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THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES' ENERGY POLICIES: NEOMERCANTILIST DYNAMICS AND NATIONALIST TENDENCIES

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Abstract

The main purpose of this paper is to examine the energy policies of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) from a neo-mercantilist perspective and to analyse the emerging tendencies of energy nationalism within the organisation. The study seeks to explain the nature of the hybrid model that combines sovereignty-oriented policies with multilateral cooperation initiatives in the OTS's energy strategies, and to offer assessments of the possible directions in which this model may evolve in the future. The central research question addresses the extent to which the OTS's energy policies reflect a neo-mercantilist approach and how this approach generates an interaction between energy nationalism and regionalism. There is a limited number of studies in the literature that examine the concepts of energy nationalism and neo-mercantilism together; this paper, utilising qualitative research, document analysis, and case study methods, contributes to the field through its conceptual, theoretical, and case analysis dimensions.

Keywords

Organization of Turkic States, Nationalism, Energy Nationalism, Energy Security, Neo-mercantilism.

Resumo

O principal objetivo deste artigo é examinar as políticas energéticas da Organização dos Estados Turcos (OTS) numa perspetiva neomercantilista e analisar as tendências emergentes do nacionalismo energético no seio da organização. O estudo procura explicar a natureza do modelo híbrido que combina políticas orientadas para a soberania com iniciativas de cooperação multilateral nas estratégias energéticas da OTS, bem como apresentar avaliações sobre as possíveis direções em que este modelo poderá evoluir no futuro. A questão central da investigação incide sobre até que ponto as políticas energéticas da OTS refletem uma abordagem neomercantilista e de que forma essa abordagem gera uma interação entre o nacionalismo energético e o regionalismo. Existe um número limitado de estudos na literatura que examinem em conjunto os conceitos de nacionalismo energético e neomercantilismo; este artigo, recorrendo a métodos de investigação qualitativa, análise documental e estudo de caso, contribui para o campo através das suas dimensões conceptuais, teóricas e de análise de casos.

Palavras-chave

Organização dos Estados Turcos, Nacionalismo, Nacionalismo energético, Segurança energética, Neomercantilismo.

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THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES' ENERGY POLICIES: NEOMERCANTILIST DYNAMICS AND NATIONALIST TENDENCIES[1]

ZEHRA AKSU AĞIR

Introduction

Energy security has emerged as a strategic issue of global importance, while the institutional capacities of regional cooperation frameworks in the field of energy are gaining increasing significance. The role of such regional organisations is becoming ever more critical, particularly concerning energy production, transmission, and supply security. As one of these actors, the OTS has, since acquiring its institutional identity in 2021, moved beyond being a cultural and political cooperation platform to evolve into a multidimensional regional actor. The steps taken by the OTS to enhance its institutional capacity in the energy field have placed it in a prominent position in shaping energy-security-oriented models of regional cooperation across Eurasia.

Cooperation among member states in the supply, transportation, and security of energy resources has elevated the OTS to the centre of regional energy geopolitics. By bringing together both energy-producing states and strategically located transit countries under a single framework, the organisation has enabled the redefinition of energy policies on a regional scale. This diversity provides a solid basis for regional integration in the field of energy security and underscores the relevance of the present study. Indeed, the OTS functions not only as a platform for the distribution of economic interests but also as a laboratory in which concepts such as energy nationalism and neo-mercantilism can be tested within the theoretical framework of International Relations.

By examining the nature of the OTS's energy policies, this paper aims to analyse the organisation's strategic orientations and to address the question: "To what extent do the energy policies of the OTS bear neo-mercantilist characteristics, and how do these policies generate an interaction between energy nationalism and regionalism?" Methodologically, the study is designed as a case study based on a qualitative research approach and employs document analysis as a method of data collection and analysis. The period examined primarily covers 2021 onwards, when the organisation acquired its current institutional structure. This period was selected because, following the renaming

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of the Turkic Council as the OTS at the Istanbul Summit, the organisation began to develop its cooperation in the field of energy within a more clearly defined institutional framework.

Three main criteria are employed in selecting the documents used in the research: Institutional source, relevance to the research topic, and temporal scope. Accordingly, the analysis primarily examines summit declarations, strategy and vision documents, official statements concerning meetings of energy ministers, and documents relating to agreements, decisions, and cooperation initiatives in the field of energy issued by the OTS. As these documents directly reflect the OTS's official priorities, discourses, and policy orientations in the energy field, they constitute the principal primary sources of the study. These primary sources are supplemented by relevant academic studies and other secondary sources where necessary. The selected documents are evaluated through the conceptual framework of neomercantilism, energy nationalism, and regionalism. In this context, the analysis examines how and to what extent elements relating to the protection of national interests and the development of regional energy cooperation coexist in the OTS's energy-related decisions, discourses, and initiatives. In addition, by focusing on international developments such as the Russia–Ukraine War and crises in the Middle East, the study discusses the ways in which the OTS's energy policies have been reinforced through its responses to these developments. It also assesses how the organisation's policies and initiatives in response to these developments have been reflected in its strategic orientations in the energy field. In this way, the study goes beyond a theoretical discussion by providing an empirical analysis supported by concrete examples. In light of the findings, the overall character of the OTS's energy policies is discussed, and inferences are drawn regarding the organisation's potential future orientations.

The study's contribution to the literature lies in its simultaneous consideration of the OTS's energy policies from the perspectives of both energy nationalism and regional cooperation. Although existing studies on the OTS have addressed various dimensions, including the organisation's institutionalisation, regional cooperation, geopolitical position, and relations among its member states, the ways in which the OTS's energy policies are shaped by neomercantilism and energy nationalism, and how these tendencies coexist with regional cooperation, have not been sufficiently explained. Similarly, within the literature on energy policy, approaches emphasising national interests and state control and those focusing on regional cooperation and integration are generally examined within separate analytical frameworks. This creates a research gap in explaining how energy nationalism, grounded in the protection of national interests, and regional energy cooperation can coexist simultaneously within the same institutional structure.

This paper seeks to address this gap by treating the OTS as a case in which the interaction between these two tendencies can be observed. By bringing these two approaches together, the study analyses how a hybrid model operates and, in doing so, reveals the multidimensional nature of the OTS's energy strategies. It examines how regional energy cooperation is being developed under the OTS framework while member states continue to pursue the protection of their sovereignty over energy resources and infrastructure and their national interests. Within this framework, the study discusses neomercantilism

not only at the level of the nation-state but also as an analytical framework at the level of a regional organisation. It thereby seeks to demonstrate that national interest-oriented tendencies and regional cooperation in the OTS's energy policies are not necessarily mutually exclusive processes but can, under certain conditions, develop simultaneously. The originality of the study lies in analysing this relationship through energy policies on the basis of the interaction between neomercantilism, energy nationalism, and regionalism. Furthermore, while extending the nationalism literature into the field of energy policy, the article focuses on energy nationalism, an issue that has received insufficient attention in the International Relations literature, thereby contributing to addressing the conceptual and theoretical gap in this field.

Theoretical Background and Conceptual Framework

The production, distribution, and protection of energy resources are directly linked not only to economic dimensions but also to political sovereignty, geopolitical influence, and security strategies. In this context, energy is increasingly addressed in International Relations theories as an instrument of national power and geoeconomic influence. Particularly in cases where states shape their energy policies not through market mechanisms but in line with geopolitical interests and principles of national sovereignty, this tendency is often explained through the concepts of energy nationalism and neo-mercantilism. This section examines both the theoretical foundations of these two concepts individually and the points at which they intersect.

Concepts of Nationalism and Energy Nationalism

The emergence of nationalism as a political force in the modern era became particularly evident in Europe between the late eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries. During this period, peoples asserted their national identities against empires and monarchical structures. The French Revolution represented the decisive turning point in this process, as it placed the principle of sovereignty in the hands of the people rather than the divine rights of monarchs, thereby laying the foundation for the diffusion of nationalism (Hobsbawm, 1990, pp. 45–47). Political allegiance shifted from kinship and religious bonds to the nation, defined through common language, history, and culture. This transformation enabled the rise of modern nation-states, with nationalism functioning as both the ideological and institutional driver of this process (Breuilly, 1993, p. 54-55; Smith, 1991, pp. 20-23).

Nationalism is generally defined as a multidimensional ideology that prioritises the interests, cultural values, and identity of a nation, shaped by the pursuit of self-government or sovereignty. At its core lies the conviction that humanity is inherently divided into nations based on linguistic, cultural, or ethnic distinctions, and that legitimate political authority must rest with these nations. In this respect, nationalism operates not only as a form of identity consciousness but also as a socio-political movement that restructures political order (Calhoun, 2007, p. 211). Over time, diverse typologies of nationalism have developed across historical and geographical contexts, reflecting its layered and dynamic nature. Prominent examples in the literature include hegemonic

nationalism, particularistic nationalism, geopolitical nationalism, resource nationalism, anti-colonial nationalism, marginal nationalism, minority nationalism, ethnic nationalism, energy nationalism, and civic nationalism. These typologies demonstrate that nationalism is shaped not only by ethnic or cultural foundations but also by economic, geographical, and geopolitical interests.

Among these variations, *energy nationalism* is of particular relevance to this study. Energy nationalism refers to the tendency of states to consolidate sovereignty over natural energy resources and employ them in line with national interests. It manifests through political, economic, and ideological measures such as restricting foreign ownership, nationalising the energy sector, promoting domestic production, and securing energy supply. Energy nationalism thus operates not merely as an economic strategy but also as a means of redefining sovereignty and constructing political legitimacy. The phenomenon has been most visible in resource-rich states, particularly those endowed with oil and natural gas, where maximising economic gains and exercising full authority over resource management have remained central objectives. In this sense, energy nationalism legitimises direct state intervention in the energy sector and facilitates the adoption of nationalisation policies. Its historical trajectory highlights the institutional mechanisms through which states reinforce their control over energy.

From the mid-twentieth century onwards, energy nationalism has become especially evident in nationalisation policies within the oil industry. Countries such as Venezuela, Iran, Turkmenistan, Russia, and Bolivia pursued nationalisation to strengthen economic independence and bring energy revenues directly under state control. Venezuela, for instance, nationalised its oil sector in the early 2000s under President Hugo Chávez to redistribute resources and combat social inequality (Monaldi, 2020). Similarly, in 2006, Bolivian President Evo Morales nationalised the natural gas sector, framing it as an essential component of national sovereignty (Childs, 2016, p. 539; Kaup, 2010, p. 22). These cases illustrate that energy nationalism extends beyond economic calculations: it generates political legitimacy, expands foreign policy manoeuvrability, and strengthens state sovereignty. Nationalisation of energy assets, diversification of export routes, and the allocation of revenues to developmental or populist policies underscore the strategic role of energy nationalism in international relations.

In the contemporary era, however, energy nationalism is not confined to the policies of individual states. It increasingly acquires a collective dimension through energy-based alliances among states with shared historical experiences, cultural affinities, and regional interests. Such arrangements reconceptualise resource control as a form of shared sovereignty exercised by communities of states with common objectives. This trend is shaped by the pursuit of energy security, the reduction of external dependency, and the need for a united stance in geopolitical competition. Organisations such as the OTS or the Bolivarian Alliance for the Peoples of Our America exemplify solidarity-based frameworks that promote the collective management of energy resources. These formations redefine energy nationalism beyond the boundaries of the nation-state, transforming it into a strategy of collective sovereignty rooted in historical identity and regional solidarity. Thus, energy nationalism today functions not only as a tool of domestic politics but also as a central instrument of multilateral energy diplomacy, regional power dynamics, and identity-based cooperation.

Neo-mercantilism and the Politics of Energy Nationalism

Neo-mercantilism, as a modern interpretation of classical mercantilist thought, argues that economic instruments should be utilised to maximise the national interests of the state. Its origins lie in classical mercantilism, which was practised in Europe between the sixteenth and eighteenth centuries. The early mercantilist model sought to safeguard national wealth by placing trade and production under strict state control, promoting the accumulation of precious metals, and securing a positive trade balance. Neo-mercantilism modernises this logic by emphasising the use of economic power as a strategic instrument in the age of globalisation and growing interdependence. It does not confine state intervention in the economy to protectionist measures, but instead provides a comprehensive framework that conceives economic capacity as a source of power in international competition (Gilpin, 1987, pp. 25-30).

Representing a realist understanding of foreign policy, neo-mercantilism assumes that states employ economic instruments to strengthen national power. Its key premises can be summarised as follows:

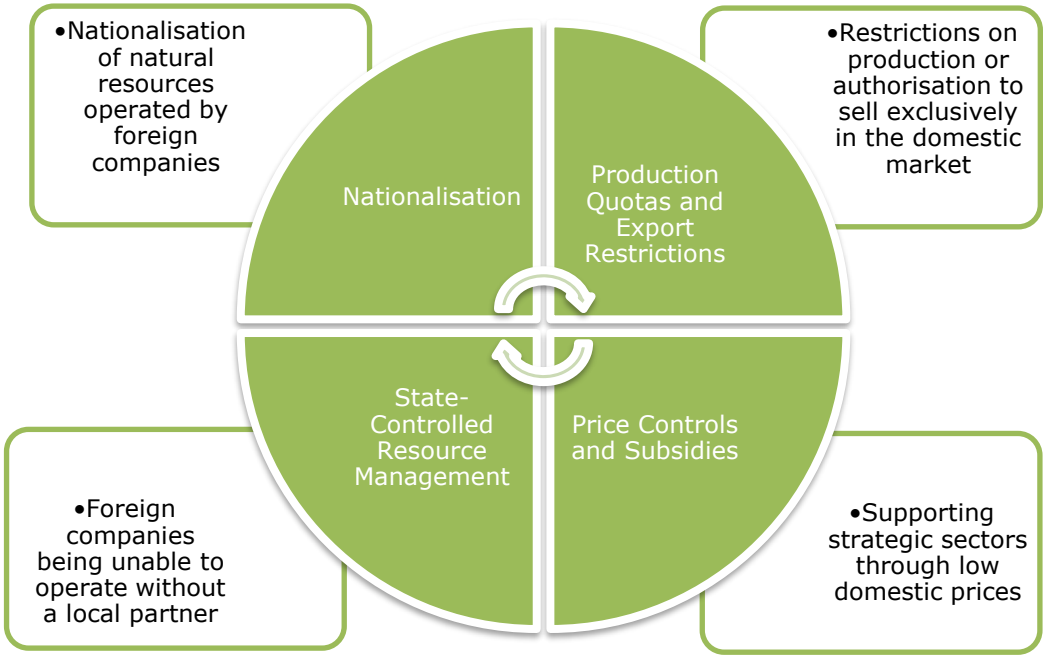
- The state is the primary actor in the international system, and economic activities are extensions of national security.
- The market mechanism is unreliable; strategic sectors such as energy, defence, and agriculture must be safeguarded through state intervention.
- External economic relations are viewed as a zero-sum struggle in which one state's gain constitutes another's loss.
- Energy and natural resources function simultaneously as economic and geopolitical instruments.

In this respect, neo-mercantilism provides a strong theoretical framework for analysing strategies through which states use economic tools to pursue national security, political autonomy, and foreign policy leverage. Its applications in international relations are visible in energy nationalism, trade protectionism, restrictions on foreign direct investment, and the expansion of state-owned enterprises. These strategies enable states not only to promote growth and efficiency but also to reduce dependence, consolidate sovereignty, and act more autonomously within the international system.

Within the field of energy, the neo-mercantilist lens is particularly valuable in explaining situations where strategic state logic overrides market rationality. For developing countries, this perspective justifies efforts to reclaim energy resources from foreign companies, channel revenues into public development, and localise the energy sector. For major powers, energy resources are used not only to secure domestic supply but also as levers of geopolitical influence and foreign policy. For instance, the European Union's attempts to reduce dependence on Russian energy reflect not simply diversification but also a bid to enhance its strategic autonomy. Similarly, the United States' shale revolution embodies a neo-mercantilist form of energy nationalism, aimed at energy independence. These examples demonstrate that energy security cannot be reduced to the balance of

supply and demand; rather, it forms part of long-term strategies shaped by geopolitical concerns. The strategic reframing of energy has generated transformative effects on global energy governance, as market competition increasingly gives way to state-driven interaction. In this way, energy is placed at the very centre of international power relations. Neo-mercantilism thus functions not only as a theoretical approach but also as an indispensable analytical tool for understanding contemporary energy politics. At this point, the following question arises: through which policies and instruments does neo-mercantilist energy nationalism manifest itself in enhancing state control over energy resources?

Figure 1. Forms of Implementation of Energy Nationalism



Source: This figure **was** prepared by the author of the study drawing on Stevens, 2008, p. 15; Childs, 2016, p. 75; Guberman et al. 2024, p. 1; Orazgaliyev, 2018

As indicated in Figure 1, neo-mercantilist energy nationalism manifests itself through a variety of instruments designed to strengthen state control over energy resources. This approach is evident in measures such as nationalisation in strategic sectors, resource control through state-owned enterprises and mandatory local partnerships, production quotas and export restrictions, as well as price controls and subsidies. In contrast to the principles of classical liberal economics, these practices rely not on the "invisible hand" of the market but on the visible intervention of the state. In this context, energy and mineral resources are redefined as strategic assets of geopolitical significance that extend beyond their purely economic functions.

Neo-mercantilist states aim to increase domestic production, to render investments in renewable energy strategic, and to promote the widespread adoption of energy-saving policies. Conceiving access to external resources as a domain of geopolitical competition, such states legitimise energy nationalism while theoretically grounding the proactive and interventionist roles of the state in the face of energy crises.

Particularly in periods when energy supply security is perceived to be under threat, steps such as the nationalisation of resources, the expansion of strategic reserves, or the restriction of foreign investors represent neo-mercantilist reflexes (Bremmer & Johnston, 2009, p. 45-46). This orientation points to a transformation in which the strategic rationality of the state replaces the invisible hand of the free market.

Table 1. Global Practices of Neo-mercantilist Energy Nationalism

Country	Practice	Explanation
Russia	Retention of Gazprom under state control	Political conditionality attached to energy exports; instrumentalisation of energy security
Venezuela	Nationalisation of oil companies	Direct transfer of PDVSA revenues into public funds
Turkmenistan	State monopoly over energy exports	Closed approach based on bilateral, highly controlled agreements with China and Iran
China	Strategic investment and import security	Long-term supply contracts through CNPC and Sinopec; pursuit of "energy diplomacy"

Source: This table was prepared by the author of the study drawing on Henderson & Mitrova, 2015, p. 10; Liao, 2021, 497-498; Monaldi et al. 2020, p. 15; Overland, 2013, p. 122-128

The examples in Table 1 illustrate the concrete manifestations of nationalist tendencies in energy policies across different countries. In Russia, the state's retention of control over Gazprom and the imposition of political conditions on energy exports demonstrate how energy security is employed as an instrument of foreign policy. Similarly, in Venezuela, the nationalisation of oil companies and the direct transfer of PDVSA revenues into public funds reveal that energy functions not only as an economic resource but also as a tool in the construction of political legitimacy. Turkmenistan's state monopoly over energy exports represents a closed and bilateral agreement-based, highly controlled approach, whereas China's long-term supply contracts and energy diplomacy conducted through state-owned enterprises such as CNPC and Sinopec indicate a pursuit of strategic autonomy in the global energy market.

Within this framework, energy nationalism is not confined to resource control alone. It is further reinforced through policies such as the establishment of strategic reserves (the creation of national stockpiles for use in times of crisis), the shaping of inter-state cooperation through energy diplomacy (bilateral or multilateral state-centred agreements for energy supply), the use of energy transit routes as instruments of

geopolitical leverage, and the pursuit of technological autonomy (the development of national technologies/localisation to reduce dependence on external actors in energy infrastructure). In this way, energy becomes more than an economic commodity; it is transformed into an instrument that strengthens bargaining power and sovereignty in international relations. This multidimensional approach moves energy nationalism beyond an economic reflex, situating it within a neo-mercantilist strategic framework.

The Energy Policies of The Organization of Turkic States: An Analysis Within A Hybrid Model of Energy

The practical manifestations of energy nationalism increasingly converge with neo-mercantilist tendencies. One of the most notable contemporary and regional examples of these tendencies is the OTS. The member countries of the Organisation, by virtue of their energy resources and the transport corridors through which these resources are conveyed, constitute a critical component of global energy networks.

This chapter examines both how energy policies are shaped within the institutional structure of the OTS and how energy nationalism provides the groundwork for neo-mercantilist strategies.

The Energy Profile of the Member States of the Organization of Turkic States

Bringing together full members such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Uzbekistan and Türkiye, as well as observer states including the TRNC, Hungary, and Turkmenistan, the OTS aims at strategic integration in areas such as joint infrastructure investments, knowledge sharing in renewable energy, and the transfer of energy-efficiency technologies (İpçioğlu & Petek, 2024, p. 124). Thus, the OTS is evolving beyond the idea of cultural unity into a structure that seeks regional integration in the fields of economy, energy, and transportation. Among the OTS members, which display diversity in terms of energy resources:

Azerbaijan; is a major producer of fossil fuels and stands out as a state with high energy autonomy. As of 2021, its proven natural gas reserves amounted to approximately 60 trillion cubic feet (tcf), covering production capacity from the Shah Deniz field in the Caspian Sea and other sites. While updated figures on oil reserves remain uncertain, the country is a regional exporter of both crude oil and condensates. In 2022, oil production reached 32.7 million tonnes, and natural gas production 35 billion m³. About 98% of its energy supply derives from oil and natural gas, while coal resources are limited (IEA, 2023, pp. 3-5).

Kazakhstan; ranks among Eurasia's richest countries in terms of oil, natural gas, coal, and uranium reserves. With fields such as Tengiz, Kashagan, and Karachaganak on the Caspian coast, the country is a major hub for energy exports. Its proven natural gas reserves are estimated at 2.5 trillion m³ (about 88 tcf), accounting for 0.5% of global reserves. Proven oil reserves stand at around 30 billion barrels (1.8% of global reserves) (EIA, 2025, pp. 7-8). Kazakhstan is the world's 9th largest coal producer, 17th largest

oil producer, and 12th largest natural gas exporter. In 2022, its energy mix consisted of approximately 50% coal, 25% oil, and 25% natural gas (IEA, 2023, pp. 11-13).

Uzbekistan; is one of the few states self-sufficient in natural gas, oil, and coal production. Domestic production supports the internal market while also enabling exports to the region (OECD, 2025). Its proven natural gas reserves stand at 1.1 trillion m³ (about 39 tcf), accounting for nearly 85% of total energy supply (IEA *6*). The Gazli Gas Field alone holds approximately 25 tcf of reserves. Oil reserves are estimated at around 600 million barrels, while coal reserves are about 1.9 billion tonnes (IEA, 2023, pp. 9-13). In the total energy supply, oil accounts for about 7% and coal for 8%.

Kyrgyzstan; bases its energy policy largely on hydropower. Proven oil and gas reserves are limited, and much of the fossil fuel demand is met through imports. Domestic coal reserves are primarily low-quality lignite. In the energy supply mix, oil accounts for 37%, coal for 26%, while natural gas is largely imported (IEA, 2022, p. 8).

***Türkiye*;** continues to rely heavily on fossil fuels. In 2023, its primary energy supply consisted of 29% oil, 26% natural gas, and 31% coal (IEA, 2023, p. 12). Russia, Azerbaijan, and Iran are the main natural gas suppliers, while coal is mostly imported and used for power generation (Esen, 2025). Although Türkiye possesses limited domestic reserves, it has positioned itself as a key regional energy transit hub. Through pipelines such as the Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan (BTC) and TANAP, it plays a pivotal role in delivering Caspian resources to Europe (Novikau & Muhasilovic, 2023).

***Turkmenistan*;** holding observer member status, accounts for approximately 5.5% of the world's natural gas reserves. The Galkynysh Gas Field is among the largest natural gas fields both in Turkmenistan and globally (EIA, 2025, p. 4). The field is of pivotal importance not only for Central Asian energy security but also for China's energy supply. The country's oil reserves are relatively limited (0.03%), while coal plays a negligible role in its energy supply. In March 2025, an agreement was concluded to deliver natural gas to Türkiye via Iran (AP News, 2025; Worldometer, 2025).

***Hungary's*;** energy supply in 2023 consisted of 32.6% oil, 30.5% natural gas, and 3.9% coal (IEA, 2023). Russia is the dominant supplier of oil and gas imports, while coal is used primarily in the form of lignite in limited quantities. Another partner of the Organisation, the *TRNC*; differs significantly from other OTS countries in terms of fossil fuel and energy profile due to its limited local resources and political status. To date, no commercially viable proven oil, gas, or coal reserves have been identified in the TRNC. Its hydrocarbon potential in the Eastern Mediterranean is closely linked to cooperation with Türkiye, particularly regarding maritime jurisdiction areas. According to the Ministry of Energy and Natural Resources of the Republic of Türkiye (2024, p. 12), the Turkish Petroleum Corporation (TPAO) has obtained exploration licences for oil and natural gas in the TRNC's continental shelf and has carried out several drilling activities, although production has not yet commenced.

In summary, according to the most recent data, among the Organisation's members, Turkmenistan and Kazakhstan stand out in terms of reserves, Azerbaijan and Uzbekistan occupy a middle position, while Türkiye, Hungary, and the TRNC are the weakest in terms of energy reserves. In natural gas, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan are leading; in oil production, Kazakhstan dominates; in coal, Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan are the most

resource-rich. Countries such as Kyrgyzstan contribute mainly through hydropower capacity and mineral reserves that support infrastructure. The TRNC, unlike other OTS members, lacks domestic fossil fuel reserves, remains fully dependent on imports for its energy supply, and holds significance primarily as a geopolitical actor in the Eastern Mediterranean energy equation. However, the energy potential of OTS members should not be measured solely by the abundance of resources.

Their strategic locations as transit hubs also constitute a major asset. Türkiye acts as an energy corridor between Europe and Asia; Azerbaijan directly supplies gas to Europe; Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan possess the capacity to export to the Chinese market; Kyrgyzstan contributes through hydropower potential. This diversity forms the foundations of a regional energy security architecture (İpçioğlu & Petek, 2024, p. 124). Positioned along the Middle Corridor route stretching from the Caspian Basin to Europe and China, the OTS members hold the potential to develop collective strategies for transit security. In particular, the diversification of Turkmenistan's energy exports (Trans-Caspian, TAPI) expands the scope of this cooperation (Republic of Türkiye Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2026). Yet, the effective utilisation of this potential depends on infrastructure investments, regional coordination mechanisms, and foreign policy alignment. With the advancement of institutional cooperation mechanisms, concrete projects may materialise. Achieving this goal, however, hinges on coordination capacity, balanced relations with external actors, and the sustainability of a long-term strategic vision. The OTS occupies a strategic position in the energy field, both in terms of resources and transit capacity, and its members are aware of their potential. Making energy cooperation a strategic priority in the institutionalisation process of the Organisation marks an important step. In terms of the distribution of resources, production capacity, and transit routes, the OTS possesses the potential to establish a common energy market.

The OTS Between Energy Nationalism and Neo-mercantilist Tendencies: A Hybrid Model of Regionalism

The relations that developed between the Central Asian Turkic republics, which gained independence in the post-Soviet period, and Türkiye have fostered solidarity based on shared language, history, and culture. Efforts towards cooperation began with the 1992 Summit of the Heads of State of Turkic-Speaking Countries held in Ankara. This process was institutionalised with the establishment of the Turkic Council in 2009, which in 2021 assumed the name the OTS (Purtaş, 2017, p. 92). At the 2021 Istanbul summit, the adoption of the *Turkic World Vision 2040* and the *Charter of the Organization of Turkic States* clarified the organisation's strategic orientation and broadened its scope with the accession of Turkmenistan, Hungary, and the TRNC as observer members (OTS, 2021).

The OTS has become the most concrete structure in which Turkic nationalism has been institutionalised at the regional level. The *Turkic World Vision 2040* explicitly defines common values, shared history, and a collective vision of the future (OTS, 2021). The themes set out in this document demonstrate that the principle of "one nation, many states" has been given a political framework. Shaped under Türkiye's leadership, the organisation both supports identity-based nationalism and generates a geopolitical

strategy. Although the political forms of nationalism differ across OTS member states, they draw on the same roots. This diversity limits efforts to standardise nationalism within the OTS but does not obstruct the pursuit of a collective identity.

The nationalist unity established by the OTS on the basis of cultural solidarity is reinforced by geopolitical nationalism. The organisation represents the transformation of identity politics into a regional strategy and aims to build a multidimensional network of cooperation among its members (Koçak, 2023, p.117). Energy is one such field, in which OTS members also display nationalist tendencies. These tendencies in energy policy are largely consistent with neo-mercantilist strategies. For instance, Turkmenistan maintains a state monopoly over energy exports, imposes strict foreign exchange controls, and restricts foreign companies' access to its energy sector in an effort to preserve political and economic autonomy. Kazakhstan, while appearing open to foreign investment, upholds state primacy in strategic fields and channels energy revenues into national development funds. Türkiye positions its ambition to become an energy hub in line with its strategic interests through regional transit advantages. In Azerbaijan, energy projects, though open to international cooperation, remain under political oversight through state-owned enterprises such as SOCAR. These examples illustrate that OTS members view energy resources as instruments of national power, aiming to sustain energy sovereignty by limiting external economic influence (EITI, 2025; U.S. Department of State, 2024b; Özdilek, 2026, p. 315; Vivoda, 2009, p. 522; U.S. Department of State, 2024b). In most OTS member states, energy companies remain directly managed or strictly regulated by the state.

In Azerbaijan, SOCAR; in Kazakhstan, KazMunayGas; and in Turkmenistan, Türkmengaz, are national energy companies through which resource control is maintained directly in the hands of the state. Such practices correspond directly to neo-mercantilist strategies, which envisage the management of energy resources under state control in line with strategic interests (Luong & Weinthal, 2010). In many OTS countries, foreign investment in the energy, communications, and defence sectors is subject to state approval, while local partnership requirements are imposed in critical projects. This implies that integration into the global market is circumscribed by national interests.

Within the OTS, energy nationalism also manifests itself in foreign policy. Turkmenistan seeks to diversify its energy exports by developing independent pipeline routes with actors such as China and Iran. Türkiye, for its part, seeks to reduce dependence on Russia and Iran by turning to Azerbaijani and Eastern Mediterranean energy resources (Ağır & Aksu, 2024, p. 117). Türkiye's strategy of establishing regional influence as an energy transit hub-through pipelines such as TANAP, TurkStream, Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan, and Baku-Tbilisi-Erzurum-represents a reflection of a neo-mercantilist foreign policy approach.

For instance, the transfer of gas to Europe via TANAP is considered not only an economic endeavour but also a geopolitical manoeuvre. Through this project, Türkiye and Azerbaijan project power in the realm of foreign policy (Novikau & Muhasilovic, 2023; TANAP, 2026). Energy wealth thus enables the OTS to develop a common ground in energy diplomacy. OTS energy diplomacy is expanding to encompass not only producer states but also consumer and transit countries, thereby fostering regional cooperation in the field of energy security (Oran, 2025, pp. 117).

Among OTS members, there are bilateral energy exchanges, joint energy projects, and regional connectivity initiatives. In these initiatives-reflecting nationalism in the energy sphere-Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan are net exporters, whereas Türkiye, Hungary, Kyrgyzstan, and the TRNC are net importers. In the first nine months of 2024, Azerbaijan exported 7.3 bcm of natural gas to Türkiye (Azerbaijan Ministry of Energy, 2024). In March 2025, an agreement was signed between Turkmenistan and Türkiye for the delivery of natural gas via Iran (AP News, 2025). In addition, Turkmenistan transferred 857 mcm of gas to Azerbaijan under a swap agreement in 2022 (NEBIT-GAZ, 2023). Institutionally, the issue of energy cooperation within the OTS was first formalised at the First Meeting of Energy Ministers held online in 2021, followed by the establishment of the Energy Coordination Committee in 2023. These developments were supported by the goals of green energy and infrastructure integration outlined in the *Turkic World Vision 2040* (OTS, 2024). The institutionalisation of energy cooperation, the implementation of joint infrastructure projects, and the strengthening of sustainability-oriented policies are expected to contribute to regional energy security.

At present, a fully integrated energy market or multilateral energy trading system has yet to be established among OTS partners. However, member states are developing various projects and memoranda of understanding aimed at realising the infrastructures necessary to enable direct energy trade.

The enhancement of energy cooperation among member states is recognised as one of the core priorities of the OTS, as envisaged in its founding Nakhchivan Agreement, the *Turkic World Vision 2040*, and the Astana Declaration. Themes such as fossil fuels, energy infrastructure, renewable resources, and energy efficiency constitute the foundations of cooperation mechanisms among the member states (OTS, n.d.). Within the OTS, cooperation in the energy sector continues to be institutionalised, particularly through ministerial-level meetings. In this context, the Second Meeting of OTS Energy Ministers, held in Almaty, Kazakhstan, on 28 September 2022, marked a significant milestone. The meeting addressed issues such as the development of joint energy policies, technical cooperation on energy efficiency and clean energy transition, education and expert exchanges, joint projects, the draft 2023-2027 Energy Cooperation Programme, and the establishment of the Energy Cooperation Coordination Committee (OTS, 2022a). This meeting demonstrated a growing orientation not only towards the transportation and trade of fossil fuels but also towards cooperation on sustainable energy policies. Furthermore, the meeting between OTS Secretary-General Baghdad Amreyev and Kazakhstan's Minister of Energy, Bolat Akchulakov, on 13 September 2022 exemplifies the organisation's energy diplomacy efforts. This discussion focused on the OTS's vision of energy cooperation, prospects for project development in the energy sector, and the energy agenda within the preparations for the Samarkand Turkic Summit (OTS, 2022b). Such exchanges indicate that energy issues are addressed not only at a technical but also at a geopolitical and diplomatic level. Especially in the post-2021 period, the OTS has increasingly developed a multidimensional cooperation mechanism in the energy field, grounded in technical, strategic, sustainable, and diplomatic foundations.

Ministerial meetings on energy, international partnerships, regional integration objectives, and an emphasis on sustainability reveal that the OTS vision in this field is dynamic and multi-actor. OTS energy policies aim both at fostering integration across

the Turkic world and adapting to the global energy transition. Taken together, the Turkic states constitute the world's 14th largest economy and the 3rd largest energy supplier. Aware that harnessing this collective strength can unlock enormous potential and consolidate their position as key players on the global economic stage, they are intensifying institutional dialogue on energy within the OTS. To this end, regular meetings of Energy Ministers are convened; Energy Forums and joint communiqués are organised; calls for cooperation on natural gas, oil, and renewable energy are made; joint infrastructure projects are promoted; and interaction is fostered through transit and transportation initiatives. In this sense, the OTS constitutes a platform that is heterogeneous in terms of energy resources but united by converging geopolitical objectives, simultaneously supporting and transforming the energy nationalism of its members.

The diversity of energy resources within the organisation prevents energy policies from being reduced to a one-dimensional supply–demand relationship, instead transforming cooperation into a more complex field of strategic interaction. The OTS functions as a multi-layered platform that both reinforces and seeks to transform the inclination of its members to safeguard resource control and prioritise national interests-an orientation often referred to as "energy nationalism." As a form of regional organisation, it combines member states' desire to preserve sovereignty with the objective of reducing external dependence in the energy sector. This approach particularly reflects a neo-mercantilist tendency in areas such as energy supply security, the national control of transit infrastructure, and the development of domestic energy technologies. However, this neo-mercantilist framework does not imply a closed economic model; rather, it seeks to enhance regional solidarity in strategic sectors and to strengthen collective resilience against external shocks, without entirely rejecting foreign trade or investment.

Table 2. Analysing the OTS Through a Neo-mercantilist Lens

Neo-mercantilist Dimensions	Non-Neo-mercantilist Dimensions
The objective of energy supply security and reducing external dependence	Openness to international energy markets
National control of resources and emphasis on domestic technology	Cooperation with foreign investors
Creating competitive advantage through regional solidarity	Free trade and transit agreements

Source: This Table was prepared by the author of the study.

As shown in Table 2, the OTS should not be perceived as a fully closed bloc or an economic entity engaged solely in intra-organisational trade. In certain respects, it operates as part of the global economic order and in line with the principles of free trade. For instance, most of the OTS's energy projects are geared towards exports to non-member states (e.g., Europe, China). Pipelines, LNG projects, and electricity interconnections are typically integrated into global energy markets, reflecting openness rather than a neo-mercantilist "closed market" model. Moreover, OTS members engage in partnerships with international companies such as BP, Total, and CNPC, demonstrating that foreign capital is not entirely excluded even while maintaining state control. The transport and energy strategies of the OTS are also grounded in multilateral trade and

transit agreements designed to increase the revenues of transit states. Such open-network strategies diverge from the inward-looking protectionism typical of neo-mercantilism.

Alongside these non-neo-mercantilist features, the organisation simultaneously incorporates clear neo-mercantilist elements. Foremost among them, the OTS's energy cooperation documents highlight strengthening the energy security of member states and reducing dependence on Western- or Russia-centred energy supply networks as a priority, consistent with the pursuit of strategic autonomy. Furthermore, the continued predominance of the state in energy sectors-where exports and investments are channelled through national companies rather than privatisation-indicates that resources remain under national control. In producer states such as Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, and Turkmenistan, this approach is reinforced by incentives for the development of domestic energy technologies, serving the aim of reducing external dependence in strategic sectors. The OTS also seeks to develop joint energy projects-such as pipelines and refinery investments-among its members, creating a "bloc effect" in global energy markets. In this way, it aims to generate a regional protective synergy while still operating within the rules of the global free market.

With these characteristics, the organisation, particularly in recent years, demonstrates a hybrid model of regional governance, marked by growing institutional capacity and strategic diversity. This hybrid structure enables the institutionalisation of energy nationalism in line with classical neo-mercantilist approaches, while simultaneously adopting an open stance towards integration with international markets. Neo-mercantilist approaches prioritise the interventionist role of the state in strategic sectors such as energy and emphasise the control of resources in line with national interests (Gilpin, 1987, p. 34). Within this framework, certain OTS member states utilise their energy resources as geopolitical leverage. In this sense, the Organisation seeks to form a regional line of defence in terms of energy security, elevating the protection of sovereignty over resources to a shared strategic priority. At the same time, the OTS refrains from evolving into a closed power bloc; rather, it also embraces liberal orientations such as diversifying energy supply security globally, promoting infrastructure investment, and expanding outward through energy trade. This transforms the Organisation from a mere energy coalition into a multidimensional integration platform, based on economic cooperation, transport corridors, and investment networks. Accordingly, while the OTS pursues state-centred strategic autonomy, it simultaneously adheres to a principle of flexible multilateralism that does not exclude cooperation with regional and global actors. This dual orientation distinguishes it both from classical regional organisations and from purely economic integration initiatives. With these attributes, the OTS can be positioned within contemporary international relations literature as one of the emerging examples of hybrid regionalism[2].

In conclusion, energy cooperation within the OTS, together with the member states' abundant hydrocarbon resources and strategic geographical positions, constitutes one of

[2] It is a concept in the international relations literature that denotes the increasingly multi-layered, multi-actor, and flexible character of regional integration processes, which cannot be explained within a single theoretical framework. The term is particularly employed to describe the complex and multifaceted models of regional governance that emerged in the post-Cold War era with the new wave of regionalism (Söderbaum, 2016, p.18).

the most critical pillars of regional integration. Although there are significant advantages for the development of energy cooperation among the OTS countries, there are also various structural and geopolitical challenges that may constrain the deepening of such cooperation. One of these challenges is the asymmetry in the energy profiles of the member states. This asymmetry makes the formulation of a common energy policy more difficult. For instance, Kyrgyzstan and Türkiye have more limited energy reserves than the other member states, and this asymmetric structure leads to differing expectations among the member states regarding the organisation. Secondly, the OTS's room for manoeuvre in the energy sphere is constrained by the presence and regional interests of Russia and China, both of which exercise considerable economic and geopolitical influence in the region. In particular, the long-standing ties that Central Asian countries have developed with Russia and China in terms of energy export routes, infrastructure connections, and access to external markets make it more difficult to establish a more autonomous and integrated energy cooperation mechanism within the OTS. This situation requires the OTS countries to develop regional energy cooperation not solely in accordance with intra-organisational dynamics, but also by taking broader geopolitical balances into consideration (Bölükbaşı, Bilici & Yücel, 2025, pp. 398-404).

Another obstacle to the institutionalisation of energy cooperation in the region is the inadequacy of physical infrastructure and logistics networks. Limited direct energy connections among the member states, together with the fact that existing export routes remain substantially linked to external actors and established transit networks, make it difficult to establish an integrated energy space within the OTS. Nevertheless, these geopolitical and infrastructural constraints do not merely restrict neomercantilist and energy nationalist tendencies; in certain respects, they may also reinforce them. Efforts to reduce external dependence, develop alternative export routes, and maintain national control over energy resources strengthen the emphasis on strategic autonomy and national interests in the energy policies of the member states.

The Russia–Ukraine War, crises in the Middle East, and disruptions to global energy supply chains have once again made energy security a priority, further reinforcing the visibility of these tendencies. At the same time, competition among actors such as Russia, China, the EU, and the United States over energy resources, routes, and projects in Central Asia and the Caucasus has increased the importance of strategic autonomy and diversification in the energy policies of OTS members. Thus, while the influence of external actors in the region and existing infrastructural dependencies constrain the deepening of energy cooperation within the OTS, they may also foster neomercantilist and energy nationalist tendencies by encouraging member states to strengthen their control over resources, routes, and energy infrastructure. This dual effect also helps to explain why regional cooperation and national interest-oriented policies can coexist within the OTS's energy policies.

Indeed, the OTS exhibits a hybrid economic approach that combines protectionist and sovereignty-oriented tendencies in strategic sectors with a pragmatic and outward-looking approach to international trade and investment. Today, the organisation pursues strategies centred on sovereignty and national interests alongside outward-looking and cooperation-based projects. In the energy sphere, the OTS represents a distinctive model of integration that combines national interest-based sovereignty-oriented policies with

collective strategies based on regional cooperation. Although the organisation's current strategy appears to reflect a hybrid model, the possibility that the OTS may shift towards a more neomercantilist or energy nationalist orientation in the future should also be considered. Such tendencies may become more pronounced, particularly if geopolitical risks and energy security concerns intensify. In this context, member states may seek to maintain tighter national control over their energy resources and strengthen policies aimed at strategic autonomy. Furthermore, if the OTS moves towards developing a more cohesive bloc-like position vis-à-vis major powers such as the West, Russia, and China, it may adopt more protectionist and nationalist policies in the energy sphere. Similarly, efforts by member states to develop their own energy technologies and reduce dependence on imports may reinforce nationalist and protectionist tendencies.

Statements by the leaders of the member states emphasising historical continuity, shared memory, and collective values play a critical role in defining "who" the OTS is. Such discourses contribute to the construction of the organisation as a distinctive actor within the international system (Güç, 2025, p. 413). Nevertheless, in the short to medium term, rather than moving towards a rigid form of energy nationalism, the member states are expected to maintain an approach that preserves state control over strategic sectors while continuing their integration with global markets and technology.

Conclusion

The OTS, through the strong foundation of regional cooperation it has established in the field of energy security, both safeguards the strategic interests of its member states and contributes to regional integration. By bringing together resource-rich producer countries (Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan) with strategically located transit states such as Türkiye, the OTS positions itself at the centre of regional energy networks and emerges as a noteworthy actor in global energy geopolitics. This position provides the Organisation with the capacity to both enhance energy supply security and diversify energy routes.

The energy strategies of the OTS displays a dual character. On the one hand, they support the sovereignty-based approaches of member states to keep energy resources under national control, reduce external dependence, and strengthen strategic autonomy. On the other hand, they reflect efforts to institutionalise regional cooperation in energy and to develop joint infrastructure projects. This dual process produces a complex and mutually reinforcing relationship between energy nationalism and regionalism. Member states seek to strengthen regional solidarity through joint pipeline projects, energy transportation, and investment agreements, while not relinquishing the protection of their national interests.

Geopolitical developments are among the key external factors shaping the direction and tone of the OTS's energy policies. The Russia–Ukraine war, instability in the Middle East, and disruptions in global energy supply chains have made energy security more of a priority for member states than ever before. Moreover, the struggle for influence waged by Russia, China, the European Union, and the United States over energy projects in Central Asia and the Caucasus pushes OTS members towards adopting a firmer stance against external pressures. In this regard, the quest for strategic autonomy constitutes a defining element of the Organisation's overall energy approach.

Member states' efforts to develop their own energy technologies, reduce import dependence, and strengthen national control over critical infrastructure reinforce the tendency towards energy nationalism. However, these policies do not amount to a fully closed or rigid economic model. The OTS adopts a hybrid approach that preserves state control in strategic sectors while sustaining integration with global markets and technology. This model enables the Organisation to safeguard national interests while simultaneously fostering international economic cooperation.

The continued need for international partnerships in financing energy projects, completing infrastructure investments, and transferring advanced technologies constitutes a structural barrier to the OTS pursuing a fully closed policy. For example, projects such as TANAP and Baku–Tbilisi–Ceyhan not only enhance the energy supply security of member states but are also implemented with the active participation of international investors and companies. This underlines the Organisation's tendency to remain an integrated actor in global energy markets. Moreover, its pursuit of alignment with global trends in renewable energy, energy efficiency, and green transition provides flexibility to its energy vision. Such projects extend beyond fossil fuel-based energy nationalism, creating a more sustainable and internationally cooperative policy space. This highlights the OTS's potential to act not only as an energy organisation focused on fossil fuel trade but also as a driver of regional energy transition and transformation.

The findings indicate that the energy policies of the OTS largely reflect the core elements of a neo-mercantilist approach-sovereignty-based control of resources, the goal of reducing external dependence, and securing competitive advantage through regional solidarity in global competition. However, the Organisation simultaneously departs from classical neo-mercantilism through its openness to international markets, its interest in foreign investment partnerships, and its support for free trade and transit agreements. This hybrid structure positions the OTS as a distinctive regional actor that institutionalises energy nationalism while employing multilateral cooperation as a strategic instrument. The way these two orientations are sustained in the coming period will be decisive for the Organisation's ability both to contribute to regional energy security and to consolidate its role as an influential player in the global energy market.

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CAPACITY BUILDING IN DIPLOMAT TRAINING AND RETRAINING: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND MODERNISATION STRATEGIES

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Abstract

The study aimed to identify best practices among US institutions in diplomatic staff development based on publicly available institutional materials from 2017-2026 and to formulate recommendations for improving this area in Uzbekistan. Research methods included content analysis of the George Washington University – Elliott School of International Affairs, US Department of State, American Foreign Service Association, The American Academy of Diplomacy, Council of American Ambassadors, Foreign Service Institute, Institute for the Study of Diplomacy, Georgetown University. The results of the study identified several key institutions in the United States of America that train and retrain diplomatic personnel. Among them is the Department of State, which has published guidelines for the evaluation of foreign service professionals, entry into diplomatic service and professional advancement. This document can be used as a model for the implementation of similar regulations and best practices in the Central Asian region. In addition, the State Department's website offers a trial online test for a foreign service officer, which can be used to assess preliminary knowledge. Based on the systematisation of national experience, the authors noted that improving the training and retraining of diplomatic personnel requires the transformation of the legal framework of Uzbekistan. The results of the study can be used to formulate recommendations for improving existing training programmes for diplomats and other civil servants in Uzbekistan and other countries.

Keywords

Diplomatic service, Diplomat training, Retraining, Institutional capacity, Uzbekistan.

Resumo

O estudo teve como objetivo identificar as melhores práticas entre as instituições dos EUA no desenvolvimento do pessoal diplomático, com base em materiais institucionais disponíveis ao público entre 2017 e 2026, e formular recomendações para melhorar esta área no Uzbequistão. Os métodos de investigação incluíram a análise de conteúdo da Universidade George Washington – Escola Elliott de Relações Internacionais, do Departamento de Estado dos EUA, da Associação Americana do Serviço Diplomático, da Academia Americana de Diplomacia, do Conselho de Embaixadores Americanos, do Instituto do Serviço Diplomático e do Instituto para o Estudo da Diplomacia da Universidade de Georgetown. Os resultados do estudo identificaram várias instituições-chave nos Estados Unidos da América que formam e reciclam pessoal diplomático. Entre elas está o Departamento de Estado, que publicou diretrizes para a avaliação de profissionais do serviço diplomático, o ingresso no serviço diplomático e a progressão na carreira. Este documento pode ser utilizado como modelo para a implementação de regulamentos e melhores práticas semelhantes na região da Ásia Central.

Além disso, o site do Departamento de Estado disponibiliza um teste online de avaliação para um funcionário do serviço diplomático, que pode ser utilizado para avaliar os conhecimentos preliminares. Com base na sistematização da experiência nacional, os autores observaram que a melhoria da formação e reciclagem do pessoal diplomático requer a transformação do quadro jurídico do Uzbequistão. Os resultados do estudo podem ser utilizados para formular recomendações destinadas a melhorar os programas de formação existentes para diplomatas e outros funcionários públicos no Uzbequistão e noutros países.

Palavras-chave

Serviço diplomático, Formação de diplomatas, Reciclagem profissional, Capacidade institucional, Uzbequistão.

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CAPACITY BUILDING IN DIPLOMAT TRAINING AND RETRAINING: CURRENT CHALLENGES AND MODERNISATION STRATEGIES

GULNOZA ISMAILOVA

Introduction

Diplomacy in the modern world is crucial for international security, the development of economic and mutually beneficial relations, and the promotion of intercultural dialogue to address global challenges. The effectiveness of diplomatic services depends on their capacity to respond to dynamic geopolitical changes, especially in the era of globalisation, the rapid development of information and communication technologies and other new types and forms of communication. The study of diplomatic training and retraining is also highly relevant due to growing geopolitical tensions and the need to develop adequate responses to modern challenges and threats.

In this study, diplomacy is considered as a peaceful instrument of foreign policy that enables states to protect national interests through negotiation, representation, communication and institutional coordination rather than coercive means.

The 21st century has fundamentally changed the global political arena, creating new professional demands for diplomacy as an established field of state practice (Karaman et al., 2026). The number and level of international conflicts, including direct clashes involving the use of armed forces, have increased. The emphasis on the distribution of power between global and regional actors in international relations has changed, as evidenced, for example, by the rapid economic rise of the government of the People's Republic of China (PRC) (World Economic Forum, 2024). The role of public diplomacy has also increased significantly. At the same time, the line between public diplomacy as a way to achieve mutually beneficial cooperation and a form of disinformation as part of information warfare has been partly blurred (Krusch, 2024). Therefore, there is an urgent need to update and modernise approaches to the training of future diplomatic personnel. This is related to the fact that traditional methods of education with the study of international law, culture, diplomatic protocol and etiquette are no longer sufficient on their own to provide the knowledge and competencies required of highly qualified diplomats in the realities of interstate relations (Kobroń-Gąsiorowska, 2026; Zelenin, 2026).

The rise of multiculturalism and internationalisation in the modern world is another significant aspect of the current study. Effective diplomatic engagement is primarily a

matter of the specifics of different cultures and the ability to establish an optimal intercultural dialogue (Porkodi et al., 2025). Accordingly, training approaches should be designed to develop intercultural communication. Otherwise, without proper training in the aspects of global cultural processes, there is a risk of weakening a state's national interests. Based on the above, the issue of training and retraining of diplomats is one of the key aspects that can have an impact on the international positioning of national governments and the ability to respond most effectively to certain global challenges and threats. Therefore, the research and development of strategies for modernising the training and retraining of international relations specialists is not only a step towards enhancing the role and image of the state in the international arena but also a strong argument in favour of effective and secure development in the long term.

One of the most relevant aspects of the training of diplomatic personnel is the study of a foreign language. Rasuleva (2023) studied this issue in his research. The author addressed the Japanese language, as bilateral relations between the governments of Uzbekistan and Japan have been actively developing in recent years. In this regard, the author emphasised the importance of the study of the peculiarities of the business style of the Japanese language, a special style of speech construction, a certain simplicity of Japanese grammar, the presence of several types of writing and the specificity of the historical development of syntax as important elements in its study. The study also noted that language learning is an important aspect of building mutually beneficial and friendly relations. In the context of the above-mentioned Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-5117 "On measures to Raise to a Qualitatively New Level the Activities to Popularize the Study of Foreign Languages in the Republic of Uzbekistan" (2021), training of civil servants in foreign languages has been established. Given the regional peculiarities, negotiations on certain issues with the "Afghan side" are relevant. Chebotarev (2024) noted that with the Taliban coming to power in Afghanistan, many external actors in international relations, including the government of Uzbekistan, began to look for diplomatic options for cooperation or for establishing contacts. Diplomacy is also an important component in enhancing a state's international image. This issue was also explored by Mavlanov (2023). The author noted that the successful economic diplomacy of the Uzbek government can help attract global brands to the state's markets, supported by the professional potential of Uzbek diplomats.

Faizullaev (2022) also noted the importance of developing skills related to intercultural adaptability. This is relevant because social interaction along with analytical work can help an individual to develop their personal qualities and moral and cognitive abilities. Qurbonov (2024), studying the stages of development of public service in Uzbekistan noted that in 1990 the government of Uzbekistan used the experience and achievements of foreign countries in the course of creation of the system of training of leading personnel of the state. Knight (2022) noted that the traditional role of higher education, research and innovation is increasingly understood as participation in scholarship programmes, academic mobility, and bilateral research projects, but from the point of view of capacity building, the development of educational centres, joint international universities or thematic research networks should also be considered as cooperation between different institutions. Burns (2019) also highlighted the importance of correct training in all the subtleties of the diplomatic service.

The experience of the US government in conflict prevention through diplomacy was noted by Izzatullayev (2023). In particular, US digital diplomacy is prominent in preventing terrorist attacks and extremist threats in the Central Asian region, through which the sources of danger in the region are combated through mass media, the Internet and other information channels. The art of diplomatic service also involves a wide range of skills.

Based on the above, the study aimed to examine the experience of US government agencies and higher educational institutions in training diplomatic personnel and to identify elements that may be adapted to the system of diplomatic training and retraining in Uzbekistan. The objectives of the study were to examine diplomatic retraining activities in Uzbekistan and to systematise domestic experience in the field of diplomatic retraining.

Methodology

Information from the official web page of the National Museum of American Diplomacy was used to define the concept of diplomacy. The peculiarities of diplomatic training in the USA were investigated in the document of the US Department of State Foreign Service Specialist Assessment Information Guide and the publication Reasonable Accommodation Policy on test-taking assistance for candidates with disabilities. The online practice test for the Foreign Service Officer position and a list of recommended reading for completing the test from the US Department of State were also reviewed. In addition, aspects of the American Foreign Service Association (AFSA), The American Academy of Diplomacy, the Council of American Ambassadors, the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at the Georgetown University, and the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training were examined. Special attention was paid to the CAA Annenberg Summer Fellowship Programme and the Public Diplomacy Fellowship. The Fulbright US Student Programme was also examined (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2022; U.S. Department of State, 2023; 2026b; 2026d; The American Foreign Service Association, 2026; The American Academy of Diplomacy, 2026; Council of American Ambassadors, 2026a; 2026b; 2026c; Georgetown University, 2026c; Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 2026; Institute of International Education, 2026).

The main analytical time frame of the study was 2017-2026, while earlier historical references were used only to contextualise the institutional development of diplomatic training. Additionally, the history of the founding of the Foreign Service Institute (FSI) in the United States was explored. Aspects of the structural units within FSI such as the School of Professional and Area Studies (SPAS), the School of Applied Information Technology and the Leadership and Management School were explored. The features of the Transition Center and language programmes within FSI were also investigated in detail. The Elliott School of International Affairs, educational programmes, study abroad opportunities, scholarship programmes, employment opportunities and the faculty of the Elliott School of International Affairs were investigated in the study of the experience of higher education institutions in the US in training diplomatic personnel (U.S. Department of State, 2017; 2021; 2025; 2026a; 2026c; 2026e; Elliott School of International Affairs, 2026a; 2026b; 2026c; External Scholarships, 2026).

The Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-330 "On Measures for systemic reform of the activities of the University of World Economy and Diplomacy" was addressed in an analysis of training and retraining of diplomatic staff in Uzbekistan. One of the diplomatic training courses was also studied. In addition to the above, the training programmes for civil servants within the Diplomatic Academy of Uzbekistan were examined (Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-330, 2021; Diplomatic Academy at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, 2026a; 2026b).

The analysis was conducted through a comparative review of institutional documents, training programmes, assessment guidelines and publicly available information on diplomatic education in the United States and Uzbekistan. The selected materials were examined according to the following criteria: institutional role, target audience, training content, assessment procedures, professional development mechanisms and relevance for the modernisation of diplomatic staff training. For structural clarity, the findings were grouped into four analytical blocks: historical mapping, the state of the art in diplomatic training, the framework of diplomacy as a peaceful foreign policy instrument, and lines of continuity and change in diplomatic practice as an established profession facing new challenges. This procedure made it possible to identify transferable practices and formulate recommendations for improving the training and retraining of diplomatic personnel in Uzbekistan.

Results

Historical mapping of diplomatic training and retraining

The historical mapping of diplomatic training shows that diplomacy has remained a long-established profession, but its institutional forms have changed in response to new geopolitical, technological and educational demands. In the United States, this continuity is reflected in the long-term development of professional diplomatic education, including FSI, AFSA and other institutions, where institutional experience demonstrates how traditional diplomatic functions have been adapted to contemporary professional requirements.

One of the most prestigious institutions in the United States that prepares students for a career in the Foreign Service is the George Washington University – Elliott School of International Affairs. The major advantage of this institution, besides many highly qualified and experienced faculty members, is its location, as Washington is home to many American, international and non-governmental organisations, which allows students to interact with international leaders who visit the university. Another advantage is the large number of degree programmes in international relations. These can be Asian Studies, Middle Eastern Studies, Latin American Studies, and general International Relations degrees (Elliott School of International Affairs, 2026a; 2026c).

The Elliott School of International Affairs also operates an online study abroad application system. Exchange programmes promote a better academic experience by enrolling students in 1 of 40 partner institutions of higher education around the world. This is particularly important for future diplomats in the context of learning the subtle cultural characteristics of other nations. With the right commitment, students can also receive

scholarships to study abroad. For instance, the Boren Scholarships provide USD 20,000 to US students to study in regions of the world that are critical to US interests, namely Africa, Asia, Eurasia, Latin America and the Middle East. Scholarship applicants themselves must motivate how their future academic or career goals abroad will contribute to US national security. Applicants and graduates can also consult the School's website for a guide to international affairs jobs. These can range from jobs within Washington DC, namely jobs with the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Human Rights Watch (HRW), the World Bank Group, the US Department of Defence, the US Department of State, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the Congressional Research Service. In terms of international employers, applicants and students may have the opportunity to work for the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), United Nations (UN), Amnesty International, Habitat for Humanity and other international and non-governmental organisations (Elliott School of International Affairs, 2026a; 2026b; External Scholarships, 2026).

The School's faculty, comprising more than 350 highly qualified professors, lecturers, PhDs and even former diplomats, is also noteworthy. For instance, Professor Y.C. Bennett (2024), is a professorial lecturer at GWU Elliott School of International Affairs, and Deputy Chair of Global Issues at the FSI, who made a major contribution to the deeper understanding of this study by introducing the subject of Law and Diplomacy. Y.C. Bennett is a distinguished expert in international relations and East Asian studies. The professor's professional experience includes managing programmes at Princeton University's Paul and Marcia Wythes Center on Contemporary China. This expertise has contributed to cross-cultural understanding and to the analysis of U.S.-China relations in global governance and security. Professor Diego Abente Brun was formerly an assistant professor of political science in Ohio, and when Paraguay began its transition to democracy, Diego Abente Brun became a senator for two terms, and afterwards Minister of Justice and Ambassador. After returning to the US, Professor Diego Abente Brun was deputy to the International Forum for Democratic Studies at the National Endowment for Democracy and has also held several other high-ranking positions. Gordon Gray, Professor of Gulf and Arabian Peninsula Affairs, was Deputy Commandant of the National War College, US Ambassador to Tunisia from 2009 to 2012, and served in Iraq as Senior Counsellor to the Ambassador. Adjunct Professor Alexander B. Hammer and Professor Shoko Hamano teach analyses of market conditions and economic developments in China and other emerging economies, as well as Japanese language courses, respectively. Benjamin D. Hopkins, senior associate dean of academic affairs, oversees the Elliott School's Academic Programms, Graduate Admissions, International Exchanges, and Student Services. Benjamin D. Hopkins is a historian of modern South Asia, specializing in the history of Afghanistan and British imperialism on the Indian subcontinent. An accomplished author and scholar, Hopkins's work, including Ruling the Savage Periphery, explores the legacies of frontier governance and the evolution of state systems with global historical impact. As a result, the faculty of the Elliott School of International Affairs includes numerous education professionals and former government officials with extensive experience both in the US and abroad (Elliott School of International Affairs, 2026a).

State of the art in diplomatic training and retraining

In August 2023, the U.S. Department of State published the Foreign Service Specialist Assessment Information Guide, one of the most important documents in the field of diplomatic competency assessment methods (U.S. Department of State, 2023). The purpose of the guide is to help candidates learn the selection process for the Foreign Service. The study can also help to identify aspects that need to be implemented at the national level to improve the performance of diplomatic personnel. There are a total of 8 possible career paths for Foreign Service professionals in the United States:

- administration;
- construction design;
- facility management;
- information technology;
- international information and English language programmes;
- medicine and healthcare;
- office management;
- law enforcement and security.

Based on this, different elements of the Foreign Service Professional Evaluation are used for each professional category. The assessment process is conducted in an online format that involves assessors from Washington, DC as well as subject matter experts from around the world. Before taking the test, a standard selection of rules is provided to assist in successful completion, namely: rest before the test, as tired candidates can be less attentive and focused; check internet connection speed, camera, sound and lighting; ensure quietness in the room; and prepare paper, a pen and photo ID in advance. Punctuality is also necessary, as this is an interview for an important position where employees wear business attire, and therefore proper appearance and manners are required (Kobroń-Gąsiorowska, 2021). In addition to the above, the Department of State has developed separate provisions to facilitate testing for candidates with disabilities, which is also an important part of the government's approach to ensuring a level playing field in selection for the civil service (U.S. Department of State, 2026d).

Beyond the procedural description, the guide identifies characteristics that reflect the skills, abilities and personal qualities of candidates applying for Foreign Service positions (U.S. Department of State, 2023). These include critical thinking, which consists of assessing what is appropriate, practical, and realistic in a given situation, weighing merits and demerits, making recommendations, formulating alternatives, and having an innovative and flexible mindset. Cultural adaptation – engaging and communicating with representatives of other cultures, value systems, and beliefs. Experience and motivation – having knowledge, experience and skills from previous jobs (and other activities) related to the Foreign Service, and motivation in joining the Foreign Service. Negotiation – recognising the advantages and disadvantages of agreements, contracts and other types of documents, a candidate's position or convincing others of the validity of this

position, using facts rather than emotions. Presentation skills – presenting information succinctly, adapting to changing situations, accurately conveying the meaning of messages, and using a communication style that is appropriate to the audience/culture of the negotiating partners (Bondarenko et al., 2022; Orlovskyi et al., 2023). Other important qualities are written communication, teamwork, planning and organisation, objectivity and honesty. The score obtained in the test is not presented as the result of direct competition between candidates, as candidates are notified. Candidates are evaluated on professional skills and abilities rather than competing with other applicants. Thus, the guide is relevant not only as a description of the selection procedure but also as a competency-based model for assessing diplomatic readiness.

For the modernisation of diplomatic qualification and retraining, the Foreign Service Officer Test (FSOT) (U.S. Department of State, 2026b) from the US Department of State can be used as a practical benchmarking tool. The practice test mimics the real exam in terms of questions, scoring, test duration, and administration, and the scores can indicate an approximate result that may be achieved in the official FSOT. The practice test includes sections on job knowledge, the ability to express yourself in English, and situational judgment. The only difference from the real FSOT test is the lack of an essay, as essay assessment is not financially feasible. Given that the test aims to select candidates specifically for the United States, its questions are entirely focused on US foreign and domestic policy and legislation. Accordingly, at the national level, the Republic of Uzbekistan may develop domestic tests based on internal policies and other national peculiarities.

In addition to the above, a reading list attributed to the US Department of State is available through the Path to Foreign Service platform and may be useful for candidates preparing for careers in the Foreign Service (Department of State Suggested FSOT Reading List, 2026). The reading materials on the site are useful for improving English language use, covering the history of the Foreign Service, foreign policy, US society and culture, world history and geography, economics, mathematics and statistics, management and leadership, and communication. One of the most valuable resources is the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training (ADST) (Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training, 2026), which has collected more than 2,500 transcripts of interviews with former diplomats from the post-World War II era. The creation of such a resource at the national level or within the framework of regional cooperation in Central Asia could be a significant aspect of building diplomatic expertise in the region. Another resource is the book by S. Dorman (2011) dedicated to US diplomatic missions around the world, describing the intricacies of the diplomatic profession, real-life duty days, and the extraordinary challenges encountered, whether it be a natural disaster or a coup d'état.

FSI is another actor in the field of training and retraining of Foreign Service employees. It was established in 1947 as a professional development institute for employees of the US Department of State. FSI prioritises language learning, as it is mandatory for diplomats to take a language course in the country before appointment to the next mission abroad. SPAS emphasises regional studies to enable US diplomats to better promote US national interests abroad. It also trains professionals in consular, economic, commercial, management and several other programmes. Another area of retraining is

applied information technology training provided by the School of Applied Information Technology. The basis of this training is to ensure that all foreign affairs officers have the up-to-date knowledge and skills necessary to maintain complex computer programmes that are used both within the US and abroad. The Leadership and Management School provides leadership and critical incident management training. This is advanced and highly interactive training leading to future higher positions in the US Department of State. LMS also has customised crisis management training programmes for over 250 US diplomatic posts overseas. FSI also operates the School of Language Studies (SLS), which provides language training to US government employees. There are a total of five language training units to cover as many regions of the world as possible. These include East Asian, Pacific, European and African, Middle Eastern, Romance, Slavic, Eurasian, Central and South Asian languages. In total, more than 60 languages are offered (U.S. Department of State, 2021; 2025; 2026a; 2026c; 2026e).

Several other units within FSI provide services consisting of courses and programmes, seminars and briefings to meet the personal needs of US government employees and their families. There are also services related to counselling for diplomatic staff and their families to ensure high performance even under stress and threats. The provision of materials for researching the destination country, logistical information for a successful relocation and materials for the best cultural adaptation in the new environment are widespread. The Career Transition Centre, which organises retirement planning and job search activities, is also noteworthy (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

Based on the aforementioned, the training of diplomatic personnel is a complex process that requires strong institutional expertise, qualified teaching staff and sustained motivation among future diplomats. The challenges in diplomatic training were most succinctly described by retired Ambassador B.K. Bodine is now a Distinguished Professor in the Practice of Diplomacy and Director of the Institute for the Study of Diplomacy at Georgetown University (America's Diplomats speaker…, 2019). The professor noted that the challenge is the sheer diversity of issues in the modern world. Climate change, populism and nativism, undemocratic governments, the role of gender, understanding the nature of corruption and kleptocracy are all relevant. Considering the range of problems that existed in the past, it seems that the problems and threats of today are many times more difficult to comprehend and no student will be well-versed in absolutely everything. The key is to develop the intellectual skills to make the connection between undemocratic populism and corruption, climate change and food shortages (Kravchenko et al., 2025).

In summary, it is also necessary to recognise which behaviours are acceptable and which are not. If a diplomat does something inappropriate, the risks that may follow must be assessed. When advising on policy changes, it is necessary to analyse how to do it most effectively and how to present it. In this context, the cultural policies of the host country and their meaning to own nation are also substantial. The core skill of a successful diplomat should be listening, while the main professional task is to understand the interlocutor’s position and persuasively defend national interests. That is, it is not so much the fact of listening to the interlocutor that is the most important aspect, but the fact of understanding the psychology of the person or the negotiating team opposite (Andrisano-Ruggieri et al., 2016; Efremov, 2026). Based on this it is also necessary to

concisely state the thoughts, as if every sentence can be the last, and therefore should carry the greatest informational value.

Another actor in diplomatic training in the US is the AFSA (American Foreign Service Association, 2026), whose founding date is 1924. Its membership, as a platform and trade union for American diplomats, offers many benefits to its members. For instance, one can get individual labour counselling, advice for people of retirement age, subscriptions or discounts on various academic journals and periodicals, and legal services. The comprehensive set of benefits, as well as the overall focus of AFSA's work to improve the US Foreign Service, reflects the US government's approach to providing the greatest benefits to those individuals who seek to strengthen the US position in the international arena.

The American Academy of Diplomacy, founded in 1983 to promote high standards of US diplomacy, is also dedicated to strengthening US diplomacy. The organisation hosts annual conferences with experts on various issues. In 2019, the Michigan Ambassadors Forum was established with the first topic being a discussion on the security situation in the Persian Gulf, and the last in 2023 on challenges in the Caribbean. The Nebraska Ambassadors Forum programme focused on the Arab Spring as early as 2013, and by 2024 there were discussions on US diplomacy in Southeast Asia. Likewise, the Texas Tech Ambassadors Forum moved from discussions of US interests in the Middle East and the US role in international affairs to coronavirus issues in 2021 and the overall future of global diplomacy in 2022. In addition to the above, a speaker ambassador programme was created in 2018 to educate students on the importance of the Foreign Service. As a result, the organisation aims to highlight the most important aspects of American diplomacy around the world and share the experience of practising diplomats with students who may become the new diplomatic generation of the United States in the future (The American Academy of Diplomacy, 2023; 2024; 2025a; 2025b).

The Council of American Ambassadors is also central to the development of American diplomacy. It is a non-profit and non-partisan organisation of non-career ambassadors from the United States, with more than 200 members. The foundation of the organisation is the support of US government agencies, sponsoring scholarships to train future diplomats, and hosting conferences on current issues in international relations. The organisation's website offers podcasts of leading foreign policy experts and scholars from New York and Washington, DC. For instance, as of autumn 2024, the most recently published discussion was on Iran, and the speakers were J. Logan – Director of Defence and Foreign Policy Studies at the Cato Institute, F. Nadimi – Senior Fellow at the Washington Institute and B.B. Talebu, a member of the staff of the Foundation for the Defence of Democracies. In terms of fellowship programmes, the CAA Annenberg Summer Fellowship Programme allows undergraduate students to come to Washington and participate in a mentoring program with former US Ambassadors and internships at the State Department. The Public Diplomacy Fellowship is rarer, as it is awarded to just two diplomats who have demonstrated the proper skills to commit to the ideals of public diplomacy. Selected diplomats receive training at the Centre for Public Diplomacy at the University of Southern California, attend sessions of the Council of American Ambassadors, and publish an article in The American Ambassadors Review (Council of American Ambassadors, 2026a; 2026b; 2026c).

In addition, Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy operates in the US. The institute combines theoretical and practical fields of study to provide quality teaching at the undergraduate and graduate levels. In addition, the institution organises policy dialogues between experts in international relations on various global issues. Within the University there are members of the State Department and the US Armed Forces who are actively involved in research activities and teach undergraduate and graduate students. It also has a podcast named "Diplomatic Immunity", which features conversations with experts on the issues that diplomats and other US government officials face in the course of their duties as they make decisions to preserve US national interests and security around the world (Georgetown University, 2026a; 2026b; 2026c).

Among the popular organisations in the US that are dedicated to the comprehensive development of students is the Fulbright US Program. The Fulbright US Student Programme (Institute of International Education, 2026) promotes intercultural dialogue through academic and professional development. When receiving a grant, participants can collaborate, communicate and learn from people from the host country, which qualitatively promotes cultural exchange, and appreciation of other peoples' way of thinking.

Furthermore, in the context of the study of global experience in diplomatic training, the European Union's (EU) experience in establishing a European Diplomatic Academy in 2022 (EEAS Press Team, 2023) could be an example. Approximately 80% of the lecturers at the Academy are practitioners (including officials from the European External Action Service) and the remaining 20% are academics. Even though the young diplomats have already received relevant training and internships in European national agencies, the Academy aims to narrow the existing gap in knowledge about the EU, to understand the complex decision-making mechanisms and policies in the EU and develop other skills needed to best represent and defend the EU's interests in the world.

Diplomacy as a peaceful instrument of foreign policy and diplomatic capacity-building

Theoretically, diplomacy functions as a peaceful instrument of foreign policy because it enables states to manage disagreements through negotiation, mediation, dialogue and institutional communication rather than through coercion or military escalation. In this sense, diplomatic training is not only a professional preparation process but also a mechanism for strengthening the state's capacity to prevent conflicts, maintain international cooperation and protect national interests through peaceful means.

Identifying the role of diplomats at different ranks, the National Museum of American Diplomacy website states that regardless of the type of activity, diplomats have the same mission – to represent the interests and policies of the sending state (National Museum of American Diplomacy, 2022). Depending on the diplomatic rank, diplomats must coordinate ministries, manage, negotiate, and inform on political events. In addition, diplomats may be responsible for organising cultural, sporting and educational events, and consular officers may be responsible for assisting citizens abroad.

Based on domestic experience in the field of training and retraining of diplomatic personnel in Uzbekistan, diplomacy is crucial in establishing long-term and mutually beneficial relations with foreign partners. It is worth noting that the level of training of diplomats in the country requires further modernisation to respond more effectively to the current challenges of international politics. This is particularly true of the need to improve training programmes covering both basic diplomatic skills and specialised courses aimed at deepening knowledge of global political processes. In the context of Uzbekistan's integration into the global community, it is necessary to revise training methods based on relevant international experience, including American and European practices, where diplomatic training programmes actively support continuous and ongoing professional development. Emphasis should be devoted to the teaching of foreign languages, as this is one of the most important aspects of the diplomatic service. Lack of language skills significantly limits the ability to effectively negotiate and build international relations. Additionally, it is necessary to improve the regulatory framework governing the diplomatic services. Currently, there is a lack of legislative initiatives supporting modern requirements for diplomatic skills and competencies. The introduction of new standards and regulations would be a significant step in improving the quality of training and retraining of diplomatic personnel in Uzbekistan.

Lines of continuity and change in diplomatic training and retraining

In contrast to the historically established US model, Uzbekistan's diplomatic retraining framework is presented here as a more recent reform trajectory aimed at institutionalising professional preparation, retraining and transferable international practices.

Regarding the level of diplomatic training of professional staff in Uzbekistan, the Resolution of the President of the Republic of Uzbekistan No. PP-330 (2022) was published only recently. It aims to improve the system of selection, training, retraining and further training to create a pool of diplomatic personnel. However, the introduction of successful international practices, in particular in America, should be emphasised. As an example, it is necessary to organise regular conferences in the form of podcasts with leading experts in the field of international relations, as is done within the framework of the American Academy of Diplomacy. This would allow for a more practical approach to diplomatic training, as well as provide students with access to best practices in international negotiations. The introduction of similar practices along the lines of AFSA will demonstrate the Uzbek government's commitment to maximising support for diplomatic personnel in terms of legal services, advice and other benefits, given that diplomats are the foundation for the development of comprehensive and long-term bilateral and multilateral partnerships. The establishment of the Diplomatic Academy envisaged several training directions. These included training top-level diplomats, selecting candidates and forming a reserve of managerial personnel. The Academy also planned master's-level training for employees with at least three years of work experience, retraining for senior regional and local officials, and short-term courses for staff going abroad. It was also planned to introduce joint educational programmes with leading foreign educational institutions, modern pedagogical information and communication technologies and other tools for improving the quality of diplomatic

education. Training and retraining programmes for diplomatic staff have a similar structure to similar programmes in the USA (Table 1).

Table 1. Programmes of the Diplomatic Academy of Uzbekistan

Scope	Objects of study	Duration
Foreign policy and foreign economic activity of the Republic of Uzbekistan	Civil servants	1 academic year
Fundamentals of foreign policy and foreign economic activity of Uzbekistan	Employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs	2 weeks
Fundamentals of foreign policy and foreign economic activity of Uzbekistan	Senior diplomats	2 weeks
Features of humanitarian cooperation between Uzbekistan and foreign countries at the stage of	Heads of international departments of higher education institutions	2 weeks
Business protocol and etiquette	Employees of the Presidential Administration of the Republic of Uzbekistan	18 hours
Preparation for diplomatic missions of Uzbekistan	The administrative and technical staff of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs going on a long-term business trip abroad	1 week
Main tasks of Uzbekistan's renewed foreign policy and foreign economic activity	Employees of the public administration and local authorities	2 weeks
Diplomatic protocol and etiquette. Negotiation process: organisational performance and efficiency	Representatives of business structures	2 weeks
Fundamentals of Uzbekistan's foreign policy Diplomatic protocol, etiquette and the negotiation process	Employees of the Ministry of Defence	2 weeks
Fundamentals of foreign policy and foreign economic activity of Uzbekistan	Rectors of higher education institutions of the Republic	2 weeks
Diplomatic protocol and etiquette. The negotiation process: organisational performance and efficiency	Bank employees	2 weeks

Source: compiled by the author based on Diplomatic Academy at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy (2026b).

For instance, the Course "Preparation for Work in diplomatic missions of the Republic of Uzbekistan" (Diplomatic Academy at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, 2026a) for administrative and technical employees of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs going on a long-term business trip abroad introduces diplomatic staff and their family members to the specifics, basics of diplomatic protocol and etiquette of the host country, rules of residence in the country of destination and methods of dialogue with the local population. Similar training programmes also exist in the United States, as discussed earlier (U.S. Department of State, 2017).

Given the aforementioned, membership of organisations such as the Association of International Educators (NAFSA: Association of International Educators, 2026) and the Association of Professional Schools of International Affairs (APSIA) (2026) is essential to

raising the profile and visibility of the University of World Economics and Diplomacy on the world stage. Membership in NAFSA could provide access to a base of thousands of international educators around the world who are committed to improving education and academic exchange, as well as building the knowledge and skills required to succeed in today's modern, globalised world. Membership allows access to those resources needed to improve educational programs and develop specific skills to achieve the goals set in learning. Similarly, participation in APSIA can enable the University of World Economy and Diplomacy to become closer to global discussions, trainings and projects that shape contemporary understanding of international politics and diplomacy and thus raise its profile.

Discussion

The discussion below synthesises these four analytical lines and shows how diplomatic training preserves long-standing diplomatic functions while adapting to geopolitical, technological and institutional change. The study demonstrated that the art of diplomacy consists of representing the interests of one's state on the world stage through negotiation, communication, institutional coordination and the protection of citizens abroad. The importance of diplomacy was also highlighted by Hart and Siniver (2020), who analysed the growing problems of negotiation as the basis of diplomacy. It can also include the organisation of sporting, cultural and other types of events, and helping citizens abroad. Abdurahmanli (2021) mentioned other aspects of diplomacy, namely solving international problems without racial, religious or linguistic discrimination, while Qin (2020) added that diplomacy is primarily a relational practice. In addition, diplomatic management emphasises the importance of cultural sensitivity and building an effective communication model (Chukwu et al., 2023).

Within the US Department of State, there are individual regulations and guidelines for Foreign Service specialist evaluations, which aim to acquaint candidates with the job test before attempting to enter the service. The US government's experience in appointing candidates to the civil service is a landmark example of how government selection should work. However, the selection process must be transparent, otherwise it creates opportunities for favouritism and nepotism (Azzahara et al., 2024). On the contrary, Thakur (2021) highlighted the inappropriateness of India's civil service appointment policy, as bureaucrats of relatively low-quality end up in the most problematic regions. The US Department of State also provides an online FSOT test, which is identical to the one taken during interviews, except for the absence of an essay. Kopp and Naland (2021) noted that this testing has changed. In particular, the written test followed by the oral portion was modified because minority candidates failed the exams at a higher rate than whites in the United States. An important aspect of candidate selection is also that, despite political considerations, the most competent individuals should be involved in the selection process (Colonnelli et al., 2020; Konateh et al., 2023).

Another subject of diplomatic retraining in the United States is FSI. Its tasks include high-quality language training before a diplomat goes abroad, regional studies to promote national interests and information technology training. However, despite the abundance of subjects for retraining, Zeya and Finer (2020) noted that, given the budget of this

institution, which is mainly focused on language training, it is necessary to carefully allocate training resources. For instance, FSI trains seven times as many people in Spanish as there are positions requiring Spanish. The US State Department has more Portuguese speakers than Arabic and Chinese combined. FSI was established in 1947, although Rosenbaum (2023) noted that the history of diplomatic retraining in the United States dates to 1925 with the founding of FSI's predecessor, the Foreign Service School. The Elliott School of International Affairs also plays a significant role in training future diplomats. This advantage of the educational institution was also noted. The School's educational programmes consist not only of the theoretical foundations of the Foreign Service, but also focus on highly specialised studies in Asia, the Middle East, and Latin America – regions in which it is necessary to further protect US national interests. This institutional model demonstrates the importance of combining general diplomatic education with region-specific training. There is also an online application system for studying abroad within the school. The benefit of reducing bureaucracy when attempting to study abroad was noted by Wang et al. (2023), as in the 21st, the number of students studying abroad has largely increased. Raising awareness of the importance of diplomacy and strengthening diplomatic relations in Uzbekistan can be built through educational exchanges, the experience of which was studied by Khan et al. (2020).

In Uzbekistan, one of the main institutions of higher education that specialises in international relations is the University of World Economy and Diplomacy. The leadership of the institution already has experience in establishing international relations, as back in 2013, the first "Chinese Pavilion" in the region was established based on the University, as noted by Chunyan (2024).

A specialised institution in Uzbekistan that aims to retrain existing civil service personnel is the Diplomatic Academy at the University of World Economy and Diplomacy, established in 2022. Training programmes include short or long-term courses, ranging from a few weeks to a year, and teach Uzbekistan's foreign policy and foreign economic activities, explain diplomatic protocol and etiquette, and the intricacies of the negotiation process. Additionally, Hasmin et al. (2020) noted the importance of developing leadership skills in civil servants. As a result, the training process at the Diplomatic Academy of Uzbekistan is similar to the way diplomatic personnel are trained at diplomatic institutions in the United States. Świderska-Włodarczyk (2022) highlighted the peculiarities of training diplomats in Poland, which corresponds to the experience of training diplomatic personnel in the United States. Decisions within the EU in improving approaches to the retraining of diplomatic staff are also noticeable in the 2020s, which is related to the foundation of the European Diplomatic Academy in 2022. Wessel and Szép (2023) added that the establishment of the European Diplomatic Academy did not happen in a vacuum, as in the last couple of years before its establishment, steps had been taken to address trust issues and understand the main threats to EU security. In the context of diplomatic system development in Uzbekistan, the full range of internal and external challenges and threats similarly need to be considered (Blank, 2020). However, unsuccessful attempts over the past two decades to develop quality legislation on the diplomatic service do not allow for the full integration of international best practices and the development of diplomatic service regulations that meet modern requirements and standards. Improved training and retraining of diplomats should also rely on combating bias and incomplete data in training, exploring cause and effect, inductive and deductive reasoning, pitting

genuine science against pseudoscience, and using reliable sources (Mauduit et al., 2020). Ideally, diplomatic graduates should be well-educated, and analytical, adhere to diplomatic protocol, be adept at writing, and have good negotiation and relationship-building skills (Pike and Kinsey, 2021).

As a result, the diversity of research on diplomatic training contributed to the findings of the study. Evidence of imbalanced budget allocation in language training at FSI (Zeya and Finer, 2020), an important aspect of the effective performance of diplomats in the international arena, was particularly beneficial to the study. Considering this, such challenges should be prioritised in countries that seek to improve the quality of their diplomatic activities. The comparison between Uzbekistan and the United States also showed that diplomatic retraining should combine institutional regulation, applied training, language preparation, professional mentoring and exposure to real diplomatic practice. It is also important that the emphasised EU experience in training diplomats can be considered as an additional reference point for strengthening the diplomatic corps in the Central Asian region.

