post-Soviet space, as it is the most ambitious integration project in this context yet. It abolished internal tariffs, implementing a common customs code and is run by a 'supranational' body, the Eurasian Economic Commission located in Moscow. Decisions are taken unanimously by the Commission's council, where each state is represented by one member. By using its carrots and sticks, Moscow won Armenia, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan as new accession states, whereas Ukraine resisted. The Kremlin plans to turn the Customs Union into the Eurasian Economic Union by 2015.

It is easy to mistake the Customs Union for an organization similar to the EU, a view promoted by the Kremlin. Russia has undoubtedly found a new formula of combining economic carrots like lower energy prices with a formal integration format, enhancing its attractiveness. But its members are too dissimilar to allow for EU-style decision-making. Russia's GDP is ten times higher than that of the next largest country in the union. Russia has also taken the lead, drawing complaints from both Belarus and Kazakhstan. They have criticized the Commission for being too politicized and Putin for being too eager in recruiting new members with questionable economic credentials.

Diplomacy, societal ties, intelligence services, and propaganda

Russian diplomacy is based on a sound analysis of the opponent's weaknesses and own abilities and is highly professional. But what sets the Kremlin apart is its ability to combine diplomacy with a wide range of economic, military, and social tools and its uncomplicated approach to using these.

In the post-Soviet space, the Kremlin can exploit human ties. Despite the fact that the Kremlin preaches strict adherence to state sovereignty and non-interference in internal affairs, it has adopted a law and a strategy to support "compatriots" abroad – in practice everyone with past ties to Russia or the USSR. To fulfil this aim, the Kremlin sponsors various organizations aimed at promoting the common roots of a supposed "Russian world" and is fighting against "falsifications of history".

Russia's intelligence services continue to be an important resource for realizing foreign policy goals, even more

so as they inherited close ties to sister services in the post-Soviet space. Their task is not confined to gathering information and identifying targets, but they also carry out covert operations. With a staff estimated to be more numerous than the US Department of Homeland Security, the NSA, the CIA, and the FBI combined, Russia's civil and military intelligence services are particularly strong in human intelligence, which sets them apart from most Western counterparts.

Propaganda is part of the strategy to influence Western perceptions. Aside from the work of intelligence, the Kremlin provides considerable funds to its media arsenal. Besides various news agencies and local media, it sponsors the world-wide TV network RT (earlier 'Russia Today'). It is Russia's weapon in global information warfare, according to its executive editor. In 2013, its budget was over US$ 300 million. Drawing mostly on Western TV anchors, RT has been giving Russia's view of current events and history, often spawning conspiracy theories against the US, alongside coverage of social issues and negative aspects of Western societies. As Hannes Adomeit noted, "Evil America Today" (EAT) might therefore be a better name for this channel. It has been quite successful, being among the top three news channels in the UK and the US. Likely by using techniques of search engine optimization, RT also became the dominant news channel on YouTube.

Challenging the West

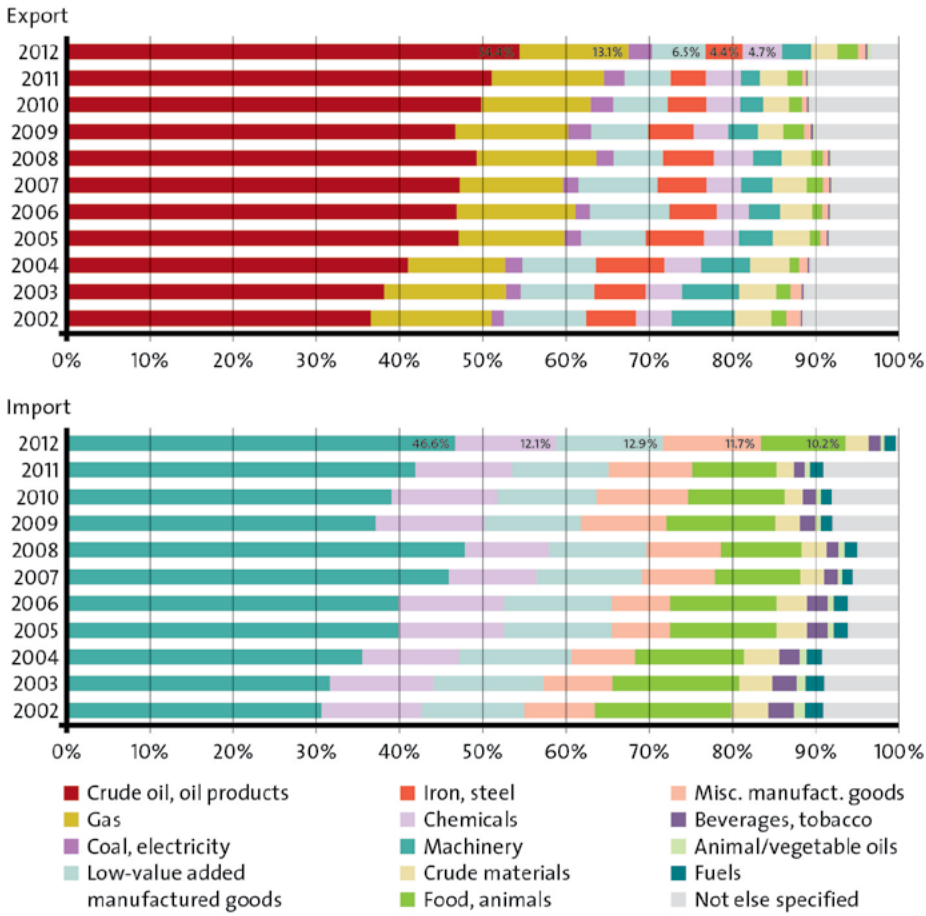
Russia has a pragmatic and unconstrained approach to using its instruments, frequently combining coercion and 'soft power'. The Kremlin clearly believes that this hard-nosed pursuit of power politics against the West will ultimately be successful, if it chooses its targets wisely. This can best be demonstrated in three areas: Russia's policy in the post-Soviet space, its quest for influence in the EU, and its dealings with the US relationship.

Ukraine and Georgia: locking the West out

The post-Soviet space is key for Russia's renewed imperial identity and for domestic stability. Various cultural, economic, and social ties between Russia and its neighbours, often weak nations, complicate the emergence of truly independent nation states, and the Kremlin has chosen to exploit this fact. To secure regime survival, it prefers to have weak nations on its borders. Meanwhile, strong nation states and competitive economies look like threats to the own system out of a Kremlin window.

President Putin considers it especially vital that Ukraine develops along

Russia's trade structure



Source: http://comtrade.un.org

similar lines as Russia. This is central for his hold on power, as both countries are connected by close cultural ties. Kyiv takes a special place in Russia's history as the birthplace of orthodox Rus. This makes it easy for the Kremlin to claim that Ukrainians are 'Little Russians', and are in fact of the same blood. Indeed, many Russians do not see Ukraine as a foreign country. Thus, Ukraine adopting a different trajectory from Russia would bode ill for the Kremlin, as Russians would both see it as a foreign policy defeat and might ask questions about the legitimacy of the Russian regime.

When Ukraine's President Viktor Yanukovych was about to sign a free trade and partnership agreement with the EU, Russia used a combination of coercion and inducements to hammer the point home that Ukraine had to choose between Russia and the EU. Russia used its traditional tools of selective import bans, and went on to severely complicate customs procedures for all Ukrainian goods as a "preventative measure". It also threatened to cancel orders for Ukrainian heavy industry if the deal with the EU were to go ahead. This hit the already foundering Ukrainian economy.

At the same time, Putin was ready to hand out a large amount of financial and non-monetary benefits to Yanukovych. Not only did he pledge to invest US$ 15 billion in Ukraine's bonds, but he also significantly lowered the gas price for Ukraine at a price tag of US$ 4–5 billion annually. In view of this, Yanukovych agreed to deepen economic cooperation and to shun the EU. But he also agreed to be taken on a very short leash, as gas price reductions have to be confirmed every quarter, while the buying of bonds can be withheld at any time. In effect, Yanukovych allowed Putin to become the guarantor of his reign.

Everything thus went according to Putin's plan, barring the human factor. The 'Euromaidan', mass protests for accountable governance and national dignity in Kyiv and the west of Ukraine turned into a major irritant for the Kremlin. It repeatedly encouraged Yanukovych to crack down on what it sees as "terrorists" and "extremists". Yet Yanukovych's periodic and ever more brutal crackdowns eventually took a high death toll. Yanukovych had to agree to an end to his reign. As his personal security abandoned him, he fled Ukraine for Russia. The opposition formed a new government and called early presidential elections. Yet its authority remains precarious.

Supporting Yanukovych, Putin had bet on the wrong horse. To cover up this failure and to regain leverage over Kyiv, Russia even compromised Ukraine's territorial integrity. In violation of the security assurances given to Ukraine in the 1994 Budapest memorandum, Russia supported "self-defence forces" in Crimea and vowed to use all available means to protect "compatriots" all over Ukraine. This soon led to Russia's de-facto control over the peninsula, sparking off the biggest crisis in post-Cold War Europe. A break-up of the country, while being a worst-case scenario, is a real danger. The ultimate outcome of Ukraine's revolution is thus very much in the balance and depends on the Western reaction.

Five years before the crisis in Ukraine escalated, Russia had already sent a clear and decisive signal to the West that his sphere of influence must not be infringed upon. The "short, victorious war" with Georgia in 2008 demonstrated the Kremlin's willingness to use conventional military force to achieve broader foreign policy goals. The goal was to limit the ability of neighbouring countries to choose their foreign policy orientation. The Kremlin chose to once and for all stop further NATO enlargement in the post-Soviet space.

After provocations involving Russian troops, Georgia had attacked Tskhinvali, the 'capital' of its breakaway republic of South Ossetia. Russia intervened, beat back the Georgian attack, yet ventured deep into Georgian territory and also sent troops to the breakaway republic of Abkhazia, about 250 kilometres away from the original battle. Western powers were shocked, but did not sanction Russia or step in to help Georgia. French President Nicolas Sarkozy eventually brokered a ceasefire agreement, which led to an end of hostilities, but was never fully honoured by Russia.

Officially, the Kremlin justified its incursion by the "genocide" against South Ossetia, yet comments by Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov and other officials before and after the war drove the point home that such "consequences for geopolitical stability" were to be reckoned with if NATO were to be further enlarged. In justifying the war by a responsibility to protect citizens abroad, Russia also went against its own foreign policy concept, which stresses strict non-interference in internal affairs and state sovereignty. Somewhat cynically, the Kremlin also tried to use the war as an argument for a new European security treaty, designed to sidestep NATO in Europe.

Russia and the EU: divide et impera

While Russia aims to lock the West out of its strategic glacis, it tries to drive the US out of Europe. Weakening NATO and US influence has long been the Kremlin's key goal vis-à-vis the EU. From the start of his reign, Putin has made it clear that he thought of the US presence in Europe as an artificial one, a remnant of the Cold War. The commitment of the US to its European NATO allies helps to equalize power relations across the continent. It strengthens the sovereignty of and gives considerable voice to small nations, while keeping the power of big nations in check. Pushing the Americans out is thus supposed to re-establish a European concert of powers. The EU would cease to be the exclusive forum for rule-setting in Europe, but would be superseded

by an overarching agreement between EU member states and Russia, backed up by a coalition of European great powers, including Russia. At the least, Russia demands an institutional forum to decide on European security issues that would side-track NATO in Europe. Given the low profile of many European states in military affairs this would give Moscow a loud voice. It would also presuppose that Europeans accept the status quo in Russia and view the current regime as legitimate. The Kremlin could then feel safe.

Energy is the keyword capturing the ambivalent relationship. It ties Russia and the EU together, as the EU is the main market for Russia's hydrocarbons, while Russia is the EU's main energy provider. Yet this renders energy a foreign policy tool as well. The Kremlin has played off different member states against each other and against Brussels, advancing its projects to lock in markets. It has also confronted the EU's diversification plans, for example in the Caucasus and Central Asia. The message was that the EU should be happy that it is receiving Russian natural resources at all and should not complain about the conditions. This met with growing resistance from Brussels, which tried both to limit Moscow's clout on the EU energy market and went on the lookout for alternative supplies. But whereas Moscow had to recognize that gas is still not so scarce that market forces can be suppressed, the EU's quest for diversification has not been hugely successful either. And the EU's reserves are dwindling. The Kremlin could thus underline the claim that accepting the status quo in Russia is a precondition for EU energy security, which only Russia can guarantee.

Naturally, Russia's ambitions to revise the post-Cold War order in the post-Soviet space are of concern for the EU. The knowledge of Russia's sizable and growing military potential has elevated Russia's clout, as the EU cannot guarantee the security of its neighbours against Russia. These perceptions have been re-inforced by cyberthreats against the Baltics and by military muscle-flexing at the EU's borders. In line with Russia's military modernization efforts, this has given credence to the claim that Russia needs to receive a seat at the EU table, even if it has muscled itself into this position.

Beyond hard power politics, the Kremlin has also worked hard to raise the acceptability of its regime in Europe. This includes raising attraction by providing resources committed to information warfare, while closing down Russia for Western influence. The Kremlin's funding of international media is key, as is skilful manipulation

Russian gas export infrastructure

of online communities. Another element is drawing on pre-existing post-Communist networks and establishing new relations with power brokers in politics and business. More recently, Putin's conservative turn has increased the Kremlin's influence among the European New Right. In France, Marine Le Pen has detected common values with the Kremlin, stretching from opposition to gay rights to "economic patriotism". East of the Rhine, the economically liberal, yet culturally nationalist 'Alternative for Germany' also revealed understanding for Russia's continuing drive to dominate Ukraine.

Russia's growing assertiveness towards the EU has had an ambivalent effect. On the one hand, it has raised calls for greater cooperation and acquiescence to Russia. Yet on the other hand, European elites have been increasingly estranged by Moscow's behaviour, thereby complicating Moscow's *divide et impera* approach. But a common strategy on how to deal with Russia has not yet emerged.

Russia and the US: vying for global status

Whereas Russia's goal in Europe has been to push the US out, on the global level Russia mainly sought recognition of its great power status. Real opposition to US policy has been modest and fairly defensive, where core interests of the Kremlin have not been touched. As the US scaled down its global ambitions under President Barack Obama, opposing the US became a low-cost opportunity. While Washington did not punish these moves, they brought domestic dividends. And even in more substantial fields, Russia was able to score some remarkable successes.

In launching the 'reset' policy with Russia in 2009, Obama wanted to get

rid of the legacy of President George W. Bush's presidency and lead relations to a new level. Hopes were high that a fresh start would be possible with President Dmitri Medvedev, but he proved to be not much more than a fill-in for Putin. And the Kremlin knew that the driver of the reset was not US strength, but rather Washington's desire to offload problems in order to turn towards more important issues. The 'New START' treaty on nuclear reductions was the main achievement. Yet this treaty mainly reaffirmed Russia's status as a nuclear power, while its ratification was made contingent on US restraint on missile defence.

Once Putin was back as president, he pursued a more assertive policy towards US presence in Europe. The issue of NATO's missile defence system again moved to the forefront, even though Washington had opted for a less advanced system. While the system cannot present a threat to Russia's nuclear second-strike capability, Putin fiercely opposes the system in order to strengthen domestic legitimacy and to avoid a stronger anchoring of the US in Europe. To increase the stakes, the Kremlin is even ready to let the whole architecture of arms control unravel. After exiting the Treaty on Conventional Armed Forces in Europe in 2007, it successfully tested a new ballistic missile in 2013 that likely violated the Intermediate-Range Nuclear Forces Treaty. Of course, the Kremlin identified the US and Western countries as the trigger for these moves.

After the reset failed, it was and is the war in Syria that provided Russia with an opportunity to take centre stage on a global level. Not only was Russia present and leading at every important diplomatic initiative and negotiations, but Russia even outmanoeuvred the US and was able to protect its ally Bashar al-Assad. By underwriting the ban on chemical weapons the Kremlin could position itself as a 'good citizen', while the killing continued. Moscow could also exploit the situation to show the deleterious consequences of "interference in internal affairs" – meaning the Western focus on humanitarian issues.

Russia acted cynically and played its cards realistically. Claiming to fulfil previously concluded contracts, Russia continued to supply arms and military advice to Assad's forces. At the same time, Gulf States, and later the West, were quick to take sides against Assad, supporting and even arming rebel fighters. When Obama dithered to defend his 'red lines' considering the use of chemical weapons, Putin seized the opportunity and pressed Assad to abandon its chemical

weapons potential. Putin got Assad on board and scored a diplomatic success, while the killing did not stop.

By contrast, the US had badly miscalculated. By abandoning Assad early on, it put all its chips on the opposition, knowing that the stakes were high. When this failed, it did not commit to a military intervention. Russia would not have granted legitimacy to such an operation in the UN Security Council, but neither did it do so in Kosovo or Iraq. As the West did not have the will to fulfil the 'Responsibility to Protect', Russia's position of "non-interference" triumphed. The West helped to fan a major bloodshed, yet it lost credibility in its wake.

Former NSA contractor Edward Snowden has become only the latest addition to these US foreign policy setbacks. For Putin, Snowden came in handy as a propaganda tool to strengthen legitimacy at home and to win new friends abroad. Putin masqueraded as nobleman at first – asking Mr. Snowden for assurances that he would do no harm to his US "partner" – but then went on to grant asylum nonetheless. Yet the fact that the Kremlin could emerge as the world's chief whistle-blower exposes a deeper problem for the West: The 'Global War on Terror' has taken a toll on the very values that the West stands for. As policy-makers on this or that side of the Atlantic did not seek approval for their dealings, the lack of explicit consent enabled the Kremlin to play the Snowden card against the US.

Accepting the challenge

Russia is back on the world stage, and it is not converging with, but actively opposing the West. Contrary to what the West hoped for in the 1990s, Russia has not embarked on the path of becoming a 'normal' democratic nation state. Rather, Moscow's imperial ambitions have been revamped. Russia is consciously implementing an anti-Western foreign policy out of domestic necessity. Locking the West out of Ukraine and Georgia, pushing the US out of Europe, and regaining the lost diplomatic equality with Washington are the three core agenda items. Although Russia has tried to develop soft power instruments, its policy is still focused on hard power and falls short when dealing with societal challenges.

Russia's agenda has been chosen wisely, as it avoids overstretch. Russia is not able to act forcefully in East Asia or in the Americas, but it is strong in Europe. Hence, the West cannot wish away and ignore Putin's Russia anymore. Neither can it project its own wishes and images on Russia, hoping that they may come true. In the

mid-term, this Russia is here to stay, and the West will have to learn how to cope with it and factor it into its own strategies.

In the longer term, the bite of Putin's instruments and the basis of Putin's power politics may well founder. Economic performance is still Putin's Achilles heel, and energy revenues may not be a panacea for all woes. In the event of dismal economic performance, Putin might be forced to fundamentally change his foreign policy. What is more, Putinism's strong personalization will complicate the eventual choice of a successor when Vladimir Putin leaves office. Last but not least, Russia's eastern neighbours are rising, and the anti-Western agenda of the Kremlin alone will fall short in meeting these new challenges.

However, for the years to come, the West will have to accept Putin's Russia as a policy challenge and devise a strategy to deal with it, while preserving its identity and values. Just continuing to ignore the Kremlin's foreign policy or hoping it will change sooner or later is a non-strategy and has reached an obvious dead end.

