BAKU DIALOGUES

POLICY PERSPECTIVES ON THE SILK ROAD REGION

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Table of Contents

Vol. 5 | No. 3 | Spring 2022

Essays

6 Bringing Russia Back in From the Cold
Nikolas K. Gvosdev & Damjan Krnjević Mišković

26 The CSTO Intervention in Kazakhstan
Filippo Costa Buranelli

40 Sino-Iranian Relations and Their Impact on South and Central Asia
Stephen J. Blank

64 Prospects for Pax Caucasia?
Vasif Huseynov

76 Repatriating Azerbaijani IDPs
Fariz Ismailzade

88 Mine Action and the Environment in Karabakh
Emil M. Hasanov

100 A New Multilateral Peace and Security Architecture
Ramon Blecua

Bringing Russia Back in From the Cold

The Strategic Consequences of (Not) Ending Quickly the Conflict Over Ukraine

Nikolas K. Gvosdev & Damjan Krnjević Mišković

"Everyone has varied interests. There are those in the West who don't mind a long war because it would mean exhausting Russia, even if this means the demise of Ukraine and comes at the cost of Ukrainian lives. This is definitely in the interests of some countries."

— Volodymyr Zelenskyy, interview to The Economist, *25 March 2022*

For all the talk that Vladimir Putin has "changed" over the last several years and that his decision to launch a major military operation in Ukraine must have resulted from illness, COVID-19-enforced isolation, or whatever else have you, the Russian president has been remarkably consistent throughout his career as his country's chief executive in his insistence that the post-Cold War settlement needed to be revised. Putin's belief that the European and global security environments

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that emerged under American leadership after the implosion of the Soviet Union do not take into account Russia's position as one of the world's great powers, and thus must be changed to ensure the overall stability and even legitimacy of a nascent international order.

Two statements he made during the October 2014 session of the Valdai Discussion Club remain representative of his strategic thinking: First, "the Cold War ended, but it did not end with the signing of a peace treaty with clear and transparent agreements on respecting existing rules or creating new rules and standards. This created the impression that the so-called 'victors' in the Cold War had decided to pressure events and reshape the world to suit their own needs and interests." Second, "Russia does not need any kind of special, exclusive place in the world [...] While respecting the interests of others, we simply want for our own interests to be taken into account and for our position to be respected."

The Western calculation seems to be that however much suffering Ukraine sustains, Russia will suffer more and the West will suffer minimally. How, exactly, is this good for Ukraine?

Those two statements need to be put alongside two others he made in April and May 2005, respectively. First, "we should acknowledge that the collapse of the Soviet Union was a major geopolitical disaster of the [twentieth] century." Second, "People in Russia say that those who do not regret the collapse of the Soviet Union have no heart, and those that do regret it have no brain. We do not regret this, we simply state the fact and know that we need to look ahead, not backwards. We will not allow the past to drag us down and stop us from moving ahead. We understand where we should move. But we must act based on a clear understanding of what happened."

Such and similar utterances do not amount to expressions of nostalgia or represent prolegomena to inevitable aggression, as has been claimed by a growing chorus of voices in the West; rather, they illustrate Putin's analytic assessment that a world order in which America sits alone at the "head of the table" (in the words of U.S. President Joe Biden) and determines who else can take a seat and where, is inherently

unstable and hence unsustainable; and that giving all due consideration to Russian interests and concerns is a necessary step in devising, at the very least, an agreed seating chart, common rules of dining etiquette, and a menu that addresses everyone's dietary preferences.

All this gives the current conflict over Ukraine a much greater degree of salience. The present crisis is not a mere border dispute or territorial claim that can be adjusted by a simple compromise; it is connected to, and even inseparable from, a larger strategic vision that has at its heart a revision of the post-Cold War era order—at least as it applies to European and Eurasian geography—that was, from the Kremlin's point of view, deliberately conceived and consciously executed without its meaningful input and assent. Moreover, to the extent that Putin's long tenure in Russia has shaped Russian strategy and allowed Putin to shape the ranks of the Russian political, security, and economic elites, one could argue Putin has pressed his cognitive imprint about Russia's role in the world on the Russian national security system. Thus, his departure would not necessarily lead to any substantive change, barring a fundamental "root and branch" restructuring of the Russian governing elite.

Given the circumstances, this seems quite unlikely: it is hard to forecast a realistic scenario in which post-Putin Russia would be led by anyone who could garner the support of the country's most relevant domestic stakeholders *and* cement his legitimacy through a victory at the polls *and* demonstrate the wherewithal to strategically reorient Russia's foreign policy posture in a direction that would become compatible with what amounts to an "end of history" worldview that one of us (Krnjević) argued in the Winter 2021-2022 edition of *Baku Dialogues* is the core belief animating the Biden Administration's foreign policy.

Together with other senior members of the Russian government, Putin adheres to a clinically realist worldview in which powers either push out into the rest of the world or run the risk of other powers pushing in.

Together with other senior members of the Russian government, Putin adheres to a clinically realist worldview in which powers either push out into the rest of the world or run the risk of other powers pushing in. For the Russian elite, the principal threat is the United States, the country that Putin identified in his February 2007 Munich Security Conference speech with the assessment that it "has overstepped its national borders in every way." The Russian elite does not believe in any altruistic liberal internationalist vision of world affairs (i.e., the latest version of the aforementioned "end of history" hypothesis), where major powers work to secure the welfare of all within a framework in which democracy is the sole legitimate form of government; therefore, they hear repeated U.S. and European pronouncements about defending a "rules-based liberal international order" as code for retaining and enhancing Western hegemony. As Putin made clear in the same 2007 speech, appeals to respect the "rules" of the liberal international order are, in his view, "designed to promote the foreign policy interests of one or a group of countries."

Russia's position as a great power is defined, in part, by being able to maintain an independent Eurasian pole of power. Thus, Putin wants to ensure that what is arguably the most powerful military alliance in history does not yet again expand its borders in such a way that these further come up directly against his country or reliable allied states like Belarus.

Putin believes that Russia has no choice but to remain as one of the agenda-setting powers of the world. His view of "sovereign democracy" is that a Russia that lacks the wherewithal to defend itself from outside pressure will find itself forced to adopt Western standards (or, an outcome expressly much more quietly in Moscow, a very junior partnership with China). Instead, as he also expressly noted in his Munich speech, Russia wants to join with a coalition of rising powers of the global South and East in order to "strengthen multipolarity" and compel the United States to accept a "reasonable balance between the interests of all participants in the international dialogue."

In turn, Russia's position as a great power is defined, in part, by being able to maintain an independent Eurasian pole of power—more or less coterminous with the old Soviet Union. Thus, Putin wants to ensure that what is arguably the most powerful military alliance in

history does not yet again expand its borders in such a way that these further come up directly against his country or reliable allied states like Belarus. In other words, he wants to cement a buffer zone between the Russian Federation and NATO by preventing additional states that were formally part of the Soviet Union (and now border its successor state as independent countries) from joining the opposing camp. In a world in which Russia's ability to project power would be greater, this would mean preventing these bordering states that are not NATO members from pursuing foreign policies that are incongruent with Russian national interests. In today's world, however, this means taking steps to prevent such states from entering into processes whose end point is membership in the Atlantic Alliance or the hosting of Western military on its soil. It also means, quite reasonably, that the West cannot ignore or oppose Moscow's concerns while expecting the Kremlin to accommodate Western priorities.

This is where Ukraine comes in. Since the breakup of the USSR, Russia has sought to ensure Ukraine does not leave its geopolitical orbit. Ukraine is thus integral to maintaining a much-diminished Russian sphere of influence.

Indeed, the Kremlin's aforementioned strategic imperative is actually nothing new: it has been a constant of Russia's foreign policy for centuries, becoming actualized in the Westphalian era of interstate relations as early as 1667 (the Treaty of Andrusovo, which affected "left bank" Ukraine), then 1764-1783 (various treaties with the Cossack Hetmanate, the Ottoman Empire, and others affecting the southern areas of Ukraine and, separately, Crimea), and then in 1772-1795 (the Partitions of Poland, which affected "right bank" Ukraine). In fact, the only time between the above dates and 1991 when all but the westernmost area of present-day Ukraine did not belong in peacetime to a state governed out of St. Petersburg or Moscow was in the immediate aftermath of the short-lived Brest-Litovsk Treaty signed by the Bolsheviks and the German Empire in March 1918.

To put this in comparative perspective, in the modern period of interstate relations, which began with the coming into force of the 1648 Treaty of Westphalia, Russia and Ukraine were part of the same state for longer than Belgium or Germany or any of the countries that have joined NATO since the end of the Cold War have been independent, sovereign states; or than Geneva has been a part of Switzerland and Rome a part of Italy; than Lorraine or Nice have belonged to France and Okinawa to Japan; and longer than the territories making up the Louisiana Purchase, the Texas Annexation, the Mexican Cession, the Oregon Country, and the Alaska Purchase have belonged to the United States of America.

To this can be added that linguistic, cultural, and religious similarities between Russians and Ukrainians were much closer to each other than were the examples enumerated above at the time of the respective political amalgamations (and in some cases, still are today).

Thus, the matter of proximate if not exactly indistinguishable identity is hardly one of fantasy. In fact, the Kremlin's official narrative, as expressed by Putin, is not simply dismissible: there is something to the Russian president's July 2021 claim that Russians and Ukrainians, since "the rule of the princes of the Rurik dynasty," have been "one people—a single whole," and that "Russia and Ukraine [...] are parts of what is essentially the same historical and spiritual space." Indeed, it takes quite a bit of misremembering of the past to dismiss out of hand that for centuries, if not a millennium or more, Russians and Ukrainians have been siblings and perhaps even conjoined twins. This does not imply they should continue to live under a common roof, but, from Moscow's conception, it does suggest that the relationship between the two can never be analogous to a marriage (in the sense that it can simply be dissolved through divorce). Of course, it also does not imply that the relationship was one of equals.

This has much to do with the fact that the Russian historiographical narrative, and hence its identity, is distinctly civilizational. In fact, Russia today is unique amongst the major powers for remaining comfortable with what amounts to an imperial legacy. Moreover, today's Russian Federation is one of the world's most ethnically, linguistically, culturally, and religiously diverse states—and this fact is largely not due to the influx of immigrants from the developing world or poorer parts of the European geography (in contradistinction to, say, the United States and the European Union).

Indeed, Putin and his inner circle have come to accept many of the broad outlines of the role Russia ought to play in the world as formulated by émigré White Russian thinkers especially grouped around the so-called "Eurasinist" movement. This

perspective argues that the Russian Empire, by gathering up the lands between the Vistula and the Pacific, had created a distinct Eurasian civilization that joined to its ethnic Russian/Orthodox core a variety of different ethnic and religious groups to form a Slavic/Turkic synthesis that, although having a number of points of commonality with European culture, represented a distinct Eurasian civilization that had points of interchange with the Islamic and Asian worlds. This civilization gave purpose to the Russian state and provided for the creation of a common cultural, political, and economic space across the Eurasian landmass.

The émigré Eurasianists reluctantly accepted the reality of Soviet power as the only force capable of holding this Eurasian entity together after the collapse and disintegration of the Russian Empire. Yet they always viewed the Marxist-Leninist ideological project as a distraction; a diversion of resources to pursue chimerical visions of uniting the world's proletariat and support revolutionary movements far from Russia's core interests that only ended up draining Russian resources and energy. In the 1970s, Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn in his famed "Letter to the Soviet Leaders" reiterated these criticisms and called for Moscow to pull back its focus to the Eurasian and Slavic worlds, and, anticipating Putin's own Arctic strategy by 30 years, advised a concentrated effort to unlock and exploit the riches of the Far North as the basis for regenerating the capabilities of the Russian state.

To the extent Soviet leaders carried out these missions, Putin sees them as worthy antecedents. However, in the February 2022 speech in which he recognized the independence of the secessionist "peoples' republics" of Donetsk and Lugansk, he alluded to what the World Bank's former lead economist Branko Milanović refers to as the "century of betrayals"—a revolutionary Bolshevik elite that rejected the Eurasian focus of a united Russian state in favor of creating separate national republics for the Soviet Union, introducing the possibility of breaking apart the united area of the Eurasian space, and the betrayal of the Soviet elites who focused on feathering their own nests and personal fiefdoms at the expense of holding together the Eurasian enterprise of the Soviet Union. One can easily imagine the present occupant of the Kremlin as a latter-day Tsar Ivan IV similarly roaming about Red Square, furious at how the nobles are plundering the treasury, refusing to defend the Motherland, and wanting for

reasons of personal gain to give the state over to be torn apart by foreigners (in Putin's case, the third betrayal is that of the United States; more on that below).

This perspective has been consistent, but over the course of his career as prime minister and president, Putin has changed his tactics and approaches in pursuit of these aims. In his first years, he hoped that a post-9/11 partnership with the United States and cooperation with the European Union and its member states to create a wider European space from Lisbon to Vladivostok would lead to Western recognition of Russian pre-eminence in what he understood to be the Eurasia region—essentially a division where the Euro-Atlantic world would voluntarily cease its eastward enlargement at the Vistula and Baltic littoral.

When it became clear that, in its pursuit of engagement with Russia, the West was not prepared to accede to any Russian sphere of influence (while insisting on what amounts to a right to expand its own all the way to Russian borders), Putin's approach became more controversial as he began to signal his readiness to use force to derail the West's Euro-Atlantic enlargement project—as reflected in his 2007 Munich speech and his 2008 tête-à-tête with George W. Bush in Bucharest. This culminated in the 2008 Russian incursion into Georgia.

From Putin's perspective, the U.S. had been more than happy to utilize Russia's influence in Eurasia in order to prosecute the post-9/11 war on terror, while continuing to oppose Russian economic and political interests in its "near abroad." The apparent U.S. effort to torpedo a 2003 Russian-proposed settlement for the Moldova-Transdnistria conflict (it would have created a decentralized state that would have given the pro-Russian separatists an effectual veto over Moldova's conduct of foreign affairs, thus guaranteeing Chișinău's perpetual neutrality) was viewed in Moscow as a signal that Washington would continue to push the enlargement of the two chief Euro-Atlantic institutions (i.e., NATO and the EU) into the Eurasian space with an eye to containing and isolating Russia while allowing Western military and economic power to come right up to the borders of the Russian heartland. Since 2003, NATO has admitted 11 new member states and the EU has admitted 11 new member states (not all are the same)—virtually all former members of communist Yugoslavia, the Warsaw Pact, or the Soviet Union itself.

The shock in the West at the 2008 Georgia incursion, which demonstrated how clearly the Russian establishment viewed the existential threat of further Western enlargement towards its borders, led to a pause and an effort to "reset" the West's relations with Russia. Yet, the efforts of both U.S. President Barack Obama and French President Nicolas Sarkozy foundered on the rejection of the 2010 proposals made by Russian President Dmitry Medvedev for rethinking security architecture in Europe, decreased in likelihood due to the 2011 NATO intervention in Libya, and ended with the 2014 "Revolution of Dignity" in Ukraine, with the forced ouster of its president, Viktor Yanukovych—who, it should be noted, had been immediately recognized by the West as having been legitimately elected—only hours after Russia had been explicitly assured that the European Union negotiators in Kyiv had settled on an orderly transition of power. Since that time, Russia has embarked on a dual approach: using "sharp power" tools to try to impact politics in Western societies while also hoping that dependence on Russian energy and resources by European economies would produce sympathetic business and political leaders.

Key to all of Putin's plans has been to ensure a friendly and pliable Ukrainian government—or, at the very least (since 2014), a militarily neutral one. Ukraine's economy, resource base, and population are critical for the success of any Russian-led Eurasian Union, which is the manifestation of Russia's ability to create that independent "Eurasian pole of power" that counterbalances a China-led Asian sphere with the Euro-Atlantic world. Ukraine's strategic real estate (particularly Crimea) in 'friendly' hands allowed Russia a safe and secure pathway to project power into the heart of Europe and the greater Middle East; in 'unfriendly' hands, it would have not only pushed back Russian power, but also exposed critical vulnerabilities of the Russian heartland.

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Ukraine also serves an important role in validating Putin's belief in a pan-Russian/Orthodox civilization that is distinct from (although related to) European/Western culture. Indeed, Putin has consistently articulated this view—most notably in the aforementioned July 2021 essay on the essential unity between the Ukrainian and Russian peoples. Moreover, there is a long tradition in Russian intellectual history of assigning blame to the pronounced emphasis on cultural, linguistic, and in some cases religious differences between Russians, on the one hand, and Belarussians and Ukrainians, on the other, as arising from efforts by outsiders to divide the 'common Russian' people and attempt to peel away these 'western Russian people' from their Russian brothers and sisters to the east. If Russian nineteenth-century writers identified the Polish-Lithuania Commonwealth as the instigator of these efforts to "divide" the Russian people, then their twenty-first-century continuators see the hand of Brussels and Washington.

Since 2014, Ukraine's political elite has rejected acceptance of the country's position as a keystone state connecting the Eurasian and European worlds, which would require some accommodation of Russian security, economic, and political concerns. This approach contrasted with the efforts taken by other post-Soviet states like Azerbaijan.

Faced with the "loss" of Ukraine in 2014, Putin took several intermediate steps: assuming direct control of the Crimean Peninsula—so vital for Russia's ability to project power across the entire Caspian-Black Sea-Eastern Mediterranean zone—in the context of a hastily-organized referendum on "reunifying Crimea with Russia," whose result (97 percent in favor) was not recognized by the West, while backing two separatist entities in southeastern Ukraine (also not recognized by the West) as a way to preclude Ukraine from taking steps to join key Euro-Atlantic institutions, starting with the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. At the same time, Russia started a series of new geo-economic projects to more closely bind Europe's economies to Russia's resource base.

Ukraine's political elite, in turn, rejected acceptance of the country's position as a keystone state connecting the Eurasian and European worlds, which would require some accommodation of Russian security, economic, and political concerns. This approach contrasted with the efforts taken by other post-Soviet states like Azerbaijan, which recognized both Putin's determination to recreate a Eurasian pole of power and the limits of the Western powers to fully resist that trend. The tack was first taken by Azerbaijan in the context of negotiating the complex terms of the landmark 1994 Contract of the Century. Today it consists in the deepening of a genuine foreign policy posture of neutrality or even non-alignment, which both accepts that Russia had some legitimate concerns and demands in the post-Soviet space, but also refuses to accept any imposition from Moscow in terms of how Azerbaijan should structure its relations with Turkey, the United States, the EU, NATO, and so on (beyond a few basic red lines like full membership in any organization in which Russia is also not a member).

Azerbaijan succeeded in large part because its leadership was able to leverage the limited support it received from its Western partners to negotiate Russian respect for its keystone status. A forthright relationship between the two leaders has also been an important factor. Azerbaijan's successful pursuit of a foreign policy of "strategic hedging" was defined by one of us (Gvosdev) in the Fall 2020 edition of *Baku Dialogues* as not having to choose between good relations with any of the major power centers of Eurasia, building on Zbigniew Brzezinski's 1997 statement that Azerbaijan had the potential to become a strategic pivot of Eurasia. The enduring prudence of Baku's foreign policy is illustrated by the fact that Azerbaijan has emerged as a trusted mediator and interlocutor capable of bringing together partners, rivals, and competitors in what may be called the Silk Road region—and beyond. As a result, every major global and regional actor now has an interest in supporting Azerbaijan's foreign policy posture, because their own prosperity and security are best served by this arrangement. Rather than relying on great power competition and a zero-sum approach, Azerbaijan's focus has been on complementarity, not rivalry, within the framework of a regional transport and energy hub in which all major power centers, including Russia, participate and benefit. This has only become more obvious in the wake of the adoption of the November 2020 tripartite statement

that ended the Second Karabakh War, which paves the way for the political and economic normalization of relations in one of the most complex regions of the world.

In contrast, two successive presidential administrations of Ukraine—those of Petro Poroshenko and Volodymyr Zelenskyy—have resisted emulating some version of Azerbaijan's foreign policy posture and the evident benefits it has accrued from its position as a keystone state. Instead, they seemed to wholeheartedly embrace the pursuit of a foreign policy originating in many ways in another statement made by Brzezinski in 1997: without Ukraine, he wrote, "Russia ceases to be a Eurasian empire." But the heads of state of Ukraine mentioned above seemed to overlook the inconvenient fact that Brzezinski did not conceive of Ukraine as anything other than an object or "square" on the "grand chessboard" of Eurasia: his primary motivation was preventing Moscow from placing one of its own pieces on that square, not to suggest a path for Ukraine to transform itself from an object of geopolitical contention into a subject or a keystone state of a nascent international order.

Thus, neither Poroshenko nor Zelenskyy countenanced adopting constitutional changes that would have prevented Ukraine from continuing towards full integration along the Euro-Atlantic path as a price for regaining control over the secessionist portions of the Donbass. Instead, Ukraine pushed back against projects such as the Nord Stream 2 pipeline that would allow Moscow to effectually end the use of Ukraine as a strategic transit state for Russian energy headed for European markets. Finally, the successful establishment of an Orthodox Church of Ukraine independent of the Moscow Patriarchate—which was largely a politically-driven measure supported wholeheartedly by Poroshenko—was a powerful rebuke to the claims of a single Russian/Orthodox civilizational space. Ukraine's halting but real reform efforts, especially in the military sphere, and closer cooperation with NATO states, also raised the possibility that at some indeterminate point in the future, the balance of forces might shift in Ukraine's favor, not only regarding the Donetsk and Lugansk entities, but perhaps even Crimea itself.

The Kremlin worked throughout 2021 to get American and European assent to a series of propositions: the permanent neutral status of Ukraine (models include Austria and Finland); acceptance of Nord Stream 2 in return for Russian promises

not to cease all energy transit through Ukraine; an end to military cooperation between Ukraine and NATO members; implementation of the Minsk Agreements that, in providing for the reintegration of Donetsk and Lugansk into Ukraine, would effectually give Russia the ability, through those entities, to veto aspects of Ukrainian foreign and domestic policy to which it objected.