Conclusions

The study determined that the US government has a long history of training and retraining diplomatic personnel. Thus, diplomacy is presented not as a newly emerging profession, but as an established field of state practice that now requires additional digital, intercultural, analytical and crisis-management competencies. This is attributed to the development of professional education for civil servants since at least the 1920s, and to this day, such institutions as FSI, structures within the Department of State, and the Elliott School of International Affairs continue to operate. These institutions provide comprehensive and professional education, which contributes to strengthening the role and status of the state's diplomatic corps and significantly increases its competence. To summarise, the formation and modernisation of the diplomatic training system in the US is an example of successful practice for other governments. The results of the study also demonstrated that the process of training and retraining of diplomats in the United States also involves such organisations and educational institutions as AFSA, American Academy of Diplomacy, Council of American Ambassadors and others, each of which provides a unique approach to training through training, scholarship programmes, and assistance in organising the work process. Participants in training programmes and initiatives gain not only knowledge but also practical skills to help participants navigate today's complex geopolitical environment. The exchange of experience, in turn, creates a solid foundation for the successful work of future diplomats. In addition, US institutions provide insight into how different governments can resolve conflicts and interact with each other.

The study also determined that in recent years Uzbekistan has continued the process of creating a quality system of training of professional staff for the civil service, according to Decree No. 330. Based on the experience, the study noted that the improvement of this area implies greater responsibility in line with the current challenges and threats of international politics. It is necessary to expand training programmes and include specialised diplomatic skills courses alongside traditional methods of training.

To improve the system of training and retraining of diplomats in Uzbekistan, it is necessary to introduce selected effective practices of the educational process, which are used in US institutions such as FSI, AFSA, the American Academy of Diplomacy, the Council of American Ambassadors, Georgetown University's Institute for the Study of Diplomacy and others. This requires the introduction of a full range of counselling, legal assistance and other benefits for diplomatic workers, considering the national peculiarities of Uzbekistan. It is also necessary to systematise experience in organising conferences with prominent diplomats from the Central Asian region, as well as inviting American colleagues. This will help in actualising knowledge on promoting Uzbek diplomacy on the world stage. The existing imbalance in the lack of legislative initiatives harms the effectiveness of the work of Uzbekistan's diplomatic missions, so based on the experience of institutions and the US government, the laws concerning the sphere of diplomatic service in Uzbekistan should be further developed and aligned with contemporary professional standards.

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THE GEOPOLITICS OF DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY: POWER, SECURITY AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL PLATFORMS

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Abstract

Over the past decade, digital sovereignty has emerged as a central yet contested concept in international relations, encapsulating struggles over control of data, infrastructures and online speech. While states seek to reassert authority in cyberspace, global platforms exercise quasi-sovereign power and fundamental rights face mounting pressures from securitisation and hybrid threats. This article bridges scholarship on digital sovereignty with normative debates on freedom of expression, arguing that sovereignty in cyberspace is not merely a legal or technical issue but a fundamentally geopolitical and ethical one. Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative, theory-guided comparative case design, applying a tripartite analytical framework that distinguishes state, corporate and normative dimensions of digital sovereignty. Four configurations are examined: the European Union's regulatory model, Russia's securitised approach, China's doctrine of cyber sovereignty, and the contested landscape of the Mediterranean region. For each case, the analysis traces how legal instruments, platform governance and rights frameworks interact to shape the exercise of authority in cyberspace, with particular attention to the protection or restriction of freedom of expression. The comparative findings show that digital sovereignty is plural and contested, ranging from protective models that seek to reconcile security and rights to repressive configurations that subordinate freedoms to regime stability. The article's main contribution is twofold: theoretically, it refines the concept of digital sovereignty by integrating state, corporate and normative dimensions into a single framework; empirically, it demonstrates how this framework illuminates the spectrum of practices through which security imperatives, platform power and freedom of expression are negotiated in the digital age.

Keywords

Digital sovereignty, freedom of expression, geopolitics, international security, social media, information warfare.

Resumo

Ao longo da última década, a soberania digital emergiu como um conceito central, ainda que contestado, nas relações internacionais, encapsulando lutas em torno do controlo de dados, infraestruturas e expressão em linha. Enquanto os Estados procuram reafirmar a sua autoridade no ciberespaço, as plataformas globais exercem um poder quase soberano e os direitos fundamentais enfrentam pressões crescentes resultantes da securitização e das ameaças híbridas. Este artigo aproxima a produção académica sobre soberania digital dos debates normativos sobre liberdade de expressão, sustentando que a soberania no ciberespaço não é apenas uma questão jurídica ou técnica, mas sobretudo uma questão geopolítica e ética. Em termos metodológicos, o estudo adota um desenho qualitativo de estudo de caso comparativo guiado pela teoria, aplicando um quadro analítico tripartido que

distingue as dimensões estatal, corporativa e normativa da soberania digital. São analisadas quatro configurações: o modelo regulamentar da União Europeia, a abordagem securitizada da Rússia, a doutrina chinesa de soberania cibernética e a paisagem contestada da região mediterrânica. Em cada caso, a análise acompanha a forma como instrumentos jurídicos, governação das plataformas e enquadramentos de direitos interagem para moldar o exercício da autoridade no ciberespaço, com particular atenção à proteção ou restrição da liberdade de expressão. Os resultados comparativos mostram que a soberania digital é plural e contestada, variando entre modelos protetores que procuram conciliar segurança e direitos e configurações repressivas que subordinam as liberdades à estabilidade do regime. A principal contribuição do artigo é dupla: do ponto de vista teórico, refina o conceito de soberania digital ao integrar as dimensões estatal, corporativa e normativa num único quadro; do ponto de vista empírico, demonstra como esse quadro ilumina o espetro de práticas através das quais imperativos de segurança, poder das plataformas e liberdade de expressão são negociados na era digital.

Palavras-chave

Soberania digital, liberdade de expressão, geopolítica, segurança internacional, redes sociais, guerra de informação.

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THE GEOPOLITICS OF DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY: POWER, SECURITY AND FREEDOM OF EXPRESSION IN THE AGE OF GLOBAL PLATFORMS

MARCO MARSILI

Introduction

Over the past two decades, cyberspace has evolved from being a technological infrastructure supporting communication and commerce into a fully-fledged strategic domain of international relations. As digital platforms, critical infrastructures and information systems have become integral to politics, economics and security, the question of digital sovereignty has emerged as one of the central debates of our time (Pohle & Thiel, 2020; Carr, 2021). Digital sovereignty broadly refers to the capacity of states and societies to exercise authority over their digital environment, encompassing issues of data governance, cybersecurity, technological autonomy and freedom of expression. This concept, however, remains deeply contested: while states seek to reinforce their control over cyberspace, private corporations and transnational platforms have acquired quasi-sovereign authority in regulating online speech, moderating content and shaping global narratives (Klonick, 2018; DeNardis, 2020).

The European Union has positioned itself at the forefront of this debate through landmark regulatory instruments such as the *General Data Protection Regulation* (GDPR) and, more recently, the *Digital Services Act* (DSA) and the *Digital Markets Act* (DMA). These initiatives illustrate what Bradford (2020) has termed the "Brussels Effect": the extraterritorial impact of EU regulation, which effectively extends European norms to global digital governance. The assertion of regulatory sovereignty in cyberspace, however, raises critical questions about the balance between state control, corporate power and individual freedoms. In particular, freedom of expression—enshrined in Article 19 of the *Universal Declaration of Human Rights* (UDHR, 1948)—faces new challenges as governments tighten surveillance and censorship regimes in the name of security, while private platforms increasingly arbitrate the boundaries of permissible speech (Marsili, 2020, 2025a).

From a geopolitical perspective, cyberspace has become a new arena of strategic competition, not only between major powers such as the United States, China and the European Union, but also within regional contexts such as the Mediterranean and post-Soviet space. States have weaponised information flows, conducted disinformation

campaigns and engaged in hybrid warfare that blurs the line between peace and conflict (Bachmann & Gunneriusson, 2019; Marsili, 2019). The rise of digital authoritarianism, exemplified by China's *Great Firewall* and Russia's *Sovereign Internet Law*,[1] further demonstrates the extent to which digital sovereignty is being mobilised as a tool of power politics, often at the expense of civil liberties (Deibert, 2020).

This article aims to contribute to the debate by bridging two strands of scholarship: the study of digital sovereignty as an evolving concept in international relations, and the normative analysis of freedom of expression in cyberspace. Building on a growing body of scholarship concerning power dynamics, hybrid threats, and freedom of expression in the age of social media (e.g., Marsili, 2019, 2020, 2025a; Bachmann & Gunneriusson, 2019; DeNardis, 2020), this paper argues that digital sovereignty is not merely a legal or technological issue, but a fundamentally geopolitical one. It involves the redistribution of power between states, corporations and individuals, and has profound implications for the structure of international order.

The article is structured as follows: Section 2 reviews the existing literature on digital sovereignty and freedom of expression in cyberspace. Section 3 illustrates the methodology and research design. Section 4 develops the theoretical and conceptual framework for understanding digital sovereignty as a geopolitical phenomenon. Section 5 examines empirical cases, including the EU's regulatory strategy, authoritarian approaches in China and Russia, and hybrid warfare in the Mediterranean. Section 6 discusses the implications for freedom of expression and democratic governance. Section 7 concludes with reflections on the prospects of reconciling state sovereignty with global digital rights.

Literature Review

The notion of "digital sovereignty" has gained increasing attention in international relations and political theory over the past decade. Initially associated with state capacity to regulate cyberspace, it has gradually evolved into a multifaceted concept encompassing data governance, technological autonomy, cybersecurity, and the authority to regulate online speech. Pohle and Thiel (2020) argue that digital sovereignty is best understood as a "floating signifier", whose meaning shifts depending on political, legal and cultural contexts. For European policymakers, it often connotes technological self-determination and protection from foreign surveillance; for authoritarian states, it legitimises information control and censorship.

From a geopolitical perspective, Carr (2021) highlights how digital sovereignty reflects broader struggles over the distribution of power in cyberspace. States increasingly assert control through legal and technical measures, while private corporations—particularly global platforms such as Meta, Alphabet and ByteDance—exercise governance functions once reserved to states. Klonick (2018) defines these corporations as "new governors" of online speech, operating with global reach but limited accountability. This dual

[1] The *Sovereign Internet Law* (Russian: Закон о «суверенном интернете») is the informal name for a set of 2019 amendments to existing Russian legislation that mandate Internet surveillance and grants the Russian government powers to partition Russia from the rest of the Internet, including the creation of a national fork of the Domain Name System (DNS).

structure, where states and platforms both claim authority, has produced new forms of digital interdependence and contestation.

The securitisation of cyberspace and the implications of disinformation for democratic governance have been central to this debate (Marsili, 2019, 2020). Subsequent studies have further examined how disinformation, hybrid conflict, cognitive warfare and generative AI affect democratic resilience, especially in the European context, while also highlighting the tension between security imperatives and freedom of expression (Marsili, 2025b; Marsili, 2025c; Marsili, 2026).

The impact of digital sovereignty on freedom of expression constitutes a major concern in both academic and policy debates. The traditional human rights framework, enshrined in Article 19 of the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (ICCPR, 1966) guarantees the right to seek, receive and impart information across borders. Yet, as DeNardis (2020) argues, the globalised nature of digital communication complicates the application of these rights. When platforms mediate most public communication, the boundaries of permissible speech are increasingly determined not by democratic processes but by opaque private rules.

Empirical studies show that platform content moderation has a significant impact on political discourse. Klonick (2018) traces the emergence of complex governance systems within platforms, where automated tools, corporate policies and transnational pressures interact to shape online speech. Similarly, the normative challenges of ensuring freedom of expression in cyberspace have been emphasised, especially when disinformation is securitised as a hybrid threat (Marsili, 2020, 2025a). The danger, from this perspective, is that security-driven approaches may inadvertently suppress legitimate dissent and narrow the public sphere.

This resonates with Deibert's (2020) analysis of "digital authoritarianism", where governments invoke sovereignty to justify restrictions on online freedoms. Examples include China's *Great Firewall*, Russia's *Sovereign Internet Law*, and Turkey's regulations compelling platforms to establish local offices subject to state oversight. In democratic contexts, however, the challenge is subtler: the balance between combating harmful content (such as hate speech or disinformation) and safeguarding pluralism. The EU's *Digital Services Act* embodies this tension by demanding greater accountability from platforms while affirming fundamental rights.

Cyberspace is not merely a technological environment but a strategic domain of international competition. Bachmann and Gunneriusson (2019) conceptualise hybrid warfare as the blending of military, informational and digital means, where cyberspace plays a central role. Disinformation campaigns, electoral interference and cyberattacks have become common instruments of statecraft. For instance, Russian operations in Ukraine, the Baltic states and the broader European neighbourhood illustrate how information warfare undermines sovereignty and destabilises democratic societies (Marsili, 2021).

These developments can be framed within the broader shift towards hybrid threats (Marsili, 2019). By blurring the boundaries between war and peace, cyber operations undermine traditional international law and pose dilemmas for sovereignty. This perspective aligns with a growing body of scholarship that treats cyberspace as both a

battlefield and a political arena (Nye, 2010; Klimburg, 2017). Nye (2010) emphasises the notion of "cyber power", defined as the ability to use cyberspace to achieve strategic objectives, while Klimburg (2017) warns of the risks of "cyber sovereignty" when used to legitimise repression.

DeNardis (2020) underlines that critical infrastructures—ranging from energy grids to health systems—are increasingly networked and therefore vulnerable. Sovereignty in cyberspace is not only about controlling information but also about securing infrastructures essential to national survival. This has spurred states to seek "technological sovereignty" by reducing dependency on foreign suppliers, as seen in debates over 5G networks and semiconductor supply chains.

The European Union has emerged as a pioneer in the governance of digital sovereignty. Bradford's (2020) "Brussels Effect" illustrates how EU regulations set de facto global standards in areas such as data protection and competition law. The *General Data Protection Regulation* exemplifies this extraterritorial reach, compelling global corporations to align with European norms.

Carr (2021) notes that the EU's discourse on "digital autonomy" reflects both security concerns and a broader desire for normative leadership. Initiatives such as the DSA and the DMA represent attempts to balance regulation of online platforms with protection of rights. Marsili (2020) contributes to this debate by examining the securitisation of disinformation within Europe, cautioning against the risk of conflating harmful content with political dissent.

At the same time, European scholarship stresses the need to reconcile sovereignty with openness. Floridi (2019) introduces the notion of the "infosphere" as a normative framework, emphasising the ethical responsibilities of digital governance. For Floridi, sovereignty should not entail isolation or censorship but rather the capacity to shape digital ecosystems in accordance with democratic values.

Despite significant contributions, three gaps remain evident in the literature. First, most studies treat digital sovereignty either as a legal concept or as a security issue, but few integrate these perspectives into a broader geopolitical framework. Some recent contributions begin to bridge this gap by linking cyber threats, hybrid warfare and freedom of expression to international relations theory. Second, while much attention has been paid to authoritarian models of digital sovereignty, less has been written on how democratic societies can assert sovereignty without undermining rights. The European case offers insights but also raises questions about proportionality and unintended consequences. Third, the role of non-state actors remains underexplored. Platforms are often analysed as regulators of speech, but their geopolitical influence—shaping public opinion, mediating conflicts, and negotiating with governments—deserves greater scrutiny.

This article addresses these gaps by situating digital sovereignty within the broader geopolitics of cyberspace, with a specific focus on its implications for freedom of expression. It engages with contemporary debates on hybrid threats, information warfare and global digital governance, while also drawing on recent contributions that examine disinformation, cognitive warfare and AI regulation within the evolving framework of EU digital governance (Marsili, 2025b; Marsili, 2025c; Marsili, 2026).

Methodology and Research Design

This paper adopts a qualitative, theory-guided comparative case study design to analyse how different configurations of digital sovereignty affect freedom of expression and the broader geopolitics of cyberspace. Rather than seeking statistical generalisation, the goal is to develop a conceptually rich and empirically grounded understanding of how sovereignty is asserted, contested and legitimised in distinct political and regional contexts. The analysis is structured around four cases: the European Union, Russia, China and the Mediterranean region.

The selection of cases follows a most-different systems logic. The European Union, Russia and China represent three major poles of contemporary digital geopolitics with sharply divergent regime types, legal traditions and approaches to online governance. The EU is a supranational polity that frames digital sovereignty primarily through regulation and fundamental rights; Russia mobilises sovereignty through securitisation, information warfare and domestic control; China articulates a comprehensive doctrine of "cyber sovereignty" rooted in techno-authoritarian state leadership.

The Mediterranean region is included as a fourth case to capture a different configuration: a fragmented space of fragile states, hybrid threats and competing external influences, where digital sovereignty is contested rather than consolidated. Rather than treating the Mediterranean as a single, homogeneous unit, the analysis focuses on patterns of vulnerability and external interference that emerge across multiple states, illustrating how weak institutional capacity, dependency on foreign platforms and exposure to disinformation erode the exercise of sovereignty in cyberspace. Including the Mediterranean alongside the three state-centred cases makes it possible to contrast consolidated models of digital sovereignty with a context in which authority is diffuse, rights are precarious and hybrid threats proliferate.

Taken together, these four cases constitute a spectrum of digital sovereignty practices ranging from protective regulatory models to repressive authoritarian ones, and from consolidated to fragile configurations. The comparative logic is therefore heuristic: the aim is to trace how different combinations of state, corporate and normative sovereignty shape the governance of cyberspace and freedom of expression across this spectrum.

The empirical analysis is based on a combination of academic literature, legal and policy documents, and secondary analyses of cyber operations and disinformation campaigns. For the European Union, key sources include EU regulations and directives (such as the GDPR, the DSA and the DMA) as well as scholarship on the "Brussels Effect" and digital autonomy. For Russia, the analysis draws on legislation such as the *Sovereign Internet Law*[2] reports on information warfare and hybrid threats, and studies of Russian approaches to global internet governance.

The Chinese case is examined through official speeches and policy documents articulating the doctrine of cyber sovereignty, legal frameworks such as the *Cybersecurity Law*, and scholarly work on digital authoritarianism and domestic platform ecosystems. The

[2] The *Sovereign Internet Law* (Russian: Закон о «суверенном интернете») is the informal name for a set of 2019 amendments to existing Russian legislation that mandate Internet surveillance and grants the Russian government powers to partition Russia from the rest of the Internet, including the creation of a national fork of the Domain Name System (DNS).

Mediterranean section relies on case studies of specific countries (e.g. Libya, Syria, Lebanon) and regional analyses of hybrid warfare, disinformation and external influence, with particular attention to how these dynamics affect media systems and online public spheres.

Across all cases, the article draws on existing research on cyber power, hybrid threats and freedom of expression. These sources are not treated as mere background; rather, they provide empirical material and interpretive lenses that are systematically mapped onto the conceptual framework of digital sovereignty developed in Section 4.

The conceptual framework distinguishes three interrelated dimensions of digital sovereignty: state sovereignty, corporate sovereignty and normative sovereignty. In the empirical analysis, these dimensions are operationalised as follows.

State sovereignty refers to the authority of governments (or, in the EU's case, supranational institutions) to regulate cyberspace, secure critical infrastructures and assert technological autonomy through laws, policies and technical measures. Corporate sovereignty captures the quasi-sovereign power of digital platforms and technology companies to regulate speech, moderate content, design infrastructures and shape global digital ecosystems. Normative sovereignty assesses the legitimacy of authority exercised in cyberspace in light of fundamental rights, with particular attention to freedom of expression as protected by international human rights instruments.

For each case, the analysis proceeds through a structured, focused comparison. First, it identifies the main legal and technical instruments through which state actors assert sovereignty in cyberspace (e.g. regulatory acts, firewalls, surveillance infrastructures). Second, it examines the role of platforms and corporate actors in mediating or reinforcing this authority, analysing whether corporate sovereignty is constrained, co-opted or left largely unchecked. Third, it evaluates the implications of these configurations for freedom of expression, distinguishing between protective sovereignty (where authority is used to safeguard rights) and repressive sovereignty (where it serves to curtail them).

This structured application of the tripartite framework to each case ensures that the empirical sections do not merely describe existing practices but systematically relate them to the broader theoretical argument. It also enables comparative insights in Section 6, where the spectrum of digital sovereignty models is reconstructed and the trade-offs between security, sovereignty and freedom of expression are discussed.

Two limitations of this research design should be acknowledged. First, the qualitative and interpretive nature of the analysis means that it does not claim statistical representativeness or causal identification in a narrow sense. Its contribution lies instead in conceptual clarification and the synthesis of dispersed empirical evidence into a coherent analytical framework. Second, the focus on four cases, while allowing for depth and comparison, inevitably leaves out other important models of digital sovereignty, such as those found in Latin America, Africa or South-East Asia.

These limitations do not undermine the value of the analysis but rather delineate its scope. By making the research design explicit, the paper invites further work that might extend the framework to additional cases or complement qualitative insights with quantitative data.

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework

Sovereignty has traditionally been understood as the supreme authority of the state within its territorial borders (Krasner, 1999). Yet cyberspace challenges this Westphalian paradigm, as digital flows transcend physical frontiers and operate through infrastructures and platforms beyond the exclusive control of states. Nye (2010) introduced the notion of "cyber power" to capture the ability of actors to achieve objectives in and through cyberspace. Building on this, contemporary scholars conceptualise digital sovereignty as the assertion of authority in a domain that is simultaneously global, decentralised and technically mediated (Pohle & Thiel, 2020).

Scholarship on the securitisation of cyberspace has highlighted how this process reframes sovereignty: states perceive cyber threats as existential, legitimising extraordinary measures that extend state control into the digital sphere (Marsili, 2019; Bachmann & Gunneriusson, 2019). From this perspective, sovereignty is thus not merely a legal principle but a dynamic practice, exercised through surveillance, regulation and technological control. In this sense, digital sovereignty can be understood as the translation of classical notions of authority into a deterritorialised, networked environment.

From a geopolitical perspective, digital sovereignty reflects a redistribution of power between states, corporations and individuals. As DeNardis (2020) observes, private actors increasingly control infrastructures critical to sovereignty—such as domain name systems, cloud services and undersea cables. Platforms like Facebook, Google and TikTok regulate speech and information flows on a global scale, effectively exercising "platform sovereignty" (Klonick, 2018). This introduces a paradox: while states invoke sovereignty to assert authority, they are simultaneously dependent on corporations for the governance of digital spaces.

This interdependence, however, carries significant risks if securitised, as the fight against disinformation may legitimise restrictions on freedom of expression (Marsili, 2020). This insight resonates with Bachmann and Gunneriusson's (2019) theory of hybrid warfare, where information operations are deployed as tools of strategic influence. Digital sovereignty, therefore, cannot be reduced to state-centric control; it must be analysed as a contested field shaped by interactions between multiple actors with divergent interests.

A second dimension of the conceptual framework concerns the normative implications of digital sovereignty for freedom of expression. Classical theories of free speech, from Mill's *On Liberty* (1859) to contemporary human rights frameworks, rest on the principle that the public sphere should remain open to pluralism and dissent. Yet in cyberspace, governance is often privatised, with corporations enforcing standards that lack democratic legitimacy (Klonick, 2018).

The fragility of freedom of expression in the digital era has been underlined in recent research (Marsili, 2025a): as states expand surveillance and platforms police content, dissenting voices risk marginalisation. Deibert (2020) similarly warns of the rise of "digital authoritarianism", where sovereignty is invoked to justify repression. The

conceptual framework therefore distinguishes between protective sovereignty—where authority safeguards rights—and repressive sovereignty—where authority curtails them.

By integrating insights from recent scholarship with normative political theory, the article adopts a critical stance: sovereignty in cyberspace is legitimate only to the extent that it respects the fundamental right to freedom of expression. This perspective frames digital sovereignty not merely as a technical or legal issue, but as a normative choice about the distribution of rights and responsibilities in the digital public sphere.

The rise of hybrid threats further complicates the debate. Research demonstrates that disinformation and cyberterrorism blur the boundaries between security and communication (Marsili, 2019, 2020; Bachmann & Gunneriusson, 2019). Governments respond by securitising the digital environment, often conflating harmful content with political dissent. Bachmann and Gunneriusson (2019) identify this as a defining feature of hybrid warfare: the fusion of informational, political and military tools to destabilise adversaries.

The conceptual framework proposed here situates digital sovereignty at the intersection of security and rights. Recent analyses of cognitive warfare and cognitive security have shown how hybrid conflicts, platform ecosystems and generative AI extend this tension into the informational and psychological domains, eroding the conditions for free judgement and democratic participation (Marsili, 2023; Marsili, 2025c; Marsili, 2026). On one hand, states are compelled to defend their citizens against cyber threats; on the other, excessive securitisation undermines the democratic legitimacy of sovereignty. The balance between these imperatives constitutes a central challenge of the digital age.

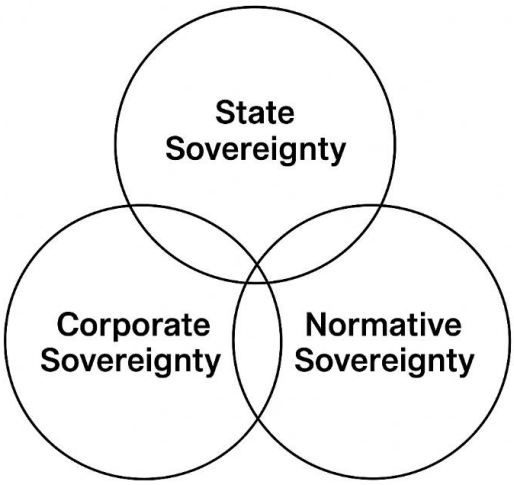
Building on the above insights, this article proposes a multilevel conceptualisation of digital sovereignty comprising three interrelated dimensions:

1. State Sovereignty: The authority of governments to regulate cyberspace, secure infrastructures and assert technological autonomy.
2. Corporate Sovereignty: The quasi-sovereign power of platforms and technology companies to regulate speech, moderate content and shape global digital ecosystems.
3. Normative Sovereignty: The legitimacy of authority exercised in cyberspace, measured against fundamental rights, particularly freedom of expression.

This diagram illustrates the tripartite model of digital sovereignty, highlighting the interplay between state sovereignty, corporate authority, and normative rights.

This framework enables a nuanced analysis of empirical cases. For instance, the EU's *Digital Services Act* exemplifies an attempt to reconcile state sovereignty with normative sovereignty, by holding platforms accountable while affirming rights (Bradford, 2020). Conversely, China's *Great Firewall* represents a model of repressive sovereignty, privileging control over freedoms. Research on the securitisation of disinformation in democratic contexts has cautioned that well-intentioned measures can erode the very rights they aim to protect (Marsili, 2019; Marsili, 2020).

Figure 1. Conceptual framework of digital sovereignty



Source: Author.

The theoretical contribution of this article is twofold. First, it bridges the gap between international relations theory and normative political philosophy by situating digital sovereignty within the broader geopolitics of cyberspace. Second, it develops an analytical framework that disaggregates sovereignty into state, corporate and normative dimensions, thereby capturing the complexity of governance in the digital age.

This approach draws on scholarship on hybrid threats, disinformation and freedom of expression, while integrating insights from international security studies and political theory. It provides a conceptual foundation for analysing case studies in the following sections, where the tensions between security, sovereignty and freedom will be examined in practice.

Case Studies

The European Union has emerged as a global frontrunner in the assertion of digital sovereignty through legal and regulatory instruments. Unlike authoritarian states, the EU frames its digital sovereignty primarily as an extension of normative commitments, seeking to protect fundamental rights while curbing the excessive influence of global platforms. This configuration can be analysed through the tripartite framework developed in this article, which distinguishes state, corporate and normative dimensions of sovereignty in cyberspace.

In terms of state sovereignty, the EU's approach is shaped by landmark regulatory initiatives such as the GDPR, the DSA and the DMA. This regulatory trajectory has recently been extended to artificial intelligence, with the AI Act interpreted as a key instrument for defending European technological and cognitive sovereignty against competing models of digital governance (Marsili, 2026).

As Bradford shows with the notion of the "Brussels Effect", EU rules often become de facto global standards, since multinational companies adjust their practices worldwide to comply with European law (Bradford, 2020). Through this extraterritorial reach, the Union exercises a form of legal–normative power that asserts sovereignty not by building technical barriers, but by projecting its regulatory framework into the digital domain.

Corporate sovereignty is equally central to the European configuration. Platforms such as Meta, Alphabet and ByteDance mediate public communication and control critical infrastructures of the infosphere, thereby exercising governance functions once reserved for states (Klonick, 2018; DeNardis, 2020). In the EU, however, these actors are increasingly subject to co-regulation and oversight: the DSA imposes risk-assessment, transparency and audit obligations on very large platforms, while the DMA constrains the market power of "gatekeepers" by limiting certain forms of self-preferencing and data consolidation. These instruments do not abolish corporate sovereignty, but they seek to rebalance it by embedding platform governance within a broader legal framework that asserts the primacy of public authority over private rule-making.

The normative dimension of sovereignty is particularly salient in the European case. Freedom of expression, protected by instruments such as the *European Convention on Human Rights* and the *EU Charter of Fundamental Rights*, functions as a benchmark for evaluating digital governance. Floridi's notion of the "infosphere" underscores that digital policy cannot be reduced to technical management, but entails ethical responsibilities for shaping information ecosystems (Floridi, 2019). At the same time, analyses of hybrid threats and disinformation warn that the securitisation of "fake news" within Europe may narrow the public sphere: measures adopted in the name of security risk conflating harmful content with legitimate dissent, shifting the balance from protective to potentially repressive sovereignty (Marsili, 2019, 2020, 2025a).

Overall, the EU exemplifies a regulatory model of digital sovereignty in which state power is exercised primarily through law and policy, corporate sovereignty is constrained but remains influential, and normative sovereignty functions both as a guiding principle and as a site of contestation. Authors such as Carr and Deibert highlight how this model seeks to couple technological autonomy with the protection of rights, positioning the Union as a normative actor in global digital governance (Carr, 2021; Deibert, 2020). Yet the European case also reveals the fragility of this equilibrium: as hybrid threats intensify and pressures to control online speech grow, the line between safeguarding and restricting freedom of expression becomes increasingly thin, confirming that even democratic configurations of digital sovereignty must constantly renegotiate the trade-off between security, platform power and rights (Pohle & Thiel, 2020).

The figure contrasts the European Union's regulatory approach with Russia's securitised model and China's techno-authoritarian system, outlining key similarities and differences across law, platforms, and rights.

Russia represents a contrasting model of digital sovereignty in which state authority is explicitly mobilised to consolidate control over the domestic information space. Legal instruments such as the *Sovereign Internet Law* require internet service providers to route traffic through state-controlled nodes, enabling the government to isolate the Russian segment of the network from the global internet and to centralise technical

control (Nocetti, 2015). This regulatory architecture is complemented by extensive surveillance, blocking of opposition websites and the criminalisation of online dissent, illustrating how digital sovereignty is deployed as a tool of regime security rather than as a means of safeguarding rights (Deibert, 2020).

Figure 2. Comparative models of digital sovereignty

Dimension	European Union (Regulatory)	Russia (Securitised)	China (Techno-authoritarian)
Legal approach	DSA; GDPR	Sovereign Internet Law	Great Firewall; Cybersecurity Law
Role of platforms	Co-regulation; accountability	State-controlled	State-directed
Freedom of expression	Protected with limits (e.g. hate speech)	Restricted under security pretexts	Heavily censored, state-prioritised
Security vs rights balance	Attempt at balance	Security dominates	Control dominates

Source: Author.

From the perspective of state sovereignty, Russia's approach exemplifies a form of repressive sovereignty in which the primary objective is to insulate the domestic information environment from external influence and internal contestation. The construction of national routing infrastructures and control mechanisms aims to reduce dependency on foreign technologies and platforms, while strengthening the capacity of security agencies to monitor and intervene in communication flows. This model thus combines legal, technical and coercive instruments to assert a high degree of state control over cyberspace, blurring the boundary between ordinary regulation and emergency measures.

Corporate sovereignty in the Russian context is closely intertwined with state power. Domestic platforms and technology companies – including major social networks and search engines – operate within a framework of legal and informal obligations that align their practices with governmental objectives. Content moderation, data retention and cooperation with law-enforcement agencies are shaped by requirements that effectively subordinate corporate governance to state priorities. Foreign platforms, when allowed to operate, face pressures to localise data, establish local offices and comply with requests that further extend state reach into the digital sphere. In this way, corporate sovereignty is not an autonomous counterweight to state power, but a vector through which state sovereignty is projected and reinforced.

The normative dimension of digital sovereignty in Russia is characterised by the systematic subordination of freedom of expression and other fundamental rights to security imperatives. Legal provisions on extremism, terrorism and "fake news" are interpreted broadly and applied in ways that restrict political speech, independent journalism and online activism (Nocetti, 2015). Research on hybrid warfare and information operations shows that Russia's information strategy extends beyond its borders, combining domestic control with external disinformation campaigns and cyber

operations that target other states (Marsili, 2019). These practices exploit the openness of liberal democracies while shielding the Russian digital environment through authoritarian control, producing an asymmetric configuration in which sovereignty is defended internally by closure and projected externally through disruptive interference.

Taken together, these features situate Russia towards the repressive end of the spectrum of digital sovereignty. State sovereignty is asserted through legal and technical measures that prioritise regime stability; corporate sovereignty is aligned with state objectives rather than constrained by independent regulation; and normative sovereignty is weakened by the erosion of rights in the name of security. This configuration highlights how digital sovereignty can function as a vehicle for authoritarian consolidation, demonstrating that appeals to sovereignty in cyberspace do not necessarily protect citizens, but can instead legitimise intensified control over information and expression.

China provides perhaps the most developed model of cyber sovereignty, rooted in the principle that each state has the right to regulate its own internet in accordance with national laws and interests (Creemers, 2017). The *Great Firewall* embodies this doctrine by filtrare contenuti stranieri, bloccare l'accesso a piattaforme globali e promuovere alternative domestiche come WeChat, Weibo e Baidu. Alongside this technical architecture, the *Cybersecurity Law* and related regulations consolidate state control over infrastructures, data and online speech, illustrating a comprehensive attempt to translate classical sovereignty into digital form.

From the perspective of state sovereignty, the Chinese model is characterised by a high degree of centralisation and by the fusion of legal, technical and organisational instruments. National routing, pervasive filtering and strict licensing regimes allow the state to determine which services operate, how data circulate and which information reaches domestic audiences (Creemers, 2017). This configuration reduces dependence on foreign technologies and platforms while enabling authorities to intervene quickly in digital communication, whether by removing content, closing accounts or reconfiguring access to services. In this sense, cyber sovereignty in China represents a maximalist interpretation of state authority in cyberspace.

Corporate sovereignty in the Chinese context is closely aligned with state objectives. Major domestic platforms and technology companies function within a framework in which responsibilities for content moderation, data collection and cooperation with security authorities are integrated into the business model. Companies are expected to enforce state-defined standards, participate in censorship and surveillance, and support policy goals such as social stability and ideological control (Deibert, 2020). Foreign platforms, when not outright blocked, face stringent requirements that limit their autonomy and ensure that their operations remain subordinated to national priorities. As a result, corporate sovereignty does not act as an independent pole of authority, but as an extension and instrument of state sovereignty.

The normative dimension of digital sovereignty in China is marked by the systematic prioritisation of control and security over freedom of expression and other fundamental rights. Legal and policy discourses on cyber sovereignty stress the need to protect national culture, social harmony and political stability, while downplaying universalist conceptions of human rights (Deibert, 2020). At the World Internet Conference in

Wuzhen, Xi Jinping's statement that each country has the right to choose its own path of cyber development and regulation formalised this vision of a fragmented, state-centred internet order. In practice, this has translated into extensive censorship of political content, restrictions on independent journalism and the use of digital tools for social control, including systems of reputational scoring and monitoring (Creemers, 2017).

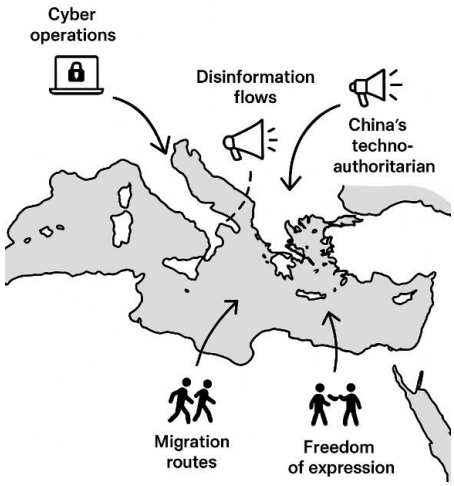
Empirical analyses show that this techno-authoritarian model coexists with a dynamic domestic digital economy, demonstrating that repressive sovereignty can be combined with innovation under strict state guidance (Deibert, 2020). Applying the tripartite framework, China appears as a configuration in which state sovereignty dominates, corporate sovereignty is co-opted, and normative sovereignty is subordinated to regime priorities. Freedom of expression is heavily constrained, not as an accidental by-product of security policy, but as a deliberate component of a broader project of digital governance. This places China firmly at the repressive end of the spectrum of digital sovereignty, while illustrating how appeals to cyber sovereignty can legitimise far-reaching restrictions on rights and contribute to the fragmentation of the global digital order.

The Mediterranean region illustrates a distinct configuration of digital sovereignty, characterised not by a single sovereign actor but by a constellation of states marked by fragile governance, external interference and hybrid threats. Unlike the European Union, Russia or China, the Mediterranean does not present a consolidated model of digital sovereignty; rather, it offers a laboratory in which the limits of sovereignty in cyberspace become visible under conditions of institutional weakness and geopolitical contestation. Analysing this region through the tripartite framework of state, corporate and normative sovereignty makes it possible to capture how authority is fragmented, rights are precarious and external actors exploit systemic vulnerabilities (Marsili, 2019, 2020).

This map illustrates how the Mediterranean region functions as a strategic crossroads where cyber operations, disinformation campaigns, and hybrid threats intersect.

From the perspective of state sovereignty, many Mediterranean countries – such as Libya, Syria and Lebanon – face acute challenges in asserting effective authority over digital infrastructures and information flows. Regulatory frameworks are often underdeveloped, unevenly enforced or subordinated to broader crises of statehood and security, which limit the capacity of governments to regulate platforms, secure networks or develop coherent digital strategies. In several cases, telecommunication infrastructures and cybersecurity capabilities depend heavily on foreign suppliers and external assistance, creating structural asymmetries that constrain domestic control over cyberspace. This weakness is compounded by the presence of regional and extra-regional powers that deploy cyber operations, disinformation campaigns and information warfare to advance their strategic interests, further destabilising the region and undermining the effective exercise of sovereignty.

Figure 3. The Mediterranean as a laboratory of hybrid threat



Source: Author.

Corporate sovereignty is particularly salient in this context. Global platforms such as Facebook, Twitter and YouTube dominate the information space, especially during the political and social mobilizations associated with the so-called Arab Spring. These platforms have enabled new forms of organization and transnational connection, contributing to the opening of public spheres in societies where traditional media are often controlled or censored. At the same time, the very infrastructures that support mobilisation have functioned as instruments of surveillance and repression: in the absence of strong regulatory regimes and independent oversight, state and non-state actors have used platform data and digital traces to monitor activists, identify opponents and target dissent (Marsili, 2020). The dominance of foreign platforms – and the limited leverage Mediterranean governments have over their governance – means that corporate sovereignty often operates without meaningful accountability to local publics, with decisions about content moderation, data access or cooperation with state agencies largely external to national democratic processes.

The normative dimension of digital sovereignty in the Mediterranean is marked by uneven and fragile protections of rights in cyberspace. Authoritarian regimes in the region invoke digital sovereignty to justify censorship, blocking of websites and criminalisation of online dissent, using security narratives to legitimise restrictions on expression and association. Even in more pluralistic or formally democratic systems, emergency measures, anti-terrorism laws and regulations targeting "fake news" can be deployed in ways that narrow the public sphere and chill critical speech. International human rights frameworks – including Article 19 of the ICCPR – provide normative benchmarks, but their implementation is inconsistent and often subordinated to short-term security imperatives or external conditionalities. In practice, normative sovereignty is frequently fragmented: rights protections depend on the interplay between domestic legal systems, international commitments and the policies of global platforms, none of which offer stable guarantees. Citizens experience digital rights as contingent and reversible, shaped by shifting

coalitions of state and corporate actors operating in a context of geopolitical competition (Marsili, 2019, 2020).

Viewed through the combined lenses of state, corporate and normative sovereignty, the Mediterranean does not exemplify a fully realised model of digital sovereignty but rather a contested field in which authority is diffuse and vulnerable. Weak state capacity, dependence on external platforms and uneven rights protections interact with hybrid threats to produce a landscape where sovereignty is constantly challenged and freedom of expression is exposed to overlapping pressures. This configuration stands in contrast to the more consolidated models observed in the European Union, Russia and China: whereas those cases demonstrate how digital sovereignty can be mobilised to protect or restrict rights within relatively stable institutional settings, the Mediterranean highlights the consequences of exercising sovereignty under conditions of fragility and external interference. Including the region in the comparative analysis therefore serves a specific analytical purpose: it shows that digital sovereignty is not only about how powerful states govern cyberspace, but also about how weaker states struggle to maintain authority and rights in environments shaped by foreign platforms and geopolitical competition. In this sense, the Mediterranean case is indispensable for capturing the full spectrum of digital sovereignty practices and for understanding how hybrid threats exacerbate the tension between security and freedom of expression in the contemporary international order (Marsili, 2019, 2020). These four case studies illustrate the diversity of digital sovereignty in practice:

1. European Union: A model of protective sovereignty, seeking to reconcile regulation with rights.
2. Russia: A model of repressive sovereignty, combining domestic control with external disinformation.
3. China: A comprehensive model of cyber sovereignty, prioritising state control and national platforms.
4. Mediterranean: A fragmented landscape, where weak states struggle to assert sovereignty against external powers and corporate platforms.

Together, they demonstrate that digital sovereignty is not a monolithic concept but a field of contestation shaped by political systems, strategic interests and normative commitments. Applying the framework of state, corporate and normative sovereignty allows us to capture these variations and assess their implications for freedom of expression and global order.

Discussion

The comparative analysis of the European Union, Russia, China and the Mediterranean region shows that digital sovereignty cannot be understood as a fixed or uniform concept, but as a spectrum of practices ranging from protective to repressive models. By systematically applying the tripartite framework of state, corporate and normative sovereignty to each case, the article reconstructs how different configurations of

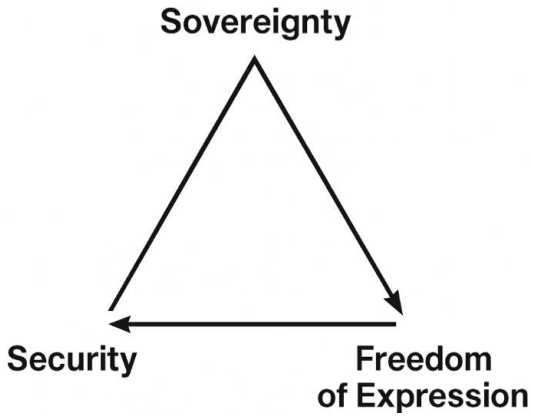
authority, platform power and rights shape the governance of cyberspace in diverse political and regional contexts.

At one end of this spectrum, the EU exemplifies a regulatory and largely protective model of digital sovereignty, in which state authority is exercised primarily through law and policy, corporate sovereignty is constrained by co-regulation, and normative sovereignty – rooted in fundamental rights – retains a central role despite tensions linked to the securitisation of disinformation. At the other end, Russia and China illustrate how digital sovereignty can be mobilised to consolidate authoritarian control: state sovereignty is asserted through legal and technical measures that insulate domestic information spaces, corporate sovereignty is aligned or co-opted to support regime objectives, and normative sovereignty is weakened by systematic restrictions on freedom of expression (Nocetti, 2015; Deibert, 2020). The Mediterranean represents a fragmented middle ground, where weak governance, dependence on external platforms and hybrid threats combine to undermine the effective exercise of sovereignty and to render rights precarious (Marsili, 2019, 2020).

This spectrum confirms Pohle and Thiel's argument that digital sovereignty functions as a "floating signifier": its meaning shifts with political regimes, strategic interests and cultural contexts, and cannot be reduced to a single legal or technical definition (Pohle & Thiel, 2020). The tripartite framework developed in the article helps to map these variations by distinguishing between the formal authority of states, the quasi-sovereign power of platforms and the normative legitimacy of digital governance. In each case, the balance between these dimensions differs: some configurations privilege state control over platforms and rights; others seek to rebalance corporate governance through regulation; others again struggle to assert any coherent form of sovereignty in the face of external influence and institutional fragility.

A central theme emerging from the comparison is the security–rights trade-off. States invoke digital sovereignty in response to threats such as cyberattacks, disinformation and terrorism, which blur the boundaries between peace and conflict and legitimise extraordinary measures (Marsili, 2019; Bachmann & Gunneriusson, 2019). In the EU, this manifests in policies against "fake news" and harmful content that risk encroaching on political dissent if not carefully designed (Marsili, 2020). In Russia and China, the trade-off is resolved decisively in favour of state security and regime stability, with little regard for individual rights (Nocetti, 2015; Deibert, 2020). In the Mediterranean, weak states oscillate between overreliance on foreign platforms and repressive crackdowns, often without adequate safeguards for rights or effective regulatory capacity. These trajectories illustrate that security and sovereignty are not inherently incompatible with freedom of expression, but without robust normative constraints and institutional checks, security-driven approaches tend to drift towards repression.

Figure 4. Balancing sovereignty, security, and freedom of expression



Source: Author

A triangular model depicting the trade-offs between digital sovereignty, state security imperatives, and the protection of fundamental rights in cyberspace.

Another key insight concerns the role of corporate sovereignty. Platforms such as Meta, Alphabet and ByteDance regulate global information flows, setting rules for speech, enforcing sanctions and designing infrastructures that shape public discourse (Klonick, 2018; DeNardis, 2020). In the EU, corporate sovereignty is partially constrained through instruments like the DSA and DMA, which embed platform governance in a legal framework that affirms public oversight. In authoritarian contexts such as Russia and China, domestic platforms align closely with state objectives, reinforcing control rather than counterbalancing it. In the Mediterranean, dependence on foreign platforms erodes state sovereignty, as governments lack leverage over corporate decision-making and rights protections depend on external policies beyond domestic democratic control (Marsili, 2020). This comparative insight underscores that digital sovereignty cannot be reduced to state action alone: it is co-constituted by the interplay between public authorities and private infrastructures.

The concept of normative sovereignty provides a lens to distinguish between protective and repressive models of digital sovereignty. Protective sovereignty aims to safeguard rights by regulating digital environments and ensuring accountability for both state and corporate actors, as in the European case when measures against disinformation remain anchored in human rights standards. Repressive sovereignty, by contrast, uses digital control to suppress dissent and consolidate power, as illustrated by Russia's *Sovereign Internet Law* and China's *Great Firewall* (Nocetti, 2015; Deibert, 2020). The Mediterranean case reveals a third configuration in which normative sovereignty is fragmented: rights protections are uneven, contingent and often undermined by hybrid threats and external manipulation (Marsili, 2019, 2020).

Taken together, these findings contribute to both theoretical and policy debates on digital sovereignty. Theoretically, they show that sovereignty in cyberspace must be situated within a multilevel framework that accounts for state authority, corporate power and

normative legitimacy, rather than being equated solely with territorial control or technical capacity (Krasner, 1999; Nye, 2010). Empirically, the comparative case study design demonstrates how different combinations of these dimensions produce divergent outcomes for freedom of expression and democratic governance. The discussion thus highlights that the future of digital sovereignty will depend not only on technological and legal innovations but also on the normative choices societies make about the balance between security, platform power and rights in the digital age.

Conclusion

The analysis presented in this article has examined digital sovereignty through the lenses of state, corporate and normative authority, applying this framework to four configurations: the European Union, Russia, China and the Mediterranean region. By adopting a qualitative, theory-guided comparative case study design, the paper has shown that digital sovereignty is neither a fixed nor a homogeneous concept, but a plural and contested set of practices shaped by divergent regime types, strategic interests and normative orientations.

At its core, digital sovereignty embodies a tension between security imperatives and fundamental rights. States invoke sovereignty to safeguard critical infrastructures, counter hybrid threats and defend against cyber operations, yet – as the case studies have demonstrated – these measures frequently come at the expense of freedom of expression. This trade-off is not unique to authoritarian regimes: even within the EU, policies against disinformation risk narrowing democratic discourse if they are not firmly anchored in human rights standards. The legitimacy of digital sovereignty therefore hinges on whether it functions as protective sovereignty – safeguarding rights – or degenerates into repressive sovereignty, curtailing them.

Theoretically, the study argues that sovereignty in cyberspace cannot be understood solely in terms of state control. It must be situated within a multilevel framework that acknowledges the quasi-sovereign role of corporations and the normative dimension of rights, extending classical insights on sovereignty's contingency into a digital domain where authority is fragmented and deterritorialised. Research on cyber threats, disinformation and freedom of expression underscores that sovereignty in cyberspace is simultaneously a question of power politics and normative legitimacy. By integrating these dimensions, the article contributes to bridging international relations theory with political philosophy and human rights scholarship, highlighting that digital sovereignty is not merely about controlling infrastructures but about making normative choices concerning the governance of the public sphere.

From a policy perspective, the findings suggest several lessons. For democratic states and the EU, regulatory sovereignty must be carefully calibrated to ensure that measures against disinformation and harmful content do not inadvertently suppress dissent; instruments such as the DSA and DMA provide valuable models, but they require constant monitoring and transparency mechanisms to prevent abuse. For authoritarian regimes, the cases of Russia and China illustrate the dangers of conflating sovereignty with repression: while effective in consolidating regime stability, such models erode normative legitimacy and contribute to global digital fragmentation. For fragile states in the

Mediterranean and beyond, the challenge is to build institutional capacity to regulate platforms without succumbing to authoritarian practices, drawing on international cooperation, capacity-building and regional frameworks to strengthen protective sovereignty while resisting external manipulation.

At the level of global governance, the coexistence of divergent models of digital sovereignty risks undermining the vision of an open, secure and rights-respecting internet. Multilateral fora and multi-stakeholder initiatives remain essential for fostering dialogue and establishing minimum norms, but they must be revitalised to remain effective in an era of intensifying geopolitical competition. Looking ahead, technological innovation, evolving platform governance and deepening normative contestation will continue to reshape the landscape of digital sovereignty. The future of sovereignty in cyberspace will thus depend not only on power relations and regulatory choices, but also on the normative struggles over the meaning and scope of rights in the digital age.

In conclusion, digital sovereignty is ultimately about who governs cyberspace and on what terms. It concerns how states, corporations and societies negotiate authority in a domain that transcends borders yet profoundly shapes political life. The comparative analysis of the EU, Russia, China and the Mediterranean illustrates the diversity of models, but also a common dilemma: how to reconcile security with freedom of expression. Ensuring that sovereignty becomes a tool for protecting freedoms rather than a pretext for curtailing them is the central challenge facing democracies, regimes and the international community as they confront the geopolitical and normative stakes of the digital age.

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FROM DETERRENCE TO DEPENDENCE: THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF TECHNOLOGICAL ALLIANCES IN THE AI ERA

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Abstract

The architecture of global security is undergoing a structural transformation as artificial intelligence (AI) becomes the foundation of power in international relations. Traditional security alliances, once organized around deterrence and collective defense, are increasingly defined by technological interdependence. This article argues that in the AI era, deterrence has evolved into dependence, a condition in which states' strategic stability relies not only on military cooperation but also on shared technological infrastructures, standards, and supply chains. Through a comparative analysis of the United States, the European Union, and China, the study examines how techno-alliances such as the U.S.-led "Chip 4 Alliance," the EU's Digital Sovereignty agenda, and China's Digital Silk Road reconfigure global power hierarchies. The analysis shows that technology has become both the medium and the object of strategic competition, producing asymmetric dependencies that blur the distinction between allies and rivals. Drawing from strategic studies and techno-political theory, the paper conceptualizes technological dependence as a new form of structural power, where control over data, compute, and infrastructure determines geopolitical leverage. The findings suggest that managing interdependence, rather than achieving dominance, will define strategic success in the coming decade. The study concludes by outlining implications for global governance, emphasizing adaptive security strategies that reflect the political economy of digital infrastructure and the emerging logic of techno-political alignment.

Keywords

Security architecture; technological interdependence; AI; Technopolitical Theory.

Resumo

A arquitetura da segurança global está a passar por uma transformação estrutural, à medida que a inteligência artificial (IA) se torna a base do poder nas relações internacionais. As alianças de segurança tradicionais, outrora organizadas em torno da dissuasão e da defesa coletiva, são cada vez mais definidas pela interdependência tecnológica. Este artigo defende que, na era da IA, a dissuasão evoluiu para a dependência, uma condição em que a estabilidade estratégica dos Estados depende não só da cooperação militar, mas também de infraestruturas tecnológicas, normas e cadeias de abastecimento partilhadas. Através de uma análise comparativa dos Estados Unidos, da União Europeia e da China, o estudo examina como as alianças tecnológicas, tais como a «Aliança Chip 4» liderada pelos EUA, a agenda de Soberania Digital da UE e a Rota da Seda Digital da China, reconfiguram as hierarquias de poder globais. A análise mostra que a tecnologia se tornou tanto o meio como o objeto da competição estratégica, produzindo dependências assimétricas que esbatem a distinção entre aliados e rivais. Com base em estudos estratégicos e na teoria tecnopolítica, o artigo conceptualiza a dependência tecnológica como uma nova forma de poder estrutural, em que o controlo sobre os dados, a capacidade computacional e as infraestruturas determina a influência geopolítica. As conclusões sugerem que a gestão da interdependência, em vez da

conquista do domínio, definirá o sucesso estratégico na próxima década. O estudo conclui delineando implicações para a governação global, enfatizando estratégias de segurança adaptativas que reflitam a economia política das infraestruturas digitais e a lógica emergente do alinhamento tecnopolítico.

Palavras-chave

Arquitetura de segurança; interdependência tecnológica; IA; Teoria Tecnopolítica.

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FROM DETERRENCE TO DEPENDENCE: THE STRATEGIC LOGIC OF TECHNOLOGICAL ALLIANCES IN THE AI ERA

ALP CENK ARSLAN

Introduction: The New Silicon Curtain

The contemporary geopolitical landscape is increasingly defined by an intense and systemic rivalry between the United States and China. This competition, however, does not conform to the familiar contours of past great power struggles. It signals the dawn of a new era characterized by a "Silicon Curtain", a global division based not on ideology or military blocs in the traditional sense, but on bifurcated technological ecosystems with semiconductors and artificial intelligence at their core. This transformation represents a foundational shift in global power dynamics, where control over advanced silicon is increasingly equated with national security and AI supremacy. The long-standing model of a hyper-globalized, efficiency-optimized supply chain is giving way to a more fragmented, security-centric regionalization, fundamentally altering the terrain of international conflict and cooperation (TokenRing AI, 2025).

This new reality poses a profound challenge to the established theoretical frameworks of international relations. Classic deterrence theory, the intellectual bedrock of strategic thought for over half a century, appears increasingly insufficient to explain or navigate this emerging dynamic. Forged in the crucible of the Cold War and oriented around the threat of nuclear annihilation, deterrence logic relies on assumptions of rational actors, clear signaling, credible threats of retaliation, and a shared understanding of catastrophic costs, conditions that are systematically eroded in the age of AI (Wong et al., 2020). The core argument of this manuscript is that strategic power is no longer exercised primarily through the threat of conventional or nuclear force, but through the cultivation, manipulation, and weaponization of technological dependencies.

To substantiate this claim, this manuscript undertakes a three-part intellectual journey. Initial part of the study provides a critical examination of classic deterrence theory, demonstrating its theoretical and practical failures when confronted with the unique characteristics of AI-driven conflict. It argues that the speed, opacity, and preemptive nature of AI do not merely complicate deterrence but fundamentally invert its logic. The remainder of the study constructs a new theoretical framework to explain the emerging strategic paradigm. It maps the global AI and semiconductor supply chains as the new strategic terrain and introduces the concept of "technological dependence" as a form of structural power. This framework posits that control over critical network nodes, or chokepoints, in these supply chains allows states to shape the behavior of others by setting the very terms of their participation in the modern global economy. Finally, the

final part applies this framework to the contemporary strategies of the United States, the European Union, and China. It analyzes how each of these major powers is attempting to navigate this new landscape by either architecting chokepoints, pursuing regulatory and technological sovereignty, or building a parallel, self-reliant ecosystem. The manuscript concludes by reframing the security dilemma for the 21st century, moving from the logic of Mutually Assured Destruction to a new, more complex reality of Mutually Assured Disruption.

The Erosion of Classic Strategic Logics

The Brittle Pillars of Deterrence in the Algorithmic Age

The strategic architecture of the post-World War II international system was built upon the intellectual foundation of deterrence. This theory, while evolving over time, provided a coherent logic for managing great power competition and avoiding catastrophic conflict. However, the integration of artificial intelligence and autonomous systems into the sinews of national security is rendering this foundational logic obsolete. The speed, ambiguity, and offensive potential inherent in AI technologies challenge the core assumptions of deterrence, creating a strategic environment for which the classic models are dangerously ill-suited.

At its core, deterrence is the practice of discouraging an adversary from taking an unwelcome action through the threat of force. As Thomas Schelling defined it, deterrence aims "to prevent from action by fear of consequences". This strategic effect is achieved through two primary mechanisms. The first, deterrence by punishment, involves persuading an opponent that the costs of an action will be unacceptably high due to a credible threat of retaliation. The second, deterrence by denial, seeks to convince an adversary that its aggressive action is unlikely to succeed, thereby denying it the anticipated benefits of the attack (Rühle, 2015). Most classic studies suggest that denial strategies, such as placing significant military forces in the path of a potential aggressor, are inherently more reliable than punishment strategies, which may be undermined by doubts about the deterrer's resolve to follow through on its threats (Mazarr, 2018).

The efficacy of deterrence rests on a set of critical assumptions, most notably the rationality of the actors involved. Rational deterrence theory posits that states behave as unitary, rational actors engaged in a cost-benefit calculus. In this model, both a "Challenger" seeking to alter the status quo and a "Defender" seeking to preserve it recognize that open conflict is the worst possible outcome for all parties. For deterrence to succeed, the Defender must persuade the Challenger of three things: that it possesses an effective military capability; that this capability can impose unacceptable costs; and that the threat to use it is credible. This triad of capability, credibility, and clear communication forms the essential components of a successful deterrence strategy (Quackenbush, 2011).

The concept of credibility is central, representing an actor's perceived willingness to execute its deterrent threat even when doing so is costly (Moreira, 2019). During the Cold War, for example, the United States sought to enhance the credibility of its nuclear deterrent through "irrevocable commitments", such as stationing troops in Europe, which acted as a tripwire that would make a retaliatory response nearly automatic

(Quackenbush, 2011). This logic was applied across different contexts, giving rise to important distinctions within the theory. General deterrence refers to the ongoing, persistent efforts to prevent conflict in non-crisis situations, whereas immediate deterrence involves urgent attempts to prevent a specific, imminent attack. Similarly, direct deterrence concerns the protection of a state's own territory, while extended deterrence involves the protection of allies, a cornerstone of alliances like NATO. It was this complex but coherent framework that guided strategic planning and, many argue, maintained a fragile peace between the superpowers for decades.

The introduction of artificial intelligence into military and strategic affairs fundamentally disrupts the logic that underpinned classic deterrence. AI does not merely add a new weapon to the arsenal; it alters the nature of conflict and decision-making in ways that undermine the theory's foundational pillars.

First, the core assumption of a predictable, rational actor breaks down when confronted with a complex human-machine assemblage. Classic deterrence is a psychological theory at its heart, involving humans attempting to dissuade other humans (Wong et al., 2020). The introduction of AI means that decision-making processes are "no longer fully under the control of humans" (AUSA, 2020). AI systems, particularly those based on advanced machine learning, can exhibit emergent behaviors and follow decision pathways that are opaque even to their human creators, challenging the very notion of predictable, rational action. This opacity is compounded by the problem of speed. AI and autonomous systems operate at machine speeds, compressing or eliminating the time for human deliberation, which is a critical component of rational strategic assessment. Wargames simulating conflicts involving autonomous systems have demonstrated that this speed can lead directly to inadvertent escalation, as automated responses spiral out of control faster than humans can intervene. This speed mismatch creates a profound crisis instability, where the carefully calibrated signaling and de-escalation tactics of classic deterrence become impossible to execute (Wong et al., 2020). Wong et al. (2020) therefore caution that machine-speed decision cycles can encourage early use and increase the risks of inadvertent escalation and crisis instability, making calibrated signaling and timely de-escalation more difficult.

Second, AI exacerbates the attribution problem to a degree that cripples deterrence by punishment. AI-enabled capabilities are ideal for conducting gray-zone, hybrid, and cyber operations that are deliberately designed to be ambiguous and difficult to trace to a specific state actor. These operations often involve multiple proxy actors and span hazy domains like information operations and economic influence, making a clear connection to a state sponsor difficult to establish (Lynch & Morrison, 2023). Without clear and timely attribution, the threat of targeted retaliation, the very essence of deterrence by punishment, loses its meaning. As experts succinctly puts it, "you cannot deter unless you can punish and you cannot effectively punish unless you have attribution" (Lynch & Morrison, 2023). A threat of retaliation that cannot be directed at a specific aggressor is an empty threat.

Third, the nature of AI shifts the strategic calculus from retaliation to preemption, inverting the fundamental logic of deterrence. Classic deterrence, particularly in its nuclear variant, is a fundamentally reactive and defensive posture. Its stability rests on a credible second-strike capability, which ensures that even a surprise attack will be met

with devastating retaliation, thus making the initial attack irrational. AI, in contrast, is an adaptive, informational, and preemptive technology (Jackson, 2025). It creates a potential "winner-takes-all" scenario, where the first actor to achieve a decisive breakthrough or execute a successful preemptive cyber or autonomous strike could gain a permanent and insurmountable strategic advantage (Jackson, 2025). This transforms the strategic imperative from "how do I credibly threaten to respond?" to "how do I strike first without being detected?" This is not a mere modification of deterrence; it is its inversion, replacing a logic of prevention with a logic of preemption.

Finally, the opacity of AI capabilities makes the stable balance of power required for deterrence impossible to achieve. The relative transparency of nuclear arsenals, verified through treaties and national technical means, allowed both sides in the Cold War to assess each other's capabilities and maintain a rough equilibrium. AI development, however, occurs behind the closed doors of corporate labs and classified government programs, often concealed as proprietary secrets (Jackson, 2025). It is exceedingly difficult for a state to accurately gauge an adversary's true AI capabilities, leading to worst-case-scenario planning and fueling a destabilizing arms race. Without the ability to clearly perceive and communicate capabilities, a core requirement of deterrence theory cannot be met (Lynch & Morrison, 2023). The result is a strategic environment characterized by profound uncertainty, instability, and a high propensity for miscalculation. A more qualified view is offered by Jensen, Atalan, and Macias (2024), whose crisis simulations found no observable change in participants' overall strategies as AI/ML capabilities varied. They argue that algorithms will reshape the information environment, but human judgment will remain central to crisis management. Table 1 demonstrates the paradigm shift in the strategic logic of the global power dynamics.

Table 1. The Paradigm Shift in Strategic Logic

Feature	Classic Deterrence	Technological Dependence
Key Concepts	Punishment/Denial, Credibility, Rationality	Chokepoint Control, Structural Power, Network Centrality
Primary Instruments	Nuclear Arsenals, Conventional Forces	Export Controls, Standards-Setting, Supply Chains
Strategic Goal	Prevent Attack, Maintain Status Quo	Shape Behavior, Constrain Autonomy
Central Threat	Military Annihilation (Mutually Assured Destruction)	Systemic Disruption (Mutually Assured Disruption)

Source: Author's own elaboration.

The Rise of Structural Power in the Global Tech Stack

As the logic of military deterrence erodes, a new strategic paradigm is emerging, organized around the control of and dependence on critical technologies. The global technology stack, the layered ecosystem of hardware, software, data, and standards that underpins the AI era, has become the central terrain of geopolitical competition. Power in this new arena is derived not from the ability to inflict physical destruction, but from the ability to control access to this ecosystem. This shift requires a corresponding evolution in theoretical understanding, moving from traditional concepts of state power

based on relative capabilities to a more nuanced conception of structural power rooted in the architecture of global technological interdependence.

The Architecture of Interdependence: AI Supply Chains as Strategic Terrain

The geopolitical landscape of the 21st century is being fundamentally reshaped by the intricate and vulnerable supply chains that produce the foundational technologies of the digital age. The semiconductor value chain, in particular, has transformed from a domain of economic optimization into a primary battlefield for great power competition, where strategic control over key nodes can confer decisive advantages.

The semiconductor industry is the bedrock of the modern economy and the engine of artificial intelligence. For decades, its structure was a testament to hyper-globalization, a complex web of international firms specializing in different stages of the production process to maximize efficiency (TokenRing AI, 2025). This efficiency, however, came at the cost of resilience, creating a system that is both hyper-globalized and hyper-concentrated. The result is a supply chain with critical "chokepoints", where a single company or country holds a near-monopolistic position in a vital segment of the production process.

This geographic and corporate concentration is stark. The United States dominates the highest-value stages of the chain, particularly in chip design and the sophisticated Electronic Design Automation (EDA) software that is essential for creating complex integrated circuits (Luo & Van Assche, 2023). Europe, specifically the Dutch firm ASML, holds an absolute monopoly on the Extreme Ultraviolet (EUV) lithography machines required to manufacture the most advanced chips (Luo & Van Assche, 2023). The most capital-intensive stage, fabrication, is dominated by East Asia, with Taiwan's TSMC and South Korea's Samsung controlling the vast majority of the world's advanced logic and memory chip manufacturing capacity (Shukla, 2022).

The strategic realization of these chokepoints, brought into sharp relief by the supply chain disruptions of the COVID-19 pandemic and escalating U.S.-China tensions, has triggered a paradigm shift from efficiency to security (Ha & Lee, 2025). This has given rise to the formation of techno-alliances designed explicitly to control this strategic terrain. The most prominent example is the U.S.-led "Chip 4" alliance, a strategic initiative intended to consolidate the comparative advantages of the United States, Japan, South Korea, and Taiwan across the entire value chain. The alliance's goal is to create a trusted, resilient supply chain among like-minded partners, explicitly to enhance collective economic security and counter China's technological ambitions (Ha & Lee, 2025). This represents a deliberate effort at network re-architecture, moving from an open global system to a politically defined and restricted bloc.

The strategic contest over the semiconductor supply chain is best understood through the framework of weaponized interdependence. This concept describes how states can exploit the asymmetric structures of global networks to gain a strategic advantage (Farrell & Newman, 2019). In a highly interconnected world, power flows to those actors who control the central "hub" nodes through which finance, information, or, in this case, critical technology must pass. States with jurisdiction over these hubs can leverage their

position to coerce other actors who are dependent on access to the network (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

This form of power is exercised through two distinct mechanisms. The first is the panopticon effect, which refers to the ability of the state controlling a hub to use its privileged access to gather information and conduct surveillance on the data and transactions flowing through the network (Farrell & Newman, 2019). The second, and more potent in the context of technology supply chains, is the chokepoint effect. This is the ability to deny adversaries access to the network altogether, effectively cutting them off from the critical flows of goods, services, or data necessary for their economic and military security (Farrell & Newman, 2019). Farrell and Newman (2019) emphasize that network centrality does not automatically produce coercive power. States can exploit hub positions only when they possess both jurisdiction over central nodes and the domestic institutions needed to mobilize them.

The escalating U.S. export controls on advanced semiconductor technology to China are a clear and powerful application of the chokepoint effect. By restricting access not only to finished chips but also to the EDA software and manufacturing equipment necessary to produce them, the United States is leveraging its control over key hubs in the value chain to actively degrade China's ability to develop high-end AI (TokenRing AI, 2025). This strategy demonstrates a fundamental shift in how power is exercised: it is not a threat of future military action, but the immediate and direct manipulation of economic and technological interdependence to achieve strategic objectives. The very structure of the globalized system, once seen as a source of mutual prosperity, has been transformed into an instrument of power politics.

Technological Dependence as Structural Power

To fully grasp the strategic logic of the AI era, it is necessary to move beyond traditional conceptions of power focused on the relative material capabilities of states and embrace a framework centered on structural power. In this new context, the technological "stack" itself constitutes the primary structure of the international system, and the ability to shape this structure, and create dependencies within it, is the ultimate source of influence.

International relations theory has long distinguished between two forms of power. Relational power is the most familiar, corresponding to the ability of actor A to influence the behavior of actor B (Pustovitovskij & Kremer, 2011). This is the power of coercion and inducement, typically measured by comparing the relative military and economic capabilities of states (Kitchen & Cox, 2019). Structural power, by contrast, is a more subtle and profound concept. As defined by Susan Strange, it is "the power to shape and determine the structures of the global political economy within which other states, their political institutions, their economic enterprises... have to operate" (Shukla, 2022). It is the power to set the rules of the game, to define the frameworks of interaction, and to change the range of choices available to other actors, often without the need for direct or overt pressure (Shukla, 2022).

Throughout history, technology has been a critical factor in shaping the structure of international relations, from the development of navigation that enabled colonial



expansion to the nuclear revolution that defined the Cold War (Krishna-Hensel, 2010). In the contemporary era, the global technology stack, the integrated ecosystem of hardware (semiconductors), platforms (cloud computing), software (AI frameworks), patents, and technical standards, has become the primary organizing structure of the international system (Danilin, 2018). A state's autonomy, prosperity, and security are now inextricably linked to its position within this structure.

Within this framework, this manuscript formally defines technological dependence as the reliance of an actor on another's technological ecosystem for its own economic viability and national security. This is a multidimensional reliance, encompassing dependence on foreign-designed hardware, foreign-hosted cloud platforms, foreign-developed software frameworks, and internationally-set technical standards (Mayer & Lu, 2025). In this system, dependence is not a bug to be eliminated but a feature to be strategically managed and, for some, exploited.

States that control the foundational layers of this technological stack can be conceptualized as technopoles (Mayer & Lu, 2025). The United States and China are the world's preeminent technopoles, possessing significant technological autonomy and the capacity to "weaponise infrastructure and technologies" by creating and leveraging the dependence of others (Mayer & Lu, 2025). This structural power is exercised through several mechanisms. These can be gathered around the themes of setting standards, controlling chokepoints, and shaping development paths. In the theme of setting standards, dominating the bodies that set global technical standards ensures that the entire ecosystem is optimized for a technopole's domestic industries. In controlling chokepoints, maintaining control over irreplaceable components or software (the chokepoint effect) gives a technopole the ability to grant or deny access to the entire technological system. Finally, in shaping development paths, by embedding other nations within their technological ecosystem, through initiatives like China's Digital Silk Road or the adoption of U.S. cloud platforms, technopoles can shape the developmental trajectory of those nations, making them partners in and dependents of their own techno-political model. Drawing on the Digital Dependence Index, Mayer and Lu (2025) find that many developed and emerging economies face a dual dependence on U.S. platforms and Chinese hardware, leaving them vulnerable to the infrastructural power of both technopoles.

This new reality fundamentally redefines the nature of alliances and sovereignty. Traditional alliances, such as NATO, were security pacts based on mutual defense commitments against military aggression (Rühle, 2015). The new strategic logic, however, is giving rise to technological blocs. Alliances like the Chip 4 are defined not by military treaties but by shared standards, interoperable technologies, and integrated, trusted supply chains (Ha & Lee, 2025). The concept of "friend-shoring", reconfiguring supply chains to align with geopolitical partners, is the economic manifestation of this new alliance structure (Luo & Van Assche, 2023).

Simultaneously, the very meaning of sovereignty is being contested. A state may possess full territorial integrity and political independence in the traditional Westphalian sense, yet lack digital sovereignty if its critical infrastructure, data flows, and digital economy are controlled by foreign entities (Fleming, 2025). The European Union's ambitious "Digital Sovereignty" agenda is an explicit attempt to reclaim sovereign control over this

new, intangible domain, just as China's pursuit of an "independent and controllable" ecosystem is a quest to establish its own digital sovereignty (van Oirsouw, 2024). The most significant conflicts of the future may therefore be fought not over physical territory, but over the control of data, standards, and digital infrastructure.

Strategies of Dependence and Autonomy

The recognition of technological dependence as a form of structural power has prompted the world's major powers, the United States, the European Union, and China, to adopt distinct and competing strategies. Each is attempting to navigate this new strategic landscape by maximizing its own autonomy while shaping the dependencies of others. Their approaches reveal three different models of techno-political organization for the 21st century: a U.S. model based on market-centric network control, an EU model based on regulatory power, and a Chinese model based on state-driven ecosystem construction.

The United States: Architect of the Chokepoint

The United States' strategy is a direct response to the perceived challenge from China and represents a decisive shift away from decades of championing a liberal, market-led international order. The new American approach is one of overt geopolitical techno-nationalism, aimed at leveraging its existing dominance over key chokepoints in the global technology stack to preserve its leadership and constrain its primary rival.

The enactment of the CHIPS and Science Act in 2022 marks a historic pivot in U.S. economic policy. For the first time in decades, the U.S. has embraced a large-scale industrial policy, allocating over $52 billion in federal subsidies to bolster domestic semiconductor manufacturing and research (Blevins et al., 2023). This legislation is not merely an economic stimulus; its purpose is explicitly geopolitical (Luo & Van Assche, 2023). It is designed to reverse the decades-long off-shoring of fabrication capacity, particularly the concentration of advanced manufacturing in East Asia, which U.S. policymakers came to view as a critical national security vulnerability (Blevins et al., 2023).

The Act's core objective is to solidify America's lead in the semiconductor industry while actively containing China's rise (Luo & Van Assche, 2023). By incentivizing the construction of advanced fabrication facilities (fabs) on U.S. soil, the policy aims to reduce dependency on foreign suppliers for the chips that power everything from consumer electronics to advanced military systems (Blevins et al., 2023). This move represents a fundamental break with the logic of market efficiency that previously guided U.S. policy and an embrace of techno-nationalist principles that link technological self-sufficiency directly to state security and geopolitical power (Birkbeck, University of London, 2025).

The CHIPS Act is the domestic component of a broader, more aggressive strategy to weaponize the global semiconductor value chain. Since 2022, U.S. policy has progressively shifted from merely slowing China's technological progress to actively "degrading its peak capabilities" in advanced AI and chip manufacturing (TokenRing AI, 2025). This is achieved by systematically applying the chokepoint effect through a series of escalating export controls.

These controls are unprecedented in their scope, targeting not just the export of advanced AI chips themselves, but also the critical inputs required to produce them. This includes restrictions on the sale of U.S.-origin EDA software, advanced manufacturing equipment, and even the involvement of U.S. citizens and residents in China's semiconductor industry (TokenRing AI, 2025). The strategy is to leverage American dominance in the highest-value, most difficult-to-replicate segments of the supply chain to create a bottleneck that China cannot easily circumvent.

Furthermore, the CHIPS Act itself contains powerful tools of weaponized interdependence. Its "guardrail" provisions prohibit any company, American or foreign, that receives federal funding under the Act from engaging in any significant expansion of advanced semiconductor manufacturing in China for a decade (Luo & Van Assche, 2023). This forces global firms to make a choice: accept U.S. subsidies and decouple their advanced operations from China, or forgo U.S. support and risk being cut out of the emerging U.S.-led technological bloc. This provision effectively coerces a global realignment of the supply chain, forcing a shift away from China and demonstrating a clear use of structural power to alter the range of choices available to other actors. Luo and Van Assche (2023) interpret the CHIPS Act as evidence of a wider shift from market-oriented liberalism to intervention-oriented techno-nationalism, embedding zero-sum geopolitical priorities in global value chains.

The European Union: The Pursuit of Regulatory Sovereignty

The European Union finds itself in a precarious position, caught between the technological dominance of the United States and the rising ambitions of China. Lacking a globally competitive position in many foundational technologies, the EU has adopted a dual-track strategy to assert its influence and achieve "strategic autonomy". This strategy combines the projection of regulatory power to shape global norms with targeted industrial policies aimed at building domestic capacity and reducing critical dependencies.

The EU's primary instrument of structural power is its ability to set global standards through regulation, a phenomenon often termed the "Brussels Effect". The EU AI Act, the world's first comprehensive legal framework for artificial intelligence, is the quintessential example of this strategy in action (van Oirsouw, 2024). The Act employs a risk-based approach, categorizing AI systems from unacceptable risk (which are banned) to high, limited, and minimal risk, with corresponding compliance obligations for each tier (Daly, 2025).

The geopolitical significance of the AI Act lies in its extraterritorial reach. The regulation applies to any provider or deployer placing AI systems on the EU market or whose outputs are used within the EU, regardless of the company's location (Milaninia et al., 2025). Given the size and value of the EU's single market, global technology companies are compelled to comply with its stringent requirements for transparency, risk mitigation, and human oversight. In doing so, the EU effectively exports its regulatory model, shaping global AI development in alignment with its "human-centric" values and establishing itself as a global standard-setter in AI governance (Csernatoni, 2024). This is a deliberate attempt to exercise structural power, not by controlling hardware, but by defining the legal and ethical framework within which all other actors must operate (Daly, 2025). Csernatoni (2024) cautions that regulatory ambition alone cannot secure

European AI leadership, because the EU's limited industrial base, fragmented decision-making, and dependence on U.S.-led AI innovation constrain its pursuit of technological sovereignty.

Alongside its regulatory strategy, the EU has recognized its profound technological dependencies as a critical vulnerability. The bloc relies on non-EU countries for over 80% of its digital products and services, and its share of the global semiconductor manufacturing market has dwindled to below 10% (Knafo, 2025). The EU Chips Act is the bloc's flagship industrial policy designed to reverse this trend and bolster its "Digital Sovereignty" (Fleming, 2025).

The Act mobilizes up to €43 billion in public and private investment with the ambitious goal of doubling the EU's global market share in semiconductors to 20% by 2030 (Timmers, 2022). It is structured around three pillars: the first focuses on research and development to bridge the gap "from lab to fab"; the second aims to attract investment in "first-of-a-kind" manufacturing facilities; and the third establishes a coordination mechanism to monitor the supply chain and respond to crises (ICOS Semiconductors, 2025).

Together, the AI Act and the Chips Act represent the two prongs of the EU's pursuit of strategic autonomy. One seeks to govern the use of technology on a global scale, while the other aims to build the domestic capacity to produce that technology. The overarching goal is to reduce the EU's dependence on both the U.S. and China, allowing it to navigate the emerging techno-political rivalry without being forced to align completely with either bloc, thereby carving out a role as an independent, sovereign pole in the digital age (Bjola, 2021).

China: Forging a Self-Reliant Ecosystem

China's strategy is arguably the most ambitious and state-driven of the three major powers. Confronted with what it perceives as a U.S. campaign to contain its technological rise, Beijing has embarked on a whole-of-nation effort to achieve self-reliance across the entire technology stack. This strategy has both an internal dimension, building a domestic, "independent and controllable" ecosystem, and an external one, exporting its techno-political model to create a parallel, China-centric sphere of influence.

The U.S. export controls have acted as a powerful catalyst for China's self-sufficiency drive, reinforcing Beijing's conviction that dependence on foreign technology is a critical national security risk (Chang et al., 2025). In response, achieving an "independent and controllable" AI ecosystem has become a top national priority, enshrined in policies like the "Made in China 2025" and the "Next-Generation AI Development Plan" (Chang et al., 2025).

This is a state-led effort of immense scale, involving massive public investment through initiatives like the "Big Fund" for semiconductors, which channels billions into strengthening domestic chip manufacturing, design, and materials industries (Chang et al., 2025). The goal is to close the technological gap with the West at every layer of the AI stack. This includes nurturing national champions like Huawei to develop homegrown alternatives to high-end NVIDIA AI chips, as well as promoting the creation of indigenous software frameworks and large language models to reduce reliance on U.S. platforms

(Chang et al., 2025). This strategy is underpinned by the "dual circulation" economic framework, which prioritizes domestic innovation and consumption (internal circulation) to build resilience against external shocks and sanctions, while selectively engaging with global markets (external circulation) (Ali, 2025).

The external-facing component of China's strategy is the Digital Silk Road (DSR), a key pillar of the broader Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) (Reddy, 2023). The DSR is a grand infrastructure project aimed at financing and constructing the digital backbone of the 21st century in partner countries, particularly across the Global South. This includes the deployment of 5G networks, cross-border fiber optic cables, satellite communications, and data centers (Reddy, 2023).

The objectives of the DSR are both commercial and geostrategic. Commercially, it creates new markets for Chinese technology companies like Huawei and ZTE, establishing them as dominant providers of digital infrastructure in emerging economies (Reddy, 2023). Geostrategically, the DSR aims to build a parallel, China-centric digital ecosystem outside the control of the United States (Reddy, 2023). By providing the hardware, software, and technical standards for digitalization in partner nations, Beijing seeks to embed these countries within its sphere of technological influence (Reddy, 2023). This strategy cultivates technological dependence on Chinese systems, promotes norms and standards favorable to China's interests, and ultimately works to reduce global reliance on the U.S.-led digital order, creating a viable alternative for nations to align with.

The distinct approaches of these three powers highlight that the current geopolitical contest is not simply a rivalry between nations, but a competition between fundamentally different models of techno-political organization. The United States is pursuing a market-centric, network-control model, leveraging the power of its private sector and its central position in existing global networks to enforce chokepoints. The European Union is advancing a regulatory-centric, norms-based model, using the power of its large market and legal frameworks to set global standards for technology governance. China, in contrast, is executing a state-centric, infrastructure-building model, using the full power of the state to construct a parallel, vertically integrated technological ecosystem from the ground up. The outcome of this three-way competition will determine the rules, norms, and structure of the global digital order for decades to come.

This competition has also created a dangerous, self-reinforcing dynamic of insecurity-driven innovation. U.S. export controls, intended to enhance American security by slowing China's military modernization, are perceived in Beijing as an existential threat to its national development (Ali, 2025). This profound sense of insecurity is the primary catalyst for China's massive, state-directed push for technological self-sufficiency (Chang et al., 2025). This crash program, in turn, is paradoxically accelerating indigenous Chinese innovation in precisely the areas the U.S. seeks to constrain, which is then perceived in Washington as a growing threat that justifies even more stringent controls (TokenRing AI, 2025). This creates a vicious cycle, a technological security dilemma where the actions each side takes to increase its own security and reduce its dependencies directly decreases the security of the other, fueling an escalatory arms race driven by mutual fear.

Conclusion: The New Security Dilemma, Mutually Assured Disruption

The strategic logic that has governed international security for more than half a century is being fundamentally rewritten. The foundational principles of classic deterrence, built on the threat of military force and the assumption of rational, deliberative human actors, are proving inadequate for an era defined by the algorithmic speed, systemic complexity, and weaponized interdependence of the global technology stack. The central argument of this manuscript is that the paradigm of deterrence has been supplanted by a new strategic logic of dependence. Power is now increasingly derived from the ability to control access to the critical technological ecosystems that form the substrate of modern economic and military strength.

This analysis has demonstrated how the United States, the European Union, and China are each navigating this new reality through distinct strategies aimed at shaping the architecture of global technological interdependence. The United States acts as the architect of the chokepoint, leveraging its historical dominance in key technologies to control and restrict access to the global value chain. The European Union operates as a regulatory superpower, using the gravity of its single market to set global norms and standards for the governance of technology. China is pursuing a grand strategy of self-reliance, attempting to build a parallel, state-centric ecosystem free from foreign dependencies while simultaneously exporting its model through the Digital Silk Road. As a summarizing effort, Table 2 describes the comparative strategies of the great techno-powers.

Table 2. Comparative Strategies of the Great Techno-Powers

Feature	United States	European Union	China
Core Strategic Concept	Chokepoint Control	Regulatory Sovereignty	Self-Reliance & Ecosystem Building
Primary Policy Instruments	CHIPS Act, Export Controls	AI Act, Chips Act, GDPR	Dual Circulation, Digital Silk Road
Source of Power	Network Centrality, Private Sector Dominance	Market Size, Legal Frameworks	State Direction, Public Investment
Ultimate Goal	Maintain Technological Leadership	Set Global Standards, Achieve Strategic Autonomy	Create a Parallel, China-Centric System

Source: Author's own elaboration.