CHAPTER 2

Sinking in shifting sands: the EU in North Africa

Lisa Watanabe

The Arab uprisings and their aftermath have important strategic repercussions for the EU. The EU's already questionable influence in North Africa risks being further eroded. Ill-equipped to respond to changing dynamics in the sub-region, the EU may struggle to secure its long-term interests. The shortcomings of the EU's approach are made all the more flagrant against the backdrop of increased engagement of regional powers in North Africa. Absent of a bolder and more coherent strategic vision towards its southern neighbourhood, the EU is on course to miss a vital opportunity.

Protesters against Egyptian President Mohammed Morsi wave national flags in Tahrir Square in Cairo, 3 July 2013

The uprising in North Africa and subsequent turmoil have major geostrategic implications for regional and global powers. Changing dynamics in the sub-region, its 'shifting sands', will not only alter intra-regional relations within the Middle East and North Africa, but also inter-regional relations. How regional and external powers respond to these upheavals will determine their ability to influence the transitions, as well as secure their long-term interests.

The European Union (EU) has attempted to recalibrate its approach to its southern neighbourhood, especially towards North African states – Algeria, Egypt, Libya, Morocco, and Tunisia – where it hopes to contribute to democratic transitions. At the same time, regional powers, such as Turkey and several Gulf States, are actively engaging North Africa and may be better able to grasp opportunities presented by unfolding dynamics and to help shape developments in the sub-region.

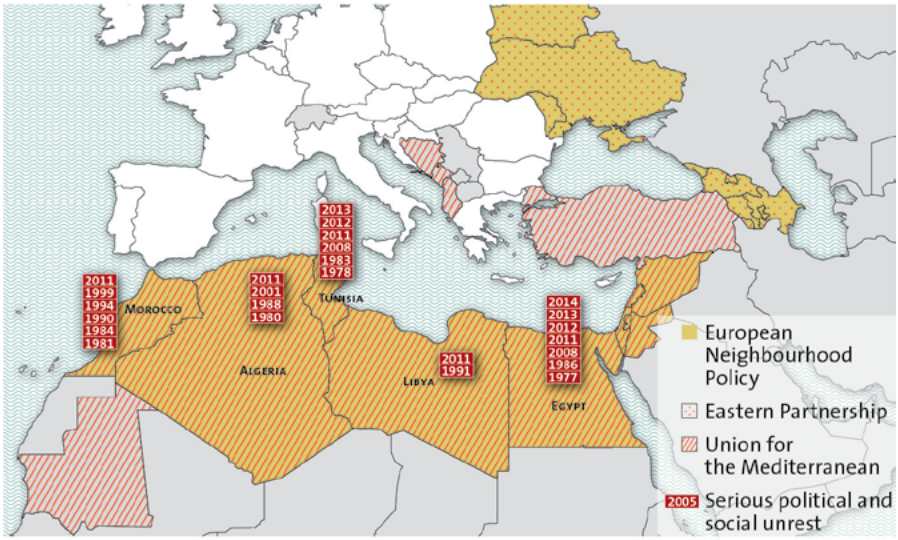
This chapter argues that the EU's response to the uprising represents little more than a repackaging of its existing approach. With its political weight in North Africa already questionable, drawing on inadequate tools at the expense of developing a coherent strategy to secure its long-term interests risks further undermining the EU's influence in the sub-region. Were the EU to strengthen its partnerships with regional political actors as part of a genuinely new strategic approach to its southern neighbourhood, its chances of avoiding such an outcome would be greater.

The EU in its southern neighbourhood

Drawing on the logic of the enlargement process, the EU has attempted to promote democratic and economic reforms in North Africa for some time, without being able to boast a great deal of success. Even prior to the uprisings, the EU had failed to find an effective way to influence countries that have no prospect of EU membership. The idea behind the European Neighbourhood Policy (ENP) was to create a buffer zone of stability or a 'ring of friends' around the EU comprised of countries lacking a membership perspective. While EU assistance was in principle conditional on reforms, the emphasis on conditionality had been waning. Even though aid to partner countries was linked to conditionality, it was nevertheless granted even when conditions had not been met. Leaders of southern partner states were also adept at exploiting the EU's overriding concern with stability and avoiding political reforms. Thus, rather than providing the basis for reforms, this strategy re-inforced

European Union and its neighbours

Bilateral and multilateral partnership frameworks



Sources: EU, Atlas der Globalisierung 2012

North Africa: countries in comparison

	Government type	Population (mil.)	Median age	People in poverty (%)	Unemploy-ment (%)**	Human Development Index (rank)*
Morocco	Constitutional monarchy	32.649	28	15 (2007)	9	130
Algeria	Republic	38.087	27	23 (2006)	10.7	93
Tunisia	Republic	10.835	31	3.8	17.4	94
Libya	Unitary provisional parliamentary republic	6.002	27	around ⅓ of the pop.	30	64
Egypt	Republic, provisional government	85.294	25	20	13.4	112

* Ranking 2013, 187 countries

** Euro Area = 12.1

Sources: UN Development Programme, CIA World Factbook, Economist

the EU's dependence on autocratic regimes whose primary interest was in preserving the status quo. Not surprisingly, more progress had been made in the economic area than in promoting democratic reforms.

The bilateral partnerships of the ENP were complemented by a multilateral and regional cooperative framework. In 2008, the EU announced the 43-country Union for the Mediterranean (UfM), which revamped the earlier Euro-Mediterranean Partnership (also known as the Barcelona Process) that had been established in 2005. Whereas the ENP was based on bilateral relations between the EU and partner states, the UfM provided a forum where all countries could meet together. The UfM was launched to give new impetus to the EU's southern partnership by attempting to upgrade the political level of the EU's relationship with Southern Mediterranean countries, providing for further co-ownership through a system of co-presidency and by making these relations more concrete and visible through large-scale regional and sub-regional projects. However, the UfM was thwarted by the divisiveness of the Arab-Israeli conflict. By the time of the Arab uprisings, the UfM had become widely viewed as a failure. Against this uninspiring backdrop, the EU attempted to revise its approach to its southern neighbourhood, with a view to contributing to democratic reforms in North Africa.

A revised approach to the southern neighbourhood

The EU's initial reaction to events as they unfolded in North Africa was timid and overshadowed by those of individual member states, particularly those with strong bilateral relations with North African states. This was most flagrantly demonstrated when France at first backed the faltering Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, before subsequently backtracking. The difficulty of developing a unified position was also demonstrated by the divisions among EU member states over whether to launch an EU military mission in Libya to assist in the provision of humanitarian assistance. When an EU Council Decision on such an operation was finally forthcoming in April 2011, the request that would have activated it was never made. This stood in stark contrast to the NATO intervention in Libya – in which, incidentally, individual EU member states, notably France and the United Kingdom, played a leading role.

Following this at first hesitant and rather embarrassing response to popular protests as they spread throughout North Africa, the EU did

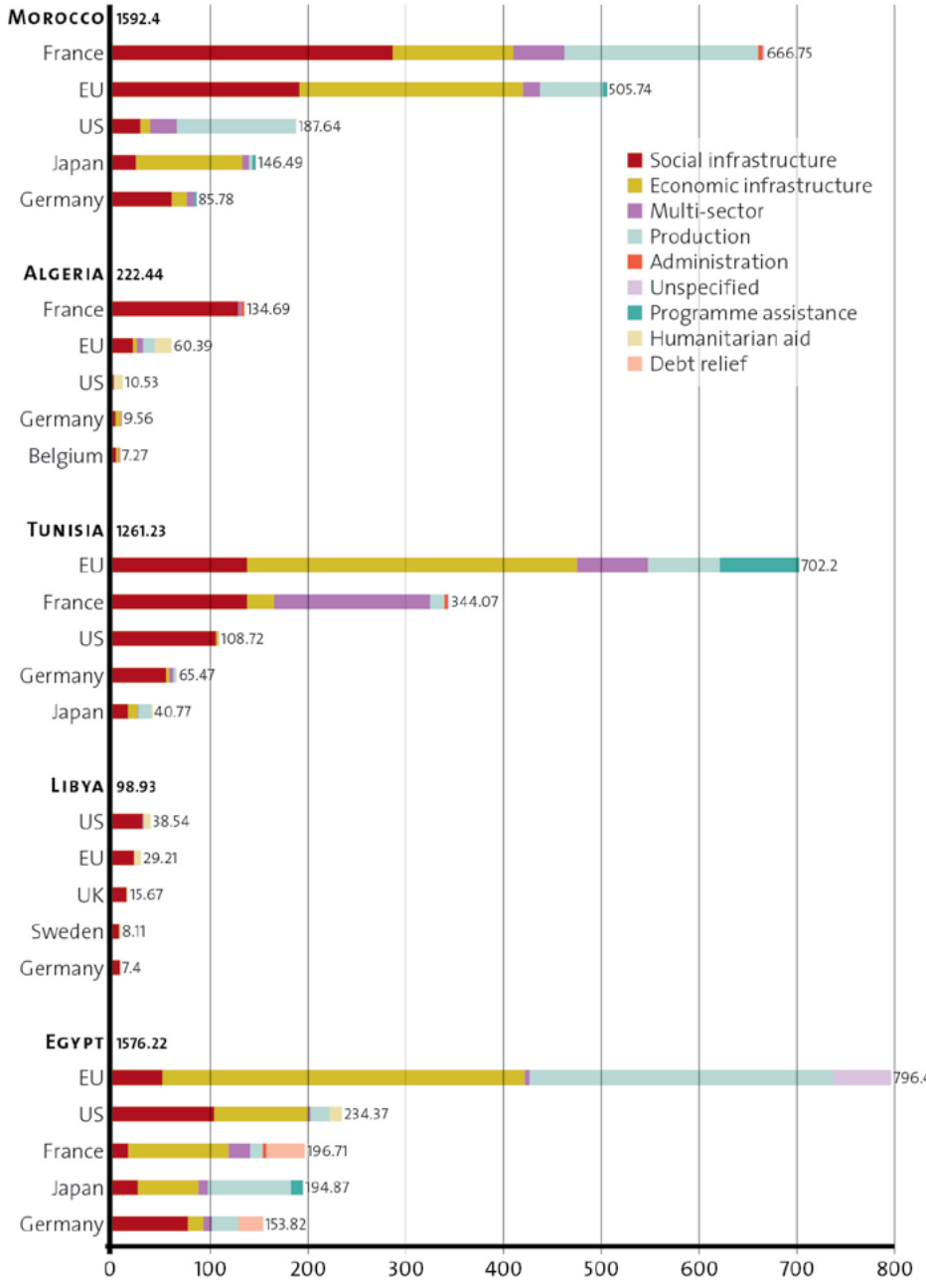
subsequently acknowledge the need to upgrade its approach to its southern neighbourhood. Member states were, nevertheless, divided over what this should be. Those located in southern Europe were keen to see the EU strengthen its engagement with its southern partners, even if at the expense of reducing support for the EU's Eastern Partnership. Yet, this met with opposition from Central European member states that favoured a more balanced approach. Divergent views as to the appropriate role of the UfM also emerged, which contributed to the ENP taking centre stage within its modified strategy.

In May 2011, the EU launched an adapted approach that attempted to boost political conditionality, basing its engagement with southern partners on the so-called 'more for more' principle that promised more benefits in return for more progress on democratic reforms. In part, it reflected the EU's failure to significantly foster democratic reforms in its southern neighbourhood in the past, as well as recognition that if it wanted to influence the reform process in these countries it needed to offer more. In addition to attempting to promote civil society and grassroots movements, the EU has increased its offer of money, markets, and mobility. In terms of money, it boosted its financial support to its southern partners. In addition to the €3.5 billion already programmed for the period 2011–2013, the EU has also redirected €600 million within the ENP budget towards its southern neighbours and provided €700 million in new grants to transition countries that demonstrate commitment and progress towards democratic reform. The EU is also offering increased access to its markets through new trade agreements – the so-called Deep and Comprehensive Free Trade Agreements (DCFTA) – with countries deemed to be democratizing. The new envisaged free trade zone between the EU and southern partners does not include the removal of labour market restrictions, however. Instead, mobility partnerships will facilitate freedom of movement, primarily for business people and students.

In addition to the provisions under the revised ENP, the EU has at its disposal a number of other instruments to support the transitions in North Africa. Measures to improve agricultural productivity have been taken as part of the European Commission's Development Policy. Through the UfM, the EU is also supporting initiatives in the areas of transport, regulatory reform, and regional energy initiatives. Apart from these direct means of support, the EU has also coordinated with EU member states to

OECD foreign aid to North Africa, 2012

in US$ million



Source: OECD

increase the lending of the European Investment Bank (EIB) and the extension of the mandate of the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development (EBRD) to the countries in the EU's southern neighbourhood.

An adapted approach, but no paradigm shift

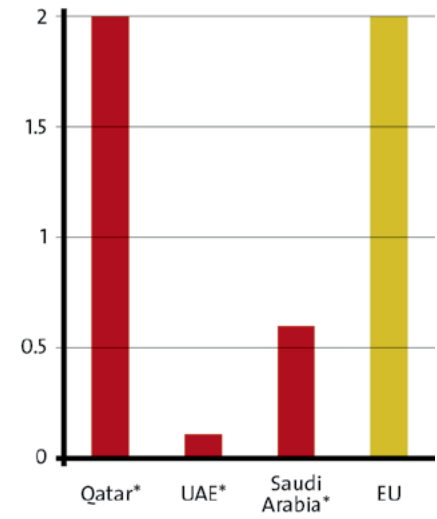
As the centrepiece of the EU's repackaged approach to its southern partners, the revisited ENP does not amount to a new strategic vision for EU engagement in North Africa. It is largely based on adapting the instruments already available to the EU. This leaves the EU ill-equipped not only to influence transitions in North Africa, but also to consolidate its role in North Africa in relation to other powers that are seeking to make gains in the context of shifts underway in the sub-region, which are intertwined with developments in the broader Middle East.

Adjusting existing instruments and seeking to re-emphasize political conditionality ignores the complex domestic situations that may make it difficult to embark immediately on reforms and prevent funding from being released for more immediate needs. North African states in transition have the possibility of accessing greater levels of assistance from Gulf States that are not based on conditionality. Tying its assistance to Egypt to the latter's acceptance of the conditionality of an IMF loan, for instance, slowed the disbursement of EU funds. In the meantime, much more generous financial assistance free of conditionality was provided by Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) instead. The EU lacks a similar means of providing rapid financial support. Moreover, modest increases in the money available from the EU are unlikely to be enough to incentivize leaders of countries that face severe socio-economic challenges, as well as deeply polarized political environments that have other options. Ultimately, the risk is that the EU's 'more-for-more' principle could translate into 'less-for-less', with the corollary of diminished EU influence.

Meagre incentives dependent on democratic reforms would be less serious if the EU had other dimensions of soft power to draw upon. For countries in North Africa, the potential of improved access to the European single market through the DCFTAs represents the EU's biggest power of attraction. The EU zone remains the most important trade partner for all countries in North Africa. However, stagnation in EU economies may encourage at least some North African states to diversify their trade relations. Moreover, the offer of deeper trade

Foreign aid to North Africa, 2012

in US$ billion



* Excludes credit lines

Sources: Saudi Fund for Development, Qatari Ministry of Foreign Affairs, United Arab Emirates Ministry of International Cooperation and Development, OECD

relations is conditional on political reforms being undertaken by its southern partners and, as such, may never actually materialize. Cultural ties are also few and highly dependent upon Europe's colonial past. It is doubtful that new North African democracies, should this transpire, will want to emulate and tie themselves to an ailing and tainted Europe. Egypt's rhetoric and decisions are indicative of the desire to forge a more independent path. With this in mind, the EU's leverage looks decidedly weak compared to other powers with potentially greater soft power resources at their disposal.

The North African geopolitical jigsaw

In the changing geopolitical context of North Africa, the Gulf States and Turkey in particular are consciously attempting to gain influence in the transition states and to carve out a place for themselves. These states have sought to enhance their influence through a combination of soft and, in some instances, hard power instruments.

The Gulf States assert their influence

The altered geopolitical balance in North Africa, its linkage to shifts in the Middle East, and concerns about the consequences of a US pivot to Asia have prompted the Gulf States to attempt to expand their influence in North Africa. The inability of Syria, Egypt, and Iraq to play their traditionally dominant roles has created a window of opportunity for states in the Gulf. Several Gulf States in particular played a more assertive role both during and after the Arab uprisings. Among the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, and the UAE have most actively sought to influence developments in North Africa since 2011. In general, recent upheavals are seen by the Gulf States as the most serious challenge to their survival and to regional stability since the 1979 Iranian Revolution. Their primary concern has been to

contain the impact of the Arab uprisings and to shape the trajectories of the transition processes.

While their general interests overlap, GCC states have adopted different approaches to the uprisings. Their overriding desire to prevent contagion of the revolutionary fervour that swept across the wider region and the need to bolster the legitimacy of their regimes has informed their response to the Arab uprisings. In addition to using hydrocarbon rents to stifle dissent at home, one means with which they have attempted to quell demands for reforms domestically is to shore up fellow monarchies in the wider Arab world. The offer extended to Morocco to become a GCC member state, despite its geographical location, should be seen in this light. This initiative was spearheaded by Saudi Arabia, which has adopted a far more counter-revolutionary approach than some fellow GCC members, and was strongly supported by the UAE and Bahrain. In contrast, Kuwait, Oman, and Qatar were more sceptical about this approach to influencing events and stabilizing the region. Even though Morocco is unlikely to become a full GCC member, the Council is unquestionably committed to supporting it, setting up a fund to provide it, along with Jordan to which membership was also offered, with US$ 2.5 billion in addition to bilateral aid. Saudi Arabia also envisaged the creation of a Gulf Union intended to facilitate military and security policy cooperation. However, the proposition failed to gain consensus among Gulf States that are wary of Saudi dominance.

Divergent attitudes towards the Muslim Brotherhood movements in North Africa have also generated differing approaches among the GCC states, with Qatar supporting the Brotherhood domestically, as well as in the region, and Saudi Arabia and the UAE seeking to balance its rise. The question of how to respond to non-Wahhabi Islamist groups has preoccupied the rulers of Gulf States since the 1970s as Muslim brothers fleeing persecution under former Egyptian President Gamel Abdel Nasser established similar reformist Islamist movements in the Gulf. However, the Arab uprisings added a new urgency to these concerns. Saudi Arabia is home to the puritan Wahhabi Sunni Islam. The Wahhabiya in Saudi Arabia have been traditionally accommodating of the Saudi state, granting the Saudi king the right to declare jihad. As such, Saudi rulers have used Wahhabism as a means of legitimizing their regime. This renders Saudi Arabia's rulers suspicious of moderate forms of political Islam that are seen as challengers to Wahhabism. The Muslim

Brotherhood in Egypt is seen as a particular threat, due to Egypt's size and traditionally influential role. In order to counter the rise of the Brotherhood, Saudi Arabia is promoting Salafism in North Africa, which has its roots in Wahhabi thought.

Unlike Saudi Arabia, the UAE has allowed the establishment of Muslim Brotherhood movements domestically, which has had repercussions for its foreign and security policy. The initial gains of political Islam in these countries emboldened the local Muslim Brotherhood movement, known as the Reform Movement (Al-Islah), which sought to cooperate with more liberal pro-democracy activists in Abu Dhabi, although they failed to gain momentum. Nevertheless, Emirati rulers along with their Saudi counterparts have been concerned that the Muslim Brotherhood movements in North Africa could encourage their affiliates in the Gulf to destabilize ruling regimes. This has given the UAE's foreign policy an anti-Brotherhood dimension, like that of Saudi Arabia. The UAE has been wary of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and Ennadha in Tunisia.