One very recent key turning point for Russia seems to have been the adoption of the "U.S.-Ukraine Charter on Strategic Partnership," signed by U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken and Ukraine's foreign minister during the latter's visit to Washington in November 2021. This document reiterated that the "strategic partnership existing between our two nations is critical for the security of Ukraine and Europe as a whole." It also underscored a joint "commitment to Ukraine's implementation of the deep and comprehensive reforms necessary for full integration into European and Euro-Atlantic institutions" on the basis of the 2008 NATO Bucharest Summit Declaration, which had stated explicitly that Ukraine and Georgia "will become members of NATO." The Charter was evidently not interpreted favorably in Moscow: what the Biden Administration undoubtedly viewed as signal of resolve was perceived by the Kremlin as a sign of intransigence.

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Still, Moscow did not abandon its policy of seeking an accommodation with the West (albeit on its own terms)—not only regarding the conflict over Ukraine, but broader questions as well. A little over a month after the U.S.-Ukraine Charter was signed, Russia provided written security and arms control proposals to the United States and NATO (the conflict over Ukraine was an integral part but hardly the sole object of these drafts). More than a month after that—so in late January 2022—Washington and Brussels provided counterproposals that fell far short of what the Kremlin had hoped to achieve. In a final set of conversations with French

President Emmanuel Macron and German Chancellor Olaf Scholz that took place soon thereafter, it became clear to Moscow that Paris and Berlin could not override Washington's objections—thereby confirming the Kremlin's longstanding view that the European members of NATO (and, by extension, the European Union itself) play little more than Robin to America's Batman on matters of strategic significance as defined by the United States.

In launching his "special military operation" deep into Ukraine, Putin has gambled that he can achieve most of his post-2014 objectives through a military campaign whilst enduring the impact of Western sanctions. Indeed, as he told the Valdai Group back in 2014, "Russia is a self-sufficient country. We will work within the foreign economic environment that has taken shape, develop domestic production and technology and act more decisively to carry out transformation. Pressure from outside, as has been the case on past occasions, will only consolidate our society, keep us alert, and make us concentrate on our main development goals."

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Putin's assertions about his country's essential self-sufficiency, as well as the expectation that Russia, as a provider of critical commodities required by the global economy, starting with energy and fuel, can weather the Western storm, sets the stage for testing how long prolonged economic sanctions against Russia can succeed, or whether the damage they inflict on Russia will cause Putin to change course. The apparent lack of enthusiasm on the part of many inhabitants of Eastern and Southern Ukraine—supposedly bastions of pro-Russian sentiment—to welcome their "liberation" in 2022, in contradistinction to the case in Crimea in 2014, has also called into question how much Putin's thesis about the essential unity of the Russian and Ukrainian peoples applies to the contemporary situation.

In starting a major military operation in Ukraine, which has demonstrated real weaknesses in both the Russian military and its economy, the Kremlin risks doing more to erode its great power status than any outside

Western policy. Russia's sources of influence in the West are receding as European economies seek to decouple from the Russian natural resource base. To push back against Western economic and political power and influence, Putin, like the canonized Russian prince Alexander Nevsky in the thirteenth century, may have to accept temporary subordination to an Asian superpower in order to preserve Russia's distinctiveness from Europe.

A window of opportunity remains ajar, if not exactly wide open, for the West's leaders to reach out to the Kremlin in order to prevent Russia from taking irreversible steps in the direction of a China so conceived.

This would obviously not be good for Russia. But it is also hard to understand how such an outcome would help the West counter China, a state whose "stated ambitions and assertive behavior present systemic challenges to the rules-based international order and to areas relevant to Alliance security"—in the words of a recent NATO summit document. This and similar statements make it clear that the West has determined that China is its foremost strategic competitor: when the CIA established a new dedicated China Mission Center in October 2021, Director Bill Burns even described its "increasingly adversarial, predatory leadership" as the "most important geopolitical threat we face in the twenty-first century." A window of opportunity remains ajar, if not exactly wide open, for the West's leaders to reach out to the Kremlin in order to prevent Russia from taking irreversible steps in the direction of a China so conceived. Doing so is in the strategic interest of the West (and also Russia), and it will require the West to decisively urge Kyiv to strike a deal with Moscow—something U.S. and European leaders have been loath to do since the conflict over Ukraine entered into its present and decisive phase in the wake of the 2014 "Revolution of Dignity."

The obvious basis of a viable settlement to the conflict over Ukraine are the two Minsk Agreements—especially those provisions that, as alluded to above, would require Kyiv, at the very least, to engage in a painful process of constitutional reform granting self-government to the Donbass in exchange for reintegrating this breakaway region into the country's constitutional order.

Why is this so important? Because in this provision may lie the key to ending the conflict over Ukraine. The deal Putin wanted to make from 2014 onwards was and largely remains based on his interpretation of its meaning: constitutional reform that would ensure a status for the Donbass that can be described as "more than autonomy, less than independence" within a sovereign Ukraine whose territorial integrity (minus Crimea) could be guaranteed in some fashion by both the West and Russia. Such guarantees would also likely involve requisite pledges to respect Ukraine's neutrality and binding commitments not to deploy troops or establish military bases on its territory. Depending on how political, economic, and battlefield realities play out in the time ahead, other considerations may also enter into the settlement picture. There are indications that Zelenskyy is at last facing up to such a possibility. Consider the following passage from his candid 25 March 2022 interview with The Economist: "Victory is being able to save as many lives as possible. Yes, to save as many lives as possible, because without this nothing would make sense. Our land is important, yes, but ultimately it's just territory. […] To save everyone, defend all interests while protecting people, and not giving up territory is probably an impossible task."

We are of course aware of the various objections to this unsentimental way of thinking. But sentimentalism is precisely what produced innumerable missed opportunities, naive misjudgments, unforced errors, and the present morass in which no actor can objectively claim to be "winning."

We are of course aware of the various objections to this unsentimental way of thinking. But sentimentalism is precisely what produced innumerable missed opportunities, naive misjudgments, unforced errors, and the present morass in which no actor can objectively claim to be "winning."

Consider that since the onset of Russia's "special military operation," not a few new hints of support have been made to Ukraine by the West—many of which, as of the time of completing the writing of this essay (i.e., on 27 March 2022), have not been fulfilled. These include fast-tracking Kyiv's EU and NATO membership processes, the handover or sale of MiGs belonging to NATO member states, the

establishment of a NATO-enforced no-fly zone over Ukraine, and even the direct involvement of NATO ground troops in the conflict.

On the other hand, the West has provided just enough support to keep Ukraine in the fight, which is another way of saying the West has taken active measures to assure Russia cannot achieve its goals on the battlefield without incurring the potential for military breakdown and economic ruin at home as well as reputational collapse abroad. The Western calculation seems to be that however much suffering Ukraine sustains, Russia will suffer more and the West will suffer minimally. This expectation, however, has neither stopped the destruction of significant parts of Ukraine's civilian and military infrastructure nor the Russian military's advance. What it has done is increased the hardship of Ukraine's population, produced millions of IDPs and refugees, and brought the global economy into a perilous position.

How, exactly, is this good for Ukraine?

The question of how to resolve the conflict over Ukraine is thus both a deeply geopolitical and ethical one. If the West truly wants the fighting to end quickly, it can either enter directly into an armed conflict with Russia—risking nuclear war—or it can bring its full influence to bear on Kyiv to negotiate a peace whose terms will look a lot like what ought to have been agreed before 24 February 2022.

All this is a little too reminiscent of a critical event in the tragic history of Bosnia: in virtually all important aspects, the November 1995 Dayton Accords that ended the war closely resembled the March 1992 Lisbon Agreement that was signed by all relevant actors a few weeks prior to its commencement before being rejected by one of them: Alija Izetbegović, the representative of the Bosnian Muslims. This rejection, which led inexorably to more than three years of civil war, took place within hours of his tête-à-tête meeting with the U.S. ambassador to Yugoslavia, Warren Zimmerman.

In between Lisbon and Dayton, 100,000 people lost their lives, something like half of Bosnia's inhabitants were internally displaced or became refugees, jihad came back to the "heart of Europe" after a century's absence, who knows how many billions of dollars were spent on weapons that caused between €50 and €200 billions of wartime damage (no one knows for sure), and its social fabric and demographic picture was irredeemably

wrecked (its present population is what it was in the early 1960s, and trending further downwards).

Regardless of who started that war and why, for Bosnia the result of protracted war was devastating: by every tangible and intangible measurement, the country remains worse off nearly three decades after war's end than it was prior to its commencement—and this despite untold billions spent by the West in propping up the country since the U.S.-backed peace was finally signed.

No one should wish a similar fate onto Ukraine, which is why finding a compromise settlement based on earlier proposals through negotiations devoid of sentiment should be completed successfully as soon as possible. Foresworn should be the temptation to look to another example from the Balkan civil wars—namely Kosovo—as somehow a more positive precedent from which to analogize what the West could hope to accomplish in the Ukrainian theatre. The truth is, Kosovo is hardly a place anyone can claim with a straight face has produced the hoped-for return on investment, even by the low standards of contemporary expectations for the Balkans. The Kosovo scenario also does not apply to Ukraine for a much more important reason: the 1999 NATO "humanitarian intervention," which was led by the United States at the peak of the unipolar moment, was fought against a small, isolated, and non-nuclear state that had been under economic sanctions for much of the decade. Even then, it took 78 days of sustained bombing on a country roughly the size of Iceland or Kentucky to produce the intended tactical result—and still today, the underlying conflict remains unresolved. Again, not a model to emulate—if, that is, the desired end-result in the context of the conflict over Ukraine is to produce conditions for restoring economic growth and political stability in Eastern Europe.

As Walter Russell Mead recently wrote, "the world is a difficult place. Geopolitics rules, and if you get power politics wrong, the rest doesn't matter." And that almost certainly means ending the conflict over Ukraine as soon as possible along the lines we have outlined above—this is in the strategic interest of all actors. What also *does* matter, in present circumstances, is for Ukraine to avoid becoming the Bosnia (or Kosovo) of Eastern Europe *and* for Russia to avoid the risk of becoming China's Belarus. Avoiding both is in the West's interest, for it would then be able to concentrate on trying to strengthen

its position against the Asian superpower Biden has argued desires "to become the leading country in the world, the wealthiest country in the world, and the most powerful country in the world." This is also in Ukraine's interest, for by wholeheartedly embracing the opportunity to become one of the world's most important keystone states, Kyiv could ensure its long-term viability as a sovereign and independent state. Finally, this is in Russia's interest, as well, for the Kremlin could build a credible narrative that its immediate objectives were met and none of its red lines were crossed—in Ukraine and, frankly, elsewhere.

> *For better or worse, Ukraine will never be as important to the West as it is to Russia—and this would be true even if Ukraine was the only item on their respective strategic agendas.*

Two decades ago, we served together as editors at *The National Interest*. During this period, one of us (Gvosdev) wrote an article entitled "The Sources of Russian Conduct" that concluded with the following statement: "The word 'appeasement' easily drips from the lips of those who dislike this analysis. […] The belief that the United States can try to pressure Russia to abandon the pursuit of what it considers to be its legitimate interests without having truly to invest much time or effort is naive at best and counterproductive at worst." Although circumstances involving the West and Russia have certainly changed for the worse in the intervening 18 years, our contention is that the guidance they contained is even more pertinent today than it was in the spring of 2004.

Our reasoning is straightforward: for better or worse, Ukraine will never be as important to the West as it is to Russia—and this would be true even if Ukraine was the only item on their respective strategic agendas. But this last is very far from being the case today—certainly for the United States, whose leadership of the West has again been reaffirmed thanks to the conflict over Ukraine. To maintain and perhaps even strengthen that leadership against China—a country that Biden defines as being in "competition [with the United States] to win the twenty-first century"—America stands to benefit greatly from bringing Russia back in from the cold. BD

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The CSTO Intervention in Kazakhstan

Implication for Regional and World Order

Filippo Costa Buranelli

In the first two weeks of 2022, Kazakhstan was ravaged by an unprecedented scale of protests, violence, and repression. While it is still very much difficult to know what exactly caused the clashes, what seems to be the case is that it involved the meeting of two different and separated dynamics. The *first* was peaceful protest, which originated in the west of the country because of the doubling of LPG prices alongside the solidarity expressed with the protesters in other parts of the country, i.e., in the north as well as in the east and the south. The second was the presence of violent bandits, criminals, and hooligans that in less than perfect coordination set ablaze Almaty, Taraz, Shymkent, and other centers in the south, which led to the bloodiest clashes in the history of independent Kazakhstan. In a series of rapid escalations, which even those inside the Central Asian nation are still struggling to understand, the initially peaceful marches descended into violence.

On 5 January 2022, the Kazakhstani authorities, fearing for the collapse of the constitutional order and for the state to spiral into country-wide bloodshed, decided to request the intervention of the Collective Security Treaty Organization (CSTO) to protect sensitive and strategic infrastructural objectives such as power grids and airports so to allow to the internal security forces to repress and quell the violence. On 6 January 2022, the CSTO Collective Security Council issued a statement indicating its decision to "send the CSTO Collective Peacekeeping Forces to the Republic of Kazakhstan for a limited period of time to stabilize and normalize the situation in that country." The same day, these forces began to arrive in Kazakhstan. On 19 January 2022, the CSTO Secretary General informed the CSTO Collective Security Council that all contingents of its Collective Peacekeeping Forces have been withdrawn from the territory of Kazakhstan.

> *The revival of this regional alliance may be read as a sign that the dynamics leading world order to embrace region-based multilateralism and a more embedded pluralism are getting stronger and clearer.*

Much ink has been spilled in writing about why these events took place, what caused them, who was behind them, and who or what favored them. Most of what has appeared in print has not been particularly coherent or accurate. The truth is that too little is known at the moment: much time will need to pass for scholars to gain a clear understanding of what exactly happened within the Kazakhstani security and elite apparatus so that these violent dynamics could be unleashed.

Yet, what has been somehow neglected and, when addressed, grossly simplified, is the role that the CSTO had in addressing the crisis, let alone the potential repercussions that this intervention may have on the Central Asian regional order and world order more widely. The escalation of the conflict over Ukraine that was triggered by the onset of Russia's "special military operation" in late February 2022 has further muddied the analytical waters.

What has gone largely unnoticed is that the revival of this regional alliance, which has been institutionally dormant in the previous years, may be read as a sign that the dynamics leading world order to embrace region-based multilateralism and a more embedded pluralism—defined as diversity of political ideas, norms, and principles—are getting stronger and clearer. Furthermore, this may mean that Eurasian regionalism itself is at a crossroads. But let's go in order.

Some Clarifications

First, clarity in terms of membership and vocabulary, as well as with respect to historical analogies, is much needed. In many reputable Western media outlets, from the

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U.S. to Italy going through Germany and the UK, among others, the term 'CSTO' was often used as a synonym for 'Russia.' Clearly, this is not the case. Nobody disputes the fact that, in terms of budget contributions, units' contributions, official language of meetings, and general overseeing of the organization (including the location of the institutional structure thereof), Russia is the primary actor within the CSTO. One just has to acknowledge that 90 percent of the budget of the organization is contributed by Russia. Yet, to equate the two is to seriously misunderstand a project that—despite the preponderance just noted—is nonetheless multilateral in nature. Russia aside, member states to the organization are Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. The importance of this multilateralism will be explained later in this essay. For now, it is important to remind the readers that the CSTO is a multilateral organization and that neglecting this multilateralism means to downplay a shared consensus and understanding on some of the cardinal principles at the heart of the organization, such as regime security and territorial integrity, that sustain and perpetuate the Eurasian regional order.

Second, the labeling of the CSTO intervention into Kazakhstan as an 'invasion.' This, again, is a gross misreading and mislabeling of what, in all effects, was an intervention following a formal request coming from the highest authority of the state experiencing internal turmoil on the basis of Article 4 of the CSTO charter. The CSTO forces entered Kazakhstani territory only after a formal invitation was extended, the necessary paperwork approved, and a decision reached by a consensus of its members was approved. As a matter of fact, Article 5 of the CSTO charter stresses the voluntary participation of its members, while Article 12 prescribes consensus when it comes to the resolutions of the main bodies of the organization, i.e., the Council for Collective Security, the Council of Ministers of Foreign Affairs, the Council of Ministers of Defense, and the Committee of Secretaries of Security Councils.

Third, this multilateral enterprise should not be confused either with prior historical examples like the Warsaw Pact or analogized with contemporary organizations (e.g., the CSTO as a 'mini-NATO'). Different from both, the CSTO manifestly lacks an underlying ideology and is mostly a tool for Russia to keep military ties with some former Soviet republics, an opportunity for smaller states to benefit from security cooperation

with Russia, and a platform to facilitate military arms sales, training, and the exchange of documents and data related to security. Let alone the enormous geographical, historical, and membership- and endowment-wise differences.

If anything, it is the lack of coordination with the United Nations, expressly foreseen by Chapter VIII of the UN Charter and recently disciplined by UN General Assembly resolution 73/331, adopted on 25 July 2019, that has been both surprising and a bone of contention. The text of said resolution includes various formulations "inviting" and "encouraging" the UN and the CSTO to "continue," "enhance," "increase," or "strengthen" their "coordination," "cooperation," "collaboration," "interaction," and "consultations" in various areas, including peacekeeping. But nothing more substantive than that. Still, the CSTO chose not to "consult" with the UN in the context of its intervention in Kazakhstan. Additional analysis will be required with respect to its motivations, although it may have had to do partly with the urgency of the matter and partly with its evolving understanding of the abovementioned embedded pluralism and its operation along strong regional multilateral lines.

Nonetheless, what is interesting to note is that right after the termination of the CSTO mission in Kazakhstan, the CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Zas and the UN Assistant Secretary-General for Political Affairs Miroslav Jenča had a meeting in which the latter noted that he was impressed by the speed and excellent organization of the transfer and deployment of the CSTO Collective Peacekeeping Forces into the Republic of Kazakhstan and appreciated the rapidity of contacts between the CSTO and the UN Secretariats and emphasized that the UN Secretary-General received timely information from the CSTO about the current situation and the deployment of the peacekeeping contingent. Also, the UN Security Council was notified of the CSTO's decision, as were the secretaries general of the OSCE and the SCO. As shall be said more on this below, notification is not consultation.

Past Operations and Present Circumstances

In previous years, the CSTO had several opportunities to intervene in conflicts taking place on the territory of its members. First, there were the inter-ethnic clashes in Osh, in southern Kyrgyzstan, for which the Kyrgyz interim

leadership guided by Roza Otunbayeva asked the CSTO to intervene so as to restore order and stability. This was in June 2010. Back then, not only did the CSTO refuse to intervene because the matter was considered by other CSTO members an internal affair of Kyrgyzstan, but also different member states opposed the intervention on the grounds that this would have embroiled the organization in a potentially explosive ethnic conflict between two members states with potentially long-lasting consequences in terms of patterns of amity/enmity in the region. In this respect, the fear of Russia coming was especially voiced by then president of Uzbekistan, Islam Karimov, at a time when Uzbekistan was still a member to the organization.

The CSTO is not perhaps an organization as active, as integrated, and as politicized as NATO; but at the same time, it is not a smokescreen for the grand designs of territorial conquest and revisionism of one or more of its member states.

More recently, in 2020, and again in Kyrgyzstan, violence erupted that brought Sadyr Japarov to power. This led to requests for a CSTO intervention, which again was declined on the basis of the internal nature of the conflict. Third, also in 2020, the CSTO's intervention was requested by Armenia during the conflict over Karabakh with Azerbaijan. And, once again, this was deemed (mostly by Russia) to be an internal conflict (i.e., a conflict taking place entirely on the territory of a non-CSTO member) and hence outside the legitimate jurisdiction of the organization. These three refused interventions, whatever the legitimacy of their grounds, led many analysts and scholars to dub the CSTO as a paper tiger, as the dog that does not bark, as a simulacrum of an organization that exists perhaps de jure but not really de facto.

The curious thing is that in the wake of its intervention in Kazakhstan, many of those same analyses and commentaries portray the organization as a vehicle of Russian imperialism and a threat to the sovereignty of its member states while also questioning why the CSTO intervened in the first place. It seems like a typical case where neither action nor inaction are satisfying outcomes. As with most things in politics, and indeed life, perhaps the truth is in somewhere in the middle. The CSTO is not perhaps an organization as active, as integrated, and as politicized as NATO; but at the same time, it is not a smokescreen for the grand designs of territorial conquest and revisionism of one or more of its member states.

The technicalities of the recent mission to Kazakhstan may help understand this point better. Notwithstanding the post facto cries that the intervention was a general rehearsal for Ukraine or that it represented yet another attempted power-grab orchestrated by Russia, the mission counted approximately 2,500 personnel, 700 of which were Belarussian, plus Armenian, Kyrgyz, and Tajik contingents, with duties of protection and surveillance of sensible infrastructure. This is not exactly an overwhelming number of soldiers. The mission lasted some 10 days, and the entire CSTO contingent left Kazakhstani territory within the timeline agreed by all members and suggested by President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev himself on 19 January 2022.

This all took place in the aftermath of two quite infelicitous statements by U.S. Secretary of State Tony Blinken, who first argued that "once Russians are in your house, it's sometimes very difficult to get them to leave," before later going on to say that "Kazakhstan will need to offer an explanation as to why the CSTO was invited." The first statement was proven wrong in light of events and, once again, seemed to neglect the fact that this was a multilateral enterprise (with the already acknowledged prominent role played by Russia, hinted at by Tokayev himself in his speech expressing gratitude to CSTO leaders). The second statement showed a peculiar interpretation of diplomacy and sovereignty: after all, Kazakhstan is a country that, being sovereign, is entitled to ask for help to whomever it wants—and this requires no further explanation, certainly not to those who have no standing to ask for one. These statements by Blinken, paired with the widespread misunderstandings analyzed above, have not proved helpful to understanding the events in Kazakhstan, let alone to the establishment of a milder and more favorable diplomatic climate between great powers, which would have been helpful, to say the least, in these recent weeks of mistrust and mutual suspicion in the context of the conflict over Ukraine.