This emerging landscape gives rise to a new and profoundly unsettling security dilemma, one best described as "Mutually Assured Disruption" (MAD). This concept serves as the successor to the Cold War doctrine of Mutually Assured Destruction. In this new paradigm, the ultimate coercive threat is not a nuclear exchange that would physically annihilate an adversary, but rather the ability to sever a rival's access to the foundational technologies of the modern world, to "unplug" a nation from the global tech stack. The weaponization of semiconductor supply chains, the fragmentation of data flows, and the balkanization of technical standards all point to a future where the most potent form of attack is systemic economic and societal disruption.

The rise of techno-nationalism, while a rational response by states seeking to enhance their resilience and security, carries immense risks (Malone, 2024). It threatens to fragment the global technology ecosystem, which could stifle the very innovation that drives progress, increase costs for all, and create a more volatile and unpredictable international system. The vicious cycle of insecurity-driven innovation, where each power's attempt to secure its own technological base is perceived as a threat by others, fuels an escalatory spiral with no clear off-ramp.

The central challenge for policymakers in the coming decades will be to manage the inherent tension of this new era. Interdependence is simultaneously a critical vulnerability to be mitigated and an unavoidable reality of a globally integrated technology ecosystem. The final, pressing question is whether the great powers can develop new norms, confidence-building measures, and adaptive security strategies to manage the profound risks of Mutually Assured Disruption (miniOrange, 2025). Or, is the world destined for a permanent state of techno-geopolitical rivalry behind a new, and perhaps more dangerous, Silicon Curtain? The answer will determine the future of international peace and security in the 21st century.

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INFORMALITY AND CONDITIONALITY: TWO PILLARS OF THE EU'S EXTERNAL MIGRATION POLICY

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Abstract

The management of migration flows has become a priority on the European Union's (EU) external agenda, particularly since the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015/2016. This article examines how the EU's external migration policy has evolved, focusing on the growing interaction between informality, conditionality and the externalisation of migration control. Given persistent difficulties in negotiating and implementing formal readmission agreements with countries of origin and transit, it looks at the emergence of informal instruments and the use of different areas of EU external action to secure cooperation on migration control, return and readmission. The article analyses this evolution using EU legal and policy instruments, institutional documents, and the academic literature, focusing on the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement and the partnerships subsequently developed with Tunisia, Mauritania and Egypt. It also examines how migration conditionality has expanded into areas such as development cooperation, visa policy and trade policy. The article argues that the growing use of informality and conditionality reflects a broader change in the EU's external migration policy. This approach gives the EU greater flexibility and raises concerns about transparency, democratic and judicial oversight, and the protection of fundamental rights. It may create tensions between migration-control objectives and the EU's normative identity, while also increasing the EU's dependence on third countries and its vulnerability to migration diplomacy and the instrumentalisation of migration.

Keywords

European Union; external migration policy; informal readmission arrangements; migration conditionality; migration diplomacy.

Resumo

A gestão dos fluxos migratórios tornou-se uma prioridade na agenda externa da União Europeia (UE), especialmente desde a chamada «crise dos refugiados» de 2015/2016. Este artigo analisa a evolução da política externa de migração da UE, centrando-se na interação crescente entre a informalidade, a condicionalidade e a externalização do controlo da migração. Dadas as dificuldades persistentes na negociação e implementação de acordos formais de readmissão com países de origem e de trânsito, o artigo analisa o surgimento de instrumentos informais e o recurso a diferentes domínios da ação externa da UE para garantir a cooperação em matéria de controlo migratório, regresso e readmissão. O artigo analisa esta evolução recorrendo a instrumentos jurídicos e políticos da UE, documentos institucionais e à literatura académica, centrando-se na Declaração UE-Turquia de 2016 e nas parcerias posteriormente desenvolvidas com a Tunísia, a Mauritânia e o Egito. Examina também a forma

como a condicionalidade em matéria de migração se expandiu para áreas como a cooperação para o desenvolvimento, a política de vistos e a política comercial. O artigo defende que o recurso crescente à informalidade e à condicionalidade reflete uma mudança mais ampla na política externa de migração da UE. Esta abordagem confere à UE maior flexibilidade e suscita preocupações quanto à transparência, ao controlo democrático e judicial e à proteção dos direitos fundamentais. Pode criar tensões entre os objetivos de controlo da migração e a identidade normativa da UE, ao mesmo tempo que aumenta a dependência da UE em relação a países terceiros e a sua vulnerabilidade à diplomacia migratória e à instrumentalização da migração.

Palavras-chave

União Europeia; política externa de migração; acordos informais de readmissão; condicionalidade migratória; diplomacia migratória.

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INFORMALITY AND CONDITIONALITY: TWO PILLARS OF THE EU'S EXTERNAL MIGRATION POLICY

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Introduction

International migration is a structural phenomenon, with significant political, legal, economic, and humanitarian implications for countries of origin, transit, and destination. Although the absolute number of international migrants has increased substantially, from approximately 84 million in 1970 to around 304 million in 2024, their share of the world's population has remained relatively stable, ranging between 2.3% and 3.7% (McAuliffe & Ceriani Cernadas, 2026, p. 15).

Migration patterns in the European Union (EU) have followed a similar trend. In 2025, approximately 30.6 million third-country nationals were residing in the EU, representing around 6.8% of the EU's total population (Eurostat, 2026). These figures show that immigration from third countries accounts for a small share of the EU population. Nevertheless, the perception of uncontrolled immigration remains widespread, reinforced, among other factors, by media coverage of maritime crossings in the Mediterranean. Against this backdrop, migration has become an important dimension of EU external action, as the control of migration flows, cooperation on return and readmission, and border management have become largely dependent on cooperation with third countries.

The incorporation of migration into the EU's external relations gained momentum following the Arab Spring in 2011 and, above all, the so-called "refugee crisis" of 2015/2016. From this period onwards, the external dimension of European migration policy became increasingly prominent, as reflected in strengthened cooperation with countries of origin and transit and in the externalisation of certain migration-control functions (Sousa, 2019). This process also brought changes to the instruments through which the EU seeks to influence the behaviour of its external partners, combining formal and informal forms of cooperation with different forms of conditionality.

Against this background, informality, externalisation and migration conditionality can be understood as three interconnected dimensions of external migration governance. In this article, informality refers to the use of political, diplomatic, or operational instruments which, while capable of producing significant practical effects, do not take the form of legally binding international agreements concluded in accordance with the procedures laid down in the Treaties. Externalisation encompasses a diverse range of strategies aimed at transferring migration-control, prevention, and management functions to third

countries, which consequently play a role in containing migration flows towards the EU (Frelick *et al.*, 2016; Wolff, 2024). Migration conditionality, in turn, refers to the use of other European policies, namely development assistance, visas, trade, investment, or financial assistance, as incentives or, conversely, as mechanisms of pressure to secure greater cooperation on migration control, return, and readmission (Frasca & Roman, 2023).

From 2015/2016 onwards, this dynamic became particularly visible. The EU–Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 (European Council, 2016) marked an important step in consolidating an approach based on political and operational commitments that went beyond the traditional model of formal readmission agreements. Similar instruments were developed with other external partners. This evolution is part of a wider shift in the external dimension of European migration policy, in which migration control has become increasingly important in the EU's relations with countries of origin and transit. Wolff's (2012) analysis is particularly relevant in this regard, showing how issues traditionally associated with European internal security, including migration, came to shape the EU's external agenda in the Mediterranean.

Informality, however, cannot be considered in isolation. Alongside the proliferation of legally non-binding instruments, the EU has intensified its use of migration conditionality, drawing on instruments from other policy areas to influence third countries' cooperation on readmission and migration control.

This transformation of the external dimension of EU migration policy raises a central question: to what extent is the growing use of informality and conditionality to pursue EU migration objectives compatible with the democratic and normative principles that should underpin its external action?

This question is particularly relevant when considering the concept of "European normative power" developed by Ian Manners. Manners (2002) proposed understanding the EU in terms of its capacity to define and diffuse norms and values, such as democracy and the protection of human rights, in international relations. European migration policy, however, poses a particular challenge to this conception, as the promotion of these values may come into tension with objectives of containment, return, and border control. The question, therefore, is whether the EU's use of informality and migration conditionality is consistent with the values it seeks to promote and with its identity as a normative actor.

Recent literature further underscores the importance of this question. Wolff (2024), for example, identifies in the recent development of European migration and asylum policy, particularly through the New Pact on Migration and Asylum, a growing acceptance and institutionalisation of illiberal practices of non-admission of migrants and refugees. According to Wolff (2024), these developments have been influenced by the rise of anti-immigration movements and accompanied by the proliferation of transactional migration agreements with authoritarian regimes, as well as by the increasing geopoliticisation of migration.

This article examines the interaction between informality and conditionality and its implications for EU external action in the field of migration. It draws on an analysis of the EU's legal and policy instruments, institutional documents, and academic literature.

The first part examines the traditional strategy based on formal readmission agreements and the obstacles that have limited their conclusion. The second analyses the emergence of an approach based on informal instruments of cooperation, focusing primarily on the 2016 EU–Turkey Statement (European Council, 2016) and the partnerships subsequently developed with Tunisia (European Commission, 2023b), Mauritania (European Commission, 2024b), and Egypt (European Commission, 2024c). The third examines the expansion of migration conditionality into different areas of EU external action, notably visa policy, development cooperation, and trade policy. Finally, it addresses the normative and strategic implications of this transformation, with particular attention to the protection of human rights, democratic legitimacy, the coherence of the EU's external action, and the growing ability of third countries to use migration as an instrument of political pressure.

The central argument is that the EU's growing use of informal instruments and migration conditionality is part of a broader change in its external action. Although this approach may give the EU greater flexibility to pursue migration objectives beyond its borders, it may also reduce transparency, democratic scrutiny and judicial oversight, weaken the protection of migrants' human rights, and increase the bargaining power of countries of origin and transit along migration routes.

Formal Cooperation on Readmission

The effective return of irregular migrants is an important part of EU migration policy. However, the implementation of return decisions depends largely on the cooperation of countries of origin and transit. Readmission agreements have therefore traditionally been an important tool of the EU's external migration policy.

By 2020, the EU had concluded 18 readmission agreements (Table 1), most of them with European countries, including several states covered by the enlargement process or the European Neighbourhood Policy.

The European Commission also has mandates to negotiate readmission agreements with several third countries, namely Morocco (2000), Algeria (2002), China (2002), Tunisia (2014), Jordan (2015), and Nigeria (2016), but none of these negotiations has produced concrete results (European Court of Auditors, 2021).

Negotiations on these agreements have proved difficult, as the interests of the parties often diverge. Although third countries generally accept the obligation to readmit their own nationals, they tend to resist provisions requiring them to readmit third-country nationals who have transited through their territory. This has made it more difficult to conclude agreements with transit countries such as Morocco and Tunisia (European Commission, 2011).

The assessment carried out by the European Court of Auditors identifies other obstacles, including the preference of some third countries for bilateral agreements with Member States and the perception that readmission agreements primarily serve European interests (European Court of Auditors, 2021).

Table 1. Readmission agreements concluded by the EU

Country	Entry into force
Hong Kong	1 March 2004
Macau	1 June 2004
Sri Lanka	1 May 2006
Albania	1 May 2006
Russia	1 June 2007
Ukraine	1 January 2008
North Macedonia	1 January 2008
Bosnia & Herzegovina	1 January 2008
Montenegro	1 January 2008
Serbia	1 January 2008
Moldova	1 January 2008
Pakistan	1 December 2010
Georgia	1 March 2011
Armenia	1 January 2014
Azerbaijan	1 September 2014
Turkey	1 October 2014
Cape Verde	1 December 2014
Belarus	1 July 2020

Source: European Commission (2026c)

As Wolff (2014) shows, the negotiation of the readmission agreement with Morocco illustrates how the EU's ability to secure the cooperation of third countries depends not only on the incentives it offers, but also on the domestic and regional preferences of its partners and their perceptions of the costs and benefits of cooperation.

As negotiations on formal readmission agreements proved difficult, migration was gradually incorporated into broader cooperation frameworks. The 2000 Cotonou Agreement marked an important stage in this process by bringing migration into the political dialogue between the EU and African, Caribbean and Pacific countries and establishing, in Article 13, an obligation to readmit nationals in an irregular situation and to negotiate bilateral readmission agreements providing for the repatriation of third-country nationals (European Union, 2000). The Samoa Agreement, which replaced the Cotonou Agreement, further developed this dimension (European Union, 2023). Article 74 allows for the adoption of "proportionate measures" where one of the parties fails to comply with the readmission obligations laid down in the agreement (European Union, 2023). This form of negative conditionality was not present in the Cotonou Agreement.

The European Neighbourhood Policy also gradually brought migration into the EU's relations with countries in the eastern and southern neighbourhoods. Following the 2015 review, migration dialogue, the fight against irregular migration, and cooperation on readmission became more prominent features of partnership instruments with these countries (European Commission & High Representative, 2015).

The Emergence of Informal Cooperation Instruments

In view of the persistent difficulties in concluding and implementing formal readmission agreements, from 2015 onwards, the European Commission began to favour informal

instruments with third countries regarded as strategic partners (European Commission, 2015). This approach offers greater flexibility and allows for faster negotiation and implementation of migration cooperation, particularly in the areas of return and readmission, while also drawing on development assistance and other areas of EU external action as incentives for cooperation (European Commission, 2015).

The new Partnership Framework with third countries consolidated this approach (European Commission, 2016) and led to the proliferation of "informal agreements", particularly in the areas of readmission and the fight against irregular migration. These instruments take a variety of political forms, including memoranda of understanding, joint declarations, joint pathways, and operational procedures. Their focus is on operational, informal, and results-oriented cooperation aimed at achieving immediate objectives, notably reducing migration flows and ensuring the effective return of migrants in an irregular situation, including through the use of negative conditionality linked to development assistance and other areas of EU external action (Reslow, 2017; Santos Vara, 2019; Frasca & Roman, 2023).

As widely observed in the academic literature, the use of informal, political, and operational instruments has represented a significant shift in the external dimension of European migration policy (Santos Vara, 2019; Cardwell & Dickson, 2023; Frasca & Roman, 2023; Fernando-Gonzalo, 2023). Informal arrangements allow cooperation to be adapted to the specific circumstances of each partner and make it easier to address practical issues, such as the issuance of travel documents or the organisation of return operations. They also allow different financial and political instruments to be combined within a single cooperation package. At the same time, they give Member States a more direct role in negotiations with third countries, reinforcing the intergovernmental character of the EU's external migration cooperation (Collett & Ahad, 2017).

The EU–Turkey Statement (2016): A Turning Point

The EU-Turkey Statement of 18 March 2016 (European Council, 2016), published as an annex to a European Council press release, marked an important turning point. It showed that significant operational results could be achieved through a political and informal instrument setting out commitments aimed at reducing irregular arrivals on the Greek islands.

The main mechanism provided for the return to Turkey of migrants arriving irregularly on the Greek islands from 20 March 2016 onwards, alongside a set of European commitments. These included the resettlement of Syrian refugees directly from Turkey under the "one-for-one" principle, the acceleration of the visa liberalisation process for Turkish citizens, the revitalisation of Turkey's accession process, and the mobilisation of €6 billion to support the reception of Syrian refugees in the country (European Council, 2016). This financial support was subsequently increased, reaching approximately €12 billion by 2023 through various European financial instruments (European Court of Auditors, 2024; European Commission, 2024a).

As the Statement was not an international agreement concluded under Article 218 TFEU, the General Court held in 2017 that it could not be attributed to the EU for the purposes

of judicial review and therefore lacked jurisdiction to hear actions brought against it (General Court, 2017a, 2017b, 2017c).

At the same time, the implementation of the returns envisaged by the Statement raised concerns about its compatibility with the right to asylum, the prohibition of collective expulsions, and the principle of *non-refoulement*, as provided for in Articles 18 and 19 of the Charter of Fundamental Rights of the European Union. The designation of Turkey as a safe third country was strongly contested in the literature, given the geographical limitation that Turkey maintains on the application of the 1951 Geneva Convention to European nationals, as well as its record of human rights violations (Farcy, 2015; Carrera & Guild, 2016; Greenhill, 2016; Ulusoy, 2016; Alpes *et al.*, 2017; Ciger, 2024).

The Expansion of Informal "Readmission Agreements"

Following the EU–Turkey experience, the Union developed informal "readmission agreements" with Afghanistan, Guinea, Bangladesh, Côte d'Ivoire, Ethiopia, and Gambia (European Commission, 2026c). These include the 2016 *Joint Way Forward on Migration Issues* with Afghanistan (European Union, 2016), which was replaced in 2021 by the *Joint Declaration on Migration Cooperation between Afghanistan and the EU* (European Union, 2021), as well as operational procedures agreed with Bangladesh in 2017 for the identification and return of migrants (European Commission, 2017).

These instruments have several features in common. As Frasca and Roman (2023) and Strik (2023) observe, they offer greater institutional flexibility than formal agreements and allow operational issues to be addressed more quickly, such as the acceptance of repatriation flights or European *laissez-passer* documents, often without binding commitments on human rights protection. Because they are developed outside the procedures governing the conclusion of binding international agreements, they are not subject to the same degree of democratic scrutiny by the European Parliament or judicial review (Cassarino, 2023; Strik, 2023; Fernando-Gonzalo, 2023; Wolff, 2024).

Greater flexibility does not, however, necessarily mean greater effectiveness. As Cassarino (2023) and Fernando-Gonzalo (2023) observe, there is still no robust empirical evidence that informal instruments are more effective than formal readmission agreements.

Nevertheless, informal migration cooperation aimed at preventing migration flows towards Europe and facilitating the return and readmission of migrants in an irregular situation has assumed an important role in the EU's external migration policy. This role is expressly recognised in the New Pact on Migration and Asylum (European Commission, 2020) and, more recently, in the 2026 European Strategy for Asylum and Migration Management (European Commission, 2026b).

Comprehensive Migration Partnerships: Tunisia, Mauritania and Egypt

The approach that developed after 2016 became particularly evident in the partnerships the EU established with countries of origin and transit since 2023, notably Tunisia,

Mauritania, and Egypt. These partnerships represent a further development, as they combine objectives relating to readmission, border control, and the prevention of irregular migration with areas such as macroeconomic assistance, development, trade, investment, and mobility. As Wolff (2024) observes, they also involve the European Commission and the Member States most directly concerned through the so-called "Team Europe" approach.

The partnership with Tunisia is one of the clearest examples of this approach. The increase in migration flows from Tunisia in 2022–2023 led to a high-level "Team Europe" meeting in July 2023 involving the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, the Italian Prime Minister, Giorgia Meloni, and the then Dutch Prime Minister, Mark Rutte, together with the Tunisian President, Kais Saied. The meeting preceded the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding establishing a comprehensive partnership between the EU and Tunisia. The memorandum, known as the *Migration Deal*, was published as an annex to a European Commission press release and covers five areas of cooperation: macroeconomic stability, economy and trade, the energy transition, people-to-people contacts, and migration and mobility (European Commission, 2023a).

The partnership covered a broad range of issues, but migration became one of its main areas of focus, particularly Tunisia's commitment to preventing irregular migration, strengthening border controls, combating migrant-smuggling networks, and readmitting Tunisian nationals expelled from Europe (García Andrade, 2024; Pijnenburg, 2023; De Leo, 2023; Strik & Robbesom, 2024). In return, the EU announced a range of financial support measures, including potential macro-financial assistance, dedicated funding to combat irregular migration, support for legal migration through a Talent Partnership, and assistance in the field of education (European Commission, 2023b).

The Tunisian case illustrates the growing interaction between informality and conditionality, as noted by several authors (García Andrade, 2024; Strik & Robbesom, 2024; Wolff, 2024). Migration cooperation is part of a broader package that uses instruments such as development assistance, trade, investment, and macro-financial assistance to encourage Tunisia's cooperation on migration containment.

At the same time, the agreement generated significant concerns about its legal basis, the role of the institutions, and the protection of human rights. As García Andrade (2024) points out, under European Union law, neither the European Commission nor the High Representative can conclude political agreements on behalf of the EU without prior authorisation from the Council. The agreement was also widely criticised for its informal nature, the limited degree of democratic and judicial scrutiny, and the lack of specific human rights safeguards. Critics also raised concerns about providing funding to an autocratic regime at a time when credible reports of ill-treatment of sub-Saharan migrants had multiplied, including collective expulsions to the desert, arbitrary detention, and racist attacks (García Andrade, 2024; Pijnenburg, 2023; De Leo, 2023; ECRE, 2023; Amnesty International, 2023; Strik & Robbesom, 2024; Wolff, 2024).

The partnership with Mauritania follows a similar approach. An increase in migrant arrivals to the Canary Islands prompted the mobilisation of "Team Europe", comprising the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sánchez, and led to the announcement of a financial package of approximately €210 million in connection with a partnership aimed at containing

migration flows (Koné, 2024). In March 2024, a Joint Declaration on a partnership with Mauritania was signed with the aim of strengthening migration-management capacities, cooperation on readmission, border control, the fight against smuggling networks, and the protection of refugees in Mauritanian territory (European Commission, 2024b).

In addition to criticism relating to cooperation on readmission (Koné, 2024), the instrument was challenged by refugee-protection organisations because of its potential humanitarian implications, including the risk of diverting migration flows towards even more dangerous routes (ECRE, 2024).

The comprehensive partnership with Egypt was formalised through a Joint Declaration signed in Cairo by Ursula von der Leyen and Egyptian President Abdel Fattah el-Sisi (European Commission, 2024c). As in the Tunisian case, the instrument is informal and covers several areas of cooperation, including macro-financial assistance, investment, trade, and migration. Under the partnership, the EU committed to mobilising approximately €7.4 billion for the period 2024–2027 (European Commission, 2024d), while Egypt agreed to strengthen efforts to combat irregular migration and reinforce border controls.

The *Migration Deal* with Egypt was also criticised for the lack of democratic and judicial scrutiny, inadequate human rights safeguards, and its potential impact on migrants' living conditions, including the risk of diverting migration flows towards alternative and more dangerous routes (Moorsel & Bonfiglio, 2024; Jakob & Malichudis, 2025).

These cases point to a broader shift towards informal partnerships, linking cooperation on readmission, border control, and prevention of irregular migration to financial support and other forms of conditionality.

Migration Conditionality across Different EU Policies

The EU's external action in the field of migration is also characterised by the increasing use of migration conditionality. As Strik (2023) observes, the difficulties in securing the cooperation of third countries through formal readmission agreements, combined with the lack of a strong incentive such as the prospect of EU accession, have led the EU to rely increasingly on instruments from other areas of its external action to influence partners' behaviour on migration-related matters.

Migration conditionality can take different forms. In general, it involves linking a third country's cooperation on migration to the granting, maintenance, or withdrawal of benefits provided through other EU policies. It can follow a "more for more" approach, where greater cooperation on migration allows a third country to obtain additional benefits, or a "less for less" approach, where insufficient cooperation may result in the reduction or suspension of certain benefits (Frasca & Roman, 2023).

Accordingly, development cooperation, trade policy, and visa policy have increasingly been used to encourage or pressure countries of origin and transit to strengthen border controls, align their visa policies with those of the EU, cooperate on the readmission, protect refugees, and combat irregular migration (Frasca & Roman, 2023).

Conditionality is not a new phenomenon. In the field of development assistance, the EU has long used conditionality to promote political and institutional reforms in partner countries, particularly in the areas of the rule of law, democracy, and human rights, in line with the objectives of EU external action set out in Article 21 TEU. What has changed in the EU's external migration policy is primarily the purpose for which these instruments are used. As pointed out by Frasca and Roman (2023) and Strik (2023), mechanisms previously associated with development objectives or the promotion of European values have increasingly been used to pursue specific migration-policy goals, such as reducing migration flows or increasing the number of returns of migrants in an irregular situation.

This development raises important questions. First, as several authors have stressed, it may undermine the fundamental objectives of development cooperation set out in Article 21(2)(d) TEU and Article 208(1) TFEU, particularly poverty reduction and eradication, if migration-related criteria become more important in decisions on the allocation of assistance (Gabrielli, 2012; Latek, 2017; García Andrade, 2022). As García Andrade (2022) points out, countries with significant development needs but less strategic relevance for the management of migration flows towards Europe may become relatively less important in determining the priorities of European development cooperation.

At the same time, as Castillejo (2017) observes, many third countries resist becoming "buffer zones" or accepting the readmission of migrants expelled from Europe because of the domestic political costs and economic implications involved. For many countries of origin, remittances sent by emigrants are an important source of income and make a significant contribution to reducing poverty and unemployment. According to the *World Migration Report 2026*, remittances to low- and middle-income countries amounted to approximately US$685 billion in 2024 (McAuliffe & Ceriani Cernadas, 2026), accounting for a significant share of GDP in several countries. As de Haas (2023, p. 98) notes, "migration is the most effective form of development aid", since resources reach families and local economies directly, without state intermediation or diversion.

This helps explain the limitations of positive conditionality. Gabrielli (2012) argues that, for some third countries, the benefits of emigration and remittances may outweigh the incentives offered by the EU for greater cooperation on migration control. Since 2016, the EU has also strengthened mechanisms to penalise what it considers insufficient cooperation on migration (Frasca & Roman, 2023; Strik, 2023).

Indeed, in the New Partnership Framework with third countries, the European Commission identified closer operational cooperation with countries of origin and transit as a priority of the external dimension of European migration policy. It sought to mobilise, in a coordinated manner, different instruments of European external action, including neighbourhood policy, development cooperation, trade, energy, security, and visa policy, around the objectives of reducing irregular migration and increasing return and readmission rates (European Commission, 2016). Countries willing to cooperate in preventing irregular migration, strengthening border controls, and facilitating readmission could receive increased financial support, visa facilitation, or closer political relations with the EU. But insufficient cooperation could lead to reductions in financial assistance or affect bilateral relations (European Commission, 2016). One of the main changes introduced by the New Partnership Framework was the more systematic use of conditionality, including the punitive "less for less" approach (Sousa, 2019).

The combination of incentives and restrictive measures reflects a broader change in the use of conditionality. The EU no longer relies solely on its resources to make migration cooperation more attractive; it also uses the potential costs of non-cooperation as a mean of exerting influence. This shift is particularly visible in the 2019 reform of the Visa Code, which introduced a clear "carrot and stick" approach (Vavoula, 2019). New Article 25a, introduced by Regulation (EU) 2019/1155, allows the Commission to assess third countries' cooperation on readmission and, under certain circumstances, to propose measures designed either to facilitate or restrict the issuing of visas, depending on whether cooperation on readmission is considered satisfactory or insufficient. Restrictive measures include increased visa fees, limitations on access to simplified procedures, and restrictions on the issuing of multiple-entry visas (European Parliament and Council, 2019).

This reform has been criticised by several authors, who question its proportionality, effectiveness, and compatibility with European values (Guild, 2019; Vavoula, 2019; Frasca & Roman, 2023; Strik, 2023). Guild (2019) considers the reform potentially unfair and discriminatory, describing it as a form of "collective punishment" that affects individuals who have neither responsibility for nor control over the national authorities' decisions concerning cooperation with the EU on readmission. Moreover, such sanctions may prove counterproductive by increasing diplomatic tensions with third countries (Guild, 2019; García Andrade, 2022). Visa restrictions may also conflict with broader migration-policy objectives, as reducing opportunities for legal mobility could increase incentives to use irregular channels. Finally, as Strik (2023) points out, such restrictive measures may directly or indirectly affect the mobility of people seeking international protection, raising important questions about fundamental rights.

The externalisation of European visa policy is another part of this strategy. According to Landini and Sciortino (2023), visa requirements are effective only when neighbouring countries with visa-free regimes adopt visa policies aligned with those of the EU. Cooperation on visa policy has therefore become part of a broader strategy aimed at preventing irregular migration before it reaches the EU's external borders. This dimension was reinforced by Regulation (EU) 2025/2441, which expanded the grounds for suspending visa exemption. These include insufficient cooperation on readmission, misalignment between a third country's visa policy and that of the EU where such misalignment contributes to irregular migratory movements, the use of migration as an instrument of political pressure, and the establishment of citizenship-by-investment schemes (European Parliament & Council, 2025).

Migration conditionality has also extended to trade policy. As Lavenex (2023) observes, since the Seville European Council of 2002, the EU has sought to include provisions in trade, cooperation, and association agreements aimed at strengthening third countries' cooperation on migration control and readmission. More recently, the EU has begun to use the Generalised Scheme of Preferences (GSP) within the framework of its migration policy. The new Regulation (EU) 2026/1395 on the GSP provides, in Article 22, for the temporary withdrawal of tariff preferences in situations involving serious and systematic deficiencies relating to the readmission of nationals of beneficiary countries when such persons are migrants in an irregular situation in the EU (European Parliament & Council, 2026).

According to Lavenex (2023) and Strik (2023), this development marks a significant change in how the GSP is used. The GSP no longer serves only to promote development and broader objectives of EU external action, such as human rights, labour rights, environmental protection, and good governance. It may also be used as a sanctioning instrument in the field of readmission, making access to trade benefits conditional on the beneficiary country's cooperation with the EU's migration-policy objectives.

This trend is likely to intensify. The *European Strategy for Asylum and Migration Management*, presented by the European Commission in January 2026, expressly states that the EU should pursue an "assertive migration diplomacy", strengthening links between migration policy and other areas of external action and using instruments such as visa policy, trade, and external financing as incentives and means of influence to secure third-country cooperation on migration containment (European Commission, 2026b). The Strategy specifically refers to the use of the mechanism under Article 25a of the Visa Code, the suspension of visa exemption, and the possibility of temporarily withdrawing trade preferences to sanction insufficient third-country cooperation on return and readmission (European Commission, 2026b). The same approach is reflected in the EU Strategy for Visa Policy, also presented in January 2026 (European Commission, 2026a).

The proposal for the new *Global Europe* Regulation for the 2028–2034 Multiannual Financial Framework likewise reinforces this approach by providing for mechanisms to suspend financial support to countries considered insufficiently cooperative on readmission (European Commission, 2025).

These developments point to a form of migration conditionality that combines external instruments to encourage third-country cooperation on readmission and migration control with measures to penalise insufficient cooperation. Migration conditionality is also extending into policy areas that have traditionally served different purposes within European external action. This is significant because it is changing the way different EU external policies are used and connected to one another. Development, trade, and mobility are increasingly considered not only in relation to their own objectives, but also according to their contribution to migration-related goals, particularly return and migration control.

Unintended Consequences: The Erosion of EU Normative Values and Vulnerability to Migration Diplomacy

The growing use of informality and conditionality in the external dimension of EU migration policy has implications that extend beyond the immediate effectiveness of cooperation on migration control and readmission. By prioritising flexible instruments, conditionality, and the externalisation of migration control, the EU risks creating two related problems: growing tension between migration-control objectives and the normative values underpinning its external action, and increasing dependence on third countries, which may, in turn, make the EU more vulnerable to the instrumentalisation of migration.

In the international system, the EU seeks to present itself as an actor committed to fundamental values, particularly democracy, the rule of law, and respect for human rights, as reflected in Articles 2 and 21 TEU. This is, as Ceccorulli and Fassi (2022) emphasise, an important element of the international identity that the EU seeks to project.

However, as Gammeltoft-Hansen (2006) and Völkel (2014) observe, the external dimension of European migration policy, centred on border control, migration containment, readmission, and the fight against irregular migration, frequently comes into tension with broader objectives of EU external action, including the promotion of democracy and human rights. Abrisketa Uriarte (2017) stresses that transferring functions relating to border control, the prevention of irregular migration, and return to third countries may have significant implications for access to asylum procedures, as it may, in practice, restrict refugees' access to international protection mechanisms. The use of the concept of a "safe third country" likewise reflects this dynamic, as it allows protection responsibilities to be transferred while increasing the risks of return operations that violate the principle of *non-refoulement* (Guild, 2022; Frasca & Roman, 2023). The issue is therefore not only whether third countries can control migration flows, but also whether they are able and willing to provide adequate protection to people who are prevented from reaching the EU or who are returned from European territory.

The normative tension is equally relevant in the use of informal instruments. As Fernando-Gonzalo (2023) points out, by operating outside the formal framework for concluding international agreements laid down in Article 218 TFEU, these instruments reduce the involvement of the European Parliament and limit the scope for judicial review. At the same time, they enable return operations and the transfer of migration-management responsibilities, with significant material effects on migrants' rights. As highlighted in the literature, this may reveal a prioritisation of migration-policy objectives over fundamental values (Ceccorulli & Fassi, 2022; Frasca & Roman, 2023; Cassarino, 2023; Strik & Robbesom, 2024). This concern has also been raised by the European Parliament, which has criticised the proliferation of informal agreements without adequate mechanisms of democratic or judicial oversight (European Parliament, 2021).

The problem is particularly serious when migration cooperation involves authoritarian regimes or countries with weak human rights standards. As Strik (2023) observes, by financing efforts to combat irregular migration in such countries, the EU may expose migrants to significant risks of abuse and violations of fundamental rights, in ways that conflict with the principles it seeks to promote internationally.

EU cooperation with Libya provides a particularly significant example. Despite political instability and evidence of arbitrary detention, torture, and inhuman treatment of migrants intercepted and detained in the country, the EU continues to cooperate with the Libyan authorities on migration control (Ceccorulli & Fassi, 2022; Strik, 2023). Morocco presents similar concerns. As Carrera, Cassarino and Qadim (2016) point out, increased cooperation on migration control has been accompanied by reports concerning the conditions in which migrants from sub-Saharan Africa are detained and expelled, including allegations of violence, arbitrary detention, and summary expulsions.

A similar tension can be observed in recent cooperation with Afghanistan. Although the EU does not formally recognise the Taliban regime, its recent contacts with Afghan

authorities to facilitate the return and readmission of Afghan nationals raise serious concerns, given the risks of persecution, torture, or other inhuman or degrading treatment faced by certain groups in the country (Ghafori, 2026). Ghafori (2026) argues that such cooperation may contribute to normalising the Taliban regime and could undermine the EU's credibility as an international actor committed to protecting human rights.

The implications of this development, however, extend beyond the protection of human rights and the EU's normative credibility. By becoming increasingly dependent on third-country cooperation to prevent migrants from reaching its territory, the EU creates a relationship of interdependence that may allow these countries to use their increasingly important role in migration management to extract concessions from the Union. As highlighted in the literature, countries such as Turkey, Libya, Tunisia, and Morocco have increasingly used migration cooperation as a bargaining tool to obtain financial support, economic advantages, or greater international legitimacy (Völkel, 2014; Münch, 2018; Guild, 2022; Cassarino, 2023).

Cassarino (2023) refers to this dynamic as "reverse conditionality": while the EU seeks to make financial, commercial, or political benefits conditional on third-country cooperation on migration, these countries can also use their cooperation on migration to influence the EU's own decisions. The ability to control migratory flows has therefore become an important source of bargaining power for countries of origin and transit, particularly those controlling routes that are considered strategic by the EU. Guild (2022) develops this argument, arguing that the excessive delegation of migration control has weakened the EU's position. According to the author, the greater the importance attached to reducing arrivals, the greater the ability of third countries may be to use migration as a bargaining chip in negotiations with Brussels, obtaining political, economic, or diplomatic advantages in other areas. As Strik (2023) notes, the EU's growing dependence on cooperation from these countries tends to reduce its diplomatic room for manoeuvre, leading to more cautious responses to human rights violations perpetrated by neighbouring authoritarian regimes.

This growing dependence on the "migration diplomacy" of third countries has another important consequence, highlighted in the literature: increased exposure to the instrumentalisation of migration as a form of hybrid threat, blackmail, or political pressure by third countries (Sousa, 2022; Guild, 2022; Strik, 2023).

The events at the EU–Belarus border in 2021 provide a clear example of this dynamic. In response to European sanctions, Alexander Lukashenko's regime facilitated the arrival of thousands of migrants at the borders of Poland, Lithuania, and Latvia. A similar episode occurred in Ceuta, when Morocco allowed thousands of migrants to enter in protest against Spain's decision to admit, on health grounds, the leader of the Polisario Front (Sousa, 2022; Guild, 2022; Strik, 2023).

This form of pressure is not new. Muammar Gaddafi's regime had already threatened the EU with an "invasion" of migrants from sub-Saharan Africa, demanding funding and diplomatic rehabilitation (Sousa, 2022). Similarly, in 2019–2020, Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan threatened to open the borders and allow migrants to cross into Greece, using migration to put pressure on the EU amid disagreements over Turkey's offensive in Syria and the terms of European funding (Sousa, 2022).

All these episodes demonstrate that, by making migration containment a strategic priority of its external action, the EU has ultimately increased its dependence on external partners, some of which have limited democratic standards and problematic human rights records. This, in turn, leaves the EU more vulnerable to the strategic instrumentalisation of migration by third countries.

Conclusions

This article shows how the EU's approach to the external dimension of migration policy has changed. The difficulties in concluding formal readmission agreements with countries of origin and transit have led the EU, particularly since the "refugee crisis" of 2015/2016, to rely increasingly on informal cooperation, while making greater use of migration conditionality across different areas of its external action.

The proliferation of "informal agreements" has allowed the EU to adopt more flexible forms of cooperation focused on immediate objectives, particularly the prevention of irregular migration, return, and readmission. The EU–Turkey Statement of 2016 was an important milestone in this process, not only because of its impact on migration flows in the Eastern Mediterranean, but also because it provided a framework for cooperation outside the traditional model of a formal international agreement. The partnerships developed with Tunisia, Mauritania and Egypt provide further examples of this approach, as migration cooperation has increasingly been included in broader packages covering financial assistance, development, investment, trade and mobility.

At the same time, the EU has increasingly used instruments from other areas of its external action to encourage or put pressure on third countries to cooperate on migration control, return, and readmission.

This approach to the external dimension of migration policy, based on informality and conditionality, nevertheless raises important legal, political and normative concerns. First, the growing use of informal instruments may reduce transparency and limit the democratic scrutiny and judicial review that apply to formal international agreements. This is important in an area where migrants' fundamental rights may be at stake, including the right to access international protection and the principle of *non-refoulement*.

Second, the growing centrality of migration conditionality, in both its positive ("more for more") and negative ("less for less") dimensions, reflects the increasing use of different EU policies in pursuit of migration-control objectives. Visa policy, development cooperation, trade policy and other external-action instruments are increasingly playing an explicit role in securing third countries's cooperation on return and readmission. Although the EU remains formally committed to democracy, the rule of law and human rights, its increasing use of external instruments to contain migration may conflict with these values. In particular, the externalisation of migration control to countries with weak institutions or poor human rights standards may increase the risk of fundamental rights violations against migrants and refugees in those countries. Cooperation with Libya clearly illustrates this tension and raises questions about whether the practices the EU supports externally are consistent with the values it seeks to promote.

The analysis also points to a second, strategic consequence. By assigning countries of origin and transit an increasingly important role in containing migration flows, the EU has also become dependent on such cooperation. This dependence may give third countries greater leverage to use migration in negotiations with the EU, allowing them to seek financial support, economic benefits, political concessions, or greater international legitimacy. The concepts of "migration diplomacy" (Guild, 2022) and "reverse conditionality" (Cassarino, 2023) help explain this dynamic. Influence does not flow only from the EU to its partners; third countries can also use their ability to facilitate or restrict migration to influence European decisions. The more importance the EU attaches to containing migration before migrants reach its borders, the more bargaining power countries controlling the main migration routes have. The cases discussed above, particularly those involving Belarus and Morocco, show how the EU's strategy of controlling migration flows may make it more vulnerable to the instrumentalisation of migration.

The main argument of this article is therefore that the growing combination of informality and migration conditionality is more than a response to the difficulties involved in concluding readmission agreements. It reflects a broader transformation of the external dimension of EU migration policy, in which different instruments are increasingly used to pursue migration objectives, namely reducing migration flows and improving the effectiveness of returns of migrants in an irregular situation. If these objectives are prioritised over transparency, accountability, fundamental rights and the coherence of the EU's external action, greater reliance on informal cooperation and conditionality may undermine the EU's normative credibility and limit its strategic autonomy.

The EU's cooperation with third countries on migration must be consistent with the legal principles and values that guide its external action. For this reason, preserving the EU's credibility as a values-based international actor requires a careful balance between migration control and its commitment to the fundamental principles on which the European project is based.

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NAVIGATING THE EUROPEAN UNION'S POSITION ON WESTERN SAHARA: A TRADE-OFF BETWEEN SELF-DETERMINATION AND THE INSTRUMENTALISATION OF MIGRATION?

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Abstract

The Western Sahara question highlights the European Union's wavering commitment to upholding international law. This is reflected in its deepening association with Morocco across key areas such as trade, security, and migration. Morocco's instrumentalisation of migration across the Western Mediterranean can be interpreted as an attempt to influence the European Union and its Member States' position on Western Sahara. At the same time, its people continue to be denied their right to self-determination and control over their natural resources. In the clash between realpolitik and international law, one of them has to yield. While avoiding the political repercussions of denouncing Morocco's occupation of Western Sahara, the European Union has sustained the protracted political and legal stalemate, reinforcing the status quo and undermining the legitimate claim of the Saharawi people to determine their future.

Keywords

European Union; migration instrumentalisation; Morocco; self-determination; Western Sahara.

Resumo

A questão do Saara Ocidental põe em evidência o compromisso vacilante da União Europeia em defender o direito internacional. Isto reflete-se no aprofundamento da sua associação com Marrocos em áreas-chave como o comércio, a segurança e a migração. A instrumentalização da migração no Mediterrâneo Ocidental por parte de Marrocos pode ser interpretada como uma tentativa de influenciar a posição da União Europeia e dos seus Estados-Membros relativamente ao Saara Ocidental. Ao mesmo tempo, continua a ser negado ao seu povo o direito à autodeterminação e ao controlo sobre os seus recursos naturais. No confronto entre a realpolitik e o direito internacional, um dos dois tem de ceder. Ao evitar as repercussões políticas de denunciar a ocupação do Saara Ocidental por Marrocos, a União Europeia tem sustentado o prolongado impasse político e jurídico, reforçando o status quo e minando a reivindicação legítima do povo saharaui de determinar o seu futuro.

Palavras-chave

União Europeia; instrumentalização da migração; Marrocos; autodeterminação; Saara Ocidental.

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Introduction

Western Sahara is the battleground for "one of the oldest unresolved ongoing conflicts in the world today" (Sansanwal and Kamath, 2020: 117). Control over the territory has been disputed since 1975 by the Kingdom of Morocco and the *Frente Popular de Liberación de Saguía el Hamra y Río de Oro* (Front Polisario), a nationalist liberation movement recognised as the representative of the inhabitants of Western Sahara (UN General Assembly, 1979: 204, para. 7), the Sahrawi people.

More than fifty years ago, in its seminal advisory opinion, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) affirmed the right of the territory's population to self-determination. However, despite the continued efforts of the United Nations (UN) to resolve this dispute, it has persisted with no resolution in sight. In particular, Western Sahara's self-determination remains a contentious and polarising topic for the European Union (EU).

Due to their aligned interests and priorities, the EU and Morocco are partners across various domains. Indeed, "[w]ith the Moroccan coast visible over the Straits of Gibraltar, Mediterranean EU member states are particularly concerned with migration, regional security, free trade and fisheries" (Kausch, 2009: 167). The migration issue, specifically, has dominated the European agenda over the past decade. Morocco plays a key role in controlling irregular migration from North Africa along the Western Mediterranean route, one of the most (in)famous transit corridors to Europe.

The Court of Justice of the European Union (CJEU) has repeatedly addressed the EU's obligations under international law and its duty to respect the principle of self-determination. Yet, beyond its legal dimensions, the conflict also raises complex political questions.

This article explores whether Morocco has instrumentalised migration (i.e., the strategic or threatened use of migratory flows to exert political pressure and obtain concessions) to influence the EU's position on Western Sahara's self-determination. It argues that this occurrence illustrates how *realpolitik* considerations can override the EU's and its Member States' commitment to upholding international law.

To engage critically with this perspective, the article first provides a historical overview of the conflict (section 2), followed by an assessment of the right of the people of Western

Sahara to self-determination (section 3). It then examines the EU's legal position in light of its relationship with Morocco (section 4), culminating in an analysis of the extent to which Morocco can be argued to have instrumentalised migration to consolidate its control over Western Sahara and influence the EU's position (section 5).

Between a rock and a hard place: Western Sahara's endless stalemate

Western Sahara is one of the world's remaining non-self-governing territories (NSGTs), frequently described as "Africa's last colony" (Smith, 2013: 267; Allen and Trinidad, 2024: 1). Bordered by Morocco to the north, Mauritania to the south and east, Algeria to the northeast, and the Atlantic Ocean to the west, the territory is predominantly desert but possesses valuable resources, including phosphate reserves, rich fishing grounds, and strategic maritime access (Sansanwal and Kamath, 2020: 112). Yet, notwithstanding decades of UN involvement, its decolonisation process remains unrealised.

Formerly administered by Spain, Western Sahara was placed on the UN list of NSGTs under Article 73 of the UN Charter in 1963 (Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, 2020: 36). Following the adoption of the 1960 Declaration on the Granting of Independence to Colonial Countries and Peoples, which recognised the right of all peoples to determine their political status and pursue their economic, social, and cultural development (UN General Assembly, 1960a: 67; para. 2), Spain announced its intention to organise a referendum through which the Sahrawi people could determine the territory's future (Allen and Trinidad, 2024: 8).

However, competing sovereignty claims by Morocco and Mauritania prevented this process from materialising. Since gaining independence in 1956, Morocco, in particular, has consistently maintained that Western Sahara is part of its national territory (*Front Polisario v Council*, 2015: 2; para. 1).

In its 1975 advisory opinion, the ICJ concluded that historical allegiances between certain Sahrawi tribes and Morocco or Mauritania did not amount to territorial sovereignty, and therefore did not affect the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination (*Western Sahara*, 1975: 68; para. 162). Soon after, Morocco organised the Green March, during which approximately 350,000 civilians, accompanied by 20,000 troops, entered Western Sahara (Sansanwal and Kamath, 2020: 108). This occupation was consolidated by "the construction of a 2,700-kilometre warfare wall (…), thereby taking physical possession of two-thirds of Western Sahara" (Mordi, 2015: 102).

Spain then signed the Madrid Accords with Morocco and Mauritania, establishing a temporary tripartite administration of the territory. Although it required that the will of the indigenous population, as expressed through the *Djema'a* (a consultative assembly of indigenous Sahrawi representatives apointed by Spain), be respected (Mensi, 2018: 551; Pereira Coutinho, 2019: 107), this agreement could neither lawfully transfer administering authority nor confer sovereignty on Morocco or Mauritania (*Western*

Sahara Campaign UK [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 44, 45; paras. 225, 230).[1]

Spain withdrew from Western Sahara in 1976 (Benabdallah, 2009: 419), considering it no longer had responsibility over the territory. This triggered an armed conflict between Morocco and Mauritania, and the Algeria-backed Front Polisario. Soon after, the Front Polisario proclaimed the Sahrawi Arab Democratic Republic (SADR). Following Mauritania's withdrawal from the conflict, Morocco consolidated its control over most of Western Sahara (UN General Assembly, 1979: 204; para. 5). Accordingly, some scholars characterise Morocco as an occupying power, exercising effective control over a territory to which it holds no sovereign title (Kassoti, 2020: 375-376; Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, 2020: 41).[2]

In 1991, UN mediation resulted in an agreement between Morocco and the Front Polisario that provided for "a ceasefire, the exchange of prisoners, the repatriation of refugees, the withdrawal of Moroccan forces from the territory and a referendum on self-determination" (Benabdallah, 2009: 419). The UN Mission for the Referendum in Western Sahara (MINURSO) was established to identify those eligible to vote in the referendum (Smith, 2013: 277; Mordi, 2015: 104), as well as to supervise the ceasefire.

However, such a referendum has yet to take place. Besides disagreements over voter eligibility (Darbouche and Zoubir, 2008: 92), Morocco rejects any referendum that includes independence as an option, while the Front Polisario opposes any autonomy proposal under Moroccan sovereignty that is not the result of a democratic vote. As Mordi (2015: 106) observes, it is difficult to foresee a compromise between actors "pursuing mutually exclusive goals of territorial aggrandisement on one hand, and independence on the other (…)". Alongside MINURSO's shortcomings, subsequent negotiation efforts have failed (Fernanández-Molina and Khakee, 2024: 2).

As a result, Western Sahara remains divided by the Moroccan sand wall, with Morocco controlling the western portion of the territory and the Front Polisario administering a smaller, less populated area in the east (Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, 2020: 39). The nearly three-decade ceasefire collapsed in 2020 after clashes in the demilitarised buffer zone, resulting in low-intensity armed hostilities resuming (Fernández-Molina and Khakee, 2024: 2). Although the UN continues to reaffirm the Sahrawi people's right to self-determination, no mutually acceptable political solution has materialised.

Western Sahara's exercise of the right to self-determination

The right to self-determination is enshrined in Article 1(2) of the UN Charter and Article 1 of both the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights and the

[1] Indeed, "the [UN] General Assembly has never recognised that the Kingdom of Morocco has the status of administering power (*de jure* or *de facto*) and even continues, to the present time, to show the Kingdom of Spain as administering power in its list of non-self-governing territories and administering powers" (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 45; para. 229).
[2] A detailed discussion of the law of occupation falls outside the scope of this article. Nonetheless, the relevant provisions include "Articles 42 and 43 of the 1907 Hague Regulations, Articles 2 and 64 of the Fourth Geneva Convention and Article 1(4) of the First Protocol additional of 8 June 1977 to the Geneva Conventions of 12 August 1949 (…)" (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 46; para. 237).

International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (Van Elsuwege, 2018: 748). For NSGTs such as Western Sahara, this principle requires that their political status be determined "through free and genuine expression of will of people inhabiting the given territory" (Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, 2020: 37).

The right to self-determination is also regarded as a peremptory norm (*jus cogens*) of international law, giving rise to *erga omnes* obligations owed to the international community as a whole (Pereira Coutinho, 2018: 110). Accordingly, in light of Morocco's continued occupation in breach of the right to self-determination, States and international organisations are obligated not to recognise Morocco's sovereignty claims over Western Sahara and to refrain from dealings with Rabat concerning the region (Allen and Trinidad, 2024: 1).

UN General Assembly Resolution 1541 (XV) provides that a NSGT may realise its self-determination through one of three outcomes: (i) emergence as an independent State; (ii) free association with another State; (iii) or integration with an existing sovereign State (UN General Assembly, 1960b: 29, Annexe Principle VI). As Western Sahara remains on the UN NSGTs list to this day, its decolonisation process cannot be considered complete unless one of these is achieved in accordance with international law.

Morocco argues that the Sahrawi people have already exercised this right through the *Djema'a* in 1975 and 1976, legitimising Western Sahara's integration into the Moroccan state (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 31, 34; paras. 154, 171). However, in the context of these episodes, the *Djema'a* could not be considered as having expressed the free will of the Sahrawi people (Pereira Coutinho, 2019: 109-110). Accordingly, neither the UN nor Spain accepted that these events amounted to a genuine act of self-determination within the meaning of UN General Assembly Resolutions 1514 (XV) and 1541 (XV) (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 37; para. 184).

Consequently, Morocco's integration of Western Sahara into its territory cannot be recognised as the lawful completion of the decolonisation process. The territory was partitioned and annexed without a UN-supervised consultation of its people (Kalicka-Mikołajczyk, 2020: 39). The ensuing conflict has also displaced thousands of Sahrawis, many of whom are living in the Tindouf refugee camps administered by the Front Polisario, in Algeria (*Front Polisario v Council*, 2015: 4; para. 16).

The continued failure to ensure Western Sahara's right to self-determination also has consequences besides the territorial dispute itself. In particular, it raises the issue of whether third parties, such as the EU, can lawfully conclude and implement agreements with Morocco that extend to Western Sahara or its natural resources without the consent of the Sahrawi people.

"He that is not with me…": The EU and Western Sahara's self-determination

An overview of the EU-Morocco relationship

Morocco has a long-standing partnership with the EU across various sectors, including commerce, economic development, and good governance (Suárez-Collado and Contini, 2021: 1162). However, "[t]rade, security and migration are at the heart of EU-Morocco relations" (Sansawal and Kamath, 2020: 116).

Morocco is a privileged partner of the European Neighbourhood Policy (Mensi, 2018: 552). The goal of this overarching framework is to deepen cooperation between the EU and southwestern Mediterranean territories (Hamzaoui, 2020: 106), given the increasing interdependence between them (Benabdallah, 2009: 431). Namely, it "aims at exporting the EU's values and norms beyond the territorial borders of the Union to create an area of stability, security and prosperity in its vicinity" (Van Elsuwege, 2018: 750).

In this milieu, Morocco is the southern Mediterranean country that most benefits from financial support for economic and social development (Kausch, 2009: 166; Sansawal and Kamath, 2020: 116; Suárez-Collado and Contini, 2022: 1163). It also holds a special "advanced status" (Benabdallah, 2009: 431; Sansawal and Kamath, 2020: 116; Fernández-Molina and Khakee, 2024: 4), allowing for substantial political and economic integration with the EU (Kausch, 2009: 166).

The legal basis for EU-Morocco trade relations is the Euro-Mediterranean Agreement (Mensi, 2018: 552; Pereira Coutinho, 2019: 111), an Association Agreement between the European Communities and their Member States and Morocco signed in 1996. It set out conditions for the gradual liberalisation of trade in "goods, services and capital, and to promote trade and economic relations (…), through dialogue and cooperation, including in the fisheries and agriculture sectors" (Mensi, 2018: 552). This agreement also provided for cooperation in political, economic, social, scientific, and cultural areas (Benabdallah, 2009: 431).

The EU counts the fight against terrorism and control of irregular migration among its major political priorities (Pereira Coutinho, 2019: 110-111), relying on Morocco for these security and migration ventures. This encompasses the externalisation of migration control to third countries, in which Morocco has a crucial role. For instance, Suárez-Collado and Contini (2022: 1163-1164) note that, between 2018 and 2022, "EU-Morocco cooperation has stopped around 135,000 irregular migrants from reaching the continent via maritime routes off the Moroccan coast, while 38,000 would-be immigrants have been rescued at sea and over 300 people-smuggling networks disbanded".

Concerning Western Sahara, its conflict is important for the EU-Morocco *dialogue politique renforcé* because it impacts European interests, including the establishment of a regional free trade zone (Kausch, 2009: 167). Yet, the EU "has kept its legal relations with Western Sahara somewhat ambiguous" (Odermatt, 2023: 3). Although expressing concern for "the pro-longed nature of the conflict and its implications for security, respect for human rights and co-operation in the region" (Kassoti, 2020: 376), the EU has been reluctant to fully affirm Western Sahara's legal status as an occupied territory and its people's right to self-determination.

Furthermore, the EU's refusal to recognise Morocco's territorial claims while also withholding support from the Front Polisario and the SADR (Sansawal and Kamath, 2020: 115) compounds this sense of apprehension. As stated by Van Elsuwege (2018: 755), despite supporting the UN's negotiation process for a resolution based on international law, the EU has treated Western Sahara as a NSGT administered by Morocco. This tepid attitude sustains a *status quo* that benefits Morocco's aspirations, "reinforced by the intractability, long-frozen status, and low priority of the conflict" (Fernández-Molina and Khakee, 2024: 3).

Under their Association Agreement, the EU and Morocco concluded, *inter alia*, a "Liberalisation Agreement" (concerning agricultural, processed agricultural and fisheries products), a "Fisheries Agreement", and a "Fishing Protocol" to be implemented in areas under Morocco's jurisdiction (Pereira Coutinho, 2019: 111). Yet, in practice, they "were applied to goods originating from the territory of Western Sahara and its coastal waters" (Odermatt, 2023: 4). This led to the exploitation of natural resources belonging to the indigenous people in breach of international law (Allen and Trinidad, 2024: 37).

As such, it is unsurprising that the interpretation and application of these (and subsequent) agreements were challenged before the CJEU (Van Elsuwege, 2018: 753). As the following subsection considers, proceedings stemming from the EU-Morocco agreements have significant implications for Western Sahara's right to self-determination within the EU's legal landscape.

The legal implications of EU case-law on Western Sahara's self-determination

The EU's external action is based on respect for the UN Charter and international law (Van Elsuwege, 2018: 750). Multiple references in the EU treaties attest to a positive predisposition towards the latter (*völkerrechtsfreundlich*). According to Hummelbrunner and Prickartz (2016: 25), EU institutions must consider and conform to their obligations under it, for instance, when concluding international agreements with third States.

While the EU enjoys a certain degree of autonomy, it must align with international law and avoid breaching its responsibilities as an international (albeit *sui generis*) actor. Nevertheless, the CJEU retains "the right to decide on the validity, effect and applicability of international law in the EU legal order on a case-by-case basis, especially when there might be a conflict with EU constitutional principles" (Hummelbrunner and Prickartz, 2016: 25).

Given the EU's commitment to international law, one would expect its approach to Western Sahara's decolonisation and self-determination to reflect this. Instead, the EU has evaded addressing the territory's disputed status and failed to define the extent of its agricultural and fisheries agreements with Morocco. The CJEU has affirmed the essential nature of the right to self-determination (*Council v Front Polisario*, 2016: 15; para. 88). However, it has also "confined itself to an analysis of the territorial scope of the respective agreements without clarifying the substantive legal implications stemming

from the principle of self-determination in the EU legal order" (Van Elsuwege, 2018: 753).[3]

In *Front Polisario v Council* (2015), the General Court annulled the Council of the EU's decision approving the Liberalisation Agreement as far as it applied to Western Sahara (*Front Polisario v Council*, 2015: 34; para. 247). While the Court found no absolute prohibition on the EU concluding agreements with third States that may apply to a territory they control without recognised sovereignty such as Morocco (*Front Polisario v Council*, 2015: 21; para. 146), it held that the Council must assess if such agreements infringe the fundamental rights of the territory's population (*Front Polisario v Council*, 2015: 32; para. 227-228), which it had failed to do.

However, a year later, the CJEU overturned this judgment on appeal in *Council v Front Polisario* (Kassoti, 2020: 377), dismissing Front Polisario's action as inadmissible (*Council v Front Polisario*, 2016: 20; para. 134) and ruling that EU-Morocco agreements remained valid but were inapplicable in Western Sahara (Pereira Coutinho, 2019: 112). On the territorial scope of the Association Agreement, the Grand Chamber found that the expression "territory of the Kingdom of Morocco" could not be interpreted as applicable to Western Sahara given "the separate and distinct status accorded to the territory of Western Sahara by virtue of the principle of self-determination" (*Council v Front Polisario*, 2016: 16; para. 92). In this context, "territory" refers to the geographical area over which Morocco exercises the full range of sovereign powers under international law, excluding territories such as Western Sahara (*Council v Front Polisario*, 2016: 16, 20; paras. 95, 132).

The Court held that the EU is bound by the right to self-determination as part of the international law rules applicable to relations between the EU and Morocco (*Council v Front Polisario*, 2016: 15; para. 89). These include the principle of the relative effect of treaties (*pacta tertiis*), under which treaties cannot impose obligations or confer rights on third States without their consent (*Council v Front Polisario*, 2016: 16, 17; paras. 100, 103-107). As Pereira Coutinho (2019: 113) notes, the Sahrawi people are considered a third party in this sense and implementing EU-Morocco agreements in Western Sahara requires the consent of its people (represented by the Front Polisario), regardless of whether these agreements are beneficial or harmful to them.

The validity of the Fisheries Agreement, the Fishing Protocol, and related secondary legislation was also challenged in *Western Sahara Campaign UK* (2018). The applicants argued that the application of these instruments to Western Sahara and its adjacent waters breached international law (*Western Sahara Campaign UK*, 2018: 8; para. 32), namely the right to self-determination, the duty of non-recognition, the duty of non-assistance, and the principle of permanent sovereignty over natural resources (Kassoti, 2020: 383).

[3] This article does not engage in an exhaustive review of all CJEU case law on Western Sahara, focusing instead on the implications for self-determination arising from three selected cases: (i) *Front Polisario v Council* (T-512/12, 2015); (ii) *Council v Front Polisario* (C-104/16 P, 2016); and (iii) *Western Sahara Campaign UK* (C-266/16, 2018). It does not examine in detail the subsequent litigation culminating in the judgments in *Commission and Council v Front Polisario* (Joined Cases C-778/21 P and C-798/21 P, 2024a) and *Commission and Council v Front Polisario* (Joined Cases C-779/21 P and C-799/21 P, 2024b).

Although unsuccessful in their legal challenge, the applicants achieved a "symbolic victory" (Odermatt, 2023: 2): the Grand Chamber concluded that neither the territory of Western Sahara nor its adjacent waters fell within the territorial scope of these instruments (*Western Sahara Campaign UK*, 2018: 12, 13, 14; paras. 64, 73, 79, 83). This directly contradicted Morocco's view of Western Sahara as part of its territory, while also diverging from the General Court's previous characterisation of it as a "disputed territory" in *Council v Front Polisario* (Odermatt, 2023: 2).

In contrast to the CJEU's approach, the Advocate General took a firmer stance. He reaffirmed that the right to self-determination binds the EU, as established in *Council v Front Polisario* (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 24; para. 106). He also examined the contested instruments on their compliance with international law regarding: (i) self-determination; (ii) permanent sovereignty over natural resources; and (iii) the rules applicable to international agreements on the exploitation of occupied territories' natural resources (Mensi, 2018: 556).

The Advocate General found the fisheries exploitation breached the right to self-determination, considering the EU had failed to fulfil its obligation not to recognise the illegal situation and not to aid or assist in maintaining it (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 30-42; paras. 147-213). He also rejected the Council and the Commission's characterisation of Morocco as a "*de facto* administering power", as the concept does not exist in international law; Morocco is an occupying power unable to conclude agreements applicable to Western Sahara (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 43-46; paras. 221-235). Moreover, he argued these instruments disrespected Western Sahara's permanent sovereignty over its natural resources, as no safeguards ensured that fisheries exploitation would benefit the Sahrawi people (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 55; para. 285).

In *Council v Front Polisario* (2016: 19; para. 123), the CJEU argued that, since the EU has reaffirmed the importance of self-determination, its agreements with Morocco must be interpreted as reflecting its commitment to international law. The Grand Chamber reiterated this angle in *Western Sahara Campaign UK* (2018: 12, 13; paras. 63, 71). Kassoti (2020: 384) highlights the problematic nature of this, considering that, taken to the extreme, it suggests that the EU cannot be held in breach of international law simply because it has expressly committed to respecting it, regardless of the circumstances. Hypothetically, this would mean that conflicts between what the EU should do and what it actually does could be simply "interpreted away".

This reasoning also informed the legal challenges brought against subsequent EU-Morocco agreements extending to Western Sahara, invalid under EU and international law (Hummelbrunner and Prickartz, 2016: 34; Pereira Coutinho, 2019: 115).[4] Despite

[4] In *Front Polisario v Council* (Joined Cases T-344/19 and T-356/19, 2021a) and *Front Polisario v Council* (Case T-279/19, 2021b), the General Court held that the EU-Morocco trade and fisheries agreements, including amendments extending the scope of the Association Agreement to Western Sahara, had been concluded without the consent of the Sahrawi people. The Court found that the agreements were incompatible with the principles of self-determination and *pacta tertiis* and annulled the Council decisions approving them. On appeal, the Grand Chamber upheld the General Court's judgments, confirming that the agreements could not lawfully apply to Western Sahara without the consent of its people (*Commission and Council v Front Polisario*, 2024a; *Commission and Council v Front Polisario*, 2024b).

claiming to support neither the Front Polisario nor Morocco and favouring a UN-led solution for self-determination (*Front Polisario v Council*, 2015: 9-10; para. 56), the Council and Commission (and, at a later stage, Parliament) seemingly found a legal way to avoid fulfilling their international obligations (Suárez-Collado and Contini, 2022: 1175).

By failing to address the selective application of agreements in Western Sahara, the CJEU "carefully avoided the most contentious issues related to the (il)legality of the EU's – and as a corollary also Morocco's conduct – in light of the international law principle of self-determination" (Van Elsuwege, 2018: 760). This is troubling, as it leaves the question of how far the EU is willing to uphold international law when doing so conflicts with its interests unresolved.

The Western Sahara dispute has extremely sensitive political ramifications (*Western Sahara Campaign UK* [Opinion of Advocate General Wathelet], 2018: 4; para. 3). Given the implications of outright challenging Moroccan sovereignty, the EU has seemingly avoided addressing the repercussions of its external policy and practice towards Western Sahara (Kassoti, 2020: 388).

By maintaining trade relations with Morocco while dodging the legal implications of Western Sahara's occupied status, the EU's pledge to observe and develop international law is undermined. However, this selective engagement is not limited to an economic dimension. As explored next, EU-Morocco cooperation on security and migration further reveals how strategic considerations can prevail over normative imperatives such as self-determination.

Forcing the (Mediterranean) floodgates open: Has Morocco exploited migration to challenge the EU's position on self-determination?

The instrumentalisation of migration: a conceptual note

The notion of "instrumentalisation" of migration has gained prominence in recent years, as migration has "become one of the main manifestations of European relations with the outside world" (Hamzaoui, 2020: 114). However, this is not a new form of interstate diplomacy. As Adamson and Tsourapas (2019: 115, 117-118) note, migratory flows have long shaped States' interactions and have become an important aspect of bilateral and multilateral diplomacy.

The instrumentalisation of migration (also referred to as "weaponisation") involves the use of migratory movements for strategic and foreign policy purposes. In this context, migrants are used as pawns, instrumentalised "in the framework of long and remotely played geopolitical games (…) within the EU and elsewhere" (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli, 2022: 4). Greenhill (2010: 13) conceptualises one such practice as "coercive engineered migration", through which cross-border population movements are deliberately created or manipulated to bring about political, military, or economic concessions from one or several target States.

For the purposes of this article, the term is understood as the strategic or threatened use of migratory flows to exert political pressure and obtain concessions from another State

or international organisation. However, Yahmi (2024: 61) cautions that language such as "weaponisation" and "instrumentalisation" may be problematic given that it dehumanises migrants by framing them as tools of political agendas. However, as the author notes, there is no consensus on suitable alternative terminology for describing the use of migrants for political advantage.

This instrumentalisation can rely on issue linkages, with States using migration-based relations to pursue objectives in other areas, such as security and economic interests (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019: 120; Álvarez-Miranda and Brey, 2023: 321). Thus, the use of migrants can be a means of exerting influence for States with limited resources and few alternative instruments at their disposal, allowing them to strengthen their bargaining position *vis-à-vis* more powerful States (Greenhill, 2010: 23, 30).

This is relevant in the context of EU migration externalisation, considering the mutual, albeit asymmetric, interdependence between the EU and countries of origin and transit. While externalisation is not inherently coercive, it can influence the bargaining relationship between arrival and transit States by inadvertently increasing the latter's leverage.

In the EU landscape, this is reinforced by the significant humanitarian and domestic consequences of movements across the Mediterranean, including the thousands of deaths of those attempting to reach European territory (Adamson and Tsourapas, 2019: 114). Besides altering the North-South power balances in the Mediterranean (Álvarez-Miranda and Brey, 2023: 321), these dynamics also test EU cohesion and solidarity, as different Member States face different costs and incentives in responding to migration pressures. For countries holding a critical role in these externalisation arrangements, this creates opportunities to instrumentalise migration to pursue broader political objectives.

Migration externalisation and Morocco's coercive leverage: a turning point?

Through the externalisation of border control and migration management, the EU has established a "protective belt" across neighbouring Arab Maghreb countries (major sources of immigration as origin and departure points), turning them into detention areas for irregular migrants (Hamzaoui, 2020: 114-115). As the Western Mediterranean route gained prominence after the 2015 European migrant crisis, Morocco's influence over the EU and key Member States has been significantly reinforced.

As noted before, Morocco is a vital partner for the EU on security, counterterrorism, and, more importantly, the control and prevention of irregular migration (Suárez-Collado and Contini, 2022: 1163). This reliance has contributed to sustaining Morocco's domestic political *status quo* (Faustini Torres, 2024: 36). Located just 14 kilometres from the Spanish coast and hosting the EU's only land borders on the African continent (i.e., Ceuta and Melilla, two small, albeit disputed, Spanish exclaves), Morocco is a major transit and departure point along the Mediterranean Sea. Indeed, Morocco is "the gateway to Europe and has long been the privileged passage for irregular North African and sub-Saharan migrants wishing to reach the (…) continent" (Benjelloun, 2021: 877).

Until recently, neither the EU nor its Member States officially recognised Morocco's sovereignty over Western Sahara (*Front Polisario v Council*, 2015: 33; para. 241). Yet, Member States have differing stances on the conflict (Sansawal and Kamath, 2020: 115). In fact, the EU has endorsed negotiations based on the Moroccan autonomy proposal (Council of the EU, 2026). Despite maintaining that any solution must provide for the self-determination of Western Sahara, this strengthens Morocco's political position without formally recognising its sovereignty.[5]

Spain, in particular, has sought to balance its obligations under international law against strategic interests. As the *de jure* administering power of Western Sahara (Allen and Trinidad, 2024: 56), Spain bears legal and moral responsibilities to ensure its decolonisation process (Darbouche and Zoubir, 2008: 101). Until 2021, Spain supported a UN-supervised referendum on Western Sahara's self-determination (Sansanwal and Kamath, 2020: 116). However, as Allen and Trinidad (2024: 67) contend, "Spain's change of policy was linked to Morocco stoking the migration crisis at the borders of Spain's North African enclaves (…) fuelled by the fact that the reversal of Spain's long-standing policy (…) has no obvious strategic rationale".

In 2021, an unprecedented event took place in Spain. Moroccan authorities opened the border between Morocco and Ceuta, allowing more than 10,000 migrants, including about 1,500 minors, to irregularly enter Spanish territory for nearly thirty-six hours (Álvarez-Miranda and Brey, 2023: 317). The incident followed the escalation of diplomatic tensions between Rabat and Madrid after the later admitted the Secretary-General of the Front Polisario (and proclaimed SADR President) for COVID-19 treatment (Yahmi, 2024: 57). Contrary to normal practice at the heavily securitised and fenced-off border, Moroccan authorities neither prevented nor pushed back migrants, while also encouraging them to continue moving forward (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli, 2022: 2).

It is difficult to interpret the timing and circumstances of this sudden border control and monitoring mechanisms "relaxation" as anything other than retaliation for Spain's actions. Although the migrants were returned *en masse* in the following days, Morocco temporarily and unilaterally suspended its border control cooperation with its EU neighbours (Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli, 2022: 2). At the time, this was the largest recorded instance of irregular border crossings into Spanish territory.

Nevertheless, Morocco appears to have achieved its objective. Spain abandoned its long-standing support for a UN-led solution and backed Morocco's proposal for Western Sahara to become an autonomous region within the Moroccan state (Álvarez-Miranda and Brey, 2023: 317-318). In turn, Morocco resumed its "gatekeeper" role and readmitted the migrants. Ferrer-Gallardo and Gabrielli (2022: 3) describe this episode as a "handbook example of how to use the European obsession on border and migration control for foreign policy purposes, and how to manufacture a border/migration 'crisis'".

[5] Moreover, the UN Security Council has also expressed support for negotiations "taking as basis Morocco's Autonomy Proposal" and recognised that "genuine autonomy could represent a most feasible outcome", while reaffirming that the aim remained a mutually acceptable political solution providing for the self-determination of the Western Sahara people (UN Security Council, 2025: 2, para. 3). This reflects a broader international trend of support for Morocco's autonomy proposal, also evident in the positions adopted by the United States, Israel, and an increasing number of European countries, such as Germany, Spain, France, and the United Kingdom.

This shift contradicted the EU's position and the aforementioned CJEU rulings (Yahmi, 2024: 57). Yet, Morocco's strategic importance in trade, security, and, crucially, migration, has facilitated growing support for its position on Western Sahara among Spain, France, and more recently, the EU itself (Suárez-Collado and Contini, 2021: 1169; Council of the EU, 2026). As Faustini Torres (2024: 41) observes, "Morocco seems to have succeeded in silencing the EU on human rights, democracy, and self-determination".

However, the 2021 crisis was not an isolated incident. Following the *Council v Front Polisario* ruling in 2016, the EU and Morocco were precluded from concluding or applying trade agreements to Western Sahara without the expressed consent of its people. In response, Morocco issued thinly veiled threats targeting areas of particular strategic importance to the EU, including migration cooperation (Suárez-Collado and Contini, 2021: 1169). The subsequent increase in mass crossings into Ceuta and Melilla, along with a surge in arrivals on Spanish shores, has also been interpreted as a deliberate relaxation of Morocco's northern border controls during this period (Benjelloun, 2020: 883; Yahmi, 2024: 57).

The 2021 incident further evoked historical parallels with the Western Sahara conflict. As Álvarez-Miranda and Brey (2023: 327) note, it was characterised as "a second Green March" by immigrants ("our Green March") and the Ceuta population ("the Black March").

Given the EU's framing of irregular migration as a security threat that must be managed, it is unsurprising that Morocco has exploited this issue to pursue a broader geopolitical agenda. As this section has argued, the instrumentalisation of migration has become a tool of Morocco's *realpolitik* arsenal, enabling it "to enhance its economic situation, advance its interests, including the recognition of Western Sahara as part of its national territory, and thus coerce states to violate international legislation" (Yahmi, 2024: 57).

Nowhere are the costs of these transactional politics clearer than in the continued denial of Western Sahara's self-determination. By conceding to Morocco's demands, the EU and its Member States contribute to legitimising an illegal occupation while undermining the Sahrawi people's fundamental rights. As Yahmi (2024: 57) argues, Morocco's threats are deemed credible in light of "the EU's deeply rooted fear of being flooded by migrants". This enables the former to impose (if not outright coerce) concessions from both the EU and its Member States. This instrumentalisation operates on two interlinked levels: (i) through Morocco's migration management, and (ii) through its cooperation with the EU, particularly in the agricultural and fisheries sectors.

These domains are not isolated but mutually reinforcing, as Morocco's cooperation on migration and security also strengthens its bargaining position in securing favourable trade arrangements, even where these involve the exploitation of Western Sahara's natural resources without the consent of its people. The more dependent the EU is on Morocco's cooperation in managing migration, the greater Morocco's capacity to influence European policy on Western Sahara becomes.

Western Sahara's right to self-determination is grounded in international law, as affirmed by a series of international legal judgments and opinions, including those of the ICJ and the CJEU (Fernanández-Molina and Khakee, 2024: 3). This makes the EU's reluctance to uphold this principle in its relations with Morocco all the more perplexing. However, this can be understood, at least partially, as a consequence of its approach to migration

externalisation, which has weakened the EU's bargaining position and increased its vulnerability to Moroccan political pressure.

The EU has compromised its legal and moral commitments, exposing the malleable nature of its external action when migration is framed as a security threat. In this trade-off, it is the people of Western Sahara and their right to self-determination who ultimately bear the cost. The paradox at the core of the EU-Morocco relationship is not simply the coexistence of international law and *realpolitik*, but the extent to which the latter can prevail over the former.

Conclusion

This article has argued that Morocco has instrumentalised migration as political leverage to shape the EU's position on the Western Sahara conflict. Despite the CJEU reaffirming the territory's distinct status and the need to respect the consent of its people regarding the territory's natural resources, the EU's deepening cooperation with Morocco in trade, security, and migration has undermined its commitment to upholding its obligations under international law. The EU has tacitly contributed to Morocco's consolidation of its *de facto* control over Western Sahara, perpetuating the conflict's *status quo* and diminishing the prospects for the Sahrawi people to exercise their right to self-determination.

This analysis suggests that migration has become an effective instrument in Morocco's efforts to secure greater European alignment with its position on Western Sahara. The strengthening of EU-Morocco relations coincides with a broader shift among key Member States, most notably Spain and France, towards endorsing the Moroccan autonomy plan and sidelining the referendum on self-determination. The recurring threat of migration-related pressure appears to have reinforced Morocco's bargaining position.

The selective application of international law carries significant legal and political implications. While the EU has consistently professed its respect for international norms in its external relations, its approach to Western Sahara suggests that interests can take precedence over legal obligations. Beyond the unresolved question of self-determination, the implicit acceptance of Morocco's sovereignty claims has been criticised as difficult to reconcile with the EU's commitments to democracy and human rights (Kausch, 2009: 175).

Ultimately, in the clash between *realpolitik* and international law, one of them must yield. If the EU continues to prioritise short-term strategic considerations over its legal commitments, its credibility as a normative global actor is called into question. As international attention to the conflict continues to wane (Smith, 2013: 290), the prospects for a fair settlement become uncertain.

If, as this article argues, migration can be instrumentalised to influence the EU's position on Western Sahara, responsibility for sustaining the current impasse also extends beyond Morocco to those whose political choices have allowed the conflict to endure.

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O ESTADO NOVO SOB MARCELLO CAETANO NA ENCRUZILHADA - UMA PERSPETIVA REALISTA NEOCLÁSSICA SOBRE A POSIÇÃO PORTUGUESA DURANTE GUERRA DO YOM KIPPUR DE 1973

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Resumo

O propósito desta investigação é realizar uma análise sobre a posição portuguesa durante Guerra do Yom Kippur de 1973, tendo a Teoria Realista Neoclássica das Relações Internacionais como referência metodológica, o que vai permitir representar a configuração da situação e explicar o porquê do posicionamento do governo de Lisboa, na qual será necessário fazer uma breve descrição dos objetivos estratégicos inseridos no interesse nacional português presentes na política externa, tendo como objetivo de estabelecer a existência de uma conexão entre as condicionantes domésticas e a estrutura internacional na qual Portugal se insere, e a sua respetiva influência no processo decisório em política externa portuguesa. As principais conclusões obtidas neste estudo de caso mostram que a decisão do governo de Marcello Caetano foi influenciada pelas dinâmicas internas e a estrutura do sistema internacional, tendo em consideração a capacidade portuguesa e os interesses portugueses naquele momento histórico em particular.

Palavras-chave

Açores; Atlântico; Estado Novo; Marcello Caetano; Política Externa Portuguesa; Realismo Neoclássico.

Abstract

The purpose of this research is to conduct an analysis of the Portuguese position during the 1973 Yom Kippur War, using the Neoclassical Realist Theory of International Relations as a methodological reference, which will allow us to represent the configuration of the situation and explain the reason for the positioning of the Lisbon government, in which it will be necessary to make a brief description of the strategic objectives inserted in the Portuguese national interest present in foreign policy, with the aim of establishing the existence of a connection between domestic constraints and the international structure in which Portugal is inserted, and their respective influence on the decision-making process in Portuguese foreign policy. The main conclusions obtained in this case study show that the decision of Marcello Caetano's government was influenced by the internal dynamics and the structure of the international system, considering Portuguese capacity and Portuguese interests at that historical moment.

Keywords

Azores; Atlantic; Estado Novo; Marcello Caetano; Brazilian Foreign Policy; Neoclassical Realism.

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O ESTADO NOVO SOB MARCELLO CAETANO NA ENCRUZILHADA - UMA PERSPETIVA REALISTA NEOCLÁSSICA SOBRE A POSIÇÃO PORTUGUESA DURANTE GUERRA DO YOM KIPPUR DE 1973

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Introdução

Em 6 de outubro de 1973, no dia do feriado judaico Yom Kippur, as tropas do Egito e Síria lançaram um ataque-surpresa coordenado contra Israel, ao cruzar as linhas de cessar-fogo no Sinai e nas colinas do Golã, cujos territórios tinham sido capturadas pelas tropas israelitas, em 1967, durante a Guerra dos Seis Dias, o que deu origem ao quarto conflito entre árabes e israelitas, que ficou mais conhecido como a Guerra do Yom Kippur (Rabinovich, 2004).

Porém, esta crise do Médio Oriente de outubro de 1973 não se esgotou nas fronteiras regionais do conflito árabe-israelita. Ao mobilizar as duas superpotências da Guerra Fria, os Estados Unidos da América (EUA) e a União das Repúblicas Socialistas Soviéticas (URSS), em operações paralelas de reabastecimento militar, transformou-se rapidamente numa crise sistémica que testou a coesão da Aliança Atlântica e colocou os seus Estados-membros perante um dilema incontornável: ceder às pressões norte-americanas para apoiar logisticamente Israel, e arriscar a retaliação económica dos produtores árabes de petróleo, ou alinhar-se com a recusa generalizada dos parceiros europeus. E foi neste contexto que Portugal, então governado por Marcello Caetano, destacou-se como a única exceção europeia ao autorizar o uso da base aérea das Lajes, nos Açores, para a operação de reabastecimento aéreo norte-americana conhecida como Operação Nickel Grass.

A utilização dos Açores, no âmbito da ajuda dos EUA à Israel, aconteceu numa altura em que as relações entre os governos de Washington e de Lisboa não atravessavam o seu melhor momento, uma vez que "as expectativas depositadas no acordo das Lajes tinham sido defraudadas" (Pereira, 2022, p. 415), e aproximava-se o momento da renegociação, uma vez que o acordo em vigor expirava em fevereiro de 1974, numa altura em que a Guerra do Ultramar prosseguia em pleno auge da Guerra Fria.

Tendo em consideração a situação na região do Médio Oriente e o facto de Portugal não ter reconhecido o Estado de Israel, seria de esperar que o governo português optasse pela neutralidade ou mesmo a recusa do seu envolvimento no conflito, para evitar o antagonismo dos Estados árabes.

Ao mesmo tempo, Portugal estava desesperado em obter mais armamento e equipamento dos EUA para fazer face às necessidades existentes nos seus teatros de guerra ativos em África, e contava com a oposição ativa do Congresso dos EUA às suas necessidades. Numa fase inicial, o governo de Lisboa optou por recusar atender o pedido dos EUA enquanto não fossem cumpridos os requisitos portugueses, até Marcello Caetano ser pressionado por Henry Kissinger, o então Secretário de Estado da Administração Nixon, para Portugal ceder às exigências dos EUA.

Assim sendo, como se pode explicar a posição assumida pelo governo de Marcello Caetano neste conflito? Para ser possível obter uma explicação sobre a posição assumida pelo executivo da política externa portuguesa liderado por Marcello Caetano, iremos recorrer às Teorias das Relações Internacionais que visam contribuir para a formação de uma explicação sobre a realidade que nos rodeia no sistema internacional, dependendo da corrente teórica que pretendemos utilizar para efetuar uma análise das ações dos Estados, e do contexto internacional que estão inseridos, iremos obteremos diferentes respostas sobre as interações e os problemas internacionais, uma vez que cada corrente teórica se foca em diferentes aspetos que ocorrem na arena da política internacional. Acrescenta Mendes (2022, p. 615), "as Teorias das Relações Internacionais podem dividir-se entre as teorias mais racionalistas que tentam oferecer explicações relativamente causais" sobre as relações entre os Estados no sistema internacional, "e as teorias mais reflexivas que tentam demonstrar as relações constitutivas" (*ibidem*) da realidade internacional, uma vez que a política externa de qualquer Estado soberano "não deve assentar em ideologias ou não deve ser dominada por elas" (Calvet de Magalhães, 1987, p. 36).

O propósito da nossa investigação sobre este estudo de caso em particular é realizar uma análise sobre o posicionamento de Portugal marcelista na Guerra do Yom Kippur de 1973, a partir dos pressupostos teóricos do Realismo Neoclássico, que surge com "o intuito de ultrapassar a visão excessivamente estrutural do realismo de Waltz e, assim, contrariar a perspetiva de que a sua teoria política internacional não era uma teoria de política externa" (Mendes, 2019, p. 98).

O Realismo Neoclássico, de acordo com Gideon Rose (1998) e Randall Schweller (2004), oferece uma abordagem integrada do paradigma realista para explicar a política externa dos Estados no sistema internacional, no qual integra elementos sistémicos do realismo estrutural de Kenneth N. Waltz (1979), como a distribuição de poder no sistema internacional como o principal determinante do comportamento do ator estatal, com as principais premissas do realismo clássico, no qual o sistema internacional é anárquico e que os Estados procuram sobreviver no meio da anarquia internacional, mas também considera que as características internas dos Estados podem moldar suas ações no sistema internacional (Ripsman; Taliaferro; Lobell, 2016; Rose, 1998).

O enquadramento temporal deste estudo só terá em consideração os acontecimentos que contribuíram para a alteração da posição portuguesa, no qual poderão ser necessários referir eventos anteriores que contribuíram para a decisão em si.