While Qatar adheres to Wahhabism, it has not been as fearful of the Muslim Brotherhood as has its neighbours Saudi Arabia and the UAE. Having provided a haven and financial support for the Muslim Brotherhood movement for decades, and promoted their cause through Al-Jazeera, Qatar has a less complicated relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt and elsewhere in North Africa. As such, it backed the Morsi government in Egypt, developed good relations with the Ennadha-led government in Tunisia, and established a close relationship with the Muslim Brotherhood in Libya. Indeed, this seems part of a conscious strategy to establish allies in a changing North Africa.

Despite differences, common to GCC states is the use of foreign aid to increase their influence in the countries where uprisings and regime change have occurred. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE are the largest GCC foreign aid donors, with most of their aid taking the form of soft loans and grants. Traditionally, GCC foreign aid has been used strategically to promote Islam, Arab solidarity, and, above all, regional stability. In 2011, aid commitments and investments from GCC states in North African countries in transition peaked, far outweighing those granted by the EU. Officially documented sources of aid tend to arrive through official national funding agencies. With foreign aid decisions being the preserve of the ruling

families rather than government ministries, disbursement of large and politically less costly forms of aid from IMF or EU sources are more readily available. Indeed, this stands in stark contrast to Western/international aid that has more constraints, due largely to good governance considerations and the need to eventually recover the loans. As a result, GCC aid can be particularly attractive to countries that risk increasing domestic unrest due to unpopular reforms. When Egypt faced threats from international donors to withdraw financial assistance following the crackdown on supporters of the ousted former President Mohammed Morsi in 2013, Cairo was able to rely more heavily on GCC aid. Saudi Arabia supplied US$ 4 billion in soft loans, deposits and grants to ease the pressure on post-Mubarak Egypt, the UAE US$ 3 billion in loans and grants and Qatar US$ 10 billion through investments and projects.

While official figures for GCC aid and credit lines alone are impressive in terms of their scale, this does not capture the full extent of financial assistance they provide to North Africa. Not all loans and grants are made public, and the channels through which unannounced sources of aid arrive are often murky. Financial assistance by GCC states, as well as private individuals, to political and social actors in the transition countries remains largely unknown. Part of this assistance appears to go to Islamist political parties, while another part goes to religious outreach and social services provided by conservative religious organizations. Both constitute additional sources of influence for GCC states in North Africa, at least among Islamist political and social actors. These bilateral sources of aid are also complemented by multilateral forms of foreign aid assistance, granted through institutions such as the Arab Fund for Social and Economic Development. Despite the difficulty of gaining a comprehensive picture of the extent of foreign aid from GCC states, their goal of increasing political clout in North Africa through their capacity to provide substantial funds is palpable.

In addition to financial assistance, Gulf investment in North Africa has also grown since 2011. In some instances, this investment forms part of foreign aid commitments, arriving in the form of economic infrastructure projects. The greatest funds for such projects came from Qatar in 2012. In Tunisia, the Qatari government is set to provide US$ 2 billion to build an oil refinery that will enable Tunisia to refine oil from Libya, with a view to becoming a hub for the export of refined products. In Egypt, Doha

announced that it will invest US$ 18 billion over a five-year period in infrastructure projects linked to natural resources and the tourism sectors. Saudi Arabia's commitments include contributing US$ 200 million towards the construction of a high-speed railway network in Morocco, US$120 million for the expansion of electrical power plant capacities and US$ 85 million for natural gas transport networks in Tunisia, and US$ 170 million for agricultural infrastructure projects in Egypt. The UAE also committed US$ 84 million to North African countries, most of which was allocated to infrastructure projects. The assistance from Qatar alone far outweighs that from the EU for similar initiatives for the same year, which amounted to US$ 370 million to Egypt; US$ 228 million to Morocco; US$ 3.84 million to Algeria; and US$ 337 million to Tunisia (see graph on p. 36). In addition to infrastructure projects, companies based in the GCC States declared 46 foreign direct investment projects in North Africa in 2012, largely in Algeria and Morocco, worth a total of approximately US$ 6 billion.

Turkey – a pivoting power with pivotal potential

Turkey, too, is attempting to create a place for itself in North Africa. Like so many other international actors, Turkey found itself in a difficult position as the protests broke out. Since the Justice and Development Party (AKP) came to power in Turkey in 2002, Turkish foreign policy has been based on the dual notions of 'strategic depth' and 'zero problems with neighbours' – the idea being to resolve bilateral problems and to enhance cooperation with other states. Under this new foreign policy approach, Ankara was intent on boosting its role in regions where it had historic ties that date back to the Ottoman era, including the Middle East and North Africa. Indeed, Turkey had much ground to make up, since its relations with its Arab neighbours had been detrimentally affected by its alignment with the West during the Cold War. The demise of the Soviet Union created an opportunity for Turkey to reconnect with areas where it has strategic depth owing to its history, culture, and geographic location. In line with this vision, Turkey was believed to be a pivotal power and not simply a Western satellite. As such, the thinking goes, it ought to exercise a more active foreign policy in regions where it has considerable soft power that had been previously neglected at the expense of privileging relations with the West and avoiding grand strategic designs.

As part of this new strategy, Ankara undertook to resolve bilateral problems with neighbours in the Middle

North Africa's geostrategic terrain

Regional actors

East. Enhancing its role in the wider region through maximizing its soft power involved deepening its relations with incumbent regimes, which necessarily entailed intensifying ties with specific leaders. Regional engagement included strengthening relations with Iran, Iraq, Syria, Jordan, Lebanon, and the Gulf States. Capitalizing on Ankara's soft power assets also implied a more active role in Turkey's neighbourhood underpinned by commonalities in terms of Islamic religious and cultural heritage. In part this was enabled by an acceptance that multiple identities could exist in the Turkish Republic and a departure from the earlier Kemalist insistence on the avoidance of promoting Sunni solidarity. Forging stronger economic ties with countries in the region also formed an important part of its new strategy. Indeed, a prime motivating factor behind Turkey's foreign policy stance, and the central place attributed to the Arab world within it, was the need to fuel the country's impressive economic growth.

Having forged closer relations with existing regimes, Turkey found itself ill-prepared to respond in an unequivocal manner to the Arab uprisings. Its initial response to events was mired in contradictions. The Turkish government expressed support for the end of the Ben Ali regime in Tunisia, and was one of the first countries to call for former Egyptian President Hosni Mubarak to step down. However, Turkey's response to the Tunisian and Egyptian uprisings differed from its reaction to the Libyan crisis. When the civil war broke out in Libya and

international voices called for Muammar Gaddafi's removal, Turkey initially backed Gaddafi and opposed NATO military intervention. Since the AKP came to office, Prime Minister Recep Tayyip Erdogan had enjoyed close relations with his Libyan counterpart. These personal ties were also reinforced by significant Turkish crude oil imports and infrastructural projects in Libya. Nevertheless, Ankara did subsequently adapt its position, aligning itself with calls for intervention and withdrawing its backing for the Gaddafi regime. Turkey even participated in the NATO-led intervention, though its role was confined to ensuring humanitarian access and enforcing the economic and military embargo against Gaddafi's forces. Financial support to the NATO-backed National Transitional Council in Libya was also provided by the Turkish government.

Turkey's initially hesitant reaction to the crisis in Libya cost it political points at the outset of the Arab uprising. Ankara has since attempted to position itself as a champion of change and democracy in North Africa. Turkey has promoted itself as a model for North African transitions. Indeed, the initial electoral successes of the Freedom and Justice Party in Egypt and Ennadha in Tunisia seemed to provide Turkey with an opportunity to ally itself with moderate Islamist regimes. Ennadha's leader Rachid Ghannouchi had expressed an interest in the 'Turkish model' as an example of an Islamist party governing a country with a secular state tradition. Other Islamists in the transition countries viewed the "Turkish model" differently, representing instead the inevitable and long-term Islamization of Turkey and the vindication of their own cause. Ankara's ties to Islamists in the transition countries were touted as invaluable foreign policy assets as Islamists emerged as winners in the initial phase of the transitions.

Navigating strategically in North Africa

With various powers competing for influence in North Africa, the EU will find it hard to navigate the new geopolitical terrain of North Africa by relying primarily on its revised neighbourhood policy. The low scale of the EU's funding means that it cannot expect to have a significant impact on North African states, particularly in light of the generous and less onerous aid and financial assistance from the Gulf States. However, its limited ability to incentivize North African states to engage in political reforms is not only due to its meagre financial offering. Whether the EU has greater soft power towards its southern neighbours than other international actors vying for influence is questionable. The only area where the

EU has significant power of attraction is in relation to trade, given that it does have a large internal market and constitutes the largest trade partner of North African countries. However, even this may be circumscribed by a lack of political reform in southern neighbours. Short of a new strategic approach to the Southern Mediterranean, the EU could see its already doubtful influence further eroded.

One of the likely outcomes of the Arab revolts is that the GCC states will show an increased focus on and influence in North Africa. Their economic clout may bring the stability needed to embark on economic reform through rapid provision of funds, though it could equally undermine efforts to reform. One of the short-term strengths of the Gulf States is their freedom from the constraints of more political participatory official political systems and strict good governance conditions linked to aid. However, their support has often been circumscribed by their ideological opposition to the Muslim Brotherhood, although the ouster of Mohammed Morsi and the banning of the Muslim Brotherhood in Egypt could make it easier for Saudi Arabia to forge closer relations with this traditionally important state. Riyadh's role could be divisive elsewhere where moderate Islamist parties could form part of the political landscape. Much the same can be said of the UAE. Qatar's more assertive foreign policy and accommodation of less radical forms of political Islam may boost its role in North Africa. Yet the extent to which it can deviate from the positions of other GCC states is likely to be limited. While Qatar is eager to put itself on the map internationally and increase its influence in North Africa, it has been reticent to risk seriously damaging its relations with fellow Gulf States by doing so. Indeed, it is perceived as having made efforts to repair relations with its more conservative Gulf neighbours by replacing its activist prime minister in the summer of 2013.

North African states themselves are also wary of the motivations of the Gulf States. While Gulf aid has no formal conditionality, there may be a price attached to it that is unwelcome, as tension between Egypt and Saudi Arabia over Egyptian foreign policy indicates. Support for Islamists by GCC states has become a contentious issue in North Africa. Qatar's role as one of the biggest donors of financial assistance and support for Islamists has prompted concern in some post-uprising states. North African countries have expressed concern about Saudi-financed support for Salafi and Wahhabi groups across the sub-region. Political polarization in

North African countries risks making economic recovery and reform all the more challenging. This makes the Gulf States' role in North Africa potentially problematic from an EU point of view, given that it could work against the EU's declared objectives.

Turkey's role in the region may be expected to grow over the longer-term and could be more sustainable than that of the GCC states, although whether this will be on the basis of representing a model is uncertain. Social unrest in 2013, and the government's reaction to domestic protests, have called into question Turkey's own democratic credentials and potential as a model for transition countries. In recent times, the AKP has come under fire for slowing domestic political reforms and imposing a particular view of society on the Turkish people. In what came to be known as the Gezi Park protests, the question of what Turkish democracy should be came to a head. The protests, which started as an attempt to block the government's intention to override a court order for a stay on work to Ankara's Gezi Park, represented an objection to the majoritarian interpretation of democracy adopted by the Erdogan government. The protests themselves may be the seeds of a deeper, more consensual form of democracy in the future. Should the latter transpire, Turkey could well represent an interesting case upon which North African transition states may draw inspiration.

There is another sense in which Turkey could be a source of inspiration. While North African countries will undergo their own unique transitions, the AKP's experience in government could be inspiring for Islamist parties, such as Ennadha, that also face the similar challenge of governing in a country where secularism had previously prevailed. The compromises from both Islamists and non-Islamists required to forge an inclusive democratic political system are great. However, the country's potential as a model for the transformation of political Islam in North Africa will ultimately depend on the AKP's own ability to promote a more inclusive vision of society. Just as its perceived imposition of particular Islamic-inspired societal values is meeting with opposition domestically, so too is the Turkish government's overriding engagement with Islamist political forces in North Africa. Indeed, alongside the Gulf States, Turkey has been accused of promoting a sectarian (i.e. pro-Islamist) agenda.

Turkey's potential soft power also lies in the performance of its economy and its economic ties with North African countries. In 2012, Turkey was

the fifth most important export market for Algeria, Egypt, and Morocco. Turkey's economic needs and the changing regional environment may favour strengthened trade and investment relations with North African countries. In many respects, its longer-term economic relations with North African countries may be more sustainable than those of the Gulf States, which have very limited private sectors, despite their efforts to diversify their economies. The exception is Saudi Arabia, which is Egypt's fourth largest trading partner. However, the strength of the Turkish economic model has itself come under greater scrutiny. After a decade of high growth rates, the economy seems to be sliding into crisis. A series of investigations into corruption by government officials have cast doubt on the independence of the judiciary and police, shaking investor confidence and leading to a significant decline of the Turkish lira against the dollar. The US Federal Reserve's decision to cease financing the crisis at the beginning of 2014 led to a further erosion of the value of the Turkish currency, as well as a vast flight from Turkish stocks. On closer inspection, steady economic growth appears to have been generated by debt-fuelled consumption and property investment, rather than investment in industry. The AKP government now faces considerable challenges of its own.

In addition to its potential allure, shifting geopolitical dynamics in the broader Middle East may also boost Turkey's position in North Africa. Turkey's attractiveness as a strategic partner for Gulf States could increase. Indeed, Turkey and the GCC had already launched a political dialogue in 2008, providing a multilateral framework for the development of what is currently a nascent relationship. Moreover, the loss, even if only temporary, of Egypt as an important Saudi ally could lead to a strengthening of ties between Ankara and Riyadh. Even prior to the Arab uprisings, Saudi Arabia and Turkey had been developing closer relations in a shared endeavour to reduce their dependence on the West. However, the AKP as a model for political Islam in government could create problems for such cooperation, depending on the fate of the Muslim Brotherhood in North Africa.

Given that regional balances are likely to become particularly important in shaping dynamics and the limited role of extra-regional powers, the EU would do well to further develop strategic partnerships with regional actors making strategic inroads in North Africa. Cooperation between the EU and GCC at present is largely related to trade and energy. The extent to which this relationship could

be upgraded to a strategic partnership is partly limited by EU deferral to the US, which still acts as the prime external regional power in the Gulf, and by the lack of domestic reform in the Gulf States themselves which could place the EU in a difficult position and render it open to accusations of double standards. However, the GCC and the EU have been able to find common ground on some security issues, and a more sustained strategic dialogue with the GCC states could be in the EU's interest, particularly if the GCC states engagement in North Africa looks set to undermine the EU's objectives of promoting reform. The scope for a strategic partnership with Turkey is notably greater, though.

The Arab revolts occurred at a time when EU-Turkish relations were at a low. Accession talks were dragging and several chapters of negotiations had been frozen as a result of the Cyprus conflict and French opposition in particular. The Arab uprisings and subsequent instability could be an opportunity to mend relations, as the re-launching of accession talks suggest. In the past, Turkey's attractiveness as a model for North African states had much to do with its status as a candidate for EU membership, and the EU would do well to try to capitalize on this. Both the EU and Turkey found themselves having to make up lost ground following the uprisings, and have since declared that they share the same aim of supporting democratic reform in the south. Turkey could provide the EU with strategic outreach.

North Africa is of vital importance to the EU. This is true not only due to its aim of promoting a particular set of values as part of a transformative agenda following the Arab uprisings, but also because developments in the sub-region can have implications for the EU in the areas of energy, security, and migration. Yet the uncertain trajectories of the North African transition countries and the more decisive engagement of other external powers with them mean that the geopolitical sands of North Africa are in flux. Without a radical revision of its approach to its southern neighbourhood, the EU may find itself sinking further in these rapidly shifting sands. Were the EU to pursue a more political approach that capitalizes on shared interests with other external actors in North Africa, in addition to being anchored in bilateral relations with partner countries, such an outcome might be averted.

CHAPTER 3

The ‘talibanization’ of insurgency

Prem Mahadevan

As Western troops continue their withdrawal from Afghanistan, the stage is being set for the emulation of Taliban insurgent tactics elsewhere. Having tested the limits of Western military power, radical Islamists are encouraged by the proposition that persistent subversion, coupled with steady attrition through direct and indirect combat – the latter primarily involving improvised explosive devices – shall exhaust the West into strategic retreat. Although no insurgent group has the capacity to prevent the entry of Western forces into a combat theatre, denying such forces the tactical ability to operate freely shall grow easier.

A member of the US Army’s 52nd Ordnance Group prepares confiscated improvised explosive devices (IEDs) for detonation near Combat Outpost Hutal in Maiwand District, Kandahar Province, Afghanistan, 21 January 2013

The withdrawal of International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) troops from Afghanistan will have important implications for the military credibility of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, as well as the European Union's political authority in the developing world. As far as radical Islamists are concerned, Western power is diminishing. For them and their supporters, proof of this decline can already be seen in Iraq, where more than a decade of counterinsurgency has brought no lasting result. Rather, Al-Qaida-linked militants have seized control of some of Iraq's most important cities, such as Fallujah and Ramadi, which were bitterly fought over by US troops less than a decade ago.

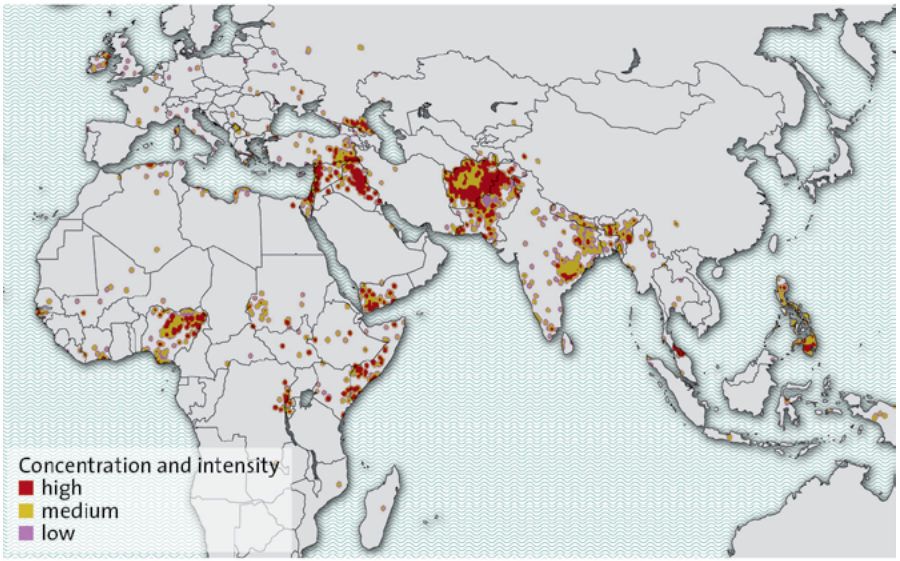
As Michael Haas notes in the next chapter, the development of anti-access/area denial doctrines has reached an unprecedented level of intensity in many non-Western countries. These states are trying to ensure that the world's preeminent military power, the United States, cannot interfere with their regional agendas. The same applies to non-state actors, which are now likely to learn from the Afghanistan example. The Taliban could not prevent US forces from entering Afghanistan in 2001; they had (and still have) no capability for implementing an anti-access strategy. However, their insurgency since 2001 has proven that even a non-state actor can pursue the modest goal of area denial against vastly superior conventional armed forces, via asymmetric warfare. Even if Western troops enter an insurgency-affected region, they can be deprived of the freedom to operate at will within it.