Regional and Global Implications

As stated above, very few analyses have devoted enough time and attention to the regional implications of the CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan—much less to its potential repercussions on world

order. First, to understand one of the most crucial consequences of these events, we need to go back to what I had said earlier about the fundamental multilateral enterprise of the CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan. The powerful message that was sent cane be summarized as follows: "Eurasia is ready to support and entrench incumbents whenever they are under foreign threat." It is undeniable, as a matter of fact, that the CSTO's Kazakhstan intervention marked a watershed for Eurasian regional security, given that it represents the first example of a deployment of military units in Central Asia from abroad since the Tajik civil war (1992-1997). A new trend in rising solidarity and mutual assistance in Central Asia may well be on its way.

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This qualitative change in the CSTO's organizational purpose—which went from a coordinating and rather technical organization to a more proactive and solidaristic multilateral forum in the field of security in a matter of weeks—is perhaps surprising, although not exactly sudden. As a matter of fact, on 19 May 2021, a meeting of the CSTO Council of Foreign Ministers was held in Dushanbe. This organ approved a draft Agreement on Jurisdiction and Legal Assistance in Cases Related to the Temporary Presence of Forces and Means of the Collective Security System in the Territories of the CSTO Member States. The purpose of this document, as reported by the CSTO, is to "create a mechanism for cooperation between the competent authorities of the CSTO member states: military police, military investigation, military prosecutor's office, military courts (tribunals) in criminal and administrative cases against persons who are part of the forces and means of the collective security system." The Agreement was then signed in Dushanbe on 16 September 2021, during the next session of the CSTO Collective Security Council. With the benefit of hindsight, this development is crucial in understanding the shift of the organization's self-defined purpose.

Thus, the first consequence of the CSTO intervention is that it seems to be in line with already consolidated trends about regime (or at least incumbent)

protection—the understanding that *avtoritet* and *stabil'nost'* constitute the two normative cornerstones of the Eurasian order. This is mostly evident in the way in which members states and crucial non-member states (e.g., China and Uzbekistan) rallied around the justification provided by Tokayev to invoke, legitimately in his mind and in that of his regional peers, Article 4 of the CSTO charter to allow for foreign forces. For example, Beijing has a lot to lose from destabilization in the region, hence China was relatively muted as the violence broke out in Kazakhstan, expressing no concerns about the CSTO mission and backing the diagnosis that a foreign-sponsored coup could be in progress.

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Whether this rationale is authentic, legitimate, and corroborated by the findings that the investigation wanted by Tokayev is now tasked to produce, is another matter. What matters here (since it has profound relevance for the salience of the notion of embedded pluralism) is the common normative and ethical understanding of what sovereignty, order, legitimacy, and stability has for the CSTO and its member states. This may not be seen necessarily as a direct promotion of authoritarianism, but rather as a convergence around a specific meaning of sovereignty, authority, and stability that converge around the idea of strong rule. In this respect, one may even look at the CSTO intervention not as an act of regional politics, but in fact as one of domestic politics—with Tokayev invoking its presence on Kazakhstani soil to be legitimized by his peers. While often overlooked in (mostly, but not exclusively) Western analyses of Eurasian regionalism, symbolism is a crucial component thereof.

The second consequence of the CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan is that it may potentially create mutual suspicion and an additional fracture within the Central Asian regional security complex, as this trend may not necessarily apply to Uzbekistan. On the same day that the CSTO announced the deployment of "Collective Peacekeeping Forces" to Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs issued an official note saying that the country

expressed confidence and hope in the leadership of Kazakhstan, and that it was sure the situation could be resolved without external assistance. The actual deployment of the CSTO units and, perhaps even more importantly, the 10 January 2022 statement made by the president of Belarus, Aleksandr Lukashenko, during an emergency meeting of the CSTO Collective Security Council (no less) that the next possible unrest could take place in Uzbekistan, have increased the suspicion of Uzbekistan towards security-based multilateral organizations. Incidentally, one could say that this suspicion is enshrined in the country's 2015 foreign policy concept, which has recently been reaffirmed, that states its commitment not to join military blocs.

The big question remains what the future of Eurasian security will look like without Uzbekistan's position being formalized.

In any event, Lukashenko's comments caused public outrage in Uzbekistan, especially among local pundits and in the expert community, although remarks by Uzbekistani officials stayed relatively restrained. Across the media, Lukashenka's remarks were called a "diplomatic mistake" and a "threat to Uzbekistan's sovereignty." Uzbekistani experts generally agreed that, as they put it, "Europe's last dictator" was doing the Kremlin's bidding: the thinly veiled message found in his clumsy remarks was allegedly intended to heighten pressure on Uzbekistan to join the CSTO and other Russia-led regionalist organizations. To Uzbekistani observers, Lukashenko's pointed remarks were the latest in a long series of attempts by Russia to pressure Uzbekistan into joining the CSTO.

However, that pressure campaign has so far been backfiring. Indeed, the CSTO troop deployment to Kazakhstan, combined with Lukashenko's warning, united Uzbekistani officials, local opinion leaders, and experts in rejecting CSTO membership under any circumstances. Whatever the Kazakhstani leader's reasons for calling in CSTO peacekeepers, political elites and experts in Uzbekistan collectively and resolutely rejected any such possibility for their own country. Specifically, they have characterized any potential invitation for foreign troops to put down domestic protests as tantamount to losing one's sovereign statehood and as a national humiliation in light of the achievement of 30 years of independence.

It is therefore legitimate to expect that, from the Uzbek side, there will be a dual move. *First*, that the abovementioned solidarist trend between Eurasian and Central Asian states with respect to regime protection and the entrenchment of incumbents will meet the favor of Tashkent in normative terms, but not in terms of how to do enforce it—this will basically amount to a dovetailing between regional norms and regional practices. *Second*, and consequently, Tashkent is likely to continue its policy of bilateralism in foreign policy, pursuing further cooperation and coordination with neighboring countries and Russia in the field of military and state security without participating in formalized multilateral structures. Thus, the big question remains what the future of Eurasian security will look like without Uzbekistan's position being formalized.

The third consequence of the CSTO intervention is that it will be reasonable to expect more openness, and a greater propensity, to discuss a possibly more proactive role for the CSTO in future conflicts in Eurasia.

The third consequence of the CSTO intervention is that it will be reasonable to expect more openness, and a greater propensity, to discuss a possibly more proactive role for the CSTO in future conflicts in Eurasia. After all, what recent events have shown is that, irrespectively of the normative standings and preferences of analysts, the CSTO has indeed demonstrated a surprising ability to adapt to local contingencies and to pursue pragmatic, goal-oriented coordination. While future interventions will keep being discussed on a case-by-case basis, it is clear that what happened in Kazakhstan will ensure the organization has more leeway to try to play a more active role that goes beyond coordination, training, and information-sharing, perhaps assuming even a mediating role in some of the existing tense situations in the region. It is not by chance, perhaps, that the wave of violence that erupted on the Kyrgyz-Tajik border in the final days of January 2022 prompted CSTO Secretary General Stanislav Stas to voice the organization's availability to play a role in resolving the issue, including mediation. This, it should be noted, contrasts starkly with the rebuttal that Kyrgyzstan's Japarov got right at a CSTO meeting in 2021

when he mentioned the CSTO as a possible arbitrator in the issue of Kyrgyz-Tajik border conflicts, thus signaling an evolution in the organization—and, perhaps, of its strategic objectives, too.

The fourth and final consequence of the CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan has more of a global reach. I hinted at this at the beginning of this essay: we may be seeing the onset of a push towards an even more entrenched and embedded pluralism in world order. This is evidenced in the statement issued on 26 May 2020 by the foreign ministers of the CSTO member states that called for establishing a fairer and more democratic world order. In particular, as Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov explained at the time, the CSTO foreign ministers "supported the creation of a fairer and more democratic world order based on internationally recognized principles of international law" and "adopted a joint statement on this issue, which reaffirms the commitment of the CSTO members to the goals and principles of the UN Charter." To many, this sounds like an inconsistency—perhaps even a contradiction in terms—given the authoritarian governance structure of most polities in Eurasia. However, one needs to go deeper in the analytical interpretation of this term, to understand that a "democratic world order" is one that is organized along the lines of a pluralist ethics and communitarian principles, and that it is democratic in that allows for fundamental differences to coexist—in other words, embedded pluralism.

Here, in this context, by "pluralism" I mean the diffuse distribution of power, wealth, and cultural authority; and by "embedded" I mean that cultural and ideological difference are not only tolerated, but respected and even valued as the foundation of coexistence. This is a concept that, *in nuce*, began to appear quite frequently in Russian official speeches (let alone in those of Central Asians) in the past few years, is inherently linked to the concept of embedded pluralism, and, indeed, is aligned to the kind of strategic and discursive narratives deployed by Chinese officials, too.

A few Russian examples are sufficient for present purposes. In a November 2021 address to the Russia-Islamic World Strategic Vision Group, Russian president Vladimir Putin mentioned the need for a "democratic world order [...] that is based on the rule of law and the peaceful coexistence of states and is free of the

dictate of force and any forms of discrimination." Putin also argued for the necessity of "promoting an interfaith and inter-civilizational dialogue, ensuring international stability and security, and building a fairer and democratic world order" at the Twelfth International Economic Summit between Russia and the Islamic world in Kazan, which took place in July 2021. A few months earlier, Lavrov had promoted "the objective trend for democratizing interaction between states and creating a fair, inclusive, and polycentric world order" in his meeting with UN Secretary-General António Guterres, stressing that "the voice of every country, regardless of its size, military, or economic capacity, must be heard within the framework of this democratic world order." Of some interest, perhaps, is that the same concerns were voiced at the Sixth BRICS Parliamentary Forum in late October 2020 by the Chairman of the State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin.

Fairer and More Democratic World Order

In this respect, the CSTO intervention in Kazakhstan has indeed entrenched this understanding of world order as it applies to Eurasia along three fundamental trajectories. First, the understanding of sovereignty not as a right but as a capacity. In other words, sovereignty in Eurasia is qualified as such not through a nominal act of international law (*superiorem non recognoscens*), but through the ability of the leadership of regional states to maintain social order, keep competing groups in check, and quell dissent that may drive such state too far from Moscow's interests.

Second, the fact that international security in Eurasia has again taken on a much-severed regional trend. This was evident not just in how swiftly the division of labor between Russia and China—premised on Russia providing military and security support and China economic incentives and opportunities—has been implemented, but also in the rapidity of the coordination and the deployment of the Kazakhstani operation, as well as the marginalization of any other actors, both state and international. As a matter of fact, no concerted great power management was visible, and the relevant international organizations were "informed" and "notified," not "consulted." This speaks directly to the idea of a "more democratic world order" that this episode symbolizes.

This friction was visible also in how the United Nations noted that members of a Kazakhstani military unit known as the Kazakhstan Battalion (KAZBAT)—which is drawn from the country's airborne forces and participates in UN missions abroad—were photographed wearing blue helmets (the images were taken by a local photographer and then spread globally by the U.S.-based AP news agency) and yet were not part of a UN peacekeeping mission. A UN spokesperson was quoted by Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, a U.S.-government-funded news organization, as stating that "United Nations troop and police contributing countries are to use the UN insignia only when they are performing their mandated tasks as UN peacekeepers, in the context of their deployment within a United Nations peacekeeping operation as mandated by the UN Security Council," which was, of course, not what took place in Kazakhstan. Yet, as we noted above, the UN was quick to congratulate CSTO's conflict-management once its mission was over.

Third, this episode may signal a push to regionalize conflict-management, allowing regional great powers to take ownership of their own regional security complexes—at least in instances in which other (regional) great powers do not object. An earlier example of this, similar in many respects to the CSTO's intervention in Kazakhstan, was the 2011 deployment of the Peninsula Shield Force (the Saudi-led military arm of the Gulf Cooperation Council) to Bahrain at the request of its government to help it defend its constitutional order against a foreign-backed aggression, identified with Iranian forces. Yet, considering what discussed above, what is important to keep in mind is that this potential push towards the regionalization of conflict management, at least in Eurasia, is being undertaken on solidarist and multilateral lines, despite the undeniable prominent role played by Russia. This multilateral discourse of necessity and legitimation is often forgotten; yet it is fundamental to understand the development of these new trends in world politics.

Moreover, exactly because it has developed along multilateral lines and is based on consensus, this solidarity and the negotiated hegemony that derives from it should not be interpreted as blind and unconditional. Solidarism as described above still develops and takes place in a highly politicized realm—one marked by contestation, tensions, historical and present sensitivities,

and strategic differences. It is, in fact, because of this tension that, for example, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Uzbekistan have taken very cautious positions on the conflict over Ukraine. That is to say, they have avoided condemning Russia directly, reaffirmed the indivisibility of Eurasian security, continued to cooperate with Moscow in many areas, advocated for the prevalence of diplomacy and dialogue, and abstained from voting in favor (or, in Uzbekistan's case, not registering a vote) of the recent Western resolution at the UN General Assembly condemning what the Russians call a "special military operation" and what the text calls an "aggression." Yet, at the same time, they have reiterated their adherence to the fundamental norms of international law and refused to recognize the separatist "people's republics" of Donetsk and Lugansk.

To conclude, it is now clear that the tragic events in Kazakhstan constitute a watershed event in the history of the country. Understanding the origins, causes, and deep impact of the popular discontent there will be of utmost importance to guarantee the sustainable renewal of a more just and equitable social contract between the authorities and the people. Yet, what should also not be forgotten is that in parallel to domestic developments, fundamental regional ones have also taken place, affecting the very meaning of security and sovereignty, and the dynamics of multilateralism in the context of Eurasia. These regional effects, in turn, are very likely to have future important repercussions for the current trajectory of world order and its embedded pluralization. Ignoring them is a mistake; downplaying them is wishful thinking. BD

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Sino-Iranian Relations and Their Impact on South and Central Asia

Stephen J. Blank

In July 2020, a draft text of a series of Sino-Iranian agreements outlining a comprehensive 25-year strategic partnership between Iran and China was leaked. The leaked text accords presaged the formal accords signed in 2021 whose text has not been released. These agreements fundamentally transformed Sino-Iranian relations and also converted the Middle East into another theater of the global Sino-American confrontation. That latter consideration shows that the significance of these accords transcends the Middle East. Although most Western commentary naturally emphasize the Sino-American and Middle Eastern repercussions of these accords, we cannot neglect their no less enormous impact on Central and South Asia and focus on those unduly neglected issues.

China's agreement to the terms, as leaked—$400 billion in investments in Iran over 25 years, particularly in large scale transportation energy, infrastructure, telecommunications, projects, and access to Iranian ports—signified a vast expansion of China's policy of forming a global network of partnerships with countries wary of American dominance. Even if this is more a declaration of intent than what will actually happen, the parties' intentions are clearly serious. The agreements also stipulated that these programs would come under the administrative rubric of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), China's signature policy, and very much a Chinese-directed series of projects.

Commitments on this scale also clearly denote a major new strategic orientation by China and Iran. Even observers who underplay these revelations like Jonathan Fulton, a Non-Resident Senior Fellow at the Atlantic Council, concede their dramatic impact on Sino-Iranian relations and world politics more generally. This is particularly significant as China does not cavalierly establish comprehensive strategic partnerships (CSP) with other states. For example, China has signed such agreements with other Gulf states like Saudi Arabia—so signing one with Riyadh's main Middle Eastern revival cannot have been a routine or impulsive decision. Neither will its impact be restricted to the Gulf and Middle East. A CSP is (or was, before the February 2022 agreement with Russia) the highest level in China's hierarchy of diplomatic relations. In a CSP, the partner states commit to the "full pursuit of cooperation and development on regional and international affairs." Since Beijing does not offer this level of partnership easily, as Fulton has also observed, a state receiving that status must be perceived by China as playing an important political and economic role internationally, and the bilateral relationship must already feature a high level of political trust, dense economic relations, and a strong, well-established relationship in other areas.

> *Commitments on this scale also clearly denote a major new strategic orientation by China and Iran.*

The specific terms of the Sino-Iranian accords are breathtaking in their scope. By stating its intention of investing $400 billion in Iran over 25 years, China displays its belief that it can defy the U.S. sanctions upon Iran and countries dealing with it, along with U.S. policy towards Iran. Moreover, the gains accruing to it from this defiance outweigh the costs, which will undoubtedly include new sanctions. Thus, the Chinese scholar of the Middle East, Fan Hongda, warned in an authorized newspaper article that there could be a point in the downward spiral of U.S.-Chinese relations at which China would no longer regard the potential cost of violating U.S. sanctions as too high. And that China is less and less constrained by U.S. factors when considering its diplomacy with Iran.

China, like Russia, evidently also believes it can continue to have strong relations with many if not all Middle Eastern states, despite ostentatiously throwing in its lot with Iran. Whether that Chinese

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calculation will be realized in regard to such enemies of Iran like Israel or Saudi Arabia remains to be seen. But, as shown below, these accords also strike substantial blows against Indian and even Russian interests in Central and South Asia.

Likewise, the economic scope of the agreements is equally breathtaking. China will build about 100 different projects in Iran, including high-speed railways and subways, free trade zones in Maku, Abadan (where the Shatt-Al Arab River flows into the Persian Gulf), and on the Gulf Island of Qeshm. China will also build infrastructure for a 5G telecommunications network, offer its Beidou satellite and accompanying Global Positioning System (GPS) to enable Iran to assert more control over its cyberspace, as China has already done. Even if some analysts, like Fulton, are skeptical about some of the grander economic and strategic claims made on behalf of an accord between these two powers, they accept that this deal will have serious repercussions in areas beyond the Middle East, e.g., South Asia. In other words, this accord has significance not only for but beyond the Middle East and the Gulf region.

The sheer scope of the impact of this Sino-Iranian deal on the Middle East, South and Central Asia, including India and Russia, tends to confirm the highly strategic nature of China's overall policies towards these regions.

At the same time these deals presage an enormous expansion of BRI through Iran into the greater Middle East. In this context, the enhancement of the quality of Iranian telecommunications also greatly strengthens Iran's ability to thwart U.S., Israeli, and Western initiatives to block its nuclear program and defend against cyber threats.

Expanded Power Projection

But while these agreements underscore a massive upgrading of China's influence in the Gulf and Middle East, commentary on these accords has neglected their substantial repercussions in South and Central Asia affecting India, Central Asia, and Russia. So, while the most consequential repercussions of these agreements are that they underscore a major enhancement of China's overall political, economic, and military position in the Gulf and Middle East and portend an alliance with Russia and Iran in the Middle East, we must also state that this greatly expanded power projection capability pertains as well to South and Central Asia, and to Sino-Indian and Russian relations as well.

In addition, the scope of China's recent moves in these latter theaters suggests a rather deliberate strategy to augment Chinese presence, influence, leverage, and power at the expense of actual and/or potential rivals, namely India and Russia. Of course, those multi-regional consequences also challenge not only local and regional governments' interests but those of the U.S. and its allies as well. In other words, the sheer scope of the impact of this Sino-Iranian deal on the Middle East, South and Central Asia, including India and Russia, tends to confirm the highly strategic nature of China's overall policies towards these regions, making Chinese policies to be more than opportunism and improvisation.

The Belt and Road Initiative is clearly a grand strategy, mobilizing the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia, and making China a global power on par with the United States, perhaps even at the center of a new world order.

Moreover, China's strategy comprises combining economics with geopolitics; and the multiple objectives of each aspect mutually reinforce each other. These economic and strategic goals comprise exporting excess capacity and overproduction in steel and coal; consolidating supply lines of energy resources and food; controlling China's restive Xinjiang region; the global dominance of Chinese economic value chains and production standards; creating advantages for Chinese corporations and technologies; and extending diplomatic leverage and influence, thereby subordinating many nations to China's preferences and interests. So, the Belt and Road Initiative is clearly a grand strategy, mobilizing the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia, and making China a global power on par with the United States, perhaps even at the center of a new world order.

Neither does China exclude military considerations. In July 2019, Defense Minister Wei Fenghe told Caribbean and South Pacific defense officials that China stood ready to deepen military cooperation

with them "under the framework of the Belt and Road Initiative." Other observers, like Director of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center Barry Pavel, have also noted the military-strategic connotations of BRI. China's newly enhanced maritime access across the Indian Ocean and Middle East into Europe will be used for classic great-power nationalist geopolitical and military purposes, including political influence and a wide range of military objectives such as Intelligence, Surveillance, and Reconnaissance (ISR); Command and Control (C2) of military forces in exercises, in shows of force to deter U.S., European, and Gulf military action, and, potentially to target U.S., Gulf, and European forces.

These agreements have been long in the making and derive from a long-term process of growing Sino-Iranian ties. Indeed, successive Iranian defense ministers have advocated closer military cooperation and partnership with Russia, India, and China to rebuff NATO enlargement and the deployment of U.S. missile defenses to the Mediterranean and Black Seas.

Once Xi Jinping visited Iran in 2016, negotiations for this series of agreements began in earnest. Meanwhile, China's economic involvement with Iran also expanded by an order of magnitude. By 2018, China had become the largest buyer of Iranian crude oil and a major investor in the South Pars gas field. China has also stated and executed its intention to replace Western firms as they left Iran due to sanctions, and to fill any U.S. or Western-made vacuum in Iran and the Middle East.

Consequently, there is every indication that the Sino-Iranian 2021 agreements mark a qualitative and multi-dimensional step forward in realizing Tehran's and Beijing's intentions—intention that have been earlier expressed and realized in policy. Therefore, these accords stand upon a well-developed foundation of previous relations and point, from the Western perspective, ominously to the future. More critically, they also create "new and dangerous flashpoints" in the Sino-American confrontation while also striking directly at Washington's Iran policy.

South and Central Asian Repercussions

The mere announcement of these accords has also already affected major power relationships in South and Central Asia. Immediately after leaking these agreements Iran renounced a major deal with India, seemingly going it alone on building the $1 billion 628 km railway from Iran's Chah Bahar port to the city of Zahedan, located near Iran's border with both Afghanistan and Pakistan (allegedly due to delays in Indian funding). The railway was intended to be part of a massive north-south trade route known as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), a multi-modal 7200-km trade and transportation corridor from Iran north to Central Asia and Afghanistan as well as Russia.