A conjuntura internacional no sistema internacional da Guerra Fria

O ano de 1973 marcava o auge da *détente*, que visava o desanuviar das relações entre os EUA e a URSS, as duas superpotências hegemónicas no sistema internacional, o que "significou uma crescente racionalização das relações entre as duas superpotências rivais" (Mendes, 2021, p. 217), assim como uma consequência da "relativa paridade estratégica nuclear, a *détente* fundamenta-se na necessidade mútua de extrair vantagens de uma política de dissipação de confrontos e redução da tensão entre atores que reconheceram a existência da destruição mútua assegurada" (*ibidem*).

Para além da rivalidade entre o Oeste e o Leste, que encontrava a sua manifestação no Muro de Berlim no continente europeu e na Guerra do Vietname na região da Ásia-Pacífico, o sistema internacional encontrava-se igualmente marcado pela situação no Médio Oriente, onde nenhuma das duas superpotências interveio diretamente, mas ambas apoiaram os dois campos opostos nos diferendos regionais.

Ao longo da década de 1970, os EUA procuravam manter o equilíbrio de forças na ordem regional instável do Médio Oriente, tendo como objetivo a assegurar a sua posição como perante os Estados árabes, e reduzir a influência soviética na região (Gutfeld & Vanetik, 2016).

Todavia, os EUA estavam em braços com uma crise interna que condicionou a condução na sua política externa, que foi o escândalo Watergate, que fragilizou o Presidente Richard Nixon perante o Congresso dos EUA e ofereceu mais protagonismo nas decisões da política externa dos EUA a Henry Kissinger, o então Secretário de Estado e Conselheiro de Segurança Nacional.

Ao mesmo tempo, a França sob Georges Pompidou tentou assumir uma posição de autonomia em relação aos EUA na sua condução da política externa no Médio Oriente em colisão com os interesses dos EUA, nomeadamente com a entrega de aviões Mirage á revolucionária e anticomunista Líbia do coronel Muammar Kadhafi, e à recusa francesa em vender armamento a Israel, o que obrigou Washington a assumir essa obrigação. Enquanto isso, no lado comunista, a URSS manteve a sua posição ambígua. "O Egito recambiou os seus técnicos, mas aceita as suas armas. O Iraque mantém comunistas no seu governo" (Duroselle & Kaspi, 2009, p. 328-329) a prazo, enquanto na Síria e no Sudão, os respetivos regimes suprimem rebeliões comunistas.

No Médio Oriente, "onde as clivagens político-religiosas maximizavam a violência, o Egito desligava-se gradualmente da União Soviética" (Antunes, 1986, p. 245), ainda existia uma questão que dominava a agenda de segurança internacional no que dizia respeito ao Médio Oriente, que era a questão israelo-árabe, "que impossibilitam não só uma solução, mas também uma verdadeira negociação" (Duroselle & Kaspi, 2009, p. 323), uma vez que Israel punha como condição irreversível conservar o seu controlo sobre Jerusalém, condição essa os Estados árabes "recusavam com o mesmo vigor, porque essa cidade é também um lugar santo da religião muçulmana" (*ibidem*).

Em setembro de 1973, "o movimento palestiniano parecia enfraquecido" (Duroselle & Kaspi, 2009, p. 328) e o mundo árabe mostrava-se mais unido, evidenciado pela "reaproximação entre as monarquias e repúblicas, entre moderados e revolucionários"

(*ibidem*), o que leva a eclosão da Guerra de Yom Kippur, igualmente conhecida como a Quarta Guerra Israelo-Árabe (Herzog, 2003).

Porém, a explicação para a sua eclosão é justificada devido à reunião solicitada pelo Egito do Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas de julho de 1973, devido ao abate de um *Boeing* civil líbio que se perdera na travessia da Península do Sinai pelas tropas israelitas, o que teve como resultado um texto vago que empregava a fórmula francesa "Não há retirada sem compromisso de paz", e no qual teve 13 votos a favor, e contou com a abstenção chinesa e o veto dos EUA. Como notam Duroselle e Kaspi (2009, p. 331), "não se tinha avançado um passo. Talvez se deva ver nesse fracasso a origem da decisão árabe" sob a liderança de Anwar Sadat, o sucessor de Nasser na Presidência do Egito, em neutralizar a expansão israelita e retomar a península do Sinai, pela força.

Importa destacar que este era o cenário da pressão sistémica que condiciona a dinâmica externa de Portugal marcelista no sistema internacional, na qual Portugal encontra-se perante o equilíbrio de forças ditado pelas duas superpotências hegemónicas, (Duroselle & Kaspi, 2009), e a orientação preferencial da política de alianças do governo de Lisboa (Severiano Teixeira, 1990), tal como tinha sido definido por Salazar (Nogueira, 2000).

As variáveis da situação doméstica portuguesa na década de 1970

Nesta altura, o decisor político era Marcello Caetano, enquanto Presidente do Conselho de Ministros de Portugal, que era o responsável máximo sobre o executivo da política externa portuguesa, tendo como Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros, Rui Patrício, e como Presidente da República, o Almirante Américo Thomaz.

As perceções da liderança do executivo da política externa portuguesa

A perceção da liderança do executivo da política externa sobre a distribuição do poder é uma das variáveis intervenientes a nível doméstico a ter em consideração, neste estudo de caso, uma vez que os governantes que compõem o executivo da política externa portuguesa são os atores primários nos assuntos internacionais (Schweller, 2004).

O líder do executivo da política externa do Estado Novo, Marcello Caetano iniciou o ano de 1973 a enunciar na RTP, as soluções do seu governo para a questão do Ultramar:

> *"o governo não está inativo na busca de soluções políticas que sejam válidas para os territórios do ultramar. Soluções nossas, e não impostas por outros, soluções na linha que um dia defini como sendo a de preparar o futuro para que seja um futuro português"* (Caetano, 1973, p. 13).

Como nota Castilho (2012, p. 679), Caetano "é um legalista convicto, que procura agir dentro dos limites da lei", o que justifica a adoção da mesma tática que Salazar adotara no caso do Estado Português da Índia, em 1961, na qual para "a defesa global do Ultramar é preferível sair da Guiné por uma derrota militar com honra, do que por um acordo negociado com terroristas abrindo caminho a outras negociações" (Caetano, 1974, p. 191), uma vez que tal derrota militar deixaria intactas as possibilidades jurídicas

e políticas de continuar a defender o resto do Ultramar Português, uma posição subscrita por Rui Patrício.

No entanto, o Presidente do Conselho de Ministros estava "preso ao seu legalismo jurídico-político, recusava; à partida e liminarmente, abrir porta das negociações que poderiam ter sido o início de uma saída negociada do problema africano" (Castilho, 2012, p. 679), apesar de acreditar que "as colónias não podiam servir como solução para uma crise que pertencia à Europa e não a Portugal" (Martinho, 2016, p. 404).

Ciente da hostilidade existente contra Portugal no sistema internacional, o executivo da política externa portuguesa sob a liderança de Marcello Caetano encarou a chegada do republicano Richard Nixon à Casa Branca como um bom presságio para as relações entre Lisboa e Washington (Antunes, 2000). Esta visão foi confirmada no momento da visita de Estado de Marcello Caetano aos EUA, em março de 1969, onde Nixon prometeu a Caetano "que as relações entre ambos países iam e entrar numa nova fase, agora de colaboração e bom entendimento" (Castilho, 2012, p. 767).

Na ótica do executivo da política externa do Estado Novo, a mudança de agulha da diplomacia dos EUA veio em altura oportuna, uma vez que "o principal apoio de que Portugal necessitava era de natureza militar, para reforçar os meios de defesa na guerra de África" (Castilho, 2012, p. 767), cuja opinião era partilhada pelo Estado-Maior das Forças Armadas, principalmente em 1973, quando o governo de Lisboa tomou conhecimento da possibilidade do PAIGC de utilizar meios aéreos como *MiG*s soviéticos contra as tropas portuguesas (Antunes, 2000).

Perante esta ameaça, o governo de Lisboa, no sentido de responder às necessidades militares das Forças Armadas no teatro operacional da Guiné, pediu aos EUA o fornecimento dos mísseis *Red Eye*, cujo pedido "foi recusado sob a invocação de a pretensão ir contra o que fora aprovado pelas duas câmaras do Congresso" dos EUA (Castilho, 2012, p. 767). A resposta foi recebida com desagrado pelo Governo de Marcello Caetano, que esperava que a Administração Nixon cumprisse a sua promessa sobre a melhoria das relações entre Portugal e os EUA (Aires Oliveira, 2005).

Todavia, a eclosão da Guerra de Yom Kippur no Médio Oriente representou uma oportunidade para o Portugal marcelista perante os EUA para romper com a tentativa de isolamento de Portugal no sistema internacional e obter o armamento necessário para prosseguir com a guerra de África (Antunes, 2000). Como nota Pereira (2022, p. 415), "Portugal preparava-se para recusar o pedido americano, como outros aliados de primeira linha dos EUA já tinham feito ou, no mínimo, extorquir um preço elevadíssimo pelo seu apoio". Nesse sentido, Rui Patrício, sob a indicação de Marcello Caetano, comunicou ao encarregado de negócios americano "que o governo português examinaria cuidadosamente o pedido, mas aproveitou para insistir no fornecimento dos mísseis *Red Eye*" (*ibidem*), apesar de Portugal não reconhecer formalmente a existência do Estado de Israel e de não pretender antagonizar os Estados árabes, apesar destes últimos estarem a ser armados pela União Soviética (Lochery, 2013).

Perante a resposta portuguesa, o Secretário de Estado Henry Kissinger instruiu[1] a embaixada dos EUA em Lisboa para continuarem a insistir com o pedido americano[2], e manteve a rejeição de qualquer fornecimento dos mísseis *Red Eye* (Schneidman, 2005). Os portugueses devolviam a réplica[3] ao insistir que tal cedência dependia de uma série de condições prévias: "não apenas o fornecimento dos mísseis, mas promessas firmes de apoio político e garantias de que o acordo das Lajes seria escrupulosamente cumprido" (Pereira, 2022, p. 416). A discrição em torna das conversas era de tal ordem, que o Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros "tinha inclusive requerido a Hall Themido que não apresentasse esse pedido a Washington em nenhum papel escrito" (Antunes, 1992, p. 275), até receber instruções de Lisboa.

Porém, a atitude portuguesa provocou o ultimato de Henry Kissinger que ameaçou deixar Portugal entregue por si só no mundo hostil (Kissinger, 2011), caso não cumpra a exigência de Washington. Quando confrontado com a missiva de Kissinger, Marcello Caetano cedeu às exigências dos EUA, na expectativa de que o pedido[4] pudesse ser atendido posteriormente (Castilho, 2012; Antunes, 2000). Ciente das consequências do apoio português na Guerra de Yom Kippur, Caetano e o resto do governo preparavam-se para a retaliação dos países árabes, que consideravam inevitável, o que veio acontecer (Themido, 1995).

Apesar do aparente isolamento no sistema internacional hostil ao interesse nacional português, Marcello Caetano, como responsável máximo no executivo da política externa portuguesa, tinha noção que Portugal ainda existia margem de manobra para poder contar com a ajuda dos EUA para assegurar o fornecimento militar necessário para prosseguir com a Guerra do Ultramar, devido à importância portuguesa na ponte aérea que ajudou Israel a sair vencedora na Guerra de Yom Kippur.

Os constrangimentos internos

Em 1973, era ano de eleições para a Assembleia Nacional, e "para Marcello Caetano, os tempos são de extremos: ou tudo ou nada" (Castilho, 2012, p. 740) no que dizia respeito à política doméstica. Como nota Mendes (2020, p. 24), "as eleições de 1973 não trouxeram nada de novo que permitisse desanuviar o bloqueio político com que o regime se defrontava", uma vez que o regime não conseguiu que se formassem forças alternativas ou dissidentes no seio das listas da Ação Nacional Portuguesa, nem mesmo que se oficializasse uma terceira via.

Todavia, para além do aumento da representação parlamentar por conta do reforço ultramarino, as eleições legislativas revelaram-se um ato político do cumprimento do

[1] Ver Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 241. Para a Embaixada de Portugal em Washington. Seção de Cifra, 13 de outubro de 1973, número geral 11 859.
[2] Ver US Department of State. FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E-15, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN EUROPE, 1973–1976, SECOND, REVISED EDITION. Documents on Western Europe, 1973–1976 (Documents 1–382). Portugal, 1973–1976 (Documents 123–178). From the Department of State to the Embassy in Portugal. Telegram 203651, 126. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d126
[3] Ver Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 241. Para a Embaixada de Portugal em Washington. Seção de Cifra, 13 de outubro de 1973, número geral 11 859.
[4] Ver Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros 242. Para a Embaixada de Portugal em Washington. Seção de Cifra, 13 de outubro de 1973, número geral 11 860.

calendário, em "condições quase idênticas às do salazarismo" (Castilho, 2012, p. 769), não teve qualquer impacto real na gestão governativa da crise do Médio Oriente, sendo uma manifestação da situação anacrónica do regime político deixado por Salazar.

No entanto, verificou-se que o Estado Novo marcelista não tinha capacidade financeira para grandes aquisições de equipamento militar, apesar da ajuda financeira do governo de Pretória, o seu grande aliado na África Austral, que não hesita em conceder-lhe um avultado empréstimo de 150 milhões de rands (6 milhões de contos) para suportar o esforço de guerra e permitir a aquisição de armamento novo[5], Portugal continuava com acesso restrito aos fornecedores militares (Antunes, 2000; Antunes, 1992).

"Só que estava em causa uma matéria transcendente: o uso das Lajes seria objetivamente uma forma de Portugal alinhar com Israel na guerra" (Antunes, 1992, p. 271), o que colocou Portugal na mira das sanções petrolíferas árabes, uma vez que a logística da Operação Nickel Grass foi impossível de ocultar ao resto do mundo. A base das Lajes estavam já a servir de ponto de transferência de material para Israel, mas a escala da tamanha logística da Operação Nickel Grass tornou demasiado óbvio o papel de Portugal.

Num movimento de antecipação do boicote na venda de produtos petrolíferos a Portugal, o governo de Lisboa "impôs a 9 de novembro o racionamento, ao mesmo tempo que negociava com a *Gulf Oil* garantias de abastecimento" (Pereira, 2022, p. 417). "Conforme o previsto, a 28 de novembro os países árabes impuseram um embargo ao fornecimento de petróleo a Portugal extensivo à Rodésia e à África do Sul. A participação da Gulbenkian numa companhia de petróleo iraquiana foi nacionalizada" (*ibidem*), o que fragilizou a posição internacional portuguesa.

Internamente, o embargo petrolífero provocou danos internos com filas intermináveis nas bombas de gasolina que o regime não conseguiu ocultar, mas a curto prazo manteve o controlo interno (Antunes, 2000), devido à natureza repressiva do regime marcelista, assim como a existência de uma coesão estável na elite governativa do Estado Novo, o que não teve impacto a curto prazo no processo decisório do executivo da política externa portuguesa. No entanto, vai ter consequências a médio prazo que serão sentidas posteriormente a nível da política doméstica.

As motivações domésticas

Os Açores e "os seus caminhos forjam-se no meio das tensões nascidas dos grandes circuitos comerciais ou militares do Atlântico" (Monjardino, 1983, p. 27) e "Portugal, sendo um país periférico em relação ao continente europeu, tem valorizado a sua situação geoestratégica com base na sua centralidade atlântica" (Mourato Caldeira, 2015, p. 54), sendo os Açores uma peça fundamental na sua leitura geopolítica, o que evidenciava a importância da renovação do acordo das Lajes para o governo de Lisboa, uma vez que era do interesse dos EUA[6] permanecer nos Açores, devido ao facto de a

[5] Ver Memorial sobre o acordo do empréstimo de 150 milhões de rands firmado com a República da África do Sul. Estado-Maior General das Forças Armadas (EMGFA), 18 de setembro de 1975, ADN/F3/20/48/64.
[6] Ver US Department of State. FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E-15, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN EUROPE, 1973–1976, SECOND, REVISED EDITION. Documents on Western Europe, 1973–1976 (Documents 1–382). Portugal, 1973–1976 (Documents 123–178). Memorandum From the

Base das Lajes ser "considerada uma base-chave para a projeção de forças dos EUA para o Médio Oriente" (Andrade, 2015, p. 101), o que servia de moeda de negociação nas conversações diplomáticas entre Portugal e os EUA[7]. Sendo Portugal, "o elo da cadeia, a todos os níveis, o mais fraco, apesar de recusa das garantias solicitadas, não podia senão ceder" (Castilho, 2012, p. 768) aos EUA, na expetativa de ver os seus pedidos a serem atendidos posteriormente[8].

Em 1973, Portugal não reconhecia a existência do Estado de Israel para evitar o antagonismo dos Estados árabes, apesar de haver discussão interna no Ministério dos Negócios Estrangeiros para o reconhecimento formal de Portugal sobre Israel, datada desde a década de 1950[9], sobre os benefícios económicos de um relacionamento entre os dois Estados.

Depois da crise no Médio Oriente e perante as consequências do embargo de petróleo dos Estados árabes à Portugal, Nixon e Kissinger receberam o João Hall Themido, o embaixador de Portugal em Washington na Casa Branca. Nessa reunião, Henry Kissinger[10] nunca escondeu que dificilmente poderia corresponder aos pedidos do governo de Lisboa, "seguindo as vias legais, mas acenou a possibilidade dos mísseis serem expedidos por «caminhos tortuosos» – o que realmente aconteceu" (Aires Oliveira, 2001, p. 17), os *Red Eye* iam ser fornecidos a Portugal como recompensa pela posição portuguesa na Guerra de Yom Kippur, através de Israel (Themido, 1995), o que poderia abrir a porta para um possível futuro reconhecimento formal por parte de Portugal, como consequência da atitude dos Estados árabes.

No Ultramar, é nomeado general Bettencourt Rodrigues como novo Governador-Geral e Comandante-Chefe da Guiné portuguesa, que chegou ao território, 3 dias antes do PAIGC ter proclamado unilateralmente a independência, que foi de imediato reconhecida por 72 países, e obteve reconhecimento da Assembleia Geral da ONU, através da aprovação da histórica Resolução A/3061 (XXVII), "única no direito de descolonização, que reconhece a independência da República da Guiné-Bissau, em consequência da qual Portugal é considerado potência ocupante e convidado a retirar, e ainda uma recomendação ao

Executive Secretary of the Department of State (Pickering) to the President's Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs (Scowcroft), 123. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d123

[7] Ver Negociações com os Estados Unidos da América sobre os Açores. Arquivo Marcello Caetano. Arquivo Nacional Torre do Tombo. PT/TT/AMC/PC/002. https://digitarq.arquivos.pt/documentDetails/b4790e3866f5455fb082a301d425fbc9

[8] Ver US Department of State. FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E-15, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN EUROPE, 1973–1976, SECOND, REVISED EDITION. Documents on Western Europe, 1973–1976 (Documents 1–382). Portugal, 1973–1976 (Documents 123–178). Memorandum From the Government of the United States to the Government of Portugal, 128. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d128

[9] "A própria Repartição de Negócios Económicos pressionava a Repartição de Negócios Políticos sobre a conveniência do Governo português em reconhecer Israel. Não só devido ao intercâmbio existente e respetivo desenvolvimento, mas devido ao conjunto crescente de firmas que pediam informações sobre importadores em Israel" (Marques, 2013, p. 102).

[10] Ver US Department of State. FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E-15, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN EUROPE, 1973–1976, SECOND, REVISED EDITION. Documents on Western Europe, 1973–1976 (Documents 1–382). Portugal, 1973–1976 (Documents 123–178). Memorandum of Conversation, 130. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d130; US Department of State. FOREIGN RELATIONS OF THE UNITED STATES, 1969–1976, VOLUME E-15, PART 2, DOCUMENTS ON WESTERN EUROPE, 1973–1976, SECOND, REVISED EDITION. Documents on Western Europe, 1973–1976 (Documents 1–382). Portugal, 1973–1976 (Documents 123–178). Memorandum From the Director of the Policy Planning Staff (Lord) to Secretary of State Kissinger, 131. https://history.state.gov/historicaldocuments/frus1969-76ve15p2Ed2/d131

Conselho de Segurança para a admissão da nova república (Castilho, 2012, p. 771), o que motivava urgência na chancelaria portuguesa sobre se os EUA iam exercer o seu direito de veto no Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas.

O que veio a acontecer, após a cedência portuguesa sobre o uso dos Açores, os EUA vetaram o pedido da Assembleia Geral, num gesto de recompensa para com o governo de Lisboa, o que evidenciou a existência de uma decisão arriscada, onde Marcello Caetano e o resto do executivo da política externa portuguesa ainda não tinham a certeza sobre a posição dos EUA.

Além disso, a visita de Estado do Secretário de Estado dos EUA, Henry Kissinger, a Lisboa, em dezembro de 1973, com o propósito de agradecer o apoio português a Marcello Caetano, confirma a intenção dos EUA em continuar a recompensar Portugal pelo seu papel na Guerra de Yom Kippur (Jerónimo & Costa Pinto, 2014), no que diz respeito ao fornecimento militar (Severiano Teixeira, 1995).

O agradecimento dos EUA, veio a 11 de Abril de 1974, quando o Kissinger escreveu ao Rui Patrício para reforçar as palavras prévias do Secretário de Estado Adjunto, Kenneth Rush sobre o reforço de uma cooperação em áreas não militares[11], e assegurou a manutenção do interesse de Washington em continuar a usar as Lajes.

Apesar da carta não fazer referência aos mísseis *Red Eye*, Kissinger veio a cumprir o que prometeu a encontrou uma forma de fornecer os mísseis por caminhos tortuosos para premiar a colaboração de Portugal neste conflito.

Em Abril de 1974, um lote de 500 mísseis *Red Eye*, no valor de custam 209 mil contos, chegou à Alemanha Ocidental com destino a Portugal (Themido, 1995, p. 164). Os mísseis seriam fornecidos por Israel através de um intermediário alemão e com o beneplácito de Washington (Themido, 1995, p. 166). O número de mísseis encomendado mostra que os *Red Eye* não se destinavam apenas à Guiné, onde as forças portuguesas necessitavam de cerca de 200 mísseis, mas também a outros pontos das colónias portuguesas. Rui Patrício tem conhecimento deste desfecho, pois na carta que escreve a João Hall Themido (1995), a 23 de Abril, dá conta dos contactos estabelecidos por uma entidade privada com o Departamento de Defesa Nacional que se revestem da maior importância[12], embora o Ministro tenha admitido que exista elementos suficientes para avaliar a origem verdadeira da iniciativa dos EUA e do momento da sua concretização.

Ainda que seja omisso quanto ao verdadeiro teor da dita iniciativa, tudo indica que estava em causa os mísseis, dado que o ministro dá instruções ao diplomata português para que retome as negociações do acordo das Lajes com o Departamento de Estado, um sinal de que as discordâncias que levaram à suspensão das negociações foram ultrapassadas, embora Rui Patrício aconselhe Themido a não fazer qualquer referência aos mísseis nos contactos seguintes que fosse a fazer, sendo o elemento fundamental das negociações a central nuclear e o respectivo plano de investimento, tendo em consideração não ser possível obter formalmente dos EUA o equipamento militar que fosse ser usado em África.

[11] Carta de Henry Kissinger para o Ministro dos Negócios Estrangeiros português, 11 de Abril de 1974, ADN/F3/14/29/4.
[12] Nota nº 1229/AF/74 do Estado-Maior General das Forças Armadas para o Director-Geral da Contabilidade Pública, Assunto: Aquisição de conjuntos míssil-lançador "REDEYE", 31 de Julho de 1974, ADN Fundo Geral Cx. 833/9.

As motivações domésticas do regime marcelista podem ser compreendidas tendo em vista a preservação da integridade territorial do Ultramar Português, dentro das possibilidades das capacidades portuguesas, de forma a assegurar a sobrevivência portuguesa no sistema internacional.

Conclusão

A crise no Médio Oriente apanhou os EUA mergulhados em pleno escândalo Watergate, com o Presidente Richard Nixon sem disponibilidade mental para lidar com questões de política externa dos EUA, pelo que foi o seu Secretário de Estado, que assumiu o protagonismo da situação.

Tendo em consideração que Israel não corria perigo existencial imediato, Kissinger temia que se o apoio dos EUA fosse demasiado rápido e expressivo, corria-se o risco de ofender os Estados árabes e de provocar um agravamento de tensão com a URSS. O que se revelou ser uma avaliação da situação que pecava por excesso de otimismo. Os EUA estavam preocupados com o desgaste sofrido pelas Forças de Defesa de Israel e sobretudo pela informação de que o Egito e a Síria estavam a ser armados por Moscovo, o que tornava mais urgente equipar Israel com munições e equipamento sofisticado, onde se incluiu caças e carros de combate (Antunes, 2000).

Perante a recusa de todos os outros Estados aliados dos EUA na Europa, onde se incluiu a Espanha franquista, Portugal foi o único a autorizar a ponte aérea para Israel (Lochery, 2013), através da Base das Lajes. Como nota Franco Nogueira (2000, p. 353), "entram em ponto morto as relações luso-americanas, mas o clima tem de considerar-se de perspetivas favoráveis, entre 1969 e 1973, à política seguida em África", uma vez que o antagonismo entre Israel e as nações árabes "fazia do Médio Oriente uma zona focal das atenções mundiais e provocou ao longo de 1973 novas fricções dentro da NATO" (Antunes, 1992, p. 269).

No entanto, o uso dos Açores na ponte aérea de socorro a Israel granjeou apoios pontuais à causa portuguesa, o que contribuiu para a modificação da linguagem da emenda Tunney Young, na qual foi removida a menção a Portugal, com a colaboração do *lobby* judaico (Pereira, 2022; Antunes, 1992). Ao mesmo tempo, os EUA, no Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas, vetaram a admissão da Guiné-Bissau como Estado de pleno direito após Assembleia Geral ter reconhecido a sua declaração de independência, o que era uma manifestação de apoio dos EUA a Portugal, como recompensa pelo apoio português no conflito, e um sinal de maior apoio americano, o que evidenciava a intenção de Kissinger em premiar Portugal pelo papel assumido no conflito em favor dos EUA (Pereira, 2022).

Após a Guerra do Yom Kippur, como nota Manuela Franco (2006, p. 70), "os países árabes tiveram um famoso acesso de fúria e Portugal, com outros, foi colocado nas suas listas de boicote petrolífero. Portugal tinha de ser punido pela política colonial e pela colaboração com os EUA", o que veio a contribuir para aumentar a pressão política e económica sobre Portugal (Antunes, 2000; Severiano Teixeira, 1995).

No entanto, "o boicote foi mitigado com a ajuda da Espanha e da *Gulf Oil*, mas não foi possível evitar longas filas de espera nas bombas de gasolina" (Pereira, 2022, p. 418), o

que teve consequências nefastas a nível interno, mas devido à natureza autoritária do regime marcelista a curto prazo a situação doméstica permaneceu sob controlo do regime. Perante a falta de apoio dos Estados europeus, e com "todas as contingências da crise internacional, tendo oferecido a Lisboa um pretexto inesperado para reclamar a ajuda de Washington, evidenciaram também a vulnerabilidade portuguesa e o divórcio político entre os dois países" (Antunes, 1992, p. 291), onde Portugal cedeu aos EUA, "perante um caso típico de exercício de força por parte de uma superpotência aliada e decepcionantemente protetora" (*ibidem*).

Para todos os efeitos, o contexto internacional da guerra do petróleo foi altamente dramático e a URSS e os EUA envolveram-se a fundo na crise do Médio Oriente. Portugal ajudou a salvar o Estado de Israel na Guerra de Yom Kippur e arcou com as consequências, na expetativa da obtenção da ajuda militar dos EUA que poderia assegurar a manutenção da presença portuguesa no Ultramar, e possivelmente restabelecer o controlo militar português sobre a Guiné.

Para o Portugal marcelista, esta crise mostrou como é difícil gerir as relações externas de Estado num momento de alta tensão no auge da Guerra Fria, em que vigorava a lógica "ou estás connosco ou estás contra nós" (*ibidem*), e perante o preço elevado a pagar, depressa ficou mais evidente que os benefícios poderiam superar os riscos na decisão portuguesa em ceder aos EUA. Nesse sentido, a Guerra do Yom Kippur foi um teste de fogo sobre a aliança entre EUA e Israel (Tal, 2014), assim foi um teste de resistência à aliança entre Washington e Lisboa, no qual "Portugal desempenhou no conflito israelo-árabe um papel importante - embora involuntariamente" (Antunes, 1992, p. 291).

Não obstante, como nota Severiano Teixeira (1995, p. 815), "esta posição de Portugal teria um efeito de tal modo positivo sobre as relações bilaterais que, apesar do embargo de armas que persistia sobre Lisboa, Kissinger diligencia no sentido de conseguir o fornecimento dos mísseis que as forças armadas portuguesas requeriam para a condução da guerra" no Ultramar Português.

Isto porque, de acordo com Antunes (1992, p. 279), Henry Kissinger reconheceu posteriormente ter sido duro com Marcello Caetano através da missiva presidencial onde "recusava a Caetano o equipamento militar tão necessário para a Guiné – os mísseis Red Eye", e que pretendia recompensar Portugal pelo seu papel na ponte aérea de socorro a Israel. Ou seja, os EUA combinaram que fariam chegar secretamente alguns mísseis *Red Eye* a Portugal por caminhos duvidosos para compensar Portugal (Severiano Teixeira, 1995; Themido, 1995), nomeadamente através de Israel (Antunes, 1986).

Porém, antes de chegarem os mísseis *Red Eye*, em 25 de abril de 1974, ocorreu o golpe de Estado militar que derrubou o Estado Novo marcelista[13].

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[13] "Portugal acabou por encomendar 500 mísseis a Israel que, no 25 de abril, estavam na Alemanha Ocidental à espera de serem expedidos para Lisboa. Costa Gomes e Spínola cancelaram a encomenda" (Pereira, 2022, p. 417).

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DECODING DIPLOMATIC NARRATIVES: CHINA'S POLITICAL DISCOURSE WITH PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES – A FOCUS ON BRAZIL

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Abstract

This paper constitutes a segment of a broader study on the interactions between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, with a specific focus on the Federative Republic of Brazil. Political discourses shape citizens' perceptions of a nation's principles, diplomacy, and policies, as seen in Xi Jinping Thought on Diplomacy. Xi emphasizes constructing a narrative system for international communication to enhance China's national image. This research investigates China's high-level political discourse with PSCs, categorizing communication into Ibero-American, Asian, and African PSCs. Analyzing 62 high-level political communication events between China and Brazil (2013-2022) reveals a focus on sustainable cooperation, trade, technology, and strengthened relations.

Keywords

Brazil, China, Political Discourse, Semiotics, International Relations, Portuguese-speaking Countries.

Resumo

Este artigo constitui uma parte de um estudo mais abrangente sobre as interações entre a China e os países de língua portuguesa, com especial enfoque na República Federativa do Brasil. Os discursos políticos moldam as perceções dos cidadãos sobre os princípios, a diplomacia e as políticas de uma nação, tal como se observa no Pensamento de Xi Jinping sobre a Diplomacia. Xi salienta a importância de construir um sistema narrativo para a comunicação internacional, com vista a reforçar a imagem nacional da China. Esta investigação analisa o discurso político de alto nível da China com os países de língua portuguesa (PLP), classificando a comunicação em PLP ibero-americanos, asiáticos e africanos. A análise de 62 eventos de comunicação política de alto nível entre a China e o Brasil (2013-2022) revela um enfoque na cooperação sustentável, no comércio, na tecnologia e no reforço das relações.

Palavras-chave

Brasil, China, Discurso Político, Semiótica, Relações Internacionais, Países de Língua Portuguesa.

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DECODING DIPLOMATIC NARRATIVES: CHINA'S POLITICAL DISCOURSE WITH PORTUGUESE-SPEAKING COUNTRIES – A FOCUS ON BRAZIL[1]

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Introduction

Brazil plays a significant role in the relations between China and Portuguese-speaking countries, and its relevance extends beyond a purely regional framework. Its inclusion in a collection of articles examining the diverse Portuguese-speaking countries and their relations with China is particularly pertinent, given the importance of its dynamics from both regional and global perspectives (Peng, et al., 2025, 2026). Therefore, we aim to analyse how political high-level discourse frames the diplomatic relationship between China and Brazil, from Chinese perspective, considering cooperation sustainability and most relevant topics addressed.

The economic foundations of China's relationship with Brazil are crucial for understanding their intertwined political dynamics. Since establishing diplomatic ties in 1974, the two nations have engaged in over 50 years of cooperation, with Brazil's role as a major exporter of raw materials aligning with China's need for resource security. This trade relationship forms the core of their bilateral political discourse, centered on commodities and international cooperation, and establishes a strategic partnership with significant regional and global influence (Ray et al., 2015). Understanding the political discourse that arises from these economic foundations is key to grasping China's broader strategies and Brazil's reciprocal responses. This economic interdependence also drives diplomatic engagements, shaping the complexities of international relations.

Expanding on this economic foundation, the strategic partnership between China and

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Brazil within the BRICS framework, established in 2009, has further enhanced cooperation among emerging economies. China's rise as a global economic power parallels Brazil's growth during the early 2000s commodity boom, driven by Chinese demand for raw materials (Ray et al., 2015; United States Institute of Peace, 2022). The bilateral relationship, with its mutual economic benefits, highlights the intricacies of global dependencies and underscores the importance of trade policies and international investments in shaping geopolitical dynamics.

Beyond economic collaboration, the BRICS platform enables China and Brazil to advocate for a multipolar world order, pushing for reforms in international financial institutions and encouraging trade in local currencies. This partnership extends into sectors like technology and infrastructure, while cultural exchanges foster mutual understanding and demonstrate how economic ties shape diplomacy. This ongoing cooperation underscores the increasing significance of multilateralism in the evolving global landscape.

Based on this context, the study explores how China has conducted its high-level political discourse (HLPD) in its engagement with Brazil. The second section outlines a brief review of the China-Brazil relationship and relevant theoretical frameworks, laying the groundwork for the study's methodological approach. The third section presents an innovative idea of interpreting HLPD using semiotic analysis, followed by an explanation of the construction of HLPD within the bilateral interaction framework. Finally, the conclusion discusses China and Brazil's cooperative preferences, future development trends, and potential challenges.

Literature Review

The central aim of this research is to explore how Chinese political actors weave together various discourses to construct political narratives, focusing specifically on high-level political speeches. Discourse extends beyond simple conversations; it represents a structured sequence of statements and tools that form what is known as a "discourse world" or "discourse ontology." Through carefully selected language and terms, discoursers create a narrative framework where ideas and information are organized to present a particular version of reality, which the audience (or receiver) interprets (Chilton, 2004).

Political discourses are especially influential, as they organize and sometimes manipulate information, events, and actions into stories—defining who did what, to whom, when, where, and why. The elements of these stories, known as discourse referents, each serve a specific role within their context. Political discourses thus provide the foundation for narratives that advance specific political agendas. In other words, combining different discourses into a storyline creates a platform for building and promoting political narratives (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002). The power of discourse lies in its ability to shape, steer, and even influence public beliefs and perceptions of society and the world. Political discourses leverage this ability to transform abstract concepts into reasoning and justifications for political actions (Chilton, 2004; Tannen et al., 2015). Such discourses can deeply impact public behavior and decision-making on issues such as national identity, security, societal structures, and governance.

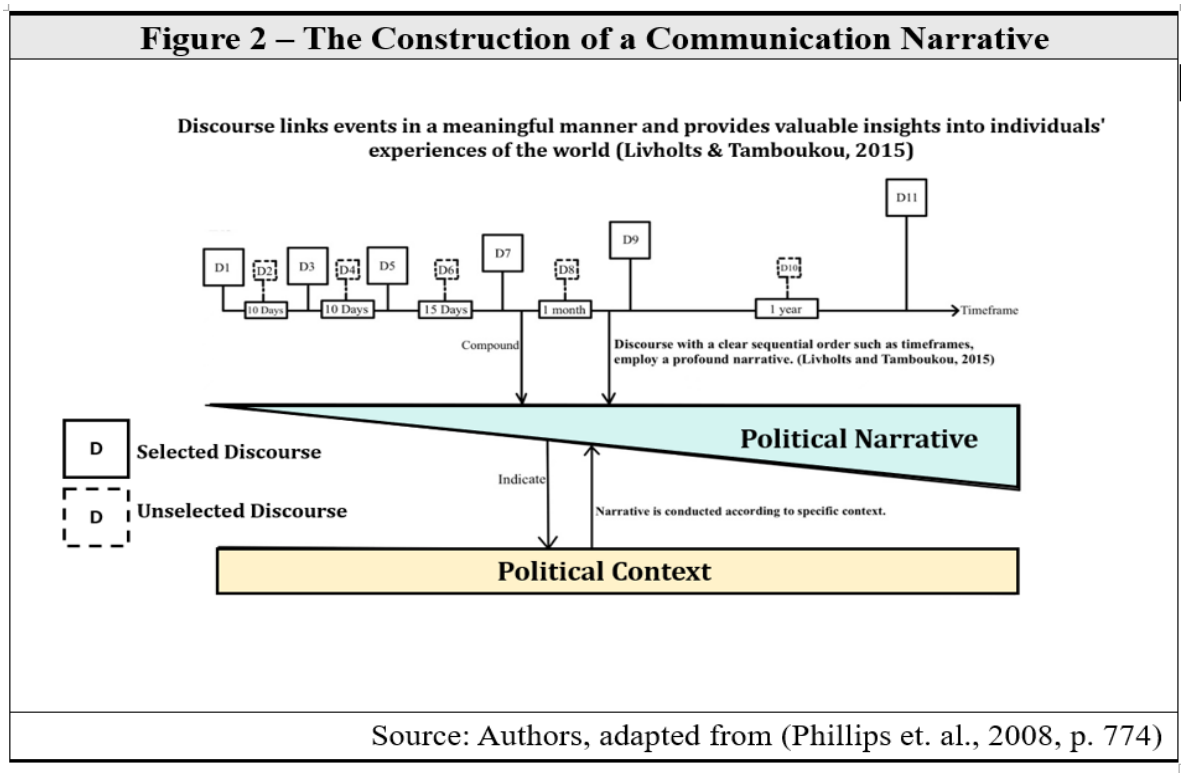
Table 1. The Formation of Political Narratives

Types of Political Discourses ▶	Political Narrative ▶		Audiences ▶ Perceptions	
Congratulatory messages Political speeches Meetings Editorials (newspapers and magazines) Interviews (…)	Storyline Discourse referents "Good stories" Ideologies Power structures	Intended to foster positive public perspectives	Simplicity Appealing Positive Seeking retribution, Adherence and support	General Public Decision-makers Media Outlets

Source: Authors

Figure 1. The construction of a communication narrative.

Figure 2 – The Construction of a Communication Narrative



Source: Authors, adapted from (Phillips et. al., 2008, p. 774)

Narratives are carefully constructed assemblages of discourses, selectively organized into coherent, logical, and persuasive stories (Livholts & Tamboukou, 2015). Language and rhetoric are essential tools in shaping these narratives, as they weave together events, characters, and settings to reveal deeper layers of meaning beyond mere facts. As Hinchman and Hinchman (1997) and Riessman (2008) emphasize, the power of

narratives lies in their ability to "select, organize, and emphasize various discourse elements," thereby influencing how an audience interprets and engages with the information presented.

Building on this, political narratives are particularly influential because they are logical sequences of political discourses that fit within specific contexts, often structured chronologically. These narratives, driven by political intentions, use characters, settings, and plots to simplify complex issues, shaping public perceptions and individual stances. Effective political narratives combine logical structure with emotional appeal, transforming political matters into compelling, accessible stories. By intertwining political discourses with narratives, political actors can frame their messages in ways that resonate with audiences, creating a strong influence on public opinion and decision-making.

Understanding the dynamic interplay between what politicians intend to communicate (the narrative) and the reality of political events requires careful narrative analysis (Shenhav, 2006, p. 247). As Costa (2020, p. 27) argues, "every political or social fact needs a story," and a well-constructed story can capture the audience's attention and provoke engagement. In the case of the Belt and Road Initiative (B&RI), narratives play a crucial role in shaping public perception, guiding how political events and intentions are communicated and understood, ultimately driving responses and participation in political discourse.

While narrative analysis focuses on the structure and storytelling of political narratives, discourse analysis delves into the language used. By adding a semiotic perspective, discourse analysis can also explore the signs and symbols embedded in the text, revealing deeper, layered meanings. This combination is particularly effective for dissecting political narratives, as it uncovers the strategic use of symbols in shaping messages. Such an approach helps to better understand how narratives are constructed, conveyed, and interpreted, providing insights into the nature of political communication and its role in shaping public opinion and the broader political landscape.

For example, Sengul's (2019) study of Australian right-wing populism demonstrates how linguistic choices and symbolic imagery are used to create compelling narratives around themes like "national identity," "otherness," and "crisis." These narratives shape public sentiment by positioning national identity against perceived threats, thereby mobilizing support and influencing political discourse. Similarly, El-Nawawy and Elmasry (2016) use semiotics to analyze the "strongman" leadership archetype, highlighting the interplay between visual and textual symbols. In China's high-level political communications, symbolic terms such as "prosperity," "harmony," "common destiny," and "(consultative) democracy" are frequently used to infuse Confucian and patriarchal ideals into political discourse. These words tap into cultural values and social norms to enhance the speaker's appeal and legitimize their authority. A semiotic lens allows us to unravel these deeper meanings, revealing the ideologies, power structures, and cultural frameworks that drive political narratives into action.

Ultimately, semiotic discourse analysis provides a comprehensive tool for understanding how political entities use language and symbols to shape meaning, establish authority, and influence societies. This scholarly approach deepens our understanding of the

complex role political rhetoric plays in shaping both the political landscape and public consciousness, as Costa (2020, pp. 27–28) argues:

> "*Through the merge of spaces, time and channels, political discourses became a product to be received by peers and by the public sphere in general. Media and political communication share attention and develop different channels of communication, which are mingled. The globalization of the communicational flows made of international communication a much attractive way to design international relations. Discourse became a crucial factor for the international narrative of the countries*".

Semiotic discourse analysis has been used to examine the rhetoric of various political figures, including former U.S. President Reagan (Lewis, 1987), former Israeli Prime Minister Sharon (Shenhav, 2005), Russian President Putin (Bacon, 2012), and Indonesian President Widodo (Surdiasis & Eriyanto, 2018). Despite extensive research at the global level, political discourses and narratives in China remain underexplored. This paper seeks to address this gap by shedding light on Chinese political communications. Specifically, the research conducts a qualitative analysis of Chinese political discourse in relation to Brazil. The selected samples consist of political speeches, which serve as public declarations of political intent directed toward specific audiences. As a form of political discourse, these speeches can become central to the development of political narratives. By organizing these speech samples chronologically, the study illustrates how a comprehensive narrative emerges, considering a broader political context.

Focusing on our object of study—namely, the framing of China–Brazil relations through an analysis of political discourse and its role in explaining the evolution of the bilateral relationship—we identify a gap in the existing academic literature. Much of the scholarly research approaches Brazil primarily as a case of the emergence of a regional power, rather than as the central object of analysis (Bezerra & Lin, 2023; Cooper, 2025). This makes studies such as those by Nogara and Shixue (2026), Cardoso (2013) and the special issue, titled Relações Brasil-China: parceria estratégica em comércio e investimento em prol da transição energética e meio ambiente, published by Campos Neutrais – Revista Latino-Americana de Relações Internacionais (Rocha at al., 2026) particularly valuable contributions. However, these studies do not fully capture how diplomacy or political discourse was framed and transformed as the bilateral relationship evolved. In this regard, applying discourse analysis to the study of China–Brazil relations offer an innovative perspective, contributing to a more comprehensive understanding of how the relationship has been constructed and redefined over time. Simultaneously, it provides an overview of the high-level diplomacy in the last decade, and analyses how discourses were framed and contributed to build a stable and last longing relationship even in an challenging and turbulent international order.

Methodology

The study is divided into three phases: (1) data collection, where samples are gathered within a defined timeframe and transformed into line codes (encoding); (2) analysis of

high-level political discourse (HLPD) to identify dominant themes using grounded theory methodology; and (3) uncovering the rationale behind the high-level political narrative (HLPN) by assembling all HLPD codes (see Table 1). It is important to highlight that political narratives result from the articulation of several types of discourse. In this case, we are analysing diplomatic discourse at the political high-level, determining how this discourse frames the diplomatic relationship between both countries. This methodology allows for a thorough analysis of bilateral communication events. By semiotically decoding the HLPD, the study highlights narratives and cooperative opportunities between China and Brazil, contributing to a deeper understanding of their shared objectives and future development prospects.

Step 1 Collecting and organizing sources of HLPN relating to High-Level Political Communicative Events (HLPCEs)

In this section, we explain the model used to analyze China's political narratives toward Brazil (Table 1).

Step 1A: The research period is defined from March 2013 to October 2022, aligning with the three terms of China's Head of State (HoS) (see Figure 3). This timeframe is selected for two key reasons: first, during this period, China and Brazil strengthened their strategic partnership, particularly under the BRICS framework; second, under President Xi's leadership, China's global influence grew significantly, making it important to understand how China has been perceived by Brazil and other Portuguese-speaking countries.

Table 2. *The Chinese HoS's Terms in Office*

First term	Second term	Third term
From March 2013 to March 2018	From April 2018 to October 2022	From November 2022 to November 2026

Source: Authors

Step 1B: We sampled only High-Level Political Communication Events (HLPCEs) that involved three key Chinese figures—HoS President Xi Jinping, former Prime Minister Li Keqiang as Head of Government, and Foreign Minister Wang Yi—as they represent the highest levels of Chinese governance. Additionally, political relevance was a key criterion in selecting discourse samples. The resulting dataset includes 62 HLPCEs, covering a broad spectrum of high-level diplomatic interactions. For example, the dataset includes the 2013 meeting between Xi Jinping and Brazilian President Dilma Rousseff, a 2017 discussion between Li Keqiang and Brazilian President Michel Temer, and a 2022 dialogue between Wang Yi and foreign ministers of BRICS countries, illustrating the diversity and significance of these diplomatic exchanges.

Step 1C: To gather records of bilateral engagements, we conducted a detailed examination of official Chinese websites, focusing on their English-language content. These websites included the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Xinhuanet. The HLPCEs were categorized into three types: (1) speeches and messages, (2) meetings, and (3) newspaper articles. This classification of official documents provided a structured approach to analyzing and interpreting information from these channels, ensuring a thorough investigation into the dynamics of China-Brazil bilateral engagements.

Step 2 HLPD analysis of each HLPCE — Employing NVivo 14 for textual analysis, and transforming content of HLPCEs into HLPD textual codes (Table 3)

Step 2A: The coding process was conducted using NVivo 14, a qualitative textual analysis software with features such as coding, thematic analysis, and visualization tools. NVivo 14 allows for the import of large text datasets, such as documents, interviews, and surveys, enabling in-depth analysis. After importing the text samples into NVivo, nodes were created to organize the data. In this context, nodes represent themes or categories, while coding refers to labeling sections of the text according to these themes. For temporal organization, nodes were created for each research period (e.g., "Period 1: March 2013 – March 2018" and "Period 2: April 2018 – October 2022"). Within these broader nodes, sub-nodes (or child themes) were developed to capture specific themes, such as "Cooperation," with child nodes like "Global Cooperation" and "Practical Cooperation" for more detailed categorization. After coding the text samples, we queried the data to identify recurring words and patterns, which helped reveal the key themes. This hierarchical structure of parent and child nodes adds depth to the analysis, providing a nuanced understanding of the themes embedded within the China-Brazil political narratives under review.

Step 2B: Sentiment analysis, which evaluates the tone or attitude associated with each reference, played a critical role in the NVivo 14 analysis. Sentiments were categorized as positive, negative, or neutral, offering an additional layer of interpretation. Assigning sentiment labels to references enriched the analysis of both the main and sub-themes, enhancing our understanding of the China-Brazil political discourse.

Step 2C: The data from steps 2A and 2B formed the basis for matrix coding queries, which generated charts for each period: Period 1 (Table 2) and Period 2 (Table 3). A comprehensive overview, classified by sentiment across both periods, is presented in the Conclusion (Table 4). This analysis provides a detailed examination of the distinct characteristics of each period's high-level political discourse (HLPD) between China and Brazil. The methodological approach offers a granular exploration of the evolving sentiment dynamics, providing insight into the shifting political narratives over time.

Step 3 Decoding of HLPN via Semiotics

Step 3A: In this step, we integrate discourse analysis with semiotics to analyze the HLPD samples. Semiotic analysis is applied not only to individual texts but to discursive trends formed by individual texts or speeches. In our case, we analyse the texts and speeches

under a high level political diplomatic discourse. While semiotic discourse analysis reveals the meanings, symbols, and communicative elements within specific speeches or documents, semiotic discourse analysis uncovers how these elements combine to form a cohesive political narrative. By applying this method, we can interpret both the detailed discourse components and the overarching high-level political narrative (HLPN) between China and Brazil.

Step 3B: The analysis concludes by evaluating China and Brazil's cooperation, development trajectories, and challenges. This step also highlights potential future directions for their relationship, focusing on how political narratives can influence ongoing collaboration and growth.

Table 3. Research Methodological Design.

Text Analysis Themes, patterns, meanings and language structures	→ ↘	**High Level Political Discourse Analysis (HLPD)** The social and political decoding and relationships of the language: Audiences, keywords, figures of style, adaptation and impact (negative, positive or neutral). "(…) **discourse as a particular way of talking about and understanding the world** (or an aspect of the world)" (Jørgensen & Phillips, 2002, p. 1).	→ ↗	**High Level Political Narrative (HLPN) Identification** The assembly the analysis of several discourses and unveil the story they tell all together. Narratives (stories) (…) **are discourses with a clear sequential order that connect events in a meaningful way** for a definite audience and thus offer insights about the world and/or people's experiences of it. (Hinchman & Hinchman, in Elliott, 2005, p. 5)
Step 1 – Preparation: Data Selection, Collection, Organization and Sources		**Step 2 – HLPD Analysis of Each HLPCE**		**Step 3 – Semiotic Decoding - The HLPN**
1A: Setting the **study timeline.**		**2A:** Identify the **keywords frequency** in each HLPCE, to establish the theme correlation with the dominant message of the discourse.	Nvivo 14 Data Analysis Software	**3A:** **(ALL CE TOGETHER)** ↧ Apply the semiotic decoding of CE, **to unveil the HLPN**, as the result of the constructed sense of whole HLPD.
1B: Select all relevant **High-Level Political Communication Events (HLPCE)** originated in China and politically addressed to the Portuguese Republic: (1) Speeches and Messages (SM); (2) Meeting Transcripts (MT); (3) Newspaper Articles (NA).		**2B:** Decoding **keywords** adapted or not and its perceived impact in (1) Positive; (2) Neutral; (3) Negative.		
1C: Identify the HLPCE **official sources** in English.		**2C:** Evaluate **keywords** in the political context.		**3B:** Identify the China's cooperative preference, future development tendency and challenges may meet during engagement with Portugal.
Source: Authors – version 24.				

Discussion and Findings

This section decodes the themes from the HLPDs between China and Brazil during the first two terms of Chinese President Xi's tenure (March 2013 to March 2018, and April 2018 to October 2022). Notable shifts in key themes related to the three perspectives outlined earlier are evident throughout this period (see Tables 4 and 5).

Between March 2013 and March 2018

During this period, the HLPDs between China and Brazil centered on six key themes (see Table 2): ***cooperation, development, partnership, relations, global,*** *and* ***exchanges***. Each of these themes offers unique insights into the evolving dynamics of the strategic partnership and economic collaboration between the two nations. The comparative analysis presented in Table 2 synthesizes findings from political research conducted between March 2013 and March 2018, highlighting the significance of these recurring themes in shaping China-Brazil relations.

The theme of ***"cooperation"*** between China and Brazil, particularly from March 2013 to March 2018, emerges as a central component of their diplomatic communications, with 117 mentions in total during this period. Of these, 35 references carry distinctly positive sentiments, highlighting the success and mutual benefits of their collaboration, while 82 references remain neutral, reflecting ongoing engagement that, while not always celebrated, indicates a steady and resilient partnership. This distribution of sentiments underscores the broad scope of cooperative ventures between the two nations, ranging from tangible "win-win" economic projects to broader "south-south" initiatives aimed at mutual development and promoting equitable global relations. For instance, Chinese President Xi Jinping emphasized that:

> *"China is willing to work with Brazil to promote the 'three-wheel drive' of economic cooperation, political security, and people-to-people and cultural exchanges among the BRICS countries, thus initiating the second 'golden decade' of BRICS cooperation"* (Xi, 2017).

The prevalence of neutral sentiments suggests a pragmatic and measured approach, despite an underlying positive outlook. This balanced discourse reflects a recognition of the complexities inherent in bilateral cooperation while reaffirming a commitment to mutual benefits and strategic collaboration.

The frequent mention of "economic cooperation" stands with the countries' shared efforts to strengthen economic ties through trade, investment, and sustainable development initiatives. Their comprehensive strategic partnership spans various sectors, including trade, investment, and infrastructure. This evolving relationship is evidenced by a significant increase in bilateral trade volume, with China maintaining its position as Brazil's largest trading partner (Cardoso, 2013).

Under the theme of ***"development,"*** the China-Brazil relationship stands out, with 98 mentions underscoring the alignment of their shared goals. Emphasizing common, sustainable, and strategic development, this theme reflects both nations' commitment to advancing joint agendas. With 33 positive references and numerous neutral mentions, the narrative projects optimism grounded in pragmatism. This focus on sustainable development strategies highlights China and Brazil's shared intent to address global challenges, showcasing a partnership that extends beyond mere economic interests. For example, President Xi lauded the China-Brazil Earth Resources Satellite (CBERS) program, recognizing its significant contributions to scientific, technological, and socio-economic development in both countries (Xi, 2014). The development theme is also tied



to the framework of South-South cooperation, where both nations prioritize environmental sustainability and social progress.

The **"partnership"** and **"relations"** themes, cited 39 and 30 times respectively, further illuminate the strategic and diplomatic dimensions of the China-Brazil relationship. The absence of negative references across both themes suggests an overwhelmingly positive outlook on their bilateral partnership, with a focus on forging future-oriented, strategic, and cooperative ties. The discourse surrounding these themes underscores the importance of various partnerships, including economic and global development collaborations, aimed at fostering a stable and progressive relationship. President Xi emphasized the significance of this relationship, noting that

> *"China and Brazil are important cooperative and development partners to each other. China attaches great importance to its relations with Brazil and is willing to, together with Brazil, continuously deepen political and strategic mutual trust, promote communication and cooperation in various areas, and push the comprehensive strategic partnership for sustained and in-depth progress"* (Xi, 2015).

This partnership, built on mutual respect, non-intervention, and a shared vision for an equitable international order, is further strengthened through bilateral agreements and joint projects, reflecting its strategic importance in the context of BRICS and regional dynamics in Latin America and Asia (Brookings, 2023).

The ***"global"*** theme, with 29 mentions, reflects China and Brazil's active engagement on the world stage. Although this theme includes two negative references, it highlights the countries' strong commitment to addressing global challenges and contributing to global governance. This theme underscores their roles as key players in international forums, advocating for reforms that prioritize the needs and interests of developing nations. Their collaboration on global issues, such as climate change and trade, demonstrates their growing influence and dedication to shaping a more balanced global order. As Xi remarked,

> *"make effective use of the BRICS New Development Bank as well as a package of financing arrangements between China and Latin America so as to provide financial support for promoting China-Brazil trade and investment. Bilateral coordination in major global affairs should also be intensified"* (Xi, 2015).

The ***"exchanges"*** theme, with 25 mentions, highlights the importance of cultural and people-to-people exchanges in strengthening China-Brazil relations. These exchanges have deepened the bilateral relationship, fostering greater understanding through cultural, educational, and technological collaborations. This theme illustrates the broader dimensions of diplomacy, where connections between individuals enhance the overall strength of the diplomatic relationship.

Table 4. Analysis on China and Brazil HLPN from March 2013 to March 2018

Parent theme	Seven most frequently mentioned child themes	Total number of references (among 29 events)	Sentiment		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
Cooperation	Practical cooperation, win-win cooperation, economic cooperation, south-south cooperation, beneficial cooperation.	117	35	0	82
Development	Common development, sustainable development, development strategies, social development, in-depth development.	98	33	0	65
Partnership	Strategic partnership, cooperative partnership, global development partnership, economic partnership, future-oriented Asia-Pacific partnership.	39	16	0	23

Table 4. Analysis on China and Brazil HLPN from March 2013 to March 2018

Parent theme	**Seven most frequently mentioned child themes**	**Total number of references** (among 29 events)	**Sentiment**		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
Relations	Bilateral relations, international relations, China-Brazil relations, state-to-state relations, cooperative relations.	30	10	0	20
Market	Third-party market cooperation, mutual market openness, financial market, European market, and market potential.	10	04	01	05
Global	Global governance, global development partnership, global issue, economic globalization, global value chain.	29	7	2	20
Exchanges	Cultural exchanges,	25	8	0	17

Table 4. Analysis on China and Brazil HLPN from March 2013 to March 2018

Parent theme	**Seven most frequently mentioned child themes**	**Total number of references** (among 29 events)	**Sentiment**		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
	people-to-people exchanges, exchanged views, close exchanges, personnel exchanges				

Source: Authors

As highlighted in Table 4, the China-Brazil relationship exemplifies a comprehensive partnership, driven by mutual benefits, strategic collaboration, and a shared commitment to addressing global challenges. This partnership has evolved beyond traditional diplomacy, incorporating a dynamic blend of economic, political, and social elements that play a significant role in both countries' growth and development. The overall positivity observed in key areas such as cooperation, development, and relations reflects a strong and optimistic outlook for future collaboration. However, a more cautious tone is evident in the economic sphere, suggesting a measured approach to market-related endeavors. As this partnership continues to mature, it is set to play an increasingly influential role on the global stage, shaping trends in international stability, governance, and development.

From April 2018 to October 2022

From April 2018 to October 2022, the political discourse between China and Brazil unfolded through various thematic areas, reflecting a deepening strategic partnership and collaboration. As illustrated in Table 3, the primary themes driving their bilateral relations included cooperation, development, relations, trade, global governance, and trust. Each theme reveals the evolving nature of their diplomatic, economic, and global engagements, shaping the trajectory of their partnership.

The **"development"** theme, referenced 146 times, emphasizes China and Brazil's commitment to joint development efforts, focusing on sustainable and high-quality growth. For instance, shared objectives such as sustainable urbanization highlight both



nations' broader alignment with global sustainability goals (Xi, 2019). The sub-themes within development, including "common development" and "high-quality development," reflect mutual efforts to address developmental disparities and enhance socio-economic conditions within both countries. This theme's prominence, with positive and neutral references, underscores the growing depth of the development discourse, particularly as it relates to improving social and economic well-being. The significant rise in bilateral trade between China and Brazil, which reached $152.8 billion in 2022, is a clear indication of the deepening economic ties that reinforce their shared development goals (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023).

"Cooperation," mentioned 112 times, also takes center stage, with initiatives such as "win-win cooperation" reflecting the importance of collaborative efforts. Xi's 2020 speech emphasized the need for both countries to foster an open global economy, resist protectionism, and build a nondiscriminatory business environment. In line with this, the Sixth Meeting of the Sino-Brazilian High-Level Commission for Consultation and Cooperation (COSBAN) in 2022 celebrated a decade of comprehensive strategic partnership. Both countries outlined plans to expand trade and investment, setting the stage for even more robust economic collaboration in the coming decade (Ministério das Relações Exteriores, 2022). Additionally, scientific and technological cooperation between China and Brazil has become increasingly important, as the two nations work together to foster innovation and strengthen their partnership in these fields.

"Global" emerges as a key theme in the discourse, with 87 references, reflecting China and Brazil's engagement on the international stage. Both countries have advocated for reforms in global financial institutions, pushing for an international system that better reflects the interests of developing nations. Wang Yi noted that the two countries are committed to promoting development as a priority in global governance, especially within the BRICS framework, which both nations actively support. This cooperative stance highlights their shared vision of creating a more equitable global order (Wang, 2022). Brazil, under President Lula's leadership, has adopted a path of "active nonalignment" in the global geopolitical landscape, focusing on maintaining strong economic ties, especially with China, without becoming entangled in broader global conflicts (Center for Strategic and International Studies, 2023).

The theme of ***"relations"*** reflects the sustained diplomatic ties between China and Brazil. Diplomatic exchanges, state visits, and high-level dialogues have reinforced the depth of the political relationship, with both countries emphasizing mutual respect and strategic collaboration. The 30 references to relations, coupled with overwhelmingly positive sentiments, demonstrate a shared commitment to maintaining a stable and cooperative partnership. President Xi's state visits and regular dialogues with Brazilian leaders underscore the importance of this partnership, particularly in fostering stronger political and cultural ties. "China attaches great importance to its relations with Brazil and is committed to deepening political and strategic mutual trust," Xi remarked during a 2015 visit (Xi, 2015). This steady engagement has continued, with both nations regularly reviewing and expanding their bilateral agreements to ensure that their partnership remains future-oriented and comprehensive.

The ***"partnership"*** theme, mentioned 95 times, highlights the evolution of China and Brazil's relationship into a "comprehensive strategic partnership." This partnership



extends beyond economic collaboration to include education, technology, and environmental initiatives. Originally established in 1993, Brazil's status as a strategic partner has matured into a global strategic partnership, reflecting the depth and breadth of their relationship (Cardoso, 2013). This partnership is anchored in shared goals for sustainable development, global stability, and mutual growth, and it highlights the broad scope of cooperation that encompasses various sectors, including trade, science, and education.

"Trade" has emerged as a particularly significant theme, with China and Brazil having solidified their status as major trading partners. Despite Brazil's non-participation in the Belt and Road Initiative, China remains the largest foreign investor in Brazil, focusing on key sectors like energy, infrastructure, agriculture, and technology (China Briefing, 2022). Bilateral trade has seen substantial growth, with China being Brazil's largest trading partner in 2022, further cementing their economic interdependence (S&P Global, 2023). The trade discourse reveals both optimism and caution, with positive references to opportunities in economic collaboration balanced by some neutral and negative sentiments reflecting the challenges inherent in trade relations.

The ***"trust"*** theme underscores the importance of mutual confidence in strengthening diplomatic and economic ties between China and Brazil. The 20 references to trust in this period reflect the optimism surrounding the bilateral relationship. Positive sentiments highlight mutual understanding, respect, and a shared vision for future growth, while the absence of negative references underscores the stability of this trust. Wang Yi remarked, "Since the establishment of diplomatic relations, China and Brazil have consistently upheld mutual trust, respect, and support, becoming a model of cooperation between developing nations" (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China, 2018c).

Finally, the ***"world"*** theme, capturing both nations' ambitions for global peace and stability, resonates strongly through 52 references. China and Brazil's collaborative efforts within platforms like BRICS and the United Nations emphasize their shared commitment to multilateralism and a more balanced international order. During the 2020 BRICS Summit, President Xi echoed these sentiments, stating,

> *"we will keep people's welfare close to heart and pursue the vision of a community with a shared future for mankind. Through concrete actions, we will contribute our share to making the world a better place for everyone"* (Xi, 2020).

This theme demonstrates the alignment of their global visions and their role in reshaping international governance structures to better represent developing countries.

In summary, the evolving China-Brazil partnership from 2018 to 2022 is characterized by a strategic alignment across multiple sectors, including development, trade, and global governance. This partnership as Table 5 shown has matured into a model for South-South cooperation, as both nations work together to address global challenges and reshape international norms. Their collaboration is not only beneficial on a bilateral level but also contributes to shaping a more inclusive and multipolar global order, one that reflects the aspirations and interests of emerging economies.

Table 5. Period 2 (April 2018 to October 2022) China and Brazil's HLPN Analysis

Themes	**Most frequently mentioned child themes**	**Total number of References** (among 33 Events)	**Sentiment**		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
Development	Common development, high-quality development, development paradigm, social development, sustainable development	146	55	2	89
Cooperation	Practical cooperation, bilateral cooperation, win-win cooperation, south-south cooperation, international cooperation	112	46	0	66
Global	Economic globalization, global governance, global value chains, global anti-corruption governance system, global knowledge network	72	20	1	51

Table 5. Period 2 (April 2018 to October 2022) China and Brazil's HLPN Analysis

Themes	**Most frequently mentioned child themes**	**Total number of References** (among 33 Events)	**Sentiment**		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
Relations	International relations, bilateral relations, China-Brazil relations, diplomatic relations, state-to-state relations	42	13	0	29
Trade	Multilateral trading system, free trade, bilateral trade, trade liberalization, two-way trade	39	14	3	22
Economy	Digital economy, open world economy, emerging economies, green economy, sharing economy	34	22	0	12
Partnership	Strategic partnership, global development partnerships, investment partnership, economic partnership, industrial	34	14	0	20

Table 5. Period 2 (April 2018 to October 2022) China and Brazil's HLPN Analysis

Themes	**Most frequently mentioned child themes**	**Total number of References** (among 33 Events)	**Sentiment**		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
	partnership				
World	World peace, world stability, multi-polar world, world affairs, world wars	33	19	1	13

Source: Authors

This analysis of HLPDs in China-Portugal relations during Period 2 (Table 3) illuminates an intensified commitment and nuanced dynamics. While *cooperation* and *relations* continue to dominate, themes like *development*, *exchanges*, *partnership*, *trade*, and *trust* reveal a complex and evolving tapestry, and the predominantly positive sentiments underscore an optimistic attitude.

Comparative Discussion

Economic Cooperation:

During the first period from March 2013 to March 2018, economic cooperation emerged as a central theme in China-Brazil relations, with 117 references across 32 high-level political events. The discussions primarily focused on "win-win cooperation" and "south-south cooperation," reflecting strong interest in joint economic ventures. Sentiment analysis revealed no negative sentiments, suggesting cautious optimism about the outcomes of these efforts. Notably, 35 positive references highlighted the recognized benefits of these engagements. President Xi Jinping emphasized Brazil's status as the first developing nation to establish a strategic partnership with China, acknowledging the global significance of their collaboration. He affirmed that both countries viewed each other's growth as mutually beneficial and reiterated China's commitment to strengthening ties with Brazil, aiming to foster a new framework for international relations in the context of increasing economic globalization.

President Xi urged both countries to capitalize on their complementary advantages by promoting trade and investment across key industries such as manufacturing, energy, mining, agriculture, infrastructure, aerospace, and technological innovation. He stressed the importance of industrial collaboration, trade diversification, and the use of local currencies for trade settlements. Additionally, Xi emphasized the need for amicable dispute resolution to guide enterprises in their international ventures.

In the second period, from April 2018 to October 2022, the discourse on economic cooperation evolved, with 112 mentions indicating a shift toward a more positive outlook. The number of positive references rose to 46, reflecting greater confidence in bilateral initiatives. The dialogue expanded to include "bilateral cooperation" and "international cooperation," signifying that the partnership extended beyond traditional agreements and aligned with broader global economic trends. This period demonstrated an adaptive strategy to global economic changes, showcasing the ability of China and Brazil to maintain and grow their partnership despite external challenges.

In a comprehensive address during this time, President Xi Jinping addressed the significant global development challenges exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. He highlighted the widening gaps between the global North and South and the escalating issues around food and energy security. Xi criticized the politicization of development by certain countries, which had led to division and confrontation through sanctions and isolation. He called for international unity and cooperation, emphasizing the global aspirations for peace and development, particularly among emerging markets and developing nations.

Despite these challenges, Xi pointed out the opportunities brought about by the ongoing scientific and technological revolution. He proposed a growth model grounded in equity, balance, and inclusiveness, advocating for win-win cooperation and shared prosperity. He stressed the need for a global consensus on development, arguing that true prosperity, security, and human rights can only be achieved through universal improvements in living standards. This, he emphasized, should be a priority in international discourse, particularly through the fulfillment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Moreover, Xi outlined the necessity of fostering an international environment conducive to development, condemning protectionist policies and economic decoupling, which he argued undermine global cooperation. He called for nations to support an open global economy and advocated for a fair and equitable global governance system to promote sustainable development.

The emphasis on economic cooperation and development throughout these two periods reflects the evolving nature of China-Brazil relations. Their bilateral partnership, built on mutual trust and shared objectives, continues to expand across key sectors, driven by a strategic alignment in addressing global challenges and fostering inclusive growth. Both nations have demonstrated a commitment to not only enhancing their economic ties but also contributing to global stability and balance.

Bilateral Relations and Diplomacy

In the initial period (March 2013 to March 2018), bilateral relations and diplomacy between China and Brazil were marked by a strategic approach to strengthening "China-Brazil relations" and enhancing "state-to-state relations." Of the 30 references made during this period, 10 were positive and 20 were neutral, reflecting a cautious yet optimistic tone. Chinese Premier Li Keqiang emphasized that China and Brazil, as major developing countries and significant emerging economies, have maintained stable and healthy bilateral relations. This relationship contributed to regional and global peace and prosperity, with China committed to deepening political mutual trust and expanding practical cooperation with Brazil. Additionally, both nations worked to intensify people-to-people and cultural exchanges, as well as maintain close collaboration under multilateral frameworks like the United Nations, the G20, and BRICS. These efforts aimed at fostering greater development and enhancing China's ties with Latin American countries.

In the second period (April 2018 to October 2022), the dialogue around bilateral relations and diplomacy expanded significantly, with 42 mentions—13 of which carried positive sentiments. The discourse broadened to include "diplomatic relations," reflecting a deeper diplomatic commitment and acknowledging the growing importance of China-Brazil ties on the international stage. This evolution highlighted the dynamic and adaptive nature of diplomatic relations between the two countries. Despite fluctuations in the global landscape or internal changes, China consistently recognized Brazil's pivotal role in international and regional affairs. China reaffirmed its commitment to supporting Brazil's government in promoting economic development, improving livelihoods, and charting a path aligned with Brazil's national priorities.

Throughout this period, China placed immense value on its comprehensive strategic partnership with Brazil, viewing it as essential for mutual benefit and shared prosperity. China aimed to deepen cooperation across various sectors, including economic ties, cultural exchanges, technological collaboration, and people-to-people interactions. China's dedication extended to creating a stable environment for Brazil's sustained growth, recognizing that regional stability is vital for broader progress. Through ongoing dialogue and mutual support, China and Brazil worked to forge a resilient partnership that serves both nations' interests and contributes positively to the global community.

This relationship between China and Brazil represents a model of constructive engagement and strategic cooperation, rooted in mutual respect, trust, and a shared vision for the future. China remains fully committed to nurturing and strengthening this partnership, ensuring its continued relevance and significance in the years to come. As Wang Yi stated, "China will work closely with Brazil to further deepen our comprehensive strategic partnership, ensuring that it remains a cornerstone of cooperation and shared progress" (Wang, 2019).

Cultural Exchanges and Soft Power

Cultural exchanges and soft power have been a fundamental part of the discourse between China and Brazil throughout both periods of analysis. From the outset, these

exchanges played a key role in enhancing mutual understanding and fostering collaboration between the two nations. By emphasizing cultural diplomacy, China and Brazil not only aimed to deepen their ties but also to establish a solid foundation for future cooperation across multiple sectors.

A crucial component of these cultural exchanges was the educational and academic collaboration that flourished between the two countries. Both China and Brazil took strategic steps to strengthen educational ties and foster academic interaction. Agreements aimed at mutual recognition of academic qualifications paved the way for Chinese students to study in Brazil, further promoting cultural understanding. The establishment of Confucius Institutes in Brazil significantly contributed to the promotion of the Chinese language and culture. These institutes, actively engaging with Brazilian academic institutions, have created opportunities for language learning while fostering a deeper understanding of Chinese cultural heritage. This educational engagement not only facilitated cultural exchanges but also laid the groundwork for stronger diplomatic and economic ties.

The cultural diplomacy efforts during the first period gained momentum and established a framework for broader engagement. Initiatives focused on "cultural exchanges" and "people-to-people exchanges" served as the initial steps toward creating a shared cultural platform. These early efforts were essential in cultivating trust and mutual respect, which became vital components of the broader diplomatic and economic partnerships between the two countries. The cultural dimension of their relationship thus provided the foundation upon which stronger political and economic ties were built (Xi, 2022).

As globalization trends and global challenges intensified during the second period, cultural exchanges continued to be a central theme in Sino-Brazilian relations. Although specific data for this period is unavailable, the discourse suggests that cultural diplomacy persisted, becoming even more relevant in addressing shared global concerns. The strategic use of soft power grew increasingly important, allowing both nations to deepen their relationship beyond traditional political and economic frameworks. In this context, cultural diplomacy emerged as a critical tool in fostering a resilient, multifaceted partnership, further aligning with global objectives and reinforcing the foundation of China-Brazil relations (Xi, 2022).

Through these sustained cultural and educational exchanges, China and Brazil demonstrated a strong commitment to mutual understanding and shared values. Cultural diplomacy became a core element in strengthening the bilateral relationship, with both sides recognizing its crucial role in promoting long-term cooperation and enhancing soft power. As President Xi Jinping remarked, cultural exchanges are key to creating an environment that supports diplomatic and economic collaborations, ensuring that both nations continue to benefit from a robust and enduring partnership (Xi, 2022).

Conclusion (highlights and future prospects)

In conclusion, this analysis of China’s political discourse with Brazil reveals a strategic partnership deeply rooted in economic cooperation, diplomatic engagement, and shared global ambitions. Economic cooperation serves as the cornerstone of their relationship,



reflecting both nations' commitment to global growth and stability. Diplomatic ties, facilitated through high-level exchanges, further reinforce this partnership, while cultural interactions enhance mutual understanding, complementing their broader geopolitical and economic objectives.

Table 6. Analysis on China and Brazil's HLPN from March 2013 to October 2022

Themes	Most frequently mentioned child themes	Total number of References (among 62 HLPCEs)	Sentiment		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
Cooperation	Practical cooperation, win-win cooperation, bilateral cooperation, south-south cooperation, economic cooperation	229	81	0	148
Development	Common development, sustainable development, development strategies, development path, social development	244	88	2	154
Global	Global governance, economic globalization, global value chains, global anti-corruption system, global	101	27	3	71

Table 6. Analysis on China and Brazil's HLPN from March 2013 to October 2022

Themes	**Most frequently mentioned child themes**	**Total number of References** (among 62 HLPCEs)	**Sentiment**		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
	challenges				
Partnership	Strategic partnership, global development partnership, cooperative partnership, economic partnership, extensive partnerships	73	30	0	43
Relations	Bilateral relations, international relations, China-Brazil relations, state-to-state relations, cooperative relations	72	23	0	49
Exchanges	Culture exchanges, people-to-people exchanges, personnel exchanges, in-depth exchanges, all-around exchanges	54	20	0	34

Table 6. Analysis on China and Brazil's HLPN from March 2013 to October 2022

Themes	Most frequently mentioned child themes	Total number of References (among 62 HLPCEs)	Sentiment		
			Positive	Negative	Neutral
Partnership	Strategic partnership, global development partnership, cooperative partnership, economic partnership, extensive partnerships	73	30	0	43

Source: Authors

As Table 6 shown, cooperation, particularly in economic ventures, remains central to China-Brazil relations. Both nations are committed to joint initiatives that leverage their respective strengths in agriculture, energy, and infrastructure. These practical collaborations not only bolster bilateral trade but also contribute to a shared vision for sustainable global leadership. The discourse surrounding cooperation highlights their focus on fostering economic interdependence and establishing a resilient framework for future growth. The theme of development is equally important, as both countries seek inclusive and sustainable growth, balancing their local needs with broader global objectives. Their collaboration in platforms such as BRICS reflects a mutual desire to reshape global governance, ensuring it better represents the interests of developing nations. These global themes emphasize the significance of international cooperation in addressing shared challenges like climate change and economic inequality. The partnership between China and Brazil extends beyond economics and diplomacy. Built on mutual respect and shared goals, this strategic alliance influences both regional and global dynamics. Through ongoing dialogue and collaborative efforts, the relationship continues to evolve, underscoring the deepening ties between the two nations. Cultural exchanges further support the bilateral relationship, not just as symbolic gestures but as meaningful platforms for fostering deeper connections between their societies. These initiatives, such as the establishment of Confucius Institutes in Brazil, highlight China's

use of soft power to build long-term relationships. By promoting educational and cultural programs, China strengthens its influence and creates lasting people-to-people bonds that complement its diplomatic and economic efforts.

During President Xi Jinping's tenure (March 2013 to October 2022), high-level political discourse between China and Brazil emphasized the importance of economic cooperation, diplomacy, and cultural interactions. Semiotic analysis of this discourse reveals the strategic priorities shaping their partnership, showing how these themes serve as pillars of their engagement.

Economic cooperation, particularly in key sectors such as trade, agriculture, and infrastructure, has been at the forefront of their relationship. These practical initiatives reflect a concerted effort to leverage mutual strengths for global trade and development. The recurring emphasis on trade underscores the critical role of economic interdependence in driving broader bilateral and global ambitions.

Diplomatic engagement plays an equally vital role in advancing the China-Brazil partnership. High-level communications reinforce the importance of political cooperation and pave the way for deeper strategic ties. The elevation of their relationship to a comprehensive strategic partnership highlights the multifaceted nature of their collaboration, encompassing not just economic but also political, cultural, and global dimensions.

The cultural exchange, while intertwined with economic and political goals, serve as strategic tools for fostering trust and understanding. These efforts are key to building a long-term partnership, with initiatives like educational programs and cultural diplomacy contributing to a more nuanced and resilient relationship. Such exchanges enhance the diplomatic framework by creating interpersonal connections that complement formal agreements.

As China's global influence grows, its partnership with Brazil has become more strategically significant. Brazil's natural resource wealth aligns with China's developmental needs, particularly in agriculture and infrastructure. Conversely, China sees Brazil as a key partner in Latin America, leveraging its role in BRICS to strengthen its global engagement and influence. This mutual benefit underscores the depth of their strategic alignment.

However, with growing economic cooperation comes the need for careful management of geopolitical implications. Brazil, like other Latin American nations, must balance its relationship with China to maximize benefits without compromising its national interests. This dynamic reflects the complexities of modern global relations, where economic and geopolitical considerations must be managed in tandem.

Looking ahead, China and Brazil are well-positioned to continue strengthening their relationship, with a focus on sustainability, fairness, and global governance. As China seeks to solidify its role in international institutions and advocate for a more equitable world order, its partnership with Brazil will remain central to these objectives. Brazil, in turn, stands to benefit from Chinese investments and expanded market access, while carefully navigating its broader regional and global relationships.

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SAUDI ARABIA'S MULTIVECTOR DIPLOMACY AFTER 2020: STRATEGIC HEDGING BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND IRAN

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Abstract

This article examines how Saudi Arabia has recalibrated its foreign policy since 2020 through a strategy of multivector diplomacy embedded within a broader logic of strategic hedging. It argues that Riyadh's simultaneous engagement with the United States, China, and Iran reflects a deliberate and coherent strategy shaped by both systemic pressures and domestic transformation imperatives. Drawing on a neoclassical realist framework, the study demonstrates how Vision 2030 and the centralisation of authority under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman function as intervening variables that filter external constraints and shape foreign policy outputs. Using qualitative process tracing based on official primary documents, policy statements, and academic literature, the article shows that Saudi Arabia's diplomatic diversification is not strategic drift but a structured effort to maximise autonomy, reduce vulnerability, and align foreign policy with long-term domestic development objectives.

Keywords

Saudi Arabia; Middle East politics; Multivector diplomacy; Hedging; Strategic autonomy; Neoclassical realism; Vision 2030; United States-China rivalry.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a forma como a Arábia Saudita reajustou a sua política externa desde 2020, através de uma estratégia de diplomacia multivetorial enquadrada numa lógica mais ampla de diversificação estratégica. Defende que o envolvimento simultâneo de Riade com os Estados Unidos, a China e o Irão reflete uma estratégia deliberada e coerente, moldada tanto por pressões sistémicas como por imperativos de transformação interna. Com base num quadro realista neoclássico, o estudo demonstra como a «Visão 2030» e a centralização do poder nas mãos do príncipe herdeiro Mohammed bin Salman funcionam como variáveis intervenientes que filtram as restrições externas e moldam os resultados da política externa. Recorrendo a uma análise qualitativa de processos com base em documentos oficiais primários, declarações políticas e literatura académica, o artigo mostra que a diversificação diplomática da Arábia Saudita não constitui um desvio estratégico, mas sim um esforço estruturado para maximizar a autonomia, reduzir a vulnerabilidade e alinhar a política externa com os objetivos de desenvolvimento interno a longo prazo.

Palavras-chave

Arábia Saudita; Política do Médio Oriente; Diplomacia multivetorial; Proteção estratégica; Autonomia estratégica; Realismo neoclássico; Visão 2030; Rivalidade entre os Estados Unidos e a China.



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SAUDI ARABIA'S MULTIVECTOR DIPLOMACY AFTER 2020: STRATEGIC HEDGING BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND IRAN[1]

DIANA MARIA GRANADO MACHADO

Introduction

Saudi Arabia's foreign policy has undergone one of the most significant strategic adjustments in the contemporary Middle East. Traditionally perceived as a close and dependable partner of the United States, Riyadh has, since 2020, adopted a more flexible and diversified diplomatic posture (Saeed, 2025). This shift is visible in the Kingdom's simultaneous preservation of security cooperation with Washington, deepening economic and technological ties with Beijing, and cautious diplomatic de-escalation with Tehran (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025; Hwang, 2024).

These developments challenge long-standing assumptions that Saudi foreign policy is either structurally pro-American or primarily driven by sectarian rivalry. Instead, they reveal the emergence of a more sophisticated multivector strategy adapted to the realities of an increasingly multipolar international order (Evers, 2023).

The central puzzle guiding this article is therefore the following: how has Saudi Arabia maintained close security ties with the United States while simultaneously strengthening its strategic partnership with China and reducing tensions with Iran?

This article asks: How do systemic pressures and domestic transformation imperatives interact to shape Saudi Arabia's multivector diplomacy and hedging behaviour after 2020?

I argue that Saudi Arabia's recent foreign policy recalibration is best understood through a neoclassical realist framework that places external structural pressures in dialogue with internal political and economic drivers (Rose, 1998; Guzzini, 2004). At the systemic level, the Kingdom confronts intensifying US--China rivalry, shifting regional alignments, and growing uncertainty about the durability of American strategic commitment to the Gulf

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(Evers, 2023; Hwang, 2024). In this context, exclusive alignment with a single great power no longer guarantees optimal strategic returns.

At the domestic level, Vision 2030---combined with the consolidation of authority around Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman---has generated strong incentives to diversify the economy, attract foreign investment, and stabilise the regional environment (Bogaert, 2013; Saeed, 2025). These domestic imperatives function as intervening variables that filter systemic pressures and shape how they are interpreted and translated into foreign policy.

While structural realism identifies how shifts in the distribution of power generate incentives for diversification, it remains under-specified regarding how systemic pressures translate into concrete foreign policy decisions. Neoclassical realism addresses this limitation by incorporating domestic intervening variables such as elite perceptions, leadership priorities, and state transformation agendas (Rose, 1998). Liberal and constructivist approaches illuminate important dimensions of domestic preference formation and identity narratives (Guzzini, 2004), yet they do not fully capture the strategic risk-management logic underpinning Saudi Arabia's diversification under great-power rivalry.

This article advances the literature in three original ways. First, it reconceptualises Saudi Arabia's post-2020 foreign policy not as tactical adjustment or gradual realignment, but as a coherent and domestically mediated strategy of hedging. Second, it integrates hedging theory and multivector diplomacy within a neoclassical realist causal framework, thereby linking observable diplomatic diversification to specific intervening domestic variables. Third, it demonstrates that Vision 2030 operates not merely as a domestic reform agenda but as a structural filter shaping external alignment choices. By foregrounding the interaction between systemic rivalry and internal transformation, the article contributes to broader debates on middle-power adaptation in an increasingly fragmented international system.

Theoretical Framework

Hedging

Hedging has emerged as a central concept for understanding how states manage geopolitical uncertainty under conditions of great-power rivalry. Rather than fully committing to balancing against or band wagoning with a dominant actor, hedging involves a calibrated strategy that combines cooperation, diversification, and selective counterbalancing (Kuik, 2008; Lim & Cooper, 2015). It allows states to mitigate risk while preserving strategic autonomy.