Although the Taliban model of insurgency has yet to be exactly replicated in other contexts, some aspects can already be noticed elsewhere. Suicide bombings in Mali, 'swarming' assaults in Iraq and the tactical innovativeness of jihadist groups in Syria all point to battlefield lessons being transmitted along a knowledge chain originating in Afghanistan. The operators of this chain might be Al-Qaida or its affiliates, or even the Taliban themselves. For over the last decade, the insurgents in Afghanistan have developed a distinctly pan-Islamist worldview, partly out of a desire to mobilize resources from the wider Arab and Islamic community against Western troops in Afghanistan.

This chapter will highlight the main characteristics of 'talibanized' insurgency. In so doing, it will provide a checklist of tactics and techniques that Western militaries will have to watch for in the future, when operating overseas against Islamist guerrillas.

Geography of terrorism

Terrorist incidents, 2012



Source: Global Terrorism Database, University of Maryland

Beginning with the strategic developments that allowed the Taliban to recover from the overthrow of their regime in 2001, the chapter will examine the innovative methods by which the Taliban have enhanced their military, psychological and economic clout and illustrate how other groups are copying these methods. Finally, the chapter will offer some reflections on what the ISAF withdrawal might signify for Western military interventions elsewhere.

Strategic development of talibanization

The Taliban insurgency has been a tactically decentralized affair that has retained a surprising degree of strategic coherence. Therein lies the first clue to its success: the existence of a layered organization that functions as a loose network while preserving the unity of purpose that comes with hierarchical structures. Any insurgent leader who was co-opted by the West or the Afghan government was swiftly labelled a renegade and deprived of the credibility that would have created a split in the insurgent movement. Throughout, the power centre of the insurgency lay in its leadership's continuing close ties with Pakistani intelligence, and the strategic advice it seems to have received therefrom.

Western analysts have noted that the Taliban have long had an innate understanding of guerrilla tactics at the field level, based on the accumulated wisdom of three decades of civil war in Afghanistan. However, in strategic terms the insurgency of 2002–14 was markedly different from any kind of campaign that the Taliban had ever waged before. This has given rise to speculation that after 2001 the Taliban leadership was following a blueprint for Maoist-style protracted warfare, provided by extraneous actors. Its own leadership showed no particular gift of generalship either before or during the 2001 invasion by US forces, thus raising the question of how Taliban leaders could have had the vision to organize a long-term resistance movement.

Calibrating operations with subversion

Evidence of such a capacity for long-term planning has increasingly come to light. It is known that the Taliban spent the years 2002–05 infiltrating large numbers of cadres into Afghanistan, from safe havens in Pakistan. These cadres, some crossing the international boundary in groups of 100 or more, avoided carrying out the large-scale attacks which were well within their means. Instead, they focused on quietly subverting the populations of remote rural areas, which could serve as bases for the coming insurgency. During this period, other Taliban forces kept Afghan and ISAF troops preoccupied along the international boundary with low-level irritants such as rocket fire and shallow penetration raids. Distracted from the Afghan interior, and subjected to a policy downgrade back home caused by preoccupation with the war in Iraq, ISAF units were unable to organize for counterinsurgency.

Airpower was a powerful tool for both sides, but in very different ways. ISAF used it to great effect while carrying out area dominance missions and decapitation strikes. The Taliban used it to showcase the 'foreignness' of their enemy and discredit the country's pro-Western leadership for not resisting the use of vastly superior force against Afghan civilians. Thus, the operational contribution of airpower in support of ISAF offensives was balanced out by the psychological boost that it gave the insurgent recruiting apparatus, largely because the insurgents did not have any ability to compete with this instrument. Since they could not be blamed for civilian lives lost in airstrikes, the Taliban used airpower (or rather, the lack of it) to justify their own resort to terrorist tactics.

Fusing terrorism and insurgency

Talibanized insurgency combines tactics of terrorism and guerrilla warfare.

Thus, insurgents in Afghanistan have developed an operational model that is resistant to 'conventional' counter-insurgent measures such as winning hearts and minds among local populations. Unless first provided with security, few rural communities will be willing to cooperate against the insurgents. Yet blanket security coverage cannot be extended throughout the countryside, due to the need to protect infrastructural targets, particularly in a rugged landscape where connectivity is poor.

Counterinsurgent commanders are then caught up in the dilemma of how best to use their limited forces efficiently. Both politically and doctrinally, Western militaries are better suited to short-duration counterterrorism missions than long-duration counter-insurgency, with its attendant task of state-building. Force structures differ dramatically between the two types of mission. Counterterrorism requires the use of stand-off firing platforms and lightly equipped helicopter-mobile special operations troops. Counterinsurgency requires an extensive on-ground infantry deployment and sustained investment in community liaison and trust-building through civic action. It also has a strong civilian component, in the form of both developmental work and political negotiation.

Keeping an eye on the prospect of eventually returning to power, the Taliban have avoided resorting to methods which would lose them popular support within their already finite, Pashtun-centric power base. Thus, they have not carried out frequent rocket attacks on population centres, as the Afghan mujahideen did during the 1980s and the subsequent civil war. In areas where they have a strong support infrastructure, they have provided advance warning to the population before launching attacks on ISAF troops. This allows the locals to escape military retribution and bolsters the Taliban's image as a people-friendly force. However, in areas where the ISAF presence is stronger and popular support for the insurgency is not as pronounced, the insurgents have been happy to carry out provocative attacks. They hope that by doing so, they can engineer a security backlash that would fall upon the locals, who would then either support the insurgency or at least suffer for not having done so.

Exploiting local tensions

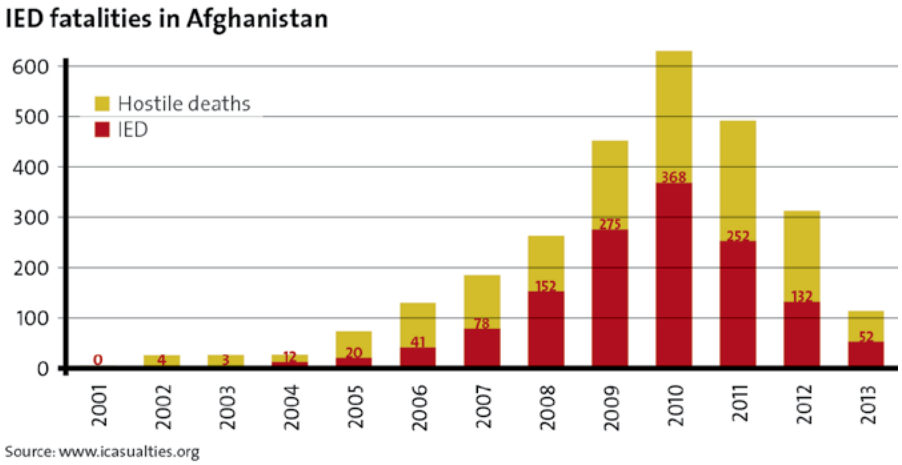
The Taliban have been especially shrewd in identifying local faultlines and grievance narratives, which they can capitalize on for recruitment. In remote villages, they begin the process of subversion by approaching influential community leaders. The

insurgents have a good idea of who these individuals are, thanks to cells of 'spotters'. If the community leaders do not respond favourably, the Taliban simply go around them and appeal directly to village youth. Another recruitment tool is the insurgents' shadow justice system. In southern Afghanistan, which is the Taliban heartland, they have installed non-local judges who arbitrate on disputes. The rulings handed out are backstopped by the clear threat of violence for non-compliance. Given the slow pace of the government judicial system, it is unsurprising that many Afghans perceive Taliban courts as a better alternative. In this way, the Taliban can claim that they are already governing large parts of the country and therefore cannot be excluded from political office in the event of a negotiated settlement to the conflict.

In areas where they have neither a support infrastructure nor scope for arbitrating local disputes, the Taliban use assassination as an instrument to shape power dynamics. They kill a government official, triggering a war of succession among various tribes who all vie to get their own candidate appointed to the vacant post. In the process, the Taliban offer their services to one of the factions, thereby introducing themselves into a political landscape from which they had previously been excluded. On other occasions, they have assassinated key individuals in order to weaken the constituency that they represent. Thus, the killing of the Pashtun leader Hamid Karzai's half-brother in 2011 weakened the Karzai clan, while that of Burhanuddin Rabbani, a former Afghan president, weakened the Jamaat-e-Islami. Both political groupings could have stood in the way of the Taliban's ambitions to capture power in the central government once the ISAF withdrawal is complete.

The Taliban as a proliferator of tactical innovations

There is, as yet, no combat theatre where the talibanized style of insurgency has been imported in its entirety as a composite model. However, elements of this style have surfaced in regions across the world where radical Islamists are active. Often, there is a direct link with Afghanistan, in the form of transnational jihadist networks forged by Al-Qaida. The Taliban themselves have contributed to the formation of these networks: Over the past decade, from being a purely local movement, the insurgents have evolved into a success story of the global jihadist community for having stood firm against Western forces. The Taliban have learnt to appreciate the value of Arab support in particular, since it has enhanced their military effectiveness by opening new channels of funding and skill-sharing.



IEDs begin to fundamentally influence war costs

The most potent weapon wielded by the Taliban has been the improvised explosive device (IED). In previous conflicts, IEDs were a means of tactical attrition. With the recent insurgencies in Iraq and Afghanistan, they have transformed into instruments of strategic coercion. Their usage is characterized by a double asymmetry which works in favour of insurgents and terrorist groups. First, the time required to develop new IED designs is less than the time required to develop countermeasures. The pace of technology change thus allows insurgents to dictate the pace of operational activity, since military commanders are compelled to focus on force protection until counter-IED systems become available. Second, there is an asymmetry of costs: Afghan IEDs can be built for as little as $265 apiece. The US government, in contrast, spent $18 billion on designing and manufacturing bomb-detection equipment. There have been further costs, amounting to $45 billion in mine-proof vehicles.

This double asymmetry skewers the cost-benefit ratio of waging counter-insurgency far from Western borders, with all the attendant difficulties of arranging force logistics overseas. Governments are not keen to bear the expense of fighting technologically-advanced guerrillas. Insurgents on the other hand have few inhibitions about projecting their power through foreign training missions: As early as 1991, Hizbollah operatives taught Al-Qaida how to assemble large vehicle-borne IEDs. Al-Qaida eagerly absorbed these lessons because it wanted to emulate Hizbollah's area

denial success in driving out US and French military forces from Lebanon in the 1980s – a feat that Osama bin Laden was determined to surpass in his own fight with the West. Likewise, the Taliban acquired their competence in IED-manufacturing through knowledge transfer from Iraqi jihadist trainers in 2004–05.

There is little reason to believe that the insurgents in Afghanistan, having benefited from foreign assistance, will not now engage in skill-sharing themselves, and arm jihadist groups elsewhere with the technical knowledge to mass-produce anti-personnel and anti-vehicle mines. The Taliban have already demonstrated the capacity to build 8000 IEDs annually, or a little more than 22 per day. This is more than the British army faced in over 30 years of insurgency in Northern Ireland, where the IED first made its appearance as a tool of guerrilla warfare in the early 1970s.

Cultural norms no barrier to adaptation

Sceptics may argue that cultural differences will limit the widespread emulation of Taliban-style IED attacks in other theatres. The historical record is not promising in this regard. Traditionally, Afghan Islam has been more tribalist than fundamentalist. Suicide bombing in particular was frowned upon. Although the first such bombing occurred in May 2003, it was not until 2006 that suicide attacks became a regular feature of Taliban operations. The attitudinal shift occurred because Iraqi insurgent trainers, based on their own experience of combat against US troops, advised the Taliban that regular use of this tactic would help in eliminating the focal points of Western counterinsurgency efforts.

Despite being initially reluctant to break the Islamic taboo against suicide, Afghan insurgents were eventually won over by operational logic. Assassinations which had previously been difficult to carry out became easy; in just one year (2005–06), success rates shot up from 40 % to 85 %. Initially sourced from among foreign militants fighting in Afghanistan, suicide bombers were soon coming from communities who had suffered from ISAF counterinsurgency operations. Not content with just this source of recruits, the Taliban also abducted children from remote areas and indoctrinated them for suicide attacks. Knowing that women and children are less likely to be screened at security checkpoints, the Taliban have used girls as young as eight years as human bombs. In a similar vein, they have pioneered the use of 'turban bombs'. Many Afghan men wear turbans and

consider it an insult if asked to remove these for security screening. Through experimenting with such tactics, the Taliban have found that breaking societal norms and resorting to underhand methods of attack (even by local standards) pays handsome military dividends that offset the cost to their public image.

Since 2007, it appears that Chechen militants have made the same discovery in the South Caucasus. The so-called 'Caucasus Emirate', a network of local jihadists with pronounced sympathy for Al-Qaida, has carried out an unrelenting war of attrition against Russian security forces and civilians. Unlike the early Chechen separatists of the 1990s, these jihadists do not care about international opinion. They are not interested in appealing to the out-groups that they are fighting, but only in winning the respect of their relatively small in-group. As a result, since 2009 they have been carrying out provocative attacks on soft targets, in part because they are competing alongside regional franchises of Al-Qaida to attract fresh funding and volunteers from the global jihadist community. Jihadists in Syria and Mali currently have an edge in the race for resources. Since these are 'new' conflict areas – the jihadist equivalent of emerging markets – improvisation of weaponry and especially IEDs has been noticeable as a result of advice received from foreign militants. The appearance of suicide bombings targeted at peacekeeping forces in Mali is an example.

Strategic communication as part of the battlespace

Another field in which the insurgents have been surprisingly adept is propaganda, or what is known as 'strategic communication'. Aimed at influencing perceptions that are held by the adversary as well as neutral observers, strategic communication is a tool used to wear down the adversary's morale and raise doubts about the legitimacy of his cause. The war in Afghanistan has seen this tool becoming ever more potent. For a group whose ideological slant once opposed digital entertainment, the Taliban have had few qualms about waging digital insurgency. Radio broadcasts and DVDs of the insurgents' recruiters delivering fiery sermons are widely accessible in Afghanistan. The Taliban even operate websites expounding on their vision of an Islamic state. Knowing that doctrinaire ideas about banning female education would not go down well with the populace, the insurgents have moderated their rhetoric. They now claim to have no objection to girls' schooling, but oppose the 'Westernization' of school curricula and mixed-gender classes. These

are issues that most Afghans find no quarrel with.

Most impressive of all has been the insurgents' ability to shape perceptions of the actual conduct of operations on the ground, and the results achieved. Contrary to notions of the group's strong motivation levels, evidence from the field suggests that violent coercion plays a part in driving Taliban fighters into battle. Insurgent campsites raided by ISAF have yielded signs of drug use, in the form of used syringes, while defectors have spoken about fratricidal killings as a result of harsh discipline. Analysis of the insurgency's micro-politics reveals a fragmented structure, with considerable autonomy being granted to subordinate commanders. Yet none of this has dispelled the notion that the Taliban are a rigidly hierarchical entity with the capability to significantly influence violence levels in Afghanistan. This ability to appear far more motivated and capable than they really are has been a key component of the insurgents' psychological warfare campaign.

Several commentators have remarked on the speed with which the Taliban contacts the international media and disseminates its own version of a story, leaving ISAF and Afghan government forces with the burden of establishing the actual facts and issuing a rebuttal. The insurgents can plant a story in the Western media within an hour of a newsworthy incident occurring. In contrast, ISAF and Afghan spokesmen almost never possess the full facts at short notice. This breeds a crisis of credibility and confidence as far as larger audiences are concerned, since they extrapolate the military situation based on the public relations performance of government officials.

The Taliban can also provide subversive entertainment, in the form of social media duels with NATO spokesmen. Though amusing to read, the exchanges serve to equate the insurgents with the Western forces who are fighting them. Every propaganda point made by the latter is swiftly met with a riposte from the Taliban, thus weakening the overall impression of progress that is crucial to maintaining public support for counterinsurgency. In this regard, the Somali group Al-Shabaab seems to be copying the Taliban. During its September 2013 attack on the Westgate Mall in Nairobi, Al-Shabaab kept up a running commentary via Twitter. Seeking to ridicule the Kenyan government, the group was successful in creating a widespread impression of tactical incompetence on the part of Kenyan security forces. Interestingly, both the Taliban and Al-Shabaab seem to have begun using Twitter as an instrument

Social Media warfare

ISAF and Taliban, Afghanistan

Al-Shabaab, Kenya/Somalia

of psychological warfare at exactly the same time, in September 2011.

Complex ambushes despite Western air supremacy

Western militaries are reliant on airpower when operating overseas. This is both an asset and a liability. On the one hand, airpower provides a supply lifeline as well as badly-needed fire support during combat engagements. On the other, its importance to the effectiveness of counterinsurgency makes guerrillas highly adaptive to the threat it poses. This has been seen in Afghanistan, where the Taliban have learnt to live with the limitations that hostile airpower usage poses to their operations in a relatively open, arid region. Other insurgent groups will not be far behind in learning that Western airpower threats can indeed be circumvented, even as attacks on ground forces continue unabated.

Initially the Taliban targeted heavy vehicles, hoping that such attacks would cause more casualties. Subsequently they shifted to smaller IEDs, which were intended only for use against foot patrols. By doing this they nullified the counterinsurgency policy being employed by Western units, that of trying to build good relations with Afghan villagers through directly engaging with them. Anti-infantry IEDs ensured that patrols avoided staying in any one locality long enough to be ambushed. In the process, villagers understood the larger message: Western soldiers were worried for their own safety, and could not be counted on to provide protection against the insurgents for any length of time. Many villages thus avoided sharing intelligence with ISAF troops, and some even prepared to reach an accommodation with the insurgents, as and when the ISAF would eventually leave.

During this phase (2007–09) Western forces still maintained a high rate of operational activity, compelling the insurgents to do battle whenever they were discovered. In one 14-month period, 3000 engagements took place between the Taliban and security forces in just two provinces of southern Afghanistan, while another 1300 occurred in the east. During these engagements the Taliban would concentrate fire onto the enemy's communications equipment and heavy weaponry. The insurgents had learned from experience how long it took ISAF airpower to deploy in support of ground forces, and tried to ensure that they could break off contact before it arrived. Recently, French troops in Mali recovered documents suggesting that the lessons learnt by the Taliban are being disseminated widely to other jihadist groups. The documents captured in Mali included an exhaustive list of suggestions for avoiding contact with Western air forces, and focused especially on the risk of drone strikes.