Obviously, INSTC is another of those grand designs for inter-continental trade to strengthen global economic integration and integration in Central Asia itself and with external major players like Russia and India. Russian planners originally thought that China could benefit from INSTC, but BRI negated that expectation. India saw INSTC as an import-export route to Russia and Central Asia, a way of reaching Central Asia without depending on Pakistani forbearance (which is currently inconceivable), and as a means to jumpstart significant growth for India's overall foreign economic and trade relations. So, it agreed to invest $365 million to develop the deep sea port of Chah Bahar on the Indian Ocean only 300 km from Pakistan's hub at Gwadar, which is the site of a major Chinese BRI project.

This project began in the 2000 Indo-Russo-Iranian accords to build transportation networks to connect these states, and Central Asia with European markets. It languished until 2015 when the signing of the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) on the Iranian nuclear program broke the sanctions imposed by Washington and allowed work to go forward. Indian commentators like Meena Singh Roy wrote then that ending sanctions on Iran opened up possibilities for revitalizing the INSTC project.

Although India and Iran resumed active discussion of large-scale Indian investment in the project, the restoration of sanctions when the United States withdrew from the JCPOA, the lack of European investment in Iran, and India dilatoriness, has held the project back and retarded investments by India, which does not want to run afoul of Washington even though it had gotten a waiver previously for INSTC. Moreover, INSTC remains more an idea than a real project. It lacks a mechanism for addressing operational issues on the ground—e.g., funding infrastructure problems and customs

procedure disputes. There is also a lack of common border crossing rules, weak container trade, and multiple rail and transit problems that hinder trade; and, of course, there is the uncertain Afghan situation. All these issues impede realization of the INSTC vision.

So, while BRI is moving forward, INSTC remains essentially on the drawing board and may well never come off that board. Therefore, it appears that Chinese influence has undermined India's efforts to push into Central Asia (not surprisingly given the current Indo-Chinese tensions). This should not come as a surprise since BRI has, from its inception, carried an anti-Indian orientation even before the most recent upsurge in fighting between India and China in the disputed Himalayan border zones. So, the impact upon India of these accords is quite consistent with the preceding thrust of Chinese policy. Neither is this likely to be a coincidence.

Since the Sino-Iranian accords involve some $400 billion in Chinese economic investment over a quarter of a century, give China a major role in modernizing Iranian railroads, ports, 5G networks, and telecommunications generally, Iran may also expect that China might fund this railway. In return for discounted supplies of Iranian hydrocarbons for the next 25 years, Iran apparently now counts on China to replace India in this and other projects. While India has sent high-level delegations to Iran to salvage the situation, a Chinese railroad there clearly throws a spoke into the Indian wheel and simultaneously undermines Russia's prospects as well as INSTC. Since both India and Russia regarded China as "the elephant in the room" and saw INSTC as their counter to BRI, this Iranian investment places major complications in the way of materializing INSTC, and thus both countries' efforts to counter BRI with something tangible rather than mere words on paper.

China's deal with Iran undermines Indian policy in general and particularly in regard to Pakistan and Central Asia whilst also bringing Iran into CPEC.

Thus, and this is not unusual, China's major deals with one or more country along the BRI route lead it deeper into regional politics and processes—something it is apparently willing to undertake in order to enhance its presence in Iran and Central Asia and thwart India. China's deal with Iran undermines Indian policy in general and

particularly in regard to Pakistan and Central Asia. Pakistani sources characterize this deal as bringing Iran and Pakistan closer together, as it incorporates Iran into the China-Pakistan Energy Corridor (CPEC) whose value has grown from $46 billion to $62 billion.

Greater Iranian-Pakistani cooperation has been a goal of Pakistani President Imran Khan since 2018. This collaboration will also allow all three countries—i.e., Iran, Pakistan, and China—to collaborate more effectively in reducing the threat posed by anti-Chinese Baloch separatists who have regularly targeted Chinese infrastructure projects along the Iran-Pakistan border and enhance collaboration against the Jaish Ul-Adl militant group that plagues Iran and which Tehran believes Pakistan has assisted. Iran-Pakistani cooperation in and of itself thus helps the internal security situation in both countries and adds security to Chinese investments in both states.

Trilateral cooperation between China, Pakistan, and Iran will inevitably diminish Indian influence and presence in the Gulf, Central Asia, and even the Indian Ocean given China's growing network of ports in the region.

Moreover, diminishing India's role at Chah Bahar may enhance the role of Pakistan's port at Gwadar, which is a centerpiece of BRI, and allow China to be the sole de facto manager of both ports. Lastly, Iran's incorporation into BRI will probably help Pakistan confront its perennial energy crises, as Iran can export oil, gas, and electricity to Pakistan at low rates and the still-delayed Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) pipeline may well move forward as well. In this context, worth mentioning is the fact that China's Petroleum Pipeline Bureau (CPPB) has long since expressed an interest in working on the remaining part of the IPI from Gwadar to the Iranian border. Meanwhile Iran is also discussing an LNG pipeline to China in the context of CPEC. And trilateral economic cooperation will also allow Pakistani-Iranian trade to grow to a potential $5 billion. On top if that, Pakistan can use China's banks to support this trade thus helping Iran evade Western sanctions.

Trilateral cooperation between China, Pakistan, and Iran will inevitably diminish Indian influence and presence in the Gulf, Central Asia, and even the Indian Ocean given China's growing network of

ports in the region. Since Pakistan has embargoes Indian shipments to Afghanistan and Central Asia originating in the Iran port of Chah Bahar, China not only deprives India of a crucial strategic vantage point and lever of influence in Central Asia—since that port is and was crucial to any Indian seaborne foreign and commercial policy, especially in Central Asia—it also deprives India of means of competing with CPEC, which it opposed. And as the ports of Gwadar and Chah Bahar have signed "sister ports" MOUs, their inclusion in China's "string of pearls" will certainly further enhance cooperation between them and likely result in more Chinese investment. Thus, this deal will certainly intensify Indo-Chinese tensions that will rebound to Pakistan's benefit and help it exclude a direct Indian access to Afghanistan and the rest of Central Asia—an exclusion that could become all the more troubling for India as the Taliban (which Iran, Pakistan, and China support) consolidate power in Afghanistan.

China is utterly self-interested and relentlessly subordinating Russian interests to its own goals as well as being driven by a more genuine market logic that respects economic realities.

Neither is it unusual for China to undercut Russia's grand Eurasian designs. As Pavel Baev observed in September 2020: "any progress in advancing plans for Eurasian cooperation depends upon a readiness to invest in joint projects. China has been working diligently on executing President Xi Jinping's trademark Belt and Road Initiative, reassuring Russia of its benign intentions; but at the same time, Beijing has so far seen little need to cut in Russian partners." This still appears to be the case. Indeed, for all the talk of a grand Eurasian partnership between China and Russia, this has been the fact all along. Despite Russia's enforced official optimism that BRI is fundamentally different from Russia's integration efforts in the former Soviet Union, or that these projects are complementary, the evidence suggests a third alternative: China is utterly self-interested and relentlessly subordinating Russian interests to its own goals as well as being driven by a more genuine market logic that respects economic realities.

Thus, a 2020 analysis of the rail component of BRI by Singapore-based scholar Shang-su Wu makes it clear that China has deemphasized the railway element of BRI through Mongolia to Europe because it would bring "potential rival" Russia into play and give Moscow a possible veto over such Sino-European rails transport and trade. Similarly, for a variety of technical reason—e.g., differing rail gauges, state policies—Central Asian states' railway progress to Europe can go through Russia or link up with trans-Caspian shipping or INSTC to thwart the clear Chinese intention to make BRI the premier rail venue for trans-continental shipping in the Silk Road region. Therefore, buying into this railway from Chah Behar and neutering INSTC is clearly a strategic move to reduce not only India's but also Russia's ability to challenge China in Central Asia and, in turn, to have leverage over BRI.

Indeed, if Russia represents the most likely commercial "gateway" to Europe for China and a potential geo-economic and geostrategic rival, negating its projects and curtailing its reach into Central and Southwest Asia makes eminent sense for a China on the march. Nevertheless, Russia has not yet altered it course for an alliance with China against America in which China inevitably will play the leading role—the likely consequences of the conflict over Ukraine dramatically increase the odds of this strategic trajectory.

Furthermore, Moscow has tried—inconsistently, to be sure—to fashion alternatives to BRI. The greater Eurasia concept outlined by Putin in 2015 was one such example; a second has been the subsequent championing of cooperation with China on BRI. But a third was INSTC which, if developed, could have become a real competitor for BRI in bringing India, Iran, and Central Asia closer to Russia and giving them more scope for independent international trade and economic power. Since Moscow, despite its cooperation with China, keeps saying it will not play second fiddle to China (although that is clearly what is happening), it valued INSTC and cooperation with India: this was and remains a balancer for China in Asia from Moscow's standpoint whilst also offering Russia a valuable strategic instrument for connecting with the Gulf and Indian Ocean.

In 2014, Chinese investors announced interest in a high-speed Moscow-Kazan railway that would go to Beijing. Yet while the original memorandum of understanding envisaged the route passing through Siberia, China later revealed that the line would go instead from Kazakhstan's capital Astana (subsequently renamed Nur-Sultan) through China's Xinjiang, bypassing Russia and

cutting travel time by two-thirds. And this is supposed to be a "model project of Russo-Chinese cooperation." Other options for Sino-European trade likewise bypass Russia altogether, going instead through Central Asia and the South Caucasus. More broadly, given that maritime intercontinental trade from which Russia is absent remains vastly cheaper than overland trade, land routes account for less than 1 percent of total cargo between China and Europe.

To be sure, Russia has brought some of this on itself by failing to reform its economy and expand both domestic and foreign investment in its territory and in Central Asia. In particular, Moscow has been wary of investing in infrastructure projects, for all the big talk about grandiose projects like INSTC and the concept of a greater Eurasia. Moreover, Russia also has a rather unfortunate history of abandoning its own infrastructure commitments in mid-stream, leaving countries like Kyrgyzstan and others in the lurch. Indeed, as the Lowy Institute's Bobo Lo wrote recently in a paper commissioned by the French Institute of International Relations regarding the Kremlin's Greater Eurasia concept, "there is little evidence so far that it is up to the task. Today, Greater Eurasia is more an anti-project than project, an expression of Russian animus toward the liberal international order rather than a serious blueprint for global governance."

These Russian failings, which appear to be intrinsic to its system, are one reason to explain why Sino-Russian economic collaboration outside of energy has been so disappointing. But in fact, it appears quite evident that China does not have, if it ever did, a genuinely collaborative vision of Sino-Russian economic cooperation in Eurasia. China has flatly refused to take up any of the 40 transportation projects that the Eurasian Economic Union—Moscow's central project for Eurasian economic integration—has so far put forward, and it should be noted that Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov was conspicuously absent at the July 2020 BRI conference in Beijing. Instead, Russia appears to have promoted

China does not have, if it ever did, a genuinely collaborative vision of Sino-Russian economic cooperation in Eurasia.

engagement with India which, it thought, could act both bilaterally and regionally with Central Asian states instead of going through the BRI mechanism. Russia also obviously counted on INSTC and the Ashgabat Agreement, in force since 2016, which has been defined as a "multimodal transport agreement signed by the governments of Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Turkmenistan, Iran, Pakistan, India, and Oman to create an international transport and transit corridor facilitating transportation of goods between Central Asia and the Persian Gulf."

However, by virtue of the agreements with Iran, China has essentially undone both India and Russia's aspirations for an independent economic base for such grandiose transportation and infrastructure projects in Eurasia. Thus, beyond ejecting India from a major Central Asian project and sundering its expected links to those states, Chinese moves have also undercut Russia's grand design for a north-south transport corridor with India. This has left BRI and its "coordination" with BRI as the only game in town for Moscow, another move that reinforces Russian dependence on, or even subordination to, China.

The Importance of Roads and Ports

Other economic trade and investment issues also have strategic significance for China's ties to Iran, Central Asia, and the Middle East. The scale of envisaged Chinese investments in Iran will likely lead to a noticeable upsurge of Chinese private security firms or military companies in Iran. The figure of up to 5,000 Chinese security personnel has duly been mentioned. But the building of roads also encompasses military uses as does the real possibility that Iran, like Sri Lanka and seven other countries, will fall into a debt trap to China that then has China taking over strategic facilities in return for writing down or writing off sovereign debt. Here it is worth looking at concurrent Chinese initiatives in the vicinity of Iran. Among the countries in danger of falling into that debt trap are Kyrgyzstan and Tajikistan, where China is either taking over territory, building military bases in Tajikistan, or angling for control over Kyrgyz railways. Thus, it is not surprising that merely announcing these accords triggered an outbreak of the highly developed Iranian sense of nationalism, charging the government with "selling off" parts of the country.

Other examples of these accords' impact beyond the Middle East and the Gulf or the Indian Ocean Region also merit consideration. In this context, the many reports that began to surface in 2020 that China is offering the Taliban large investments in energy and infrastructure projects in return for the Taliban concluding peace with the Afghan government should be seen as more than economic inducements for peace in Afghanistan. One of these reports indicated that China would commence building a major six-lane highway road network across Afghanistan. This has grown in salience since the August 2021 Taliban takeover of the country. China has also worked with Pakistan to express concern about a "potential terrorist resurgence" once U.S. troops leave Afghanistan, despite Pakistan's long-running encouragement of those selfsame groups.

While it is incontestable that a modernized and expanded road network that permits cross-country transportation and access to neighboring countries and benefits large investors like China can enhance trade, investment, and overall connectivity, we cannot remain oblivious to the obvious strategic advantages of this proposed network—especially in the context of the grand strategic design outlined above.

Not only would this road network facilitate regional trade with Central Asia, it also would undoubtedly connect directly to Iran and permit direct land access from China to Iran to accompany China's considerable maritime presence in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf. This land access to both Central Asia and Iran would admirably serve as a means of rapidly transporting land power—i.e., army forces and components for air and/or missile bases, should China or Iran ultimately desire them.

This network would therefore admirably serve as a means for China to project direct force into Afghanistan, Central Asia, or Iran—if needed. Since China is already beginning to project forces into Tajikistan and Afghanistan, there is good reason to watch these road projects very carefully.

But the agreements enabling a Chinese presence in Iranian ports is even more consequential. Since foreign ports are contractually bound to serve as military ports for China, there should be little doubt that contractors on these road and telecommunications projects would similarly be obligated, given China's past record on its foreign projects. Thus, in addition to an enhanced ability to project land and naval forces if not components for air

and missile operations, China, through its telecommunications projects—e.g., using Huawei—could soon possess the capability to project informational influence and power into Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran. Therefore, from this vantage point it seems quite clear that we are witnessing the gradual unfolding of this comprehensive economic-military-informational strategy buttressed by Chinese diplomacy and power throughout the entire expanse of Central Asia. Moreover, we are only in the early stages of this grand design. For example, Uzbekistan's decision to ship its seaborne foreign trade through Pakistani ports enhances the role of the port of Gwadar and potentially China's presence there, and thus, indirectly at least, its potential leverage over Uzbekistan.

In addition to an enhanced ability to project land and naval forces if not components for air and missile operations, China could soon possess the capability to project informational influence and power into Central Asia, Afghanistan, and Iran.

Equally importantly, beyond enhancing Iran's defense capability, the agreements also grant China access to Iranian ports. Thus, everything we know about the Sino-Iranian accords also point to an increase in China's overall power projection capabilities, i.e., not only in the military sphere. Specifically, China will gain access to two ports along the coast of the Sea of Oman. A Chinese presence at Jask, located just outside the Straits of Hormuz, gives Beijing unprecedented access to the Gulf and a listening capability there. This presence not only fits with BRI, but it is also part of China's "string of pearls" network of ports that connects its shores through Southeast Asia, Gwadar in Pakistan, and Hambantota in Sri Lanka all the way to Djibouti in the Horn of Africa. China has also bought ownership of the ports of Kumkort (Turkey's third largest port), Haifa, and Piraeus as well as equity in the ports of Rotterdam, Hamburg, and Antwerp. Although this network of ports obviously has intrinsic economic-political implications, this network has hitherto lacked a connection to the Gulf.

In Sri Lanka's case, the Hambantota concession was so onerous that the government could not meet its bills, fell into China's debt trap, and had to surrender ownership to China. But ownership

is not the only question here. Israel's sale of the port of Haifa alarmed U.S. officials and was one reason for U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's March 2019 trip to Israel since Haifa was a British army base during the British Mandate in Palestine and could be used in a similar capacity by the United States, if necessary. In fact, America's FY 2020 National Defense Authorization Act specifically stated that

> the United States has an interest in the future forward presence of United States naval vessels at the Port of Haifa in Israel but has serious security concerns with respect to the leasing arrangement of the Port of Haifa as of the date of the enactment of this Act; and should urge the Government of Israel to consider the security implications of foreign investment in Israel.

This military concern applies now throughout the entire expanse of this Chinese string of pearls and is, from the American perspective, well warranted. Although there is as yet no sign of any military impact due to these Chinese acquisitions of foreign ports, the Center for Advanced Defense Studies (C4ADS), a Washington, DC-based think tank, reported in 2018 that Chinese law obligates all Chinese-owned commercial ports to provide logistical support for the PLA if needed. Indian analysts worry about this with regard to Pakistan and China's presence at Gwadar, but American concerns should go beyond Gwadar to embrace the entire Indian Ocean Region and the Middle East—now that Iran is in the picture.

Taken in the context of the unrelenting buildup of China's naval, amphibious, and power projection capabilities, the expansion of China's existing port network in the Indian Ocean at Djibouti and now into the Mediterranean through these ports, can only arouse even greater concern in Washington, the West, and across the Middle East. This program of acquiring ownership status in key foreign ports must also be viewed in the context of China's military-civil fusion program. When examined through this lens, it becomes clear that these acquisitions represent both economic and potential strategic objectives that are inextricably tied together. The acquisition of foreign ports represents a leadership preference for leveraging China's growing foreign commercial presence. Indeed, that fusion process is also now law, since Chinese-made civilian infrastructure projects, including foreign ones, must fulfill military specifications.

Therefore, there is no reason to doubt that, should China gain port access in the Gulf, it will link up

with its base at Djibouti and other ports it is acquiring in the Indian Ocean Region for both commercial and military purposes. This, in turn, indicates that China's apparent policy is to develop BRI ports with dual-use functionality. Specifically, Beijing appears to seek ports with terminals that can support various types of PLA military operations. Such capabilities include high standard RO-RO features to unload heavier than normal cargo (e.g., armored vehicles), berth depths of at least ten meters (to accommodate warships), cold storage facilities, assembly sites, and heavy-duty reinforced access roads.

Indeed, this civil-military fusion process allows China to build up both sources of power unobtrusively and quickly, if need be, and use its burgeoning port network for whatever purposes are necessary. China already owns two dozen ports in the Indian Ocean Region and roughly the same number in Europe. Thus, it is developing not only a formidable economy and military but also an inter-operability between the civil and military economies with respect to operational logistics.

Such concerns about Iran and China's relations and policies do not stop there. China's efforts to acquire controlling stakes or at least equity in major ports has gone global. Already by 2017 China had invested $20 billion in such projects and was seeking allies and markets in 65 countries. The network of ports and other logistical facilities in Europe, Africa, and Asia provides China with a high degree of operational self-reliance and capacity. Control of international supply lines and logistical processes gives a country political leverage if that country is prepared to use these capabilities for political ends. While there are restrictions on European countries and other liberal democracies against using commercial and civilian assets to achieve political ends, no such limitations exist in China. Indeed, it is a crucial part of the country's toolkit to use economic leverage to achieve both economic and non-economic ends.

China's official *Blue Book of Non-Traditional Security* (2014-2015), an annual volume produced by state-sanctioned academics and researchers, states that two of BRI's purposes are to mitigate American-led geopolitical machinations and ideas, and to promote a new international discourse and order that enhances China's national power and soft power. Investment in ports and other assets should be considered in the context of the concept of "strategic support

states," which came to prominence amongst Chinese strategists earlier this decade. In a 2015 consensus paper of 50 Chinese scholars on China's periphery diplomacy in the Xi Jinping era, cultivating "strategic support states" is achieved through regional cooperation and providing economic and public goods as China expands westward. According to aforementioned analysis by the C4ADS think tank, one of the principles of cultivating a "strategic support state" is to ensure that "China has the ability and resources to guide the actions of the country so that they fit into its strategic needs."

There is ample evidence to suggest this is not abstract strategizing by policy wonks. In Pakistan, enormous Chinese investments, such as in the Port of Gwardar, have given the Pakistani economy an instant economic sugar high. But they have also burdened that country with debt that it cannot repay and turned Pakistan into a long-term client state of China's. A similar situation occurred in Sri Lanka with regards to its Hambantota Port, as mentioned above. Over the past five years, China has invested over $5 billion in Cambodia, a sum equivalent to about one-quarter of the country's GDP, in return for Phnom Penh pushing China's interests in organizations such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). This includes a 100 percent ownership of the Koh Kong New Port. Like Pakistan and Sri Lanka, Cambodia cannot change course while it is caught in a Chinese debt trap. And indeed, its port at Ream is now becoming the latest member of the Chinese port network, replete with a nearby airstrip that could easily give Chinese air coverage over much of Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean Region.

U.S. officials have claimed to observe a pattern whereby China invests heavily in a state's critical infrastructure; then it acquires valuable waterfront real estate through a Chinese company, ostensibly solely for commercial activity; and then finally the site becomes part of a larger strategic and geopolitical network of China. This pattern apparently occurred in Ream in Cambodia and could easily be happening in Sri Lanka and especially Pakistan. And it certainly appears to be underway in Iran, depending on the language contained in the actual Sino-Iranian agreements. Meanwhile, strategically the proximity of Ream to an airport under construction by a Chinese company near Sihanoukville on the Gulf of Thailand substantially enhances China's power projection and overall military power capabilities throughout Southeast Asia and

the South China Sea, not to mention becoming another key element in China's "string of pearls" in the Indian Ocean. The ensuing threats to India and ASEAN members are quite obvious.

Thus, the creation of this "string of pearls" appears to be well underway from Southeast Asia all the way to Djibouti near the Red Sea. Its Middle Eastern acquisitions are only part of a larger grand design. And given the potential military implications of those acquisitions, this network could substantially augment China's power projection capability.