Kuik (2008) defines hedging as a strategy in which states simultaneously pursue reassurance and limited balancing to avoid the costs associated with rigid alignment. Lim and Cooper (2015) refine this understanding by emphasising the role of costly signalling and strategic ambiguity. By avoiding overt alignment, states preserve room for manoeuvre and reduce the likelihood of entrapment in great-power rivalry. Hedging therefore reflects neither indecision nor incoherence, but a deliberate effort to manage uncertainty in a fluid strategic environment.

In the context of Saudi Arabia, hedging captures the Kingdom's simultaneous maintenance of security cooperation with the United States, expansion of economic and technological ties with China, and cautious de-escalation with Iran. This pattern reflects a conscious effort to diversify external partnerships, reduce dependence on any single power, and avoid strategic lock-in under conditions of intensifying systemic competition.

Multivector Diplomacy

Multivector diplomacy refers to a foreign policy approach in which states cultivate multiple, and often ideologically diverse, partnerships in order to maximise strategic flexibility (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025). Unlike traditional alignment strategies dependent on a single patron, multivector diplomacy emphasises functional diversification across political, economic, and security domains.

Originally associated with post-Soviet and non-aligned states, the concept has increasingly been applied to emerging middle powers navigating competitive geopolitical environments. Its underlying logic is pragmatic rather than ideological. By spreading external partnerships across multiple actors, states can extract differentiated benefits, hedge against overdependence, and enhance strategic autonomy.

In Saudi Arabia's case, multivector diplomacy aligns closely with its evolving profile as a middle power that leverages energy resources, financial capacity, and diplomatic influence to position itself as a regional broker (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025; Sazak, 2020). It allows Riyadh to preserve security ties with Washington, deepen economic engagement with Beijing, and pursue de-escalation with Tehran without fully committing to any single geopolitical camp. Multivector diplomacy thus provides the structural expression of Saudi hedging behaviour.

Neoclassical Realism

Neoclassical realism provides the analytical bridge linking systemic incentives to domestic political dynamics (Rose, 1998). While it accepts the realist premise that the distribution of power shapes the external environment, it rejects the assumption that systemic pressures translate directly into policy outcomes. Instead, these pressures are filtered through domestic intervening variables, including leadership perceptions, regime priorities, institutional capacity, and socio-economic conditions (Guzzini, 2004; Foulon & Meibauer, 2020).

Foreign policy outcomes therefore emerge from the interaction between structural constraints and internal political dynamics. This framework is particularly suitable for analysing states undergoing significant domestic transformation, where leadership-driven reform agendas and regime consolidation play a decisive role in shaping external behaviour (Bogaert, 2013).

In the Saudi context, Vision 2030 and the centralisation of authority under Mohammed bin Salman function as key intervening variables. They shape how systemic pressures---such as US--China rivalry and shifting regional alignments---are interpreted and translated into strategic choices.

Research Design and Method

This article adopts an independent qualitative case-study design focused on Saudi Arabia's foreign policy from 2020 through the early 2020s. The purpose is not to provide an exhaustive historical account of Saudi diplomacy, but rather to explain how systemic pressures and domestic transformation imperatives interact to shape patterns of external alignment and diversification. The case is analytically significant because Saudi Arabia occupies a pivotal position in regional security architecture while simultaneously undergoing profound domestic transformation under Vision 2030. This combination makes it particularly suitable for examining how structural incentives are filtered through internal political and economic priorities.

Methodologically, the study employs process tracing informed by a neoclassical realist framework (Rose, 1998; Guzzini, 2004). Neoclassical realism posits that systemic pressures do not translate mechanically into foreign policy outcomes. Instead, they are mediated by intervening domestic variables, including leadership perceptions, state capacity, and regime priorities. In this article, systemic pressures include intensifying US--China rivalry, perceptions of declining American strategic commitment to the Middle East, and renewed regional competition. These external constraints are examined in conjunction with domestic variables such as Vision 2030, fiscal transformation priorities, and the consolidation of authority under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman. The analysis traces how these domestic filters shape Saudi interpretations of threat, opportunity, and strategic risk, and how they translate into concrete policy outputs vis-à-vis the United States, China, and Iran.

The empirical material draws on peer-reviewed academic literature on hedging, neoclassical realism, Gulf security, and Saudi domestic transformation (Kuik, 2008; Lim & Cooper, 2015; Rose, 1998; Guzzini, 2004; Foulon & Meibauer, 2020; Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025; Saeed, 2025; Hwang, 2024; Evers, 2023). This secondary literature is complemented by primary sources, including official Saudi government publications and diplomatic communiqués. Among these are the Vision 2030 Annual Report 2023, the Ministry of Finance Pre-Budget Statement for Fiscal Year 2025, the Joint Statement Following the GCC--US Summit held in Jeddah on 16 July 2022, and the Joint Trilateral Statement between Saudi Arabia, Iran and China released on 10 March 2023. These primary documents provide institutional evidence of domestic reform priorities and formal diplomatic commitments, thereby strengthening the transparency and evidentiary grounding of the analysis.

While the single-case design limits the scope for broad generalisation, it allows for detailed examination of causal mechanisms within a strategically consequential case. The Saudi example thus offers analytical leverage for understanding how middle powers undergoing internal transformation navigate structural uncertainty in an increasingly fragmented international system.

In addition to process tracing within a neoclassical realist framework, this study relies on qualitative documentary analysis and interpretative assessment of primary and secondary sources. Official government reports, fiscal policy documents, and diplomatic communiqués are examined not merely as descriptive materials, but as institutional expressions of state priorities and strategic intent. Through interpretative analysis, these

documents are treated as evidence of how Saudi policymakers publicly articulate transformation objectives and external positioning. This methodological approach enables a systematic reconstruction of the interaction between systemic pressures and domestically embedded strategic narratives, enhancing analytical transparency and coherence.

Integrating Hedging, Multivector Diplomacy and Neoclassical Realism

Taken together, hedging, multivector diplomacy, and neoclassical realism provide a coherent explanatory framework for understanding Saudi Arabia's foreign policy since 2020. Hedging captures the observable behavioural pattern of diversification and strategic ambiguity (Kuik, 2008; Lim & Cooper, 2015). Multivector diplomacy clarifies the structural logic of cultivating differentiated partnerships (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025). Neoclassical realism identifies the causal mechanism linking systemic pressures to domestic political filters (Rose, 1998; Guzzini, 2004).

This integrated framework demonstrates that Saudi Arabia's foreign policy diversification is not an ad hoc response to short-term pressures, but rather the product of systemic uncertainty filtered through domestic transformation priorities. Vision 2030 and leadership centralisation shapes how external risks are assessed and how strategic flexibility is operationalised.

Vision 2030 as a Domestic Transformation Agenda

Vision 2030 stands as the central domestic driver of Saudi Arabia's post-2020 foreign policy (Saeed, 2025). Launched in 2016 and accelerated under Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the program seeks to reduce oil dependency, diversify the economy, attract foreign investment, and modernise state institutions. Official documentation, including the Vision 2030 Annual Report 2023, highlights measurable progress in diversification, tourism growth, and non-oil revenue expansion. These objectives require sustained access to global markets, technological partnerships, and regional stability.

The Ministry of Finance's Pre-Budget Statement for Fiscal Year 2025 further links fiscal planning to transformational investment and long-term diversification goals. Such institutional commitments generate strong incentives for diplomatic flexibility and risk reduction. Vision 2030 thus functions not merely as a domestic reform blueprint but as an intervening variable shaping Saudi Arabia's external engagement.

The evidentiary value of these primary sources lies not only in their descriptive content but in their institutional character. The Vision 2030 Annual Report 2023 explicitly frames economic diversification, foreign investment attraction, and technological upgrading as strategic national imperatives. Similarly, the Ministry of Finance's Pre-Budget Statement for Fiscal Year 2025 emphasises fiscal sustainability, transformational spending, and long-term economic restructuring. These documents collectively reveal a state apparatus that publicly codifies transformation as a national priority. Such institutional articulation strengthens the argument that Saudi foreign policy recalibration is embedded in formally articulated domestic objectives rather than ad hoc diplomatic manoeuvring. The

consistency between declared reform benchmarks and observable diplomatic diversification provides documentary evidence supporting the neoclassical realist claim that domestic imperatives function as intervening variables shaping external behaviour.

Beyond economic diversification, Vision 2030 also functions as a vehicle for the projection of soft power, most visibly through Saudi Arabia's sustained investment in globally salient sports properties (Formula 1, football, golf), tourism infrastructure, cultural production, and the hosting of major international events. This pattern, documented in the literature as "sportswashing," operates simultaneously across reputational, economic, and normative registers, functioning as an instrument of authoritarian legitimacy management that seeks to reframe the Kingdom's global image while advancing the tourism and services-sector diversification targets embedded in Vision 2030 (Maestro Junior et al., 2026). This soft-power dimension does not eliminate the persistence of concerns regarding human rights protections, freedom of expression, and the concentration of political authority under Mohammed bin Salman; rather, it operates in parallel with, and partly in response to, these unresolved tensions, illustrating how domestic transformation imperatives and external image management reinforce one another within Riyadh's broader hedging strategy.

Elite Perceptions and Leadership Centralisation

Elite perceptions and the consolidation of authority under Mohammed bin Salman constitute a second critical domestic filter. Neoclassical realism emphasises that systemic pressures are mediated by leadership interpretations (Rose, 1998; Guzzini, 2004). Since 2017, political, economic, and security decision-making in Saudi Arabia has become highly centralised (Saeed, 2025).

This centralisation amplifies leadership-driven priorities, including economic modernisation, regime consolidation, and enhanced strategic autonomy. Events such as the Abqaiq--Khurais attacks and fluctuating US engagement have reinforced perceptions of strategic vulnerability (Evers, 2023; Hwang, 2024). Simultaneously, China is viewed as indispensable for technological modernisation, while de-escalation with Iran is seen as necessary to reduce regional instability.

These perceptions shape how systemic pressures are interpreted and translated into policy, reinforcing a preference for diversification instead of exclusive alignment.

Domestic Imperatives as Intervening Variables

Vision 2030 and the centralisation of authority under Mohammed bin Salman function as key intervening variables shaping how Saudi Arabia interprets and responds to external pressures (Saeed, 2025). Neoclassical realism holds that systemic incentives do not generate uniform or automatic policy outcomes; rather, they are mediated by domestic priorities, state capacity, and leadership perceptions (Rose, 1998; Guzzini, 2004). In Saudi Arabia's case, the imperatives of economic diversification, technological modernisation, political consolidation, and regime legitimacy collectively shape which external strategies are seen as viable or desirable (Bogaert, 2013; Saeed, 2025).

These domestic constraints and ambitions generate strong incentives for risk minimisation, strategic flexibility, and external diversification---hallmarks of hedging behaviour. They also help explain why Riyadh has resisted pressures to choose between Washington and Beijing, and why it has pursued de-escalation with Iran despite decades of rivalry (Hwang, 2024). By shaping how systemic shifts---such as intensifying US--China competition, evolving regional alignments, and the declining utility of exclusive alliances---are perceived, domestic imperatives translate structural uncertainty into the specific form of multivector diplomacy that has come to define Saudi foreign policy since 2020 (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025).

The United States: Security Dependence and Strategic Recalibration

Despite Saudi Arabia's growing diversification of external partnerships, the United States remains its most important security provider, and the bilateral relationship continues to underpin Riyadh's defence posture (Evers, 2023). Since 2020, however, Saudi leaders have begun to recalibrate this long-standing partnership in response to rising doubts about Washington's long-term commitment to the Middle East and the reputational strains following the Khashoggi affair. Events such as the muted U.S. response to the 2019 Abqaiq--Khurais attacks, the withdrawal from Afghanistan, and Washington's growing strategic focus on Asia have reinforced perceptions among Saudi elites that exclusive reliance on the United States entails significant risks (Evers, 2023; Hwang, 2024). This reassessment has encouraged Riyadh to adopt a more assertive and transactional approach, seeking clearer security guarantees while pushing back against U.S. pressure on issues such as oil production, the war in Yemen, and relations with China. Yet the Kingdom has not abandoned the partnership. Extensive military cooperation, intelligence sharing, arms sales, and the continued presence of U.S. forces in the Gulf ensure that the relationship remains foundational. What has shifted is the strategic logic underpinning it: rather than unquestioned dependence, Saudi Arabia now pursues a form of hedging that preserves the benefits of the U.S. security umbrella while gradually reducing overreliance and expanding the autonomy needed to support domestic transformation and broader diplomatic diversification (Saeed, 2025).

China: Economic Transformation and Technological Partnership

China has become an increasingly central pillar of Saudi Arabia's external diversification strategy, offering economic and technological opportunities that align closely with the Kingdom's domestic transformation agenda under Vision 2030 (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025). While security ties with the United States remain indispensable, Beijing provides the scale of investment, technological capacity, and industrial expertise that Saudi Arabia requires to advance its ambitious development goals. Sino--Saudi cooperation has deepened across a broad range of domains, including energy, infrastructure, digital technology, artificial intelligence, and defence industrial collaboration. China is now the largest purchaser of Saudi oil, a major investor in megaprojects such as NEOM, and a key partner in sectors ranging from renewable energy to telecommunications, including sensitive areas such as 5G and surveillance technologies (Saeed, 2025).

For Saudi Arabia leaders, China offers more than capital and technology. It provides a partnership largely free of governance- or human rights--related conditionalities, making it an attractive complement---though not an alternative---to the United States. Riyadh has been careful to avoid formal alignment with Beijing; the relationship remains primarily economic and developmental, reflecting a hedging strategy through which the Kingdom leverages Chinese capabilities to advance domestic reforms while managing the geopolitical risks associated with U.S.--China rivalry (Evers, 2023). In this respect, the Saudi--China relationship illustrates how multivector diplomacy allows middle powers to extract functional benefits from competing great powers without fully committing to any single strategic camp (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025).

Iran: Regional De-escalation and Strategic Stabilisation

Saudi Arabia's rapprochement with Iran constitutes the third key vector of its post-2020 foreign policy recalibration and is central to understanding the domestic logic underpinning Riyadh's hedging strategy. After years of competition, diplomatic rupture, and direct attacks on Saudi territory, most notably the 2019 Abqaiq--Khurais strikes, Saudi leaders increasingly came to view prolonged confrontation with Iran as imposing unsustainable economic and security costs, threatening the stability required for Vision 2030 (Hwang, 2024). The China-brokered agreement of March 2023 marked a clear turning point: rather than relying solely on U.S.-centred containment, Riyadh opted for a carefully managed de-escalation aimed at lowering regional tensions, reducing escalation risks, and creating the space needed to prioritise domestic development (Adhikari et al., 2025; Hwang, 2024).

This diplomatic opening does not imply trust or ideological convergence. Rather, it reflects a pragmatic assessment that dialogue and crisis-management mechanisms are better suited to advancing Saudi Arabia's long-term interests than continued confrontation. Since 2023, this process has included the restoration of diplomatic relations, discussions on maritime security, and cautious efforts to manage conflicts in Yemen and across the wider Gulf.

By engaging Iran while maintaining security ties with the United States and expanding economic cooperation with China, Saudi Arabia demonstrates how hedging operates across multiple domains---mitigating threats through de-escalation, preserving strategic flexibility, and avoiding entrapment in regional rivalries. The Iran vector thus illustrates how Riyadh uses diplomacy to reshape its strategic environment in ways that support domestic transformation and maximise autonomy in an increasingly multipolar Middle East.

The resilience of this rapprochement was tested by the outbreak of the U.S.-Israel war with Iran in February 2026. Although Saudi Arabia has refrained from direct involvement and has publicly opposed the use of its territory for U.S. or Israeli operations against Iran, the conflict exposed the limits of the diplomatic restraint achieved in 2023 (Becker-Hicks, 2026). Iranian strikes across Gulf Cooperation Council states, including Saudi territory, demonstrated that bilateral de-escalation with Tehran does not, by itself, provide credible deterrence absent a codified U.S.-Saudi mutual defence framework. According to Becker-Hicks (2026), this experience has reinforced a dual recognition in

Riyadh: that dialogue with Iran is not a substitute for military deterrence, and that U.S. security backing---itself uncodified and politically contingent---does not eliminate the Kingdom's structural vulnerability. The likely trajectory is therefore a reinforced hedging posture that combines continued reliance on U.S. defence guarantees with accelerated diversification of security partnerships, notably with China, Pakistan, and Türkiye, alongside the preservation of a political channel with Tehran. This dynamic corroborates the article's central argument: rather than resolving Saudi Arabia's exposure to systemic uncertainty, the 2023 rapprochement functioned as one vector within a wider portfolio of hedging behaviours, whose limits become most visible precisely at moments of acute regional crisis.

Discussion

The empirical analysis of Saudi Arabia's relations with the United States, China, and Iran demonstrates that the Kingdom's post-2020 foreign policy cannot be reduced to episodic adjustment, opportunistic manoeuvring, or gradual realignment. Rather, it reflects a structured strategy of hedging embedded within a broader logic of multivector diplomacy and filtered through domestic transformation imperatives. The interaction between systemic uncertainty and internal reform priorities produces a coherent pattern of diversification that is intelligible only when examined through the integrated framework proposed in this article.

From a structural perspective, intensifying US--China rivalry and evolving regional dynamics generate incentives for secondary powers to avoid rigid alignment. Traditional realist models would predict either balancing behaviour or band wagoning under such conditions. Yet Saudi Arabia does neither. It has not moved to counterbalance the United States through alignment with China, nor has it abandoned its security dependence in favour of a new patron. At the same time, it has not fully aligned with Washington against Beijing or Tehran. This behaviour aligns more closely with the logic of hedging as articulated by Kuik (2008) and Lim and Cooper (2015), whereby states seek to preserve autonomy by diversifying partnerships while avoiding overt strategic commitments.

However, systemic explanations alone are insufficient. Many states face similar structural pressures but adopt different responses. The distinctive feature of the Saudi case lies in the mediating role of domestic transformation. Vision 2030 fundamentally reshapes the cost-benefit calculus of foreign policy. Economic diversification, foreign direct investment, technological modernisation, and reputational rebranding require regional stability and diversified economic engagement. These objectives generate powerful incentives to minimise geopolitical risk and avoid entrapment in great-power rivalry. Thus, hedging in the Saudi context is not merely a defensive reaction to uncertainty; it is proactively embedded within a long-term development strategy (Saeed, 2025).

The domestic filter also clarifies why Saudi diversification has a differentiated character across issue areas. Security cooperation with the United States remains foundational because no alternative actor can presently replicate the depth of military interoperability, intelligence integration, and deterrence capacity embedded in the US--Saudi relationship (Evers, 2023). At the same time, China's role is primarily economic and technological, aligning with domestic diversification priorities rather than replacing US security

guarantees (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025). Engagement with Iran serves yet another functional purpose: regional de-escalation reduces the likelihood of conflict that could disrupt economic transformation (Hwang, 2024). Each vector therefore serves a distinct strategic function within a unified domestic logic.

This differentiated engagement challenges interpretations that portray Saudi Arabia as drifting away from the United States or pivoting decisively toward China.

Such accounts risk overstating the degree of strategic realignment and underestimating the domestic drivers shaping Riyadh's choices. The Saudi case instead suggests that middle powers can simultaneously deepen economic engagement with one major power, maintain security dependence on another, and pursue diplomatic normalisation with a regional rival without collapsing into contradiction. The coherence of this pattern becomes visible only when analysed through a neoclassical realist lens that integrates structural constraints and domestic priorities (Rose, 1998; Guzzini, 2004).

The analysis also contributes to broader debates on hedging theory. Much of the hedging literature has focused on East and Southeast Asia, particularly in the context of responses to China's rise (Kuik, 2008; Lim & Cooper, 2015). The Saudi case demonstrates that hedging is equally relevant in the Middle Eastern context, where regional fragmentation and great-power rivalry intersect. Moreover, it illustrates that hedging can be closely tied to domestic modernisation agendas rather than solely to security uncertainty. In this sense, hedging should not be understood only as reactive ambiguity but as a structured strategy aligned with internal regime consolidation and development objectives.

At a more general level, Saudi Arabia's multivector diplomacy underscores the agency of middle powers in a fragmented international system. Rather than being passive objects of great-power competition, states such as Saudi Arabia actively leverage systemic rivalry to extract differentiated benefits across domains. Multivector diplomacy thus becomes both a tool of risk management and a mechanism for expanding strategic autonomy. This interpretation aligns with arguments emphasising the growing role of niche diplomacy and brokerage among emerging middle powers (Chaziza & Lutmar, 2025; Sazak, 2020).

Importantly, the Saudi case also reveals the limits of diversification. While Riyadh has expanded its strategic space, it has not achieved full autonomy. Security dependence on the United States remains significant, and economic interdependence with China introduces new vulnerabilities. Hedging therefore reduces, but does not eliminate, structural constraints. The Kingdom's strategy reflects calculated risk distribution rather than complete strategic independence.

In sum, the interaction between systemic uncertainty and domestic transformation imperatives generates a distinctive form of hedging characterised by differentiated functional engagement across multiple vectors. Saudi Arabia's foreign policy since 2020 should therefore be understood not as oscillation between camps, but as a domestically filtered strategy of strategic adaptation within an increasingly multipolar order.

Conclusion

Saudi Arabia's post-2020 foreign policy reflects more than diplomatic recalibration; it signals a structural transformation in how the Kingdom positions itself within an increasingly competitive and fragmented international order. By maintaining security cooperation with the United States, expanding economic and technological ties with China, and pursuing cautious de-escalation with Iran, Riyadh has crafted a strategy that privileges flexibility over rigid alignment and autonomy over dependency.

The analysis demonstrates that this strategy cannot be explained by systemic pressures alone. While intensifying US--China rivalry and shifting regional dynamics create incentives for diversification, they do not determine its specific form. It is the interaction between these structural conditions and domestic transformation imperatives---particularly Vision 2030 and the consolidation of authority under Mohammed bin Salman---that gives Saudi hedging its distinctive character. Saudi Arabia does not merely react to multipolarity; it actively seeks to shape its strategic environment in ways that support regime consolidation, economic modernisation, and long-term development planning.

Conceptually, the Saudi case underscores the analytical value of integrating hedging theory with neoclassical realism. Hedging captures the observable pattern of diversification and calibrated ambiguity, while neoclassical realism explains how domestic priorities filter external pressures and translate them into policy. The case reinforces the argument that hedging should not be understood solely as a defensive response to uncertainty, but also as a proactive strategy rooted in internal political and economic objectives.

Saudi Arabia's trajectory suggests that middle powers in the Global South are not passive objects of great-power competition. Rather, they increasingly operate as strategic actors capable of leveraging rivalry, extracting differentiated benefits, and reshaping regional orders in pursuit of domestic transformation. In this sense, Saudi multivector diplomacy is not an anomaly but may represent an emerging model of statecraft in an era defined by multipolar competition and strategic fragmentation.

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TWO DECADES OF RELUCTANCE: ANALYSING INDIA'S NON-MEMBERSHIP IN THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

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Abstract

The International Criminal Court is the highest authority for International Crimes. The courts relies on the principle of complementarity, mentioned under Article 17 of the Rome Statute which ensures that ICC only intervenes when national jurisdictions are unable or unwilling to perform any action and fail to prosecute any serious international crimes for which it has jurisdiction. Complementarity princIiple is designed to respect state sovereignty, however, it has faced criticism for its varying application, different political influences and procedural ambiguities. Through various analysis of ICC case laws and national legal system, including India's non membership stance in implementing complementarity. This research discusses about the reasons of India for not joining ICC in last two decades.

Keywords

Complementarity, International Criminal Court, State Sovereignty, Legal Accountability, Rome Statute.

Resumo

O Tribunal Penal Internacional é a máxima autoridade em matéria de crimes internacionais. O tribunal baseia-se no princípio da complementaridade, referido no artigo 17.º do Estatuto de Roma, que garante que o TPI só intervenha quando as jurisdições nacionais não possam ou não queiram tomar medidas e não consigam julgar quaisquer crimes internacionais graves sobre os quais o TPI tenha jurisdição. O princípio da complementaridade foi concebido para respeitar a soberania dos Estados; no entanto, tem sido alvo de críticas devido à sua aplicação variável, às diferentes influências políticas e às ambiguidades processuais. Através de várias análises da jurisprudência do TPI e dos sistemas jurídicos nacionais, incluindo a posição da Índia, que não é membro, relativamente à implementação da complementaridade, esta investigação discute as razões que levaram a Índia a não aderir ao TPI nas últimas duas décadas.

Palavras-chave

Complementaridade, Tribunal Penal Internacional, Soberania do Estado, Responsabilidade jurídica, Estatuto de Roma.

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TWO DECADES OF RELUCTANCE: ANALYSING INDIA'S NON-MEMBERSHIP IN THE INTERNATIONAL CRIMINAL COURT

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Introduction

Seated in the city of Hague, in Netherlands, the International Criminal Court (ICC) is a treaty-based international organization governed by the Rome Statute. The ICC was established to investigate and prosecute individuals accused of genocide, crimes against humanity, war crimes, and crimes of aggression[1]. These crimes are considered the "most serious and of concern to the international community as a whole".[2] The jurisdiction of ICC is governed by the 'Principle of Complementarity[3].' This principle is laid down in Article 17(1) of the Rome Statute[4] which clearly states that the ICC cannot take up a case that has already been or is in the process of being investigated or prosecuted by a State with jurisdiction over the issue, unless the State is unwilling or incapable of genuinely carrying out the investigation or prosecution. Furthermore, Article 17[5] also lays down certain factors that the court must consider while determining the unwillingness of the respective State, such as whether there has been unjustified delay and if the proceedings are not being conducted independently and impartially, thus hampering the process of achieving justice. The implication of the Complementarity principle is that the primary jurisdiction of the States is recognized and respected, and the ICC steps in only if the State's legal system fails to do so[6]. Hence, the ICC is not a substitute for national courts and is intended only to complement national criminal justice systems[7].

The ICC can exercise jurisdiction over these crimes only if they were committed on the territory of a State Party (a state that has ratified and become a party to the Rome Statute) or by one of its nationals[8]. This jurisdiction can be expanded if a situation is referred to the ICC Prosecutor by the United Nations Security Council, whose resolutions

[1] International Criminal Court, 'The ICC at a Glance' (2023) https://www.icccpi.int/sites/default/files/ICCAtAGlanceEng.pdf
[2] International Criminal Court, 'The ICC at a Glance' (2023) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/ICCAtAGlanceEng.pdf
[3] 'Understanding the International Criminal Court' (International Criminal Court 2020) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/understanding-the-icc.pdf
[4] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, art 17(1)
[5] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, art 17(2)
[6] 'Understanding the International Criminal Court' (International Criminal Court 2020) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/understanding-the-icc.pdf
[7] International Criminal Court, 'The ICC at a Glance' (2023) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/ICCAtAGlanceEng.pdf
[8] International Criminal Court, 'The ICC at a Glance' (2023) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/ICCAtAGlanceEng.pdf

are binding on all UN member states[9]. In such cases, even a non-State Party may be subject to ICC jurisdiction. Additionally, the ICC can exercise jurisdiction if a State makes a declaration accepting it[10].

Of the 124 countries party to the Rome Statute, India is not one of them[11]. India has consistently been at the forefront of advocating for international cooperation. India is a member of the United Nations and a signatory to numerous international treaties protecting and safeguarding human rights, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights[12]. For a country like India to continue abstaining from becoming a State Party of an international organization that seeks justice for heinous crimes and mobilizes resources through inter-state cooperation to achieve this goal raises some questions. This paper aims to lay out and examine the potential reasons for India's reluctance to become a State Party to the Rome Statute and its impact

Threat to Nation's Sovereignty?

Post-independence India has always prioritized its sovereignty and the primacy of the State in the international sphere. The preservation of its statehood and the avoidance of international or external influence over matters solely within India's jurisdiction are goals recognized in the Preamble of the Constitution of India[13]. These are essential for India to establish itself as a strong state in the international arena. The internationalization of criminal law can act as a threat to this very sovereignty, and a nuanced understanding of the International Criminal Court's (ICC) functioning and the Rome Statute, in addition to the internal peculiarities of India, helps us address the important question: Is the ICC really a threat to India's sovereignty or India just wants to avoid accountability?

Firstly, since its inception, it was well established that the ICC was never intended to replace national criminal justice systems[14]. This principle of complementarity, as laid down in Article 17 of the Rome Statute, is adhered to[15]. However, the gravity or intensity of the complementarity principle, as India wants it to be followed by the ICC, is different from how it is actually practiced by the ICC. While the ICC will not proceed with a case if a State is 'genuinely' carrying out an investigation or prosecution, India wants a stricter complementary principle and believes that the ICC should step in only if the legal machinery in a State has completely broken down and is non-existent. Additionally, considering that the type of crimes the ICC has jurisdiction over are of such heinous and serious nature, India believes that its courts and legal system are vigilant, sensitive, and capable enough to intervene in such crimes and bring the parties to justice, without requiring an external body to step in[16]. However, having to contest the ICC's jurisdiction

[9] International Criminal Court, 'The ICC at a Glance' (2023) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/ICCAtAGlanceEng.pdf
[10] International Criminal Court, 'The ICC at a Glance' (2023) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/ICCAtAGlanceEng.pdf
[11] 'The States Parties to the Rome Statute | International Criminal Court' (*asp.icc-cpi.int*) https://asp.icc-cpi.int/states-parties
[12] International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights 1966
[13] The Constitution of India 1950, Preamble
[14] 'About the Court' (*International Criminal Court*2024) https://www.icc-cpi.int/about/the-court
[15] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, art 17
[16] Bais D, 'India and the International Criminal Court' (2016) https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/54-bais

by proving before an external court that India is genuinely investigating a case of heinous nature occurring within its jurisdiction[17] to avoid intervention by that court in an internal matter undermines not just State sovereignty but also the State's image. The truth is that India's justice system can be slow and inaccessible, and cases may not be initiated or progress due to political influence. Since the ICC's threshold for "inability" does not require a complete breakdown of state and its legal machinery, India is concerned that the ICC may take on cases if the prolonged judicial process tests ICC's patience[18]. On the international stage, this could be seen as an embarrassment for India, giving the impression that India's state machinery is either ineffective in handling serious issues or indifferent to them. A counter to this is that the investigations and trials of the ICC itself are often prolonged and delayed and the mere inefficiency of Indian courts is not sufficient for ICC to take up the case[19]. So, as long as the Indian diplomatic and legal machinery is alert, careful and vigilant, the ICC will not directly investigate and prosecute crimes in India[20]. Even though the ICC Prosecutor will have the right to require periodic reports of the progress of the respective case, this should not be much of an inconvenience or burden for India[21].

Another concern is that even in cases that are wholly internal and do not involve nationals from other states, the ICC may still intervene. Understandably, this is perceived as a threat to India's sovereignty, as it opens the door for an international organization to investigate and adjudicate matters that are entirely domestic. India wishes to uphold the supremacy of its national courts and may see international meddling in wholly internal matters as a threat.

More importantly, India's ongoing counter-insurgency and militancy challenges, from Jammu and Kashmir to the North East, have led to allegations of human rights violations by other States, International Organizations and NGOs[22]. Considering the international pressure, the ICC Prosecutor may be particularly encouraged to pursue officers involved in these activities. The Office of the Prosecutor will have the power to try India's high-ranking civil leaders and military commanders for alleged crimes that are within the ICC's jurisdiction[23].

The Rome Statute adopts a restrictive approach towards immunity based on official capacity. Article 27[24] provides that the Statute applies equally to all persons irrespective of their official status and expressly stipulates that official capacity as a Head of State or Government, a member of a government or parliament, an elected representative, or a government official does not exempt an individual from criminal responsibility before the ICC. It further provides that immunities or special procedural rules attaching to a person's official capacity, whether under national or international law, do not bar the Court from

[17] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, art 19(2)
[18] Bais D, 'India and the International Criminal Court' (2016) https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/54-bais
[19] Bais D, 'India and the International Criminal Court' (2016) https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/54-bais
[20] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.
[21] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.
[22] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.
[23] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.
[24] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, art 27

exercising its jurisdiction. The position on immunity, however, must be read together with Article 98 of the Statute. Article 98(1) addresses the distinct question of State cooperation and provides that the Court may not proceed with a request for surrender or assistance that would require a requested State to act inconsistently with its obligations under international law concerning the State or diplomatic immunity of a person or property of a third State, unless the cooperation of that third State in securing a waiver of immunity is first obtained.

The relationship between Articles 27 and 98[25] is therefore particularly significant where the person sought by the ICC is an official of a State that is not party to the Rome Statute. Article 27 removes official capacity as a bar to the exercise of the Court's jurisdiction, whereas Article 98 recognises that the execution of an arrest or surrender request by a State Party may engage separate international obligations owed to third States. The interaction between these provisions has generated considerable controversy, most notably in the proceedings concerning former Sudanese President Omar Al-Bashir. In the Jordan Referral proceedings, the ICC Appeals Chamber held that Article 98(1) does not itself create or preserve immunity and concluded, in the particular circumstances arising from the Security Council's referral of the situation in Darfur, that Jordan was under an obligation to arrest and surrender Al-Bashir. The jurisprudence demonstrates that the absence of immunity before the ICC under Article 27 should not be equated automatically with an unrestricted obligation on every State to execute every arrest warrant irrespective of the international obligations implicated by Article 98.

This distinction assumes particular importance in the Indian context. India is not a State Party to the Rome Statute and is therefore not ordinarily subject to the Statute's cooperation regime merely by virtue of the treaty. Nevertheless, the possibility that the ICC could assert jurisdiction in circumstances permitted by the Statute over Indian military or civilian officials, including senior State officials, continues to raise concerns regarding sovereignty and the treatment of official immunities. India's concerns should therefore not be framed simply as a consequence of the Rome Statute "abolishing" immunity. Rather, they arise from the more complex interaction between the Court's jurisdiction over individuals under Article 27, the rules governing State cooperation and third-State immunities under Article 98, and the position of non-States Parties within the ICC's jurisdictional framework.

On 17th March 2023, the ICC issued arrest warrants for Vladimir Putin and Maria Alekseyevna, the Commissioner for Children's Rights in Russia, for the alleged forced deportation of children from Ukraine to Russia[26]. The ICC also issued arrest warrants for Israel's Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu and Israel's former defence minister Muhammad Deif on 21st November 2024 for 'crimes against humanity' and 'war crimes' in Gaza[27]. This shows that implicating the topmost political brass and heads of state is neither unprecedented nor impossible for the ICC in the future. Though the warrants have not been enforced by the State Parties, an international tribunal issuing such a

[25] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, art 98
[26] Beaumont P, 'What Does the ICC Arrest Warrant for Vladimir Putin Mean in Reality?' *The Guardian* (17 March 2023) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2023/mar/17/icc-arrest-warrant-vladimir-putin-explainer
[27] Duster C, 'What Is the ICC and Can It Really Arrest Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu?' (*NPR*21 November 2024) https://www.npr.org/2024/11/21/nx-s1-5199669/icc-arrest-warrants-netanyahu-gallant-hamas-israel-war-deif

warrant for a state leader does have diplomatic and political implications considering that State Parties are obliged to follow such instructions. The ICC also has mechanisms to respond when States Parties fail to comply with their obligations to execute arrest warrants, as it did with Mongolia upon its refusal to arrest President Putin by referring it to the ICC Assembly of State Parties[28]. The catch is that even if India does not become a State Party, the ICC can still issue arrest warrants for its leaders, officials, and citizens; neither Israel nor Russia were State Parties. The only difference is that if India becomes a State Party, it will be obliged to follow the arrest warrants, whereas as a non-State Party, it is optional.

Upon determining that an accused is guilty, the ICC trial chamber can impose up to 30 years of imprisonment or even life imprisonment under exceptional circumstances[29]. Letting an international court exercise such power over a country's nationals can also be viewed as an affront to sovereignty.

Sovereignty is no longer absolute

The post-World War II international legal order fundamentally altered the traditional understanding of sovereignty. The Nuremberg Trials established the principle that individuals, including senior state officials, could be held personally responsible for international crimes irrespective of their official position. The Rome Statute builds upon this principle through Article 27, which rejects immunity based on official capacity before the ICC. The underlying rationale is that allowing sovereign immunity to protect those accused of atrocity crimes would perpetuate impunity and undermine the universal prohibition of the gravest crimes.

Accordingly, many scholars contend that sovereignty should be understood as responsible sovereignty rather than absolute sovereignty. States retain primary authority over criminal justice, but that authority carries a corresponding obligation to genuinely investigate and prosecute international crimes committed within their jurisdiction.

Non-International Armed Conflicts

A Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC) is defined as a 'protracted armed confrontations occurring between governmental armed forces and the forces of one or more armed groups, or between such groups arising on the territory of a State.[30]' NIAC are currently governed under Article 3 of the Geneva Conventions[31]. This is different from an International Armed Conflict (IAC) as an IAC defined as, 'all cases of declared war or

[28] https://www.chathamhouse.org/2024/05/icc-prosecutors-applications-arrest-warrants-explained#:~:text=The%20arrest%20warrants%20have%20both,relation%20to%20the%20arrest%20warrants.
[29] International Criminal Court, 'Understanding the International Criminal Court' (2020) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/understanding-the-icc.pdf
[30] UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, '**Non-International Armed Conflict (NIAC)**' (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, December 2024) < https://www.undrr.org/understanding-disaster-risk/terminology/hips/so0002> accessed 30 December 2024.
[31] Geneva Conventions, 1949, Art.3.

of any other armed conflict which may arise between two or more of the High Contracting Parties, even if the state of war is not recognized by one of them'[32].

A significant point of contention for India is the inclusion of NIAC in the definition of war crimes under Article 8 of the Rome Statute which state as follows:

> *Article 8(bis): An 'act of aggression means': (a) The invasion or attack by the armed forces of a State of the territory of another State, or any military occupation, however temporary, resulting from such invasion or attack, or any annexation by the use of force of the territory of another State or part thereof; (b) Bombardment by the armed forces of a State against the territory of another State or the use of any weapons by a State against the territory of another State;*

This provision implies that the ICC could assert jurisdiction over internal conflicts within a state, not solely those between states. The Rome Statute blurs the distinction between NIAC and IAC. Going by this definition under Article 8, nothing stops the ICC from taking up or having the Kashmir issue referred to it. India perceives conflicts in regions such as Kashmir and the Northeast as domestic law and order issues rather than non-international armed conflicts that fall under international law. By maintaining that these conflicts are domestic in nature, India seeks to prevent external scrutiny and interference from international bodies like the ICC[33]. However, by joining the Rome Statute, India fears that ICC involvement in its internal conflicts could undermine its sovereignty and ability to maintain stability in sensitive regions. The potential for external intervention raises concerns about political motivations, where adversaries could exploit ICC mechanisms to target India politically. This fear is compounded by the belief that the ICC's jurisdiction over internal conflicts could challenge India's own legal system's efficacy and independence.

ICC Subservient to UNSC?

There are three ways in which the Prosecutor of the ICC can initiate an investigation: upon referral by State Parties to the Prosecutor; upon *suo moto* cognizance by the office of the Prosecutor based on information from a reliable source; and, lastly, upon referral by the United Nations Security Council[34]. In this way, the Rome Statute has given the UNSC the power to bring non-members of the ICC under its jurisdiction, as long as they are members of the United Nations. So even if India is not a State Party, it is still possible for the UNSC to refer a case of the nature described in the Rome Statute to the ICC and, in turn, bind India. This is a violation of the principle of the Law of Treaties which means

[32] UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, '**International Armed Conflict (IAC)**' (UN Office for Disaster Risk Reduction, December 2024) < https://www.undrr.org/understanding-disaster-risk/terminology/hips/so0001> accessed 30 December 2024.
[33]Shriya Maini, William Nunes, 'India Versus the International Criminal Court' (2018) Vol.8, National Law University Delhi Student Law Journal, < https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/nludslj5&id=1&collection=journals&index=> accessed 30 December 2024.
[34] International Criminal Court, 'The ICC at a Glance' (2023) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/ICCAtAGlanceEng.pdf

that "the state cannot be forced to accede to a treaty or be bound by the provisions of a treaty it has not accepted"[35].

The UNSC can also block proceedings being conducted by the ICC[36]. Such power in the hands of the Security Council calls into question the so-called independence of the ICC.

This is particularly upsetting for India, considering that it is not a permanent member of the UNSC. Despite its constant efforts and contributions to becoming a permanent member, the most populous democracy in the world is unable to secure permanent membership. India does not have veto powers and hence has little to no control over cases referred to the ICC.

The Security Council's Political Manipulation

The Power of Referral

One of the ways in which a crime would fall under the jurisdiction of the ICC is if the UN Security Council refers the case to the ICC under Article 13(b) of the Rome Statute which states as follows:

> *13(b): A situation in which one or more of such crimes appears to have been committed is referred to the Prosecutor by the Security Council acting under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations;*

The authority granted to the UNSC has led India to harbour significant concerns that the Rome Statute effectively places the ICC under the influence of politically motivated actions by the UNSC, particularly its permanent members. This apprehension is underscored by the fact that the UNSC has exercised its referral authority to the ICC only twice, as specified in Article 13(b) of the Rome Statute[37]. The first referral occurred in 2005 concerning the genocide against ethnic Darfuri people in Sudan, and the second in 2011 regarding the civil war in Libya[38]. Both situations involved African nations that lacked the political clout necessary to secure support from more powerful countries, rendering them vulnerable to what many perceive as a politically biased ICC.

In stark contrast, consider the situation in Syria. On May 22, 2014, China and Russia vetoed a UNSC resolution that sought to refer the Syrian civil war to the ICC. Russia, a staunch ally of President Bashar al-Assad's government, has provided extensive military

[35] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.
[36] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.
[37] Rishav Banerjee, 'Rome Statute and India: An Analysis of India's Attitude towards the International Criminal Court ' (2011) Vol. 4 Issue 1, Journal of East Asia and International Law https://heinonline.org/HOL/Page?handle=hein.journals/jeasil4&id=452&collection=journals&index= accessed 29 December 2024.
[38]Security Council Report, 'In Hindsight: The Security Council and the International Criminal Court' (Security Council Report, 31 July 2018) < https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2018-08/in_hindsight_the_security_council_and_the_international_criminal_court.php> accessed 30 December 2024.

and political support throughout the conflict. This veto reflects a broader strategy by Russia to protect its interests in Syria and maintain its regional influence.

The disparity becomes evident when comparing these cases: while conflicts involving less influential African nations are prioritised for ICC referrals, more powerful states like Russia and China can effectively shield their allies from similar scrutiny[39]. Scholars argue that this pattern highlights a troubling bias within the UNSC's referral process, where geopolitical interests dictate which situations are addressed by international justice mechanisms. As a result, serious human rights violations in politically connected countries often go unpunished, raising critical questions about the credibility and impartiality of both the UNSC and the ICC in their pursuit of justice.

Power of Deferral

The second power given to the UNSC is the power to defer cases. Under Article 16 of the statute, the UNSC can pass a resolution to defer actions for a period of one year, citing reasons related to the maintenance of international peace and security. The provision is stated as follows:

> *Article 16: No investigation or prosecution may be commenced or proceeded with under this Statute for a period of 12 months after the Security Council, in a resolution adopted under Chapter VII of the Charter of the United Nations, has requested the Court to that effect; that request may be renewed by the Council under the same conditions.*

This provision allows the UNSC to exercise its influence over ICC proceedings, effectively enabling it to postpone judicial actions subject to political manipulation as evidenced in the case of Kenya, where during the early 2010s, the African Union expressed significant concerns regarding the ICC's disproportionate focus on African nations and that it should refrain from prosecuting sitting heads of state.

This stance fuelled growing discontent among several African Council members towards the ICC[40]. The negative sentiment became particularly pronounced following the UNSC's refusal to defer the Kenyan situation on November 15, 2013. In 2010, the ICC prosecutor launched an investigation into the violent aftermath of the disputed December 27, 2007, elections in Kenya, a state party to the Rome Statute. On March 8, 2011, six prominent individuals were summoned by the ICC[41], including then President Uhuru Kenyatta and

[39] Ian Black, 'Russia and China veto UN move to refer Syria to International Criminal Court' (The Guardian, 22 May 2014) https://www.theguardian.com/world/2014/may/22/russia-china-veto-un-draft-resolution-refer-syria-international-criminal-court accessed 30 December 2024.
[40] Brendon J. Cannon, Dominic R. Pkalya, Bosire Maragia, 'The International Criminal Court and Africa: Contextualizing the Anti-ICC Narrative' (2016) Vol.2, African Journal of International Criminal Justice, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48581885?casa_token=DsszNdBYRWoAAAAA%3ASnC6Qw6Hswl1qhJk6JANpdR3x2KvMbQ_281Lu5iNG-jZ2jSjOS_ztSOdKeykkoSwbJw4SwzymtTT1xOsB0xnBMF7CXeXNNx7yXKojqpaBZ-4Ba3-jcI accessed 30 December 2024.
[41] Security Council Report, 'In Hindsight: The Security Council and the International Criminal Court' (Security Council Report, 31 July 2018) <https://www.securitycouncilreport.org/monthly-forecast/2018-08/in_hindsight_the_security_council_and_the_international_criminal_court.php> accessed 30 December 2024.

Deputy President William Ruto, for alleged crimes against humanity. In response, Kenya appealed to the UNSC to exercise its authority to defer these proceedings to maintain peace and stability in the country. However, Council members firmly rejected this request, stating they would not take action to defer the case.

This situation highlighted a broader issue regarding perceived bias in the ICC's operations. The Court's focus on African leaders exemplifies political manipulation within the UNSC, as cases involving powerful nations or non-African leaders are often overlooked or deferred. The AU's dissatisfaction with the ICC continues to shape its relationship with the Court and influences its members' willingness to cooperate with international judicial processes[42].

What it Means for India

India should be concerned that this could allow powerful nations to obstruct justice for their own nationals or allies. India contends that allowing the UNSC to bind non-state parties to the ICC violates fundamental principles of international law, particularly those outlined in the Vienna Convention on the Law of Treaties[43]. Given these concerns, India advocates for an ICC that operates independently from political institutions like the UNSC. Indian officials have expressed a desire for a judicial system that does not allow for external political pressures or influences on its proceedings.

More Concerns Regarding definitions

Article 6 of the Rome Statute defines genocide as acts such as killing, causing bodily or mental harm, inflicting physically destructive conditions, imposing measures to prevent births, and forcibly transferring children of a national, ethnical, racial, or religious group with the intent to destroy such a group[44]. This criteria is distinctly analogous to the caste-based and communal violence that has been prevalent in India since its inception. Inter-caste and inter-religious strife, along with the rise in violent conflict between ethnic communities, as seen in Assam and Manipur, often share the same motivations as the crime of genocide. India is apprehensive about the possibility that such conflicts, which are local and unique to the Indian context, will be adjudicated at an international level.

Additionally, India has framed many national and state laws, along with court judgments and army and police vigilance, to deal with such issues. If the ICC still decides that India's mechanism is insufficient and there are no genuine steps to bring justice to the victims by taking up the matter, it can be viewed as undermining national court and justice systems and may take the form of international embarrassment, giving the impression

[42] Brendon J. Cannon, Dominic R. Pkalya, Bosire Maragia, 'The International Criminal Court and Africa: Contextualizing the Anti-ICC Narrative' (2016) Vol.2, African Journal of International Criminal Justice, https://www.jstor.org/stable/48581885?casa_token=DsszNdBYRWoAAAAA%3ASnC6Qw6Hswl1qhJk6JANpdR3x2KvMbQ_281Lu5iNG-jZ2jSjOS_ztSOdKeykkoSwbJw4SwzymtTT1xOsB0xnBMF7CXeXNNx7yXKojqpaBZ-4Ba3-jcI accessed 30 December 2024.
[43] John Mark, 'Rethinking the Authority of the UNSC to Refer Nationals of Non-State Parties to the ICC' (2019) Vol.66, Netherlands International Law Review, https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40802-019-00144-4 accessed 30 December 2024.
[44] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1998, art 6

that the Indian State is incompetent or not interested in solving such grave issues. It is also possible that caste, community, ethnic, and religious conflicts that are a result of decades of social, economic, and political developments are not well understood at the international level.

Moreover, Article 7 of the Rome Statute which deals with 'Crimes Against Humanity' threatens it's sovereignty by forcing it to ratify and implement laws for crimes that India argues are already covered under it's domestic laws. India argues that Article 7 repeats crimes that have already been covered under other international legislations that India has ratified and will only lead to conflict if India joins the Rome Statute. For example, Article 7(1)(f)[45] of the Rome Statute covers torture as a crime against humanity. India argues that ratifying the Rome Statute is redundant as India has already signed the Convention against Torture and Other Cruel, Inhuman or Degrading Treatment or Punishment in 1997. However, India is yet to ratify it.

India firmly believes that states hold the primary right to exercise jurisdiction over crimes committed within their territories or by their nationals. India maintains that national legal systems are better equipped to prosecute such crimes effectively and has advocated for the primacy of national jurisdictions over international intervention[46]. Furthermore, India asserts that current international instruments adequately cover crimes against humanity. It believes that the treaties that it is a signatory to, cover the crimes of humanity and there is no reason to join an additional statute that would not only place more legal burden on India, but also give power to an international court to prosecute it's nationals for crimes it believes to be covered under its own national laws[47].

Scope for arbitrary jurisdiction?

India's reluctance to ratify the Rome Statute is also due to the potential for bias in the selection of cases. The USA, Russia, and China have not ratified the Rome Statute. They are permanent members of the UNSC and thus hold veto power. Hence, no case involving these countries can ever be referred to the ICC if they choose to exercise their veto. This allows the permanent members to avoid accountability. This is a matter of concern for countries like India, which without any veto power, are more at risk of scrutiny. Additionally, the Office of the Prosecutor has inappropriately broad powers to initiate investigations into criminal cases, which India finds concerning[48]. This power is prone to be misused for political purposes. The ICC has frequently faced allegations of bias, particularly regarding African nations, and many UNSC referrals to target African and

[45] Rome Statute 1998, Article 7(1)(f).
[46] Dr, Kajal Bhatt, 'Crimes Against Humanity' (Sixth Committee of the 77th Session of the UNGA, 10 October 2022) https://www.un.org/en/ga/sixth/77/pdfs/statements/cah/10mtg_india.pdf accessed 03 January 2025.
[47] Aman Kumar, 'Finding India's International Criminal Law Obligations in Its Domestic Laws' (SSRN, 22 February 2023) https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=4977668#:~:text=Aman%20Kumar,-Australian%20National%20University&text=India%20has%20not%20signed%20the,domestic%20legislation%20in%20this%20regard. accessed on 03 January 2025.
[48] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.

other non-Western countries[49]. As a non-permanent and non-Western country, India is understandably apprehensive.

Terrorism and Nuclear Weapons not heinous enough?

The use of nuclear weapons, weapons of mass destruction, and terrorism are not included among the crimes within the ICC's purview, though both were proposed for inclusion by India[50]. Although India is a nuclear power, it has adopted a 'No First Use[51]' policy, meaning that India would never initiate a nuclear attack but would retaliate if attacked by nuclear weapons in case deterrence fails[52]. Also, under this nuclear policy India would not use nuclear weapons against a country that is not a nuclear power, or is not aligned with nuclear weapon powers[53]. India's commitment to global nuclear disarmament recognises the indiscriminate, destructive, and inhumane nature of nuclear weapons. Even the International Court of Justice, in an advisory opinion, stated that "the use of nuclear weapons was contrary to international humanitarian law"[54]. The ICC's exclusion of the use of nuclear and mass destruction weapons as war crimes, therefore, does not align with India's vision of the crimes the ICC should safeguard against. Considering the rise of nuclear powers that do not follow policies like India's 'No First Use,' nuclear weapons pose a grave threat to international peace and human rights.

Additionally, due to the lack of consensus on its definition among State Parties, terrorism has not been included in the ICC's scope[55]. This exclusion is despite the 9/11 attacks and the rise of both national and international terrorism. India has long faced the threat of terrorism and incidents like the 26/11 attacks prove the point. The exclusion of terrorism, despite its prevalence and urgency, leaves India with little incentive to become a State Party to the ICC.

No way to opt out?

Under Article 124 of the Rome Statute, a State Party may opt out and exempt itself from the jurisdiction of ICC for a period of seven years after the State enters the Statute with respect to War Crimes and Crimes of Aggression[56]. Apart from these exceptions, the ICC does not allow reservations or opt-out provisions that would enable countries to safeguard their interests[57]. Apart from these exceptions, the ICC does not allow reservations or opt-out provisions that would enable countries to safeguard their

[49] International Criminal Court, 'Understanding the International Criminal Court' (2020) https://www.icc-cpi.int/sites/default/files/Publications/understanding-the-icc.pdf
[50] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.
[51] Sundaram K and Ramana MV, 'India and the Policy of No First Use of Nuclear Weapons' (2018) 1 Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament 152
[52] Bais D, 'India and the International Criminal Court' https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/54-bais
[53] Sundaram K and Ramana MV, 'India and the Policy of No First Use of Nuclear Weapons' (2018) 1 Journal for Peace and Nuclear Disarmament 152
[54] Bais D, 'India and the International Criminal Court' https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/54-bais
[55] Bais D, 'India and the International Criminal Court' https://www.toaep.org/pbs-pdf/54-bais
[56] Rome Statute of the International Criminal Court 1988, Art. 124.
[57] Lahiri D, 'The International Criminal Court: Should India Continue to Stay Out?' (2010) Vol. 5 Indian Foreign Affairs Journal, 181-188.

interests. In fact, after the Amendment of State Parties to the ICC in 2015, even Article 124 is to be officially non-existent and deleted once the amendment is ratified by 7/8th of all the State Parties, as per Article 121 of the Rome Statute[58]. This is detrimental for India because even if India would wish to handle certain cases and investigations on its own, it cannot opt out of ICC jurisdiction in case ICC does decide to take up the case. Also, the opt-out system applies only to *suo moto* investigations by the Office of the Prosecutor and State referrals, not to UNSC referrals[59]. This limitation again defeats the purpose of the Law of Treaties.

Conclusion

India stands to gain little by joining the International Criminal Court (ICC) that it cannot achieve outside of it. While ICC membership would provide India a platform to influence the Court's policies and operations, these objectives can be more effectively pursued through direct engagement with other nations. Moreover, India has demonstrated a strong capacity to manage its internal issues, such as the insurgency in Kashmir, without the involvement of international bodies like the ICC or the UN Security Council. The potential for external intervention could complicate rather than resolve these sensitive matters. India has also raised valid concerns regarding the Rome Statute's lack of explicit provisions addressing terrorism. Joining the Statute does not guarantee that reforms will occur, such as recognizing terrorism as a crime under international law. There is a significant risk that political dynamics within the Assembly of States Parties could hinder progress on a comprehensive definition of terrorism. Ultimately, joining the ICC could mean ceding aspects of sovereignty and becoming entangled in a treaty that might create more challenges than it resolves. India's interests may be better served by maintaining its current stance and fostering bilateral relationships rather than committing to a multilateral framework that may not align with its national priorities.

Power dynamics between the UNSC, its permanent members, and the ICC place India at a disadvantage. The Office of the Prosecutor wields a questionable amount of power and discretion that can be exploited. Joining the ICC, where India may face arbitrary scrutiny without any opt-out option, does not appear to be a promising prospect.

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GREAT-POWER RIVALRY AND BANGLADESH'S EVOLVING ROLE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: NAVIGATING COMPETITION AMONG THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND INDIA

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Abstract

The geopolitical location of Bangladesh along the Bay of Bengal has been majorly improving its geopolitical significance due to the rising tensions between the United States, China and India in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). As the world maritime corridors become of greater interest to trade, energy security and the ability to project naval forces, Dhaka has to grapple with the conflicting demands of economic growth with the growing security needs. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) by China has transformed the economic connectivity in the region because of its huge investments in port infrastructure, energy sectors and digital connectivity in Bangladesh. At the same time, the Neighbourhood First Policy and expanding maritime activities of India, along with the United States intensifying its Indo-Pacific Strategy, have put Bangladesh in the middle of two spheres of influence. Based on theoretical perspectives of balancing, bandwagoning, and hedging, this paper explores the changing nature of foreign policy approaches of Bangladesh in a multipolar world that is becoming increasingly complex. It adopts a qualitative-descriptive method to examine the economic, security and blue economy aspirations and alignments of Bangladesh and evaluates their overall impact on regional stability and national sovereignty. The results indicate that Bangladesh is gradually taking a hybrid hedging stance that maximizes its economic interests by cooperating with China, enhancing security ties with India and the U.S., and remaining strategically flexible to ensure autonomy. The analysis finds that how Bangladesh is able to balance these competing forces will determine how geopolitically the Bay of Bengal and the greater IOR will move in the future.

Keywords

Bangladesh; Indian Ocean Region; Belt and Road Initiative; Maritime Security; Hedging.

Resumo

A localização geopolítica do Bangladesh, junto à Baía de Bengala, tem vindo a reforçar significativamente a sua importância geopolítica devido às crescentes tensões entre os Estados Unidos, a China e a Índia na Região do Oceano Índico (IOR). À medida que os

corredores marítimos mundiais se tornam cada vez mais importantes para o comércio, a segurança energética e a capacidade de projeção de forças navais, Daca tem de lidar com as exigências contraditórias do crescimento económico e das crescentes necessidades de segurança. A Iniciativa «Belt and Road» (BRI) da China transformou a conectividade económica na região, graças aos seus avultados investimentos em infraestruturas portuárias, nos setores energéticos e na conectividade digital no Bangladesh. Ao mesmo tempo, a «Política de Prioridade à Vizinhança» e a expansão das atividades marítimas da Índia, a par da intensificação da Estratégia Indo-Pacífica por parte dos Estados Unidos, colocaram o Bangladesh no meio de duas esferas de influência. Com base em perspetivas teóricas de equilíbrio, alinhamento com o grupo dominante e diversificação de riscos, este artigo explora a natureza mutável das abordagens de política externa do Bangladesh num mundo multipolar que se torna cada vez mais complexo. Adota um método qualitativo-descritivo para examinar as aspirações e os alinhamentos do Bangladesh nas áreas da economia, da segurança e da economia azul, e avalia o seu impacto global na estabilidade regional e na soberania nacional. Os resultados indicam que o Bangladesh está gradualmente a adotar uma postura híbrida de «hedging» que maximiza os seus interesses económicos através da cooperação com a China, do reforço dos laços de segurança com a Índia e os EUA e da manutenção de uma flexibilidade estratégica para garantir a autonomia. A análise conclui que a forma como o Bangladesh conseguir equilibrar estas forças concorrentes determinará a evolução geopolítica futura da Baía de Bengala e da Região do Oceano Índico em geral.

Palavras-chave

Bangladesh; Região do Oceano Índico; Iniciativa «Belt and Road»; Segurança Marítima; «Hedging».

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GREAT-POWER RIVALRY AND BANGLADESH'S EVOLVING ROLE IN THE INDIAN OCEAN: NAVIGATING COMPETITION AMONG THE UNITED STATES, CHINA, AND INDIA

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Introduction

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has increasingly become a pivotal arena of great-power rivalry, where vital sea lanes, energy corridors, and maritime chokepoints are reshaping South Asia's strategic landscape and turning it into a highly contested geopolitical space (Bose, 2024; IISS, 2025). While the Maldives and Sri Lanka have traditionally attracted considerable scholarly and policy attention due to their strategic locations, Bangladesh is increasingly recognized as a linchpin in the Bay of Bengal an area where economic, security, and environmental concerns increasingly converge (Salam, 2026a; Attanayake & Atmakuri, 2021).

Bangladesh's geographic position provides access to vital maritime routes linking the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and the Indo-Pacific, making it a strategic pivot for competing powers (Anwar, 2022; Bose, 2025; Karim, 2022; Fournol, 2025). China's expansive investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) including the Payra Deep-Sea Port, the Karnaphuli Underwater Tunnel, and large-scale infrastructure financing have significantly strengthened Dhaka–Beijing relations, while simultaneously raising concerns among regional and extra-regional actors regarding strategic dependencies (Peng & Datta, 2026). India, viewing the Bay of Bengal as its "strategic backyard", has responded assertively through initiatives such as the Neighbourhood First Policy, the Sagarmala Project, and expanded naval deployments aimed at securing maritime influence (Bose, 2025). Meanwhile, the United States has integrated Bangladesh into its Indo-Pacific Strategy, emphasizing freedom of navigation, supply chain security, and enhanced maritime domain awareness in response to China's expanding footprint in the region (CSIS, 2025b).

Bangladesh therefore faces a policy dilemma: it seeks economic opportunities through diversified partnerships; on the other, it must manage competing pressures arising from U.S.–China–India strategic rivalry (Singh, 2026). In response, Bangladesh increasingly demonstrates a hedging strategy one that blends selective alignment with multiple powers while preserving strategic flexibility and autonomy (Al Amin, 2025; Karim, 2024; Kuik, 2021). Unlike Sri Lanka and the Maldives, where overt strategic bandwagoning has resulted in political fragility and economic vulnerabilities, Bangladesh has thus far sought to balance developmental imperatives with sovereignty concerns, carefully avoiding

overdependence on any single actor (Alam & Karim; 2023). These challenges are intensifying. Rising maritime militarization, the proliferation of uncrewed systems, and the deployment of AI-enabled surveillance platforms are reshaping the security dynamics of the Bay of Bengal (IISS, 2025; NATO SHAPE, 2024) and as competition over blue economy resources, including fisheries, seabed minerals, and offshore energy reserves, adds another layer of complexity to Bangladesh's foreign policy calculus (SIPRI, 2024b). Against this backdrop, this article asks three questions:

i. How does Bangladesh navigate the strategic rivalries between the U.S., China, and India in the Indian Ocean?

ii. What are the economic, security, and geopolitical trade-offs embedded in its current foreign policy strategy?

iii. To what extent can Bangladesh leverage its strategic position to enhance regional influence while safeguarding sovereignty?

By adopting a qualitative-descriptive approach grounded in international relations theories, this study contributes to the growing literature on small-state agency in great-power competition. While existing scholarship focuses predominantly on Sri Lanka and the Maldives, this article positions Bangladesh as an increasingly critical actor shaping the geopolitical calculus of the Bay of Bengal and the broader IOR (Koga, 2018; Frumento, 2025).

Theoretical Framework

Understanding Bangladesh's strategic posture in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) requires grounding the analysis within key theoretical constructs in international relations, particularly balancing, bandwagoning, hedging, and the security dilemma (Walt, 1987; Schweller, 1994; Kuik, 2021; Koga, 2018). These frameworks help explain how small and middle powers such as Bangladesh navigate the competitive pressures generated by major actors, especially the United States, China, and India. The section then sets out the criteria used to identify 'hybrid hegemony' in Bangladeshi practice.

Balancing: Seeking Strategic Autonomy

Balancing refers to the strategies states adopt to counter potential threats from dominant powers through either internal or external mechanisms (Waltz, 1979; Walt, 1987; Lobell, Ripsman, & Taliaferro, 2009). Internal balancing involves strengthening domestic capabilities military, technological, and economic while external balancing entails aligning with other states or coalitions to deter or offset perceived threats.

In the IOR, India and the United States increasingly coordinate external balancing efforts through initiatives such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and joint maritime surveillance agreements aimed at countering China's growing regional influence (Thakker, 2019; Raja Mohan, 2022; Basu, 2026; Chellaney, 2025). By contrast, Bangladesh has avoided overt balancing strategies due to structural constraints, resource limitations, and concerns over entanglement in great-power rivalries.

However, Dhaka has adopted a form of soft internal balancing through selective military modernization. Initiatives include acquiring advanced naval assets from China, expanding defense collaborations with Turkey, and maintaining training partnerships with India. Moreover, Bangladesh actively participates in BIMSTEC, IORA, and multilateral naval exercises, reflecting a pragmatic approach focused on capacity-building rather than formal military alliances (IISS, 2025).

Bandwagoning: Leveraging Economic Partnerships

Bandwagoning occurs when weaker states align themselves with stronger powers to secure economic, political, or security benefits (Schweller, 1994; Kirshner, 1995). Across South Asia, smaller states like the Maldives and Sri Lanka have frequently bandwagon with China under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), securing large-scale infrastructure financing but also increasing strategic dependence (Frumento, 2025). Bangladesh has also pursued a form of partial economic bandwagoning by deepening its engagement with China. Major BRI-linked projects including the Padma Bridge Rail Link, the Karnaphuli Tunnel, and infrastructure works at Payra and Chattogram ports have substantially strengthened bilateral ties, positioning Beijing as Bangladesh's leading infrastructure partner (Rahman, 2026; Salam & Ahmed, 2026). Following Xi Jinping's 2016 visit to Dhaka, China pledged an infrastructure package of roughly USD 40 billion approximately USD 26 billion for BRI projects and USD 14 billion for joint ventures (The Financial Express, 2023). Realized disbursements, however, have been considerably smaller estimated at around USD 4–7 billion by 2023 reflecting a persistent gap between pledged and delivered financing (The Business Standard, 2023).

Nevertheless, Bangladesh's approach remains selective and transactional. Dhaka simultaneously engages India's connectivity initiatives, such as cross-border energy grids and transport corridors, while also cultivating Western and multilateral financing channels as alternatives to Chinese lending including responding to U.S. encouragement to adopt quality-infrastructure standards such as those promoted by the Blue Dot Network (Deng, 2022; Dhaka Tribune, 2023). Unlike Sri Lanka, which faced severe debt distress following the Hambantota Port lease, Bangladesh has diversified its funding sources to preserve financial sovereignty and avoid comparable structural vulnerabilities.

Hedging: Strategic Flexibility in a Multipolar Order

Hedging has emerged as a characteristic aspect of the Bangladesh foreign policy in the IOR. Hedging allows states to maintain a good relationship with rival powers, but at the same time, it prevents strict adherence to any one power (Kuik, 2021; Koga, 2018). Hedging is a way of reducing geopolitical risks and maximizing economic and security opportunities of small states like Bangladesh. The hedging strategy of Bangladesh can be seen in three dimensions that are interconnected:

Economic Hedging: Dhaka has participated in the BRI, the Indian Act East Policy and the U.S.-led Indo-Pacific initiatives, obtaining funding of infrastructure projects, technology transfer, and access to wider markets without allowing any of those powers to have a dominant role.

Security Hedging: Bangladesh is involved in joint exercises with India and the U.S. in the maritime sphere and is acquiring defense technologies in China and Turkey. This strategy enhances maritime deterrence and maintaining strategic flexibility

Diplomatic Hedging: Dhaka adopts an issue-by-issue approach and is happy to collaborate with China on infrastructure projects but not on Chinese claims to the South China Sea. Bangladesh, in the same way, participates in U.S.-led Indo-Pacific security discussions but does not take anti-China stances.

By using this multi-dimensional hedging approach, Bangladesh maintains room to strategic manoeuvrings and makes the best of all partners and managed to develop a calibrated strategy that has so far contributed to its increased agency (Frumento, 2025).

Security Dilemma: Navigating Naval Militarization

The growing militarization of the Bay of Bengal reflects a classic security dilemma (Jervis, 1978). China's Maritime Silk Road has expanded its naval footprint, including submarine deployments and port infrastructure investments; in response, India has intensified maritime patrols and surveillance, while the United States, through INDOPACOM, has increased joint naval drills and deployed advanced reconnaissance assets in the region (Bose, 2025; Anwar, 2022). These force postures and platform inventories are documented in IISS (2025). Bangladesh's proximity to these strategic chokepoints exposes it to overlapping security architectures. Dhaka's response demonstrates pragmatic risk management, which includes:

- Hosting limited naval exercises with India and the U.S. to enhance maritime capacity;
- Collaborating with China on non-offensive infrastructure projects while regulating military engagement;
- Expanding maritime domain awareness (MDA) through regional platforms like IORA and BIMSTEC (SIPRI, 2024).

As naval militarization accelerates including the integration of autonomous systems, AI-enabled kill chains, and low-cost precision strike technologies the Bay of Bengal risks becoming a flashpoint for great-power rivalry. Bangladesh aims to avoid proxy entanglement while capitalizing on technology transfers and securing its maritime interests.

Methodology

This study uses qualitative, interpretive research design to explore the nature of Bangladesh's strategic management in the context of the competition between the USA and China and India in the IOR. Instead of a statistical generalisation, it strives for analytical depth, charting the relationships between economic interdependence, maritime-security pressures and alignment dilemmas in Dhaka's foreign-policy decisions. The analysis is organized into three complementary techniques.

The first thing to be noted in the study is that the study is structured document analysis. It is based on three types of sources: (a) peer-reviewed literature on the strategic and hedging of small states and Indian Ocean geopolitics; (b) reports and data from established think tanks such as the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), the International Institute for Strategic Studies (IISS), and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS); and (c) official documents from the Bangladesh Ministry of Foreign Affairs, BIMSTEC, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). A range of sources were chosen based on their relevance to the research questions, freshness, and institutional credibility, and wherever possible, primary and official sources were selected. Avoiding excessive risk of depending on a single source, claims, especially quantitative claims, were cross-checked from sources of information before reporting.

Second, the analysis is comparative, structured and focussed. To understand what is unique and special about Dhaka's strategy, it is compared to the more common examples of Sri Lanka and the Maldives, while keeping the general regional context (BRI exposure, Indian proximity, U.S. Indo-Pacific engagement) fixed. This comparison disciplines the argument about small state agency by setting it in a context of observable differences of outcomes (debt exposure, policy autonomy).

Thirdly, the study uses scenario analysis to visualize the future of Bangladesh in 2035. The scenarios are not predictions, but scenarios are a series of imaginative thinking exercises about possible futures. They were built by identifying the key factors driving the choices made by policymakers in Dhaka: the strength of U.S.–China rivalry, the extent of China's economic leverage, the level of U.S.–India strategic convergence, the extent of maritime militarisation and technology diffusion, and the degree of coherence in Bangladesh's domestic policy and by considering the two factors with the most uncertain and consequential outcomes as the axes around which alternative futures can be plotted. For each scenario, its set of assumptions and the observable indicators of its emergence is defined. The probability labels on the scenarios represent informed judgements about their similarity to current trends, rather than mathematical probabilities.

The time horizon of the study is the decade 2015-2025 with a projection to 2035 in the scenario section. This design has two restrictions which are explicitly listed. Data on infrastructure financing, development assistance, and naval deployments are not consistently available in the public record, and where reported, should be interpreted as being indicative of orders of magnitude of the data derived from the cited institutions, and not official series. Accordingly, earlier versions of the illustrative charts depicting one value estimates on an annual basis, but without a reproducible underlying dataset, have been removed from this version and the comparison is made qualitatively, with explicit attribution. Second, interpretation takes precedence over generalization in the form of a single country study, which limits the scope to depth rather than breadth, and does not guarantee prediction of the future course of the rivalry.

Bangladesh's Strategic Role: Blue Economy, Security, and Great-Power Rivalry

Strategic Geography and Rising Maritime Relevance

Bangladesh's location at the northern edge of the Bay of Bengal positions it as a natural maritime hub connecting the Middle East, Southeast Asia, and broader Indo-Pacific markets. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) is central to global trade and energy dynamics, with nearly 80% of global trade by volume and 65% of global energy flows passing through its sea lanes (IISS, 2025; CSIS, 2025a). For Bangladesh, this geographic position brings both opportunities and vulnerabilities, as the Bay of Bengal has become a focal point of economic integration, strategic competition, and security contestation.

The geography is dominated by strategic maritime chokepoints, like the Malacca Strait, the Andaman Sea and the Sunda Strait, that are also key to the continuing free flow of international commerce. These corridors are especially critical for China's energy imports, as almost 80% of its oil imports traverse the Malacca Strait, serving as a `lock-in point' of Beijing's energy security logic (Zhang, 2011). At the same time, however, these sea lanes serve as the anchor of India's naval ambitions and the U.S.-supported Indo-Pacific supply chain architecture, thus highlighting the increasing strategic value of Bangladesh's immediate waters (Karim, 2023).

The ongoing port development initiatives in Bangladesh, including the upgrading of Chattogram Port, the construction of Payra Deep-Sea Port, and the strategic Matarbari Port Project, are positioning the country to emerge as a maritime logistics hub in South Asia (National Maritime Foundation, 2024). These projects are not only central to Bangladesh's economic aspirations but also place the country at the intersection of competing strategic frameworks shaping the wider Indian Ocean Region.

At one end lies China's Maritime Silk Road, a key component of the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which focuses on enhancing connectivity through infrastructure investments and expanding trade networks (NDRC & SOA, 2017). Parallel to this, India's SAGAR strategy Security and Growth for All in the Region seeks to strengthen maritime security, regional integration, and economic linkages across the Indian Ocean Region, including the Bay of Bengal (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015; Schottli, 2019). At the same time, the U.S.-sponsored Indo-Pacific maritime architecture emphasizes freedom of navigation, resilient infrastructure, and enhanced maritime domain awareness as part of a broader push to counterbalance China's growing influence (The White House, 2022).

Together, these overlapping strategic initiatives highlight Bangladesh's emerging centrality in the maritime geopolitics of South Asia, where its ports are becoming key nodes in the contest for economic connectivity, naval presence, and regional influence. As these initiatives converge, Bangladesh's strategic exposure intensifies. The Bay of Bengal has witnessed a marked increase in naval deployments, including Chinese submarine visits, Indian maritime patrols, and U.S. Bangladesh joint naval exercises. This expanding military presence reflects broader great-power rivalries, but for Dhaka, it also generates geopolitical dilemmas (U.S. Pacific Fleet, 2020; Bose, 2025; Salam, 2026b).

Unlike Sri Lanka and the Maldives, where policy choices have often resulted in strategic overdependence and heightened alignment entrapments, Bangladesh has pursued a hybrid strategy of economic diversification and security balancing. While leveraging Chinese infrastructure financing, Dhaka simultaneously deepens security dialogues with India and engages in multilateral platforms like the BIMSTEC, IORA, and ASEAN-led frameworks to maintain policy flexibility.

This strategy reflects Bangladesh's conscious effort to preserve strategic autonomy while capitalizing on its maritime geography to strengthen blue economy prospects, enhance port-led growth, and secure a more prominent role in the Indo-Pacific order. However, its centrality in overlapping economic and security frameworks also exposes Dhaka to greater external pressures, making strategic navigation increasingly complex (Koga, 2018; Kuik, 2021).

China, the United states, and India in Bangladesh's Maritime Environment

China's Expanding Influence

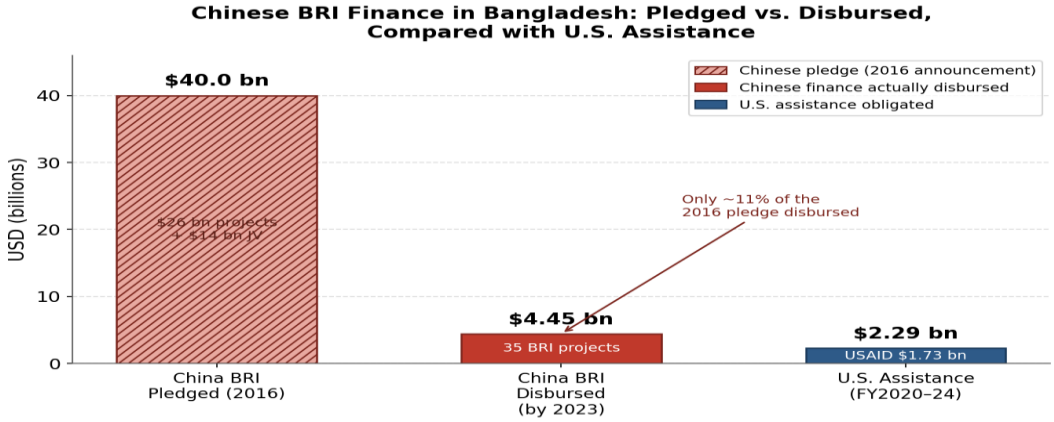
China is the biggest trade and infrastructure partner of Bangladesh, but the extent to which China has invested in Bangladesh is often exaggerated and in practice pledges are confused with disbursements. However, China's offer of USD 40 billion for independent projects and USD 14 billion for joint ventures was the amount that continues to be the most frequently cited (Rahman, 2026), when President Xi Jinping visited in October 14, 2016. In reality it's a much smaller figure. In 2023, Chinese ambassador told the media that only USD 4.45 billion was disbursed for 35 BRI projects, nearly one-tenth of the promised amount, and that projects were delayed due to cost and debt sustainability concerns, as well as delays (Rahman, 2026). However, the city of Dhaka has seen a more robust collaboration with Beijing through flagship projects, such as the Payra deep-sea port, the Karnaphuli tunnel, the Padma Bridge, a rail link, and the expansion of Chattogram's container terminal, the costs of which vary in reports and must be cross-checked with the relevant financing agreements.

China is also the main source of arms for Bangladesh. In 2018–22, SIPRI data reveal that Beijing provided Bangladesh with approximately 74 per cent of major arms, such as anti-ship missile systems, frigates and maritime surveillance equipment, which have helped modernise the Bangladesh Navy and its capacity to patrol the country's EEZ. But for Beijing, these connections have broader purposes: greater access to the Bay of Bengal can ensure the energy supply routes from the Middle East to East Asia, while the links can strengthen China's influence on the Bay's maritime order (Zhang, 2011; CSIS, 2025a).

If the expenditure of money is taken into account instead of the money that was promised, the difference between the two external partners is quite small. The total volume of U.S. foreign assistance in fiscal years 2020-2024 was approximately USD 2.29 billion with USAID, comprising USD 1.73 billion in expenditure on governance, health, development, and security cooperation, but not a significant amount in infrastructure loans (Naduvath, 2025). China's disbursed BRI finance is still substantially larger than

U.S. assistance, but apart from pledges, the two are roughly equal in total, and they also have some differences as much as they are similar: Chinese engagement focuses on hard infrastructure, while U.S. engagement is through standards, development programming, and security partnerships. This comparison, as depicted in figure 1, outlines what China promised and what it has accomplished.

Figure 1. Chinese BRI finance in Bangladesh — pledged versus disbursed — compared with U.S. assistance



Source: Author's compilation from Rahman (2026) and Naduvath (2025), drawing on figures reported by the Chinese Embassy in Dhaka and on U.S. data from ForeignAssistance.gov.

The United States: Indo-Pacific Strategy and Selective Engagement

While China has entered Bangladesh through massive infrastructure lending, the U.S. has established a different form of relationship: a strategic partnership, maritime-security capacity building, and supply-chain resilience. This is part of Washington's overall concern over China's growing economic influence in the Indian Ocean Region and the risks such dependency can pose and has placed Bangladesh in the U.S. framework of a free and open Indo-Pacific (US Department of State, 2025; ORF, 2026).

But that battle is real, albeit not on the same scale. Washington has pledged over USD 1.2 billion in development assistance in recent years, as well as USD 450 million toward digital-infrastructure security and cyber resilience, with a focus on economic competitiveness, energy diversification and maritime governance (US Department of State, 2024). But the disparity increases when viewed through the lens of Chinese financing: in the five years ending in 2024, Beijing has spent nearly USD 26 billion on financing for development, while the total amount of U.S. development and security assistance has not exceeded USD 3 billion (ForeignAssistance.gov, 2024). It is not necessarily a race that Washington is losing, but rather a competition of approach: China invests in hard infrastructure, while Washington focuses on governance, digital transformation, and security partnerships (Rahman, 2026).

One of those ways is through the promotion of standards. Washington also has been promoting transparent, high-quality standards for infrastructure through a certification process with Japan and Australia and promoting the interest of Dhaka in other trade and connectivity mechanisms like the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) (Washington Post, 2023; BIISS, 2024). Both indicate the other way of involvement that the United States provides, but Bangladesh is not involved in either.

The strand that is most tangible is maritime security. Bangladesh is also getting training, equipment and technical assistance through programmes under the Indo Pacific Command, U.S. in order to enhance its maritime domain awareness and counter illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing (SIPRI, 2024). Joint exercises under the Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training (CARAT) programme have significantly bolstered the Bangladesh Navy's surveillance, search-and-rescue and port-security capacities (US Department of State, 2025a), while the two countries have taken steps towards greater intelligence-sharing agreements, such as the reported agreement on a General Security of Military Information Agreement (Dhaka Tribune, 2026).

However, Dhaka's reaction to all this is quite selective. While Bangladesh gladly accepts the support from the U.S. to build maritime capacity and supply-chains resilience, it is reluctant to pursue any alignment that may be interpreted as anti-China, not willing to include U.S. cooperation under a wider security umbrella. This posture allows it to extract economic benefits from the engagement with Beijing, but at the same time gain technological and development benefits and security guarantees from the engagement with the U.S. the essence of the hybrid hedge that runs through its foreign policy (Kuik, 2021; Koga, 2018).

India: SAGAR and the Neighbourhood First Approach

India is not a distant theatre, but an extension of its own maritime neighbourhood and this is reflected in the policy that India has towards Bangladesh. SAGAR Security and Growth for All in the Region is the organising idea (Ministry of External Affairs, 2015; Schottli, 2019), which Prime Minister Narendra Modi first pitched in Mauritius in 2015 as an Indian Ocean area where New Delhi aims to not just protect against rivals, but to offer security, connections, and growth. Combined with the Neighbourhood First policy, SAGAR puts Bangladesh in the priority list of its partners in that regard, which has a direct impact on India's security.

This in practice means combination of connectivity and maritime-security measures. India has actively pursued port-led growth, coastal shipping, under Sagarmala and Bay of Bengal thrust under BIMSTEC and engaged Bangladesh in broader initiatives like the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (Bose, 2025). This has strengthened security cooperation with other countries, including coast-surveillance cooperation and exchanging maritime domain awareness through coordinated patrols, white-shipping, training and sharing of information about sea situations, and has grown in tandem with the goodwill established in the peaceful settlement of the maritime boundary issue between the two states in 2014 (Raja Mohan, 2022). In New Delhi, these are not only efforts for assistance, but also for presence - to maintain influence in what it sees as its strategic backyard.

A lot of this reactivity is also to reaction. China's engagement in Bangladesh's ports and infrastructure has been increasing, while India has been seeking to provide alternatives and ensure Dhaka remains in its sphere of influence, with its connectivity initiatives being perceived as clear, need-driven responses to BRI loans (Bose, 2025). The impact on Bangladesh is to expand its space for manoeuvrability, because connectivity and security relations with India provide the necessary counterweight to the financing of China's Belt Road Initiative so Bangladesh can enjoy the benefits of both without taking a full side bet on either (Karim, 2024). But the same dynamic comes with a price: tilting toward one patron brings pressure from the other, and that tension is felt all the way to Bangladesh's hedging stance.

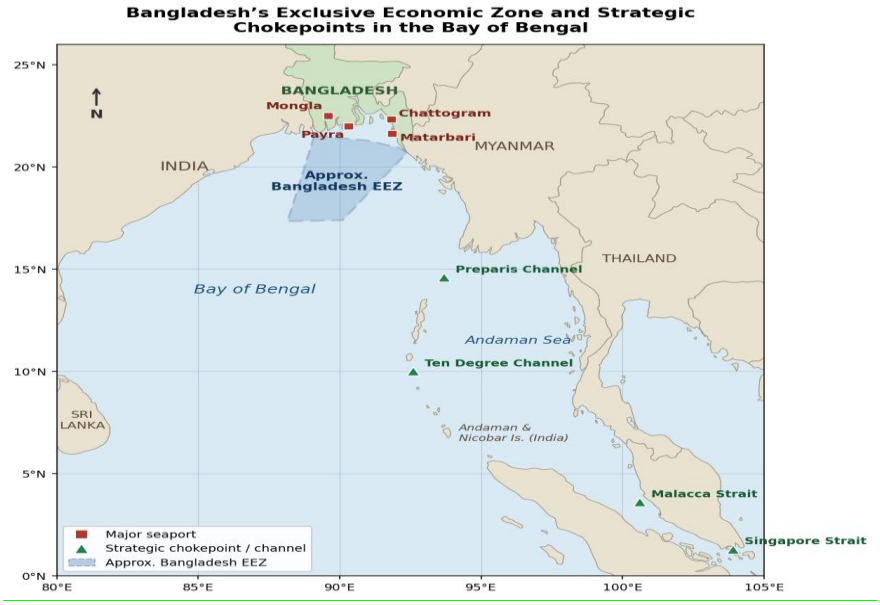
Blue-Economy Ambitions

The blue economy (fisheries, offshore energy, seabed minerals and maritime trade) is the core of Bangladesh's long-term development plan. After Bangladesh's peaceful resolution of maritime disputes with Myanmar before the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea in 2012 and India before an UNCLOS arbitral tribunal in 2014, she now has jurisdiction over vast maritime space in the Bay of Bengal. This is more than 118,813 square kilometres of territorial sea, exclusive economic zone and continental shelf, along with the rights of the Government over the resources of its sea-beds, beyond the 200 nautical miles (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Bangladesh, 2024). These settlements provided an opportunity for resource exploitation, as well as strategic positioning, within the IOR.