The tactical sophistication of Taliban operations increased in 2009. The guerrillas fought pitched battles in which they used mortars to get foreign troops to take cover, and then hit them with rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs) and automatic fire. Firing positions were changed often. Radio discipline – a key weakness which had often been exploited in the past by Western signals intelligence capability – was better maintained while on the move. As a precaution against bombardment, the insurgents learned to water down the ground, to prevent dust from being kicked whenever a mortar was used and thereby giving away their location. They also showed good fire control, launching RPGs in coordinated attacks from different directions onto individual targets. Their fields of fire interlocked, with machine guns being used to continuously suppress targets even as mortar and RPG teams set up new firing positions. RPGs were used to disable armoured vehicles rather than destroy them outright, since the crew members became vulnerable to small arms fire in any case when they attempted to exit the vehicle. Irrigation ditches were a favourite firing position for Taliban machine gun and mortar teams, since they provided effective cover while manoeuvring away from an essentially road-bound enemy. Given the similarities between Afghanistan and the tactical topography of Mali – large arid expanses with scattered communities – French and United Nations forces might expect to encounter similar tactics in the future. The fact that jihadists in North Africa openly fight under the Al-Qaida franchise suggests that if and when Al-Qaida's core leadership acquires a

safe haven in post-ISAF Afghanistan, the fallout will not be long in appearing across other conflict zones where Islamist insurgencies are being waged.

Tactical deception and counterintelligence

Insurgencies are, to a large degree, a game of intelligence and counterintelligence. The Taliban have shown a strong understanding of Western counterintelligence techniques, using this to plan attacks that leave a small logistical footprint. With few leads to follow, investigators have difficulty in identifying the persons behind a terrorist incident in an urban area. The attack methods used by the insurgents are: cross-networking (deploying cadres from multiple area commands, or even loaned from other militias) and suicidal assaults conducted in security forces uniforms.

The Taliban have been helped by the virtually non-existent capability of Afghan officialdom to regulate the manufacture and sale of security forces uniforms. On numerous occasions, insurgents have used police and army uniforms to attack protected locations or otherwise engage in 'black' operations – killing civilians and attributing responsibility to the security forces. In yet another ploy, they have infiltrated sympathizers into the security forces as bona fide recruits. These 'sleeper' agents remain dormant for months, learning weapon drills and winning the trust of their colleagues, before carrying out surprise attacks, usually in the form of shooting rampages. ISAF troops have been badly hit by such encounters, which understandably lead to tensions between the Afghan and foreign troops and greatly reduce their ability to operate jointly. Considering that much of the Western effort in counterinsurgency campaigns consists of local capacity-building, the risk of insider attacks in other combat threats is only likely to grow. European training missions in northern and central Africa, if deployed for any length of time, could be especially vulnerable to such attacks unless strict personnel vetting standards are maintained for recruits to the local police and military.

Organized crime as a funding source

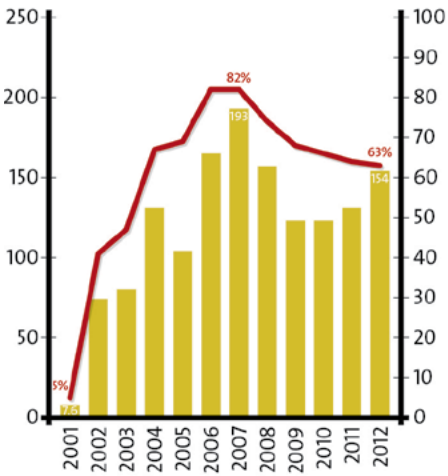
Talibanized insurgency is a lucrative business opportunity for criminal entrepreneurs. Anecdotal evidence suggests that insurgents in Afghanistan cooperate with the private armies of drug lords. Besides taxing the drug trade, in the form of extracting hard cash and/or material goods such as vehicles, the insurgents offer physical protection for drug convoys. On occasion, they have even been suspected of staging attacks to draw away security forces' attention from border

crossing points where traffickers were moving drugs. If these reports are accurate, the personnel losses suffered by the Taliban would still be worthwhile. Although authoritative estimates are impossible to come by, it has been speculated that the Taliban receive about 40 % of their funding from the Afghan drug trade.

ISAF and Afghan government efforts to curtail the trade have backfired. First, opium eradication was seen as an assault on the already impoverished Afghan peasantry. The Taliban were quick to offer monetary support to affected farmers, asking in return that they assist the insurgency. Many were happy to do this. Meanwhile, the destruction of opium farms in government-controlled territory had the unforeseen side-effect of driving up prices in territory controlled by the Taliban, thus strengthening the insurgency's financial base. In recognition of their mistake, ISAF commanders thereafter attempted to pursue the traffickers directly. However, almost all trafficking syndicates had a measure of local government protection, in some cases extending to the authorities in Kabul.

Poppy cultivation in Afghanistan

in hectares and % of global cultivation



Sources: UNODC, Islamic Republic of Afghanistan Ministry of Counter Narcotics

Besides drugs, the Taliban also generate revenue by extortion. Shopkeepers are expected to pay 10 % of their earnings to the insurgents, while trucks plying the national highways have to pay 'road taxes'. Since Afghan security forces also engage in such practices, which are blatantly illegal, the Taliban are not perceived any worse than the police as far as economic predation goes. Rather, the relatively disciplined manner of their cadres generates a favourable impression upon most Afghans.

The criminal dimension makes Taliban-style insurgency more resilient to action by security forces. It may also make insurgent factions more volatile and prone to competitive extremes of violence. The January 2013 assault upon a gas field in Algeria was partly

caused by a disagreement over the division of proceeds from cigarette smuggling. A local commander, upon being accused of paying more attention to his personal racketeering business than to waging jihad, decided to prove his critics wrong by carrying out a major terrorist attack on Western workers at the gas field. In a slightly different vein, drug cartels in Mexico have become far more violent as a result of combat skills introduced by deserters from the Mexican army and police. Lured by salaries that are twelve times higher than what they could earn in government service, many combat specialists have joined the drug cartels as mercenaries, ratcheting up violence levels in gang warfare. It is interesting to note that certain Mexican drug lords have been openly compared to the Taliban, due to their penchant for mutilating and beheading victims and displaying the severed body parts in public spaces.

Curtailing Western interventionism

The Taliban insurgency in Afghanistan has managed to withstand the best prescriptions of counterinsurgency theory and practice. Its resilience has encouraged other jihadist movements elsewhere in the world in the belief that Western military forces can be defeated over time. Although there exist no insurgent groups with the capacity to prevent a modern Western army from entering their territory, preventing such an army from operating freely is an easier task. Anti-access would not be a threat to Western force projection efforts in such a scenario, but area denial very likely would be.

Given that Western militaries are being forced to economize, it is safe to suggest that talibanized insurgency offers a model that other Islamist guerrillas would study carefully. There are already worrying signs in Mali, where the initial success of French military intervention bears some resemblance to the immediate aftermath of the 2001 Afghanistan invasion. Instead of staying to fight, the bulk of the Malian rebels have scattered to cross-border sanctuaries in Libya and Chad. If they now build up a capability for political subversion, using the highly organized, Maoist-like strategy developed by the Taliban, the Malian rebels could eventually hope to regain much of what they have lost. The Taliban are already getting close to doing so, despite having fought a numerically much stronger force than has so far been deployed in North Africa. With the French military component being downsized and United Nations peacekeeping troops currently functioning at half their sanctioned strength, the operational environment in Mali is favourable to a Taliban-style insurgency.

History shows that international terrorism received a major boost following the US withdrawal from Vietnam. A belief that strong military powers can be humbled through terrorist tactics runs through much of Al-Qaida's ideological and operational thinking. With the war in Afghanistan now close to ending on less than favourable terms for the West, it is necessary to anticipate the fallout that this conflict could have upon other regions in the developing world, where Western interests are threatened. Following a decade of unsuccessful efforts to reshape attitudes and societies in regions where Islamist insurgencies are active, Western societies have grown more preoccupied with domestic affairs and have little appetite for sustained foreign interventions. Knowing this, insurgent leaders are likely to continue waging regional conflict without concern for Western military power. In short, the West may leave Afghanistan, but Afghanistan will not leave the West for several years to come.

CHAPTER 4

Mounting challenges to geostrategic access

Michael Haas

The foundations of the US-sponsored global security system are crumbling. Prospective state and non-state challengers are steadily improving their ability to deny the United States, and its major allies, effective access to vital portions of the sea, air, space, and cyber domains. As their relative capability wanes and operational constraints accumulate, the deterrent value of forward-deployed combat forces is called into question. With its bedrock of military power exposed and subject to erosion, the future of the liberal security order is in the balance.

A United States Navy carrier strike group conducts exercises, somewhere in the Atlantic, 10 December 2013

The durability of the US-centric system of global security provision is now a matter of growing concern for strategic planners around the world. At the source of their preoccupations are doubts regarding the ability of the system's underwriters to sustain long-standing commitments in the face of increasing military and economic constraints. Chief among these are restrictions on the unmatched ability of the US armed forces – and, at a much lower level, those of first echelon allies like the United Kingdom and France – to position, sustain, and leverage superior combat power when and where it is needed. Some now fear that, as the global reach on which they ultimately depend is curtailed, established security arrangements will wither.

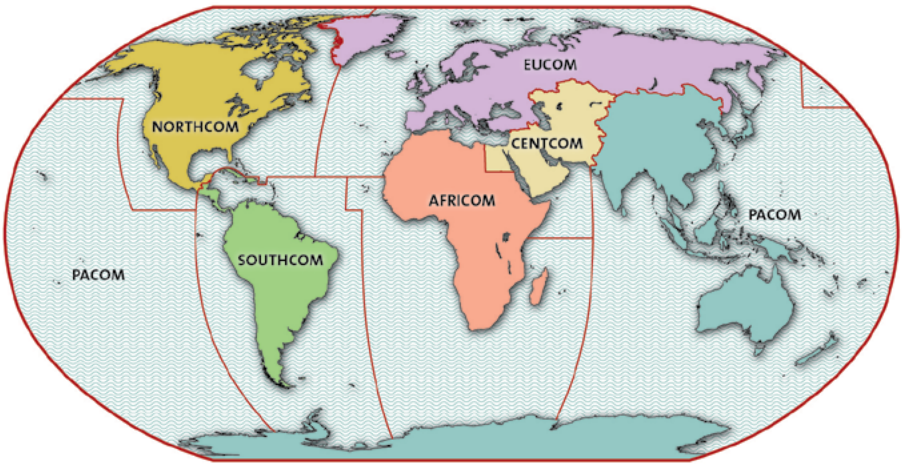
Several developments feed into this perception. As advanced military capabilities proliferate and emergent powers seek control over their environment, the United States' military edge is blunted, as is also explored in the next chapter by Martin Zapfe. Simultaneously, shrinking defence budgets and contracting defence-industrial bases accentuate the burdens associated with maintaining a meaningful level of qualitative superiority. Should regional actors succeed in carving out 'contested zones' that are beyond the effective reach of long-range power projection, the guardians of the geostrategic status quo will find it ever more difficult to shore up local allies and to counter revisionist initiatives.

In fact, China's military modernization efforts are already beginning to neutralize core elements of the United States' military access network, even as Beijing's growing assertiveness along its periphery is stimulating the demand for US security provision. With forward bases exposed to missile attacks, carrier strike groups at risk from Chinese integrated defences, and battle networks susceptible to disruption, the operational advantages of the US military and its regional auxiliaries are melting away.

Much more circumscribed challenges are presented by a range of asymmetric warfare capabilities that smaller powers, such as Iran and North Korea, are fielding to reduce US freedom of action close to their shores. While they lack the depth and sustainability of a fully-fledged counter-intervention strategy, such approaches can nonetheless complicate the operational calculus of, and inflict substantial losses on, an intruding force. While it is likely to be accompanied by a level of self-deterrence and subject to important constraints, the availability to these actors of nuclear or chemical

A blueprint for global security provision

US geographic Combatant Commands according to the Unified Command Plan



Source: US Department of Defense

arms will not fail to further exacerbate these complications.

Meanwhile, disruptive non-state actors continue to thrive in spaces of contested governance, some of which sit astride important lines of communication. Unlike capable state actors, their ability to deny major military powers access to their region is minimal. But as they acquire weapons of growing sophistication, the costs of military intervention into these spaces are rising and the chances of operational success are reduced. Likely imbalances in motivation and casualty acceptance serve to underline these restrictions.

From a European perspective, this heralds a period of growing uncertainty about future defence requirements and traditional modes of burden-sharing. With their relative military capability in precipitous decline, the global weight of European states is further reduced. But while the hegemonic bargains of old remain superficially intact, Europe is unlikely to wake up to the shifting requirements of global security provision any time soon.

The sinews of supremacy

Expeditionary military capabilities have played a fundamental role in shaping and sustaining successive

incarnations of Western global supremacy. The United States, in particular, has built and maintained an extensive system of alliances and security partnerships supported by a large overseas military presence. This system has allowed the US and its allies to restructure the global security environment – centred on the core regions of Europe, the Middle East, and East Asia – to an extent that is quite literally without parallel in human history.

Outside their home regions, only America's most capable allies – the United Kingdom and France – have been able to make a meaningful contribution to this effort, whereas such countries as Japan, Germany, Italy, Spain, Australia, and South Korea have acted as auxiliaries mainly at a regional level. It is only in the less stringent and more fragmented security environment of the post-Cold War era that the expeditionary impulse has become an important driver of force structure decisions for second and third echelon allies.

Like other hierarchical schemes for security provision before it, the current system is based on political commitments to defend its clients in the face of external threats, backed up by the credible combat potential of the security providers' armed forces. While some have argued that the salience of military power in international politics is on the wane, it remains the *sine qua non* of collaborative security provision. However, where commitments are multiple and their geographic scope is extensive, force levels are rarely – if ever – sufficient to physically backstop all of them simultaneously. As in a banking system, potential liabilities always exceed the actual capabilities available to the creditor, often by a very significant margin. In dealing with this structural shortfall in the ultimate currency of security provision, the key requirements are strategic mobility and geostrategic access.

Strategic mobility is the linchpin of system maintenance, in both a physical and psychological sense. Only if security providers possess the factual ability to deploy, re-deploy, and leverage adequate military resources to shore up the system when and where it is necessary, can they hope to retain the trust and allegiance of their clients. In security systems that span several regions, such mobility has traditionally been provided by naval forces. Like the air forces by which they are now complemented, naval assets are either self-projecting or able to project other elements of a nation's armed forces.

In order to project and sustain a substantial fraction of its combat forces overseas in support of its

commitments, an outside power must secure geostrategic access – that is, the requisite freedom of action to establish and maintain a political-military presence within a given theatre. This presupposes the existence of sufficient projection forces, control over lines of communication to the theatre, and the availability of facilities for disembarkation, staging, and support, which can take the form either of temporary installations or fixed bases.

To effectively leverage his combat potential, the security provider must also assure access at the operational level, which results in the ability to conduct military operations with sufficient freedom of action and effectiveness to accomplish their aims. This requires that forces deployed into the theatre be survivable and logistically sustainable in the face of enemy action.

In hierarchical orders that consist of sovereign political units, access usually depends on the acquiescence of security consumers, who also tend to provide many of the facilities and services on which the security providers' forward-deployed forces rely. To the extent that this is the case, security provision and geostrategic access are, in fact, mutually dependent.

While these arrangements are beneficial to all involved, the benefits are not equally distributed. Hence, the United States in particular gets vastly more out of its global military presence than does any single client or grouping of clients. In other words, the safeguarding of security providers' national security interests and the provision of protective services go hand in hand. It is entirely plausible, in fact, that while they require effective military access to provide for the security of others, the system's underwriters are in the security provision business mainly to gain and retain this access for their own non-altruistic purposes.

To guarantee the integrity of these arrangements, the US and its major allies have consistently acted – from the Korean War to the Persian Gulf War to the ongoing island disputes in the East and South China Seas – to avert emerging military challenges and prevent other powers from carving out exclusive rights that could diminish their strategic prominence. However, as Western economic, military, and ideological dominance gives way to a more polycentric distribution of power, the days of unfettered access are almost certainly coming to a close.

Denial dawning

US security provision efforts, whether undertaken unilaterally or in concert with the more capable among its allies, have never gone entirely unopposed.

In past decades, rudimentary cost-imposing strategies have attained modest successes in several instances.

During Operation Desert Storm, Iraq utilized low-cost and obsolete moored mines to limit coalition naval forces' operational freedom of action inside the Persian Gulf. While the overall impact on naval operations was limited, a guided missile cruiser and an amphibious assault ship were severely damaged by mine strikes. The employment of Scud-type ballistic missiles against allied staging areas and political centres of gravity entailed both direct and indirect costs, including the diversion of significant US resources.

During the Kosovo War of 1999, Serb air defence forces proved extremely adept at limiting their exposure to NATO's suppression of enemy air defences (SEAD) and limited the alliance's operational freedom of action throughout the campaign. As a result of force protection measures taken in response to the persistent surface-to-air threat and Serb deception, NATO air forces failed miserably in their efforts to destroy mobile military targets inside Kosovo itself.

Also, in October 2000, an Al-Qaida terrorist cell struck the guided-missile destroyer USS Cole, while it was refuelling inside the Yemeni port of Aden. Utilizing a primitive shaped charge placed inside a small boat, the suicide attack inflicted severe damage and killed 17 US sailors, with another 39 injured in the blast.

As none of these attacks were indicative of serious constraints on either geostrategic or operational access, they are better conceptualized as limited attempts at area denial. In fact, in the unipolar international order that took shape in the immediate post-Cold War era, US and allied freedom of action was never in serious dispute. Yet, as the full weight of Western power projection – unconstrained by any meaningful geostrategic counterweight and enabled by the burgeoning informational revolution in military affairs – became apparent, countervailing tendencies of a far more sophisticated nature began to stir.

With the Iraqi and Serbian defeats fresh in their minds, potential targets of Western military interference – prominently including the Chinese People's Liberation Army (PLA) – began to invest in capabilities and operational frameworks designed with the sole intent of offsetting US and allied superiority at acceptable cost. As they expand the means and diversify the approaches available to them for access denial purposes, these efforts are now beginning to bear fruit.

Entrepreneurs of exclusion

As it is through the forward presence of its military establishment that the dominant role of the United States in the security affairs of the three core regions is maintained, the only reliable way for a challenger to reduce this role is to be able to negate its military component. Several key vulnerabilities present themselves for exploitation. Above all else, the current access regime is highly dependent on a relatively small number of forward bases and carrier battle groups. In quantitative terms, most of its forward-deployed striking power is concentrated in short-range aircraft. Finally, the entire system is held together by vulnerable space assets and computer networks that are almost certainly susceptible to some degree of disruption.

Most of the military anti-access approaches that are currently in evidence directly target one or several of these vulnerabilities. In doing so, they are harnessing two major sources of military change: proliferation dynamics in the area of advanced conventional weapons and doctrinal innovation. While the former provide a growing number of actors with increased levels of capability to inflict damage on a capable opponent, it is the latter that ties these military-technological potentials into a system that provides operationally significant combat power.

As far as the 'hardware' component is concerned, most analyses emphasize a number of key capabilities that are seen as constituting the core of a 'modern' anti-access defence: Sophisticated anti-ship missiles (ASMs) and extended air defence systems provide a means of keeping all but the stealthiest and most survivable attack platforms at bay. Equipped with advanced torpedoes and mines, as well as longer-range ASMs, the presence of even a few silent diesel-electric submarines can disrupt an intruder's sea lines of communication and seriously complicate forward operations. Conventionally armed ballistic missiles are an ideal asset for attacks against well-defended area targets, such as airbases. Meanwhile, anti-satellite (ASAT) weapons and other means of information warfare could severely degrade the command and control (C2), intelligence, surveillance and reconaissance (ISR) as well as precision targeting without which the tightly coordinated and fast-paced operations preferred by Western militaries are bound to falter.