Other military challenges are equally conceivable. For example, the Pentagon has reported that Moscow and Beijing are now ready to sell fighter jets, main battle tanks, helicopters, and modern naval capabilities to Iran. In China's case, this has not yet materialized but undoubtedly Iran continues to seek them. American analysts also have reported about the existence of "triad of disinformation" whereby Iranian, Russian, and Chinese messaging is following parallel or converging lines against the United States, raising the specter of collaboration in information war against America and its allies.

This pattern of going from economic presence through political influence to enhanced defense capabilities fully comports with China's Arctic policies, for example, and appears to be a pervasive pattern of contemporary Chinese grand strategy.

Thus, China's forthcoming deals with Iran appear to be part of a larger Chinese strategy for enhancing its economic, political, and ultimately military presence in the Middle East and Central and South Asia. This pattern of going from economic presence through political influence to enhanced defense capabilities fully comports with China's Arctic policies, for example, and appears to be a pervasive pattern of contemporary Chinese grand strategy.

And as befits a comprehensive strategic design, this network of infrastructural investments also reaches into information and communications as well. Cyberspace and the so-called Digital Silk Road link all these roads and ports together through cyber and satellite communications and reconnaissance that also include fiberoptic cables, projects where companies like Huawei play

a major role. The data from these linkages goes into China's "big data" technology infrastructure and lend support to next-generation artificial intelligence (AI) technologies that China seeks to dominate.

These and other aspects of the Digital Silk Road also include the export of AI and other information technologies to promote China's surveillance state techniques abroad. In this light, it appears that BRI will increasingly serve as a conduit for the export of surveillance techniques and technologies that in all too many instances can be characterized as truly Orwellian. This, of course, is anathema to the Western conception of governance. For example, Chinese companies like Huawei, Hikvision, and Dahua—all three are included on America's restricted entity list—supply AI surveillance technology to over 60 countries, nearly 40 of which are part of the Belt and Road Initiative. Indeed, Huawei alone provides AI surveillance technology to at least 50 countries worldwide.

China's Smart Cities and Smart Ports programs also strive to centralize vast realms of data into a centralized platform to boost economic activity and efficiency. This program and similar Chinese technology export programs pervade the Silk Road region to a considerable degree. It seems reasonable to suppose these will extend into Iran as a result of the Sino-Iranian accords, which would thereby consolidate the linkages emanating from China through Central Asia to Iran and vice versa. In and of itself, these appear to be in the service of entirely legitimate development goals.

And, in a sense, they are. However, such and similar programs also provide terrestrial, cyber, and space linkages that fuse commercial and military activities and data together. Therefore, BRI integrates dual-use infrastructure, Smart Ports and Cities, and space and digital systems, which clearly goes far beyond what the West would consider to be the advancement of economic influence.

Beijing's BRI strategy bolsters its technological, economic, political, and security interests, which taken together means that China is increasing its rule-setting power—something that the European Union, in its own way, has also indicated is a priority (and this has caused it to work closely with the United States in some regulatory domains like data flows and the privacy issues they inevitably raise). Thus, BRI can be seen as an instrument for advancing these Chinese strategic goals but also through the various technological advantages

embedded in the Digital Silk Road and Space Information Corridor. Therefore, we must see these ports and neighboring industrial clusters to which China may now be getting access as constituting "strategic strongpoints," as, in fact, many Chinese analysts call them.

Ramifications

The evidence presented in these pages tends to confirm two main points. *First*, that a major component of China's overall geostrategy, at the center of which stands BRI (understood as possessing dual-use functionality), is to assume a leadership role in establishing a new global political and economic order in opposition to what its proponents call the "rules-based liberal international order." *Second*, that China's agreements with Iran, which are intentionally characterized by non-transparency, will almost certainly have significant repercussions for India, Pakistan, and Central Asia.

This clearly reflects China's far-reaching strategic ambitions. Whether these ambitions can be fully realized, only partially realized, or, less likely, fail to be realized remains a question for the future. Still, there can be no doubt that China is already heavily involved in shaping the domestic agendas of BRI states. It seems likely that this presence will grow in the time ahead, together with the implementation of BRI. Indeed, as Bruno Maçães writes in his *Belt and Road: A Chinese World Order* (2020), Cambodia's Sihanoukville, the home of a projected airport and the base at Ream, is already a Chinese city. Meanwhile, he adds, BRI provides the overarching framework for Pakistan's every economic policy and project as well as its policy decisions and reforms.

At the same time, this essay also raises many questions revolving around the Sino-Iranian agreements, the chief of which is how these will affect not only the Middle East but also Central and South Asia. These same agreements also force us to consider the potential prospect of trilateral strategic coordination between China, Russia, and Iran—and even the possibility that this could rise to the level of a de facto alliance in the time ahead. This, in turn, compels us to think about the implications of that possible new formation for international politics in the regions under consideration and, indeed, globally. In that context, the examples provided here show that despite the intimacy of Sino-Russian relations, China does not miss an opportunity to subordinate Russian interests

to its own strategic interests. Beijing's behavior in the first month of the latest phase of the conflict over Ukraine reinforces this point. This raises the puzzling question of why, despite China's repeated exploitation of Russia, Moscow continues to adhere to it and bind itself ever more closely to Beijing. The last question concerns the extent to which Chinese strategic ambitions, the execution of which centers on BRI, can ultimately succeed.

Such and similar questions are no cause for lament, but rather constitute an acknowledgement of the open-ended character of contemporary international relations and their complexity, whereby regional and global strategic issues meld and intertwine in myriad and multiple ways. Given China's actual and potential power as well as the already visible aggressiveness of its policies, the issues raised here and elsewhere mean that the questions raised here and elsewhere might emerge from this and related analyses will preoccupy us for a long time to come. The issues raised by China's negotiations for an agreement on the scope discussed in these pages are already transforming regional relationships and processes in the Middle East as well as in South and Central Asia. This essay has already raised some of these issues, but what it also shows is that Sino-Iranian relations and their ramifications will influence global processes and relationships for years, perhaps decades to come. BD

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Prospects for Pax Caucasia?

The 3+3 Regional Cooperation Initiative

Vasif Huseynov

The 3+3 format for regional cooperation is an initiative that was first proposed by the leaders of Turkey and Azerbaijan in the aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, building somewhat on an idea that originated in Iran during the war itself. This grouping covers the three countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) plus the three most important countries neighboring this region (Russia, Turkey, and Iran).

Thus in December 2020, Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan announced the initiative at a joint press conference with his Azerbaijani counterpart, President Ilham Aliyev, during his visit to Baku in which he reviewed the military parade marking Azerbaijan's victory over Armenia in the aforementioned war—a war that heralded the fundamental transformation of regional geopolitical and geo-economic realities. On this occasion, Erdoğan called 3+3 a win-win initiative for all actors in the region. Given its obvious potential to promote peace and security in the South Caucasus and facilitate the normalization of relations between former belligerents, some local experts believe that the 3+3 initiative could be instrumental for the emergence of Pax Caucasia.

Four of the six countries immediately reacted positively to the initiative, with Armenia and Georgia expressing some reservation. While Armenia initially sounded skeptical, the government of Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan eventually confirmed its participation in this format. For now, the only country that retains distance from the Pax Caucasia process is Georgia which, due to its ongoing territorial dispute with Russia, refuses to participate in this platform and proposes an alternative 3+2 format (the countries of the South Caucasus + the EU and the United States).

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In terms of the bottom line, 3+3 may perhaps come to be seen as the regional flagship project that established a much longed-for Pax Caucasia.

Tbilisi has called its counterproposal the "Peaceful Neighborhood Initiative" but has taken no concrete action to set it in motion. Neither Aliyev nor Pashinyan have yet to publicly comment on the 3+2 format. Others have also remained silent. Hence, the likelihood it can prevail over the 3+3 framework in geopolitical substance is low, given that it excludes major active regional players like Russia and Turkey and substitutes them with two Western actors that are evidently less engaged in the region. The advent of the present phase of the conflict over Ukraine, which began on 24 February 2022, has also not increased the prospects of the Georgian idea being adopted, either.

Meanwhile, the Georgian leaders acknowledged that it would be "necessary" to participate in regional geopolitical projects "in some form." This has been widely interpreted as Tbilisi's nodding to possibly take part in the 3+3 format. However, given that Georgia has not decided to so yet, the discussions at the moment are being held in the 2+3 format (Armenia and Azerbaijan plus Russia, Turkey, and Iran). Nevertheless, the initiative continues to be widely called 3+3 by both regional media outlets as well as state officials and the expert community—the idea being that this maintains the hope or expectation that sooner or later Georgia will join the club.

The 3+3 initiative is reminiscent of some cooperation projects proposed by regional actors soon after the collapse of the Soviet Union. Such attempts previously failed due to several reasons, among others, because Armenia and Azerbaijan refused to cooperate with each other for as long as the conflict over Karabakh remained unresolved, i.e., for as long as Armenia continued to occupy territories belonging to Azerbaijan. Given the liberation of these territories that was a result of the Second Karabakh War (as enshrined in the 10 November 2022 tripartite statement between Armenia,

Azerbaijan, and Russia), the regional circumstances have changed, which has provided auspicious grounds for the implementation of all-inclusive cooperation projects. The 3+3 initiative is one such project that can serve as a platform for the peaceful resolution of the disputes amongst the member countries and for negotiations regarding the (re) opening of all regional transportation and communication links. This has the potential to promote economic and political cooperation in the context of the countries concerned in the face of regional and global challenges. In terms of the bottom line, 3+3 may perhaps come to be seen as the regional flagship project that established a much longed-for Pax Caucasia.

This essay examines the 3+3 regional cooperation platform initiative from various analytical perspectives. It first analyses the historical evolution of the idea of the 3+3 initiative, in light of previous proposal that could not be implemented in the wake of the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Second, it examines the transformation of regional geopolitics in and around the South Caucasus after the Second Karabakh War, which promises to be conducive to the realization of the Pax Caucasia vision. Finally, the essay explores the opportunities on offer by the 3+3 platform and the challenges this initiative is presently facing. It concludes with some policy recommendations for the governments of 3+3 members.

Enduring Goal of the Post-Soviet Period

In the late 1990s, the political leaders of the South Caucasus and some surrounding states concluded that it was necessary to bring the regional countries together under the umbrella of some sort of regional structure and create a solid basis for cooperation amongst them based on the mutual respect to each other's territorial integrity and national sovereignty. This was seen as an opportunity to achieve peace and security and unleash the region's full potential for economic development in the context of broader post-Soviet transition plans.

One of the first moves in this direction was made by the former Georgian President Eduard Shevardnadze in the second half of 1990s. In proposing the establishment of a "Peaceful Caucasus," Shevardnadze was seeking to push for more inclusive and deeper cooperation between the lands of the Caucasus (both southern and northern parts of the Caucasus). Although this idea failed to take hold in practice, it pioneered future discussions regarding regional frameworks.

Thus, for example, at the Istanbul summit of the OSCE in November 1999, President Heydar Aliyev of Azerbaijan proposed the creation of a pact to resolve regional problems and ensure peace, security, and stability in the South Caucasus. His idea was supported by President Süleyman Demirel of Turkey, who developed a broader proposal and communicated the nascent concept to the state leaders of the region. President Robert Kocharyan of Armenia and President Eduard Shevardnadze of Georgia joined the initiative.

This proposal, which was ultimately named the "Caucasus Stability Pact," was more outward-looking. The idea was to build an organization on the basis of a 3+3+2 format, which would have included the European Union and the United States along with the countries of the South Caucasus (Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Georgia) and neighboring region (Russia, Iran, and Turkey). The initiators were proposing to include security and conflict resolution issues along with economic cooperation and democratic reforms as thematic issues. President Heydar Aliyev underscored that "the countries of the South Caucasus must enter the twenty-first century free from all conflicts and confrontations and accept their own Pact for Security and Peace."

However, despite this understanding on the necessity of establishing a pact for peace, security, and stability in the South Caucasus, there was a major impediment that was at the time not possible to overcome. President Heydar Aliyev declared that "there is one condition" for the realization of these proposals: "It is the solution of the conflicts in the Southern Caucasus in the first place [...]. Armenia must liberate the occupied territories of Azerbaijan and over one million Azerbaijani IDPs must return home." The sides, unfortunately, failed to reach a breakthrough in the settlement of the conflict over Karabakh. For Azerbaijan, it was unacceptable to build any kind of relations with Armenia so long as 20 percent of the country's internationally recognized territories remained under its illegal occupation.

Another impediment to the "Caucasus Stability Pact" initiative was posed by the rejection of the European Union to participate in this project. In 2006, having just put forward its European Neighborhood Policy (ENP), the EU stated that this instrument would make a separate Stability Pact redundant. For example, in his remarks at a hearing

of the Political Affairs Committee of the Parliamentary Assembly of the Council of Europe on 12 May 2006, senior EU Commission official Robert Liddell said this proposal did not promise any added-value for the EU's existing policy: "I don't see much difference between what people are talking about in the Stability Pact and what the ENP is offering." Moreover, in the post-Shevardnadze period, Georgia lost interest in the initiative as well. Fearing that this framework would bog the country down, in terms of perception, in the political boundaries of the South Caucasus, the Georgian government refused to join the initiative. Salome Samadashvili, Georgia's ambassador to the EU, in the aforementioned hearing conducted by the Council of Europe, said her country "will not be captive to any regional approach, and Georgian society will move forward steadily on the course which it has chosen [namely, pursuing closer links with the EU and NATO]." Thus, in early 2000s, some of the stakeholders targeted by the "Caucasus Stability Pact" proposal were lukewarm in their support to the idea, though for different reasons.

The idea of a stability and cooperation platform in the Caucasus came back to the agenda of regional politics in 2008, after the Georgia-Russia war. This time, the progenitor was Erdoğan. Discussing this with Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev, he proposed to develop cooperation between Georgia, Armenia, Azerbaijan, Russia, and Turkey in a "five" or "3 + 2" format. Medvedev supported the idea, describing it as an "opportunity to conduct a denser, sometimes informal dialogue, to contribute to the solution of economic, transport, and energy problems of the region." But again, the proposal could not get off the ground at the time either because of the contradicting priorities of the regional states in foreign policy or the challenges posed by the unresolved conflict over Karabakh between Armenia and Azerbaijan.

The 10 November 2020 tripartite agreement for all intents and purposes put an end to the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenian forces, and, as such, opened a unique window of opportunity to revive the idea behind the South Caucasus peace initiatives put forward by the previous generation of regional leaders.

Transformation of Regional Geopolitics

The 10 November 2020 tripartite agreement for all intents and purposes put an end to the occupation of Azerbaijani territories by Armenian forces, and, as such, opened a unique window of opportunity to revive the idea behind the South Caucasus peace initiatives put forward by the previous generation of regional leaders. Azerbaijan's official recognition of the conflict as "resolved" and Armenia's agreement to the codification of the state border between the two countries based on Soviet-era maps raise hopes that the two countries will be able to overcome their longstanding enmity, and restart commercial, societal, and diplomatic relations. This would pave the way for Baku and Yerevan to play leading roles in the establishment of a Pax Caucasia.

The resolution of the conflict over Karabakh and the commitment contained in the tripartite statement to (re)establish transport and communication links in the region is indeed a notable chance to set in motion a virtuous circle of economic, political, and societal developments. The envisioned transportation projects, in particular the Zangezur corridor, constitutes the core of the 3+3 initiative. The Zangezur corridor will not only connect mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan exclave through the southern part of Armenia but also will provide a transportation link between other members of the 3+3 group. Armenia will gain ease of access to Iran and Russia through the territories of Azerbaijan, thanks to this corridor. The corridor will also provide a stable overland communication between two major regional powers: Turkey and Russia. By connecting the 3+3 members through infrastructure, the Zangezur corridor will open up an opportunity for their political rapprochement and the deepening of economic cooperation.

In a recent deal with Iran on 11 March 2022, Azerbaijan obtained an alternative route to the Zangezur corridor, which in turn markedly strengthened Azerbaijan's negotiating position with Armenia. The memorandum of understanding signed by the two states in Baku mapped out a plan to establish new transport and electricity connections to link the western part of mainland Azerbaijan with its Nakhchivan exclave via Iran's northwestern region. In a way similar to the Zangezur Corridor (approximately 43 km), the trans-Iranian route (55 km) is also supposed to include both railway and motorway links in

addition to communication and electricity connections. This new route is planned to be constructed in proximity to the Iranian-Armenian state border and will generally mirror the Zangezur corridor. As a result of the new realities created by the Iran-Azerbaijan deal, Armenia now finds itself in a position of needing the implementation of the Zangezur corridor much more than Azerbaijan. Hence, it stands to reason that Armenia will demonstrate more interest in the Zangezur project and its speedy implementation in the future. Otherwise, it will lose out to the economic benefits that the Zangezur corridor project was designed to provide in the first place.

As a result of the new realities created by the Iran-Azerbaijan deal, Armenia now finds itself in a position of needing the implementation of the Zangezur corridor much more than Azerbaijan.

Of course, the new agreement between Iran and Azerbaijan that provides a direct alternative to the Zangezur corridor is of huge importance for the Azerbaijani side, as well. Nevertheless, it does not mean that Azerbaijan has abandoned its plans to build a transportation passage through southern Armenia. The bottom line is that both the Zangezur corridor and the trans-Iranian corridor will provide a practical basis for substantive talks on the establishment of a regional cooperation platform.

"We must create a new platform for cooperation in the region," Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev stated at the 10 December 2020 press conference with his Turkish counterpart in Baku. The suggestion he made on that occasion was to combine the various existing trilateral cooperation platforms in the region (Turkey-Azerbaijan-Georgia, Azerbaijan-Russia-Iran, Turkey-Russia-Iran), thus uniting them into a single six-party framework with the addition of Armenia. Inviting Yerevan to join such a new initiative, President Aliyev noted that "if the Armenian leadership draws the right conclusions from the war, renounces its unfounded claims and looks ahead, then [the Armenians] can also take a place on this platform. We are open to this […]. We must turn this page over; we must end the enmity."

Although revanchist political groups are still powerful in postwar Armenia and call for rapid (re)armament and for preparing for

a new war against Azerbaijan, the country's leaders have never ruled out Yerevan's participation in the 3+3 format. For Armenia, being rather dependent on Russia in terms of security and economy, it would be inadmissible to stay out of a flagship project that is promoted by its major ally. Pashinyan's government, however, has insisted that the 3+3 initiative should not replicate already existing formats. "For example, the Armenian prime minister said in an online press conference in November 2021, "we do not discuss the settlement of the Nagorno Karabakh issue, for which there is the format of the OSCE Minsk Group Co-chairs, in the 3+3 format. Next, we have a trilateral commission working on the opening of the regional communications and this issue should not be discussed within the 3+3 format as well. Issues that are key and are not discussed in already existing formats should be discussed. Is it possible to formulate such issues? We will live to see," added Pashinyan.

For Armenia, being rather dependent on Russia in terms of security and economy, it would be inadmissible to stay out of a flagship project that is promoted by its major ally.

Although the results of the Second Karabakh War were seen by many as signaling a decline of the influence of both Russia and Iran in the region (to the advantage of Turkey, whose presence is understood to be increasing), this has not led to any confrontation, as had been expected. The three powers have so far managed to remain on amicable terms, rather than engage in the pursuit of maximalist objectives, which would have the effect of undermining peace and stability in the South Caucasus. This situation creates a good basis for the realization of the 3+3 initiative.

For Russia, the existing status quo is acceptable, as it has deployed its troops to the territories of Azerbaijan: the only country in the South Caucasus that did not have a Russian military presence in recent years. This gives Russia important leverage to safeguard its authority over regional politics for the foreseeable future. Hence, Moscow does not view the present state of the Azerbaijan-Turkey bilateral relationship as a threat. On this account, the Kremlin supports the 3+3 initiative and finds it useful to put forward regional solutions to the problems and challenges of the region.

For its part, Azerbaijan's multilateral approach in foreign policy serves as a geopolitical bridge between Russia and Turkey and is instrumental in the promotion of a regional cooperative environment. In fact, President Ilham Aliyev has described cooperation between Russia and Turkey in the south Caucasus as a "provider of security" in the new geopolitical configuration that has arisen in the wake of the Second Karabakh War, stating in October 2021 that the Azerbaijan-Turkey-Russia axis will be the core of the new cooperation platform.

For Iran, the 3+3 format represents an instrument to remain engaged with the South Caucasus and thus affect regional political and economic processes. This is of great importance for Tehran as some outcomes of the Second Karabakh War—e.g., the growing role of Turkey in the region, the Zangezur corridor initiative, and the deployment of Russian peacekeepers proximate to the Iranian border—were interpreted by some Iranian observers as a threat to the country's national interests. Iran was largely seen as a relative loser of the Second Karabakh War.

As The Heritage Foundation's Luke Coffey has written, Iran did not welcome the sudden change in the status quo between Armenia and Azerbaijan as, *inter alia*, the resulting new realities could deprive Tehran of some sources of income and tools that it traditionally used as leverage in its policies towards both Armenia and Azerbaijan. But Iran has had to adjust to the new situation and grasp any opportunity offered. The 3+3 initiative is seen such an opportunity. Hence, Iranian Then-Foreign Minister Javad Zarif emphasized in January 2021 during a diplomatic tour of all 3+3 candidate countries that "we are looking to form a six-party cooperation union in the region, and it is the most important goal of this regional trip." The aforementioned March 2022 deal between Baku and Tehran was another important development that assuaged the latter country's concerns regarding some potentially negative consequences of the building of the Zangezur corridor by providing necessary opportunities for Iran to become part of the transit hub emerging in its northern neighborhood.

The 3+3 platform is seen by Turkey as an instrument to help the region's three countries find common ground for peaceful cooperation to the benefit of all six countries. For Erdoğan, the regional states "can achieve reconciliation with this platform," which would include infrastructure, political, diplomatic, and many other issues. As opposed to the expectations of some analysts made

during the Second Karabakh War, Turkey did not pursue maximalist objectives and avoided making moves that would threaten Russia or Iran. Instead, Ankara sought to play a constructive role in the quick restoration of peace and stability in the region after the war. The efforts towards the normalization of the Armenia-Turkey relations and the reopening of borders between the two states will make a critical contribution to the restoration of peace in the region and, in turn, to the actualization of the 3+3 initiative.