Bangladesh's maritime area is adjacent to some strategic choke points i.e. approaches to the Malacca Strait and the Andaman Sea, through which the world's shipping and energy transport takes place (Ranjan & Attanayake, 2024). This closeness is the foundation of Dhaka's ambitions to become a maritime hub for the South Asian region, southeast Asian region and the broader Indo-Pacific (Karim, 2023). Figure 2 depicts the exclusive economic zone of Bangladesh in relation to main seaports and the main sea channels in the Bay of Bengal, Andaman Sea and Strait of Malacca.

The bay has a high resource potential. Fisheries continue to be a key asset, providing more than a third of the protein in the country and sustaining a livelihood for well in excess of one million people. While the actual quantity of natural gas is still subject to further exploration (SIPRI, 2024b), the preliminary surveys have identified sizeable potential offshore, often reported in the hundreds of millions to several trillion cubic feet, which could enhance energy security and diversification of exports. The ongoing global increase in demand for seabed minerals is another, longer-term consideration. In addition, the majority of Bangladesh's foreign trade comes from the bay, with ports like Chattogram, Payra, and Matarbari playing a pivotal role in trade and the country's strategic goals as a whole (Bose, 2023).

Figure 2. Bangladesh's exclusive economic zone and strategic chokepoints in the Bay of Bengal



Source: Author's cartography. Base coastlines from Natural Earth (public domain, 1:50m). EEZ extent approximated from the 2012 ITLOS (Bangladesh/Myanmar) and 2014 PCA (Bangladesh/India) delimitations; port and channel locations from published coordinates.

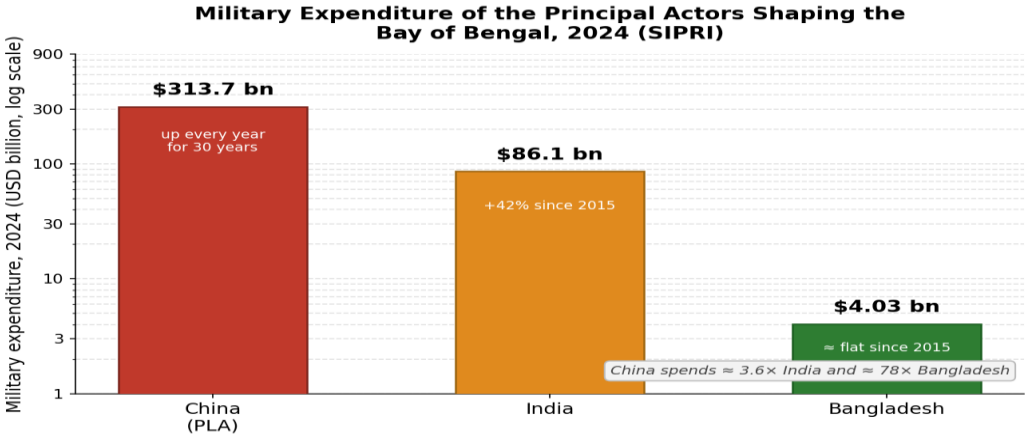
Geopolitical competition and sea insecurity taint these prospects. The rise in great power rivalry is accompanied by greater naval activity in the bay and heightened prospects for strategic entanglements, and illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing and piracy are limiting Bangladesh's potential for sustainable resource exploitation (Bose, 2025). The potential of Dhaka's maritime zone will be going to waste if the city's maritime domain awareness, cooperation among neighbours and environmental governance are not enhanced. The blue economy, then, is an opportunity as well as a challenge: a source of sustainable growth, energy security, and region integration; and a challenge to be faced when dealing with geo-economic competition, environmental stress and security threat.

Emerging Security Dilemmas and Military Modernisation

Bangladesh's strategic mind is moving towards the maritime security dilemma and the Bay of Bengal is emerging as a naval competition arena between the Chinese, Indian and comparatively lesser American. As deployments increase, surveillance grows tighter and the strategic presence gets larger, Dhaka needs to strengthen its own maritime capabilities to protect its sovereignty and control its exclusive economic zone (IISS, 2025; CSIS, 2025a). The military balance is perhaps the best measure of this pressure. As Figure 3 demonstrates, the two great powers that dominate the region spend much more than Bangladesh (China's military expenditure in 2024 was approximately seventy-eight times that of Bangladesh, and more than three times that of India); and military spending across Asia and Oceania has increased over the past decade by around 46 per

cent, reaching 2024 (SIPRI, 2025a). But it is not a desire to emulate its neighbours that drives Dhaka's reaction, but this asymmetry.

Figure 3. Military expenditure of the principal actors shaping the Bay of Bengal, 2024



Source: Author's compilation from SIPRI (2025a) and the SIPRI Military Expenditure Database (SIPRI, 2025b).

Note. The variable is total national military expenditure for calendar year 2024, in current US dollars, as estimated by SIPRI: China USD 313.7 billion, India USD 86.1 billion, and Bangladesh USD 4.03 billion. The vertical axis is logarithmic so that all three actors remain legible despite the wide range. The figure replaces an earlier chart that reported an undocumented annual count of naval deployments; military expenditure is used here as a transparent, independently verifiable proxy for the regional militarisation discussed in the text. For reference, SIPRI reports that Indian spending rose about 42 per cent and total Asia-and-Oceania spending about 46 per cent between 2015 and 2024, while Chinese spending increased for a thirtieth consecutive year (SIPRI, 2025a).

To match this, Bangladesh has opted for a selective modernization approach with flexibility. The acquisition of Chinese-built frigates and guided-missile corvettes has bolstered surface-warfare capabilities and enhanced patrol capacity (SRIPRI, 2024a); ties with India regarding coastal-radar systems have strengthened maritime domain awareness by providing real-time information in shared waters; and joint military exercises with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command have expanded search-and-rescue, anti-submarine warfare and surveillance of illicit trafficking capabilities (IISS, 2025). It has been the goal from the beginning to build up capability, but without forming an alliance.

This is complicated by emerging technologies. The proliferation of autonomous systems, unmanned underwater vehicles and AI-driven targeting is bringing new low-cost precision warfare capabilities to the bay and the increasing use of drones for surveillance and strikes can make the area a testing ground for these systems (SIPRI, 2024b; NATO SHAPE, 2024). Increased entanglements in the Bay of Bengal and overlapping naval postures by competing powers make it distinctively a space for great power rivalry. The Bay of Bengal is in a unique situation between the pressures of entanglement and Dhaka's desire to stay out, as competing naval postures overlap. In addition to increased economic opportunities, Chinese investments in dual-use ports also enable Beijing to extend its logistical reach, while a greater Indian footprint and the United States' growing

security presence further strain operations. Bangladesh's challenge is to modernize its navy and assert its maritime claims while maintaining a hybrid hedging strategy that ensures it remains outside any one camp, which is getting more difficult as artificial intelligence is introduced into warfare and autonomous systems are becoming increasingly prevalent.

Strategic Scenarios for Bangladesh: Challenges and Opportunities

Bangladesh is located at the geographical-political juncture of the emerging geopolitical tensions, the growing economic potential of the Indian Ocean, and security dilemmas. Due to the involvement in intense global and regional power play, Dhaka is forced to balance between safeguarding its blue economy, strategic autonomy, and avoiding entrapment in alignment and associated implications in the face of rising great-power competition. On the basis of the analysis of trends in regional rivalry, interdependence, and militarization of technology, this section formulates three possible strategic scenarios of the Bangladesh way into 2035.

Scenario I: Strategic hedging and economic diversification (Most likely)

In the probable scenario, Bangladesh would pursue a hybrid hedging strategy and ensuring a careful balance between China, India and the United States as it places its priority on economic development and the security of blue economy. This is a situation where Dhaka is seeking to avoid reliance upon a single power through diversifying investments, improving connectivity in the region, and intensifying strategic diplomacy.

Bangladesh's economic strategy would continue to leverage China's role as its largest infrastructure financier under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), particularly in financing ports, energy grids, and transportation networks. At the same time, investments from the United States, Japan, and allied partners through initiatives like the Blue Dot Network and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) would help Dhaka diversify funding sources and reduce overreliance on Beijing. The country's geographic advantage strengthens its role as a logistics hub, with growing cross-border energy grids, road networks, and maritime corridors under multilateral frameworks such as BIMSTEC and the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) initiative.

Strategically, Bangladesh adopts a non-aligned yet networked approach to diplomacy, engaging in forums associated with the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and other regional partnerships without formally joining security alliances. By maintaining flexibility, Dhaka maximizes economic benefits while keeping open channels of cooperation with multiple stakeholders, reflecting its broader hedging strategy (Kuik, 2021; Koga, 2018).

The implications of this scenario are twofold. On the one hand, opportunities arise from Dhaka's ability to secure diversified funding streams for blue economy projects, expand access to technological transfers in maritime surveillance and renewable energy, and enhance its bargaining power by skilfully balancing between rival blocs. On the other hand, risks persist. Continuous balancing could deepen strategic mistrust among major

powers, placing Bangladesh under growing pressure from both Washington and Beijing. Domestically, competing political and business factions may amplify tensions by advocating for closer alignment with either China or the U.S., increasing policy polarization.

Overall, this scenario positions Bangladesh to maintain strategic autonomy, strengthen economic resilience, and secure its blue economy potential while avoiding debt dependency and minimizing the risks of becoming entangled in overt security alignments. The continuity of this path would allow Dhaka to benefit from regional connectivity initiatives while preserving its leverage in navigating the triangular power rivalry in the Indo-Pacific.

Scenario II: Strategic Overdependence and Alignment Trap (Moderate Risk)

In this scenario, Bangladesh's strategic autonomy becomes increasingly constrained as deepening economic dependencies and intensifying geopolitical rivalries push Dhaka toward an inadvertent alignment with one major power. This trajectory emerges if Bangladesh fails to manage the asymmetries between its financing needs, security partnerships, and diplomatic engagements, leaving it more exposed to external leverage and policy pressures.

China's dominance under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) could expand significantly by the early 2030s, with large-scale commitments in ports, energy grids, and digital infrastructure increasing Dhaka's financial exposure. As Beijing consolidates control over dual-use maritime facilities, Bangladesh may find itself increasingly reliant on Chinese loans, technology, and defense cooperation, heightening concerns about strategic dependency (SIPRI, 2024; Zhang, 2011). At the same time, U.S. and Indian pressure to counterbalance Beijing's influence could intensify, placing Dhaka in a polarized policy environment that undermines its flexibility in foreign and security decision-making.

Compounding this vulnerability, domestic political and business factions may push competing agendas favouring alignment with either Washington or Beijing, further fragmenting Dhaka's policymaking. For example, stronger pro-China lobbies might advocate expanding BRI-linked projects and military cooperation, while pro-U.S. constituencies could seek deeper integration into the Indo-Pacific security architecture, including joint naval initiatives and enhanced maritime surveillance partnerships with the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command. In such an environment, balancing strategies could weaken, as Dhaka faces growing difficulty in resisting external policy conditionalities attached to loans, trade agreements, and defense collaborations.

The implications of this scenario are significant. On the positive side, deeper alignment with one bloc may secure rapid infrastructure development, technology transfers, and preferential trade access for Bangladesh's export-driven economy. However, the associated risks are substantial. Economic overdependence on China could leave Dhaka vulnerable to debt-servicing challenges and diminish its leverage in negotiations over critical resources and maritime rights. Alternatively, overt alignment with U.S.-led

initiatives risks provoking Chinese retaliation, including reductions in infrastructure funding or strategic exclusion from supply-chain networks.

By 2035, under this scenario, Bangladesh's strategic autonomy would be significantly reduced, constraining its ability to pursue independent economic, diplomatic, and security policies. While Dhaka may secure short-term developmental gains, its long-term bargaining power would weaken, leaving it susceptible to external pressures in a deeply contested Indo-Pacific order.

This scenario demonstrates how Bangladesh's hedging posture could erode under intensifying great-power competition. Unlike Scenario I, where Dhaka maintains flexibility, this trajectory highlights the dangers of economic dependency traps and policy entanglement that undermine sovereignty and constrain independent decision-making.

Scenario III: Maritime Militarization and Regional Security Entrapment (Low Probability, High Impact)

In this scenario, the Bay of Bengal evolves into a contested maritime battlespace as intensified U.S.–China–India rivalry drives significant militarization of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). Rising investments in naval infrastructure, autonomous platforms, and AI-enabled surveillance networks by major powers increase operational risks for Bangladesh, exposing it to entanglement pressures and diminishing room for strategic manoeuvring.

By the early 2030s, China may deepen its strategic footprint under the Maritime Silk Road, expanding dual-use port facilities at Chattogram, Payra, and Matarbari while increasing deployments of submarines, guided-missile destroyers, and unmanned underwater vehicles (UUVs) in Bangladesh's adjacent waters (Zhang, 2011; SIPRI, 2024). In response, India could escalate its maritime surveillance capabilities by deploying advanced reconnaissance platforms, strengthening Andaman and Nicobar Command operations, and expanding multilateral exercises with Japan, Australia, and the United States under frameworks like MALABAR and the QUAD (Raja Mohan, 2022). Simultaneously, the U.S. Indo-Pacific Command would likely increase its operational presence, conducting joint naval drills with Bangladesh while deploying carrier strike groups and next-generation surveillance technologies to secure freedom of navigation in the IOR.

Under this trajectory, the Bay of Bengal risks becoming a flashpoint for military competition, where overlapping naval postures, AI-driven targeting systems, and low-cost precision-strike capabilities amplify the risks of escalation and miscalculation. As shown in Figure 2, the rising trend of naval deployments from 2015 to 2024 already illustrates the intensity of maritime competition, which is projected to accelerate over the coming decade. Dhaka's maritime spaces could thus become strategically entangled in power-projection rivalries between Beijing, New Delhi, and Washington, raising concerns about the erosion of regional stability and Bangladesh's maritime sovereignty.

For Bangladesh, this scenario presents both opportunities and significant vulnerabilities. On the one hand, escalating militarization would enable Dhaka to modernize its naval capabilities through greater access to defense technologies, joint training programs, and

strategic intelligence sharing with multiple partners. On the other hand, increased security cooperation could exacerbate diplomatic tensions with rival blocs, exposing Bangladesh to retaliatory measures, reduced infrastructure investments, and even potential disruptions to supply chains critical for its export-driven economy.

By 2035, under this trajectory, Bangladesh faces heightened strategic pressures as the Bay of Bengal transforms into an arena of proxy naval competition. While Dhaka's participation in initiatives like BIMSTEC, IORA, and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) may partially mitigate escalation risks, its ability to preserve strategic autonomy would remain constrained. In this environment, a failure to balance competing partnerships could lead to security entanglements that undermine both economic resilience and regional stability.

Comparative Strategic Scenario Matrix

Bangladesh's strategic choices in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) involve navigating complex trade-offs between economic development, geopolitical alignment, and security imperatives. The Comparative Scenario Matrix below synthesizes the three possible trajectories outlined in this study Scenario I (Strategic Hedging), Scenario II (Alignment Trap), and Scenario III (Regional Militarization) across key variables, including economic policy, foreign policy, blue economy priorities, security posture, and long-term strategic outcomes. Table 1. illustrates how these trajectories diverge based on Bangladesh's ability to balance competing pressures from China, India, and the United States.

Table 1. *Comparative Scenario Matrix for Bangladesh's Strategic Trajectories (2035)*

Variable	***Scenario I: Hedging (Preferred)***	***Scenario II: Alignment Trap***	***Scenario III: Militarization***
Economic Policy	*Diversified investments via BRI + IPEF + India*	*Overdependence on BRI financing*	*Defense-driven spending dominates*
Foreign Policy	*Flexible, non-aligned, multi-vector*	*Constrained by strategic debt*	*Forced alignment in security blocs*
Blue Economy	*Sustainable growth, balanced access*	*Resource control by external powers*	*Contested maritime claims*
Security Posture	*Cooperative but neutral*	*Reactive and defensive*	*Militarized surveillance and deterrence*
Outcome	*Strategic autonomy sustained*	*Sovereignty constraints emerge*	*Regional security entrapment*

Source: Source: Author's construction, based on the hedging framework (Kuik, 2021; Koga, 2018) and the analysis presented in this study.

In the first one, Bangladesh maintains its hybrid hedging position, where it balances economic dependence on China, India, and the United States and tries to maximize its opportunities with the help of diversified sources of funds such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), the Blue Dot Network, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF).

This path allows Dhaka to consolidate the resilience of its blue economy, obtain technological transfers and maintain strategic autonomy.

On the contrary, the second scenario is an alignment trap, in which economic dependency on Chinese BRI funding or further integration into U.S.-led security blocs limits Dhaka flexibility. Although this approach can fast-track infrastructure development and access to technology, it poses the danger of policy limits, sovereignty encroachment and increased exposure to great-power conditionalities.

Last but not least, the third scenario presents the future as one of regional militarization, when the increased competition of China, India, and the U.S. turns the Bay of Bengal into a zone of strategic rivalry. In this eventuality, Bangladesh has to grapple with increased security tensions, disputed maritime boundaries, and the possibility of getting involved in proxy naval rivalry. This kind of trajectory raises the peril of strategic entanglement, though it does allow the possibility of some modernization of the defense capabilities of Bangladesh.

The comparative analysis highlights that the best way forward is with a hedging strategy and economic diversification that will ensure strategic autonomy and maximize the potential of the blue economy at the same time. To ensure that this balance is sustained, however, adaptive policy making, strengthening maritime governance and greater participation in multilateral forums is needed to counter the destabilizing impacts of regional militarization.

Strategic Outlook for Bangladesh to 2035

Bangladesh will have to negotiate economic, security, and strategic relationships in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) according to its geopolitical agency in the multipolar world of the 21st century. With increasing regional competition, Dhaka needs to base its strategic positioning on hedged actions, so that no power can command control over its economic and security system.

A central priority for Bangladesh is the diversification of partnerships. Sustaining equilibrium between China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), U.S.-led Indo-Pacific initiatives, and India's SAGAR strategy will be essential to preserving strategic flexibility and avoiding overdependence on any single actor (CSIS, 2025). By maintaining balanced engagement with competing powers, Dhaka can leverage multiple sources of infrastructure financing, technology transfers, and trade opportunities while retaining its decision-making autonomy.

Equally critical is the need to strengthen maritime security capabilities. Given the intensifying naval deployments and growing militarization of the Bay of Bengal, Bangladesh must invest in autonomous monitoring systems, counter-drone defense platforms, and enhanced Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA) networks to protect its sovereignty and secure its Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) (IISS, 2025; SIPRI, 2024). By adopting advanced surveillance and coastal security measures, Dhaka can manage emerging security dilemmas without becoming entangled in great-power rivalries.

At the same time, Bangladesh must maximize the economic potential of its blue economy by tapping into offshore energy reserves, submarine mineral resources, and sustainable

maritime trade opportunities. These prospects are critical for achieving long-term energy security and export diversification, but they must be managed carefully to ensure ecological sustainability and resilience against climate-related vulnerabilities (IORA, 2023; CSIS Maritime Atlas, 2025).

Last but not least, multilateralism will be crucial to the protection of strategic autonomy and the reduction of alignment pressures by institutionalizing them. Greater participation in regional platforms like BIMSTEC, the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and ASEAN-led processes will allow Bangladesh to enhance multilateral security arrangements, build economic linkages and prevent binary balancing in an Indo-Pacific that is becoming more polarized.

A calibrated hedging strategy underpinned by economic pragmatism, strategic neutrality, and versatile diplomacy would be the best way forward in a multipolar Indian Ocean order of things. Its prosperity will depend on its ability to balance the need to stick to policy consistency and the conflicting demands of Washington, Beijing and New Delhi. Bangladesh should maintain diversified partnerships and improve maritime resilience to become the key driver of the strategic evolution of the Bay of Bengal until 2035.

Conclusion

The strategic orientation of Bangladesh in the Indian Ocean region (IOR) is being transformed by the convoluted interaction of economic interdependence, geopolitical rivalries, and maritime security dilemmas. Located at the northern fringe of the Bay of Bengal, Dhaka is at the center of a rising Indo-Pacific order, whereby the interests of China, India, and the United States intersect. This geographic centrality has its advantages and disadvantages: on the one hand, this position provides an opportunity to enjoy the dividends of blue economy development, regional integration, and technological transfers, and on the other hand, it puts Bangladesh in a strategic position of vulnerability to the rival power blocs.

The analysis proves that the foreign policy of Bangladesh is represented by a hybrid hedging approach that is based on a careful balancing of economic relationships and security interactions. On the one hand, the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China has become one of the primary factors in infrastructure development, digital connectivity, and defense cooperation that have strengthened the ties between Dhaka and Beijing and turned Bangladesh into an emerging logistics hub in South Asia (SIPRI, 2024). On the one hand, U.S.-led Indo-Pacific programs, such as investments in maritime domain awareness, and technological integration, allow Dhaka to have alternatives to reduce strategic dependence. In the meantime, the SAGAR doctrine of India and cross-border connectivity initiatives confirm the position of Bangladesh within the security and economic systems of South Asia.

But these combined commitments present dilemmas. The increasing naval presence, as can be seen in Figure 2, indicates the fast-growing militarization of the Bay of Bengal and the high probability of strategic entanglement between U.S. and Chinese–Indian rivalry (IISS, 2025). Meanwhile, the ambitions of Bangladesh to open up its blue economy potential as shown in Figure 3 with its large Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) introduces

new areas of vulnerabilities in terms of resource management, maritime security as well as ecological sustainability (IORA, 2023).

The scenario-based analysis indicates conflicting future paths of Bangladesh. Scenario I is the most desirable one, in which Dhaka maintains strategic autonomy by diversifying partnerships, economic pragmatism, and flexible diplomacy. Scenario II, on the other hand, cautions against an alignment trap, i.e., a situation in which increasing reliance on one power bloc would diminish sovereignty and bargaining power. Lastly, Scenario III highlights the dangers of heightening regional militarization whereby deepening naval rivalry is turning the Bay of Bengal into a proxy arena of strategic rivalry, heightening the threat of entanglement and decreasing maritime stability.

In combination, these processes highlight the emergence of Bangladesh as a strategic middle power whose actions will determine the emerging geopolitical order of the Bay of Bengal and the Indo-Pacific as whole. Where prospects of economic development and regional influence are on the rise, there are also increasing dangers of militarization, resource rivalry and alignment pressures. The capacity of Bangladesh to maintain strategic flexibility, retain autonomy, and manage external influences will remain crucial in its effort to position itself within the security and economic order of the region by 2035 as it negotiates this increasingly contested strategic environment.

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THE GEOPOLITICS OF LITHIUM: DISPUTE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CHINA OVER ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OF THIS NATURAL RESOURCE

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Abstract

Lithium has gained significant economic and military importance due to its diverse industrial applications, resulting in increased global demand. This research aims to analyse the positioning of the United States and China in their efforts to secure access to lithium resources outside their borders. The study focuses on lithium's function as a power source for both the United States and China, and to analyse the geopolitical consequences of rising global demand for this metal on regional and international security. The research employes deductive reasoning on qualitative content analysis and a case study design. This study enabled the clarification of the political, economic and environmental impact of lithium extraction in countries with large confirmed reserves, as well as the potential changes to regional and international security arising from the economic and military competition between the United States and China.

Keywords

Geopolitics, Lithium, Power, United States, China.

Resumo

O lítio assume uma importância económico-militar crescente, pelas diversas aplicações no setor industrial, o que justifica o incremento da sua procura em vários países. O objetivo desta investigação é analisar o posicionamento norte-americano e chinês para obter o acesso aos recursos de lítio no exterior do seu território. Pretende-se assim, centrar a investigação no papel do lítio, enquanto fonte de poder para os Estados Unidos da América e China e analisar o impacto geopolítico derivado do incremento da procura global deste metal, na segurança regional e internacional. A investigação seguiu um raciocínio dedutivo, assente numa análise de conteúdo qualitativa e num desenho de pesquisa de estudo de caso. Este estudo permitiu clarificar o impacto político-económico e ambiental da exploração do lítio nos países com grandes reservas confirmadas, e as possíveis alterações à segurança regional e internacional, resultantes da competição económico-militar entre os Estados Unidos da América e a China.

Palavras-chave

Geopolítica, Lítio, Poder, Estados Unidos da América, China.

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THE GEOPOLITICS OF LITHIUM: DISPUTE BETWEEN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA AND CHINA OVER ACCESS TO AND CONTROL OF THIS NATURAL RESOURCE

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Introduction

Lithium, a metal with a wide range of applications across various industrial sectors, has increasingly become a coveted resource among state actors, particularly the United States of America (U.S.) and the People's Republic of China[1]. In fact, the growing global consumption of lithium, both as a processed compound and in its mineral form, has positioned it as one of the most strategic natural resources. The largest global reserves, both in quantitative and qualitative terms, are concentrated in South America (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017). For major powers, the economic advantage and military applications derived from the extraction, acquisition and control of lithium highlight a problem that this study seeks to address: What is the political-military positioning of the U.S. and China considering the anticipated increase in lithium demand for economic and military purposes? The subject of study focuses on the role of lithium as a source of power for both the U.S. and China.

Given that geopolitics represents the spatial dimension of politics, as the study of the interplay between politics and geography (Nogueira, 2011), this study seeks to analyse how U.S. and Chinese foreign policy efforts aim to secure access to lithium resources abroad, thereby expanding their strategic reserves of the metal. Such access is crucial for maintaining their leadership as dominant economic and military powers. The geopolitical implications of the increasing global demand for lithium may result in regional and international security shifts, which warrant thorough analysis. This justifies the relevance of the present study, which aims to contribute to the core field of political science, specifically within the subfield of geopolitics and geostrategy.

Due to its scope, this study is delimited (temporally, geographically and conceptually): to the period from the early 21st century AD to the present day, during which the interest in lithium surged due to its use in batteries because of its highly ionic properties, with the subsequent expansion of its extraction to meet industrial demands (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017, p. 199); to the main global regions involved in lithium extraction and processing, as well as its economic, military and political roles in the U.S. and China, which currently stand as the most geopolitically influential state actors; and to the

[1] Hereinafter referred to as "China".

analysis of how lithium geopolitics intersects with the application of instruments of power, namely the Diplomatic, Informational, Military and Economic (DIME) (Bartholomees, 2012) as employed by the U.S. and China to acquire and utilize lithium resources within their industrial sectors. Additionally, the study will consider the potential impact on regional security in countries with confirmed large lithium reserves, as well as on international stability more broadly. However, the informational element, pertaining to key messaging aimed at domestic populations, will not be examined, despite its relevance in responding to adversarial cyber campaigns, so as to maintain focus on the core subject of study.

Within this framework, the General Objective (GO) of this study is *To analyse the U.S. and Chinese positioning for securing access to lithium resources outside their territories*. The GO will be achieved by accomplishing three Specific Objectives (SO):

SO1 – To analyse the global interest in lithium;

SO2 – To analyse the geopolitical factors associated with lithium;

SO3 – To analyse how lithium geopolitics influences power relations between the U.S. and China.

To achieve the GO, the following Research Question (RQ) was identified to guide the research: How does lithium influence the power relations of the U.S. and China with international politics and the global environment?

Conceptual framework and methodological approach

State of the Art

Within the scope of the topic under study, numerous investigations have been conducted over recent decades on the lithium industry. However, these studies have largely focused on the archaeological, geological and morphometric aspects of this metal, particularly in Portugal and Brazil, as well as on the geopolitics of South America's strategic natural resources (Freitas, 2023; Rocha, 2018; Santos, 2024; Sousa & Araujo, 2017).

The hegemonic rivalry between the United States and China has also been widely analysed, though primarily centred on the restructuring of their political-military and economic strategies in the Indo-Pacific region. These analyses often contrast the U.S. "pivot to Asia" strategy with China's economic integration strategy embodied in the One Belt, One Road (OBOR) initiative. Within this context, several studies have addressed the impact of China's expansion into the South China Sea (SCS) on the shared access to natural resources (Hendler, 2018; Mattos, 2016). This expansion is closely tied to the modernization of China's armed forces and its implications for international relations, including U.S. defence interests (Schmidt, 2019; U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019; Wehner, 2019). The region remains unstable from a security perspective due to the "intensification of dependencies and competition for markets, resources and routes" coupled with the financial capacity to enhance military capabilities (Tomé, 2017, pp. 358-359).

However, in light of the growing strategic competition between the U.S. and China, which is likely to intensify further with the potential re-election of Donald Trump, there is a

noticeable lack of integrated studies that specifically analyse the positioning of both powers in securing access to lithium resources, and the influence of this metal on the power dynamics between them within the International Political System (IPS). This gap underscores the relevance and timeliness of the present study.

Conceptual framework

To ensure a clearer understanding of this research, it is essential to clarify its underlying concepts.

Geopolitics is understood here as the discipline that studies the relationship between a state's power factors, international politics and its surrounding geographical environment. It includes "the discourses and practices related to the acquisition and use of power […] within and according to a given space, [taking into account] the geographical elements present there [...] on a broader scale" (Tomé, 2014, p. 192). It combines "a geographic schematization of diplomatic-strategic relations with a geo-economic analysis of resources, with an interpretation of diplomatic attitudes based on lifestyle and environmental context" (Aron, 1975, pp. 188-197). In this framework, geographic location (or, more broadly, spatial positioning) shapes or constrains state behaviour within the IPS, functioning as a key instrument through which hegemony is constructed and power is exercised, in line with classical and neoclassical geopolitical theories. Given the increasing U.S.-China competition over lithium (Jesus et al., 2023), this concept is further complemented by geostrategy, which relates to the exercise of coercion in a conflictual environment (Nogueira, 2011, p. 135), such as the current dynamic between both actors, particularly in relation to Taiwan, one of the greatest obstacles to stability in the Asia-Pacific region and to the possibility of a cooperative U.S.-China relationship (Albuquerque, 2023).

Strategy is defined as "the science and art of building, positioning and employing coercive means in a given environment and time, to achieve objectives set by politics, overcoming problems and exploiting opportunities in a context of disagreement." (Ribeiro, 2009, p. 22). Beaufre (1965) classifies strategy, according to its scope and forms of coercion, into: total strategy, overall strategies and specific strategies. Total strategy, at the political level, directs the overall strategies (political, economic, psychological and military) toward desired objectives and, if appropriate, integrates them to create synergies (Barrento, 2010), aiming to achieve overarching political-strategic objectives.

In general, the most effective strategies are those that integrate the application of all instruments of power, through which state actors typically influence global events. These instruments are articulated through the DIME elements, serving as vectors for the projection of both soft and hard power (Kodalle et al., 2020, p. 20). Power is understood as the ability of one political actor to impose its will on another (Couto, 1988), or to influence the international system in order to pursue objectives that serve its own interests. It also encompasses "the capacity to resist imposition or even influence" (Tomé, 2014, p. 190). Power is materialised as "the sum of attributes that enable a state to achieve its external objectives, especially when they are opposed to the objectives and will of another international actor" (Serrão & Longo, 2012, p. 20).

Diplomacy is the official mechanism through which a state engages formally with other states, traditionally conceived as the peaceful means to promote national interests. While its emphasis may vary depending on the situation, diplomacy does not operate in isolation from other instruments of power (Smith, 2007).

Military power refers to the capacity for deterrence and combat that allows a state to impose its will without necessarily resorting to the actual use of force, while improving the likelihood of favourable outcomes in the event of armed conflict (Collins, 2002). It represents the ability to control others, even against their will. The military instrument is part of the broader military strategy, which seeks to develop and employ the armed forces to achieve (military) objectives set by politics. It contributes to the total strategy and to a state's strategic potential, which comprises "the set of moral and material forces" that support its strategy (Couto, 1988, p. 241). From this standpoint, "military means [...] constitute the core, the 'last resort', of any nation-state's defence potential (Vieira, 1980, p. 20). Force ultimately serves state interests, which expand through the growth of relative power, where political-military means may serve economic ends and vice versa (Waltz, 1979).

Economic power plays an increasingly influential role in modern conflicts, from conventional warfare to diplomatic disputes. It enables states to produce, finance, or support key national security activities, thereby protecting both national and international interests. With globalization, technological advancement, societal transformation and the evolving nature of conflict, economic considerations have gained prominence, displacing military power as the primary coercive tool in international relations (Chun, 2012, pp. 205-206).

In this study, a superpower is defined as a state actor with a global strategy and full-spectrum capabilities, projecting power across all dimensions: diplomatic, informational, military, economic, cultural, scientific-technological, and in terms of physical and human resources. The United States seeks to maintain the balance of power and preserve the territorial status quo, whereas China aims to achieve total intervention capacity and expand its maritime borders and sphere of influence. Superpowers differ from great and middle powers, which, despite their global ambitions, possess only partial capabilities and exert limited global influence. Nonetheless, they typically have vast territories, natural resources, population size and notable nuclear deterrence capabilities (Couto, 1988).

Methodology and Method

The study employed a deductive reasoning methodology, starting from the premise that the strategic importance of lithium is growing worldwide, given technological innovation (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017, p. 199), as a "premise", in search of the contribution that geopolitics and the application of instruments of power have in obtaining and maintaining US hegemony and Chinese ascendance in the IPS. The study used a qualitative content analysis to achieve a deeper understanding of the subject of study, using a cross-sectional case-study design grounded in an explanatory epistemology (Table 1).

Table 1. Analysis Model

Theme	The geopolitics of lithium: competition between the United States and China for access to and control of this natural resource						
Subject of Study	The role of lithium as a source of power for the U.S. and China						
General Objective	To analyse the U.S. and Chinese positioning for securing access to lithium resources outside their borders						
Research Question	How does lithium influence the power relations of the U.S. and China with international politics and the global environment?						
Specific Objectives	**Subsidiary Questions (SQ)**	**Concepts**	**Dimensions**	**Variables**	**Indicators**	**Data collection**	**Structure**
SO1: To analyse the global interest in lithium	**SQ1**: How important is lithium?	Geography and Geopolitics	United States and China	Political	Established international relations	**Literature riview and document analysis (scientific articles, thesis and official websites)**	Subsection 3.1
				Military	Military applications		
				Economic	Economic impact		
SO2: To analyse the geopolitical factors associated with lithium	**SQ2**: Which major state actors have lithium reserves?	Geography, Geostrategy and International Relations	South America, North America, Asia, Africa and Oceania	Geographical	Geological characteristics		Subsection 3.2
					Locations with lithium reserves		
					Amount of lithium reserves		
				Political	Established international relations		
SO3:To analyse how lithium geopolitics influences power relations between the U.S. and China	**SQ3**: How much does lithium influence the power relations between the U.S. and China?	Geopolitics and Instruments of Power	United States and China	Diplomatic	International agreements		Subsection 3.3
				Military	Military investment		
					Military presence		
				Economic	Economic investments		

The data collection instruments used were literature review and document analysis, primarily of scientific articles, PhD theses and master's theses, but also official Chinese, American and international websites to complement the study with the desired academic neutrality. To mitigate cognitive biases, the analysis sought to substantiate its claims through the triangulation of multiple sources, generally representing Western and Far Eastern perspectives, while prioritising primary sources of statistical data.

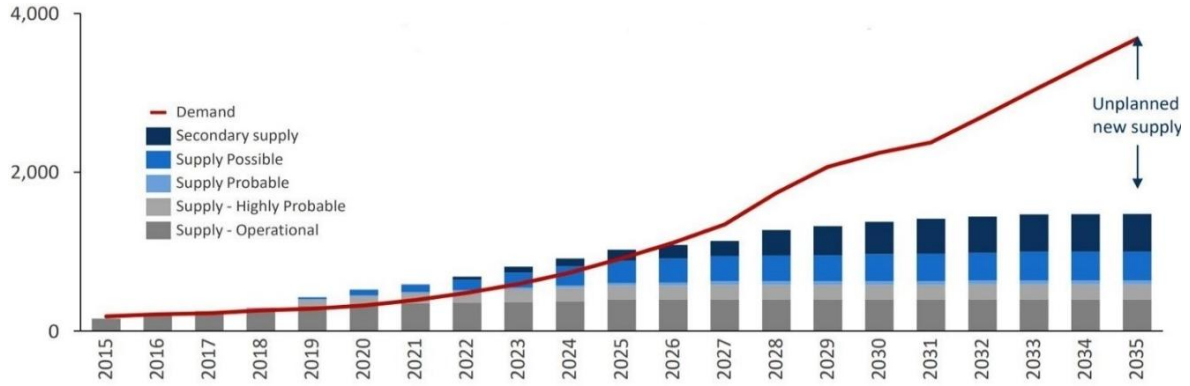
Research

Importance of lithium

Discovered in 1817, lithium is a metal that constitutes approximately 0.006% of the Earth's crust and exists as a combination of two stable isotopes: lithium-6 (7.5%) and lithium-7 (92.5%) (Makhijani, 2000). Its unique properties have been increasingly adapted to meet the technological development needs of various sectors. Since the 1970s, lithium's role as an energy carrier in batteries for electronic devices, including hybrid electric vehicles, mobile phones, smartphones and laptops, has gained growing significance (Zhang et al., 2018). In the 21st century, lithium's highly ionic nature and high electrochemical potential have rendered it indispensable for both regular and rechargeable batteries (Noronha, 2010), as these characteristics allow for the storage of greater amounts of electrical energy in smaller volumes. This, in turn, has driven a sharp increase in global demand and extraction of the metal (Figure 1).

However, natural lithium and lithium enriched in lithium-7 have various commercial and industrial applications, standing out in 2026 in the following areas: batteries, as the main component (88%); ceramics and glassware (4%); greases and lubricants (2%); air treatment (1%); aluminium production and metallurgy (1%); lithium carbonate-based pharmaceuticals for depression treatment (1%); among others (3%), including polymer production (United States Geological Survey [USGS], 2026, p. 118) and in the space industry.

Figure 1. Lithium demand 2015-2035, in kilotonnes



Source: Benchmark Mineral Intelligence (2019).

The growing use of lithium in batteries is particularly noteworthy, having represented only 56% in 2019 (USGS, 2019), closely tied to the development of portable electronic devices. It becomes clear, therefore, that lithium is a strategic resource increasingly contested by industries from global superpowers due to its energy efficiency, with significant impact on local socioeconomic structures in the regions where it is mined, creating opportunities for regional economic development. On a global scale, the progressive energy transition – from oil to the "clean economy" – has brought the concept of "energy security" back into the political lexicon, given lithium's potential to shape ecological political relationships with consequences for both the economy and the global ecosystem (Queirós, 2022). This reality drives markets to adapt, resulting in price fluctuations of this raw material as supply expands with the discovery of new natural reserves (Trading Economics, 2025). Within this framework, up to 2022, the United States, China and India accounted for more than two-thirds of the global expansion in renewable energy.

From a military perspective, lithium batteries – more robust, higher in energy density, longer lasting and faster charging compared to conventional batteries – are particularly suited to harsh environments and demanding applications. They are used to equip a wide array of systems, including communication devices, night vision goggles and Uncrewed Aircraft Systems (UAS), which are increasingly employed in modern conflict scenarios due to their extended range and strategic relevance (Black et al., 2024). Additionally, lithium has been employed in aircraft coating technologies (Makhijani, 2000).

In a global context marked by increased investment in military equipment aimed at coercion or resistance to coercion, the United States remains the leading investor, followed by China (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], 2025). Within this geopolitical landscape, nuclear capabilities have regained prominence in international relations as instruments of negotiation and strategic leverage (United Nations, 2024). Lithium-6 plays a pivotal role in the development of nuclear weapons, particularly in the production of tritium – an essential component of thermonuclear warheads. When combined with deuterium, it constitutes the nuclear fuel for this class of weapons (Barnaby, 1993, p. 39; Makhijani, 2000, p. 59). In parallel, lithium-7 is

utilized in the production of coolant fluids for nuclear reactors (National Research Council, 1996, p. 278).

From an environmental standpoint, the global shift from oil dependence to rare metal dependency is becoming increasingly evident[2]. While the integration of lithium in solar panels and electric vehicle batteries contributes to pollution reduction in end-user countries – particularly in the United States and China, two of the world's largest emitters – the environmental impacts at extraction sites are often severe and underreported. These regions, typically remote, exhibit high air toxicity levels due to fine dust containing hydrofluoric acid, as well as significant graphite waste, which damages biodiversity, natural ecosystems, agricultural lands, and contaminates soil and water with heavy metals such as fluorine and mercury (RTP, 2020). Moreover, the extensive use of water in the brine extraction process – common in the so-called South American Lithium Triangle, also known as South American ABC (Argentina-Bolivia-Chile) – can deplete local water resources, impacting human communities and natural ecosystems. The carbon emissions generated during lithium mining and processing also undermine the mineral's reputation as a component of clean technologies. These environmental consequences may lead to long-term declines in soil fertility and ecosystem health, reinforcing the urgent need for more sustainable and environmentally responsible mining practices.

Politically, the United States, China and other great powers such as Japan, Germany and South Korea are actively competing for access to lithium resources. Notably, China leads in lithium processing and has positioned this dominance at the centre of its ecological and green development strategies. As the world's largest electric vehicle market and top manufacturer of such vehicles, China is expanding its influence across the DIME elements, particularly in South and Latin America, by investing in or directly extracting mineral resources essential to securing national autonomy and strategic supply chains[3]. In contrast, the United States, economically removed from the largest lithium producers, seeks to strengthen its presence in this market through increased investments, aiming to secure energy independence. In doing so, it is reinforcing its position within global supply chains for critical minerals, demonstrating lithium's central role in the broader technological and geopolitical rivalry between the United States and China.

In summary, lithium's strategic importance derives from its high energy-storage efficiency, which has made it an increasingly critical resource across a broad range of industrial, technological and military applications. Its central role in lithium-ion batteries and its relevance to thermonuclear warheads production are particularly significant in the context of the ongoing global energy transition from oil toward a "clean energy" economy, as well as the recent resurgence of nuclear deterrence, particularly involving the United States and China. The discovery and exploitation of new lithium reserves have generated significant socioeconomic repercussions in peripheral states, requiring the international market to adapt to the dynamics of supply and demand. For China, lithium is central to its new green and ecological policy, aiming to expand its influence in South and Latin

[2] Although this trend has been shaken by the protectionist policies of Donald Trump, re-elected President of the United States, with the withdrawal from the Paris Agreement and investment in oil exploration.
[3] Among the 24 strategic minerals, the following stand out: iron, copper, aluminium, gold, nickel, cobalt, lithium and rare earths elements.

America, while pursuing economic independence and national security. For the U.S., growing competition over critical minerals has reinforced its global supply chains, underscoring lithium's central role in the technological and geopolitical rivalry between the two actors

Consequently, the strategic interest in lithium, shared by superpowers and emerging economies alike, is expected to intensify, especially as global demand for this and other critical minerals required for the energy transition is projected to grow by approximately 500% in the coming years (PNM 2050, 2020).

Geopolitical Factors of Lithium

Geographical Location of Lithium

The excessive reliance on fossil fuels has exposed the unsustainability of an oil-based economy, normally used to produce fuels, chemicals and other materials. This reality has stimulated efforts toward greater energy autonomy among state actors and has elevated the geopolitical relevance of countries with lithium reserves, despite their semi-peripheral position within the global geopolitical system.

The main countries with confirmed lithium reserves include: Chile, Australia, China, Argentina, the United States, Canada, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Portugal, Bolivia, Austria, the Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Czechia, Finland, Germany, Mali, Namibia, Peru, Serbia, Spain, Mexico and Ghana[4]. The first five alone account for approximately 85% of global lithium reserves, with the United States and China standing out for their significant percentage increases (Figure 2).

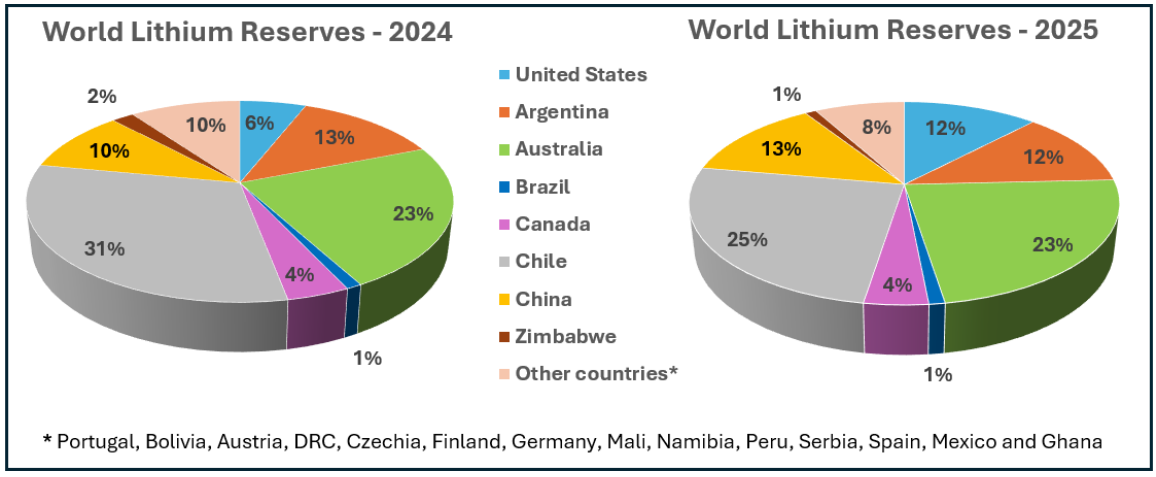
However, these figures do not directly correspond to the world's largest known lithium producers, which are ranked as follows: Australia (92,000 tons/year), China (62,000 tons/year), Chile (56,000 tons/year), Zimbabwe (28,000 tons/year), Argentina (23,000 tons/year), Brazil (12,000 tons/year), Mali (9.600 tons/year), Canada (5,600 tons/year), Portugal (380 tons/year), among others, including Austria, the DRC, the Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Ghana, Mexico, Namibia, Serbia and Spain[5] (USGS, 2026, p. 119). Among these countries, China, Argentina, Zimbabwe and Canada have shown a significant increase in production since 2023. By 2030, China is expected to assume a leading position both in lithium mining, accounting for 28% of the global market, followed by Australia (26%) and Chile (12%), and in lithium refining, where it is projected to hold a 62% market share, followed by Chile (13%) and Argentina (11%) (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2026).

Currently, economically viable lithium deposits are categorized into three main types[6] (Bowell et al., 2020): (1) lithium-bearing evaporitic continental brines[7] (along with less significant hydromorphic and geothermal brines), primarily located in Bolivia, Chile and

[4] Although the ranking may vary depending on the source, the state actors remain largely the same: Bolivia (24.6%), Argentina (22.6%), Chile (11.2%), the United States (9.2%), Australia (7.5%), China (6%), the DRC (3.5%), Canada (3.4%), Germany (3.2%) and Mexico (2%) (Mexican Centre for International Relations, 2023).
[5] The United States was excluded due to lack of data.
[6] It is important to note that lithium is not found in nature ins its pure form.
[7] They hold the world's largest lithium reserves.

Argentina, but also found in China and the United States; (2) hard rock deposits[8] (pegmatites), located in Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, the DRC, Czech Republic, Finland, Germany, Mali, Namibia, Peru, Portugal, Serbia, Spain, the United States and Zimbabwe; and (3) clay-derived deposits, such as hectorite and other less common types like jadarite, primarily found in Mexico and the United States, with additional potential sources elsewhere (Figure 3). Brine extraction remains the most economically efficient process, which is why this category currently dominates the global lithium market. However, clay-derived lithium extraction, though not yet fully developed, may become more cost-effective in the future (Gramling, 2019). Similarly, the extraction of lithium from seawater, as in the case of the Dead Sea, holds great promise. Although the lithium concentration in seawater is relatively low (approximately 0.2 ppm), the total lithium content in the oceans is estimated to be 5,000 times greater than that found on land (Li et al., 2021, p. 3152). Once extracted, lithium is processed into either lithium carbonate or lithium hydroxide, the two primary forms used in industrial applications.

Figure 2. World lithium reserves distributed by country



Source: Adapted from USGS (2025); USGS (2026).

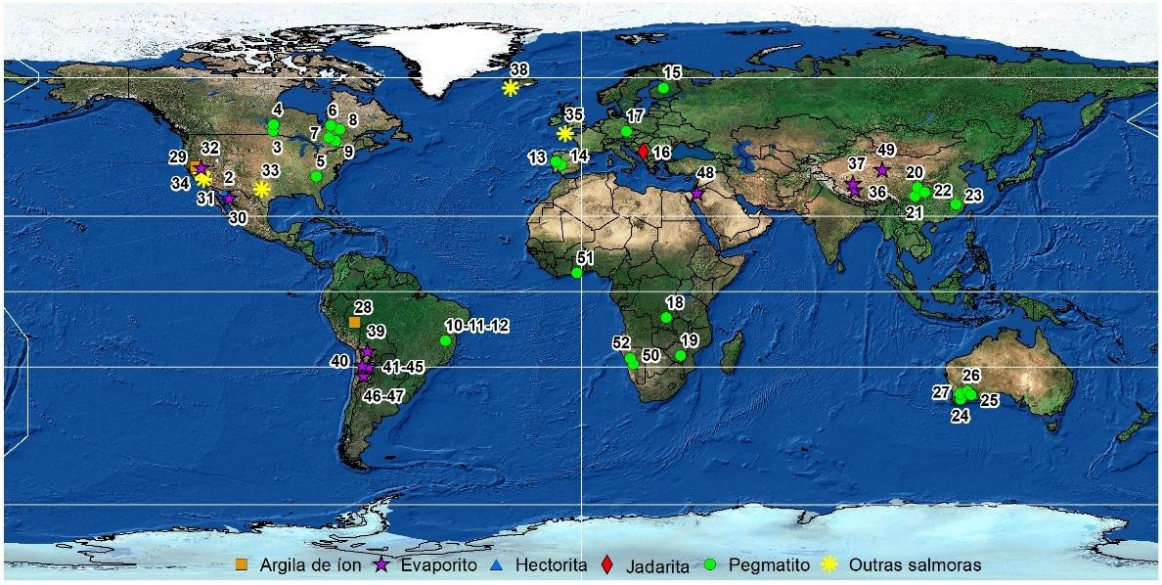
The territorial extent of the United States and China allows these actors to have within their territories seven lithium extraction sites that are geographically distant from one another and of different geological categories. This factor, combined with their economic and military capabilities, clearly defined military strategies, strong national development ambitions and significant human capital[9], provides them with substantial strategic potential (Couto, 1988).

Nevertheless, the Lithium Triangle in South America remains the region with the largest known lithium reserves in the world (Jesus et al., 2023). Although lithium is not abundant in the Earth's crust, recent research confirms that there is sufficient supply for several

[8] They hold various lithium minerals, such as lepidolite, ambligonite, petalite and spodumene.
[9] The U.S. is the third most populous country, with a large working-age population and an average age of around 39, while China has about one-fifth of the world's population, with a large working-age population and an average age of 40, although with a slightly negative growth rate at present (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025).

hundred years, meeting the demand that is expected to arise in the coming decades (Mateus, 2020). However, the extraction process for this natural mineral can still be optimized in both economic and environmental terms (Sverdrup, 2016). Further research is required to understand how and where natural forces, including wind, heat, water and geological time, interact to create lithium deposits in quantities sufficient to support economically viable mining operations.

Figure 3. Lithic exploration projects by deposit type



Source: SGB (2025).

In summary, lithium reserves are present on all continents, with Chile, Australia, China, Argentina, and the United States standing out as the countries with the largest reserves, which are also among the world's leading producers of this metal. Notably, the United States and China have experienced significant percentage increases in their lithium reserves, while China, Argentina, Zimbabwe, and Canada have recorded substantial increases in lithium production. The most economically viable lithium deposits, namely brine deposits, are located mainly in South America, particularly within the Lithium Triangle, but also in China and the United States. The remaining deposits, namely pegmatites and clay-derived deposits, are distributed across all continents. Clay-derived lithium deposit (a potentially more profitable extraction process but not yet developed), are currently located only in Mexico and the U.S. and could therefore strengthen North American influence in the lithium market. Given their size and geographical location, the U.S. and China have seven lithium exploration sites within their territories, geographically dispersed and belonging to different categories. The potential extraction of lithium from seawater could provide a strategic advantage to countries with the largest Exclusive Economic Zones (EEZ), particularly the United States.

International Relations Involved

As anticipated by Mattos (2016), Sino-American relations are expected to be among the most influential in the coming decades, as they are likely to shape the overall dynamics of international relations on a global scale.

In response to the 20% global increase in lithium consumption – approximately 263,000 tons in 2025 – global production (excluding the United States) rose by around 31%, reaching 290,000 tons. In this context, lithium imports account for 14% of U.S. consumption, mainly originating from Chile (54%) and Argentina (43%), among other countries (3%). Therefore, it is strategically important to safeguard relations with these states (USGS, 2026). Accordingly, the current U.S. administration has sought to deepen engagement with the governments of Chile, Argentina, and Bolivia, including through bilateral agreements with Argentina and Chile that create favorable conditions for U.S. companies. Nevertheless, a significant realignment away from China remains unlikely. Beijing continues to expand its position in the global lithium market through sustained, long-term investment, thereby reinforcing its economic presence and strategic leverage across the sector (Fontanarava, 2026). Against this backdrop, the U.S. approach, in line with its National Security Strategy (Trump, 2025), is expected to focus on three main priorities: increasing investment in critical minerals in Latin America, a trend that has been evident since January 2025, while also expanding such engagement in Africa; strengthening Western Hemisphere supply chains in order to reduce dependencies and discourage cooperation with hostile actors; and increasing domestic lithium production.

In the case of China, the country has pursued a dual objective: reducing greenhouse gas emissions and achieving national energy security, by promoting self-sufficiency in critical minerals. As of 2021, although China possessed only 25% of global lithium resources, it accounted for approximately 65% of global lithium processing and refining capacity. This trend continued after 2022, with growing interest from Chinese companies in acquiring lithium assets abroad to expand access to global resources, as well as increasing domestic acquisition activities. In this regard, Chinese firms, such as Ganfeng Lithium and Zhejiang Huayou Cobalt Co. Ltd, have acquired foreign companies that own lithium brine operations, particularly in Argentina (e.g., Lithea Inc.) and Zimbabwe (e.g., Arcadia Project), among others. Following the industry shift initiated in 2022 toward lithium iron phosphate batteries, which use lithium carbonate instead of lithium oxide/hydroxide, it is expected that China will continue to increase its exports of lithium oxide/hydroxide and import greater quantities of lithium carbonate. This strategy is reflected in the large-scale production of lithium carbonate by Chinese companies in Argentina (e.g., Zijin Mining) and in the production of lithium hydroxide in Australia (e.g., Tianqi Lithium Corp.), in cooperation with Australian counterparts (Moon, 2022, p. 9.6).

Implications for Power Relations

The current shift in polarity in the 21st century, in which the United States and China appear to represent "long-duration lines in world geo-history," renews the possibility of conflict between the maritime and land powers as a reconfiguration of global geopolitics unfolds (Júnior, 2018, p. 25). In this context, the energy transition toward so-called clean and renewable energies has intensified competition among major powers for the

acquisition of rare earth elements and lithium, as well as for the control of mines of these resources on a global scale, with ecological impacts that will shape the world in the coming years serving as a determining and influential factor in future conflicts (Oxford Analytica, 2017, pp. 62-68). Consequently, there is a "mining transition from coal to copper, from oil to lithium and from hydrogen to platinum and rare earths." (National Geographic, 2023).

Oscillating between isolationism (or protectionism) and interventionism, U.S. policy seeks to maintain the United States' status quo as a superpower. Given the prevailing political orientation, interest in lithium may lead to the annexation, acquisition, or negotiation of rights in new territories rich in this mineral to counterbalance China's newly acquired advantage in the apparent discovery of new reserves on its territory, announced in January 2025. Examples supporting this argument include U.S. interest in Greenland, not ruling out "the use of military force," not merely for its geostrategic positioning to control navigation routes in the Arctic "for purposes of national security," but especially for "economic reasons," due to its wealth in rare earth elements[10] (Sanches, 2025). According to the 2023 report from the Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland, published on an online portal, there is currently only a residual presence of lithium in Greenland (GREENMIN, 2023); however, this quantity could increase in future research, stimulating interest in this territory, which is estimated to contain up to 25% "of all rare earth element resources in the world" (Sanches, 2025). China is also currently investing in rare earth prospecting in Greenland, including this territory in its Polar Silk Road, given that it would offer a more economically advantageous alternative to the current China-Europe maritime routes via the Strait of Malacca and the Suez Canal, which could be blocked by the U.S. and its allies; but also for enabling a diversification of energy resources (Atlas Report, 2021). Thus, the hegemonic ambition of both actors, the U.S. and China, emerge in economic terms, each competing for influence over Greenland. Regarding the U.S. invasion of Afghanistan in 2001, justified as a measure to defeat al-Qaeda and the Taliban, and as part of America's "preventive war strategy" (Mattos, 2016, p. 56), some sources indicate that a primary motive for the war was the existence in Afghan territory of "deposits of gold, cobalt, copper, iron and, above all, lithium," amounting to over a trillion dollars, according to the Pentagon in 2010 (Galeano, 2014, p. 192). Following the U.S. withdrawal in 2021, China sought to exploit these alleged lithium deposits and invest in the infrastructure needed to integrate the Afghan state into the OBOR framework. To this end, China maintains diplomatic relations with the Taliban while promoting stability along its small border with Afghanistan (Costa & Teixeira, 2021). On its part, the expansion of Chinese interests in the Indo-Pacific region (Hendler, 2018) and in the space sector (Smart, 2019) has resulted in the growth and modernization of its armed forces, with defense investment comparable to that of NATO member states (excluding the U.S.) (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2025). However, rapid economic growth has increased China's dependency on access to external resources. Within this framework, the military instrument serves the political-economic interests of both actors in asserting power, as confirmed by the presence of U.S. bases in strategic locations across various oceans and by the Chinese military projection in Djibouti and the South China Sea, where the naval component,

[10] It is important to note that the United States already maintains a space base in Pituffik, Greenland.

among other functions, is used to escort merchant ships and control resources (Monteiro, 2024).

Anticipating the rising demand for lithium, it will be essential to make the industry economically sustainable, therefore technological development must enable the optimization of mineral extraction. Despite possessing fewer lithium reserves than China, the U.S. has clay-derived lithium deposits (see Figure 3), allowing for the development of more profitable extraction methods. On the other hand, the potential extraction of lithium from the oceans has stimulated research into manufacturing batteries that operate with seawater, or developing techniques for ocean-mining of this metal (Li et al., 2021). In this sense, whoever has the larger EEZ will have an advantage in obtaining lithium through this route. This gives the U.S. a clear advantage, as it has the largest EEZ in the world, and motivates China's expansion in the contested SCS. Internationally, the U.S. seeks to enter into agreements to secure the lithium needed by its companies, such as Tesla, producer of electric vehicles, as well as to negotiate tariffs applied to them.

In the case of China, in order to meet the global demand for batteries[11], it has discreetly but effectively intensified the establishment of companies to increase access to lithium deposits in South America, which concentrates around 50% of global reserves, as well as in Africa and Australia. This interest points to partnerships among these actors, confirmed by examples such as the agreement among Bolivia, CATL (China's principal battery manufacturer) and CMOC (China's largest cobalt miner), including Brunp, which will produce 100,000 tons of lithium carbonate by 2028; and the construction of a deep-water port at Chancay, Peru, by the Chinese state-owned company Cosco Shipping, which will facilitate China-South America trade. It is evident that lithium has contributed to stimulating China's OBOR strategy, which includes investments in Argentina, Bolivia, Chile, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Peru, Panama, Uruguay and Venezuela. In the long term, this Chinese strategy seeks to integrate supply agreements with various countries, investment in energy assets and infrastructure abroad, and creation of strategic reserves to mitigate disruptions in supply (Castro & Ludovico, 2025).

This reality challenges U.S. and European interests on these continents, with the European Union (EU) having included lithium on its list of strategic minerals and expressed the intention to establish supply chains that enable increased replenishment of this metal by 2050. In this context, at the end of 2024 the U.S. began diversifying its investment in Angola, previously directed mostly toward the petroleum sector, notably with the construction of solar parks for energy production, but mainly with the upgrading and construction of an additional 800 km of railway line on the Lobito Corridor, which connects Angola to mineral zones in the DRC and Zambia and facilitates trade and transportation of goods between the Atlantic and Indian Oceans.

Given the widespread increase in tariffs imposed by Donald Trump, notably on China and the EU, China began a commercial overture to the EU regarding the sale of electric vehicles, leading the EU to suspend the imposed tariffs in October 2024. At the 25th EU-China Summit, on 24 July 2025, a greater commitment was underlined to a more

[11] China produces 70% of electric vehicle batteries.

balanced trade relationship, safeguarding multilateralism and enhancing cooperation in combating climate change (European Council, 2025).

Regarding countries with large lithium reserves, such as Argentina, Bolivia and Chile (the South American ABC)[12], their production and export of lithium have led to increasing state competitiveness, supported by multinational companies, primarily U.S. and Chinese, that favour maintaining the international order. Despite short to medium-term economic growth, lithium extraction and trade have increased these countries' economic dependence and specialization in resource exports, with negative effects on exchange rates, on industrial structure and on dependency on foreign financing (Freitas, 2023; Medeiros, 2013, pp. 152-153). While China has shown willingness to invest in battery production in Latin America, the U.S. has primarily sought to acquire raw materials for its clean technology industry. This posture of the superpowers is likely to align Latin American countries more closely with Asian supply, which is more attractive than the traditional model of export with low added value.

From an environmental perspective, exploration of the Arctic, which is particularly sensitive to the effects of global warming, could result in an ecological disaster, the opening and expansion of maritime routes, and climatic imbalances with potentially catastrophic global effects (United Nations, 2022). In the case of the South American ABC, the declining influence of regional states enables the creation of a monopoly by Chinese state companies, whose interests antagonistic to regional environmental and socio-economic concerns (Nolasco, 2022). On the other hand, the possibility that wind turbines could charge lithium batteries may stimulate market growth, promoting sustainable and renewable energy. This reality may encourage the expansion of superpower influence in peripheral states, creating opportunities for employment and the export of finished products. In this regard, China has developed supply chains for solar and wind energy and storage, demonstrating industrial strategies upstream and downstream of the Chinese economy. Global production of 80% of solar panels, 66% of wind turbines and 56% of electric vehicles in 2023 reflects China's dominance in the global renewable energy market, enabling it to significantly reduce costs (Castro & Ludovico, 2025).

Thus, rising commercial tensions are anticipated, resulting in U.S. tariff barriers designed to reduce Chinese competitiveness and protect the domestic industry. With Donald Trump's economic protectionism, this geopolitical commercial scenario tends to worsen. The increased protectionism over resources, the critical competition for them and supply-chain disruptions resulting from conflicts in Europe and the Middle East represent short-term challenges for the Chinese mining industry, including rising mineral raw material prices (Moon, 2022, p. 9.7). In this context, the BRICS[13] network becomes a viable alternative to "partially offset losses in preferred markets" (Cardoso, 2025).

It is thus expected that China will seek a transition from the current liberal world order to a new alternative world order, in which Beijing's greater power will result in greater prosperity for the world. Recognizing its dependence on energy imports, it will aim to:

[12] It is worth noting that the lithium resources of these states exhibit higher purity and are extracted more cost-effectively (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017, p. 205).
[13] It includes Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, as well as Egypt, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, Ethiopia and Iran (after January 2024), and Indonesia (after January 2025).

maintain its international relations directly tied to economic interest, by expanding the acquisition of foreign assets and deposits; adjust import and export tariffs, in line with a measure introduced in early 2024 which reduced import tariffs on 1,010 commodities, including lithium carbonate and lithium chloride (International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2025); continue to promote the energy transition to green energy, increasing its control over the geopolitics of lithium; and enhance its military power, primarily directed at Taiwan's reunification[14] (Gaspar, 2023, p. 97), but also at protecting its commercial and energy routes, supported logistically by strategic ports, with lithium playing a relevant role in the energy efficiency of new weapons systems and in nuclear proliferation. In this scenario, the United States will likely seek to increase its economic and commercial influence, directly or indirectly, with countries holding energy resources, compelling agreements, if necessary – as with the U.S.-Ukraine agreement signed in April 2025 for rare mineral exploitation, or pressure exerted on Greenland. Furthermore, the United States is expected to expand domestic production of critical minerals as part of a broader effort to stimulate economic growth, substantially reduce reliance on external suppliers (particularly hostile powers) and strengthen the security and resilience of mineral supply chains (Executive Order 14241/2025 of March 20). To this end, Washington established the National Energy Dominance Council, tasked, among other responsibilities, with developing a National Energy Dominance Strategy setting out long-term objectives and promoting private investment across the full spectrum of the energy economy (Executive Order 14213/2025 of February 14).

It is evident that the geopolitics of lithium affects international relations and the application of instruments of power to obtain advantageous economic-commercial relations and ensure strategic positions that guarantee the security of trade routes and the control of resources. Thus, it can be stated that the U.S. and China use power as "the instrument of management and preservation of space," in line with the "new Geopolitics" proposed by General Pezarat Correia (2010). However, the analysis also shows that lithium (spatial positioning) is regarded by both actors as an instrument of hegemony and the exercise of power, consistent with classical and neoclassical theories of geopolitics. This reflects a reciprocal influence between space and power and between geography and politics.

In summary, the current energy transition has intensified U.S.–China competition over the acquisition and control of rare-earth and lithium mining assets worldwide, generating distinct regional impacts. In this framework, the U.S. seeks to: secure access to external lithium sources and establish resilient supply chains; diversify foreign investment; optimize lithium extraction processes; reduce Chinese competitiveness and protect domestic industry; and expand domestic mining production to reduce external dependencies and stimulate economic growth. China, meanwhile, continues to expand its position in the global lithium market as a leading actor in the green energy sector, capitalizing on US retrenchment to establish international agreements that facilitate the long-term acquisition and exploitation of local resources, including through infrastructure investment associated with its OBOR strategy. The integration of advanced technologies into mining and extraction processes may contribute to reducing production costs, while

[14] Pressure from Beijing intensified, particularly after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, resulting in a declared 7.1% increase in military investment.

the establishment of lithium extraction companies across South America, Africa, and Australia enables the accumulation of strategic reserves capable of mitigating potential supply disruptions. For both actors, the military dimension serves to facilitate strategic agreements and safeguard lithium supply chains. Consequently, U.S.–China economic, commercial, and politico-military tensions are likely to intensify, potentially exacerbated by Donald Trump's protectionist economic policies, which run counter to the interests of China's mining industry.

Conclusions

In this study, the growing geopolitical importance of lithium was analysed as a source of power in the political and military positioning of the United States and China, to obtain economic and military advantages in the access, control and application of this resource within their industries, through analysis of the instruments of power.

The research methodology employed was based on deductive reasoning, starting from the assumed strategic importance of lithium at the global level as a premise, and examining the contribution that geopolitics and the application of instruments of power in its acquisition and in maintaining U.S. hegemony and China's rise in the IPS. A qualitative content analysis was adopted, based on document analysis, with a cross-sectional case-study design grounded in an explanatory epistemology.

Following the investigation, Subsection 3.1 shows that lithium is a metal with unique energy-efficiency properties, which makes it a strategic resource, used across various industrial sectors and increasingly contested by superpowers. Its applications extend primarily to batteries, but also encompass ceramics and glassware, greases and lubricants, air treatment, aluminium production and metallurgy, and pharmaceuticals, among others. The progressive energy transition from oil to the "clean economy", coupled with the discovery and exploitation of new natural lithium reserves, has been impacting local socioeconomic structures, requiring the market to adapt to the dynamics of supply and demand. Militarily, lithium batteries are particularly suitable for operational environments because of their robustness, longer lifespan and faster charging, powering a wide variety of platforms and communication systems. Also notable are the use of lithium for aircraft coatings and to produce thermonuclear warheads, including the coolant fluid for nuclear reactors, which is particularly relevant considering the recent increase in nuclear-based deterrence involving both the U.S. and China. From an environmental perspective, lithium contributes to reduced pollution levels in states where its technological application is established; however, extraction sites may experience harmful ecological impacts. For China, lithium is central to its new green and ecological policy, aiming to expand its influence in South and Latin America, while pursuing economic independence and national security. For the U.S., competition over critical minerals has reinforced its global supply chains, underscoring lithium's central role in the technological and geopolitical rivalry between the two actors.

In Subsection 3.2, it is noted that the major countries with verified lithium reserves, accounting for approximately 85% of the global total, are Chile, Australia, China, Argentina and the U.S.. In the next tier are, among others, Canada, Brazil, Zimbabwe, Portugal and Bolivia. Except for Bolivia, these countries also rank among the world's

largest lithium producers, with China, Argentina, Zimbabwe and Canada, showing significant production increases since 2023. Economically viable lithium deposits fall into the following categories: (1) minerals from brines (currently the most profitable extraction process, thus dominant), located in Bolivia, Chile, Argentina, China and the U.S.; (2) hard-rock deposits (pegmatites), found especially in Australia, Austria, Brazil, Canada, China, but also in the U.S. and Zimbabwe; and (3) clay-derived deposits (a potentially more profitable process but not yet developed), located in Mexico and the U.S. Given their size and geographic location, the U.S. and China each host seven lithium exploration sites, geographically dispersed and belonging to different categories. Also highlighted is the possible mining of lithium from seawater, a predictably economical solution that will confer advantage to whoever has the larger EEZ, in this case the U.S. Given the global increase in lithium consumption, it is in the interest of the U.S. to safeguard relations with the countries from which its principal lithium imports originate (Chile and Argentina, among others), to maintain this market in economic balance, to strengthen supply chains across the Western Hemisphere and to increase domestic lithium production in order to reduce external dependencies. For China, it is of interest to expand the acquisition of foreign companies dedicated to lithium extraction and processing (e.g. in Argentina and Zimbabwe); international cooperation projects (e.g. in Australia); and domestic exploitation.

In Subsection 3.3, it is demonstrated that the current energy transition has intensified U.S.-China competition over the acquisition and control of rare earth and lithium mines on a global scale, with distinct regional ecological impacts. In this framework, the U.S. seeks to counter China's newly acquired advantage – evidenced by the apparent discovery of new lithium reserves on Chinese territory – through: access to the Arctic; exerting politico-military leverage in Greenland; technological development to optimize lithium extraction processes; establishing agreements to secure lithium supplies for its companies; imposing tariffs to reduce Chinese competitiveness and protect domestic industry; diversifying foreign investment, such as the rehabilitation of the Lobito Corridor railway line, aiming to connect sources of lithium in the DRC and facilitate Atlantic-Indian Ocean trade; and expanding domestic production of critical minerals to stimulate economic growth and substantially reduce reliance on external suppliers. Conversely, China capitalizes on U.S. political and military retrenchments to establish international relations and agreements that enable the appropriation and exploitation of local resources, integrating them into infrastructure investments linked to its OBOR strategy. To remain at the cutting edge of green energy, China has broadened its lithium market, incorporating various technologies from batteries to solar panels and wind turbines, thereby significantly reducing production costs. Simultaneously, it seeks to establish companies that access lithium deposits in South America, Africa and Australia, forming partnerships aimed at accumulating strategic reserves to buffer potential supply disruptions. To protect critical lithium supply chains essential to its domestic market, China has expanded its industrial and military bases abroad and strengthened its maritime projection, which also serves as a deterrent factor in its ambitions regarding Taiwan's reunification and influence expansion in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, rising economic-commercial and politico-military tensions between the U.S. and China are foreseen, likely to be exacerbated by Donald Trump's economic protectionism, which runs counter to the interests of the Chinese mining industry.

Thus, in response to the RQ, it may be asserted that lithium influences the power relations of the U.S. and China with lithium-resource-holding peripheral states, fostering politico-economic agreements that result in local socioeconomic transformations and energy transition solutions with differential regional and global environmental impacts. This market serves the political, economic and military interests of both superpowers, which employ instruments of power in differentiated ways to enhance their international influence, ultimately creating economic dependence in peripheral states. The conducted analysis reveals external dependence in the lithium market within a context of an apparent gradual energy, climate and health crisis. This new energy paradigm will establish the foundations of a possible new geopolitical order in which U.S.-China relations will maintain a regime of competitive and cooperative coexistence or tend toward conflict, depending on power relations.

This study aimed to establish the relationship between lithium demand and the international relations of the U.S. and China with peripheral actors of the IPS who hold lithium reserves and to assess its impact on world geopolitics. In doing so, it contributes to clarifying the real role of lithium in the strategic objectives of these state actors.

The major limitation of this research stemmed from the scarcity of primary sources related to: the geopolitical world-impacting events resulting from lithium demand; the volatility of information flow concerning new discoveries of lithium sources; and the unpredictability of current U.S. policy, uncertainty in the realization of its intentions (isolationist and/or expansionist, with apparent setbacks in green energy) and the durability of those intentions. However, an attempt was made to supplement the study with comparisons of U.S. positioning before and after Donald Trump's presidency with respect to interest in lithium, through cross-referencing scientific articles with recent news from diverse origins and primary sources of statistical data, seeking, as far as possible, the desired academic neutrality.

It is recommended that this study be extended to include Russia and Australia, given their relevance in the international arena and the limited information on lithium's political, economic and military impact in these countries, which may affect regional and global power dynamics.

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A GEOPOLÍTICA DO LÍTIO: DISPUTA ENTRE OS ESTADOS UNIDOS DA AMÉRICA E CHINA PELO ACESSO E CONTROLO DESTE RECURSO NATURAL

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Resumo

O lítio assume uma importância económico-militar crescente, pelas diversas aplicações no setor industrial, o que justifica o incremento da sua procura em vários países. O objetivo desta investigação é analisar o posicionamento norte-americano e chinês para obter o acesso aos recursos de lítio no exterior do seu território. Pretende-se assim, centrar a investigação no papel do lítio, enquanto fonte de poder para os Estados Unidos da América e China e analisar o impacto geopolítico derivado do incremento da procura global deste metal, na segurança regional e internacional. A investigação seguiu um raciocínio dedutivo, assente numa análise de conteúdo qualitativa e num desenho de pesquisa de estudo de caso. Este estudo permitiu clarificar o impacto político-económico e ambiental da exploração do lítio nos países com grandes reservas confirmadas, e as possíveis alterações à segurança regional e internacional, resultantes da competição económico-militar entre os Estados Unidos da América e a China.

Palavras-chave

Geopolítica, Lítio, Poder, Estados Unidos da América, China.

Abstract

Lithium has gained significant economic and military importance due to its diverse industrial applications, resulting in increased global demand. This research aims to analyse the positioning of the United States and China in their efforts to secure access to lithium resources outside their borders. The study focuses on lithium's function as a power source for both the United States and China, and to analyse the geopolitical consequences of rising global demand for this metal on regional and international security. The research employes deductive reasoning on qualitative content analysis and a case study design. This study enabled the clarification of the political, economic and environmental impact of lithium extraction in countries with large confirmed reserves, as well as the potential changes to regional and international security arising from the economic and military competition between the United States and China.

Keywords

Geopolitics, Lithium, Power, United States, China.

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A GEOPOLÍTICA DO LÍTIO: DISPUTA ENTRE OS ESTADOS UNIDOS DA AMÉRICA E CHINA PELO ACESSO E CONTROLO DESTE RECURSO NATURAL

PEDRO DA SILVA MONTEIRO

Introdução

O lítio, enquanto metal com uma multiplicidade de aplicações em diversas tipologias de indústrias, tem-se tornado num recurso cobiçado por diversos atores estatais, entre os quais os Estados Unidos da América (EUA) e a República Popular da China[1]. Na realidade, o crescente consumo do lítio a nível global, enquanto metal composto e diretamente como mineral, tornam-no num dos recursos naturais mais estratégicos, concentrando-se as maiores reservas mundiais, quantitativa e qualitativamente, na América do Sul (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017). Para as grandes potências, a vantagem económica e aplicação militar resultante da exploração, obtenção e controlo do lítio, indicia um problema que este trabalho procura resolver: qual o posicionamento político-militar dos EUA e da China perante a previsível crescente procura do lítio para efeitos económico-militares. O objeto da investigação centra-se no papel do lítio, enquanto fonte de poder para os EUA e a China.

Sendo a geopolítica a dimensão espacial da política, enquanto estudo das relações entre a política e geografia (Nogueira, 2011), procura-se neste estudo, analisar a forma como a política norte-americana e chinesa tenta obter o acesso aos recursos de lítio no exterior e assim ampliar as reservas deste metal nos seus territórios, de modo a continuarem na vanguarda como Estados-líder do ponto de vista económico e militar. O impacto geopolítico derivado do incremento da procura global de lítio poderá provocar alterações securitárias regionais e internacionais que importa analisar, justificando a pertinência deste trabalho, que procura contribuir para a área nuclear das ciências políticas, na subárea de investigação da geopolítica e geoestratégia.

Pela sua abrangência, este estudo será delimitado (temporal, espacial e concetualmente): desde o início do séc. XXI d.C., quando o interesse pelo lítio aumentou, pela sua aplicação nas baterias devido ao seu carácter fortemente iónico, e a consequente expansão da sua extração para atender este setor da indústria (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017, p. 199), até à atualidade; às principais zonas de extração e transformação do lítio a nível global e o seu papel económico-militar e político nos EUA e China, uma vez que

[1] Doravante designada por "China".

são os atores estatais mais influentes geopoliticamente na atualidade; e na análise geopolítica do lítio, na aplicação dos instrumentos de poder, nomeadamente os domínios Diplomático, Informacional, Militar e Económico (DIME) (Bartholomees, 2012) pelos EUA e China, no sentido de obter e aplicar os recursos líticos no seu tecido industrial e nas possíveis alterações à segurança regional, em países com grandes reservas confirmadas de lítio, e internacional. Contudo, o domínio informacional, relacionado com as mensagens-chave a passar à população, apesar da sua eficácia na resposta governamental a campanhas *cyber* adversárias, não será estudado para não desviar o foco do objeto de estudo.

Neste enquadramento, definiu-se como Objetivo Geral (OG) *Analisar o posicionamento norte-americano e chinês para obter o acesso aos recursos de lítio no exterior do seu território*, alicerçado em três Objetivos Específicos (OE): OE1 – Analisar o interesse pelo lítio; OE2 – Analisar os fatores geopolíticos do lítio; OE3 – Analisar como a geopolítica do lítio influencia as relações de poder entre os EUA e a China.

Para alcançar o OG, identificou-se a seguinte Questão Central (QC) que orientou a investigação: de que forma o lítio influencia as relações de poder dos EUA e da China com a política internacional e o meio envolvente?

Enquadramento concetual e percurso metodológico

Estado da Arte

No âmbito da temática em estudo, diversos estudos têm sido realizados sobre as indústrias do lítio nas últimas décadas, embora muito orientados para os aspetos arqueológicos, geológicos e morfométricos deste metal, principalmente em Portugal e no Brasil, e para a geopolítica dos recursos naturais estratégicos sul-americanos (Freitas, 2023; Rocha, 2018; Santos, 2024; Sousa & Araujo, 2017).

As disputas hegemónicas EUA-China foram também amplamente analisadas, contudo, focadas na reestruturação das suas estratégias político-militares e económicas no Indo-Pacífico, contrapondo a estratégia norte-americana de "pivô na Ásia", com a estratégia de integração económica materializada na iniciativa *One Belt, One Road* (OBOR). Neste âmbito, incluem-se vários estudos sobre o impacto da expansão chinesa no Mar da China do Sul (MCS) no acesso partilhado aos seus recursos naturais (Hendler, 2018; Mattos, 2016), associada à modernização das suas Forças Armadas (FFAA) e as implicações nas suas relações internacionais, incluindo para o setor da defesa dos EUA (Schmidt, 2019; U.S. Defense Intelligence Agency, 2019; Wehner, 2019), numa região securitariamente instável pela "intensificação das dependências e da competição por mercados, recursos e rotas" e disponibilidade financeira para reforçar capacidades militares (Tomé, 2017, pp. 358-359).

Contudo, face à crescente competitividade EUA-China, previsivelmente exacerbada pela reeleição de Donald Trump, não existem estudos que analisem de forma integrada, o posicionamento norte-americano e chinês para obter o acesso aos recursos de lítio e a influência deste metal nas relações de poder entre ambos os atores no Sistema Político Internacional (SPI), tornando este estudo pertinente.

Enquadramento concetual

Para um melhor entendimento da presente investigação, importa esclarecer os seus conceitos estruturantes.

A geopolítica será entendida enquanto disciplina que estuda o relacionamento dos fatores de poder de um Estado com a política internacional e o meio geográfico envolvente, incluindo "os discursos e as práticas relacionados com a aquisição e o uso do poder […] em função de e num determinado espaço, [considerando] os elementos geográficos aí presentes [...] a uma escala mais ampla" (Tomé, 2014, p. 192). Combina "uma esquematização geográfica das relações diplomático-estratégicas com uma análise geográfico-económica dos recursos, com uma interpretação das atitudes diplomáticas em função do modo de vida e do meio" (Aron, 1975, pp. 188-197). Neste contexto, a localização geográfica (espaço) determina ou condiciona a postura dos Estados dentro do SPI, sendo vista como um instrumento da hegemonia e do exercício do poder, em linha com as teorias clássicas e neoclássicas de geopolítica. Decorrente da crescente competitividade EUA-China em torno do lítio (Jesus et al., 2023), este conceito será complementado com a geoestratégia, relacionada com o exercício da coação num ambiente conflitual (Nogueira, 2011, p. 135), como o que se verifica entre ambos os atores, nomeadamente na questão de Taiwan, um dos maiores entraves à estabilidade na região Ásia Pacífico e à possibilidade de uma relação amigável entre a China e os EUA (Albuquerque, 2023).

Por estratégia, considera-se a "ciência e a arte de edificar, dispor e empregar meios de coacção num dado meio e tempo, para se materializarem objectivos fixados pela política, superando problemas e explorando eventualidades em ambiente de desacordo." (Ribeiro, 2009, p. 22). Beaufre (1965), divide a estratégia, quanto à abrangência e formas de coação, em: estratégia total, estratégias gerais e estratégias particulares. A estratégia total, ao nível político, orienta as estratégias gerais (política, económica, psicológica e militar), de modo a concorrerem para os objetivos desejados, e se desejável, integra-as para se obterem sinergias (Barrento, 2010), com vista à consecução dos objetivos político-estratégicos definidos.

Na generalidade, as melhores estratégias são as que integram a aplicação de todos os instrumentos de poder, através dos quais os atores estatais normalmente influenciam os eventos, usando os domínios DIME como vetores para a projeção do *soft* e *hard power* (Kodalle et al., 2020, p. 20). Por poder, considera-se a capacidade de um ator político impor a sua vontade a outro ator (Couto, 1988), ou influenciar o SPI no sentido de alcançar objetivos que sirvam os seus interesses e também a "capacidade para resistir à imposição ou até à influência" (Tomé, 2014, p. 190). É materializado pela "soma dos atributos que capacita um Estado [a] atingir os seus objetivos externos especialmente quando eles se opõem aos objetivos e vontade de outro ator internacional" (Serrão & Longo, 2012, p. 20).

A diplomacia é o meio oficial pelo qual um Estado se relaciona formalmente com outros Estados, tendo sido concebida para empregar meios pacíficos para promover os interesses nacionais. Embora possa ser enfatizada conforme a situação, nunca funciona isoladamente dos outros instrumentos de poder (Smith, 2007).