The technological basis for such defensive advantage is, however, highly variable. Even obsolete weaponry of little independent value can be used to great effect, if it is properly integrated into a suitable doctrinal framework for its use. So embedded, the range

of instruments that can be utilized for anti-access or more limited area denial purposes is very broad indeed – potentially including anything from an explosive-laden dinghy to a full-scale thermonuclear weapon. Therefore, successful approaches are not likely to be dominated by any single element, no matter how novel or impressive.

More than their individual components, it is the complexity of the challenge that the intervening power is presented with – the tactical and operational dilemmas which it entails – that makes such approaches difficult to overcome. In this regard, idiosyncratic mixtures of high-tech and low-tech instruments may prove particularly successful in disrupting the preferred patterns of Western military operations.

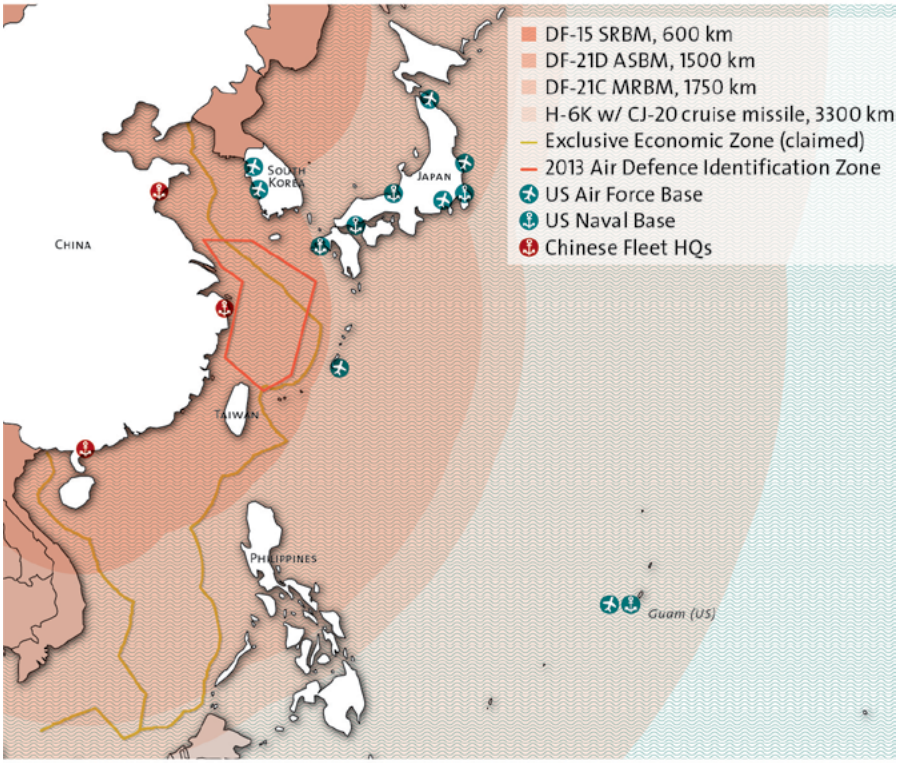
Engineering a high-end challenge

Over the last two decades, the military organization that has made the most progress in creating a multi-layered system for access denial is China's People's Liberation Army. Under the long-standing monikers of 'active defence' and 'local wars under informatized conditions', the PLA is now fielding a diverse portfolio of missile, air, and naval forces optimized for counter-intervention operations in the narrow seas along China's periphery, and in the Taiwan Strait in particular. In fact, this effort has become an archetype to which analytical treatments of current access denial challenges overwhelmingly have reference.

While it includes most of the 'core' capabilities commonly associated with anti-access and area denial, some elements of the Chinese approach have been singled out as being particularly significant. Chief among these is the world's first partially-operational anti-ship ballistic missile (ASBM), a variant of the medium-range DongFeng(DF)-21 that is currently being introduced into the PLA's Second Artillery Force. Carrying a manoeuvrable re-entry body, it is designed to disable a large, moving surface target – such as an aircraft carrier or one of its escorts – over ranges in excess of 1500 kilometres. With land-based firepower reaching this far into the high seas, naval operations may no longer be dominated by surface warships in a 21st century setting.

Given that the effective range of current and projected carrier aircraft is significantly shorter, and airbases in the region would probably be under simultaneous ballistic and cruise missile attack, this presents a major challenge for the United States' regional posture. In conjunction with other land- and sea-based systems, the ASBM could throw a protective umbrella over

China's anti-access footprint



Sources: Air Power Australia, Chinese Ministry of National Defence, Congressional Research Service

Chinese forces operating in the South and East China Seas. US attempts at re-establishing control over denied areas would initially have to rely on a very limited range of assets, including its attack and cruise missile submarines, and its small fleet of stealthy B-2 bombers. Moreover, as a land-based system enabled by sensors deployed in space, direct attack on any element of China's ASBM capability would raise daunting issues of escalation control.

Another focal area of China's access denial efforts has been its anti-satellite programme, which should be seen as part of a broader preoccupation with offensive information warfare. Besides its kinetic ASAT capability, the PRC is also thought to have developed non-kinetic means of disrupting the space-based enablers on which the US military critically depends. As a kinetic offensive in space would invite US retaliation in kind, and

produce enough destructive debris to permanently impair both civilian and military uses of space, a focus on the latter variants would seem to provide the rising anti-access power with more attractive lines of effort.

China is also known to have one of the world's most active programmes for cyberwarfare and espionage, and has already scored major successes on this front. According to an official US government report, this includes the theft in recent years of highly classified data relating *inter alia* to the Joint Strike Fighter, the Littoral Combat Ship, the Terminal High Altitude Area Defense anti-missile system, and more than 20 other major defence acquisition efforts.

However, in the current debate, cyber operations are being emphasized at the expense of a broader concern with the electromagnetic spectrum at large – that is, electronic warfare (EW) in all its various dimensions. As far as actual combat is concerned, the impact of EW on vital command, communications, and targeting functions is likely to significantly outrank that of cyberactivities, narrowly conceived. Conversely, the benefits of effective countermeasures will be more tangible in this well-established but widely underappreciated area of military operations.

Overall, it is critical that analysts develop an integrated understanding of these various capabilities, and of the basic strategic tendencies and operational inclinations that they reflect. Perhaps most worryingly, there is evidence of a strong preemptive streak in the Chinese conceptualization of anti-access warfare, which depends on the shaping effects of early offensive operations to overwhelm a US and allied posture that is still markedly superior in most respects. It would thus seem that the PLA is setting itself up for a destabilizing competition to 'get in the first blow' – a competition that an offensively-oriented US Navy and Air Force are unlikely to spurn.

Pushing back with limited means

If China has become the paragon of full-scale access denial, the best examples of lower-level approaches to counter-intervention are currently presented by Iran and the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK). While both of these countries are severely hampered by economic infirmities and technological barriers, they are now deploying an array of low-cost forces designed to complicate an intervening power's access requirements as it closes in on their respective territories. While these measures are likely to crumble under the concentrated blows of US power projection, supported in both regions by increasingly

capable regional allies, they may well shift the balance of mutual deterrence in favour of the local challenger.

The Iranian and North Korean anti-access approaches have several major elements in common. Firstly, both countries are fielding large arsenals of conventionally armed ballistic missiles that serve as partial compensation for their deficits in combat aviation. Based on essentially the same Soviet-derived technologies which were passed on to Iran by the North Koreans, these arsenals each consist of hundreds of Scud-type short-range missiles and a significantly smaller number of medium-range missiles.

All of these weapons are likely to be effective only against large area targets and, because they are hardly immune to interception and their radius of damage is small relative to any conceivable target, only when fired *en masse*. However, when targeted at large military installations or civilian infrastructure, they can cause substantial disruption and impose costs that the intervening power may well consider unacceptable. In conjunction with other instruments, they can thus be expected to serve as a valuable deterrent in many lower-level crisis situations.

A second key element in both the Iranian and North Korean approaches is asymmetric naval capabilities. While Iran's conventional navy is weak, with surface forces made up of obsolete platforms that would fall an easy prey to any capable adversary, it controls the only submarine fleet in the region. Composed of a small number of modern, Russian-built diesels as well as domestically-built coastal and midget submarines, this is a force to be reckoned with in the confined and shallow waters of the Gulf. Given the extremely difficult sonar conditions that are likely to prevail there, US and allied anti-submarine efforts are unlikely to yield quick results.

Perhaps even more difficult to counter are the unconventional naval forces of the Pasdaran (or Iranian Revolutionary Guards Corps), which comprise as many as 150 fast patrol craft, most of which are well-armed. Like the submarine force, their operations are aided by the favourable geography of the Gulf. With a doctrine of high-speed, decentralized operations, these swarms of small boats could make for a cramped and volatile tactical environment.

North Korea's naval force structure is somewhat similarly balanced, comprising even larger numbers of both surface and sub-surface units. While these vessels have scant chances of survival against a first-class navy, the

2010 sinking of the South Korean corvette Cheonan by a DPRK midget submarine underlined the cost-imposing potential possessed even by low-value asymmetric assets.

By distributing their firepower in so many small packages, each one of which is individually expendable, Iranian and North Korean naval forces are leveraging the proximity advantage of the local defender and countering the superiority of the major surface combatant with speed, concealment, surprise, and sheer numbers. Crucially, as the intruder closes in on the defender's shores, the coastal state can also bring its land-based firepower to bear in support of such distributed naval operations.

A third element that both states emphasize is passive defence, which provides an extremely cost-effective means of limiting their exposure to Western strike warfare from the air and sea. Iran is known to be a leading maker of ultra-high-performance concrete for both civilian and military applications, and has moved major elements of its nuclear and missile programmes underground for fear of Western air attack. North Korea has deployed much of its front-line heavy artillery in caves and other hardened firing positions to protect it from allied counter-battery fire, and is almost certainly storing any nuclear weapons components inside extremely hard, or deeply buried, facilities.

While the US armed forces in particular have made defeating such methods a priority mission, and are fielding both conventional and nuclear weapons developed for this specific purpose, the advantage here lies with the defender. In fact, when covered by thick-enough layers of solid rock, such facilities may be beyond the reach of even a megaton-class thermo-nuclear warhead.

While they are not without limitations even at the tactical level, nuclear weapons constitute an extremely potent counter-intervention capability. Both Iran and North Korea have invested a significant portion of their limited resources in this area, and have been targeted by US and allied coercive diplomacy to avert their acquisition of these 'ultimate' weapons. So far, only the DPRK has succeeded in creating an embryonic nuclear arsenal and delivery system. Meanwhile, Iran's attempted development of a precursor capability has been slowed down by stringent non-proliferation efforts and is currently subject to extensive international controls.

As is evident from these two cases, as well as several other failed acquisition

attempts, international pressure – not entirely coincidentally orchestrated by the United States and its major allies – now presents would-be nuclear powers with significant and possibly insurmountable obstacles. The possession and use of chemical weapons, which could also constitute a potent disincentive to intervening powers, is also being targeted by global norm-enforcement efforts. Moreover, overreliance on such highly escalatory instruments would confront inferior powers with unpleasant choices should deterrence ever fail.

It is therefore likely that conventional weaponry married to asymmetric operational concepts will continue to dominate the 'anti-Western way in warfare'. In Iran's case, the salience of these approaches in its defence strategy will undoubtedly increase further as additional restrictions are imposed on its nuclear work. Its attempts at acquiring a credible ASBM capability of its own – though unlikely to succeed in the near term – would seem to point in this direction. In those cases where they are present, nuclear and chemical weapons will no doubt impose considerable limitations on access operations and present delicate challenges for escalation control.

Missiles from the void

A final challenge to Western geostrategic access is presented by non-state and hybrid actors and their ongoing quest to assert control over spaces of contested governance. While the long war on global Islamic jihadism has led to an unprecedented expansion of US and allied 'shadow warfare' activities, both territorially organized and transnational militant groups of this type continue to thrive throughout the greater Middle East, in East Africa, and beyond.

In some respects, deep US and allied interference in these regions is now proving profoundly counterproductive. Having plundered the arsenals of the decaying autocracies in Libya and Syria with the infelicitous assistance of Western governments caught up in normative pretensions of their own making, and receiving state support from Western allies in the Gulf region, a number of militant groups are now increasing their operational reach and expanding their arms portfolios.

The most impressive example of the recent growth in non-state military capability, however, remains the Hezbollah militia. With generous backing from Syria and Iran, the 'Party of God' has not only amassed tens of thousands of artillery rockets, which now make it the first non-state actor to possess a fully-fledged strategic attack capacity vis-à-vis a sovereign state. It has also proved itself capable

of contesting Israeli operational access from the sea by launching several Iranian-supplied ASMs at the missile corvette INS Hanit during the 2006 Lebanon War. Reportedly, this limited potential for anti-shipping operations has recently been augmented by samples of a much more formidable weapon system, namely, the advanced Yakhont ASM sold to the Assad government by Russia in late 2011.

In another notable incident, in September 2013, an Egyptian militant group of much lesser stature succeeded in attacking a container vessel transiting the Suez Canal. While the attackers' use of rocket-propelled grenades serves to underline the comparative feebleness of their organization and is hardly indicative of an acute threat to Canal shipping, this incident may well be a portent of more ominous developments to come.

In combination, these recent developments herald a future in which non-state actors can not only complicate or defeat military ground operations on their home turf, but also besiege strategic chokepoints and dispute command of the sea out to several hundred kilometres from the shores they control.

The great contraction

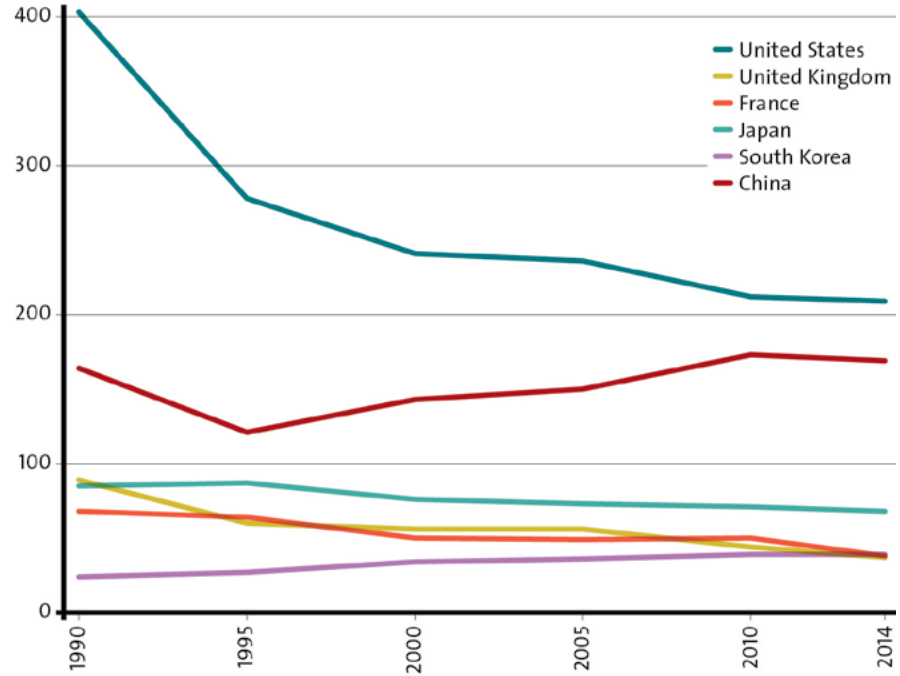
Meanwhile, in the light of constricted budgetary environments and spiralling modernization costs, the proponents of the geostrategic status quo are finding it ever more difficult to maintain a significant technological edge over prospective challengers. While military forces occupy centre stage in the struggle for geostrategic access, it is economic factors that now represent the greatest impediment facing Western security providers' adaptation efforts.

The root causes of this particular challenge are global shifts in latent power resources and fiscal irresponsibility at home. This includes a long-standing, and increasingly fatuous, tendency to let defence acquisition costs spiral out of control. This means that the defence budgets of the US and its allies are shrinking in both absolute and relative terms, while also buying less on a dollar-for-dollar basis.

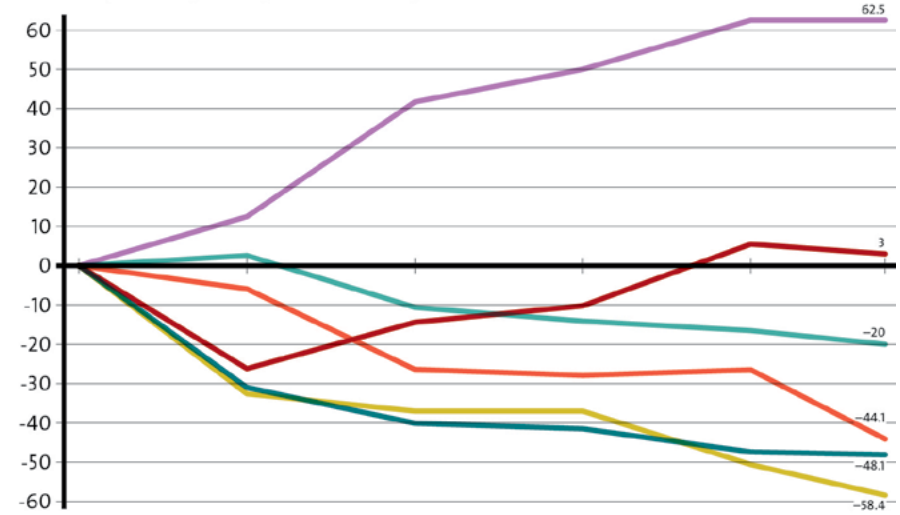
As a result of these developments, military adaptation in the face of more stringent access requirements and growing vulnerabilities is taking place within the confines of a fiscal straightjacket. In the United States, the impact of the Budget Control Act of 2011 – which comes on top of earlier substantial cuts made by Secretaries Robert Gates and Leon Panetta – is already being felt throughout the force. The UK is undergoing the most radical defence consolidation in its recent history, which has led to

The relative decline of Western projection forces

Principal combat and amphibious warfare ships



Index: Net percentage change in fleet strengh since 1990



Sources: IISS Military Balance 1990–91, 1995–96, 2000–01, 2005–06, 2010, 2014

the temporary elimination of its carrier force and a further constriction of deployable combat power. In France, defence spending will be held constant for the next several years – something of a best-case outcome given its current economic travails.

With budgets stagnant or in decline, and acquisition costs on the rise, the security providers are working themselves into a structural dilemma: They are building ever smaller numbers of ever more expensive platforms with which to accomplish the same, or even more demanding, missions. While these platforms are undoubtedly becoming more capable, numbers matter profoundly. Even with greater availability and combat power, the Royal Navy's six Type 45 destroyers will not be able to provide the same level of forward presence as the twelve Type 42 destroyers they are replacing. With shrinking force levels, the significant military powers of the West become less able to provide assurance and react to emerging threats in a timely manner.

In addition, the growing debate regarding the survivability of non-stealthy platforms that is fuelled by the rise of anti-access warfare suggests that the self-deterrence entailed by this tactical vulnerability may well be transformed into a crippling 'strategic' vulnerability. As security providers become less willing to risk their expensive assets, in which an ever increasing share of their capability is concentrated, their forward posture becomes less credible and the psychological foundations of security provision are weakened.