Challenges and Opportunities

The 3+3 platform has already begun to be operationalized. The group held its first meeting on 10 December 2021 in Moscow. The meeting was attended by the deputy foreign ministers of Azerbaijan, Armenia, Russia, and Turkey and the Director General of Iran's foreign ministry. The representatives of Georgia rejected the invitation to the meeting and chose not to attend at any level. Despite the absence of Tbilisi, in statements made by Kremlin officials other participants concerning this meeting, they referred to it as having taken place in a "3+3" format and expressed hope that Georgia would join soon, making it clear that "the door remains open."

This message was reiterated by Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu when he announced that the next meeting of the group will be held in Turkey, adding that Ankara believes Georgia will attend the upcoming meeting. As of this writing, however, Georgia's position remains unchanged. "Georgia will definitely not attend the 3+3 meeting," said Georgia's ambassador to Turkey, George Janjgava, to the Turkish media in early January 2022. Although we see Turkey and Azerbaijan as "strategic partners" and Armenia as a "historical and good neighbor," he added, "Russia is a country that is occupying 20 percent of Georgian territory."

Georgia's conflict with Russia is, therefore, one of the major challenges that the Pax Caucasia process encounters at the moment. It is a challenge not only because it prevents Georgia's participation in the 3+3 format, but also—and perhaps more importantly—because it prevents the establishment of completely peaceful environment in the region. Although a new war between Russia and Georgia is not expected anytime soon, violent escalations cannot be ruled out in the future. The 3+3 format might actually serve as a platform for the normalization of Georgia's relations with Russia and could deliver some breakthrough towards the settlement of

the conflict. If Georgia treats it as an opportunity to normalize relations with Russia and break the deadlock in their conflict over Abkhazia and South Ossetia, a policy change may occur in the country's attitude to the initiative.

Present rivalries and distrust between most participating countries (e.g., Russia-Turkey, Armenia-Azerbaijan, Armenia-Turkey, Turkey-Iran, and Iran-Azerbaijan), whether in the context of the South Caucasus or elsewhere, is another factor that would make it difficult, if not impossible, for the group to come together under one umbrella for an extended period of time.

Moreover, the fate of the Pax Caucasia initiative is inextricably linked with the success of the Armenia-Azerbaijan peace process, the complete implementation of the 10 November 2020 trilateral statement, and successful normalization of the Turkey-Armenia relations.

The 3+3 format might actually serve as a platform for the normalization of Georgia's relations with Russia and could deliver some breakthrough towards the settlement of the conflict.

The sincerity of the interest of both Tehran and Moscow in fostering peace and stability in the South Caucasus is another factor that will be necessary to gauge in advancing the likelihood of success of the six-nation initiative.

It is important to note that participating 3+3 countries declare their interest to overcome the hostile atmosphere in the region and look for shared solutions to the problems that they face.

Time will show if they can realize this in practice.

Another challenge is the lack of a certainty of the agenda on which the platform would be built. The first 3+ 3 meeting did not reveal the issues that would be on the agenda of the platform. For now, it seems that the reopening of the regional transportation routes is going to be the main focus of the initiative. However, it is questionable whether this solely would suffice for the platform to become a sustainable regional mechanism to contribute to peace and security in the region.

This appears to be an explicit concern for the Azerbaijani side, for instance. President Ilham Aliyev, in an interview with the Azerbaijani media on 12 January 2022, characterized the 10 December 2021 meeting of the 3+3 platform as "introductory" and said he expects subsequent meetings to focus more on concrete issues like the reopening of regional transportation routes and other cooperation areas. It is indeed important for the group to clearly define a roadmap and agenda for their future activities. The participating countries should not refrain from setting ambitious goals, including some sort of institutionalization of 3+3 and launching more projects to deepen economic, humanitarian, and political cooperation.

The opportunities for the realization of the Pax Caucasia initiative and the benefits it promises for the future of the region can be manifold. This would create a security situation in the South Caucasus that has never existed before in the history of the region.

Realization at Last?

The opportunities for the realization of the Pax Caucasia initiative and the benefits it promises for the future of the region can be manifold. This would create a security situation in the South Caucasus that has never existed before in the history of the region. The external powers, which have traditionally competed for influence in the region, used to manipulate conflicts taking place between the region's countries, playing them off against each other. The Second Karabakh War and the subsequent emergence of the 3+3 initiative, which would bring these powers together in an all-inclusive regional mechanism for the first time ever, would open a new chapter in the history of the South Caucasus.

Thus, this platform holds significant potential to become not only actualized but even sustainable—unlike previously proposed regional initiatives. Indeed, the 3+3 cooperation platform has been made possible only thanks to the new regional realities that appeared in the South Caucasus in the wake of the Second Karabakh War. In short, the six-nation initiative is an attempt by the regional countries to create a solid basis and relevant mechanisms to cooperate in areas of mutual interest and thereby to produce joint solutions to common problems and challenges. BD

Repatriating Azerbaijani IDPs

Policy Priorities and Recommendations

Fariz Ismailzade

The conflict over Karabakh between Azerbaijan and Armenia, which started in 1988 and resulted in the occupation of some 20 percent of Azerbaijan's internationally recognized territories, produced a massive humanitarian catastrophe in the region. Around 350,000 ethnic-Azerbaijanis were driven from their homes in the Republic of Armenia in 1988-1989, becoming refugees in the Republic of Azerbaijan. At the same time, the armed conflict in and around the former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) resulted in the ethnic cleansing of an additional 650,000 ethnic-Azerbaijanis from their homes in 1992-1993. By some estimates, back in 1993 Azerbaijan was one of the largest refugee- and IDP-hosting countries in the world, given that 1 out of every 7 of the country's Azerbaijani population fell into one of those two categories. In addition to that, Azerbaijan also hosted large numbers of Chechen, Afghan, and Meskheti Turks.

Azerbaijani refugees and IDPs mostly came from towns and villages outside the former NKAO part of the Karabakh region. Forcibly driven from their homes, they first settled in temporary tent camps, railway wagons, university dormitories, public buildings, and old sanatoriums. After being ethnically cleansed, their houses in Karabakh were looted and destroyed by Armenian occupational forces. Towns like Fuzuli, Jabrayil, Agdam, Gubadly, and Zangelan were entirely raised to the ground.

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During the last 30 years, refugees and IDPs received significant humanitarian assistance from various foreign donors, a plethora of national charity organizations, and, of course, the Azerbaijani government. The latter had even launched a housing program for them with the funds accrued by the State Oil Fund, the country's sovereign wealth fund, which enabled many families to move from tent camps into purpose-built single-family home developments that oftentimes included land plots for agricultural activities. When Ilham Aliyev first ran for president in 2003, he had promised to eliminate the need for all tent camps in the country—a promise that he fulfilled in 2007 thanks to the priority allocation of resources from increasing oil revenues. Nevertheless, large number of refugees and IDPs continued to live in temporary housing in Baku and other urban centers that sometimes had significant safety issues and subpar sanitation facilities.

The Second Karabakh War, which ended the Armenian occupation of Karabakh, opened up new opportunities for the return of IDPs to their hometowns and the full restoration of their previous livelihoods in the liberated areas.

Despite the fact that refugees and IDPs receive many welfare benefits from the government of Azerbaijan (e.g., free education, free utilities, monthly remuneration for food and other social payments), their living standards remain suboptimal, and the rate of poverty, health risks, and other social problems among the refugee and IDP community remains higher than the country's average. At the same time, serious concerns remain regarding the employability and religious education of young people belonging to refugee and IDP communities, with many analysts fearing that this part of the population can be more susceptible to recruitment by foreign radical sects and similar such groups.

The Second Karabakh War, which ended the Armenian occupation of Karabakh, opened up new opportunities for the return of IDPs to their hometowns and the full restoration of their previous livelihoods in the liberated areas. Their joy and happiness, beamed by media outlets to the entire nation and, indeed, to the whole world, was unprecedented in the history of Azerbaijan. The whole country came together in rejoicing the return of

its lands and the final settlement of what had been a longstanding frozen conflict.

Three Challenges

More than a year has passed since the end of the Second Karabakh War, and the sustainable repatriation of IDPs to their hometowns remains a priority policy issue for the government as well as international donor organizations.

Despite these high hopes, the return of IDPs has not been an easy process for three main reasons: the contamination of Karabakh by mines and explosive remnants of war, the physical destruction of the region, and outstanding security challenges. Each will be addressed in turn.

The return of IDPs has not been an easy process for three main reasons: the contamination of Karabakh by mines and explosive remnants of war, the physical destruction of the region, and outstanding security challenges.

Karabakh is one of world's largest and most heavily mined areas in the world. To take the Agdam district as an example, the Armenian side surrendered mine maps to Azerbaijan that contained over 97,000 mines. Similarly large figures exist in Fuzuli and other districts. Some 200 Azerbaijani civilians were killed and wounded in the past year due to their efforts to pass without permission into the formerly occupied lands to visit their native villages. Even some construction workers and journalists have been killed.

Right after the Second Karabakh War came to an end on 10 November 2020, the Azerbaijani authorities and influential external stakeholders began exerting pressure on the Armenian government to surrender all its mine maps, which the latter refused to do initially. Only after serious international pressure was applied on Yerevan were maps exchanged for Armenian detainees. Yet, according to Azerbaijani government sources, the accuracy of these maps is around 25 percent.

The Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) has been working intensively in the liberated territories, and some foreign governments (e.g., the U.S., the UK, France, Turkey) have donated specialized equipment and seconded

skilled professionals to ANAMA to speed up mine action activities, yet the large size of the liberated territory and the huge amount of mines delays the completion of these works while posing serious risks to the lives of repatriated IDPs.

The liberation of Karabakh was accompanied by the realization that its towns, villages, and infrastructure had been completely destroyed by Armenian forces during the occupation period. Even seasoned and jaded conflict-resolution experts were shocked by the level of destruction that had taken place in Karabakh. Houses belonging to Azerbaijani families were looted and the result was sold as construction material. Entire neighborhoods were razed to the ground. Whole towns and cities were destroyed. Agdam is now popularly called "Hiroshima of the Caucasus." Religious and cultural sites were also not been spared by the Armenian occupants: sanctuaries, graveyards, monuments, palaces—destroyed. As President Aliyev said during the Second Karabakh War, in liberated Fuzuli Azerbaijani soldiers could not even find a single building to post the Azerbaijani flag.

Even seasoned and jaded conflict-resolution experts were shocked by the level of destruction that had taken place in Karabakh.

Moreover, all other forms of infrastructure, including electric lines, power stations, roads, and railroads have been destroyed as well. The tracks of the famous Soviet-era railway, which connected Azerbaijani, Russian, Iranian, and Armenian railway networks, were taken apart and sold as scrap metal.

Thus, a precondition for the return of IDPs is the undertaking of serious infrastructure works. The Azerbaijani government has already started many of them, including several major highways and roads within Karabakh, the railway system via the Zangezur transport corridor, new international airports (one has already been finished in Fuzuli, two more are under construction in other parts of the liberated region), and dozens of electric modular hydro power stations. Special attention is being given to the construction of housing and agricultural farms. The village of Agali in the Zangelan district is being reconstructed according to contemporary "smart village" norms and systems. In the Agdam district, a new industrial park is under construction. The Sugovushan settlement in the

Tartar district will have major sport facilities near its water reservoir. Many cultural and religious sites, especially in Shusha, are being renovated and restored. Hotels and other tourism objects are under construction in Shusha and Agdam, as well. At the same time, some agricultural areas and fruit orchards are being utilized by Azerbaijani companies.

It is estimated that some initial groups of IDPs will be able to return to Karabakh by the end of 2022, but the numbers will be small. More funding, time, and resources are needed for massive housing construction as well as for the development of other necessary infrastructure objects like schools, hospitals, government offices, factories, and so on. International donor agencies, such as the UN and the World Bank, are also in the process of discussions and negotiations with the government of Azerbaijan in order to help and facilitate the process. In March 2022, the UN sent a large assessment mission into Azerbaijan and its liberated areas in order to plan its own programs, interventions, and assistance.

In this context, worth mentioning is the potential of Karabakh to become not only a large-scale agricultural, tourism, and industrial zone for the Azerbaijani and, indeed, regional economy, but also to serve as transit hub for the Silk Road region as a whole. For that reason, the Azerbaijani government has offered to Armenia to develop the Zangezur transport corridor and thus to link the transport networks of two countries with Turkey, Russia, and Iran. This could open the potential not only for huge economic benefits for the entire region, but also serve as a strong foundation for the establishment of regional sustainable peace. Unfortunately, Armenia continues to delay this process and it seems like transport and connectivity projects will pass through Iranian territory, leaving Armenia isolated again from regional integration projects. In this regard, an agreement between Iran and Azerbaijan was signed in March 2022, while tri-party discussions between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia have not yet produced many results on this issue, with Armenia delaying the agreement on road construction and only giving consent for the railway connection in the context of the Zangezur transport corridor.

The third reason the return of IDPs has not been an easy process centers around outstanding security challenges. This relates to cross-border violations of the 10 November 2020 tripartite

agreement, lack of progress on the delimitation and demarcation of the state border with Armenia, continued attacks from armed Armenian groups in Khankendi, the unclear future status of the Russian peackeeping forces, and many other elements of the aforementioned agreement.

> *The government decided to conduct a social survey among IDP families in the wake of the Second Karabakh War in order to better gauge their repatriation needs, plans, concerns, and desires.*

Several times, Azerbaijan has offered to sign a peace treaty with Armenia and to peacefully reintegrate the Karabakh Armenians into Azerbaijani statehood, but these efforts have so far been rejected.

During his 14 March 2022 speech at the Antalya Diplomacy Forum, Foreign Minister Jeyhun Bayramov spoke of Azerbaijan's peace proposal. He indicated that this proposal consists of five key points: *one*, the mutual recognition of respect for the sovereignty, territorial integrity, and inviolability of internationally recognized borders and political independence of each other; *two*, the mutual confirmation of the absence of territorial claims against each other and the acceptance of legally binding obligations not to raise such a claim in future; *three*, the obligation to refrain in their inter-state relations from undermining the security of each other, from threat or use of force both against political independence and territorial integrity, and in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the UN Charter; *four*, the delimitation and demarcation of the state border and the establishment of diplomatic relations; and *five*, the unblocking of transportation and other communications, building other communications as appropriate, and the establishment of cooperation in other fields of mutual interest.

A lack of progress on the peace process front might also negatively affect the return rate of Azerbaijani IDPs and increase their concerns regarding their future safety.

IDP Social Survey

Given that some 30 years have passed since the First Karabakh War and the ethnic cleansing of one million Azerbaijanis, the government decided to con-

duct a social survey among IDP families in the wake of the Second Karabakh War in order to better gauge their repatriation needs, plans, concerns, and desires.

New generations of young people belonging to the Azerbaijani refugee and IDP community have been born and raised in camps and settlements, most of them living closer to urban centers and experiencing a lifestyle that is significantly different from the largely rural lifestyle their families led in the formerly occupied regions. The State Committee for Affairs of Refugees and Internally Displaced Persons had regularly held smaller-scale local surveys in the past years, mostly for the purpose of better planning the resettlement of IDPs from tent camps into new houses.

The new survey took place between January and December 2021, and ADA University was officially contracted to design the methodology, draft the survey form, and analyze the results. The academic team of the project included not only faculty and experts from ADA University, but also from the State University of Economics, the Institute of Economics of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, and several think tank representatives.

The overall project consisted of three parts: online survey among IDPs (the target number was 50,000 individuals), two successive face-to-face in-depth interviews with 3,000 randomly selected IDP families during home visits to their settlements and current places of residence, and, finally, a survey among Azerbaijani businessmen regarding their investment and business plans in the liberated territories.

The online survey was meant to serve also as an informational and motivational tool for the repatriation effort to come. The survey among the businessmen helped to provide an understanding of the scope of their future activities as well as their main concerns for contemplating investments in Karabakh.

Readers of *Baku Dialogues* are most likely to be interested primarily in the methodology and the results of the face-to-face in-depth surveys. The 3,000 families were selected in a reliable way with proper focus on sociological rules of representation and random selection. The survey form consisted of some 35 questions, and all formerly occupied regions of Azerbaijan were represented in the survey. The volunteers that conducted these surveys and visited IDP homes had passed a

multi-layered selection process and then a specially-designed training program at ADA University.

The survey mainly focused on the intention of IDPs to go back to their former hometowns and villages in Karabakh. It also inquired into the terms and conditions that would need to be met for the repatriation to be successful. Respondents were offered several scenarios and choices to make, ranging from the most minimalistic conditions (i.e., going back to Karabakh but only receiving from the government a secure and safe plot of land) to the most maximalist conditions (i.e., receiving from government land and a new house, free utilities, and jobs). In-between scenarios included only utilities and land; land and housing; land, housing, and other necessary infrastructure.

The percentage of respondents willing to go back to their hometowns was in the absolute majority.

One should not be surprised that almost all the IDP families surveyed within this project expressed huge excitement and joy about the liberation of their native lands, for which they had been longing and eagerly awaiting for almost 30 years. The percentage of respondents willing to go back to their hometowns was in the absolute majority.

Yet, obviously, the percentage of respondents willing to return to Karabakh went down more or less proportionate to the minimalization of repatriation conditions. IDP families asked serious questions and expressed concerns about safety issues, housing, jobs, and the general state of infrastructure in the area.

There were, of course, some respondents that expressed a desire to go back home even with their own funds, without waiting for government housing. But the numbers in this category of respondents was in the minority, due to the fact that most IDPs still live in suboptimal financial and economic conditions. Nevertheless, this category also presents an important opportunity for the government and international donors, because it shows that some percentage of the IDPs surveyed do not need extra financial help in order to settle back in Karabakh. These people should be granted immediate access to secure lands in order to build their houses and secure their presence in the liberated areas.

Several important observations caught the attention of the survey team, such as the difference in answers within families (depending on gender and age); the inability (and/or unwillingness) of young people to work in agriculture and their strong preference for an urban lifestyle; the strong desire of IDP families to go back to their exact native villages and their refusal to live in other parts of Karabakh (feelings of nostalgia and a longing for their former community of friends and relatives played a strong role in this issue). These issues will need to be considered by the government as it develops plans for the reconstruction of the liberated areas. Some IDPs have also expressed concerns about the continuation of their social welfare benefits and the future status of their IDP cards.

> *How will the repatriation be organized, and when? What will be the conditions? And what will happen to the legal status and welfare benefits of the IDPs?*

Seven Policy Recommendations

As more time passes since the Second Karabakh War came to an end, so the IDP population becomes more impatient and concerned about plans for repatriation. Many of them are eager to visit their native villages, liberated lands, and the graves of their ancestors. Although short bus tours to Agdam and Shusha are being organized by the authorities, such and similar events still do not address the needs and expectations of the entire IDP population.

How will the repatriation be organized, and when? What will be the conditions? And what will happen to the legal status and welfare benefits of the IDPs? Such questions remain largely unanswered.

It is important that the government authorities consider the following seven recommendation during the repatriation process.

First, for the time being, the Azerbaijani government seems to be focusing on the high tech construction of "smart" villages and towns. These are very commendable efforts, and it is likely that the modern way of construction will be appreciated by the future residents of these villages and towns. However, such a pace of development takes more time and financial resources while at the same time reducing the speed of repatriation. It would be advisable to allocate some plots of secure and landmine free land to those IDPs that are willing to quickly repatriate and develop their own property and agricultural farms there. This would relieve the government of some of its financial burden towards these families while also helping to the repopulation of Karabakh. The latter is especially important in the postwar period, as an empty Karabakh does not look good either to the international community or the Azerbaijani population. Populating Karabakh will also bring economic dividends to the country. It is important to advocate that not all reconstructed villages need to be ultra-modern and high-tech. Letting IDPs develop their own, organic villages in modest ways will also serve the common goal and mission.

Second, sending IDPs back to new housing settlements is part of the effort. Another important element of the repatriation process is providing sustainable economic livelihood to them in future years. This could be possible only after creation of jobs and industries that match their skills, educational level, and professional backgrounds. Thus, a detailed understanding of their backgrounds is important for the development of relevant industries in liberated Karabakh. Azerbaijani companies should receive strong stimuli from the government to quickly settle in Karabakh and begin operations. Subsidies, tax incentives, and other financial mechanisms must be rapidly developed by the government authorities.

Third, liberated Karabakh has several hundreds of towns and villages, some of which are extremely small and located in remote, hard-to-access mountainous areas. It will be impossible and economically inefficient to redevelop all of them. The government has proposed some initial plans to consolidate and unite some of the villages, which seems to be negatively perceived by the IDP community. They want to relocate back to their exact villages. A strong and persuasive communication and awareness campaign must be organized in order to better educate and inform the IDP families about these developments. It is unrealistic for IDPs to expect their neighborhoods to look exactly the same as they did 30 years ago. Many of their relatives and neighbors have passed away or moved to other countries.

Fourth, it is quite likely that the future economic composition of the Karabakh region will need specific qualifications and specialties that the IDP community presently

lacks or is deficient in. Moving experienced Azerbaijanis from other parts of the country could also become a priority in this regard. The same can apply to young, non-IDP families that are willing to work in labor-intensive sectors of economy. This process should not be delayed too long.

Fifth, the Karabakh region of Azerbaijan has always been renowned for its specific culture and traditions. Preserving these traditions is very important. Thus, repatriation efforts should consist not only of infrastructure works, but also of efforts to restore, preserve, and promote the local sub-culture, revive unique-to-the-region traditions, festivals, elements of cuisine, holidays, music, and handcrafts. This is especially important considering the generation gap between those who lived in Karabakh before the ethnic cleansing and those who grew up outside the liberated areas. Overall, it is important to create not only well-built settlements in Karabakh, but also to foster a sense of community, common values, kinships, relations, and united broad networks.

The survey included some questions on the prospect for renewed coexistence and, fortunately, the results, as expressed by Azerbaijani IDPs were quite favorable.