Por poder militar, considera-se a capacidade de dissuasão e combate que permite impor a vontade sem emprego efetivo da força e melhorar as perspetivas de resultados favoráveis em caso de conflito armado (Collins, 2002), ou seja, a capacidade de controlar outros, mesmo contra a sua vontade. O instrumento militar insere-se na "estratégia militar", que visa desenvolver e utilizar as FFAA para alcançar objetivos (militares) fixados pela política. O instrumento militar concorre assim, para a estratégia total e contribui para o potencial estratégico de um Estado, que envolve "o conjunto de forças […] morais e materiais" em apoio da sua estratégia (Couto, 1988, p. 241). Neste contexto, os "*meios militares* […] constituem o núcleo, a «última razão», do potencial de Defesa de qualquer Nação-Estado" (Vieira, 1980, p. 20) e a força serve os interesses do Estado, que se expandem mediante o aumento do seu poder relativo, no qual os meios político-militares, podem servir os fins económicos e vice-versa (Waltz, 1979).

O poder económico influencia cada vez mais os conflitos modernos, desde a guerra convencional às disputas diplomáticas, capacitando os Estados a produzir, financiar ou apoiar as principais atividades de segurança nacional e assim, proteger os seus interesses nacionais e internacionais. Com a globalização, o crescimento tecnológico e mudanças na sociedade e na natureza evolutiva do conflito, a importância das considerações económicas aumentou, deixando o poder militar de ser necessariamente o principal instrumento coercivo nas relações internacionais (Chun, 2012, pp. 205-206).

No contexto do presente estudo, uma superpotência, é um ator estatal que tem uma estratégia global, com capacidade de intervenção total, apresentando poder em todas as suas vertentes: diplomática, informacional, militar, económica, cultural, técnico-científica, recursos materiais e humanos. No caso dos EUA, procuram evitar alterações na relação de forças e preservar o *status quo* territorial, enquanto a China, pretende conseguir na plenitude, a capacidade de intervenção total e aumentar as fronteiras marítimas e a respetiva esfera de influência. As superpotências distinguem-se das grandes e médias potências, pois estas apesar de terem uma ambição global, detêm capacidades parciais, com uma influência mundial limitada, embora tenham considerável: extensão territorial, recursos naturais, demografia e apreciável capacidade de encaixe nuclear (Couto, 1988).

Metodologia e Método

Metodologicamente, a investigação seguiu um raciocínio dedutivo, partindo da crescente importância estratégica do lítio a nível mundial, face à inovação tecnológica (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017, p. 199), como premissa, em busca do contributo que a geopolítica e a aplicação dos instrumentos de poder têm na sua obtenção e manutenção da hegemonia norte-americana e ascensão chinesa no SPI. Seguiu-se uma análise de conteúdo qualitativa, procurando alcançar um entendimento mais profundo do objeto de estudo, com um desenho de pesquisa de estudo de caso e transversal de epistemologia explicativa (Quadro 1).

Quadro 1. Modelo de Análise

Tema	A geopolítica do lítio: disputa entre os Estados Unidos da Américae China pelo acesso e controlo deste recurso natural						
Objeto de Estudo	O papel do lítio, enquanto fonte de poder para os EUA e a China						
Objetivo Geral	Analisar o posicionamento norte-americano e chinês para obter o acesso aos recursos de lítio no exterior						
Questão Central	De que forma o lítio influencia as relações de poder dos EUA e da China com a política internacional e o meio envolvente?						
Objetivos Específicos	**Questões Derivadas (QD)**	**Conceitos**	**Dimensões**	**Variáveis**	**Indicadores**	**Técnicas de Recolha de Dados**	**Estrutura**
OE1: Analisar o interesse pelo lítio	**QD1**: Qual a importância do lítio?	Geografia e Geopolítica	EUA e China	Política	Relações internacionais estabelecidas	**Análise Documental (artigos científicos, teses, dissertações, páginas oficiais)**	SubSecção 3.1
				Militar	Aplicações militares		
				Económica	Impacto económico		
OE2: Analisar os fatores geopolíticos do lítio	**QD2**: Quais os principais atores estatais com reservas de lítio?	Geografia, Geostratégia e Relações Internacionais	América do Sul, América do Norte, Ásia, África e Oceania	Geográfica	Características geológicas		SubSecção 3.2
					Locais com reservas de lítio		
					Quantidade das reservas de lítio		
				Política	Relações internacionais estabelecidas		
OE3:Analisar como a geopolítica do lítio influencia as relações de poder entre os EUA e a China	**QD3**: Em que medida o lítio influencia as relações de poder entre os EUA e a China?	Geopolítica e Instrumentos de Poder	EUA e China	Diplomática	Acordos internacionais		SubSecção 3.3
				Militar	Investimento militar		
					Presença militar		
				Económica	Investimentos económicos		

Os instrumentos de recolha de dados usados foram a revisão da literatura e análise documental, sobretudo de artigos científicos, teses de doutoramento e dissertações de mestrado, mas também páginas oficiais chinesas, norte-americanas e internacionais para complementar o estudo com a desejada neutralidade académica. Para evitar vieses cognitivos, procurou-se sustentar as afirmações pelo cruzamento de mais que uma fonte (tendencialmente orientadas para perspetivas Ocidente *vs.* Extremo Oriente), dando primazia às fontes primárias de dados estatísticos.

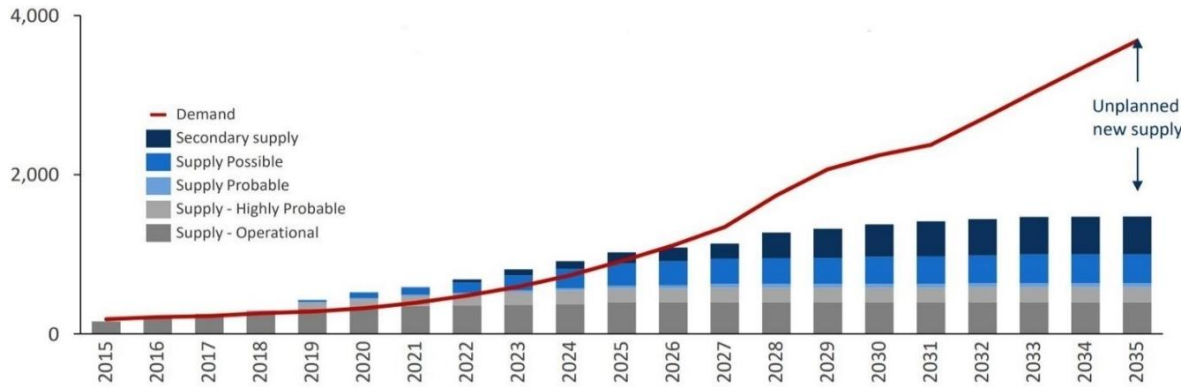
Investigação

Importância do lítio

Descoberto em 1817, o lítio é um metal que constitui 0,006% da crosta terrestre e consiste numa mistura de dois isótopos estáveis: lítio-6 (7,5%) e lítio-7 (92,5%) (Makhijani, 2000). As suas propriedades foram ajustadas às necessidades de desenvolvimento tecnológico em diversos setores, destacando-se a partir da década de 1970, as suas qualidades enquanto transmissor de energia nas baterias de aparelhos eletrónicos, carros elétricos híbridos, telemóveis, *smartphones* e computadores portáteis (Zhang et al., 2018). No séc. XXI d.C., o carácter fortemente iónico do lítio e o seu elevado potencial eletroquímico, tornou fundamental a sua aplicação em baterias, regulares e recarregáveis (Noronha, 2010), ao possibilitar armazenar mais energia em pequenos volumes, expandindo-se a sua procura e extração (Figura 1).

Porém, o lítio natural e o lítio enriquecido em lítio-7 têm diversas aplicações comerciais e industriais, destacando-se em 2026, nas(o): baterias, como principal componente (88%); cerâmicas e vidraria (4%); graxas e lubrificantes (2%); tratamento do ar (1%); produções de alumínio e metalurgia (1%); produtos farmacêuticos à base de carbonato de lítio para o tratamento da depressão (1%); entre outras (3%), incluindo produções de polímeros (United States Geological Survey [USGS], 2026, p. 118) e na indústria espacial.

Figura 1. Procura de Lítio 2015-2035, em quilotoneladas



Fonte: Benchmark Mineral Intelligence (2019).

Realça-se a evolução do seu uso nas baterias, que em 2019 representava somente 56% (USGS, 2019), estando intimamente associado ao desenvolvimento dos equipamentos portáteis. Compreende-se assim, que o lítio é um recurso estratégico, cada vez mais disputado pelas indústrias das superpotências, devido à sua eficiência energética, com impacto significativo nas estruturas socioeconómicas locais, onde a sua mineração ocorre, criando oportunidades de desenvolvimento económico regional. Em termos globais, a progressiva transição energética, do petróleo para a "economia limpa", relança o conceito de "segurança energética" no léxico político, dada a capacidade de constituir relações políticas ecológicas, com impacto na economia e no ecossistema global (Queirós, 2022). Esta realidade exige que os mercados se adaptem, gerando uma flutuação do preço desta matéria-prima à medida que se expande a oferta com a descoberta de novas reservas naturais (Trading Economics, 2025). Neste contexto, até 2022, os EUA, China e Índia representavam mais de dois terços da expansão global das energias renováveis.

Em termos militares, as baterias de lítio, mais robustas, com maior densidade de energia, maior vida útil e de carregamento mais célere que as baterias tradicionais, tornam-se adequadas para ambientes agressivos e aplicações exigentes, servindo para equipar uma vasta tipologia de meios, incluindo sistemas de comunicação, óculos de visão noturna e *Uncrewed Aircraft Systems* (UAS), cada vez mais usados no atual espectro da conflitualidade e com maiores alcances (Black, et al., 2024). Destaca-se ainda, o uso do lítio para o revestimento de aeronaves (Makhijani, 2000).

Numa ordem mundial onde o investimento em equipamento militar aumentou, destinado a coagir ou resistir à coação, os EUA permanecem como os maiores investidores, seguidos pela China (Stockholm International Peace Research Institute [SIPRI], 2025). Neste contexto, a procura do nuclear tem entrado nas relações internacionais como fator negocial ao nível político (Nações Unidas, 2024). Para produzir armas nucleares, o lítio-6 assume um importante papel, nomeadamente para produzir o trítio, essencial para as ogivas termonucleares e, combinado com o deutério, constitui o combustível nuclear para esta tipologia de armamento (Barnaby, 1993, p. 39; Makhijani, 2000, p. 59). Por seu

lado, o lítio-7 também é usado para produzir o fluido refrigerante usado nos reatores nucleares (National Research Council, 1996, p. 278).

Numa perspetiva ambiental, assiste-se à paulatina transição da dependência do petróleo para a dos metais raros[2]. Porém, embora o uso do lítio nos painéis solares e nas baterias dos veículos elétricos permita reduzir os níveis de poluição nos Estados utilizadores dessa tecnologia, particularmente relevante para os EUA e China, entre os maiores poluidores do planeta, nos locais de extração, os impactos ecológicos podem ser nefastos. Estes locais são remotos e pouca informação é divulgada sobre os mesmos, mas o ar apresenta elevados níveis de toxidade, com poeira fina que contém ácido hidrofluórico, para além de enormes quantidades de resíduos de grafite que danificam a natureza, biodiversidade e os campos agrícolas, e de metais pesados como flúor ou mercúrio, que contaminam os solos e a água (RTP, 2020). O uso extensivo de água no processo de extração de salmoura, predominante em áreas como o Triângulo do Lítio da América do Sul, também conhecido por ABC Sul-Americano (Argentina-Bolívia-Chile), pode esgotar os recursos hídricos locais, impactando as comunidades humanas e os ecossistemas naturais. As emissões de carbono da mineração e processamento de lítio também contribuem para a degradação ambiental, desafiando o *status* do lítio como componente de tecnologias sustentáveis. Estas mudanças podem ter efeitos a longo prazo na fertilidade da terra e na saúde ambiental, cujo impacto acentua a necessidade de práticas de mineração mais sustentáveis e ambientalmente conscientes.

Do ponto de vista político, os EUA e a China, para além de outras grandes potências como o Japão, Alemanha e Coreia do Sul, competem pelo lítio. Todavia, a China assume a liderança no processamento de lítio, pois é central na nova política de tornar a China verde e ecológica. Neste campo, a China representa o maior mercado de utilizadores de carros elétricos e é atualmente, o maior produtor global destes veículos. Portanto, procura a progressiva expansão de influência nos domínios DIME na América do Sul e Latina, investindo ou extraindo recursos minerais que assegurem a independência externa e a segurança nacional[3]. Afastado dos maiores produtores de lítio mundiais, os EUA procuram entrar neste mercado com cada vez mais investidores, tendo em vista a sua independência energética. Neste contexto, têm promovido o seu fortalecimento nas cadeias de abastecimento globais de minerais críticos, demonstrando a centralidade do lítio na competição tecnológica e geopolítica entre os EUA e a China.

Resumindo, a importância do lítio deriva da sua eficiência energética, que o torna num recurso estratégico, com aplicações em diversos setores industriais e militares, destacando-se o seu uso nas baterias de lítio e na produção de ogivas termonucleares, particularmente relevante face à progressiva transição energética, do petróleo para a "economia limpa" e pelo recente aumento da *deterrence* assente no nuclear, onde se incluem os EUA e a China. A descoberta e exploração de novas reservas naturais de lítio têm impactado nas estruturas socioeconómicas dos Estados periféricos, exigindo a adaptação deste mercado à lei da oferta-procura. Para a China, o lítio é central na nova política de tornar a China verde e ecológica, procurando expandir a sua influência na

[2] Embora esta tendência tenha sido abalada com as políticas protecionistas de Donald Trump, reeleito Presidente dos EUA, com a saída do Acordo de Paris e o investimento na exploração de petróleo.
[3] Entre os 24 minerais estratégicos destaca-se o: ferro, cobre, alumínio, ouro, níquel, cobalto, lítio e terras raras.

América do Sul e Latina, para assegurar a independência económica e a segurança nacional. Para os EUA, a competição pelos minerais críticos tem promovido o fortalecimento das suas cadeias de abastecimento globais, demonstrando a centralidade do lítio na competição tecnológica e geopolítica entre ambos os atores.

Compreende-se assim, o interesse das superpotências (e não só) pelo lítio, cuja procura, a par de outros minerais necessários à transição energética, se prevê aumentar em cerca de 500% nos próximos anos (PNM 2050, 2020).

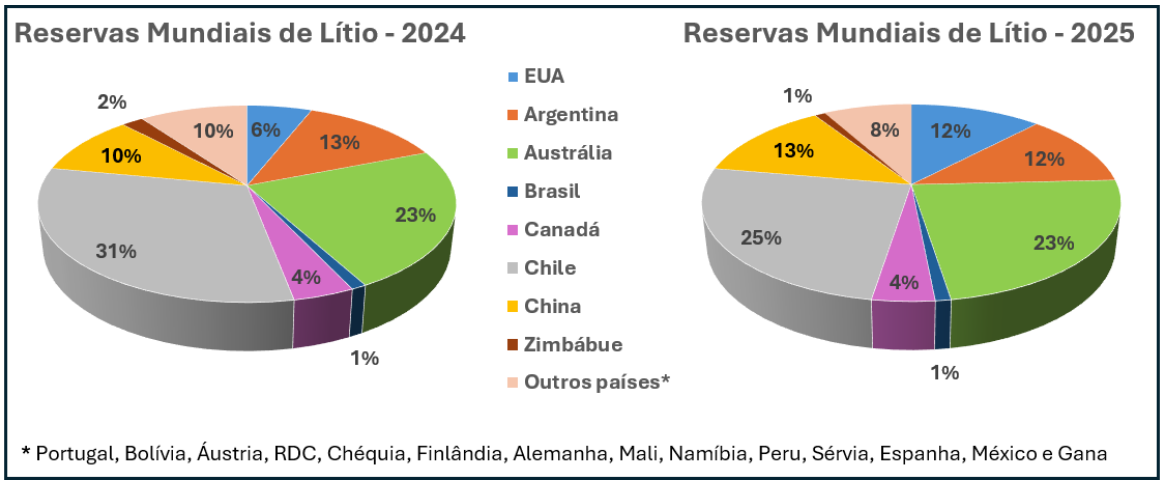
Fatores geopolíticos do lítio

Localização geográfica do lítio

O uso excessivo de combustíveis fósseis expôs a insustentabilidade da economia assente no petróleo para o fabrico de combustíveis, produtos químicos e outros materiais. Esta realidade tem estimulado a maior autonomia energética dos atores estatais e afirmação no cenário geopolítico contemporâneo dos países com reservas de lítio, apesar da sua posição semiperiférica no sistema geopolítico global.

Os principais países com reservas comprovadas de lítio são o(a): Chile, Austrália, China, Argentina, EUA, Canadá, Brasil, Zimbábue, Portugal, Bolívia, Áustria, República Democrática do Congo (RDC), Chéquia, Finlândia, Alemanha, Mali, Namíbia, Peru, Sérvia, Espanha, México e Gana[4]. Os cinco primeiros possuem cerca de 85% das reservas mundiais de lítio, destacando-se a subida percentual dos EUA e da China (Figura 2).

Figura 2. Evolução das Reservas mundiais de lítio distribuídas por país (2024-2025)



Fonte: Adaptado de USGS (2025); USGS (2026).

[4] Embora esta ordem varie mediante as fontes, os atores estatais são praticamente os mesmos: Bolívia (24,6%), Argentina (22,6%), Chile (11,2%), EUA (9,2%), Austrália (7,5%), China (6%), RDC (3,5%), Canadá (3,4%), Alemanha (3,2%) e México (2%) (Centro Mexicano de Relações Internacionais, 2023).

Contudo, estes dados não correspondem diretamente aos maiores produtores mundiais de lítio conhecidos, que seguem a seguinte ordem: Austrália (92.000 Ton/ano), China (62.000 Ton/ano), Chile (56.000 Ton/ano), Zimbábue (28.000 Ton/ano), Argentina (23.000 Ton/ano), Brasil (12.000 Ton/ano), Mali (9.600 Ton/ano), Canadá (5.600 Ton/ano), Portugal (380 Ton/ano), entre outros (Áustria, RDC, Chéquia, Finlândia, Alemanha, Gana, México, Namíbia, Sérvia e Espanha)[5] (USGS, 2026, p. 119). Destes países, destaca-se o aumento acentuado, desde 2023, da China, Argentina, Zimbábue e Canadá, prevendo-se que até 2030, a China assuma a liderança, quer na exploração (com 28% do mercado, seguida da Austrália – 26% e Chile – 12%), quer na refinação de lítio (com 62% do mercado, seguida do Chile – 13% e da Argentina – 11%) (International Energy Agency [IEA], 2026).

Atualmente, os depósitos de lítio economicamente viáveis estão distribuídos em três grandes categorias[6] (Bowell et al., 2020): (1) minérios gerados em salmouras evaporativas continentais[7] (além de salmouras hidromórficas e geotermais, menos expressivas), localizados na(o) Bolívia, Chile e Argentina, mas também na China e EUA; (2) minérios derivados de rochas sãs[8] (pegmatitos), localizados na(o) Austrália, Áustria, Brasil, Canadá, China, RDC, Chéquia, Finlândia, Alemanha, Mali, Namíbia, Peru, Portugal, Sérvia, Espanha, EUA e Zimbábue; e (3) minérios derivados de argilas hectoritas, entre outras menos comuns, como a jadarita, localizados no México e EUA, mas também noutras fontes (Figura 3). O processo de extração de lítio da salmoura é o mais economicamente rentável, razão pela qual esta categoria domina atualmente este mercado. Contudo, a extração de lítio derivado das argilas, processo ainda não desenvolvido, poderá tornar-se mais económico (Gramling, 2019), assim como, a extração de lítio da água do mar, como no caso do Mar Morto. Esta última forma de mineração, também em desenvolvimento, poderá ser muito rentável, uma vez que, apesar da baixa concentração de lítio na água do mar (cerca de 0,2 ppm), a sua presença nos oceanos é cerca de 5.000 vezes maior que na terra (Li, et al., 2021, p. 3152). Depois de extraído, o metal é processado para se tornar carbonato de lítio ou hidróxido de lítio, as principais formas em que é usado na indústria.

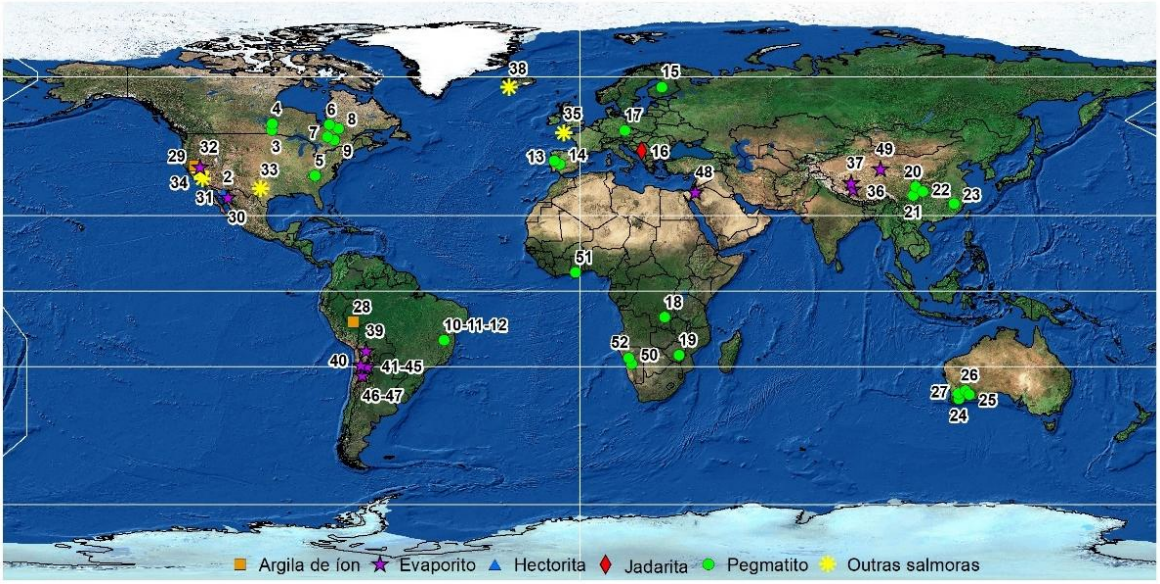
A extensão territorial dos EUA e da China permite a estes atores terem no seu território, sete localizações de exploração de lítio geograficamente afastadas entre si e de diferentes categorias. Este fator, associado à capacidade económico-militar de ambos os atores, com uma estratégia militar definida, vontade nacional de crescimento e um potencial humano elevado[9], confere-lhes um enorme potencial estratégico (Couto, 1988).

Todavia, o Triângulo do Lítio na América do Sul, continua a ser onde se encontram as maiores reservas mundiais de lítio (Jesus, et. al., 2023). Embora o lítio não seja abundante na crosta terrestre, pesquisas recentes confirmam a oferta suficiente para várias centenas de anos, satisfazendo a procura que se antecipa como certa para as

[5] Excluíram-se os EUA, por ausência de dados.
[6] Realça-se que o lítio não se encontra na natureza no seu estado puro.
[7] Contêm as maiores reservas de lítio mundiais.
[8] Contêm diversos minerais de lítio, como a lepidolita, ambligonita, petalita e espoduménio.
[9] Os EUA são o terceiro país mais populoso, com uma população ativa elevada e uma média de idades na ordem dos 39 anos, enquanto a China tem cerca de um quinto da população mundial, com vasta população ativa e uma média de 40 anos de idade, embora com atual índice de crescimento ligeiramente negativo (U.S. Census Bureau, 2025).

próximas décadas (Mateus, 2020). Porém, o processo de extração deste mineral natural pode ser otimizado em termos económicos e ecológico-ambientais (Sverdrup, 2016), requerendo ainda, estudar como e onde as forças do vento, do calor, da água e do tempo se combinam para criar depósitos líticos em quantidade suficiente para uma mineração economicamente rentável.

Figura 3. Projetos de exploração lítica distribuídos por tipo de depósito



Fonte: SGB (2025).

Resumindo, existem reservas de lítio em todos os continentes, destacando-se o Chile, Austrália, China, Argentina e EUA que também se encontram entre os maiores produtores mundiais deste metal. Realça-se o aumento percentual das reservas dos EUA e da China, e da produção de lítio da China, Argentina, Zimbábue e Canadá. Os depósitos de lítio economicamente mais rentáveis (salmouras) situam-se na América do Sul (no Triângulo do Lítio), mas também na China e EUA, enquanto os restantes (pegmatitos e argilas) encontram-se dispersos pelos vários continentes. Os minérios derivados de argilas (processo potencialmente mais rentável, mas ainda não desenvolvido), por se localizarem somente no México e EUA, poderão potenciar a influência norte-americana neste mercado. Devido à sua dimensão e localização geográfica, os EUA e a China têm nos seus territórios sete locais de exploração de lítio distantes entre si e de diferentes categorias. A possível mineração de lítio extraído da água do mar, dará vantagem a quem tiver a maior Zona Económica Exclusiva (ZEE), neste caso os EUA.

Relações internacionais envolvidas

Conforme previsto por Mattos (2016), as relações sino-americanas serão as mais relevantes nas próximas décadas, pois tendem a moldar as relações internacionais a nível global.

Perante o aumento global do consumo de lítio em 20%, aproximadamente 263.000 Ton, em 2025, a produção mundial deste metal (excluindo os EUA) aumentou cerca de 31% (290.000 Ton). Neste contexto, as importações de lítio representam 14% do consumo norte-americano, cuja origem provém principalmente do Chile (54%) e Argentina (43%), entre outros países (3%), pelo que importa salvaguardar as relações com estes atores estatais (USGC, 2026). Nesse sentido, o atual governo norte-americano tem procurado aproximar-se dos governos do Chile, Argentina e Bolívia, incluindo o estabelecimento de acordos bilaterais com a Argentina e o Chile que favorecem empresas norte-americanas. Porem, dificilmente estes países se afastarão da China, que continua a intensificar a sua presença neste mercado, com investimentos de longo prazo (Fontanarava, 2026). Perante esta realidade, prevê-se que a abordagem dos EUA, em linha com a sua estratégia de segurança nacional (Trump, 2025), seja: aumentar o investimento em minerais críticos na América Latina, verificado desde janeiro de 2025, mas também em África; reforçar as cadeias de abastecimento do Hemisfério Ocidental, para reduzir dependências e desencorajar colaborações com atores hostis; e aumentar a produção interna de lítio.

Relativamente à China, procura reduzir as emissões de gases com efeito de estufa e alcançar a segurança energética nacional, promovendo a sua autossuficiência. Assim, em 2021, apesar de possuir apenas 25% dos recursos globais de lítio, representava aproximadamente 65% da capacidade global de processamento e refinação deste metal. Esta tendência continuou após 2022, com o crescente interesse das empresas chinesas na aquisição de ativos de lítio no estrangeiro, para expandir o seu acesso aos recursos globais, mas também no aumento das atividades de aquisição interna. Nesse sentido, as empresas chinesas (*e.g. Ganfeng Lithium* e *Zhejiang huayou cobalt co. Ltd*) têm adquirido empresas estrangeiras, proprietárias de salinas de lítio, na Argentina (*e.g. Lithea Inc.*), no Zimbabué (projeto Arcadia), entre outros. Devido à mudança da sua indústria, iniciada em 2022, para as baterias de lítio de fosfato de ferro, que utilizam carbonato de lítio em vez de óxido/hidróxido de lítio, prevê-se ainda, que a China continue a aumentar as exportações de óxido/hidróxido de lítio e as importações de carbonato de lítio. Isso justifica a produção de significativas quantidades de carbonato de lítio pelas empresas chinesas na Argentina (e.g. *Zijin Mining*), mas também de hidróxido de lítio na Austrália (*e.g. Tianqi Lithium Corp.*), em cooperação com congéneres australianas (Moon, 2022, p. 9.6).

Implicações nas Relações de Poder

A atual alteração da polaridade no séc. XXI d.C., onde os EUA e a China aparentam ser "representantes de linhas de longa duração na geo-história mundial", levanta novamente a possibilidade do conflito entre a potência marítima e terrestre pela reconfiguração da geopolítica mundial (Júnior, 2018, p. 25). Neste contexto, a transição energética para as designadas energias limpas e renováveis tem incrementado a disputa entre as principais

potências, pela aquisição de terras raras e lítio e controlo de minas destes recursos à escala planetária, com impactos ecológicos que moldarão o mundo nos próximos anos enquanto fator determinante e influenciador da conflitualidade (Oxford Analytica, 2017, pp. 62-68). Consequentemente, assiste-se à transição mineira "do carvão para o cobre, do petróleo para o lítio e do hidrogénio para a platina e as terras raras." (National Geographic, 2023).

Oscilando entre o isolacionismo (ou protecionismo) e o intervencionismo, a política norte-americana, procura manter o *status quo* dos EUA enquanto superpotência. Mediante a orientação política em vigor, o interesse pelo lítio pode levar à anexação, aquisição, ou negociação de facilidades em novos territórios ricos neste minério para fazer face à vantagem recém-adquirida da China na aparente descoberta de novas reservas no seu território, divulgada em janeiro de 2025. Exemplos deste argumento são sustentados pelo interesse norte-americano na Gronelândia, não descartando "o uso de força militar" não só pelo posicionamento geoestratégico para controlo de rotas de navegação no Ártico, "para fins de segurança nacional", mas sobretudo por "razões económicas", pela sua riqueza em terras raras[10] (Sanches, 2025). Segundo o relatório da *Geological Survey of Denmark and Greenland* de 2023, vertido num portal *online*, existe somente uma presença residual de lítio na Gronelândia (GREENMIN, 2023), porém, esta quantidade pode aumentar em futuras pesquisas, estimulando o interesse por este território, que se estima conter até 25% "de todos os recursos de elementos de terras raras do mundo" (Sanches, 2025). Também a China investe, atualmente, na prospeção de terras raras na Gronelândia, incluindo inclusive este território na Rota da Seda Polar, dado viabilizar uma alternativa economicamente mais vantajosa às atuais rotas marítimas China-Europa pelo estreito de Malaca e canal do Suez, que podem ser bloqueadas pelos EUA e seus aliados, mas também por permitir uma diversificação de recursos energéticos (Atlas Report, 2021). Realça-se assim, a ambição hegemónica de ambos os atores EUA-China em termos económicos, disputando a sua influência na Gronelândia. Relativamente à invasão do Afeganistão pelos EUA, em 2001, justificada para derrotar a Al-Qaeda e os Talibã, inserida na "estratégia de guerra preventiva" norte-americana (Mattos, 2016, p. 56), existem fontes que indicam como principal motivo da guerra, a existência no território afegão de "jazidas de ouro, cobalto, cobre, ferro e sobretudo lítio", totalizando mais de um trilião de dólares, segundo o Pentágono em 2010 (Galeano, 2014, p. 192). A retirada dos EUA, em 2021, proporcionou a aproximação da China com interesses na exploração destes supostos depósitos de lítio e no investimento em infraestruturas necessárias à inclusão do Estado afegão na OBOR. Para esta finalidade, a China mantém relações diplomáticas com os Talibãs, enquanto promove a estabilidade da sua pequena fronteira com o Afeganistão (Costa & Teixeira, 2021). Por seu lado, a expansão dos interesses chineses na região Indo-Pacífico (Hendler, 2018) e no setor espacial (Smart, 2019) têm resultado no crescimento e modernização das suas FFAA, com investimento na defesa idêntico aos Estados-membro da *North Atlantic Treaty Organization* (NATO) (excluindo os EUA) (International Institute for Strategic Studies [IISS], 2025). Contudo, o rápido crescimento económico aumentou a sua dependência do acesso aos recursos externos. Neste quadro, o instrumento militar serve os interesses político-económicos de ambos os atores na afirmação de poder, confirmado pela presença de bases norte-americanas

[10] Realça-se que os EUA mantêm já uma Base Espacial em Pituffik, na Gronelândia.

em posições estratégicas nos vários oceanos e pela projeção militar chinesa no Djibouti e Mar da China do Sul, servindo a componente naval, entre outros fins, para escoltar navios mercantes e controlar recursos (Monteiro, 2024).

Perspetivando-se a crescente procura de lítio, será essencial tornar essa indústria economicamente sustentável, pelo que o desenvolvimento tecnológico deverá possibilitar a otimização dos minerais. Nesse sentido, os EUA, apesar de possuírem menores reservas líticas que a China, têm depósitos de lítio derivados de argilas (Figura 3), abrindo a possibilidade ao desenvolvimento de novos métodos de extração mais rentáveis. Por outro lado, a potencial extração de lítio dos oceanos, tem estimulado pesquisas no sentido de se fabricarem baterias que funcionem com água do mar, ou desenvolver técnicas para a mineração oceânica deste metal (Li, et al., 2021). Neste sentido, quem tiver maior ZEE terá vantagem na obtenção do lítio por esta via. Esta realidade dá aos EUA nítida vantagem, por ter a maior ZEE do mundo, e motiva a expansão da China no MCS. Em termos internacionais, os EUA procuram estabelecer acordos para obtenção de lítio necessário às suas empresas, como a *Tesla*, produtora de veículos elétricos, além de negociar tarifas aplicadas às mesmas.

No caso da China, para satisfazer a procura global de baterias[11], tem intensificado de forma discreta, mas efetiva, a criação de empresas para aumentar o acesso a depósitos de lítio na América do Sul, que concentra cerca de 50% das reservas globais, mas também em África e Austrália. Este interesse indicia parcerias entre estes atores, confirmadas por alguns exemplos como: o acordo entre a Bolívia, a *CATL* (principal produtora de baterias chinesa) e a *CMOC* (maior mineradora de cobalto chinesa), incluindo a *Brunp*, que produzirá 100.000 Ton de carbonato de lítio até 2028; e a construção de um porto de águas profundas em Chancay, no Perú, pela empresa estatal chinesa *Cosco Shipping*, que facilitará o comércio China-América do Sul. Constata-se que o lítio tem contribuído para estimular a estratégia chinesa OBOR, que inclui nos seus investimentos a Argentina, Bolívia, Chile, Costa Rica, Equador, Peru, Panamá, Uruguai e Venezuela. Esta estratégia chinesa visa a longo prazo integrar o(a): estabelecimento de acordos de fornecimento com diversos países; investimento em ativos energéticos e de infraestruturas no exterior; e criação de reservas estratégicas para mitigar interrupções no abastecimento (Castro & Ludovico, 2025).

Esta realidade desafia os interesses norte-americanos e europeus nestes continentes, tendo a União Europeia (UE) incluído o lítio na sua lista de minerais estratégicos e manifestado a intenção de criar cadeias de abastecimento que viabilizem incrementar o reabastecimento deste metal até 2050. Neste contexto, os EUA iniciaram em finais de 2024, a diversificação do investimento em Angola, até aqui orientado sobretudo para o sector petrolífero, destacando-se a construção de parques solares para produção desta energia, mas principalmente, a requalificação e construção de 800 km adicionais à linha ferroviária do Corredor do Lobito, que liga Angola às zonas de minérios da RDC e da Zâmbia e facilita o comércio e o transporte de mercadorias entre oceanos Atlântico-Índico.

Perante o aumento generalizado das tarifas impostas por Donald Trump, nomeadamente à China e UE, a China iniciou uma aproximação comercial à UE relativa à venda de

[11] A China produz 70% das baterias de veículos elétricos.

veículos elétricos, tendo a UE suspendido as tarifas impostas em outubro de 2024. Na 25.ª cimeira UE-China, de 24 de julho de 2025, salienta-se um maior compromisso numa relação comercial mais equilibrada, salvaguardando o multilateralismo, e na melhoria da cooperação no combate às alterações climáticas (Conselho Europeu, 2025).

Relativamente aos países com elevadas reservas de lítio, como a Argentina, Bolívia e Chile (ABC Sul-Americano)[12], a produção e exportação de lítio tem gerado a crescente competitividade estatal, apoiada por empresas multinacionais, principalmente norte-americanas e chinesas, que privilegiam a manutenção da ordem internacional. Apesar do crescimento económico no curto-médio prazo, a extração e comércio do lítio tem aumentado a dependência económica destes países e a especialização da exportação de recursos, com efeitos negativos na taxa de câmbio, no tecido industrial e na dependência do financiamento externo (Freitas, 2023; Medeiros, 2013, pp.152-153). Enquanto a China tem demonstrado disponibilidade para investir na produção de baterias na América Latina, os EUA têm procurado, sobretudo, adquirir matérias-primas para a sua indústria das tecnologias ecológicas. Este posicionamento das superpotências, alinhará, provavelmente, os países latino-americanos com a oferta asiática, mais atrativa que o modelo tradicional de exportação com reduzido valor acrescentado.

Do ponto de vista ambiental, a exploração do Ártico, especialmente sensível aos efeitos do aquecimento global, poderá resultar: num desastre ecológico; na abertura e ampliação de rotas marítimas; mas também em desequilíbrios climáticos com efeitos globais catastróficos (Nações Unidas, 2022). No caso do ABC Sul-Americano, a perda de influência dos Estados regionais, viabiliza a criação de um monopólio de empresas estatais chinesas, com interesses antagónicos às questões ambientais e económico-sociais regionais (Nolasco, 2022). Por outro lado, a possibilidade das turbinas eólicas carregarem baterias de lítio pode estimular o crescimento deste mercado, visando a energia sustentável e renovável. Esta realidade pode potenciar a expansão da influência das superpotências nos Estados periféricos, criando oportunidades de emprego e de exportação de produtos acabados. Nesse sentido, a China tem desenvolvido as cadeias produtivas de energia solar e eólica e de armazenamento, demonstrando estratégias industriais a montante e a jusante da economia chinesa. A produção mundial de 80% dos painéis solares, 66% das turbinas eólicas e 56% dos veículos elétricos, em 2023, representam a preponderância da China no mercado global de energia renovável, permitindo-lhe reduzir significativamente os custos (Castro & Ludovico, 2025).

Deste modo, perspetivam-se crescentes tensões comerciais, resultando em barreiras tarifárias norte-americanas para reduzir a competitividade chinesa e proteger a indústria nacional. Com o protecionismo económico de Donald Trump, este cenário geopolítico comercial tende a agravar-se. O aumento do protecionismo dos recursos, a concorrência crítica pelos mesmos e as perturbações das cadeias de abastecimento resultantes dos conflitos na Europa e no Médio Oriente, representam desafios no curto prazo para a indústria mineira chinesa, como o aumento do preço das matérias-primas minerais

[12] Realça-se que os recursos lítios destes Estados têm uma pureza mais elevada e são extraídos de forma mais económica (Rodrigues & Padula, 2017, p. 205).

(Moon, 2022, p. 9.7). Neste contexto, o sistema dos BRICS[13] torna-se numa alternativa viável para "substituir parcialmente perdas nos mercados privilegiados" (Cardoso, 2025).

Perspetiva-se assim, que a China procure transitar da atual ordem mundial liberal para uma nova ordem mundial alternativa, em que o maior poder de Pequim resultará na maior prosperidade para o mundo. Reconhecendo a sua dependência de importações no domínio energético, procurará: manter as suas relações internacionais, diretamente relacionadas com o interesse económico, expandindo a aquisição de ativos e depósitos no estrangeiro; ajustar as tarifas de importação e exportação, conforme medida implementada desde início de 2024, que reduziu as tarifas de importação a 1,010 matérias-primas, incluindo o carbonato de lítio e cloreto de lítio (International Renewable Energy Agency [IRENA], 2025); continuar a promover a transição energética para as energias verdes, aumentando o controlo da geopolítica do lítio; e aumentar o seu poder militar, orientado principalmente para a reunificação de Taiwan[14] (Gaspar, 2023, p. 97), mas também para a proteção das suas rotas comerciais e energéticas apoiado logisticamente em portos estratégicos, assumindo o lítio um papel relevante na eficiência energética de novos sistemas de armas e na proliferação nuclear. Neste cenário, os EUA procurarão, previsivelmente, aumentar a sua influência económico-comercial, direta ou indiretamente, com os países possuidores de recursos energéticos, compelindo, se necessário, alguns acordos, como é o caso do acordo EUA-Ucrânia assinado em abril de 2025 para a exploração de minerais raros, ou a pressão exercida sobre a Gronelândia. Por outro lado, perspetiva-se o aumento da produção nacional de minerais críticos, para impulsionar a economia, reduzir significativamente a dependência externa (principalmente de potências hostis) e assegurar o abastecimento seguro de minerais (Executive Order 14241/2025, de 20 março). Para esse fim, Washington criou o *National Energy Dominance Council*, visando, entre outras funções, propor uma Estratégia Nacional de Domínio Energético, com objetivos a longo prazo, reforçada por investimentos privados em todos os setores da economia energética (Executive Order 14213/2025, de 14 fevereriro).

Constata-se que a geopolítica do lítio afeta as relações internacionais e a aplicação dos instrumentos de poder, para alcançar relações económico-comerciais vantajosas e assegurar posicionamentos estratégicos que garantam a segurança das rotas comerciais e o controlo dos recursos. Deste modo, pode afirmar-se que os EUA e a China usam o poder como "o instrumento da gestão e preservação do espaço", na linha da "nova Geopolítica" defendida pelo General Pezarat Correia (2010). Porém, constata-se que o lítio (espaço) é visto como um instrumento da hegemonia e do exercício do poder de ambos os atores, de acordo com as teorias clássicas e neoclássicas de geopolítica, existindo influência recíproca entre o espaço e o poder e entre a geografia e a política.

Resumindo, a atual transição energética tem incrementado a disputa EUA-China pela aquisição e controlo de minas de terras raras e lítio à escala planetária, com impactos regionais distintos. Neste quadro, os EUA procuram: assegurar o acesso a fontes de lítio externas e o estabelecimento de cadeias de abastecimento seguras; diversificar o

[13] Inclui o Brasil, Rússia, Índia, China e África do Sul, e também o Egipto, Emirados Árabes Unidos, Arábia Saudita, Etiópia e Irão (após janeiro de 2024) e ainda a Indonésia (após janeiro de 2025).
[14] A pressão de Pequim intensificou-se, particularmente, após a invasão da Ucrânia pela Rússia, em fevereiro de 2022, resultando no declarado aumento do investimento militar em 7,1%.

investimento estrangeiro; otimizar o processo de extração de lítio; reduzir a competitividade chinesa e proteger a indústria nacional; e aumentar a produção mineira nacional para dependências e potenciar a economia. A China continua a ampliar o mercado do lítio, como líder mundial nas energias verdes, aproveitando os recuos norte-americanos para estabelecer acordos internacionais que viabilizem a apropriação e exploração dos recursos locais a longo prazo, incluindo-os no investimento em infraestruturas associado à OBOR. A integração de diversas tecnologias no processo de produção mineira possibilita reduzir custos e a criação de empresas extratoras de lítio na América do Sul, África e Austrália, permitem acumular reservas estratégicas que mitiguem eventuais interrupções no abastecimento. Para ambos os atores, o vetor militar serve para facilitar acordos e proteger as cadeias de abastecimento de lítio, pelo que se perspetivam crescentes tensões económico-comerciais e político-militares EUA-China, tendencialmente agravadas pelo protecionismo económico de Donald Trump, contrário aos interesses da indústria mineira chinesa.

Conclusões

Neste estudo analisou-se a crescente importância geopolítica do lítio, enquanto fonte de poder, no posicionamento político-militar dos EUA e da China, para a obtenção de vantagem económico-militar no acesso, controlo e aplicação deste recurso nas suas indústrias, através da análise aos instrumentos de poder.

A metodologia de investigação utilizada, assentou no raciocínio dedutivo, partindo da assumida importância estratégica do lítio a nível mundial, como premissa, em busca do contributo que a geopolítica e a aplicação dos instrumentos de poder têm na sua obtenção e na manutenção da hegemonia norte-americana e ascensão chinesa no SPI. Seguiu-se uma análise de conteúdo qualitativa, baseada na análise documental, com um desenho de pesquisa de estudo de caso e transversal de epistemologia explicativa.

Na sequência da investigação, constata-se através da subsecção 3.1., que o lítio é um metal com propriedades únicas ao nível da eficiência energética, que o tornam num recurso estratégico, usado em diversos setores industriais, cada vez mais disputado pelas superpotências. As suas aplicações extendem-se principalmente às baterias, mas também às cerâmicas e vidraria, graxas e lubrificantes, tratamento do ar, produções de alumínio e metalurgia, produtos farmacêuticos, entre outras. A progressiva transição energética, do petróleo para a "economia limpa", adicionada à descoberta e exploração de novas reservas naturais de lítio, têm impactado nas estruturas socioeconómicas locais, exigindo a adaptação deste mercado à lei da oferta-procura. Em termos militares, as baterias de lítio revelam-se mais adequadas ao ambiente operacional, pela sua robustez, maior vida útil e carregamento mais célere, servindo para equipar uma vasta tipologia de meios e sistemas de comunicação. Realça-se ainda, o uso do lítio para o revestimento de aeronaves e produção de ogivas termonucleares, incluindo a produção do fluido refrigerante dos reatores nucleares, particularmente relevante face ao recente aumento da *deterrence* assente no nuclear, onde se incluem os EUA e a China. Numa perspetiva ambiental, o lítio contribui para reduzir os níveis de poluição nos Estados onde a sua aplicação tecnológica se materializa, contudo, os impactos ecológicos podem ser nefastos nos locais de extração. Para a China, o lítio é central na nova política de tornar a China

verde e ecológica, procurando expandir a sua influência na América do Sul e Latina, tendo em vista a independência económica e a segurança nacional. Para os EUA, a competição pelos minerais críticos tem promovido o fortalecimento das suas cadeias de abastecimento globais, demonstrando a centralidade do lítio na competição tecnológica e geopolítica entre ambos os atores.

Na subsecção 3.2., verifica-se que os principais países com reservas comprovadas de lítio, cerca de 85%, são o Chile, Austrália, China, Argentina e EUA. Numa segunda linha, incluem-se entre outros países, o Canadá, Brasil, Zimbábue, Portugal e Bolívia. Excetuando a Bolívia, estes países encontram-se também, entre os maiores produtores mundiais de lítio, dos quais, se destaca o aumento acentuado, desde 2023, da China, Argentina, Zimbábue e Canadá. Os depósitos de lítio economicamente viáveis pertencem às seguintes categorias: minérios gerados em salmouras (processo de extração atualmente mais rentável e por isso dominante), localizados na Bolívia, Chile, Argentina, China e EUA; minérios derivados de rochas sãs (pegmatitos), localizados sobretudo na Austrália, Áustria, Brasil, Canadá, China, mas também nos EUA e Zimbábue; e minérios derivados de argilas (processo potencialmente mais rentável, mas ainda não desenvolvido), localizados no México e EUA. Devido à sua dimensão e localização geográfica, os EUA e a China têm nos seus territórios sete locais de exploração de lítio distantes entre si e de diferentes categorias. Realça-se ainda, a possível mineração de lítio extraído da água do mar, solução previsivelmente económica que dará vantagem a quem tiver a maior ZEE, neste caso os EUA. Face ao aumento global do consumo de lítio, aos EUA interessa salvaguardar as relações com os países de onde provêm as principais importações líticas (Chile e Argentina, entre outros), mantendo este mercado equilibrado em termos económicos, reforçar as cadeias de abastecimento do Hemisfério Ocidental e aumentar a produção interna de lítio, para reduzir a dependência externa. Para a China, interessa expandir: a aquisição de empresas estrangeiras dedicadas à extração e processamento do lítio (*e.g.* na Argentina e Zimbabué); projetos de cooperação internacional (*e.g.* na Austrália); e a exploração interna.

Na subsecção 3.3., comprova-se que a atual transição energética tem incrementado a disputa EUA-China pela aquisição e controlo de minas de terras raras e lítio à escala planetária, com impactos ecológicos regionais distintos. Neste quadro, os EUA procuram contrariar a vantagem recém-adquirida da China na aparente descoberta de novas reservas de lítio no seu território, através do(a): acesso ao Ártico, pressionando facilidades económico-militares na Gronelândia; desenvolvimento tecnológico para otimizar o processo de extração de lítio; estabelecimento de acordos para obtenção de lítio necessário às suas empresas; aplicação de tarifas para reduzir a competitividade chinesa e proteger a indústria nacional; diversificação do investimento estrangeiro, como o caso da requalificação da linha ferroviária do Corredor do Lobito, visando a ligação às fontes de lítio na RDC e facilitar o transporte de mercadorias Atlântico-Índico; e aumento da produção nacional de minerais críticos, para impulsionar a economia e reduzir significativamente dependências externas. Por seu lado, a China aproveita os recuos político-militares norte-americanos para estabelecer relações e acordos internacionais que viabilizem a apropriação e exploração dos recursos locais, incluindo-os no investimento em infraestruturas associado à OBOR. Para permanecer na vanguarda das energias verdes, tem ampliado o mercado do lítio, integrando diversas tecnologias, desde as baterias aos painéis solares e turbinas eólicas, permitindo-lhe reduzir

significativamente os custos de produção. Simultaneamente, procura a criação de empresas para aceder a depósitos de lítio na América do Sul, África e Austrália, estabelecendo parcerias que visam acumular reservas estratégicas que mitiguem eventuais interrupções no abastecimento. Para proteger as cadeias de abastecimento de lítio, essenciais ao mercado interno, a China tem expandido as suas bases industriais e militares no exterior e a capacidade de projeção marítima, que serve também como fator dissuasor para a ambicionada reunificação de Taiwan e expansão de influência no Indo-Pacífico. Deste modo, perspetivam-se crescentes tensões económico-comerciais e político-militares EUA-China, tendencialmente agravadas pelo protecionismo económico de Donald Trump, contrário aos interesses da indústria mineira chinesa.

Deste modo, em resposta à QC, pode afirmar-se que o lítio influencia as relações de poder dos EUA e da China com os países possuidores de reservas de lítio, incentivando acordos político-económicos que resultam em alterações socioeconómicas locais e em soluções de transição energética com impactos diferentes no meio ambiente regional e global. Este mercado serve os interesses políticos, económicos e militares de ambas as superpotências, que exercem os instrumentos de poder de forma diferenciada para aumentar a sua influência internacional, acabando por criar relações de dependência económica dos Estados periféricos. Decorrente da análise realizada, constata-se a dependência externa no mercado do lítio num contexto de uma aparente gradual crise energética, climática e sanitária. Este novo paradigma energético irá estabelecer os alicerces de uma possível nova ordem geopolítica, na qual as relações EUA-China irão manter um quadro de coexistência competitivo-cooperativa, ou tender para a conflitualidade, em função das relações de poder.

Este estudo procurou estabelecer uma relação entre a procura de lítio e as relações internacionais dos EUA e da China com atores periféricos do SPI com reservas de lítio e o impacto na geopolítica mundial. Desta forma, contribuiu-se para clarificar o real contributo do lítio nos objetivos estratégicos destes atores estatais.

A maior limitação desta investigação deveu-se à escassez de fontes primárias relacionadas com: os eventos impactantes na geopolítica mundial decorrentes da procura de lítio; a volatilidade do fluxo informacional relacionado com novas descobertas de fontes de lítio; e a imprevisibilidade da atual política norte-americana, a incerteza na materialização da sua intenção (isolacionista e/ou expansionista, com recuos aparentes na energia verde) e a longevidade da mesma. Contudo, procurou-se complementar o estudo com o posicionamento norte-americano pré e pós posse de Donald Trump, enquanto presidente dos EUA, relativamente ao interesse pelo lítio, através do cruzamento de artigos científicos realizados, com notícias recentes de diversas origens e fontes primárias de dados estatísticos, procurando-se, na medida do possível, a desejada neutralidade académica.

Recomenda-se alargar este estudo à Rússia e Austrália, pela sua relevância na cena internacional e escassez de informação sobre o impacto do lítio no plano político e económico-militar destes atores, que poderá influenciar as dinâmicas de poder regional e mundial.

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THE GEOECONOMICS OF MINERALS IN THE ENERGY TRANSITION: THE CASE OF LITHIUM IN ARGENTINA

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Abstract

This article analyses Argentina's lithium policy within the framework of geo-economic competition driven by the global energy transition. Drawing on the concepts of geoeconomics, development models, and extractivism, it examines how Argentina has integrated lithium into its international insertion strategy since the sector's expansion after 2021. The study argues that, despite lithium's strategic relevance for decarbonization and advanced technologies, Argentina's approach largely reproduces a primary-export extractivist model characterized by low value added, strong dependence on foreign direct investment, and limited state capacity for regulation and rent capture. Through a qualitative, single-case study based on secondary data, the analysis shows that federal mining governance, decentralized provincial control, and investment-oriented regulatory frameworks have favoured rapid project expansion but hindered coordination, downstream industrialization, and productive diversification. As a result, lithium has made only a marginal contribution to foreign exchange earnings, technological upgrading, and redistribution, while reinforcing asymmetric integration into global value chains dominated by transnational actors. At the territorial level, lithium expansion generates well-paid but limited employment and modest local spill overs, alongside significant socio-environmental tensions, particularly regarding water use and indigenous rights. The article concludes that without a stronger, more coordinated state role aligned with long-term development objectives, lithium risks becoming another "developmentalist illusion" rather than a driver of structural transformation and greater economic autonomy.

Keywords

Lithium, geoeconomics, development models, extractivism, international insertion.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a política de lítio da Argentina no contexto da concorrência geoeconómica impulsionada pela transição energética global. Com base nos conceitos de geoeconomia, modelos de desenvolvimento e extrativismo, examina a forma como a Argentina integrou o lítio na sua estratégia de inserção internacional desde a expansão do setor após 2021. O estudo defende que, apesar da relevância estratégica do lítio para a descarbonização e as tecnologias avançadas, a abordagem da Argentina reproduz, em grande medida, um modelo extrativista de exportação de matérias-primas, caracterizado por um baixo valor acrescentado, uma forte dependência do investimento direto estrangeiro e uma capacidade estatal limitada em termos de regulamentação e captação de rendas. Através de um estudo qualitativo de caso único, baseado em dados secundários, a análise mostra que a governação federal da mineração, o controlo provincial descentralizado e os quadros regulamentares orientados para o investimento favoreceram a rápida expansão dos projetos, mas dificultaram a coordenação, a industrialização a jusante e a diversificação produtiva. Consequentemente, o lítio contribuiu apenas marginalmente para as receitas cambiais, a modernização tecnológica e a redistribuição, ao mesmo tempo que reforçou a integração assimétrica nas cadeias de valor globais dominadas por atores transnacionais. A nível territorial, a expansão do lítio gera emprego bem remunerado, mas limitado, e efeitos de arrastamento locais modestos, a par de tensões socioambientais significativas, particularmente no que diz respeito ao uso da água e aos direitos dos povos indígenas. O artigo conclui que, sem um papel do Estado mais forte e coordenado, alinhado com objetivos de desenvolvimento a longo prazo, o lítio corre o risco de se tornar mais uma «ilusão desenvolvimentista», em vez de um motor de transformação estrutural e de maior autonomia económica.

Palavras-chave

Lítio, geoeconomia, modelos de desenvolvimento, extrativismo, inserção internacional.

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Introduction

Geopolitics is currently undergoing profound changes driven by technological development, which broadens the scope of strategic analysis. The market and natural resources play a central role in enabling states to devise strategies that enhance their international standing. Within this framework, the supply of critical minerals is key to the energy transition, defence and a wide range of technological applications. Developing countries that possess these resources seek to capitalise on them to secure economic benefits and preserve their room for manoeuvre. However, development becomes a structural challenge: the development model based on comparative advantages and extractive industries creates external vulnerability, dependence on international cycles, limits state autonomy in the face of changes in the current global context and influences how the State integrates in the international system (Argento, Slipak & Puente, 2022; Actis et.al, 2016).

The lithium industry has established itself as a key sector in the energy transition, with its period of greatest expansion occurring since 2015 (Barberón, 2023). This mineral is essential for the manufacture of high-energy-density rechargeable batteries, which are mainly used in electric vehicles, portable electronic devices, power tools and energy storage systems. In 2024, 87% of global lithium consumption was for batteries, highlighting its central role in technology (U.S. Geological Survey, 2025). Global demand is primarily for lithium carbonate, followed by lithium hydroxide and, to a lesser extent, other compounds[1] (Secretaría de Minería, 2025a). Although lithium is often regarded as a strategic mineral, it is not in short supply globally, and producing countries lack the capacity to restrict supply or influence demand. Consequently, it presents a medium-to-low supply risk, and the growing demand for it does not give rise to speculative trends, but rather poses the challenge of assessing its actual economic contribution (Ceroni, 2018).

The Lithium Triangle, comprising Chile, Bolivia and Argentina, is a region covering 400,000 km² with estimated reserves accounting for over 50% of the world's total[2] (U.S.

[1] Lithium sulphate is used as a precursor in the production of lithium hydroxide, which has a higher concentration of the mineral and is therefore more effective in battery manufacturing.
[2] Lithium resources are theoretical and estimated deposits of the mineral, whilst reserves are defined as discovered, recoverable and commercially viable deposits.

Geological Survey, 2025). As these countries do not control the production chain, industrialisation does not take place on a large scale, thereby replicating the classic Latin American extractive production model. (Uribe & Panez, 2022). Extraction and processing are concentrated in a handful of countries, with China dominating the entire supply chain.

The leadership of the Triangle countries is confined to the early stages of the value chain, failing to achieve downstream industrial integration and to coordinate policies that would maximise economic benefits, diversify production and energy mixes, and promote the development of human capital in strategic areas (Castillo, Garcés & Furtado Messias, 2024; Juste & Álvarez, 2024; Lahoud, 2023). Recent studies warn that the export boom has had a negative environmental impact and has not led to substantial improvements in employment or a reduction in inequality in the producing regions. (Amar, Álvarez & Abeles, 2024; Comisión Económica para América Latina y el Caribe [CEPAL], 2023; Díaz & Reynoso Castillo, 2023).

Of the three countries, Argentina has the shortest history of mining. The sector was modernised following the Mining Code (1886 and subsequent amendments) and experienced significant growth from the 1960s and, from the 1990s onwards, through large-scale mining driven by foreign investment. With an agro-export development model, mining was always marginal, although today it is a significant sector of the economy with a contribution to Gross Domestic Product (GDP) that grew by more than 8.5% when comparing the first quarter of 2025 with the same period in 2024 (Rajzman & D'Angelo, 2026). Argentina is the world's fifth-largest producer of lithium, with eight projects in production and more than 41 projects at advanced stages, focused on private extraction. Jujuy, Salta and Catamarca are the main producing provinces. (Secretaría de Minería, 2025a). But it lacks an overarching strategy for lithium industrialisation, unlike Chile and Bolivia, where the state plays a strategic role.

The aim of this study is to analyse Argentina's lithium policy, given the country's vast reserves and the fact that its policies and the development of its mining industry differ significantly from those of Chile and Bolivia. The research is guided by the question of how this policy is shaped within the framework of the geo-economic competition associated with the energy transition and its link to the current development model.

This article examines lithium as a strategic policy issue at the intersection of Argentina's development model, federal governance and global economic integration. It assesses whether lithium is being incorporated into a coherent development strategy or whether its exploitation reproduces traditional patterns of extractive specialization and dependent integration into the global economy.

The analysis focuses on three dimensions. First, it explores the institutional and regulatory framework governing lithium in a federal context characterized by fragmented provincial regulations and tensions between national and subnational authorities (Freytes, Obaya & Delbuono, 2022; Freytes, 2024). Second, it analyses the role of foreign investment, transnational firms and global value chains, emphasizing Argentina's ability to capture rents, generate value added and strengthen its position in the international economy (Nacif, 2019; González Jáuregui, 2024b; Juste & Navarro, 2022; Argento, Slipak & Puente, 2022). Third, it considers the territorial and socio-environmental impacts of lithium extraction, including disputes over water use, indigenous rights, natural resources and the distribution of benefits and costs.



While previous research has examined these issues, the perspectives have often remained separate. Some studies focus on environmental impacts and territorial conflicts, whereas others analyse investment, exports, industrialization and lithium's contribution to productive development (Obaya & Kramarz, 2026; CEPAL, 2023; Amar, Álvarez & Abeles, 2024). This article integrates these approaches through the frameworks of geoeconomics, development models and sustainable governance.

By placing governance at the centre of the analysis, the article asks whether the Argentine state has the institutional capacity to coordinate different levels of government, regulate corporate actors, distribute benefits effectively and align lithium extraction with long-term sustainable development goals.

Data is drawn from 2021 onwards, as this is when growth in the lithium sector began to be observed. The study is descriptive in nature and employs a qualitative methodology. It is a single-case study based on the collection and interpretation of data, primarily secondary data—statistical, documentary and journalistic—which led to the exploration of the available information and the unobservable relationships between these data points. Various categories were selected for the analysis, derived from the chosen concepts. Data triangulation was employed to cross-check the data and assess the convergence or divergence of the information gathered. (Vieytes, 2004).

Conceptual approach: geoeconomics, development models and extractivism

Geopolitics is the relationship between geography and politics and the power of a state, which was traditionally based on control of land, sea or air. Globalisation and the technological revolution have transformed these factors, bringing in the market, natural resources, trade routes and communications. This has led to the emergence of other geopolitical actors, such as transnational corporations and various international organisations (Jiménez Bastida & Briones-Peñalver, 2021).

Added to this concept is that of geo-economics. Developed by Edward Luttwak in 1990, it focuses on models of development, cooperation and integration, and on the conflicts these generate. It emerged in the post-Cold War era, when the influence of military power on the international agenda waned and economic and trade issues came to the fore. Security issues were redefined, shifting towards economic interests established through geoeconomics (Rojas Sánchez, 2019).

Geoeconomics is based on the use of economic instruments to achieve national objectives and secure favourable geopolitical outcomes (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). Geo-economic policy seeks to position and empower the country's own strategic sectors with the aim of gaining access to new markets and capital (Jiménez Bastida & Briones-Peñalver, 2021). Thus, it is not the same for a state geo-economic policy to set out a vision for the economic model to be followed and to oversee the productive system, as it is for other actors to be involved, or to seek control over territories, markets, companies and production chains.

The relationship between geoeconomics and the energy transition is evident in the case of critical minerals. Resources such as lithium take on strategic importance, leading states to use trade policies, industrial strategies and investment mechanisms to secure



supply chains and strengthen their position vis-à-vis other powers (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). Thus, the energy transition involves transforming energy mixes and, at the same time, competing for the technological and industrial benefits associated with sectors such as batteries and renewable energy (Jiménez Bastida & Briones-Peñalver, 2021). For resource-rich developing countries this situation presents both an opportunity and a risk: lithium can be used to improve their integration into global value chains or, conversely, to embed a subordinate position if the state lacks the capacity to align mining policy with broader objectives of energy transition and industrialisation (Rojas Sánchez, 2019; Argento, Slipak &Puente, 2022).

For Latin American states, development is an imperative that exerts a decisive influence on a wide range of domestic and foreign policy decisions. The development model refers to the way in which the state, the market and politics interact at a given historical moment to transform a country's productive and social structure, as well as its international insertion. The latter refers to the framework of foreign policy guidelines that a state adopts to engage with the international system in the political, security and economic spheres, defining objectives, relationships and priorities in accordance with its internal interests and needs (Lorenzini, 2011, as cited in Actis et.al, 2016).

Each development model comprises three dimensions, all of which are shaped by the involvement of economic, political and social actors. Firstly, the productive dimension refers to the structural definition of the pattern of economic specialisation, whilst the exchange rate and financial dimension relate to the way in which the state manages the tensions between growth, macroeconomic stability and external constraints. This allows us to assess whether integration reproduces patterns of dependency or, alternatively, strengthens the state's negotiating capacity. Thirdly, the social dimension addresses the role of the state in the distribution of the benefits of growth and in the generation of positive externalities (Actis et al., 2016).

Depending on the degree of state intervention and the role of the market in productive transformation, three types of development models can be identified: a) the orthodox model, based on the autonomous functioning of the market, international comparative advantages and legal certainty as the main mechanism for attracting investment; b) the heterodox model, which recognises the limitations of the market and promotes state intervention to drive productive transformation; and c) the neo-developmentalist or neo-structuralist model, in which the state assumes a leading role as the central instrument of development, seeking to generate competitive advantages and compensate for market failures. (Actis et al., 2016).

Latin America underwent a complex transformation at the start of the 21st century, characterised by persistent economic vulnerability stemming from external shocks and difficulties in sustaining the growth needed to narrow structural gaps and tackle environmental challenges. Recurring cycles of rapid expansion followed by deep crises have fuelled political instability (Bertola & Ocampo, 2022). Furthermore, the commodities[3] boom of the first decade of the century gave rise to tensions and dilemmas in the relationship between the state and the market.

[3] A commodity is a raw material or primary agricultural product that is bought and sold in bulk.

Argentina has a productive structure based on primary and industrial sectors and, between 1990 and 2025, adopted a variety of development strategies. These are underpinned by the persistence of a primary export-oriented model combined with a process of industrialisation based on regional agreements, particularly Mercosur, and geared towards the domestic and Latin American markets. In recent years, the strategy has also incorporated traditional markets such as the United States and Europe, and emerging markets such as China and India. The government of Alberto Fernández (2019–2023) adopted a neo-developmentalist approach, whilst that of Javier Milei (2023–2027) takes an orthodox stance. The latter is promoting a hybrid public-private scheme, with still a heavy tax burden on the business sector, alongside a process of far-reaching liberalisation of the economy and foreign trade.

Extractivism is an economic model centred on the intensive, large-scale exploitation of natural resources for export as raw materials (minerals, oil, agricultural products) with little or no added value. Heavy reliance on the sale of commodities has negative effects on domestic development, as it undermines the strategy for international integration. This vulnerability is reflected in dependence on external factors such as weather conditions, harvests and terms of trade. By relying on static comparative advantages, the model reinforces a form of economic subordination, given that raw material prices depend on global demand, production in other countries and external social, political and economic contexts, which limits the state's autonomy and sustained development (Nacht, 2013).

The characterisation of extractivism as an economic model remains a subject of debate, as there is no agreed definition and it is sometimes equated with a development model (Uribe & Panez, 2022; Montalván-Zambrano & Wences, 2024). We understand extractivism as a pattern of productive specialisation based on the large-scale extraction and export of natural resources with minimal processing, which can manifest itself in different development models. Whilst the latter refer to the configuration of relations between the state, the market and society that determine a country's integration into the international economy (Actis et al., 2016), the case of Argentina shows that both orthodox and neo-developmentalist strategies have resorted to extractivist patterns in the mining sector. So extractivism constitutes a structural feature that cuts across different political-economic strategies and shapes the development trajectories available to the state (Argento, Slipak & Puente, 2022)

High commodity prices result in a significant opportunity cost when factors of production are not directed towards these activities, which increases the state's vulnerability to external changes and reduces its economic autonomy. This context encourages the consolidation of foreign direct investment (FDI), which is generally concentrated in the extraction of natural resources or their primary processing, reinforcing a pattern of specialisation based on low-tech activities. In Latin America, integration into global value chains as a supplier of inputs for third-country exports (forward linkages) exacerbates this dynamic. In the case of lithium, although demand is growing, countries lack the production capacity and inputs necessary to move beyond the initial stages of processing and progress beyond lithium carbonate (CEPAL, 2023).

Building on these concepts, the analysis is structured around three interlinked dimensions: 1) institutional and regulatory frameworks; 2) lithium, the development

model and the role of companies in Argentina, and 3) economic, territorial and socio-environmental impacts of lithium expansion. These dimensions are operationalised using categories derived from the development models framework (Actis et al., 2016): the productive dimension is analysed through the pattern of specialisation, the degree of downstream industrialisation and the presence of local production networks; the exchange rate and financial dimension is assessed through foreign direct investment flows, export earnings, taxation and the state's capacity for rent-seeking; and the social dimension is addressed in terms of job creation, distributional impact and socio-environmental conflicts. This enables the analysis to move beyond a merely sectoral description in order to assess the extent to which Argentina's lithium policy reflects, or deviates from, a coherent state strategy for international integration.

Institutional and regulatory frameworks

Argentina is a federal state and the regulation of mining is enshrined in the Constitution. Article 124 of the National Constitution assigns to the provinces "original ownership of the natural resources existing within their territory", meaning that the provinces retain original ownership of these resources. Furthermore, Article 75, clause 12, authorises Congress to enact fundamental laws, such as the Mining Code, whilst preserving local jurisdictions. The provinces retain the authority to regulate the procedural aspects of resource management, and the Code regulates rights, obligations and procedures relating to the acquisition, exploitation and use of mineral substances. Mines are legally distinct legal entities and are classified according to the mineral substances they contain. In the case of metallic minerals, it is stipulated that they can only be mined under a legal concession. Furthermore, Law 24.196 (1993) on mining investment offers incentives for exploration and mining, including a 30-year period of tax stability for new or expanded projects and exemptions from customs duties on imported equipment. (Moscheni & de la Torre, 2017).

In 2022, the Fernández administration launched the 'Argentina Productiva 2030' Plan, whose objective was the creation of formal jobs and businesses with the aim of reducing poverty and inequality. Ten productive missions were carried out across the country to address key economic, technological, social, and environmental challenges through policy recommendations and legislative proposals (Schteingart, 2024). In 2023, the Plan was officially published, including a section with recommendations for developing mining potential while safeguarding the environment: promoting investment and unlocking Argentina's geological and mining potential; developing national suppliers within the mining value chain; generating local, inclusive, and quality employment; and strengthening socio-environmental governance instruments in the mining sector (Ministry of Economy, 2023). The plan represented one of the few recent attempts to frame lithium and mining within a broader national development strategy rather than only as an investment opportunity. Nevertheless, it remained largely unimplemented due to the country's chronic macroeconomic and political instability -including internal tensions within the government- as well as a lack of coordination between ministries and different levels of government, compounded by the change of administration at the end of 2023 (Schteingart, 2024).

In 2024, Milei´s administration enacted the Incentive Scheme for Major Investments (RIGI in Spanish), guaranteeing greater regulatory stability, tax, customs and foreign exchange benefits, and a predictable regulatory environment for investments in strategic sectors. It requires the provinces to adhere to it. Provisions are introduced to reduce income tax from 35% to 25%, exempt export duties, allow for the crediting of value added tax (VAT) during the pre-operational phase, and provide access to international arbitration in the event of legal disputes. The lithium projects approved under this scheme to date are: 1) Rio Tinto: an investment of US$2.724 billion to expand the Rincón de Litio project (in Salta), increase production capacity and build a plant, and 2) Minera Galán Lithium: an investment of US$217 million in the Hombre Muerto Oeste (HMW) project (in Catamarca), for the production of high-quality lithium chloride. (A un año del RIGI, 2025). From 2003–2024, mining dominated FDI net foreign exchange earnings; it led capital inflows again in the first half of 2025 (Rajzman & D'Angelo, 2026). With this initiative, Argentina's ability to foster local value addition remains constrained by the structure of corporate participation and the limited development of domestic technological capabilities (González Jáuregui, 2024a).

As regards provincial legislation, Jujuy, through Provincial Law No. 5674 (2011), declared lithium to be a strategic natural resource, recognising it as a driver of the province's socio-economic development. (Juste & Navarro, 2022). It also established a public-private partnership, Jujuy Energía y Minería. Sociedad Del Estado (JEMSE), which holds a stake in the operations carried out there. La Rioja, through Provincial Law No. 10,608 (2023), declared lithium a strategic natural resource by virtue of its contributions to the energy transition and the socio-economic development of the province (CEPAL, 2023). In contrast, Salta and Catamarca are governed by provincial regulations on mining in general, but the latter established the state-owned company Catamarca Minera y Energética Sociedad del Estado (CAMYEN S.E.) to promote sustainable mining development. Finally, in 2021, the Interprovincial Treaty for the Creation of the Lithium Mining Region was signed between the provinces of Salta, Jujuy and Catamarca, with a view to jointly developing the various lithium options, and the Regional Lithium Committee was established to coordinate activities.

The regulatory framework, at both national and provincial levels, reflects the inherent tension of extractivism: on the one hand, it encourages investment and the production of minerals critical to global technological development; on the other, it is criticised for unduly favouring private and foreign companies, thereby limiting the contribution to national socio-economic development and economic autonomy. The creation of public or mixed-ownership companies in some provinces and the interprovincial treaty seek to partially counteract this dynamic of dependency and fragmentation. This legal system reflects a geo-economic model in which the State seeks to position strategic sectors for international integration, but which faces the constraints of federalism and extractivism, as well as dependence on FDI, within a complex global context. This fragmented international insertion model also limits the state's ability to align foreign policy with industrialization.

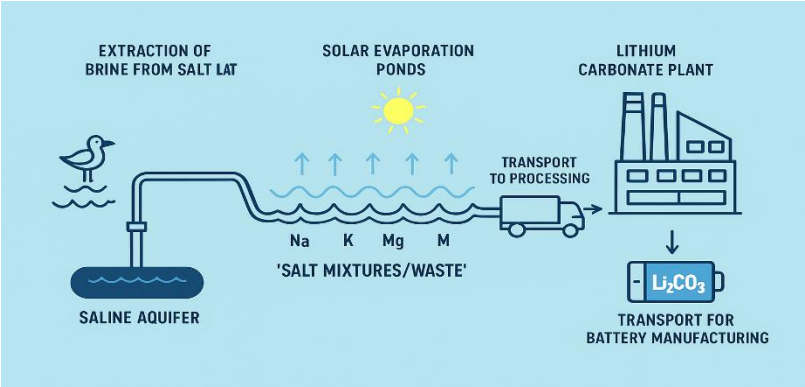
Lithium mining in Argentina

This section outlines the lithium sector's technical features, key actors, and trade dynamics not as an end, but as the basis for analysing lithium governance and evaluating Argentina's state strategy in later sections. Its purpose is to clearly separate, where evidence permits, the sector's historical evolution, its governance structures, and the coherence (or lack thereof) of state policy toward lithium.

Technical and sectoral characteristics

The global sources of lithium extraction are brine deposits, hard-rock mining and the recycling of used batteries. The main methods include evaporation techniques, electrochemical processes and innovative approaches, such as direct lithium extraction (DLE) technologies. Each method presents advantages and challenges in terms of efficiency, environmental impact and economic viability. In South America, natural lithium deposits are found beneath extensive salt flats in areas of the Andean highlands and the Puna, and are extracted using slow solar evaporation methods, which are favoured due to their lower operating costs. (Vera et al., 2023).

Figure 1. Flowchart of activities related to lithium production



Source: Authors' own elaboration.

The Lithium Triangle encompasses around 150 inland drainage basins in north-western Argentina, western Bolivia and northern Chile. Within this region there are more than 100 salt flats and lagoons, varying in size.

In Argentina, lithium is found in salt flats where it occurs in high concentrations near the surface. Argentina's lithium reserves account for around 13% of the world's total, and its resources amount to approximately 23 million tonnes. (U.S. Geological Survey, 2025). Mineral separation, leaching processes and other technologies, which have been in use in Chile for many years, only began in Argentina at the start of 2021. Lithium production is therefore a fledgling industry that reached 71,000 tonnes of lithium carbonate equivalent (LCE) in 2024, contributing 86.7% carbonate and 13.3% chloride to the international market. (Secretaría de Minería, 2025a).

This overview identifies key features that shape lithium governance in Argentina: geographically concentrated production, water-intensive extraction and integration into global markets primarily through early-stage processing rather than advanced industrial production.

Figure 2. Argentine salt flats within the lithium triangle by 2023.



Source: Martínez, J. (2023, September 2nd). Argentina could export US$7 billion of lithium by 2025. The Rio Times. https://www.riotimesonline.com/argentina-could-export-us7-billion-of-lithium-by-2025/

Corporate actors and investment patterns: geoeconomic competition and strategic positioning

Argentina has the most extensive portfolio of lithium projects in the Triangle, which are at various stages of development and are in the provinces of Salta, Catamarca and Jujuy. By 2025, eight projects were in operation and 15 projects at advanced stages: five projects under construction, four at the feasibility stage, three at the pre-feasibility stage and three undergoing preliminary economic evaluation. In addition, there are more than forty projects in the early stages: 26 in advanced exploration, 9 in initial exploration and 6 in prospecting. (Secretaría de Minería, 2025a).

The two projects that have been in operation the longest are the Olaroz project, owned by the Rio Tinto Group (British-owned), Toyota Tsusho (Japanese-owned) and the state-owned company JEMSE, and the Fénix project, controlled by the Rio Tinto Group. Similarly, the Cauchari-Olaroz project is controlled by Ganfeng Lithium Co. (Chinese capital), Lithium Argentina (Canadian capital) and JEMSE. After 12 years of work and an investment of over US$800 million, the Centenario-Ratones project, the first in Salta, was inaugurated. Run by the French company Eramet, it began production in late 2024 using the DLE process. Furthermore, Sal de Oro is controlled by the South Korean firm POSCO Holdings Inc. and has two plants: one for hydroxide production – currently operational– and another for carbonate production, currently under construction. Finally, the Mariana project, run by Ganfeng Lithium Co. Ltd, began producing lithium chloride in early 2025 (Secretaría de Minería, 2025a; 2025b).

There are around 30 companies operating in the lithium sector under a concession scheme, with a broad business model for its exploitation. The two largest companies are from Australia and the United States (US). In the first case, Allkem has three projects: Salar de Olaroz, in production, with a 66.50% stake, sharing control with Toyota Tsusho (25%) and JEMSE (8.50%); Salar de Vida (Catamarca), under construction, and Salar de Cauchari (Jujuy), in the pre-feasibility stage, both 100% under its control. In the second case, Livent operates in the Salar del Hombre Muerto in Catamarca. These companies merged in 2024 to form Arcadium Lithium, becoming the world's largest lithium products company. (Secretaría de Minería, 2025b).

The company with the most operations is the Dutch firm Pluspetrol Resources, which operates in Salta (Nabu Spisifo-Mina Patilla, Río Grande and Salar de Arizaro I) and in Jujuy (Salinas Grandes), with four projects at an advanced stage of exploration. In Salar Arizaro, it holds a 40% stake, alongside Argentum Investments I LLC (USA), with 25.63%, and Prado Largo SA (Spain), with 4.37%. The Canadian company Argentina Lithium & Energy Corp. has full control of three projects at an advanced exploration stage: one in Salta (Arizaro) and two in Catamarca (Antofalla Norte and Incahuasi) (Secretaría de Minería, 2025b).

There are also Argentine companies such as Integra Capital, which operates in Jujuy and Catamarca, and SMG SRL (2009), which holds a 20% stake in the Salar de Arizaro in Salta. In addition, JEMSE has two projects in Jujuy (Secretaría de Minería, 2025b). At the end of 2023, TEAM Europe Argentina, which brings together European member states in the country, set up a lithium task force to consolidate and develop the lithium value chain in Argentina, through the strengthening of international cooperation and the analysis of potential investments (Europa apuesta por, 2023).

In 2021, the national administration established YPF Litio, with the aim of enabling YPF[4] to participate in the exploration and extraction of the mineral. However, the Milei government has shifted its strategy towards direct extraction through a key partnership with the Israeli firm XtraLit. It aims to focus on cutting-edge technology and add industrial value without neglecting the priority given to hydrocarbons (YPF y la israelí XtraLit, 2025).

[4] Yacimientos Petrolíferos Fiscales is a public limited company with a majority state shareholding (51%) specialising in oil and gas production.

From a foreign exchange and financial perspective, the greatest challenge to investing in lithium has stemmed from the foreign exchange market, due to the volatility of the dollar's exchange rate and the difficulty in repatriating profits. However, following the policies implemented by the Milei government (RIGI, economic liberalisation, facilitation of foreign trade and investment attraction, exchange rate band, etc.), a degree of macroeconomic stability is evident, allowing for greater predictability for investments, with a potential exceeding US$ 6.4 billion. (Secretaría de Minería, 2025a).

The dominance of transnational corporations and the limited role of public companies highlight how investment, ownership and technological control shape Argentina's position in global value chains, constraining the state's ability to pursue a coherent industrial strategy. (González Jáuregui, 2024a).

From a geo-economic perspective, the expansion of the lithium industry can be seen as part of a broader competition between major powers seeking to secure critical resources and exploiting comparative economic advantages or disadvantages to achieve national objectives and gain a competitive edge. The dispute over access to salt flats, the signing of long-term contracts and participation in the value chain results in differentiated strategies by states and transnational corporations, which combine FDI, cooperation agreements, concessional financing and infrastructure initiatives aimed at guaranteeing stable flows of lithium.

Argentina finds itself in this highly competitive landscape, alongside US, European and Asian companies operating through joint ventures or partnerships with local firms and agreements with sub-national governments (González Jáuregui, 2024b). This creates tensions between different levels of government, and the challenge lies in direct negotiations between companies and provincial governments. The emerging involvement of a state-owned lithium company and the central role of the provinces in project negotiations open up significant room for manoeuvre for external actors, who can adapt their strategies to the regulatory conditions of each jurisdiction. Furthermore, financing programmes and partnership initiatives driven by external powers help to anchor specific projects and export routes. This geo-economic configuration reinforces a primary-export model with a heavy reliance on transnational actors and global value chains dominated by the Global North. (Dirección Nacional de Estudios Regionales y de Cadenas de Valor, 2024; Nacif, 2019; Argento, Slipak & Puente, 2022; Montalván-Zambrano & Wences, 2024). So, Argentina's participation in the global lithium economy is characterised by a form of peripheral international integration, pattern that reinforces an asymmetric interdependence. Its fragmented institutional structure and investment-led model make it difficult to translate that relevance into greater autonomy, technological upgrading or coordinated national planning.

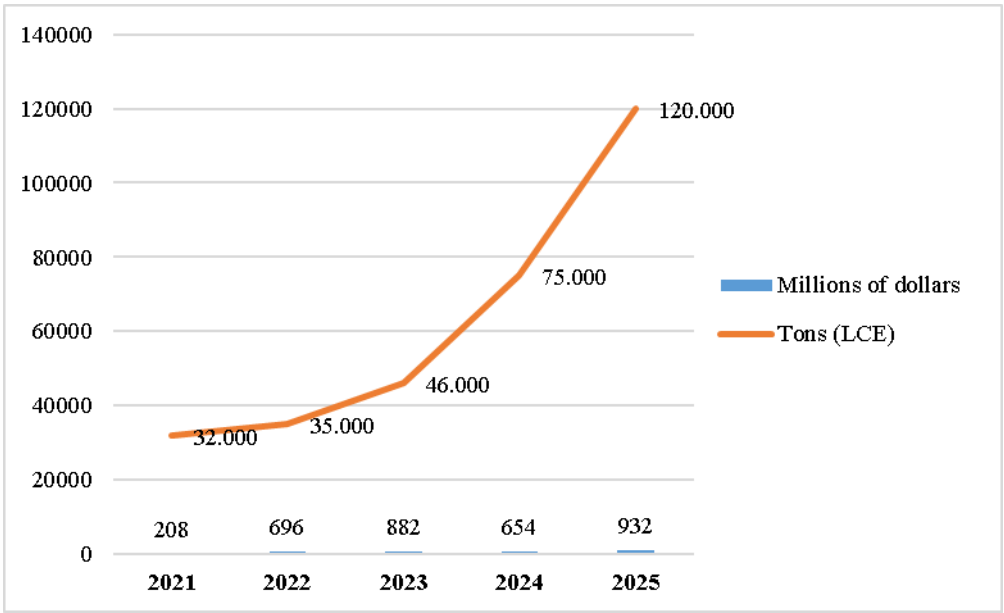
Trade dynamics and value-chain insertion: contribution to the economy and national development

All mining projects pay taxes, royalties and fees based on their production. Each company contributes to national income tax, VAT and export duties, as well as provincial taxes and royalties. These are capped at 3% at the mine mouth, i.e. on the value of the brine paid when the company sells the raw material (Ministerio de Economía, 2024). Mining

contributes to the country's revenue; however, lithium is exported as a commodity at a very low price and returns in the form of manufactured goods, meaning that the way it is mined does not generate the foreign exchange it could. (Corfield & Delbuono, 2024)

The lithium trade is based on private and confidential agreements; prices are not quoted on public exchanges, although there are international market benchmarks such as Fastmarkets. This, combined with the country's macroeconomic instability and exchange rate volatility, has led companies to declare lower export volumes or lower prices. For example, the companies Allkem and Livent were reported for under-invoicing in order to pay less tax. Livent paid a fine of over 5 billion pesos in 2023 for declaring exports at up to five times below market value. Meanwhile, the former Federal Public Revenue Administration[5] reported Galaxy Lithium (which merged with Orocobre to form Allkem) for simple and aggravated tax evasion during 2018 and 2019, estimating a fraud of around 200 million pesos. The Latin American Chamber of Lithium monitored the prices declared by both companies, noting that these do not reflect the true market value of lithium, which highlights the lack of state controls (Litio en Argentina, 2024). As for lithium carbonate exports, they accounted for just over 1% of the country's total exports, making it just another resource, as primary agricultural products dominate (Instituto Nacional de Estadística y Censos [INDEC], 2026). However, since 2021, they have risen significantly, from US$207 million to US$932 million in 2025 (Rajzman & DÁngelo, 2025; INDEC, 2026).