Even where doctrinal and acquisition priorities are adjusted to the emerging requirements, as is clearly the case in the US armed forces, fiscal constraints and serious faults in the acquisition process take their toll. To provide just one example, the US Navy's next-generation DDG-1000 destroyer programme was pared down from an initial requirement for 32 hulls to a mere three, with steep increases in costs per unit actually built. Orders for the Littoral Combat Ship, of which 52 were planned, have been cut to 32. The F-35 programme – the most expensive in American history – is also moving ahead despite doubts about the operational value of a relatively short-range aircraft in access-constrained environments. Irrespective of these concerns, it will consume the single largest share of the funds set aside for countering anti-access approaches as part of the joint AirSea Battle concept for many years to come. Meanwhile, the acquisition of a new long-range bomber to replace the B-2, of which just 19 are in service, is proceeding at a glacial pace.

As a renovation of the governmental-military-industrial partnerships remains elusive, the best option from a US perspective may be to shift the economic and military burden of security provision to its regional auxiliaries that are directly impacted by prospective challengers' anti-access measures. However, it would appear that, in the medium term, US leadership of the global security order will be difficult to sustain except on a basis of fiscal prudence.

An age of vulnerability?

In the face of a diverse set of challenges to geostrategic access, some now fear that the geopolitics of openness that has shaped the global system of the post-World War II era is gradually being replaced by a new geopolitics of exclusion. Challenges vary from domain to domain, but the aggregate picture is of an operational environment that will be more complex, and markedly less permissive, than that encountered in most conflict settings of the post-Cold War era.

While potential challengers of Western military dominance are fielding a number of impressive capabilities, any attempt at defining access denial in terms of a particular set of hardware or tactics is likely to be of limited value. In fact, what most clearly sets these approaches apart from other paradigms of military operations is their basic rationale of counter-intervention. Whatever means are likely to serve that particular end should be seen as possible ingredients of actors' attempts at tilting the balance of military advantage in favour of a regional area defence. Therefore, countermeasures based on increased flexibility and adaptability are likely to yield greater benefits than narrowly technical solutions to specific problems.

In strictly military terms, even China's full-scale approach to counter-intervention must be seen as an expression of continued inferiority vis-à-vis the United States and its regional security partners. However, current challenges appear focused on reshaping regional security arrangements in peacetime, rather than on the institution of exclusion zones in wartime. Thus, it is primarily on regional actors' perceptions of the military balance that the integrity of the US-centric security order now hinges.

With ongoing changes in both its military and economic parameters, the system's resilience in the face of growing pressures is not assured. At the very least, the confluence of external and internal restrictions will render the maintenance of geostrategic access an even more prominent concern. A partial redistribution of

responsibilities among the US and its regional partners will probably be inevitable if the basic shape of the incumbent system is to be maintained.

On the other hand, irrespective of how China and other rising powers develop, a militarily viable hegemonic alternative to US security provision is not currently in the cards. In addition, it should be noted that Western control over vital areas of the sea, air, space, and cyber domains has always been, and will remain, a matter of degree.

From a European perspective, the erosion of the United States' military preeminence would seem to present the 'old continent' with the structural opportunity to re-assert itself as an independent force in global security affairs. However, with its indigenous projection capabilities in precipitous decline and its weakness compounded by complacency, Europe's ingrained reliance on hegemonic subventionism is likely to persist, even as we enter this new era of systemic vulnerability.

CHAPTER 5

People decide, parameters shape: US foreign policy under Barack Obama

Martin Zapfe

As 2014 marks the end of the longest war in US history, it is time to look at US foreign policy beyond Afghanistan. In doing so, it is imperative to differentiate between the people who decide and the parameters that shape these decisions. Under President Barack Obama, with his domestic focus and aversion to grand strategies, the US has entered a phase of strategic pragmatism. This trend will persist, as three parameters continue to shape every President's decisions: the aftermath of the financial crisis, a US public weary of foreign wars, and the enormous shale gas revolution.

US President Barack Obama listens to a response from Chinese President Xi Jinping at the Annenberg Retreat at Sunnylands in Rancho Mirage, California, 7 June 2013

The United States of America is still the most powerful state in the world, and will be for years to come. No other competitor comes even close in its combination of military, economic, and soft power. Yet once again we have an abundance of debate regarding an imminent decline of the US. Friends and foes alike wonder which path the US will take in the next few years under President Barack Obama, and beyond. Will it take the road of an energetic foreign policy, based on a willingness to engage and to act militarily, if necessary? Or, on the contrary, will it move towards what is often called isolationism – an effort to decouple the country from the political and military entanglements of world politics, or at least of most of it, while still trying to profit economically?

Neither of these expectations is entirely realistic. Instead, this chapter puts forward a twofold argument: First, what we are likely to see is a protracted phase of 'strategic pragmatism'. This strategic pragmatism will likely take its most distinct form under President Barack Obama, as a result of his personality, worldview, and political priorities. Second, however, the underlying strategic drivers – most importantly, financial constraints, domestic war weariness, and the shale energy revolution – are independent of Obama and will affect US policy beyond his presidency. And it is because of these parameters that any long-term view on US foreign policy must necessarily come to the conclusion that the US will tend towards disengagement – at least from parts of the world deemed secondary.

To support this argument, the chapter is structured as follows: First, it will argue that to understand the foreign policy of the US, especially under President Obama, we have to get away from a search for strategy and instead focus on the parameters that shape essentially pragmatic decisions. Second, it will detail three of the most decisive parameters shaping today's and tomorrow's decisions. Third, it will look at the first six years of Barack Obama's presidency and show how the personality of Obama significantly increased the importance of these parameters for US foreign policy during those years. Fourth, it will depict two of the most important effects of this combination of personality and parameters. These are a fundamental economization of foreign policy on the one hand, and on the other a global two-tier military posture focusing the conventional, symmetric warfare capacity on the Asia Pacific region.

People decide, parameters shape

President Obama's foreign policy has been exhaustively described.

Naturally, political analysts as well as historians tend to focus on real or perceived patterns of behaviour that can be subsumed under a 'grand strategy'. However, real life policy decisions tend to evade those categories. This is especially true in times when and on issues where the US executive is under immense pressure to make critical decisions under considerable time pressure. Here the White House's Situation Room is anarchic in that it more often than not defies theoretical, logical, and strategic imperatives. Rarely do policy makers decide according to what option falls into the logic of a previously-stated strategy. They tend to judge these options against various criteria – military feasibility, domestic support, the position of Congress, the likely impact on other, potentially more important developments, to name just a few. Then, within a structured and highly bureaucratized decision-making process involving numerous influential agencies, these options are narrowed down towards an approach that might appear 'strategic'.

Yet, in the end, presidents decide. And they can do so to the surprise of outside observers, and even their closest advisors. The foremost recent example of such a development was the 2013 debates within the US administration regarding the striking of Syrian targets after the massive use of chemical weapons close to Damascus. After President Obama had publicly communicated his determination to retaliate against Syrian government targets, he reportedly surprised even his own Secretary of State John Kerry with a new focus on Syria giving up its chemical weapons, which meant he refrained from using military force. While important considerations no doubt played a role in Obama's decision – including the parallel talks with Iran on its nuclear programme, and domestic war weariness – it was definitely not an element of a grand strategy.

Of course, if defined narrowly in terms of geography or issue, foreign policy strategies can be important. Again, there are good examples. In the 1970s, Secretary of State and National Security Advisor Henry Kissinger famously opened diplomatic channels to the People's Republic of China within a carefully devised and consequentially implemented strategy; and under President Bill Clinton, the US committed itself, with moderate success, to the strategy of 'dual containment' of Iraq and Iran. In these cases, an agreed and enforced policy goal was supported by a concerted effort on the part of US governmental agencies – a narrow strategy with important benefits.

However, when it comes to 'grand strategies' concerning the role of the US in an (always) changing world, caution is the order of the day. If a 'unipolar moment' ever existed, it did so during the 1990s, during the presidencies of George H.W. Bush and Bill Clinton. With the demise of the Soviet Union, the US faced a singular moment of possibilities; international involvement had both become more feasible and gained international legitimacy. However, the Clinton administration had to abandon its first interventionist ventures after comparably light casualties in Somalia. Further military interventions were deemed impossible, and the course of the next years seemed clear. Yet, only two years after Somalia, the US intervened decisively and forcefully in the Balkan wars, thanks to President Clinton's work against the strong scepticism of the American public, and corresponding opposition in Congress.

People decide, parameters shape – this is, in short, the essence of policy analysis and of this chapter. No political observer is able to predict any single decision of the US executive, let alone the president, with certainty. What can be analysed and predicted, however, are some of the parameters likely to shape foreign policy decisions; we may then try to factor in the personality of the president.

Shaping the Situation Room

Three main parameters have shaped President Obama's foreign policy: first, the financial and economic crisis of 2008; second, public war weariness after the inconclusive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan; and, third, the perceived energy independence after the advent of shale gas and tight oil extraction on US soil.

Austerity and altruism – the financial crisis

Six years after the collapse of the famed Lehman Brothers, it is easy to forget the devastating consequences the financial crisis had on the US economy and the lives of US citizens. According to the US National Economic Council, the US lost an average of 800,000 jobs per month, the economy was contracting at above 8 %, and US households had lost a staggering $ 19 trillion in wealth by January 2009 – the month President Obama was inaugurated.

Governments have only a limited bandwidth to deal with policy issues. And in the short term, the financial crisis absolutely dominated the domestic political agenda of the new president, with the possible exception of health care reform. Unprecedented emergency measures were implemented to avoid a complete meltdown of the economic system. In addition, the

globalized financial system meant that domestic politics spilled over into foreign policy, where concerted measures to contain and overcome the crisis dictated the agenda with the G8 (later the G20), Europe and Asia. While other foreign policy issues, such as the way ahead in Afghanistan, the drawdown in Iraq and the reset with Russia demanded attention, they essentially remained second-tier policy questions for the administration.

In the mid-term, the financial crisis receded from the immediate agenda, but it continued to shape foreign policy. A sense that "foreign policy begins at home" set in, and policy debates centred on the question of whether the defence budget should be exempted from austerity measures.

Although the question of defence spending was and remains hotly debated, the Pentagon's budget is set to shrink dramatically by the end of this decade. The spending cuts that were announced by President Obama in January 2012 alone amount to about $500 billion over five years. This reduction would have pressed the services hard and reduced manpower as well as weapon systems and deployment routines; it could, however, have been legitimately seen as effective leverage to trim the military towards more efficiency, thus not only relieving the budget pressure, but inducing military reform as well.

This cannot be said, however, of the 'lawn mower' of sequestration. The additional across-the-board cuts of $1.2 trillion over ten years will massively affect the military, crossing the threshold from mere reductions in quantity towards likely losses of quality. These reductions will hit the land forces disproportionately, but they will also reduce the effectiveness and mission-readiness of the 'strategic services', Air Force and Navy. As Michael Haas puts it in the preceding chapter, a security provider, like a bank, will never be able to meet all its claims simultaneously. To stay within the picture, the financial crisis has forced the US to reduce its military net equity and leverage the remaining sum – at a time of increasing global risks.

Been there, done that – war weariness in the US

As of 2014, Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) in Afghanistan is the longest war in US history. Not surprisingly, then, a marked and deep-seated war fatigue has taken hold of the US public and is now one of the major parameters in the mind of US decision-makers. According to a December 2013 study of the 'Pew Research Center for the People & the Press', the majority of the American

public has become distrustful of foreign intervention, as 52% of Americans believe the US should "mind its own business internationally", a remarkable increase of 22% compared to 2002, at the beginning of President Bush's 'Global War on Terror'. Concurrently, 53% of Americans believe that the US is "less powerful today than ten years ago", an increase of 33% from 2004. The US population is turning inwards.

While both major US wars in Iraq (2003–2011) and Afghanistan (since 2001) led to severe casualties in absolute numbers (a combined number of 6795 US service members killed and countless more wounded by January 2014), they are not the primary reason for this war weariness. By historical comparison, and considering the length of the period in question, the casualties are relatively light; moreover, they were suffered by a professional, multi-tour, all-volunteer military that is increasingly separated from society at large.

What matters more is both the huge amount of resources put into the two enterprises, and the at best inconclusive result of the wars – especially when Americans themselves are feeling the impact of the financial crisis. A recent study by the Harvard Kennedy School of Governance estimates the potential overall costs (including long-term claims) of the two wars at between $4–6 trillion. As a result, military power as a means towards political ends beyond pinpoint, limited strikes has been discredited for the time being.

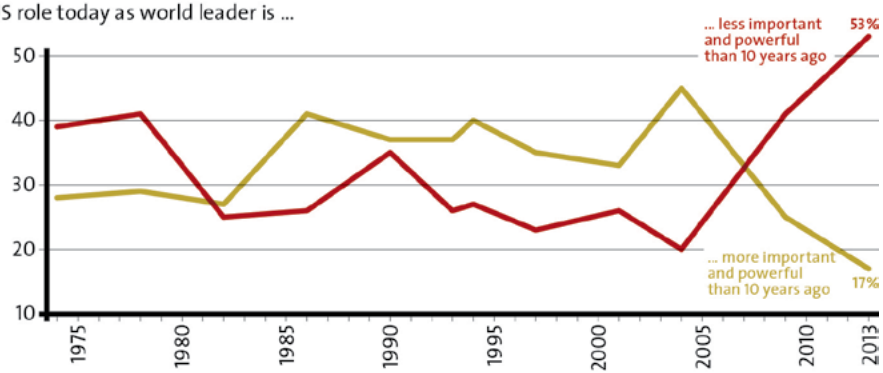
Thus a growing distrust towards military intervention increasingly mirrors the atmosphere of the 1990s. This explains to a degree the reluctance of the Obama administration to intervene militarily in the Syrian proxy war lest it be drawn into it – a striking parallel to its non-intervention in Rwanda in 1994. An increasing anti-interventionism will continue to hold sway and to shape any decision on foreign engagement beyond the economic and political sphere. That said, isolationist tendencies did not prevent President Clinton from intervening in Bosnia – and they might not prevent a future president from following the same path.

Shale energy – new energy for isolationism

Much has been written about how the increased production of shale gas and tight oil will significantly shape US foreign policy. However, the perceived effects will be more important than the real economic advantages, in that they significantly strengthen the war weariness detailed above without

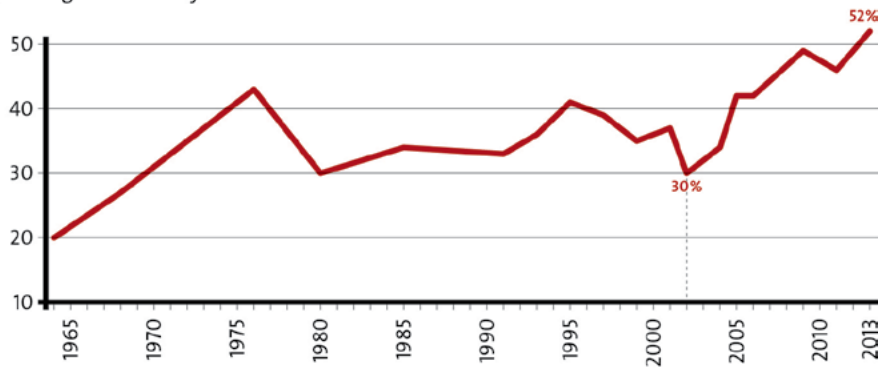
Views of US global power fall to 40-year low

US role today as world leader is ...



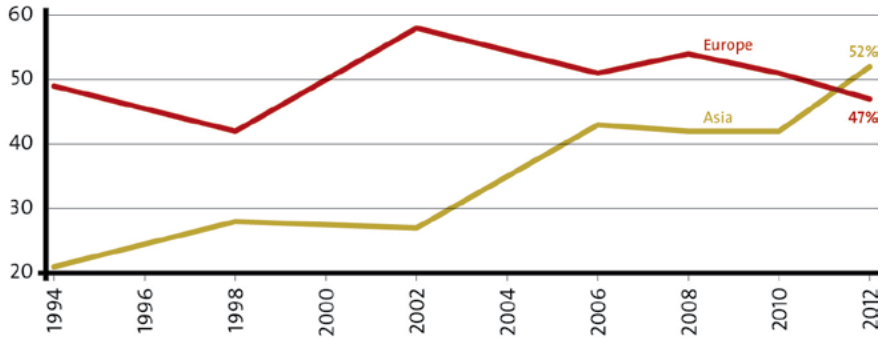
Majority says US should "mind its own business internationally"

% agreeing that "the US should mind its own business internationally and let other countries get along the best they can on their own"



In your view, which continent is more important to the US – Asia or Europe?

% who say that Asia or Europe are more important to the US



Sources: Pew Research Center 2013, Chicago Council Survey 2012

really reducing US dependency on secure trading routes, a stable Middle East and a reasonable oil price.

Since the oil shock of the seventies, the US has dreamt the dream of energy independence. Oil dependence was regularly perceived as being chained to uncomfortable alliances and undemocratic regimes with a less-than-stellar record on human rights. Thus it is to a certain degree true that energy dependency forced the US to stay engaged in foreign affairs even at times when other, nobler, interests were not at stake. Energy dependence brought realpolitik into many policy calculations.

Shale energy will change this basic calculus, and for a long time to come. However, it is not a silver bullet on the way to energy independence. The International Energy Agency (IEA) estimates that the US may become the world's biggest oil producer as early as 2015 – well within President Obama's presidency – and remain in this position for at least the next decade.

However, numerous experts have pointed out that the truth is not so simple. The global nature of oil markets means that even when the US' own exploitation is growing significantly, the country is dependent on a stable and reasonable oil price. Instability in critical supply regions will thus continue to have an impact on US interests. Since few other nations that are far more dependent on Middle Eastern oil – like China and India – seem, for the time being, willing to replace a potentially retreating US as anchor of stability in the region, the US will remain indispensable.

Taken together, the shale boom, and even more so the enthusiastic reports on the shale boom, will increase the thresholds for US intervention on the basis of economic stability. It reinforces existing trends within the population to refrain from foreign policy activism, and will therefore shape foreign policy decisions in the years ahead.

Obama as foreign policy president

While these three parameters shaped President Obama's foreign policy, it was his personality and the definition of his office that capitalized on the parameters. Where some predecessors reverted to ideological swords to cut the Gordian Knot of world politics, Barack Obama prefers the scalpel for managing foreign policy challenges, relieving their pressure without aiming for a perfect cure – at least in the short term.

Aversion to grand strategies

Besides the simple non-existence of foreign policy grand strategies

outlined above, Barack Obama does not like the notion. This is crucial to an understanding of his foreign policy. Every strategy is at the very core a simplification of reality. Real-life developments are compressed into planning parameters, thereby being simplified to the extreme.

Yet Barack Obama, the highly intelligent Harvard jurist, seems to have an inert distrust of those reductions of reality. His short-term policy choices are telling: he continued the military and intelligence element of President Bush's security policy while discarding the ideological superstructure of democratic transformation that made it a grand strategy. Again, Obama tends to manage foreign policy, and despite his visionary appeal, he is a realistic pragmatist to the bone.

It is here that we find the biggest difference between the presidencies of President Obama and his predecessor. The last grand strategy of an US administration was, arguably, the 'Global war on Terror' waged by the administration of George W. Bush after the attacks of 11 September 2001 and codified primarily in the National Security Strategy of 2002. With its emphasis on the export of liberty and the democratic transformation of states and regions, coupled with intensive and worldwide military and intelligence campaigns, it is a prime example of the power of the US being mobilized towards a global goal with multiple means.