Sixth, a new law on repatriation must be written so as to bring clarity to the welfare benefits of the IDPs, their legal status, and the phased approach to the repatriation. President Aliyev has indicated that the repatriation must be voluntary, yet more information is needed on steps and procedures for the organization of this repatriation. A phased approach should also include some settlements and public buildings in Baku and other urban areas that have safety problems.

And *seventh*, the government of Azerbaijan should involve foreign companies, philanthropies, and other types of international organizations not only for subcontracting works, which are funded by the state budget, but also as independent investors, joint venture organizers, fully or partially owned subsidiaries, and even as suppliers of temporary humanitarian assistance to local communities. Strong emphasis must be made on increasing capacity for mine action. These efforts can create new jobs and employment opportunities in the region. The government will also need to create a transparent and easy-to-navigate process of inviting foreign companies to invest in concrete projects in Karabakh.

While the massive infrastructure projects undertaken by the government of Azerbaijan in the wake of the victory in the Second Karabakh War are commendable, the delay in the repatriation of IDPs raises some concerns. It is obvious that the government alone cannot handle such large-scale activities—at least not in a speedy way. Serious international partnership will be needed.

At the same time, it is important to lower some initially set maximalist goals and expectations regarding the type and style of the housing and infrastructure that needs to be built, and to liberalize the repatriation process, thereby granting more freedom and initiative to the IDP families that are ready, willing, and able to best take advantage of that sort of opportunity.

Diminishing Animosity

Special attention must also be paid to the issue of Karabakh Armenians and their reintegration plans into the sovereignty of the Republic of Azerbaijan. This issue, although not directly linked to the repatriation of Karabakh Azerbaijanis,could also affect the rate of return, especially in those areas inside the former NKAO, where ethnic-Azerbaijanis and ethnic-Armenians lived in close proximity before the First Karabakh War. Diminishing the sense of mutual animosity will be important for peaceful coexistence to take hold in the future. The survey included some questions on the prospect for renewed coexistence and, fortunately, the results, as expressed by Azerbaijani IDPs were quite favorable.

The government of Azerbaijan will need to repatriate Azerbaijani IDPs in parallel with offering to the Karabakh Armenians some incentives for the restoration of peaceful coexistence, the disarmament of their illegal military groups, and some basic steps for joint economic activity in the region. BD

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Mine Action and the Environment in Karabakh

Overcoming Postwar Recovery Challenges

Emil M. Hasanov

The now-liberated areas of Azerbaijan are contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), the clearance thereof being one of Baku's highest post-conflict priorities. Before proceeding any further, we must provide proper definitions of these terms, since they are technical in nature and thus may not be familiar to the general reader.

According to the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on Their Destruction that was adopted in Oslo in 1997 and entered into force in 1999 (it is colloquially called the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention, or APMBC), an *anti-personnel mine* "means a mine designed to be exploded by the presence, proximity or contact of a person and that will incapacitate, injure or kill one or more persons." An *antivehicle or antitank mine* is effectually the same thing, except that it is designed to explode when triggered by a vehicle. Together, they fall under the catchall term *mine*, which the same document defines as a "munition designed to be placed under, on, or near the ground or other surface area and to be exploded by the presence, proximity, or contact of a person or a vehicle." Furthermore, *explosive remnants of war* (ERW) are defined as explosive munitions left behind after a conflict has ended. They include unexploded artillery shells, grenades, mortars, rockets, air-dropped bombs, and cluster munitions. If such weapons fail to detonate as intended for whatever reason, they are called *unexploded ordnance* (UXO); if, on the other hand, they have not been used during an armed conflict and have been left behind by the party that brought them to the battlefield, they are called *abandoned explosive ordnance* (AXO). Lastly, *cluster bombs or cluster munitions*, which are defined as weapons containing from several to hundreds of explosive submunitions. They are dropped either from the air or fired from the ground and are designed to break open in mid-air, releasing submunitions and saturating an area that can be as wide as several football pitches. Based on past practice, the failure rate of cluster munitions to explode as intended stands at between 10 and 30 percent.

The now-liberated areas of Azerbaijan are contaminated by mines and explosive remnants of war (ERW), the clearance thereof being one of Baku's highest post-conflict priorities.

The contamination of Azerbaijan by mines and ERW is primarily a result of a period of armed conflict between Armenia and Azerbaijan that effectually began in February 1988 and ended in November 2020 (secondarily, it is also the result of ammunition abandoned by the Soviet military in 1991). The conflict over Karabakh can be divided into three basic periods: the First Karabakh War, which concluded with a May 1994 Russia-brokered ceasefire that temporarily left most of Azerbaijan's former Nagorno-Karabakh Autonomous Oblast (NKAO) and seven surrounding districts in the hands of separatist ethnic-Armenian forces; the period of Armenian occupation that came in its wake; and the Second Karabakh War that lasted 44 days and culminated in the signing of a tripartite statement between Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Russia on 10 November 2022 as well as several follow up documents, including a second tripartite statement made on 11 January 2021.

Aside from establishing a "complete ceasefire and [the] termination of all hostilities in the

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area of the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict," providing for the return of Azerbaijani territory as well as the return of IDPs, and defining the terms of the temporary presence of a Russian peacekeeping force, the strategic thrust of the documents in question is, in the words of the second tripartite statement, the "unblocking of all economic and transport communications in the region." The inherent logic of the documents in question is that the "unblocking" process is meant to help lay the groundwork for the normalization of inter-state relations between Armenia and Azerbaijan, which would, in turn, result in the establishment of a sustainable peace.

A Carpet of Landmines

Integral to the fulfillment of this vision is the clearing of all minefields and ERW from the liberated areas. Doing so is also an integral part of Azerbaijan's commitment to achieve the sustainable development goals (SDGs), the chief deliverable of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development that was agreed by world leaders in September 2015. At a minimum, the presence of mines and ERW hampers access to and use of resources and infrastructure, which in turn makes it next to impossible to achieve the sustainable resettlement of IDPs to Karabakh, which in turn makes it next to impossible to reconstruct and reintegrate the liberated areas into the country's "green growth" economic plans and activities.

Technical mine action survey processes are still ongoing, and thus it is not yet possible to precisely determine the exact extent of mine and ERW contamination in the former conflict zone, including the former "line of contact," which varied between 3 and 7 kilometers in depth. Indeed, two years prior to the Second Karabakh War, a report issued by the Azerbaijan National Agency for Mine Action (ANAMA) had estimated that between 350 and 830 square kilometers of occupied land was contaminated by mines. As it turns out, these figures were a significant underestimate.

On the basis of approximations derived from presently reached mine lines, mine incident reports, information provided by the Azerbaijani Armed Forces, and other such sources, ANAMA now asserts that of the 11,784 square kilometers of liberated territory (8,725.50 square kilometers are presently under the full operational control of Azerbaijan while 3,058.50 square kilometers fall

within the Russian peacekeeping zone), 1,605 square kilometers are categorized as highest level contaminated areas and 7,120.50 square kilometers are categorized as medium and low level contaminated areas.

In other words, Karabakh is one of largest mined areas in the world—a "carpet of landmines," as some have called it. The shocking level of contamination of the now-liberated territories of Azerbaijan is a direct consequence of the actions of Armenian forces during the entirety of their deployment in Karabakh. To be precise, for three decades, Armenian forces massively and deliberately laid mines on Azerbaijani lands: during the First Karabakh War, the occupation period, the Second Karabakh War, and even in the days and weeks between the moment at which the tripartite statement was signed and the end of the period of withdrawal of the Armenian armed forces from various occupied parts of Karabakh in accordance with the timetable indicated by the tripartite statement and subsequently slightly extended, in some cases, by mutual agreement. Mines were planted in civilian infrastructure, lamp posts, canals, road junctions, rural and urban paths, courtyard entrances, cemeteries, and riverbanks, amongst other locations.

> *Karabakh is one of largest mined areas in the world—a "carpet of landmines," as some have called it.*

The mine and ERW contamination of the former conflict zone has also had a massive human toll. According to ANAMA's records, in the period 1992-2021, a total of 3,445 Azerbaijani civilians became mine victims: 639 were killed and 2,806 were injured (of this total, 65 children were killed and 365 were injured; 35 women were killed and 143 were injured; and 539 men were killed and 2,301 were injured).

The UN and ANAMA

In the immediate aftermath of the Second Karabakh War, the government of Azerbaijani expressed a need for humanitarian mine action (HMA) assistance, fully cognizant that, as leading mine action expert David Hewitson wrote in the Fall 2021 edition of *Baku Dialogues*, this consists of a plethora of integrated activities that "include more than just clearance" but also

"destroying stockpiles of unused mines, advocating for the cessation of manufacture, sale, and use of landmines, providing affected populations with risk education, and helping victims of landmine accidents." In other words, the term *humanitarian mine action* covers activities aimed to reduce the social, economic, and environmental impact of landmines and UXO, and it is not limited only to de-mining (mine and UXO survey, mapping, marking, and clearance), but also covers other activities like explosive ordnance risk education, victim assistance (including rehabilitation and reintegration), stockpile destruction and advocacy against the use of anti-personnel landmines and cluster munitions. Together, they constitute the "Five Pillars of Mine Action."

Accordingly, ANAMA requested assistance from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)—an arm of the UN with which ANAMA has been in continuous collaboration on mine action for more than two decades. In a response to this request, UNDP lead a UN inter-agency mine action assessment mission that visited Azerbaijan on 10-16 December 2020—around the time that Azerbaijan began large-scale clearance of mines and ERW.

The story begins with the formal establishment of ANAMA in July 1998 by presidential decree as a body under the State Commission for Reconstruction and Rehabilitation. (In mid-January 2021 and then in mid-September, ANAMA was restructured by two presidential decrees, which, inter alia, upgraded its status to that of a public legal entity with planning, coordination, and standard-setting responsibility for mine clearance and other mine action activities, in accordance with International Mine Action Standards (IMAS) that have been developed by leading experts in the past few decades.)

In April 1999, the Azerbaijani government and UNDP signed their first agreement on financial and technical support for a joint mine action program. Since then, UNDP has played a key and continuous role in the further development of ANAMA and has provided invaluable support to mine action programs in Azerbaijan. As a result, UNDP has gained in-depth knowledge of mine and explosive ordnance disposal in Azerbaijan and has been actively involved in analyzing existing priorities. UNDP has also helped to build up ANAMA's capacity, which in turn has helped it to establish an internationally-recognized mine action brand that has provided services

in a number of post-conflict zones abroad whilst enabling it to concentrate on its primary task: demining sovereign Azerbaijani territory.

In March 2021, UNDP agreed to scale up its support for mine action in Azerbaijan by the heightened provision of technical expertise, equipment, capacity development, funding, the conduct of a mine action needs assessment, the procurement of personal protective equipment and mine clearing equipment, and the development of heat maps for mine detection. Various other bilateral partners have also lent their support to what UNDP has called Azerbaijan's "heroic steps to eliminate landmines."

Mine action is an integral part of the recovery and, indeed, the sustainable development of Karabakh.

A Broader Environmental Narrative

But all this is but a part of a broader narrative of the environmental impact of mines and ERW on Azerbaijan as well as to the overall process of sustainable development. The lingering presence of mines and ERW constitutes an ecological, economic, and social problem. It severely constrains and even prevents access to natural resources, limits the development of the affected area, destroys ecologically fragile environments, depletes biological diversity by destroying flora and fauna, causes direct (and in some cases irreversible) damage to soil structure and water quality due to the leakage of highly toxic substances, and increases the vulnerability of soil to erosion caused by wind and water. It not only covers the surface with non-biodegradable and toxic garbage, but it also means arable land can't be farmed and pastoral fields can't be used for grazing, which denies the livelihood rights of potential returnees.

In short, mine action is an integral part of the recovery and, indeed, the sustainable development of Karabakh.

The challenge is all the greater because the Armenian forces did not keep full records of the mines they laid, but also because it is almost impossible to do so for a particularly nefarious category of armaments: cluster bombs or cluster munitions. These too were used during the Second Karabakh

War within both the combat zone and against civilian targets outside it—in cities and towns located dozens of kilometers from what was at the time the front line (e.g., Ganja, Barda, Mingachevir).

Moreover, mines, ERW, and cluster munitions can remain active for up to a century, as the experience of more than 60 countries attests. Decades after an armed conflict comes to its end, these continue killing, injuring, and orphaning children. In many mine-affected countries, children account for one in every five victims of mines, ERW, and cluster munitions. Indeed, an estimated 15,000 to 20,000 people are killed or maimed by such weapons each year.

Mines and ERW accelerate environmental damage through their explosions. These indiscrete weapons commonly contain trinitrotoluene (TNT) and cyclonite or hexogen (RDX). These substances can leach into the surrounding soil and water as their metal or timber casings disintegrate. These substances, and the compounds derived from them as they decompose, are soluble in water, long-lived, carcinogenic, and quite toxic, even in small quantities.

TNT and RDX are lethal to mammals, aquatic microorganisms, and fish. RDX is particularly toxic to mammals, including human beings. The devastation to the environment and civilian population caused by mines, ERW, and cluster bombs is well documented—and similarly with armaments enhanced with with depleted uranium.

Although no publicly-available evidence indicates at present that Armenian forces used uranium-tipped projectiles during the conflict over Karabakh, raising the issue here has merit because it helps to round out the discussion regarding the long-term damage that toxic munitions of various sorts can inflict on civilian populations in post-conflict settings around the world.

Depleted uranium is nuclear waste—a biproduct of the enrichment process where natural uranium from the earth's crust is "enriched" with higher energy uranium isotopes to produce a chemical compound suitable for use in nuclear reactors and nuclear weapons. What remains is "depleted" of about 40 percent of its radioactivity yet retains the same chemical toxicity as natural uranium.

Depleted uranium is also twice as dense as lead, making it particularly effective as an armor-piercing weapon. It is also pyrophoric, meaning that it has a tendency to

ignite spontaneously, or with a target on impact—and its fine particles can spread over a large area and be easily ingested.

Reportedly, exposure to depleted uranium can result in a staggering increase in cancer rates. The bombs detonated have chemical by-products. Chemicals supporting war activities, such as herbicides or chemical weapons, have effects that are seen for generations. In 1991, Iraqi forces had destroyed over 700 oil wells and spilled ten million gallons of crude oil, the largest human facilitated discharge of oil ever, into Kuwait's waterways and deserts. The occupying Iraqi army had also laid an estimated nine million mines in the country. In other words, Saddam Hussein used the environment itself as a weapon of mass destruction. The black smoke from burning wells during First Gulf War got deposited on the high snow peaks of Himalayas and affected the water supply downstream in the Hindu Kush, located thousands of kilometers away.

In Afghanistan, conflict has destroyed one quarter of the country's forests, leading to the conclusion that such damage may constitute the greatest environmental catastrophe that occurred in Afghanistan during the war. In the Balkans, brown bears are regular victims. In India, landmines have killed barking deer, clouded leopard, snow leopards, and Royal Bengal tigers. In Libya, gazelles have disappeared from sites that were mined during World War II. By 1991, decades of civil war in Angola had left the nation's parks and reserves with only 10 percent of their 1975 wildlife population levels. In Sri Lanka, a six-year civil war has led to the felling of over 5 million trees, a crucial resource for the farmers and villagers of the island. And in Vietnam and other parts of Southeast Asia, the industrial-scale use of "agent orange" by the U.S. continues to be associated with massive health problems in the surviving local population decades after the end of the war.

Ecocide

Mine action and related processes are thus parts of a larger environmental whole. Consider the case of Agstafa, which is located in the northwest corner of Azerbaijan near the border with Georgia. During the Soviet period, the district was home to the largest munitions depot in the South Caucasus and included extensive firing and training ranges. When Azerbaijan regained its independence in 1991, departing Red Army troops destroyed the site. As a result,

thousands upon thousands of pieces of ERW were scattered over an area of around 44 square kilometers—a situation that continues to pose a serious humanitarian, socio-economic, and environmental threat to the local population: there have been around 160 UXO-related accidents, including more than 30 fatalities. Working with various foreign partners and stakeholders, ANAMA has been engaged in a major cleanup action in the area.

The lesson to be drawn from the case of Agstafa is that warfare needs environmental rules to regulate the impact of war on civilians and the surrounding environment. Greater efforts must be made to mitigate environmental damage caused by armed conflicts.

The lesson to be drawn from the case of Agstafa is that warfare needs environmental rules to regulate the impact of war on civilians and the surrounding environment.

Another potential source of environmental damage is the behavior of occupying forces. The ecocide and environmental terror perpetrated by the Armenian occupation of Karabakh provides a stark reminder of how bad things can get.

Soon after the end of the Second Karabakh War, Azerbaijan's Ministry of Ecology and Natural Resources produced a preliminary estimate of the damage caused to Karabakh's environment and natural resources during the Armenian occupation to be about $265 billion.

In Karabakh, more than 460 species of wild trees and shrubs were present before the onset of the conflict, 70 of which are endemic species—that is to say, they do not grow naturally anywhere else. According to the Institute of Dendrology of the Azerbaijan National Academy of Sciences, 21 of these endemic species, as well as hundreds of other rare and endangered plant species, were destroyed during the occupation. Moreover, rare forest species, including plane trees, nut trees, oaks, and other valuable tree species were plundered and subjected to felling and cutting for timber. Many of these are now on the verge of disappearance. In total, 60,000 hectares of forests were destroyed in this manner.

At the same time, the Armenian occupation forces illegally exploited Karabakh's natural resources, including gold and other precious metals.

Lists of companies that illegally operated in Karabakh during the Armenian occupation have been made by foreign organizations like Israel's Koholet Policy Forum and Azerbaijani state organs, including Azerbaijan's Foreign Ministry. In very few cases has evidence been found that these companies adhered to any sort of serious environmental protection measures.

Most Contaminated Region

One serious consequence of three decades of the Armenian occupation of Karabakh is that it is quite likely the South Caucasus' most environmentally contaminated region. The recovery and restoration work will require a whole-of-government approach, which, thankfully, is already being implemented. ANAMA will continue to demonstrate leadership in mine action but will need to keep working closely with all other relevant organs of the state to undo the unfathomable damage done to Karabakh during the brutal Armenian occupation.

Aside from all the other reasons to engage in mine action in Karabakh, it is worth underscoring that doing so helps to advance Azerbaijan's commitment to fulfilling the terms of the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

The aforementioned International Mine Action Standards (IMAS), which were initially endorsed by the UN Inter-Agency Coordination Group on Mine Action in 2001, have remained a cornerstone of all mine action field interventions for over twenty years.

One of the most telling IMAS standards is IMAS 07.13, entitled "Environmental Management in Mine Action," drafted in 2017. There is no more fitting way to conclude this brief essay than to quote the entirety of its opening paragraph:

> This standard details the minimum requirements for environmental management of all mine action operations on land and underwater including planning, protection and mitigation measures. These requirements shall be complied with to ensure that the environment is not degraded by mine action work and land is returned in a state that is similar to, or where possible better than, before mine action operations commenced, and that permits its intended use. BD

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A New Multilateral Peace and Security Architecture

The Alliance of Civilizations and the Role of Spain

Ramon Blecua

The crisis over Ukraine reinforces the view that, despite progress in many areas on the international agenda in recent years, the number of people affected by conflict and violence keeps growing. In the past 20 years, the number of forcibly displaced people has doubled, reaching over 80 million. According to United Nations data, over 60 percent of conflicts have relapsed in the last decade, a staggering figure that testifies of the difficulty of conflict resolution in this context. More than 80 percent of conflicts over the past 30 years involve militias and non-state actors, while the more recent rise in transnational violent extremist groups has increased the challenges for conflict resolution. Civil wars are leading to more protracted conflicts with ethno-cultural components, which complicate the traditional political approach. Existing multilateral mechanisms and diplomatic negotiations are increasingly ineffective, and a new toolbox for conflict resolution is more urgent than ever.

The combination of great power competition, regional struggles for hegemony, and the proliferation of non-state actors create interlocking and multi-layered conflicts that impact international peace and stability. At the same time, these elements are challenging the traditional approaches whilst further putting the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals

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at risk, as recognized inter alia by the latest Strategic Plan of the UN Department of Political and Peacebuilding Affairs.

The international multilateral order is being questioned from many different quarters, while the wave of global protests shows the exhaustion of existing economic and political models, as well as the need for a new social contract. The impact of the pandemic and the measures taken to control it are also having a profound impact on these new political and economic dynamics, laying bare the growing inequalities of the new digital economy as well as the weakening of solidarity and common action. The increasingly intricate fabric of peace and conflict and the multiplicity of actors involved have made conflict resolution more complex, as stated in the December 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation. Terrorism and radicalization have become a more imminent security threat and tensions related to environmental degradation, irregular migration and forced displacement, are affecting the social fabric in fragile states in unprecedented manners.

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Today, Artificial Intelligence (AI), data processing and the new digital technologies are defining the power relations of our time, emerging as the defining tactor in politics, society, and the economy—an influence which ultimately stretches to international and diplomatic relations. In response to AI's widely acknowledged impact on global diplomacy, awareness must be raised about what has been defined as tech diplomacy, as well as AI's influence on mediation, peacemaking, and conflict resolution. AI is increasingly used in the conduct of warfare, intelligence, and disinformation operations, but it could also become a powerful instrument for monitoring the effect of those campaigns that have turned social media into the new battlefield of our time. The definition of technological governance will be critical for the future of the international system.

In its efforts to address the multifaceted challenges that conflict resolution and crisis management pose to us, the European Union External Action Service (EEAS) has included cultural heritage,

together with environmental peacebuilding, new technologies and interfaith dialogue as some of the new priorities in its mediation strategy. Its December 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation states that

> cultural heritage can constitute an important asset in conflict prevention, peacebuilding, and mediation, considering in particular its strong symbolic importance for local communities. It offers multiple points for intervention along the conflict cycle. Cultural heritage is key to restoring the social fabric that sustains peace agreements and reconciliation.

The traditional concepts of intercultural and interfaith dialogue are evolving rapidly in the changing landscape of the conflicts of twenty-first century The way that cultural heritage can play a positive role in efforts to resolve conflict, reconcile, and build peace may not be straightforward to identify in the traditional interpretation of conflict resolution, but it is now informing the new trends and narratives.

The combination of great power competition, regional struggles for hegemony, and the proliferation of non-state actors create interlocking and multi-layered conflicts that impact international peace and stability.

For the most part, the way the issue of cultural heritage in time of conflict registers is in relation to its destruction. Issues of cultural heritage can be among the most important signifiers of identity; they are potent symbolically and politically. If the issues of cultural heritage are not understood as opportunities to build respect for difference and a culture of tolerance, that space is taken by a consolidated narrative of difference and exclusion.

Recent analysis of lessons learned on these issues suggest at least three key lessons. *First*, the emphasis must be on local ownership and locally driven efforts. Anything that seems to be imposed from outside is likely to be resented. *Second*, discussions on and use of cultural heritage should seek to have multiple perspectives, allowing for other voices to participate. *Third*, emphasis should be on the process—dialogue that seeks to discover the thoughts and ideas that cultural heritage awakens in people rather than presenting them passively and statically.

While the role that cultural heritage can play in the commemoration of historical events and building collective memory is fairly clear; it depends for its success on allowing it to be seen as a legitimate area for debate and dialogue if it is going to lead to the promotion of respect and tolerance.

UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres recently requested urgent action by member states to address the interconnected crisis of climate change, environmental degradation and growing economic and social inequalities, which has been compounded by the impact of the pandemic. This call could not be in more stark contrast with the summit that launched the UN 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in 2015. The combination of these systemic crisis with the proliferation of armed conflicts and big power confrontation is the most important threat to the multilateral system in decades.

If the issues of cultural heritage are not understood as opportunities to build respect for difference and a culture of tolerance, that space is taken by a consolidated narrative of difference and exclusion.

The international peacebuilding and security architecture that a renewed UN requires must build new international alliances, embrace new technologies, AI and technological diplomacy, and incorporate new international actors in a more effective way. The new "Agenda for Peace" to be adopted at what Guterres is calling a "Summit for the Future" that may take place in 2023 will, it is hoped, open the way for a stronger multilateral system.

Guterres' dramatic message is not just a reason for alarm: it is a call for collective action. At the heart of his proposal for a common agenda is a new security architecture and peacebuilding instruments. Conflicts are increasingly complex and difficult to resolve. In 2021, the two main organs of the UN—the General Assembly and the Security Council—each adopted resolutions that set in motion the third review of the UN security architecture. This is an opportunity we must seize to address the daunting challenges at hand.

The triple crisis mentioned by the UN Secretary General is affecting disproportionately those most vulnerable, particularly in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, and it will be a conflict multiplier. Competition for more scarce resources, food insecurity

or decaying public services will have an impact on migration flows and international stability The UN Alliance of Civilizations can become one of the leading actors in the process to define the aforementioned "Agenda for Peace" that is to be adopted at the "Summit for the Future" proposed by the UN Secretary-General.

New Challenges for Mediation and Conflict Prevention

The Alliance of Civilizations was born to respond to the growing polarization and the challenges of increasing sectarian and ethno-cultural rooted conflicts at the turn of the century. It was formally established by Spain and Turkey in 2005 as an initiative of UN Secretary-General Kofi Annan. It was in truth the brainchild of two Spanish statesmen: José Luis Rodríguez Zapatero, prime minister at the time, and Miguel Ángel Moratinos Cuyaubé, who was then foreign minister and is now, as it happens, the High Representative of the Alliance of Civilizations (he had previously served as the EU Special Representative for the Middle East Peace Process). Zapatero made his proposal public for the first time in September 2004 in his address to the UN General Assembly, as part of Spain's efforts to come to terms with the Madrid terror attacks of March 2004.

Much has happened since its establishment, when the "clash of civilizations" and the U.S.-led "war on terror" dominated the security agenda and international debates, bringing criticism on the supposedly naïve vision and optimistic voluntarism of the project. Nevertheless, events in Iraq and Afghanistan—just to pick on the best-known examples of that strategy—will for long remind us of its complete failure and the need to have instruments to address the deep-rooted causes of conflict. The "war on terror" created a perverse mechanism to justify its military interventions, imposing a parallel reality that few dared to question. That lesson should not be forgotten lest we buy again in the fallacy that the failure was the result of lack of resolve and commitment not on the complete disregard for conflict resolution initiatives.

In December 2019, *Washington Post* journalist Craig Whitlock published a long research article on the Afghan war entitled "At War with Truth." This landmark investigation brought to light the endless orchestrated manipulation of facts, media messaging, and

concocted statistics to justify the continuation of a military intervention doomed to fail.

The reports that formed the basis of his investigation were not written by antiwar activists or foreign agents bent on undermining the Western war effort but, rather, by the U.S. Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction. The over $2 trillion invested until then showed a dismal result of incompetence, corruption, and continuous deterioration of the military and security situation. Still five years had to pass until U.S. President Joe Biden put an end to that expensive and tragic farce, amid fierce criticism of a large part of the security establishment, that had been part and parcel of the massive cover-up of the disaster in Afghanistan.

Since 2005, the Alliance of Civilizations has become a platform for intercultural dialogue, understanding, and cooperation. It has connected governments, religious leaders, civil society organizations, the media, and other actors committed to promoting understanding across cultural and political divides. Since that time, the Alliance has become solidly anchored in the UN system and remains a useful tool of preventive diplomacy, with great potential to contribute to conflict resolution and become an important part of the UN's new "Agenda for Peace."

As part of the overall redefinition of the role and practices of the UN in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, the Alliance's "action plan" for 2019-2023 aims to turn the organization into a relevant actor in conflict prevention and mediation through intercultural and interfaith dialogue. The priorities of the Alliance in education, youth, migration, and media, together with their cross-cutting gender approach, address some of the most important challenges for today's international agenda and show the foresight of this initiative.

Addressing the fight against violent extremism through education, interfaith dialogue, protection of places of worship and other programs, the Alliance is making important contributions to international peace and stability. Nevertheless, its new objectives are much more ambitious and far reaching. In order to achieve them, the Alliance has to leave behind complacency for both its past achievements and its own lofty goals and become a relevant factor of change on the ground in a much more challenging environment, with operational initiatives as a global player in mediation and conflict resolution.

Conflict prevention and conflict resolution endeavors of the next decade must be more holistic, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive. Incorporating lessons learnt and addressing the challenges that AI and digital platforms pose is not a choice anymore—it has become a necessity. The question of environmental peacebuilding is also being integrated now more comprehensively in interfaith dialogue initiatives, and we have witnessed the increased engagement of religious leaders in the international climate, peace, and security agenda.

Besides, the requirements to incorporate women more fully into the process of mediation and peacebuilding is now recognized as part of the agenda to fully empower women and achieve real gender equality. The Alliance of Civilizations has incorporated many of these principles in its aforementioned "action plan," but it needs operational instruments and resources to implement such goals. A platform that would be designed to implement such programs, design projects, and create networks directed at the new lines for international mediation and conflict resolution, is needed. The welcome announcement in mid-March 2022 by Moratinos that the Alliance will open a dedicated Mediation Center in Istanbul by the end of the year, is an excellent step in the right direction.

Conflict prevention and conflict resolution endeavors of the next decade must be more holistic, comprehensive, and culturally sensitive.

One of the main value-added interventions of the Alliance of Civilizations will be in conflict prevention, a role that few institutions can approach as effectively. The prevention of violent conflict is fundamental in addressing the security challenges in the global stage. At the same time, it enables long-term political and social advancement and human security, creating some of the conditions for the Sustainable Development Goals to be implemented. Preventive diplomacy serves to prevent conflict from arising between parties and to avoid the escalation and spread of conflict once it breaks out. Mediated processes and dialogue can become key pathways to peace by addressing emerging crises and conflicts at an early stage. They also have the merit of handling tensions before positions have become entrenched. Preventing conflict is one of the most difficult aspects of mediation, because it requires a certain degree of foresight and anticipation, while its success is even more elusive to measure.

Tensions around cultural issues are a good indication of impending conflict, frequently becoming the catalyst for underlying conflicts to burst into the open. Conflict weakens the cultural infrastructure of countries and the capacity of states, communities, and peoples to address cultural collapse. It ruptures and disconnects people from the environment in which they live as well as fractures society, causing instability, internal displacement, and deteriorated local economies and livelihoods. The destruction and weaponization of cultural heritage is an outcome of the changed politics in conflict zones.

Preventing conflict is one of the most difficult aspects of mediation, because it requires a certain degree of foresight and anticipation, while its success is even more elusive to measure.

Spain has been discussing joint initiatives with Turkey to give the Alliance of Civilizations a more prominent role in the new peace and security agenda of the United Nations. The foreign ministers of Spain and Turkey (José Manuel Albares and Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu, respectively) have held several trilateral meetings with Moratinos in New York, Geneva, and elsewhere in the past several months. In the midst of these ministerials, a Turkish-Spanish Summit was held in Ankara on 17 November 2021 between the President of Turkey and the Prime Minister of Spain. At its conclusion, the two leaders expressed a shared commitment to support Moratinos' vision of the Alliance of Civilizations as a relevant international actor in mediation and conflict resolution. Moratinos' recent announcement that the Alliance will open a Mediation Center in Istanbul by the end of 2022 should be read in that light, as it will ensure the agreed principles of promoting conflict prevention and resolution through inter-cultural and interfaith dialogue will be put into action in the time ahead. Spain's commitment to this endeavor comes as a result of a long-term engagement with intercultural and interfaith

dialogue, which is strongly linked to our transition to democracy nearly 50 years ago.

The Role of Spain

The December 2020 Concept on EU Peace Mediation is a groundbreaking conceptual framework for the future of the European Union's conflict resolution initiatives. By adopting new thematic lines such as environmental peacebuilding, addressing the challenges of IT and digital platforms, supporting the international agenda for women in the context of peace and security, and incorporating cultural heritage and interfaith dialogue as an effective point of entry in the conflict cycle, the EEAS has now placed itself at the cutting edge of a more holistic and comprehensive mediation handbook. As I have argued above, cultural heritage and interfaith dialogue have taken a new dimension in the digital age we are entering, where redefinition of identity lines and mass forming messaging are taking unprecedented dimensions. Art and culture have the potential for interconnecting the diversity of human civilization into a creative cross-fertilization, instead of a clash of opposing world views.

As one of the countries that has taken the peaceful resolution of conflicts as the core of its foreign policy strategy, Spain has an important role to play in the integrated approach that defines the role of the EU in mediation as a pillar of the new multilateral system.

As Spain actively participated in this process of defining the new EU mediation strategy, these elements have been also incorporated in the conceptual framework developed by the Spanish Foreign Ministry, from the Handbook of Feminist Foreign Policy to the multilateral and humanitarian diplomacy strategies. As one of the countries that has taken the peaceful resolution of conflicts as the core of its foreign policy strategy, Spain has an important role to play in the integrated approach that defines the role of the EU in mediation as a pillar of the new multilateral system.

Besides the increased numbers of refugees and displaced people it creates, the economic disruption of conflict has had considerable social and financial

costs. Spain has expressed a political engagement with the drama of forced displacement through the Global Compact on Refugees, which was adopted in December 2018 by the UN General Assembly. Investing in conflict prevention and resolution is certainly the wisest investment, as the cost of the conflict over Ukraine unfolding now painfully reminds us. Other ongoing conflicts, such as the war in Yemen, the Syrian quagmire, and the Sahel imbroglio are a source of international instability and human suffering that will eventually reach our Western doorsteps, as well. Unresolved yet decades-old conflicts compete with new ones for attention on our television screens.

Moreover, Spain is a country particularly vulnerable to the effects of climate change and we have taken a determined position regarding the implementation of our engagements in this area. Our National Adaptation Plan to Climate Change 2021-2030 incorporates the peace and security dimension as well as cross border cooperation. Both our National Security Strategy and our Foreign Policy Strategy—both adopted in 2021—also focus on environmental priorities. In the wake of a presentation made by Minister Albares to the UN Security Council on the topic of "climate, peace, and security" at the Greentree retreat in June 2021, Sevilla played host to an international workshop on climate, peace, and security on 9-10 December 2021 to promote coordinated action among scientists, diplomats, and mediation actors on an EU-wide initiative for environmental peacebuilding.

A new European Union agenda based on the convergence of heritage and peacebuilding, conflict prevention, mediation, and dialogue can underpin international support to help rebuild societies. A cultural heritage approach to peacebuilding should bring otherwise disparate themes, projects, and tools within the guiding framework to inform the EU's engagement in both conflict prevention and resolution, further supporting the multilateral agenda in these fields. With a unique capacity to connect different cultural systems for its own multilayered historical background, Spain can play a key role in innovative mediation initiatives.

All those initiatives and the political capital deriving thereof remain relevant and offer important assets for Spain to redefine its role in the new context of mediation, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.

After the transition to democracy in 1976, Spain built its foreign policy around the principles of the peaceful resolution of conflicts and the promotion of democratic values and political dialogue. Using its ability to connect across cultural and geographical divides, Spanish diplomacy broke with decades of isolation and defensiveness to become an influential actor in peace processes in Central America, supported the Arab-Israeli negotiations, and promoted a space of cooperation in the Mediterranean.

This could be seen in the 1991 Madrid Conference that kick-started the Middle East Peace Process, the launching of the Ibero-American Project in 1992, the Euro-Mediterranean Summit of Barcelona in 1995 that created a space for regional cooperation, and the signing of the Guatemala Peace Agreement in 1996 that signaled the beginning of the end of one of the most cruel and bloody wars in Central America. In 2004, the Centro International Toledo para la Paz became one of the leading international organizations in mediation and private diplomacy—the same year that, as noted above, Spain first went public with the idea of launching the Alliance of Civilizations as a way to bridge the growing cultural divide.

Spain has a long track record in the promotion of inter-cultural and inter-religious dialogue. The Three Cultures Foundation, created in 1998 by Morocco and Spain with the participation of the Peres Center for Peace in Israel and the Palestinian National Authority, became a rallying point for those in favor of reviving the spirit of tolerance and cross fertilization between Jewish, Christian, and Muslim civilizations that created one of the most brilliant cultural phenomena in modern history. The Baremboin-Said foundation was another landmark project that the Andalusian regional government and the Spanish Ministry of Foreign Affairs supported in 2004, based on the idea of Daniel Baremboin and Edward Said to use music as a bridge between Arabs and Israelis to build a new partnership that filled the gaps in the political process and promoted understanding and cooperation. The King Abdallah Center for Inter-religious and Intercultural Dialogue (KAICIID), established in 2012, was an initiative of Saudi Arabia, Austria, and Spain to promote dialogue and foster peace based on inter-faith dialogue and understanding.

Communities that had been dispossessed, exiled, or even had atrocities committed against them cling to their cultural heritage as their most precious possession.

The transformation of cultural heritage, including historic buildings, monuments, archaeological heritage, and intangible practices, as well as social relationships, is an outcome of shifting politics and conflict. Cultural heritage is relational and therefore exposes the ways in which power and structures in society take shape. The truth is that even when institutions collapse, the sense of identity and community cohesion based on both material and intangible heritage survive. Communities that had been dispossessed, exiled, or even had atrocities committed against them cling to their cultural heritage as their most precious possession.

The digital revolution is affecting our conceptions of cultural heritage as well as the political and socioeconomic dynamics, with both amazing possibilities and unchartered risks.

Spanish initiatives in the field of cultural heritage in mediation, as follow ups to recent steps taken by EEAS and UNESCO, would be an opportunity to discuss the ways in which the role of cultural heritage can be better understood in the prevention and resolution of conflict, and the challenges and opportunities it represents to build trust between parties to conflict. Building on the EU's experience in Iraq as a case study, a report elaborated by the EEAS in 2020 analyses the main components of a possible EU strategic approach to cultural heritage protection and enhancement as a tool for conflict prevention, peace building, dialogue, and mediation in the Middle East and beyond. This new approach requires the development of a methodological framework, the establishment of partnerships between heritage experts and mediation practitioners, the refinement of the tools to operate on the ground, and the identification of specific initiatives to support the process in the long run.

The internal transformation of Spain has also been inspirational for many international actors, who felt

that the Spanish political transition to democracy offers a useful model to find political solutions and achieve social consensus for creative change. All the post-1991 initiatives mentioned in this essay, together with the political capital they created, remain relevant and offer important assets for Spain to redefine its role in the new context of mediation, conflict prevention, and conflict resolution.

Mediation is certainly in a process of deep transformation, and both the UN and the EU are adapting their tools and strategies to the new reality of more complex and protracted conflicts described above. Spain certainly is taking note of the need to join those efforts and participate in the new alliances that are required to push for a renewed and invigorated multilateral system with conflict resolution at its core. The new initiative for establishing an Alliance of Civilization mediation and conflict resolution center in Istanbul, which would tap into the huge potential of intercultural and interfaith dialogue, is certainly an important contribution to that aim. BD

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BREAKING GROUND ON THE NEW ITALY-AZERBAIJAN UNIVERSITY

ADA University Partners with Five Leading Italian Universities

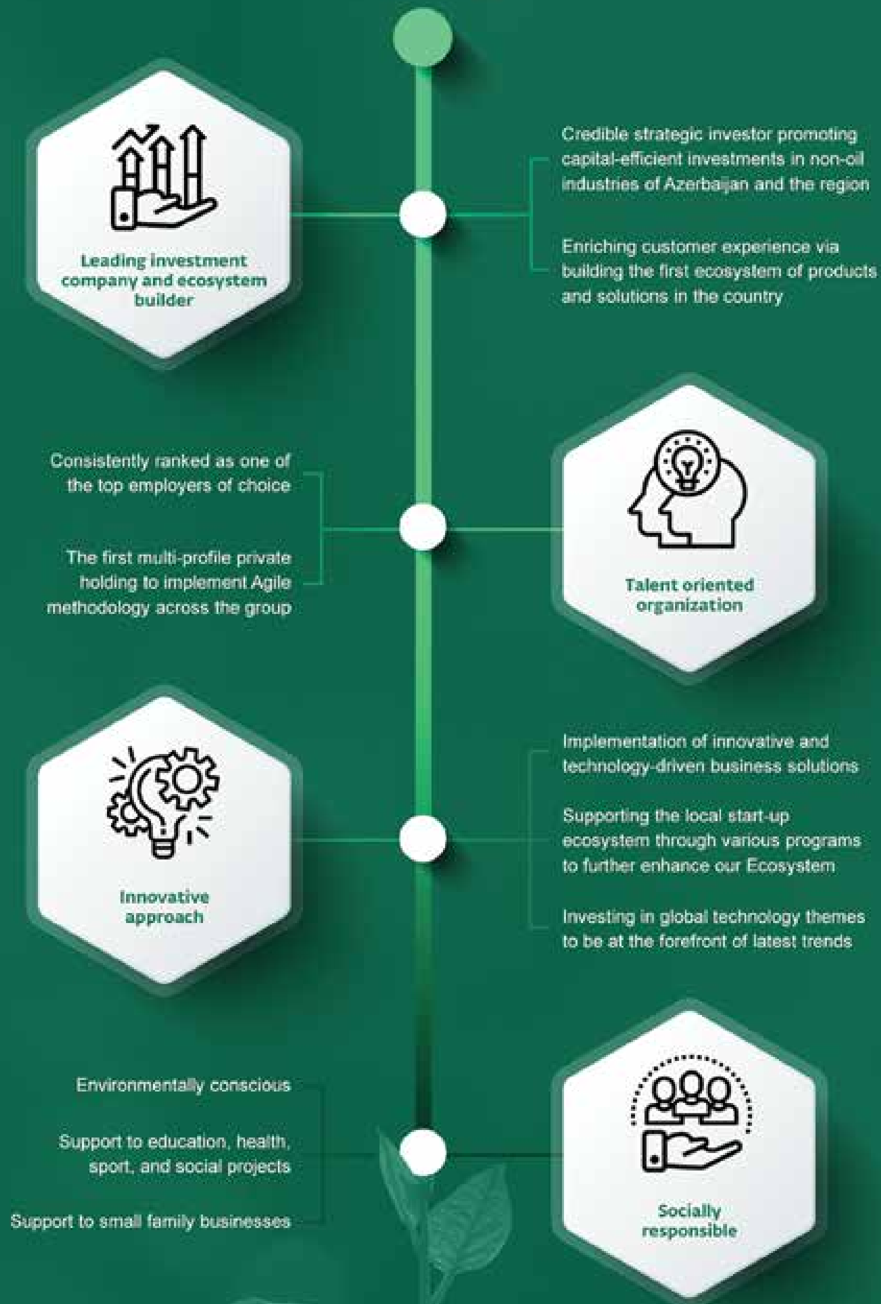
As part of a shared commitment to deepen the multidimensional strategic partnership between Azerbaijan and Italy, Italian Foreign Minister Luigi Di Maio was joined on 2 April 2022 by his Azerbaijani counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov, together with Energy Minister Parviz Shahbazov and Education Minister Emin Amrullayev, to officially break ground on the construction of the Italy-Azerbaijan University on ADA University's campus.

ADA University will partner with Luiss University, Bologna University, Politecnico di Milano, Politecnico di Torino, and Sapienza University of Rome. The new university will serve as an intellectual basecamp for the transfer of knowledge, know-how, and technology in globally-acknowledged fields of Italian excellence, including:

- Agriculture and Food Science
- Engineering
- Architecture and Urban Planning
- Interior and Industrial Design
- Management, Innovation, and Entrepreneurship

The ceremony coincided with celebrations marking the thirtieth anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two states and was followed by a conference hosted by ADA University featuring keynote addresses by the two foreign ministers.

PASHA Holding at Glance



ADA UNIVERSITY FOUNDATION

ADA University Foundation in Azerbaijan is a non-profit organization that supports the university's educational activities. We established a permanent endowment fund, an innovative concept in the country's education sector that ADA University has pioneered. ADA University Foundation also operates in Washington, DC, known as ADA International, which has become in short order a significant extension of ADA University and its educational activities in the United States.

Giving to ADA University impacts positively not only on the quality of education we can offer but also provides support that can tangibly impact the lives of ADA students, faculty, and staff by developing their education and research activities whilst enhancing academic excellence.

ADA University Foundation has partnered with more than one hundred local and foreign companies in Azerbaijan and abroad.

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