Obama's foreign policy is a continuation of his domestic policy, and he has conducted it as he campaigned – by generating high hopes through brilliant speeches. However, with regard to actual policy developments, Obama has, in the words of Aaron Miller, focused primarily on transactional instead of transformative leadership, meaning that his White House has seemed to understand foreign policy as the management of challenges, not the fulfilment of visions laid out in speeches.

While intellectually appealing, President Obama's pragmatic management approach to foreign policy has significantly raised strategic insecurity with traditional partners like Europe, Saudi Arabia and Israel. At the same time, it has failed to sufficiently reassure partners in Asia – traditional allies as well as those states not looking for an alliance but for a balancer to China. President Obama is in danger of harvesting the worst of both worlds. The verdict is out.

The White House centre stage

In day-to-day conduct, the White House under Obama is at the centre of every important policy decision.

This highly centralized policy process is the result of two experiences: First, during his first campaign, Obama relied on a small circle of advisors not connected to democratic foreign policy circles. Those advisors followed him into the White House, while Hillary Clinton called the ignored former elite into the State Department. Thus the 'underdog' campaign of 2008 was continued during his presidency, with the White House taking over the role of his campaign headquarters. Second, Obama learned early that the bureaucratic decision-making process could deliver policy results markedly different from what he had ordered. While he effectively ended the war in Iraq in 2011, he at the same time escalated the Afghan war into a full-fledged counterinsurgency campaign. This strategy change, if temporary, was communicated by Obama as focusing on the core of Al-Qaida instead of on the Taliban. What he got was different – the operational template of Iraq in the villages of Afghanistan. This experience seems to have contributed to White House security circles' marked distrust of the departments, and the highly centralized decision-making process since.

Beyond Iraq and Afghanistan, Obama's campaign against Al-Qaida may be the most instructive with regard to the character of Obama's presidency. He drastically stepped up direct action, mostly through drone strikes by the CIA or the military, against suspected Al-Qaida operatives and members of groups considered to be associated.

Armed drones used against individual targets constitute the optimal means for President Obama as they fulfil three criteria critical for the president. First, they are supposed to target dangerous operatives and thereby prevent catastrophic attacks on the scale of 9/11 that would inevitably shape his presidency and derail any domestic agenda. Second, they are perceived as a cost-effective alternative to a large number of 'boots on the ground' in the respective areas of operations, thereby fulfilling his pledge to refrain from armed nation building. And, third, the command and control process for the strikes is reportedly highly centralized, with the president and his closest advisors reserving the right to make some of the final decisions. Culminating in the commando operation that killed Osama bin Laden in Pakistan in May 2011, this effort has been so far successful, since Al-Qaida seems seriously weakened. Again, the attempt to centrally 'manage' and contain the terror threat became the core element of Obama's security policy, contrasting markedly with his visionary speeches of peaceful transformation. This contrast between

rhetoric and conduct was, if anything, the most striking feature of Obama's first term in office.

If there is anything resembling a grand strategy in the Obama administration, it is the fundamental rebalancing of US resources towards the vast Pacific region, announced in 2011. In essence, the 'Pivot to Asia' is nothing more than the consequential next step after the end of the Cold War. Since the beginning of the 1990s, US policy-makers from both sides of the aisle have repeatedly pushed for a distancing from the old continent. With core Europe pacified, and the Russian threat drastically reduced, the US had "no dogs in the fight(s)" of this region, as famously stated by Secretary of State James Baker. President Clinton had to invest a substantial amount of political capital to bring the US to intervene in the escalating Bosnian war, showing again that it was US military capabilities and its political weight that were decisive in bringing this war to a close. The same held true four years later in Kosovo. Reluctantly, the US was willing to intervene once again, while at the same time pushing the European allies hard to improve their military capabilities. The obvious split over the war in Iraq in 2003 was, on one level, proof that a united and strong Europe was no longer one of the key interests of the US. While the tone of the George W. Bush administration was new, the relevant policy content was not.

Idealists tempered by realism?

As stated above, in the end it is people who decide. During the second Obama term, changes in key positions seem to have had decisive foreign policy implications, conveying the image of a markedly more interventionist administration tempered by a reluctant president. The profoundest consequences have been caused by the ascent of John Kerry to Secretary of State. While his predecessor Hillary Clinton, together with Assistant Secretary of State Kurt Campbell, embodied the Pivot as the main foreign policy strategy of the administration, Kerry embodies a rebounding towards the 'traditional' fields: Europe and, especially, the Middle East. In addition, he explicitly renounces expectations that the US itself will move towards global disengagement.

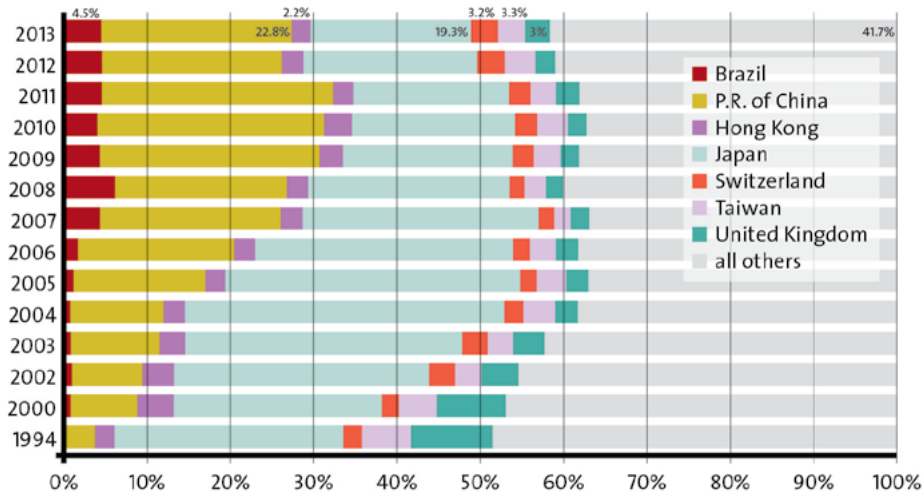
Indeed, the nuclear negotiations with Iran, the war in Syria, and the negotiations between Israel and the Palestinians are reported to consume a substantial amount of the secretary's time. The amount of bureaucratic 'bandwidth' dedicated to a region that, not long ago, was announced to be of declining importance to the energy-blessed US is impressive.

This begs the question whether the Pivot – without a doubt a major and long-term policy decision, if followed through – still ranks highest on the agenda of the administration.

Two other top job decisions have raised expectations of a more interventionist foreign policy in Obama's second term. He picked Susan Rice as National Security Advisor, after the Senate refused to confirm her easily for Secretary of State, and he nominated Samantha Power for the influential post of Ambassador to the United Nations. Both women are known for their advocacy of a more activist, interventionist US foreign policy, and their announcements have understandably been interpreted as a statement of President Obama's support of their long-standing positions.

More than one year into his second term, however, little of this influence is to be seen. Had the threatened attacks on Syrian installations taken place in 2013, this would no doubt have been attributed to the influence of Rice and Power. Yet this course was given up, most likely due to the immense war weariness of the US public and to avoid being drawn into the conflict. What emerged is a picture of a president considerably less eager to intervene abroad than his foreign policy team in the White House and the cabinet. While not surprising in its very existence, the contrast in his second term seems markedly stronger

Foreign portfolio holdings of US securities



Sources: US Department of the Treasury, Federal Reserve Board

than during his first term or under his recent predecessors.

Two consequences: economization and a two-tiered military power

This combination of personality and parameters causes numerous structural and policy consequences, among which two stand out for their long-term impact: an increased economization of foreign policy and a global military presence essentially focusing on the conventional state-on-state capabilities in the Asia-Pacific.

Economization of foreign policy

According to the Pew study, the isolationist tendencies of the US public do not, tellingly, extend as far as economic engagement. An overwhelming majority – 66 % – of Americans believe that a greater US involvement in the global economy is "a good thing". And indeed, one of the few obvious consistencies in President Obama's conduct of foreign affairs is a marked economization of foreign policy. The impetus for the focus on economic and trade partnerships is natural, coming after the shock of the financial crisis. Even before 2008, however, concerns were raised with regard to the US' dependence on foreign debtors in general, and its integral economic ties with China in particular. The complex creditor-debtor relationship of Beijing and Washington, and the resulting trade ties, are sure to influence the foreign policy agenda of every administration in the years to come.

Yet, while the roots of economization go deeper than his first inauguration, Obama has stepped up the pace. And he has explained the rationale for this decision. The Trans Pacific Partnership (TPP), intended to bolster the US economic integration into Asia, notably without and therefore against China, is a key pillar of the Pivot. In his remarkable speech in the Australian parliament in November 2011, President Obama laid out the main rationale for the rebalancing of US resources. He wants to use the economic dynamics and increasing prosperity of the vast Pacific region to support his highest priority as president: improving the US economy and creating jobs in the US.

The second major thrust to 'economize' foreign policy is the envisaged transatlantic free trade area (Transatlantic Trade and Investment Partnership, TTIP). The TTIP is instructive with regard to the US' perspective on the future of transatlantic relations. With no major security challenge in Europe, at least none that might overstrain Europe's potential capabilities, the current administration considers it time to move away from a security-based relationship. While intended

to complement the security bond of NATO, the TTIP is more likely to become the primary bridge over the Atlantic, resting on shared vital interests. This is even more bolstered by NATO's apparent failure to develop into a global partner for the US, both in terms of ambitions and in terms of capabilities.

Not three years after the then US Secretary of Defense Robert Gates, in his landmark speech in Brussels in June 2011, warned NATO partners that the alliance was in danger of becoming irrelevant for the US, this has to a large degree become reality. For the domestic president Barack Obama, Europe is relevant for its economic power and the potentially job-creating dynamics of free trade. Militarily, it is irrelevant. Yet if Europe lives up to this challenge and strengthens both its Common Security and Defence Policy (CSDP) and the European element of NATO, this could have positive consequences for the genesis of a European foreign policy. The example of the first instance of "leadership from behind" by the US during the Libyan crisis in 2011, however, is not encouraging. European partners were not equal allies during the intervention, and nor was Europe united with regard to the policy options after the fall of Muammar Gaddafi. Critical gaps in capabilities such as intelligence, surveillance, target acquisition and reconnaissance platforms, combined with the ability to strike promptly and precisely, are not even near to being closed. The CSDP summit of late 2013, heralded with much fanfare by the member states, brought no progress. On the contrary, among the important member states the visions of the future of the CSDP seem to be increasingly divergent. This will only encourage the US to further follow the path of economization and to move away from Europe militarily, with profound implications for US military policy and posture.

The US military in a symmetric and asymmetric world

From 2008 at least, budget policy is defence policy. The US' massive defence cuts, combined with the stated governmental priority of a rebalancing towards Asia, will lead to a military posture that intentionally limits military capabilities in large parts of the world, with long-term consequences. If implemented with the determination seen at the beginning, the Pivot towards Asia will effectively lead to a worldwide two-level military presence and operational focus of US forces: a predominantly 'symmetric', conventional presence in Asia focused on deterring the nation state of China; and a predominantly 'asymmetric', unconventional presence in

Africa, South America and the Middle East, aimed at supporting fledging states and combatting terrorist threats. This will have important consequences for US force posture and doctrine.

As the Pentagon's Fiscal Year 2015 defence budget proposal made clear, after more than a decade fighting largely unconventional wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, a substantial part of the US' forces is rebounding towards more traditional threats. During the counter-insurgency campaigns of the last few years, the land forces of the Army and Marine Corps have gained organizational primacy vis-à-vis the strategic services of the Air Force and the Navy, while at the same time undergoing a profound process of organizational adaptation to conduct a variety of operations against elusive enemies in partly extreme terrain. The Air Force and Navy took an operational backseat, largely confined to supporting the ground campaign on the tactical level, yet resisting fundamental organizational change – for good reason.

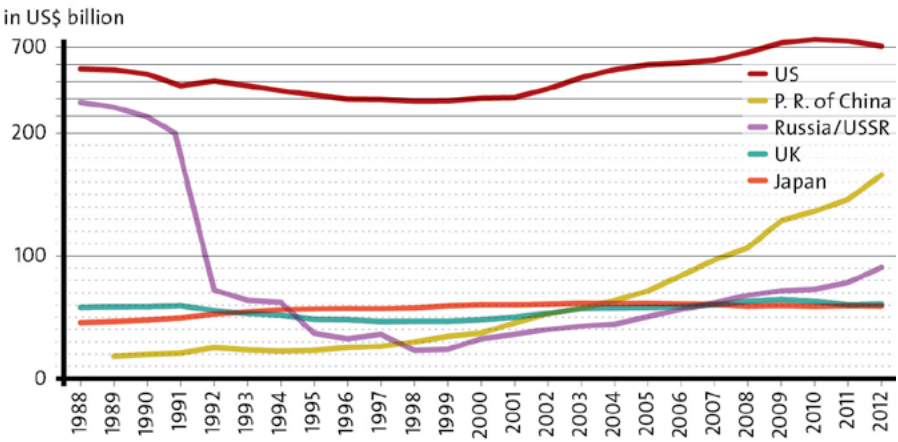
Since 2010, the Air Force and Navy have based their future planning on the concept of AirSea-Battle, modelled after the AirLand-Battle concept of the 1980s. In essence, AirSea-Battle focuses on the seamless and effective integration of both services to create operational synergies and ensure strategic access against determined adversaries. While not directed against any specified enemy, or towards any concrete scenario, it is understood that the most plausible antagonist would be the Chinese armed forces, and the most probable theatre of operations the South China Sea. AirSea-Battle is, at its very core, state-centred, symmetric, and conventional.

Concurrently, the planned financial cuts in defence spending will affect the land forces disproportionately, reversing their expansion during two major ground campaigns. The US Army alone will be reduced from 570,000 soldiers in 2010 to between 440,000 and 450,000 by 2015. The US Marine Corps, meanwhile, will strive (albeit with good chances) for strategic and operational relevance. Hard choices will have to be made. The US is not in any form in military decline; it will remain for years the preeminent military in those regions, and against those opponents, that it deems critical. Here, choices in terms of regional focus and capabilities have to be made. The Pivot, if followed through, implicitly entails this decision: giving priority to a conventional strategic presence in the Pacific.

This bureaucratic and organizational realignment will in effect lead to a two-tier military posture worldwide.

World's top 10 military spenders, 2012

By $ spent						
Rank	**Country**	**Spending 2012 ($ bil.)**	**Change 2011–2012**	**Change 2003–2012**	**% of GDP 2012**	**% of GDP 2003**
	NATO	990.93*			2.50 %	
1	United States	682.48	**–6**	32	4.40 %	3.70 %
	European Union	274.21			1.70 %	
2	P. R. of China	166.11	**7.8**	175	2.10 %	2.10 %
3	Russia	90.75	16	113	4.40 %	4.30 %
4	United Kingdom	61.01	–0.8	4.9	2.50 %	2.50 %
5	Japan	59.27	–0.6	–3.6	1.00 %	1.00 %
6	France	58.94	–0.3	–3.3	2.30 %	2.60 %
7	Saudi Arabia	56.72	12	111	8.90 %	8.70 %
8	India	47.73	–0.8	65	2.50 %	2.80 %
9	Germany	45.79	0.9	–1.5	1.40 %	1.40 %
10	Italy	34.00	–5.2	–19	1.70 %	2.00 %
	World total	1753.00	–0.5	35	2.5 %**	



* US-share: 72 %

** Of the World's GDP

Sources: SIPRI, Economist

By % of GDP			By size of armed forces			
Rank	Country	As % of GDP	Rank	Country	Regulars (thousands)	Reserves (thousands)
12		4.40%	2		1520	810
			1		2285	510
19		4.40%	5		845	20000
			23		229	30
			22		234	0
			3		1325	1155
1	Iraq	11.30%	4	North Korea	1190	600
2	Afghanistan	10.50%	6	South Korea	655	4500
3	Oman	8.40%	7	Pakistan	642	0
4	Saudi Arabia	8%	8	Iran	523	350
5	Israel	7.90%	9	Turkey	511	379
6	Jordan	5.60%	10	Vietnam	482	5000
7	Iran	5%				
8	South Sudan	4.70%				
9	Yemen	4.60%				
10	Algeria	4.50%				

Despite calls for a 'full spectrum force' able to conduct all conceivable sorts of military operations, we will effectively see that one tier of US global posturing will be focused primarily on conventional threats, while the other focuses on unconventional ones. On the one hand, the Pacific theatre will thus develop into an area of a conventional, symmetric force posture to counter a traditional military challenge. On the other hand, most of the rest of the world will be subject to the manifold 'lessons learned' of Iraq and Afghanistan. In this area, the main security challenge for US forces emanates from global jihadists, mostly using the ungoverned territory of weak states to establish save havens from which, possibly, to attack the US. This threat is asymmetric and unconventional in nature. In this area, which effectively constitutes a large part of the world, the US will mostly rely on an indirect approach of security force assistance, support using critical niche technology, and, occasionally, strikes conducted primarily by special operations forces.

Of course, this effective two-tier military posturing will not predetermine how the US will use force in any eventual conflict; but it will set the background for the regular, 'routine' conduct of foreign policy. It is further not only about pure military posturing; it is a direct deduction from the strategic priorities of the US, and therefore determines to a large degree how most of the world will encounter US military power – and how the US exercises it.

Parameters will persist

People decide, parameters shape. Three parameters have been paramount in shaping President Obama's foreign policy: the financial crisis, public war weariness, and the advent of shale gas and oil. Against this background, it is President Obama with his aversion to grand strategies, his centralized management approach to foreign policy and his domestic priorities shaping US foreign policy to a pattern best described as 'strategic pragmatism'.

Among the fundamental results are a marked economization of the US foreign policy and a two-tier global military posture that will create path dependencies for US engagement in the future. For Barack Obama, his hitherto observed conduct of foreign policy leaves him liable to be seen, in hindsight, as indecisive, non-strategic, and overly focused on his domestic political agenda. That all can be changed through diplomatic successes – be it with regard to Iran, the Middle Eastern peace process, or the war in Syria.

What does that mean for the years after January 2017 when Barack Obama

leaves office? Naturally, in a democracy with term limits for the highest office, people go short and parameters go long. Even if the financial crisis recedes from the front pages, its effects will be felt for decades, and it will leave its mark on people's minds – voters as well as office holders. For the years ahead, any president will have to factor in an American public resenting large and long-term military commitments; and a reduced energy dependence on the Middle East will in turn reduce the strategic weight of this region for the US, if not nullify it. Even beyond Barack Obama, therefore, any US administration is likely to continue in a pattern of strategic pragmatism.

CSS
ETH Zurich

STRATEGIC TRENDS offers an annual analysis of major developments in world affairs, with a primary focus on international security. Providing interpretations of key trends rather than a comprehensive survey of events, this publication will appeal to analysts, policy-makers, academics, the media and the interested public alike. It is produced by the Center for Security Studies (CSS) at ETH Zurich. Strategic Trends is available both as an e-publication (www.css.ethz.ch/strategictrends) and as a paperback.

STRATEGIC TRENDS 2014 is the fifth issue in the series. It contains a brief introduction detailing the editorial process as well as chapters on Russian Foreign Policy, the European Union in North Africa, the proliferation of anti-Western insurgent tactics from Afghanistan, the increasing challenges to geostrategic access, and US foreign policy under President Obama and beyond.

The Center for Security Studies (www.css.ethz.ch) at ETH Zurich specializes in research, teaching, and the provision of electronic services in international and Swiss security policy. An academic institute with a major think-tank capacity, it has a wide network of partners.