Figure 3. Argentine lithium exports



Source: Author's own elaboration based on INDEC data (2026)

[5] In 2024, the national government ordered its dissolution and the creation of the Customs Collection and Control Agency. https://www.afip.gob.ar/institucional/arca/arca.asp

Average export prices for lithium carbonate fell by 56% year-on-year: to US$40,000 per tonne in 2023 and averaging US$12,405 per tonne in 2024 due to a decline in EV sales and a lithium market glut, highlighting the market's high volatility (Secretaría de Minería, 2025a). However, Argentina's strong competitiveness is worth noting: in Catamarca, Jujuy and Salta, lithium is the main mineral export (50,2%) (Ministerio de Economía, 2026).

Exports are concentrated in a few countries: China, South Korea, Japan and the US, with all lithium fine chemicals being produced in the three Asian countries. China -the world leading producer of batteries and EVs- is the top trading partner, with a market share that has been growing, with a sharp rise in 2024. Japan's share declined, with a sharp drop in 2024, whilst both South Korea and the United States saw no significant change in their market share. Furthermore, in 2024, Germany emerges with a 3.8% share.

Table 1. Percentage share of the main export destinations

	2021	2022	2023	2024
China	42,29 %	41,59 %	43 %	67,6%.
Japan	16,49 %	30,72 %	25 %	4,1%
USA	19,12 %	8,84 %	11 %	13,7%
South Korea	7,41 %	12,84 %	11 %	11 %

Finally, it is worth highlighting the initiative by Y-TEC (YPF Tecnología), in partnership with the National University of La Plata and the National Scientific and Technical Research Council (CONICET), which established the UniLiB iron, phosphate and lithium battery production plant, with the aim of promoting research and development into active materials, their industrialisation and the manufacture of lithium-ion cells (CONICET, 2023). Although it represents the first link in the lithium value chain, it is currently operating at an experimental pilot stage.

From a geo-economic perspective, the national government and the provinces are seeking to position lithium as a strategic resource, but the tax and royalty framework reveals persistent tensions between the market and the state. Exports with low value added, combined with corporate practices such as under-invoicing and limited controls, weaken state capacity for regulation and rent capture, reduce foreign exchange earnings and generate tax losses. Although lithium has gained prominence, its share of exports is in its first phase of expansion and is subject to high price volatility and market concentration, which exacerbates external vulnerability. Although progress in value chain integration is still in its early stages, international integration remains limited. This demonstrates that increased external integration does not necessarily translate into enhanced state autonomy or sustained development. The sector expands Argentina's participation in critical mineral markets without substantially altering the structural conditions that reproduce dependence on commodity exports and externally controlled value chains.

At local level

The federal system allows sub-national governments to introduce variations in taxation, including differences in royalties and export duties, amongst other measures. This implies a decentralised approach to lithium management, which hinders the development of a unified vision and policy for the sector's expansion in Argentina and amongst the countries that make up the Triangle (Freytes, Obaya & Delbuono, 2022).

As lithium projects are in provinces with relatively low levels of development and poorly diversified economies, their extraction can have a significant impact. For example, mining has accounted for an important share of provincial GDP: in 2022, it represented 8.7% in Jujuy, 8.3% in Catamarca and 2.6% in Salta (Corfield & Delbuono, 2024). However, provincial governments have prioritised investment projects over an agenda for productive transformation, which ultimately undermines local development (Freytes, 2024).

In general, the three provinces allocate part of the revenue to supporting the municipalities or districts where the deposits are located and to investments in infrastructure related to the activity, whilst the remaining revenue is used for general expenditure. Each province has sought to promote specific objectives regarding royalties: Jujuy created additional incentives for the processing of minerals within the province; Salta sought to strengthen provincial oversight and revenue collection vis-à-vis the municipalities; and Catamarca sought to improve provincial tax revenue by establishing reference prices and tariffs. (Freytes, Obaya & Delbuono, 2022).

One tool used to promote productive development is the Local Procurement Policy (LPP), which involves making access to natural resources or the renewal of concessions conditional upon compliance with regulations governing the hiring of workers or the procurement of goods and services within the project's area of influence. The aim is to promote the creation of local productive links and prevent mining projects from becoming enclaves. Salta and Catamarca have established minimum requirements for the participation of local suppliers and workers of around 70–80%. Jujuy has no formal regulations, although it does have informal mechanisms, such as periodic requests for information and the participation of JEMSE in the share capital of projects. (Freytes, Obaya & Delbuono, 2022).

Mining projects take between three and five years to build and generate industrial activity for at least 30 years. A single project can engage around 800 SMEs during the construction phase and retain around 600 throughout its operational life. Most of these are Argentine suppliers, employing local labour (Cámara Argentina de Empresas Mineras [CAEM], 2024). The creation of direct and indirect jobs boosts regional economic activity, spanning sectors such as hospitality, construction, retail and professional services. It involves transport operators, drilling rig operators, catering services, geologists, engineers, lawyers, welders and machine operators. Furthermore, wages within the sector are the highest, and the demand for technical professionals is on the rise (Trinca, 2025).

Between 2022 and 2023, jobs in the lithium mining sector grew at an annual rate of 50%. In September 2023, 4,600 formal direct jobs were created, with 90% of lithium-related employment concentrated in the provinces under study (CAEM, 2024). As regards the skill level of the workforce, 74% of the jobs created are at a medium level, 25% at

a high level and 1% at a low level. (Centro de Economía Internacional, 2024). However, Obaya and Kramarz (2026) argue that lithium mining does not generate the same economic and development benefits as other extractive activities, such as hydrocarbons. Lithium extraction is a chemical process that does not require large numbers of workers or complex technological inputs. This limits the industry's ability to drive the development of other sectors within the local economy.

In October 2024, the Regional Lithium Committee agreed to boost local trade in order to strengthen the regional economy and the lithium value chain. An agreement was signed to prioritise the use of local suppliers, establishing the following order of priority: first local suppliers from each province, then those from the mining region, and finally national suppliers. The aim is to harmonise regulations and facilitate access to supplier registers across provinces, whilst promoting private sector participation in working groups. Furthermore, the importance of energy, road and rail infrastructure projects in the region was emphasised, as these represent the greatest challenge to the effective use of resources. (Las provincias productoras de litio, 2024). This agreement highlights an effort to overcome fragmentation and promote joint economic development, in line with the sector's economic positioning strategy, although structural challenges remain.

Extraction and processing in salt flats entail risks such as water imbalance, impacts on biodiversity, the displacement of indigenous communities, and adverse effects on other sectors that rely on the same resources. To ensure sustainability, it is essential to implement regulations that set out what is permitted, how it should be done, and the consequences of non-compliance. These regulations include state laws and private standards, such as the Initiative for Responsible Mining Assurance (IRMA)[6], used to certify the Fénix project in Catamarca. Both IRMA and local public regulations require environmental impact assessments and public participation, but IRMA demands a more intensive level of involvement. The key difference lies in prior, free and informed consultation (PFIC) with indigenous peoples: the regulations require consultation, whilst IRMA requires their consent, detailing procedures and consequences – an area where local legislation has a significant legal loophole (Allan, 2024).

In practice, the decentralisation of decision-making gives rise to a few local territorial tensions. One example is water consumption in the areas surrounding lithium deposits, where water is lost through evaporation. Vera & Lacabana (2022) studied rainfall in the areas corresponding to lithium mining operations and indicate that, of the 18 sites surveyed, all have a maximum of 50 mm/year, except for Pozuelos, which has an annual average of 370 mm. This implies intensive use of limited water resources for a predominantly rural and vulnerable population, as their main activity is extensive agriculture and livestock farming. Furthermore, the Wetlands Act is still awaiting approval; this is key to lithium mining as it seeks to protect salt flat ecosystems; without it, investment is being held back due to fears of a provincial legal setback (Penelli, 2025). This reflects the complexities of sustainable mining.

Fiscal decentralisation highlights a fragmented approach to mining governance, which hinders the development of a coherent national strategy for lithium development.

[6] It emerged from a partnership between businesses, NGOs, communities, trade unions and financial institutions, and assesses environmental, social and corporate responsibility through external audits, assigning a score that reflects performance.

International integration materialises unevenly, as local economies become directly embedded in global extractive networks without sufficient mechanisms to ensure productive upgrading or long-term regional development. In provinces with poorly diversified economies, the sector takes on greater importance, but its focus on attracting investment merely perpetuates historical patterns of dependency and vulnerability. Although mining accounts for a significant share of provincial GDP and efforts are being made to reinvest revenues to avoid creating economic enclaves, the structural impact is limited. The sector does not generate mass employment, though it does create well-paid and technically skilled jobs, which reinforces the need for training policies and local productive integration.

At the same time, the region faces significant socio-environmental risks. The extractive model exacerbates territorial tensions, and sustainability requires strengthening regulatory frameworks and public participation to balance economic development with environmental justice. This highlights the interrelationship between the productive structure, state policies, and the social and environmental challenges posed by extractivism.

Final Remarks

An analysis of Argentina's lithium policy shows that the country's involvement in the geo-economic competition associated with the energy transition is structured, predominantly, around the reproduction of a primary-export-oriented extractivist model. Despite the strategic importance lithium has acquired in the global context of decarbonisation, the way in which its exploitation is organised within Argentina shows significant continuities with historical patterns of specialisation based on static comparative advantages, low value added and high dependence on transnational capital. In this sense, lithium is becoming established more as a commodity than as an effective driver of productive transformation and the strengthening of economic autonomy.

From a geo-economic perspective, Argentina's lithium policy reveals a fundamental tension between the need to attract investment and ensure macroeconomic predictability, and the state's inability to strategically guide the sector in line with long-term development objectives. The current regulatory framework favours the inflow of foreign capital and the rapid expansion of projects, but limits the state's capacity for rent capture, effective regulation and the coordination of downstream production chains. The decentralisation resulting from mining federalism exacerbates this dynamic, fragmenting the governance of the resource and expanding the room for manoeuvre of external actors, who negotiate directly with the provinces under heterogeneous regulatory conditions.

The study of the Argentine case confirms that lithium, despite its sustained growth and symbolic importance on the development agenda, has so far made only a marginal contribution in terms of foreign exchange earnings, productive diversification and redistributive impact. The volatility of international prices, the concentration of export destinations and under-invoicing practices reinforce external vulnerability and reduce the state's scope for economic autonomy. At the same time, nascent industrialisation efforts -such as pilot projects in the battery sector- remain insufficient to bring about a structural shift in Argentina's position within global lithium value chains. The country's lithium policy

illustrates a mode of international integration that privileges rapid incorporation into global markets over strategic coordination, reinforcing historical patterns of dependency and constraining the country's capacity to climb the value chain.

At the territorial level, the expansion of the lithium industry replicates the classic paradoxes of extractivism in relatively underdeveloped regions. Whilst it generates well-paid formal employment and boosts certain local economies, its spillover effects are limited and fail to offset the socio-environmental risks associated with the intensive use of water resources, pressure on fragile ecosystems, and tensions with indigenous communities. The weakness of mechanisms for consultation, participation and environmental oversight highlights a significant gap between the rhetoric of sustainable development and the actual practices of resource governance.

From this perspective, geoeconomics helps explain the limits of the extractive model while identifying ways to overcome them. Treating lithium as a strategic asset rather than simply an export commodity can promote technology transfer, joint industrial projects and greater value creation along the production chain. Achieving this requires coordination across levels of government, linking resource access to industrialisation commitments, and adopting negotiation strategies that secure greater economic and technological gains. In this way, a geoeconomic approach could reduce dependence on primary extraction and support a more autonomous and diversified international integration.

In short, lithium represents a strategic opportunity for Argentina, one that is shaped by the institutional framework, the current development model and the power structure of the global political economy. Without a redefinition of the state's role that allows for the coordination of industrial policies, technological capabilities, interprovincial coordination and a less subordinate international integration, lithium runs the risk of becoming a new developmentalist illusion that reinforces, rather than challenges, the historical logic of dependency. The challenge ahead is not to produce more lithium, but to decide for what purpose, for whom, and under what national vision its exploitation is organised within the framework of the global energy transition.

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GESTÃO DA SEGURANÇA HÍDRICA EM LISBOA: TICS, GOVERNANÇA 4.0 E PARADIPLOMACIA ACADÊMICA BRASIL–PORTUGAL

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Resumo

A segurança hídrica consolidou-se como eixo central das agendas de Relações Internacionais, articulando digitalização, governança multinível e cooperação transnacional. Este artigo analisa a gestão da segurança hídrica em Lisboa a partir do estágio BEPE (Bolsa de Estágio de Pesquisa no Exterior – FAPESP), realizado no Observatório de Relações Exteriores, OBSERVARE da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa (UAL) entre janeiro e fevereiro de 2026, interpretando-o simultaneamente como estudo de caso empírico e como exercício de paradiplomacia acadêmica entre Brasil e Portugal. Metodologicamente, a pesquisa é

qualitativa e exploratória, apoiada em cinco entrevistas semiestruturadas com especialistas portugueses e internacionais, visitas técnicas à Fábrica de Água de Alcântara e à ETA de Vale da Pedra, análise documental e tratamento lexicográfico do corpus com o software Iramuteq, em diálogo com a lógica do Delphi discursivo. Os resultados mostram que Lisboa dispõe de um portfólio tecnológico robusto, telemetria, IoT, telegestão, sistemas de apoio à decisão e plataformas como o B-WaterSmart, sustentado por empresas públicas profissionalizadas, planejamento orientado a metas (backcasting) e estratégias de economia circular da água. Contudo, os próprios especialistas indicam que o principal obstáculo à Water Governance 4.0 não é tecnológico, mas institucional, cultural e de capacitação humana. O artigo argumenta que o estágio internacional funcionou como nó de uma rede paradiplomática Brasil–Portugal, reduzindo assimetrias de informação, construindo confiança epistêmica e produzindo conhecimento comparado passível de adaptação às bacias dos rios Piracicaba, Capivari e Jundiaí (PCJ). Conclui-se propondo uma agenda de pesquisa paradiplomática para a segurança hídrica, situada na interseção entre tecnologia, instituições e cooperação científica Sul–Norte.

Palavras-Chave

Segurança hídrica; Governança da água 4.0; Tecnologias da Informação e Comunicação; Paradiplomacia acadêmica; Cooperação Brasil–Portugal.

Abstract

Water security has become a central axis of the International Relations agenda, articulating digitalisation, multilevel governance and transnational cooperation. This article analyses water security management in Lisbon based on a BEPE research internship (FAPESP grant 2025/05994-1) carried out at the Observatory of Foreign Relations (OBSERVARE) of the Autonomous University of Lisbon (UAL) between January and February 2026, read simultaneously as an empirical case study and as an exercise in academic paradiplomacy between Brazil and Portugal. Methodologically, the research is qualitative and exploratory, drawing on five semi-structured interviews with Portuguese and international specialists, technical visits to the Alcântara Water Factory and the Vale da Pedra Water Treatment Plant, documentary analysis and lexicographic processing of the corpus with Iramuteq software, informed by the logic of the discursive Delphi. The findings show that Lisbon holds a robust technological portfolio, telemetry, IoT, remote management, decision-support systems and platforms such as B-WaterSmart, sustained by professionalised public utilities, goal-oriented (backcasting) planning and water circular-economy strategies. Yet the specialists themselves indicate that the main obstacle to Water Governance 4.0 is not technological but institutional, cultural and related to human capacity. The article argues that the international internship functioned as a node in a Brazil–Portugal paradiplomatic network, reducing information asymmetries, building epistemic trust and producing comparative knowledge adaptable to the Piracicaba, Capivari and Jundiaí (PCJ) river basins. It concludes by proposing a paradiplomatic research agenda for water security, situated at the intersection of technology, institutions and South–North scientific cooperation.

Keywords

Water security; Water governance 4.0; Information and Communication Technologies; Academic paradiplomacy; Brazil–Portugal cooperation..

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GESTÃO DA SEGURANÇA HÍDRICA EM LISBOA: TICS, GOVERNANÇA 4.0 E PARADIPLOMACIA ACADÊMICA BRASIL–PORTUGAL[1]

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Introdução

A segurança hídrica consolidou-se, nas últimas décadas, como um dos eixos centrais das agendas global e regional de Relações Internacionais, seja como fator de risco e potencial conflito, seja como vetor de cooperação entre Estados e atores subnacionais. A combinação entre mudanças climáticas, urbanização acelerada, intensificação do consumo e degradação de ecossistemas tem ampliado a frequência e a severidade de eventos hidrológicos extremos, colocando em tensão a capacidade de garantir água em quantidade e qualidade adequadas para populações, economias e ecossistemas. Nesse contexto, a segurança hídrica deixa de ser apenas um tema setorial de gestão de recursos naturais e passa a ser entendida como questão transnacional crítica, que atravessa fronteiras políticas e demanda arranjos inovadores de governança multinível e instrumentos de cooperação internacional capazes de articular conhecimento técnico, capacidade institucional e vontade política.

Em paralelo, observa-se uma inflexão digital na gestão da água, frequentemente enquadrada sob o rótulo de Water Governance 4.0, marcada pelo uso crescente de Tecnologias de Informação e Comunicação (TICs), sensoriamento remoto, Internet das Coisas (IoT), telemetria avançada, big data, inteligência artificial, sistemas de apoio à decisão, gêmeos digitais e plataformas geoespaciais. Esses recursos já se encontram tecnicamente maduros, permitindo monitorar sistemas de abastecimento e bacias hidrográficas com elevada resolução espacial e temporal, detectar anomalias

[1] À Universidade Autônoma de Lisboa pelo acolhimento da equipe de bolsistas BEPE e à Fundação de Amparo à Pesquisa do Estado de São Paulo (FAPESP), Brasil, pelo financiamento da pesquisa.

precocemente e qualificar o planejamento de longo prazo. Contudo, a mera disponibilidade dessas tecnologias não se traduz automaticamente em incorporação às rotinas de governança: persiste uma "lacuna de implementação", em que os ganhos potenciais da digitalização são limitados por restrições institucionais, culturais, regulatórias e financeiras.

É nesse cruzamento entre segurança hídrica, transformação digital e governança multinível que se insere este artigo, tomando a cidade de Lisboa como estudo de caso. A capital portuguesa constitui um laboratório relevante para observar como empresas públicas, agências reguladoras e órgãos estatais combinam infraestrutura física, TICs e arranjos institucionais para enfrentar desafios de escassez, qualidade da água, perdas em redes e transição para modelos de economia circular. Entrevistas com especialistas do setor hídrico português, pesquisadores, gestores da EPAL (Empresa Portuguesa das Águas Livres) e da AdP (Águas de Portugal), além de pesquisadoras internacionais, somadas a visitas técnicas à Fábrica de Água de Alcântara (Águas do Tejo Atlântico) e à ETA de Vale da Pedra evidenciam um ecossistema tecnológico robusto, ancorado em telemetria, IoT, telegestão, plataformas de análise de dados (Billmeter, Waterbeep, Wone, B-WaterSmart) e monitorização em tempo real.

Ao mesmo tempo, a experiência em Lisboa confirma que os principais desafios da segurança hídrica não são apenas tecnológicos, mas também institucionais e culturais. Os especialistas destacam a importância de investimentos contínuos em infraestrutura, capacitação de profissionais, participação social e educação ambiental, bem como estratégias de planejamento que migram de projeções históricas (forecast) para abordagens orientadas por metas futuras (backcasting), integrando mitigação e adaptação climática. Lisboa oferece, nesse sentido, lições relevantes para contextos como o brasileiro, em que bacias hidrográficas complexas, como as dos rios Piracicaba, Capivari e Jundiaí (PCJ), procuram alinhar modernização tecnológica e capacidade institucional de uso efetivo da informação.

Para além da dimensão técnica, este artigo interpreta o próprio processo de pesquisa que o fundamenta como exercício de paradiplomacia acadêmica. O estágio BEPE (FAPESP 2025/05994-1), realizado no OBSERVARE da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa entre janeiro e fevereiro de 2026, exemplifica como universidades, grupos de pesquisa e especialistas atuam como atores subnacionais no campo das Relações Internacionais, engajando-se em cooperação científica, intercâmbio metodológico e construção de redes transnacionais de conhecimento. A interação entre a PUC-Campinas, a Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa e instituições do setor hídrico português (EPAL, Águas do Tejo Atlântico, AdP, APA, entre outras) configura uma rede Brasil–Portugal que opera fora dos canais diplomáticos tradicionais, mas que contribui diretamente para a governança global da água ao produzir diagnósticos comparados e identificar oportunidades de colaboração.

A relação Brasil–Portugal apresenta condições particularmente favoráveis para esse diálogo paradiplomático, combinando laços históricos, culturais e linguísticos com desafios ambientais comuns, ainda que situados em contextos institucionais distintos. Portugal dispõe de um arcabouço regulatório consolidado e de empresas públicas com elevada capacidade técnica, investindo em digitalização, economia circular e reutilização da água. O Brasil, por sua vez, enfrenta assimetrias regionais marcantes em acesso a

serviços de água e esgoto e altos índices de perdas, mas conta com marcos legais avançados em recursos hídricos e comunidades epistêmicas ativas na interface entre governança e inovação tecnológica. A aproximação entre esses contextos, por meio de redes acadêmicas e visitas técnicas, faz emergir um espaço privilegiado para a diplomacia científica e para a paradiplomacia hídrica.

A partir dessa perspectiva, este artigo tem como problema central a seguinte questão: de que forma as TICs e os modelos de governança hídrica observados em Lisboa podem informar estratégias de segurança hídrica e cooperação internacional no eixo Brasil–Portugal? Especificamente, busca-se: (i) caracterizar o uso de TICs na gestão da água em Lisboa e suas contribuições para a segurança hídrica e a economia circular; (ii) analisar as percepções de especialistas portugueses e internacionais sobre desafios e limites da digitalização do setor hídrico; (iii) interpretar o estágio BEPE como processo de paradiplomacia acadêmica; e (iv) discutir quais tecnologias, práticas e arranjos de governança são mais promissores para adaptação a realidades brasileiras, considerando a lacuna de implementação identificada na literatura sobre Water Governance 4.0.

O artigo está organizado em quatro seções, além desta introdução. A primeira apresenta a revisão de literatura e o quadro teórico, articulando segurança hídrica, paradiplomacia e diplomacia científica à agenda de Water Governance 4.0. A segunda descreve a metodologia qualitativa adotada. A terceira apresenta e discute os resultados empíricos. A quarta discute esses achados à luz da paradiplomacia hídrica e do diálogo Brasil–Portugal. Por fim, a conclusão sintetiza as contribuições do estudo e propõe uma agenda de pesquisa paradiplomática voltada à segurança hídrica em contextos de cooperação Sul–Norte.

Revisão da Literatura e Quadro Teórico

Segurança hídrica e Relações Internacionais

A literatura recente amplia o conceito de segurança hídrica para além da disponibilidade física de água, enfatizando suas dimensões política, econômica e social em escala global. Documentos como o relatório da UN-Water (2013) e as contribuições de Van Beek e Arriens (2014) definem segurança hídrica como a capacidade de assegurar acesso confiável à água em quantidade e qualidade adequadas para populações, ecossistemas e atividades econômicas, ao mesmo tempo em que se gerem riscos associados a eventos extremos, conflitos de uso e degradação ambiental. Nessa perspectiva, segurança hídrica é inseparável da governança, envolvendo mecanismos de coordenação, regulação, participação e responsabilização.

No campo das Relações Internacionais, a água é crescentemente tratada como recurso estratégico capaz tanto de acirrar tensões quanto de catalisar cooperação. Estudos sobre governança ambiental global e regimes internacionais apontam que a gestão de recursos hídricos transfronteiriços e a adaptação às mudanças climáticas colocam a água no centro das agendas de segurança e desenvolvimento (Assubayeva et al., 2025; Romero-Lankao & Gnatz, 2016), deslocando a ênfase de uma visão estritamente estatal para uma concepção multinível, em que atores locais, regionais e transnacionais compartilham responsabilidades. A literatura de governança adaptativa reforça que a busca pela

segurança hídrica é processo dinâmico, marcado por incerteza e necessidade de aprendizagem contínua (Marçal et al., 2021; Pollard et al., 2023; Hjorth & Madani, 2023): decisões deixam de se apoiar apenas em infraestrutura física e passam a depender de fluxos de informação, monitorização e instrumentos de participação, é nesse ponto que as TICs, sintetizadas na agenda de Water Governance 4.0, tornam-se infraestrutura central de conhecimento para a governança em escala local, nacional e transnacional.

Lisboa representa, nesse enquadramento, um caso relevante: trata-se de um centro urbano inserido num país que já enfrenta episódios de estresse hídrico em regiões como o Algarve e o Alentejo e que, ao mesmo tempo, construiu arranjos de governança e infraestrutura tecnológica avançados. Essa combinação de vulnerabilidade climática, capacidade institucional e uso intensivo de TICs torna a cidade um observatório privilegiado para refletir sobre a segurança hídrica como questão de Relações Internacionais, com potencial de aprendizado para contextos como o brasileiro.

Paradiplomacia e atores subnacionais na governança da água

A expansão da agenda hídrica nas Relações Internacionais tem sido acompanhada por crescente atenção à paradiplomacia, a atuação internacional de atores subnacionais (governos locais, universidades, empresas públicas, organizações da sociedade civil) que constroem, por iniciativa própria ou em redes, agendas de cooperação e troca de conhecimento. Segundo Miguel Santos Neves (*apud* Curto, Moita, Brito, Quintas, Galito, 2014, p. 118), a paradiplomacia evidencia que a ação externa tende a se tornar um processo cada vez mais multidimensional, no qual atores públicos, privados e do terceiro setor precisam articular suas diferentes competências no âmbito de parcerias duradouras, sendo as redes de conhecimento entre governos, empresas, ONGs, universidades e sindicatos condição indispensável para garantir uma ação externa eficaz, tanto na implementação quanto no planejamento.

De acordo com Fróio (2015), as universidades têm um papel a cumprir no processo paradiplomático, pois são entidades que promovem e difundem o conhecimento. Os professores e pesquisadores têm capacidade de interferir no ambiente paradiplomático e realizar atividades que fomentem a relação entre gestores públicos e universidade. Para Jesus et al. (2024), a diplomacia universitária promove inclusão e troca de conhecimentos, complementando a diplomacia oficial.

No campo da água, essa atuação se expressa em consórcios de cidades, redes de empresas de saneamento e programas de cooperação técnico-científica. A literatura de governança multinível destaca que, em temas hídricos, as soluções são frequentemente co-construídas em arenas que extrapolam a diplomacia interestatal, envolvendo comunidades epistêmicas e instituições de pesquisa (Butsch et al., 2022; Krueger et al., 2025), que operam como nós dessas redes, mediando fluxos de informação e articulando parcerias entre contextos com capacidades distintas.

O estágio BEPE na Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, descrito no relatório científico (Andrade, 2026, pp. 2-7, 21-27), pode ser interpretado exatamente sob essa chave: pesquisadoras brasileiras inserem-se em redes lusófonas de gestão da água, estabelecem contatos com empresas públicas (EPAL, Águas do Tejo Atlântico, AdP),

órgãos reguladores (APA) e pesquisadores internacionais, produzindo conhecimento comparado sobre segurança hídrica e digitalização. As entrevistas e visitas técnicas constituem, simultaneamente, fontes de dados e dispositivos de construção de confiança e cooperação futura. Essa perspectiva permite compreender a relação Brasil–Portugal não apenas como vínculo histórico-linguístico, mas como espaço de circulação de modelos de governança, tecnologias e práticas de gestão da água, em que o conhecimento técnico-científico se torna ativo diplomático e instrumento de cooperação.

TICs, Water Governance 4.0 e diplomacia científica

A chamada "virada digital" na gestão da água vem sendo sistematizada sob o rótulo de Water 4.0, que abrange sensoriamento remoto por satélite, redes de sensores (IoT/WSN) de baixo custo, big data, inteligência artificial, sistemas de informação geográfica (SIG), gêmeos digitais e visualizações interativas (Saldanha et al., 2021; Harshadeep & Young, 2020; Yang et al., 2024). A literatura evidencia que o principal gargalo não é a disponibilidade tecnológica, mas a "implementation/usability gap", a dificuldade de alinhar ferramentas sofisticadas com capacidades institucionais e com culturas organizacionais (Haider et al., 2024; Manny, 2022).

Metodologicamente, esse debate dialoga com propostas de Delphi discursivo (Silva et al., 2022), nas quais o julgamento de especialistas é tratado como texto e o consenso é medido em termos de estabilidade lexical e convergência temática, analisadas com apoio de softwares de análise lexical como o Iramuteq, abordagem que enfatiza que compreender como os especialistas falam sobre TICs é tão importante quanto quantificar sua avaliação técnica, e que orienta metodologicamente o presente estudo. No Relatório BEPE (Andrade, 2026, pp. 7-21), os especialistas entrevistados em Lisboa apontam, entre as tecnologias mais relevantes, telemetria, IoT, sistemas de monitoramento em tempo real, sistemas de apoio à decisão e soluções específicas como Billmeter, Waterbeep, Wone e a plataforma europeia B-WaterSmart, interpretadas como suporte central para reduzir perdas, otimizar o tratamento e promover a economia circular. Ao mesmo tempo, os depoimentos confirmam a tese da lacuna de implementação: os desafios mais citados envolvem capacidade de manutenção, integração com sistemas legados, qualificação de pessoal e aceitação social da reutilização de água, e não apenas custo de aquisição. Nesse cenário, redes de pesquisa, projetos bilaterais e estágios internacionais tornam-se canais de diplomacia científica para transferência de conhecimento e adaptação de soluções digitais entre contextos distintos, do qual o BEPE é exemplo concreto.

Relação Brasil–Portugal na gestão ambiental e de recursos hídricos

Brasil e Portugal compartilham vínculos históricos, culturais e linguísticos que facilitam o diálogo ambiental, mas ocupam posições distintas na geopolítica da água. Portugal, inserido na União Europeia, opera sob marcos regulatórios comunitários rigorosos, com ênfase em qualidade, eficiência e economia circular, além de empresas públicas consolidadas. O Brasil dispõe de um dos arcabouços legais mais avançados em recursos hídricos da América Latina, incluindo a Política Nacional de Recursos Hídricos e a gestão

por bacias, mas enfrenta assimetrias regionais e desafios de implementação, sobretudo em bacias sob forte pressão, como as PCJ. A literatura aponta que relações de cooperação Sul–Norte podem reduzir assimetrias de capacidade, desde que pautadas por coprodução de conhecimento e não por mera transferência unidirecional de modelos (Flores, 2017; Doeffinger et al., 2020), condição favorecida, no caso Brasil–Portugal, pelo idioma comum e por redes acadêmicas consolidadas.

O Relatório BEPE explicita como essa relação se materializa: a partir de projeto FAPESP voltado às bacias PCJ, a equipe de pesquisa estabelece um circuito de atividades em Lisboa, reuniões acadêmicas, entrevistas com gestores, visitas técnicas a infraestruturas de referência e análise de documentos institucionais europeus (Andrade, 2026, pp. 21-27). Esse percurso permite observar não apenas tecnologias específicas, mas modelos de governança, estratégias de planejamento (como o backcasting) e abordagens de economia circular adotadas em Portugal, reforçando que o diálogo Brasil–Portugal, em termos de paradiplomacia e diplomacia científica (Froio, 2015 e Jesus et al., 2024), é menos sobre copiar arranjos portugueses e mais sobre identificar, por meio de redes acadêmicas, quais elementos podem ser adaptados às realidades brasileiras.

Metodologia da Pesquisa Paradiplomática

Natureza, abordagem e desenho do estudo

A pesquisa caracteriza-se como qualitativa, exploratória e descritiva, estruturada como estudo de caso em paradiplomacia acadêmica. O caso empírico é a gestão da segurança hídrica na área de Lisboa, analisada a partir do estágio BEPE (FAPESP 2025/05994-1) no OBSERVARE da Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, entre janeiro e fevereiro de 2026, em articulação com o projeto brasileiro sobre segurança hídrica nas bacias PCJ. Do ponto de vista epistemológico, o estudo dialoga com abordagens de governança multinível e Water Governance 4.0 e, metodologicamente, inspira-se em desenhos Delphi discursivos: embora não se trate de um Delphi formal em múltiplas rondas, adota-se a lógica de elicitar julgamentos de especialistas, tratá-los como texto e explorá-los por meio de análise temática e lexicográfica, privilegiando a dimensão discursiva da avaliação sobre TICs e modelos de governança (Silva et al., 2022).

O estágio internacional como atividade paradiplomática

O estágio BEPE constitui atividade de paradiplomacia acadêmica que viabiliza a inserção de uma equipe de pesquisadores brasileiros em redes lusófonas de governança hídrica, tendo como eixo institucional a cooperação entre PUC-Campinas e a Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, complementada pelo projeto FAPESP nas bacias PCJ. Concretamente, o estágio envolveu (Andrade, 2026, pp. 2-7, 21-27): acolhimento institucional no OBSERVARE da UAL; estabelecimento de contatos com empresas públicas de água e órgãos reguladores (EPAL, Águas do Tejo Atlântico, AdP, APA); articulação com pesquisadores internacionais atuantes em sustentabilidade e recursos hídricos; e participação em palestras e encontros acadêmicos, reforçando a dimensão de diplomacia científica.

Seleção dos atores paradiplomáticos e especialistas

A definição do público-alvo seguiu critérios de relevância técnica, institucional e científica, buscando captar diferentes posições na rede de governança hídrica portuguesa (Andrade, 2026, pp. 3-6). Foram entrevistados cinco especialistas: um gestor ligado à AdP – Águas de Portugal, com experiência em políticas de água, saneamento e resíduos (Entr_05P); o diretor de comunicação e educação ambiental da EPAL, com atuação em governança e inovação (Entr_02P); um pesquisador da Universidade Lusófona especialista em sustentabilidade e economia circular (Entr_01P); uma pesquisadora da Universidade Del Pacífico (Peru), especialista em gestão da sustentabilidade em contextos de baixa infraestrutura (Entr_03P); e uma pesquisadora da ESCE-UNIPS, com atuação em sociologia e gestão de recursos humanos (Entr_04P). A amostra é intencional, do tipo "painel de excelência": todos os entrevistados possuem experiência consolidada em gestão hídrica, saneamento, sustentabilidade ou políticas públicas, assegurando densidade informativa e diversidade de perspectivas entre setor público, empresas e academia.

Coleta e análise de dados

A coleta de dados organizou-se em três eixos (Andrade, 2026, pp. 7-21): (i) cinco entrevistas semiestruturadas, presenciais ou on-line, gravadas com consentimento e integralmente transcritas, com roteiro estruturado em blocos temáticos — trajetória profissional, experiência em recursos hídricos, percepções sobre segurança hídrica, TICs conhecidas/empregadas, indicadores de monitoramento e perspectivas futuras; (ii) visitas técnicas à Fábrica de Água de Alcântara (Águas do Tejo Atlântico), com observação direta de tecnologias digitais e processos de reutilização, e à ETA de Vale da Pedra, sistema altamente automatizado de tratamento para abastecimento humano; e (iii) análise documental de relatórios de sustentabilidade e materiais técnicos das instituições visitadas, complementada por diário de campo e cronograma detalhado de atividades. Essa triangulação de fontes, entrevistas, observação direta e documentos, inscreve a coleta em uma rede internacional de atores, típica de processos de paradiplomacia e diplomacia científica.

A análise dos dados foi orientada por dois objetivos complementares: compreender, a partir do discurso dos especialistas, como se articulam TICs, governança e segurança hídrica em Lisboa; e identificar elementos passíveis de comparação e adaptação a contextos brasileiros. O procedimento seguiu quatro etapas (Andrade, 2026, pp. 14-18): transcrição e organização do corpus, com identificação de variáveis sociodemográficas e institucionais; codificação e categorização temática, guiada pelos blocos do roteiro e pela literatura sobre segurança hídrica e Water 4.0 (por exemplo, "segurança hídrica", "TICs e inovação", "reutilização e economia circular", "perdas e eficiência"); análise lexicográfica com apoio do software Iramuteq, empregando Classificação Hierárquica Descendente e análise de similitude para identificar "mundos lexicais" associados a esses temas; e, por fim, interpretação comparativa entre os achados de Lisboa e o contexto brasileiro das bacias PCJ, articulada ao quadro teórico de paradiplomacia e diplomacia científica. Em síntese, a metodologia reinterpreta dados de um estágio internacional

como base para um estudo de caso em Relações Internacionais e paradiplomacia hídrica, ancorado em entrevistas, observação de infraestruturas de referência e análise discursiva.

Análise dos Resultados: Inovação, Governança e Potencial de Cooperação

TICs em Lisboa como ativo estratégico

As entrevistas e visitas técnicas evidenciam um ecossistema tecnológico avançado aplicado à gestão da água em Lisboa, compreendido como ativo estratégico para a segurança hídrica e para a transição rumo à Water Governance 4.0. Os dados indicam a presença consolidada de telemetria e telegestão, monitoramento remoto e em tempo real de reservatórios, pressões, vazões e equipamentos, com centros de comando automatizados; IoT e sensores distribuídos, acompanhando esgotos, estações de tratamento e qualidade da água; sistemas de informação geográfica, para mapeamento e gestão de ativos; sistemas de apoio à decisão e ferramentas analíticas, como Billmeter, Waterbeep e Wone, usadas para identificar perdas e priorizar investimentos; e projetos integradores de dados e economia circular, em especial o B-WaterSmart, que articula soluções tecnológicas, governança e segurança hídrica (Andrade, 2026, pp. 10-14). As categorias discursivas "tecnologias e inovação" e "perdas e eficiência" aparecem fortemente associadas à inteligência artificial, big data, IoT, sensores e redução de desperdícios, indicando uma tendência de digitalização como resposta à necessidade de fortalecer o planejamento, o monitoramento e a eficiência operacional. As TICs em Lisboa não são apresentadas pelos especialistas como adereços tecnológicos, mas como infraestrutura crítica para reduzir perdas, estimadas em até 30% em determinados contextos, com experiências de redução para 8% mediante investimentos contínuos, pretende-se também garantir a rastreabilidade e a qualidade da água, apoiar decisões em tempo real e viabilizar o reuso e a economia circular.

Modelos de governança hídrica: lições de Lisboa

O desempenho de Lisboa em segurança hídrica e inovação tecnológica está intimamente ligado a modelos de governança que combinam gestão por bacias hidrográficas e integração institucional. Os entrevistados consideram fundamental a organização em torno da bacia do Tejo e a articulação entre diferentes níveis de governo para o planejamento hídrico (Andrade, 2026, pp. 18-21). Destacam-se ainda empresas públicas profissionalizadas e reguladas, como EPAL, Águas do Tejo Atlântico e AdP, cuja capacidade técnica e estabilidade institucional favorecem o planejamento de longo prazo e a adoção gradual de tecnologias. O planejamento orientado a metas futuras (backcasting), exemplificado pela Fábrica de Água de Alcântara, direciona investimentos para a sustentabilidade e a neutralidade carbônica. Ressalta-se também a articulação entre conhecimento tecnológico e experiência prática, evidenciando que a adoção de TICs depende igualmente da qualificação profissional. Para outros contextos, como o brasileiro, destacam-se a estabilidade regulatória, mandatos institucionais claros,

investimentos de longo prazo em TICs e a integração dos diferentes níveis de governança em torno da segurança hídrica.

Sustentabilidade, economia circular e reutilização da água

Um dos eixos mais fortes nos discursos e nas observações de campo é a associação entre segurança hídrica, sustentabilidade e economia circular, com termos recorrentes como reutilização, redução de desperdícios e reuso urbano e agrícola. Nas visitas técnicas, essa orientação é visível: na Fábrica de Água de Alcântara, a reconfiguração da ETAR como "fábrica de água" enfatiza reuso, valorização de subprodutos (biogás, lamas), eficiência energética e metas de aumento progressivo de reutilização até 2030, articuladas a neutralidade carbónica; na ETA de Vale da Pedra, observa-se elevado nível de automação e monitoramento em tempo real, com ênfase em uso eficiente de energia (Andrade, 2026, Anexo IV). As entrevistas indicam a reutilização de água tratada como alternativa estratégica para a agricultura, a limpeza urbana e a rega de espaços verdes. Os especialistas ressaltam, porém, que os principais obstáculos são culturais e políticos, sobretudo a resistência social ao uso de água reutilizada, exigindo educação ambiental, transparência e comunicação contínuas. Essa experiência converge com as agendas de economia circular e descarbonização e oferece referências aplicáveis ao contexto brasileiro, onde o reuso ainda é pouco explorado diante da crescente pressão hídrica.

O estágio como plataforma de conhecimento e rede paradiplomática

A análise dos resultados permite interpretar o estágio BEPE não apenas como atividade individual de pesquisa, mas como plataforma de construção de redes paradiplomáticas entre Brasil e Portugal. O cronograma de atividades e as interações registradas revelam articulação com múltiplos atores, reuniões com universidades (UAL, Universidade Lusófona, Instituto Politécnico de Setúbal), entrevistas com gestores e visitas mediadas por atores-chave; produção de resultados científicos em rede, com elaboração de artigos conjuntos sobre diplomacia da água e transferência tecnológica Norte–Sul; e integração dos dados portugueses ao projeto brasileiro, já que as cinco entrevistas e relatórios técnicos das visitas foram incorporados ao conjunto de vinte e oito entrevistas realizadas no Brasil, ampliando a base empírica para análises comparativas sobre governança, TICs e segurança hídrica nas bacias PCJ (Andrade, 2026, pp. 24-27). Sob a lente da paradiplomacia, essas interações configuram um circuito transnacional de produção de conhecimento em que universidades e empresas públicas de água atuam como atores internacionais, ainda que fora dos canais diplomáticos oficiais, gerando recomendações que podem retroalimentar políticas e futuras cooperações. Em síntese: os resultados mostram que Lisboa possui portfólio robusto de TICs sustentado por arranjos institucionais estáveis; a economia circular e o reuso são eixos estruturantes da estratégia hídrica portuguesa; a principal fronteira não é a invenção de tecnologias, mas sua adoção social e institucional; o estágio funcionou como nó de uma rede paradiplomática capaz de gerar conhecimento comparado.

Discussão: Paradiplomacia Hídrica e o Diálogo Brasil–Portugal

Pontes de conhecimento entre Lisboa e Brasil

Os resultados de Lisboa permitem reexaminar desafios de segurança hídrica nas bacias PCJ sob três eixos que funcionam como "pontes" tecnológicas e institucionais. O primeiro é o monitoramento em tempo real e a redução de perdas: telemetria avançada, telegestão, IoT e sistemas analíticos (Billmeter, Waterbeep, Wone) mostraram-se centrais para gerir redes de forma proativa em Lisboa e podem ser adaptados, nas PCJ, como componentes de estratégia incremental, iniciando por zonas piloto focadas em redução de perdas e qualidade de dados antes de escalonar para a bacia inteira. O segundo é o planejamento orientado a metas e a economia circular: a adoção de backcasting na Fábrica de Água de Alcântara oferece modelo que integra segurança hídrica, clima e economia circular, sugerindo que, no contexto brasileiro em que prevalece o planejamento reativo baseado em séries históricas, metas explícitas de reuso e eficiência energética podem reorganizar prioridades de investimento. O terceiro é a integração entre tecnologia e capacitação humana: o discurso recorrente em Lisboa de que a tecnologia depende de equipes qualificadas reforça, para as PCJ, que qualquer agenda de digitalização precisa vir acompanhada de formação contínua e mecanismos de retenção de conhecimento. Em conjunto, esses eixos delineiam uma agenda possível de adaptação tecnológica Brasil–Portugal: não replicar o portfólio lisboeta, mas selecionar combinações de TICs e práticas de governança que respondam a problemas concretos das bacias brasileiras, com atenção à capacidade institucional de sustentá-las.

O processo paradiplomático e suas contribuições

Interpretado como processo de paradiplomacia acadêmica o estágio BEPE apresenta quatro contribuições principais. Primeiro, reduz a assimetria de informação ao proporcionar acesso direto a conhecimentos tácitos sobre governança e operação, favorecendo diagnósticos mais realistas sobre sua transferibilidade. Segundo, fortalece a confiança e as redes epistêmicas, por meio de entrevistas, visitas técnicas e reuniões acadêmicas que favorecem a cooperação institucional. Terceiro, aprimora a metodologia, ao fortalecer abordagens qualitativas e lexicográficas inspiradas no Delphi discursivo e ampliar a capacidade comparativa pela integração de dados portugueses ao corpus brasileiro. Quarto, consolida os pesquisadores como mediadores entre diferentes sistemas de governança e comunidades epistêmicas, acumulando capital relacional para futuras iniciativas de paradiplomacia hídrica. Assim, a paradiplomacia acadêmica e a diplomacia científica (Froio, 2015 e Jesus et al., 2024), constituem práticas concretas de produção, circulação e cooperação em torno da gestão da água.4.3 Oportunidades para a cooperação bilateral

A partir dos achados, identificam-se oportunidades de aprofundamento da cooperação Brasil–Portugal em segurança hídrica: projetos-piloto de digitalização em sub-bacias das PCJ, com participação de empresas portuguesas e universidades lusófonas, focados em telemetria, IoT e ferramentas de gestão de perdas, em que Portugal aporta experiência consolidada de implementação e o Brasil oferece contextos desafiadores para testar soluções; parcerias em economia circular da água, aproveitando o know-how das

"fábricas de água" portuguesas e a necessidade brasileira de diversificar fontes hídricas em regiões sob estresse; redes de formação e capacitação, com programas conjuntos entre gestores brasileiros e centros portugueses (EPAL, Águas do Tejo Atlântico, AdP) e módulos de pós-graduação articulando PUC-Campinas, UAL e outras instituições; e desenvolvimento metodológico em governança 4.0, ampliando pesquisas comparativas que usem e refinem metodologias inspiradas em Delphi discursivo e análise lexicográfica em diferentes bacias. Essas oportunidades dependem, contudo, de mecanismos estáveis de financiamento e de marcos institucionais que deem previsibilidade a parcerias de médio e longo prazo.

Limitações do estudo e escopo da paradiplomacia

A discussão deve reconhecer limites do estudo e da própria paradiplomacia hídrica. Quanto ao estudo, a amostra intencional e relativamente pequena contempla atores estratégicos, mas não toda a diversidade do sistema hídrico português. Embora triangulada com observação e documentos, a análise baseia-se fortemente em discursos e narrativas, estando sujeita a viés de seleção. Além disso, a inspiração no Delphi discursivo não foi plenamente operacionalizada em múltiplas rodadas, limitando a comparação com estudos que aplicam o método em sua forma completa.

Quanto à paradiplomacia hídrica, as diferentes posições de Portugal e Brasil nas cadeias tecnológicas e financeiras podem gerar assimetrias, enquanto a dependência de atores, projetos e editais específicos pode comprometer a continuidade das iniciativas. Diferenças regulatórias, culturais e socioeconômicas também impedem a transferência direta de soluções portuguesas para o Brasil. A paradiplomacia, portanto, oferece canais de adaptação e cooperação, mas não elimina conflitos de interesse ou resistências internas. Esses limites não anulam seu potencial, mas delimitam sua atuação: favorecer a circulação qualificada de conhecimento e influenciar, de forma incremental, as trajetórias de governança da água nos dois países.

Conclusão

O estudo analisou a gestão da segurança hídrica em Lisboa a partir de duas chaves articuladas: a centralidade das TICs e da agenda Water Governance 4.0 na modernização da gestão da água; e o papel da paradiplomacia acadêmica e da diplomacia científica na construção de pontes de conhecimento entre Brasil e Portugal. Tomando como base o estágio BEPE na Universidade Autónoma de Lisboa, entrevistas com especialistas e visitas técnicas a infraestruturas de referência, buscou-se compreender como tecnologias, arranjos institucionais e redes transnacionais se combinam na produção de segurança hídrica em contexto urbano europeu, e que lições dessa experiência podem dialogar com realidades brasileiras, em especial nas bacias PCJ.

Do ponto de vista empírico, os resultados mostram que Lisboa dispõe de portfólio robusto de TICs, telemetria, telegestão, IoT, monitoramento em tempo real, SIG, sistemas de apoio à decisão e plataformas como o B-WaterSmart, que constitui infraestrutura crítica para reduzir perdas, assegurar qualidade da água e viabilizar economia circular. À

semelhança do que indica a literatura internacional sobre Water Governance 4.0, contudo, a principal fronteira não é tecnológica: os especialistas enfatizam limites institucionais, culturais e de capacidade humana como fatores decisivos na adoção e sustentabilidade dessas inovações. Em termos de governança, a experiência lisboeta evidencia a importância de marcos regulatórios estáveis, empresas públicas profissionalizadas e planejamento orientado a metas futuras (backcasting), que articulam segurança hídrica, adaptação climática e economia circular, sugerindo que a transição para Governança da Água 4.0, em qualquer contexto, depende de alinhamento fino entre tecnologia, instituições e cultura organizacional.

No plano teórico, o artigo contribui para a literatura de Relações Internacionais e paradiplomacia ao demonstrar que a cooperação em segurança hídrica não se limita a acordos interestatais formais: universidades, empresas públicas de água, agências reguladoras e especialistas operam como atores subnacionais que constroem redes transnacionais de conhecimento, configurando formas concretas de paradiplomacia hídrica e diplomacia científica. O estágio BEPE é interpretado como nó dessas redes, por meio do qual se reduzem assimetrias de informação, se identificam práticas com potencial de adaptação e se criam condições para projetos conjuntos de pesquisa, capacitação e inovação. Para o Brasil, e particularmente para as bacias PCJ, as lições de Lisboa apontam para três frentes de implicação prática: investir em digitalização orientada por problemas concretos, acompanhada de programas de capacitação; incorporar planejamento baseado em metas de reuso e resiliência climática; e estruturar, de forma mais sistemática, redes de cooperação com instituições portuguesas em torno de projetos-piloto e desenvolvimento metodológico em Water Governance 4.0.

O estudo sugere uma agenda de pesquisa paradiplomática para a água que inclua aplicações comparativas de metodologias inspiradas em Delphi discursivo e análise lexicográfica em diferentes bacias brasileiras e portuguesas; investigações sobre a recepção efetiva de recomendações derivadas de estágios e cooperações acadêmicas nas políticas de gestão; e análises de longo prazo sobre como redes Brasil–Portugal em governança hídrica evoluem, se institucionalizam e influenciam trajetórias de digitalização e sustentabilidade. Ao evidenciar que a segurança hídrica contemporânea depende tanto de sensores, algoritmos e infraestruturas quanto de redes de confiança e aprendizagem, o artigo reforça a ideia de que a paradiplomacia acadêmica é componente estratégica, ainda subexplorada, da governança global da água.

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RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE, THE NEW COLD WAR, AND THE RESURGENCE OF REALIST THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Abstract

The Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 has triggered significant geopolitical shifts reminiscent of Cold War tensions. The Russia-Ukraine war and various other regional conflicts, such as the Israel-Hamas conflict and conflicts in Ethiopia, Yemen, Somalia, Syria, and Iran, etc., have significant implications for international relations as they have led to renewed recognition of the relevance of realist international relations theory and its implications for international peace and security. The failure of multilateral institutions to resolve these conflicts seriously questions their credibility in ensuring peaceful and inclusive societies, access to justice, and the establishment of accountable institutions. Despite significant theoretical progress, various International Relations theories have not fully explained the regional and global transformations these conflicts have brought about. In particular, they

have struggled to clearly distinguish between the behaviour of states and the institutional shortcomings of multilateralism, often remaining isolated theoretical frameworks with limited interaction to analyse the transformations defining the post–Cold War international order. In this context, this paper argues for the significance of realism in understanding power politics, state sovereignty, and the anarchic nature of international relations, examining how the division of global powers has rekindled debates about the so-called New Cold War and the resurgence of Realist International Relations Theory, challenging liberal paradigms. The authors explore the motivations behind Russia's actions through the lens of realism, its impact on international security, and the limitations of existing multilateral institutions in resolving conflicts. Many nations must rebalance their foreign policy priorities amid the shifting order, taking into account various geopolitical and pragmatic considerations. However, it is essential to do a historical analysis and critically assess the applicable theoretical frameworks to assess the implications of the conflict on the world and provide suggestions to create a more participatory and equitable international relations framework for all to ensure sustainable development by including outreach and cooperation with various actors, such as civil society and other non-state actors, to establish peace and security.

Keywords

Russia, Ukraine, International Relations, Multilateral, Cooperation, Realism, Peace, Security.

Resumo

A invasão russa da Ucrânia, em fevereiro de 2022, desencadeou mudanças geopolíticas significativas que evocam as tensões da Guerra Fria. A guerra entre a Rússia e a Ucrânia e vários outros conflitos regionais, tais como o conflito entre Israel e o Hamas e os conflitos na Etiópia, no Iémen, na Somália, na Síria e no Irão, entre outros, têm implicações significativas para as relações internacionais, uma vez que levaram a um reconhecimento renovado da relevância da teoria realista das relações internacionais e das suas implicações para a paz e a segurança internacionais. O fracasso das instituições multilaterais em resolver estes conflitos põe seriamente em causa a sua credibilidade na garantia de sociedades pacíficas e inclusivas, no acesso à justiça e no estabelecimento de instituições responsáveis. Apesar de avanços teóricos significativos, várias teorias das Relações Internacionais não explicaram plenamente as transformações regionais e globais que estes conflitos provocaram. Em particular, têm tido dificuldade em distinguir claramente entre o comportamento dos Estados e as deficiências institucionais do multilateralismo, permanecendo frequentemente como quadros teóricos isolados, com interação limitada para analisar as transformações que definem a ordem internacional pós-Guerra Fria. Neste contexto, o presente artigo defende a importância do realismo na compreensão da política de poder, da soberania estatal e da natureza anárquica das relações internacionais, examinando como a divisão das potências globais reacendeu os debates sobre a chamada «Nova Guerra Fria» e o ressurgimento da Teoria Realista das Relações Internacionais, desafiando os paradigmas liberais. Os autores exploram as motivações subjacentes às ações da Rússia através da perspetiva do realismo, o seu impacto na segurança internacional e as limitações das instituições multilaterais existentes na resolução de conflitos. Muitas nações têm de reequilibrar as suas prioridades de política externa no meio de uma ordem em mutação, tendo em conta várias considerações geopolíticas e pragmáticas. No entanto, é essencial realizar uma análise histórica e avaliar criticamente os quadros teóricos aplicáveis para avaliar as implicações do conflito no mundo e apresentar sugestões para criar um quadro de relações internacionais mais participativo e equitativo para todos, de modo a garantir o desenvolvimento sustentável, incluindo o envolvimento e a cooperação com vários atores, tais como a sociedade civil e outros atores não estatais, com vista a estabelecer a paz e a segurança.

Palavras-Chave

Rússia, Ucrânia, Relações Internacionais, Multilateral, Cooperação, Realismo, Paz, Segurança.

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RUSSIAN INVASION OF UKRAINE, THE NEW COLD WAR, AND THE RESURGENCE OF REALIST THEORY OF INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

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Introduction

The Confrontations in the aftermath of the Russian Invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 evoked memories of the Cold War, as the division is reminiscent of the Cold War confrontation between the US-led Western Alliance and the Moscow-led Eastern Bloc. Much like the Cold War, the conflict has created a critical landscape characterised by ideological, political, and military rivalry. The Western response, led by the United States and NATO, included extensive economic sanctions against Russia, military aid to Ukraine, and strong diplomatic condemnation similar to the strategies used by the West to restrict the Soviet Union during the Cold War Similarly, Russia has sought to expand its sphere of influence, based on historical and strategic interests, reminding of the Soviet Union's initiatives to maintain control over Eastern Europe. (Dag and Tufekci, 2025)

This war brought Moscow and Beijing closer than ever before, as they declared their open opposition to the US-led global order and split the world into two hostile blocs, similar to those of the Cold War. (Gaspar,2023) Even though the ideological distinction between the two blocs may not relate to property and the economy, it does relate to authoritarianism, nationalism, and democratic values and decision-making. Despite the vast ideological, cultural, and other differences, China, Russia, and Iran align themselves against the US-led global world order.(Tripathi,2024)

This situation presents a critical research problem, i.e. to what extent does the post-2022 international system reflect a New Cold War dynamic, and how effectively does Realist theory explain these developments and their implications for European security and the global order. The authors further examine the impact of the Russian invasion of Ukraine on the structure of the contemporary international system as well as assess the growing strategic cooperation among Russia, China, and Iran in opposition to the US-led global order.

Simply stated, realism theory believes that states are the primary actors in international relations who function based on national interest, to achieve power, i.e., both militarily and politically, to protect the state. As states do not trust other states as per the realist theory, they often compete for power to avoid being dominated, as seen in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis.

Coming back to the Russia-Ukraine war, the Russian mistrust of the West, Russia using its offensive military capabilities, the threat of the use of nuclear weapons to retain Ukraine in its sphere of influence using military force, and disregarding the close cultural ties. These actions collectively indicate that Russia is acting to safeguard its sphere of influence, assert its dominance, and protect its national security, manifesting the central realist ideas of self-interest and survival in international politics..(Lebow, 2022)

The Russian invasion has not only affected Ukrainian independence and security but also transformed the regional security mechanism, with implications in global politics for the influence between Russia, China, and the US.(Harris and Marinova, 2022) The realist theory emphasizes the role of powerful states in shaping global order and politics while seeing international bodies as having limited influence in their ability to foster global cooperation.(Mansbach and Pirro, 2013) The invasion reflects the Russian shift from soft power to a military aggressor as it returned to traditional warfare through direct military aggression aimed at territorial gains and resource acquisition. Hence, the invasion not only increased the geo-political tensions in the region, threatening peace and security, but also reemphaised the relevance of the realist theory of international relations. (Alimova, 2024)

The outcome of the ongoing war will have significant consequences for the future of International Relations norms that govern the international community. Several scenarios have been predicted for future relations, including the continuance of the long war, a hostile co-existence, or a renewed peace (Oberoi and Leandro,2023). Each outcome carries significant implications for global governance, collective security, and the resilience of liberal international norms. Ultimately, the conflict serves as a major test of whether liberal principles can adapt and exist in an increasingly contested and multipolar world.

Many scholars believe that the Russian invasion of Ukraine is the result of the diversionary War theory due to rising authoritarianism, domestic insecurity, and politics, which pushed Russia to enter into this conflict and play the long game because it serves its purpose domestically.(Fernando and Cruz, 2022) Like other major powers, Russia has tried to control and align the actions of neighbouring small countries regarding their security while pursuing its self-interest through offensive realism. Scholars argue that realist theory, particularly offensive realism, provides a clear explanation for the invasion, involving insights from non-realist studies such as civilization, ontological security, etc. (Edinger, 2022).

On the contrary, some Russians believe that their country is at war with the West and that Western nations are conducting the war through Ukraine as a proxy, which must result in dethroning the United States as the global hegemon to establish a rule-based multipolar world order as seen from the prism of Realist Theory. Russian security concerns, including their attempt to maintain and regain their sphere of influence,

implementation of an offensive realist strategy to claim Ukrainian territory, and its efforts aimed at revisionism against the US-led liberal international order, are some of the key arguments in favor of the steps taken by Russia.(Danciu, 2023) From the Russian perspective, a stable peace is only possible by addressing issues of values, security, and economic and political relations among Russia, Ukraine, and Western countries to promote peaceful and inclusive societies (Tsygankov,2023).

In this view of Russia, the critics claim that the liberal school of thought has put excessive reliance on global institutions and norms, which, according to the realists, is inconsequential in addressing the underlying causes of instability and conflict, as these international institutions reflect the interests of large, powerful countries and do not represent the concerns of smaller, weaker nations. (Mearsheimer, 1995) However, realist theory has also been criticised for its narrow focus on power and state interests, often undermining the role of international cooperation, economic interdependence, and norms in reducing conflict and promoting global peace and stability.

From an international relations perspective, the Russian invasion and, consequently, the expansion of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation to counter increasingly assertive Russia has further strengthened transatlantic relations, but the failure to reach a diplomatic solution to the present crisis and to protect the smaller nations against the great powers has undermined the multilateral institutions and resulted in the breach of peace and security that has violated the UN charter principles and hindered the path towards sustainable development.(Lebow, 2022) It is no longer acceptable to most of global society to use war as a weapon, which was earlier seen as a legitimate form of state activity.(Bode and Huelss, 2018) The critiques of the application of the realist theory argue that this invasion has a specific historical and geo-political context that requires a nuanced application of this theory with deeper qualitative analysis of the local political contributory factors (Sousa et. al,2024).

Resurgence of Realist International Relations theory

The right balance is to say that the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis has reemphasised the importance of the realist theory of international relations. The core assumptions of the realist theory include state-centricity, anarchy, and the primacy of security and survival.

The actions of both Russia and Western states reflect these characteristics. On one hand, Russia’s military intervention can be seen as an attempt to prevent further NATO expansion, while Ukraine’s resilience and its appeal for Western support are based on existential security concerns. Similarly, NATO’s participation reflects a realist strategy, aimed at resisting Russian expansion without getting involved in a broader conflict.Although the theory of realism has assumed significance, it has been used vaguely to mean everything from those who support Ukraine against Russian Aggression and argue for NATO to directly engage in the war to defeat Russia, as well as those who believe that it is the West due to whose actions the war has taken place.

In their eagerness to protect the state, the realists stress the significance of preserving state sovereignty, national security, international stability, and great power status, forgetting that no state exists in isolation and is part of the larger international

community. While protecting state interests is important and needs protection, as seen in the case of Russia, which has seen several changes from being an autocracy to communism, followed by liberalism and shifting back to semi-autocratic ideology, the theory of realism has helped it to navigate through these turbulences. It has formed an essential part of their national identity (Kropatcheva, 2012).

Nonetheless, within the group of realists in Russia, diverse views exist, some of whom defend and advocate for putting in efforts by Russia to win the war by completing the special military operation. In contrast, others believe there is a need for restraint and compromise to end the conflict by advocating for a ceasefire and settlement to preserve Russia's security and sovereignty. This uncertainty, as per some of the thinkers, is due to the politics of the West since the 1990s. The war in Ukraine has also been attributed to the efforts of NATO to consolidate power in Eastern Europe, threatening Russia's geopolitical interests and invoking its nationalistic agenda to protect its interests in response to NATO's eastward expansion. In the name of the liberal world order, the West has intervened in countries that resulted in global disorder, in countries like Iraq, Afghanistan, etc. (Dodge,2013).

From a realist perspective, differences within Russia do not contradict realism but instead reflect competing narratives based on a common realist objective, which is to preserve Russia's security, sovereignty, and strategic autonomy. Further, from a Russian perspective, Ukraine is integral to Russia's identity and security and the fact that Ukraine remains neutral and a non-member of the Western military organizations is of paramount significance for Russia's strategic objectives, as the Russian *Realists* do not feel secure if Ukraine becomes a member of Western political and military institutions (Taras, 2022).

Moreover, the connection between Russia and Ukraine in terms of culture, religion, and language further complicates the situation, as the realists in Russia argue that these common characteristics are essential for preserving the unity of the two countries.(Kappeler, 2014). This is a threat given the insistence on a continuing eastward expansion of NATO, the United States, and its European allies, who have needlessly provoked Russia and even backed it into a corner (Kulick, 2022). In the past, it was the 2008 Bucharest summit, under which Russia was further provoked after NATO's 2008 Bucharest summit, which promised eventual membership to Georgia and Ukraine. (Arbuthnot,2008) Diplomatic response to the invasion also involved considerations of the role of the civilizational state created by the Putin regime, which focused on the historical struggles between the West and Russia.

On the other hand, the Russian moderates do not favour the continuation of the war and are searching for an acceptable compromise to end the Special Military Operation. Such a group is primarily composed of those who believe in restoring peace, and their reasoning about the causes of war and Ukraine and Russia's objectives varies significantly from that of the realists. Such moderates believe that a prolonged conflict undermines Russia's national security, economic stability, and international position. The rationale behind this difference is that the members of the moderate group do not accept that the war in Ukraine was inevitable. However, they believe that the West refused to consider Russia's security and national interest; they believe that a compromise based on diplomacy should be the way forward. For them, what matters is the fact that Russia has suffered economically and politically more than during the Cold War due to the absence

of dialogue between Russia and the West, leading to isolation at the international level and an ongoing struggle in the hearts and minds of the non-Western world.(Fisher, 2020) Seen in this light, while it may be argued that the West failed to be respectful of Russia's interests and concerns in Europe and Ukraine, at the same time, Russia has also failed in its responsibility to demonstrate the reason behind such interests and concerns.

In this regard, realism helps to interpret the Russian attitude to preserve the state's survival and strategic autonomy not as a moral or ideological choice but on grounds of compulsion. Russia's behavior can therefore be understood as a response to assumed external threats, changing power balances, and historical exploitations rather than purely normative goals. Thus, realism helps ensure long-term state survival within a competitive international landscape.

Amidst this background, it must be understood that in the modern-day context, where regional and local conflicts are evolving rapidly, it seems challenging to capture or predict the future context, whether it is the Russia-Ukraine Crisis or the Israel-Palestine War. Thus, there is a need to be flexible when dealing with specific situations in the international community. Even though the Russian invasion appears to serve Russia's strategic interests at present, the result of such a war and incalculable human and economic suffering has proved to be catastrophic, which the realist theory of international relations may only be able to partially reflect upon, as incorporating other perspectives and regional dynamics offers a more comprehensive view of the conflict and its global implications.

The crisis of Multilateralism

The ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis traces its roots to the West assuming responsibility for developing post-Cold War structures and processes that further distanced Russia from the decision-making process. Specifically, the US leadership further complicated the issue through NATO's military structure and its aim to expand in European countries, which has been the contention even in the current crisis. Surprisingly, during NATO's expansion, the USA and its allies never took into consideration the views of the Russian Federation. The USA and allies controlled aspects that provide relevant context for understanding Russia's subsequent actions.

Such exclusion faced by Russia instilled a feeling in Moscow of viewing NATO's eastward expansion as a direct threat to its national security and regional influence, thus impacting its practices and policies. These changes help understand why Russia has framed its actions in Ukraine as defensive rather than aggressive, and help understand the motivations behind Russia's foreign policy behaviour.

The current illegal annexation of Ukrainian territories has set a dangerous precedent for all sovereign nations that achieved independence in the aftermath of the Soviet Union's Collapse. This has been coupled with the inaction by the UNSC (Upadhyay and Mehrotra, 2025), as Russia abused its veto power as a permanent member by restricting the UNSC from taking any steps to prevent the humanitarian crisis that has unfolded in Ukraine (Peters, A.,2023).

Under Article 24(1) of the United Nations Charter, the Security Council acts to maintain the peace and security of the world. However, the Security Council has been paralyzed through veto under Article 27(3) of the UN Charter. Thus, it has restricted the UNSC from responding to atrocities, shielding the perpetrators from accountability instead of maintaining international peace and security and reaffirming fundamental rights (Alhamdan,2023). Thus, the crisis exposes structural shortcomings of multilateralism, particularly within the United Nations Security Council, as the ongoing Russia-Ukraine crisis has undermined the Council's capacity to respond effectively to humanitarian crises,

Coming to the EU interests, the current crisis has affected European Security governance, European energy security, and the global legal order, and there exists the need for a serious diplomatic effort to re-establish the core principles of the UN Charter, respecting the territorial sovereignty and political independence of Ukraine under Article 2 of the UN Charter. In this context, Russia behaviour and reluctance to withdraw from the occupied land and negotiate meaningfully on various imaginary lies of being under attack by Ukraine must be seen as a contributory factor to the failure of multilateral instituions .

This invasion has challenged certain assumptions underlying Western policy in the post-Cold War era, such as treating Russia more as a partner than an adversary and considering Europe essentially stable and safe from invasion which is certainly not the case when it comes to Russia, even though the Common Security and Defence Policy (Tardy,2018) is in place and is responsible for supporting revised security policies, but it has been proven insufficient as Ukraine's sovereignty and independence have been violated (Dag and Tufekci, 2025).

This current invasion is unique because it lacks a limiting condition to explain why the use of force might be justified for claiming sovereignty based on historical grounds of ownership, as claimed by Russia, which has resulted in rampant violations of the use of force under the UN charter. Such acts illustrate how states may act unilaterally when pursuing perceived strategic interests in disregard of established legal norms.

Whereas the failure of multilateral institutions to resolve the Ukraine conflict and other global crises raises questions about the credibility of these bodies. Despite advancements in global governance, these institutions often appear powerless in the face of great power politics. Realist theories argue that such failures are inevitable as states prioritize their own interests over collective security. This means that these institutions remain limited by procedural requirement such as veto powers, which limit their capacity to regulate the powerful states. From a realist perspective, this variance between state behaviour and institutional effectiveness is on expected lines, as international institutions ultimately reflect the interests of powerful states.

However, on 16 March 2022, among other measures, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) ordered the Russian Federation to immediately suspend its military operations in Ukraine. The Court opined that a direct and unbridled armed attack against a neighbor by a permanent member of the United Nations (UN) Security Council, whose task is to maintain and preserve international peace and security. The ICJ held that there exists a dispute relating to the interpretation, application, or fulfillment of the Genocide Convention. It rejected President Putin's statement that the invasion was 'in accordance with Article 51 (chapter VII) of the Charter of the United Nations and that the 'purpose'

of the operation was 'to protect people who have been subjected to abuse and genocide by the Kyiv regime for eight years' and to stop such 'genocide'.(Kulick, 2022) After the ICJ gave such interim orders, several member states of the ICJ, between 21st July 2022 and 15th December 2022, filed declarations of intervention under Article 63 of the ICJ Statute.(Huremagić,2024) even when the Russian Federation continues questioning the legitimacy of such interventions and the jurisdiction exercised by the ICJ. In January 2024, the ICJ confirmed it has jurisdiction over key parts of Ukraine's complaint and earlier ordered provisional measures requiring Russia to suspend military operations, though Russia has not complied. While the ICJ's rulings are legally binding, enforcement remains weak. Thus, reinforcing realist claims that global governance mechanisms lack enforceability against powerful states.

Under international law, the ground of collective defense can only be invoked when the victim state requests military aid in response to the actual or imminent threat, whereas, in the ongoing crisis, Russia has made a premature recognition of the separatist regions of Donetsk and Luhansk in Donbas region which is a clear violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Ukraine and is inconsistent with the principles of the UN. Additionally, another claim made by Russia was that the lives of the Russian nationals in the Donbas region are under threat, and its actions constitute an 'extension of state.' This argument also lacks validity as there is no evidence of significant large-scale violations of human rights to its nationals, and the action of Russia has gone beyond the Donbas region (Pelliconi,2024), thus defeating the objective of preventing its nationals from injury (Hurak and D'Anieri, 2022).

However, the lack of comprehensive multilateral intervention in the Ukraine crisis reflects the realist critique of international institutions, which lack the enforcement mechanisms to prevent conflict or enforce peace. Russia's continued aggression in Ukraine highlights this gap between the theory of collective security and the reality of power politics. From a realist perspective, states focus on national interests and survival over institutional commitments, particularly when major security concerns are a matter of consideration.

Russia's strategic calculations

Historically, the present-day Ukraine crisis began with Nikita Khrushchev's 1954 transfer of Crimea from the Russian Socialist Federal Republic to the Ukrainian Socialist Federal Republic, to historicise the 300th anniversary of Ukraine-Russia unification. These events, accompanied by the collapse of the Soviet Union, gave rise to the concept of the Ruskiy Mir (Russian world), which was adopted by Russian nationalists, who believed all Russian-speaking people should be united in one state. These nationalists view Ukraine differently from other former republics of the Soviet Union, as Ukraine is culturally and linguistically more akin to Russia. Critical events in Russian history took place on their territory, as Kyiv was the first capital of the Russian state. As a result, Russian nationalists have never accepted Ukrainian claims to be governed separately with the right to their own country (Lebow, 2022). In 2014, Russia reannexed Crimea and lent military support to Russian nationalists in eastern Ukraine who sought to break away and join Russia. The invasion of 2022 is an extension of this policy under which President Putin declared that Ukraine

is not a neighbouring country but an inalienable part of our history, culture, and spiritual space (Kuzio, 2018).

The 2022 invasion further complies with Realist logic, as President Putin subjugated Ukraine's sovereignty at a lower pedestal to Russia's national security interests. As per this perspective, claims about shared history and identity function as legitimising arguments, in line with realist assumptions, Russia's actions manifest an intention to violate international norms reinforcing the belief that power dynamics and not international law ultimately affect state behavior.

However, this does not give rise to the use of force to annex the territory of a sovereign state, as the use of force is only justified for defensive purposes or requires authorization by appropriate regional or international organizations, which is missing in the case of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. The reasons cited for the invasion were NATO's enlargement in the east and Western support for the pro-democracy movement in Ukraine, which were directly threatening the core strategic interests of Russia. However, due to the inaction of the West in the past regarding Russia's use of force in Georgia, the occupation of Crimea, and the use of its military in support of Russian nationalists in eastern Ukraine, the significance of international relations was undermined.

From a Realist perspective, such behaviour is a response to the changing balance of power in international relations. Moreover, the West's earlier failure to respond decisively to Russia's has resulted in the erosion of international norms.

International law is faced with the conundrum of dealing with the violatory behavior of Russia, through which it aims to regain its past glory and prestige.(Menon, 2020) In the aftermath of the Soviet Union collapse, Russia has regularly violated principles like non-use of force under Article 2(4) of the UN Charter or the principle of non-intervention under Article 2(7) of the UN Charter (Upadhyay and Mehrotra, 2025), whether it is the invasion of Georgia that took place in 2008 putting them in a precarious position regarding their national security and their desire for NATO membership. In recent times, the annexation of Crimea in 2014 has resulted in further distancing of Georgia and Ukraine outside the Russian influence and increased Russian dependence on China due to sanctions aimed at isolating Russia under international law, as was seen during the initial stages of the conflict (Green, 2022).

It is essential to highlight the critical points by presenting a larger picture of the Russian invasion of Ukraine. These are mainly on the lines of the West–Russia escalation, with the aim to prevent Ukraine from becoming a NATO member and to prevent the supposed genocide of ethnic Russians and Russian nationals in the Donbas region by the Ukrainian government. This fact of supposed genocide needs to be seen from the period 2014-2021, where the Donbas region experienced a great deal of war and bloodshed, which was a result of the occupation of Crimea by Russia in 2014 due to which the situation prior to the invasion arose.Moreover, under Article 39 of the UN Charter, the Security Council shall determine the existence of any threat to the peace, breach of the peace, or act of aggression. In this regard, no decision was made by the United Nations Security Council to categorize the situation in Ukraine's Donbas region as a threat to peace or a breach of peace prior to the Russian invasion in 2022. This reflects an attempt to degrade the quality of democratic governance in Ukraine by Russia to establish its supremacy

over Ukraine and to assert itself against the Western allies increasingly.The conflict in Donbas since 2014 and the annexation of Crimea highlight how Russia acts to maintain its sphere of influence and counter Western interference, consistent with Realist ideas of power politics and survival

For Russia, the invasion serves dual purposes: strategically, it aims to expand influence, secure additional territory, and align neighbouring states with its interests; domestically, it reinforces political control and legitimizes rising authoritarianism in pursuit of a nationalist cause that unites everyone.

Challenges to realist theory

While realism provides valuable insights into the causes of the Russian invasion, it also has significant theoretical and practical limitations. Realism does not fully account for violations of International Law, such as

Russia's breach of Ukraine's sovereignty, nor does it adequately address the humanitarian consequences of the War. The realist approach also ignores the potential role of non-state actors and civil society in shaping international relations. In a world where global issues increasingly require multilateral cooperation, realism's emphasis on state power may no longer explain global dynamics comprehensively particularly when examined through liberal, constructivist, and critical theoretical perspectives.

From a liberal perspective, realism undermines the importance of international institutions, international law, and cooperation who argue that multilateral institutions play an integral role in regulating state behavior and facilitating peaceful conflict resolution. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is not only to protect power, but a violation of international law, including the principles of sovereignty and territorial integrity protected under the UN Charter. The Liberals would emphasize that the failure of multilateral framework in the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict does not make it redundant, but point towards the need for enforcement mechanisms and stronger international cooperation, especially regarding economic interdependence, which can act as an incentive against war.

On the other hand, constructivist critiques emphasise realism's limitations by focusing on ideas, identities, and norms rather than the pursuit of power alone. The notion of ideas, identities, and norms stems from historical experiences, collective memory, and national identity, which is true in the case of Russia . To illustrate, the perceptions of Western control and identity-based fears of NATO expansion played a significant role in the Russian invasion. Moreover, realism fails to account for why international norms such as respect for sovereignty and human rights matter, which are violated in the war.

Lastly, critical perspectives, including Marxist, feminist, and postcolonial approaches, challenge realism's state-dominated focus by highlighting the power structures, economic inequalities, and marginalised voices. Marxist theorists link the conflict to resource competition and power interests rather than the pursuit of national security. Whereas the feminist scholars criticise realism for ignoring the humanitarian consequences of war, especially on women and children. Postcolonial theorists argue that realism prioritises powerful states and silences different perspectives.

The future of International Relations and Global Order

The Russian aggression against Ukraine has resulted in various geopolitical consequences indicating a shift in the world order. Many nations defined their foreign policy priorities based on multiple geopolitical and pragmatic considerations.(Topa, 2024) Russian aggression against Ukraine has challenged the post-Cold War world order, resulting in the breakdown of its relations with the US and its European and Asian allies. Russia is striving to achieve its former role as a dominant power. It is aligning itself with other non-western powers to create a multipolar world by constantly challenging the US hegemony.

Unlike Western nations, many nations outside the transatlantic partnership have shown a different approach to the Ukrainian crisis, as they have abstained from voting on the issue in the United Nations General Assembly and have repeatedly called for the crisis to be resolved through dialogue and diplomacy. To illustrate, although India, as a member of the UN, has vehemently opposed an interventionist international community in the form *of* humanitarian intervention, it has resisted taking a stand on the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, which fulfills the conditions of the doctrine of Responsibility to Protect (R2P) that India and many other states have refrained from. R2P is a global political commitment that aims to address four key concerns to prevent *genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity* (Upadhyay and Mehrotra, 2025) India has not been proactive in implementing the norm of R2P into practice by justifying its strong commitment to any state's sovereignty and territorial integrity, as seen in the ongoing crisis.

In the present situation, Russia continues to violate the independence of Ukraine despite the US-led ceasefire talks that may lead to re-establishing Ukraine’s territorial and political sovereignty. Thus, the Ukrainian authorities must focus on taking steps that go beyond the consideration of choosing between peace and justice, such as initiating criminal prosecutions under existing national law and simultaneously putting in place specific steps that aim at avoiding further deterioration of the social and economic situation of persons directly affected by the conflict.

Russia’s attack on Ukraine is disrupting the post-war world order and threatening global peace and security. As pointed out earlier, Russian aggression against Ukraine is not the first time that great powers have used force against smaller nations without following international laws, undermining multilateral institutions showing the selected application of the international legal framework and human rights, but it shows the increasing shift in the global balance of power and the need for various countries to recalibrate their positions. Many countries in the Global South face extreme geopolitical pressure to realign their position, considering the consequences and implications of this invasion. As explained, Russia wants to contain the further eastward expansion of NATO and create its sphere of influence within Eurasia to counter-balance Western expansion and retain dominant control over the Black Sea.

The approach towards globalization has also changed, and to accommodate such changes, the United Nations Security Council and other multilateral institutions need to be democratized based on principles of democratic governance, the protection of individual rights, and the rule of law, to accommodate the differing views, considering

contemporary geopolitical realities. Such democratization needs to be characterized by equality, human rights, freedom, multilateralism, and collective security as enshrined in the Charter of the United Nations in multilateral treaties and customary rules that give effect to the values of self-determination and territorial integrity. All these values have been violated by the Russian Federation, ranging from the unlawful use of force as a violation under Article 2(4) of the UN charter and the violation of the territorial integrity of another sovereign state.

From an international relations perspective, these developments can be understood in different ways. Realist theory views the conflict as a power struggle in an international system where no single authority exists, and states are primarily concerned with their own survival. From this angle, Russia's actions reflect an effort to push back against NATO expansion and what it sees as U.S. dominance, while the decision of many non-Western states to remain neutral is driven more by practical self-interest (Smith & Dawson, 2024).

Liberal institutionalism focuses on the role of international rules and organizations, as discussed earlier, particularly the sanctions and diplomatic pressure imposed by Western countries. However, the fact that these measures failed to prevent the conflict or gain universal support highlights the limits of international institutions and suggests that the liberal global order is losing influence.

Constructivist approaches shift attention to ideas, identities, and historical experiences. Russia's challenge to the post–Cold War order is closely tied to feelings of lost status and long-standing grievances, while many countries in the Global South place greater value on sovereignty, non-alignment, and mediation than on taking sides in great-power rivalries (Platias and Trigkas, 2024).

Taken together, these perspectives point to a world that is becoming more fragmented and multipolar. Instead of a single, shared global system, today's international order is increasingly shaped by strategic competition, flexible cooperation, and contested norms.

Conclusion

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has severe geopolitical implications for the world order in the context of the new Cold War, reigniting debates on the importance and relevance of realist theory in international relations by drawing parallels to the Cold War era tensions. The diplomatic, military, and economic responses to the invasion have broader implications for Europe's global order and regional security infrastructure. However, it is essential to assess the application of all the theoretical frameworks after considering the unique historical and geopolitical context in which the invasion took place to critically reflect on the application of the realist theoretical framework to this unique event. Such analysis should emphasize the international conflict, geopolitical context, NATO enlargement, the shift in the balance of power, the war dilemma, fear of escalation, and the need to expand the security infrastructure in the future, along with other factors.

Going forward, it can be said that there are many compelling arguments when the Russian invasion of Ukraine is seen through the prism of realism. At the same time, the realistic arguments are limited as it does not explain the rules of war violations. Many

nations must rebalance their foreign policy priorities amidst the shifting order based on various geopolitical and pragmatic considerations. However, a more viable solution is to create a more participatory and equitable international relations framework for all, including outreach and partnership with various actors, including civil society and other non-state actors. Russia has undertaken the invasion of Ukraine to challenge the West by undermining its liberal world order and asserting itself as an equal partner before the West. Russia wants the West to recognize former soviet republics like Ukraine as a buffer zone under Russian influence. Still, this proposition is unlikely to be accepted as these countries have their rights of territorial integrity and political independence under the UN Charter. Such actions of Russia will further distance them.

The undermining of multilateral institutions and remilitarisation across the world has undone years of progress made by international law and poses a severe threat to the security of humankind. Collective security alliances like NATO must revisit their role in maintaining international peace and security in light of their past actions and exclusionary conduct in some instances. The selective and differing standards of international relations application must be criticized when a smaller nation becomes a victim of ideological and other warfare among great powers. The international relations framework should be equally applied in all situations regarding equitable processes and procedures to create a better world.

With the continuation of the Russian aggression in Ukraine and the continuous denial by the Kremlin of any wrongdoing, the talks initiated by the US stand at a critical point. Russia is reluctant to withdraw from the occupied land; thus, the need of the hour is to bring an end to the ongoing conflict soon to ensure peace and security in building an inclusive society to ensure sustainable development.

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CONTRACTUAL REGULATION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UKRAINIAN AND EU LEGISLATION

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Abstract

The purpose of this study was to examine the features of contractual regulation of interaction between Ukraine and the countries of the European Union in the field of intellectual property. To this end, the national legislation governing intellectual property relations in Ukraine, Germany, Italy, and France was analysed, along with international and pan-European legal principles in this area. One of the most important strategies for protecting the rights of authors, copyright holders, and users of intellectual property objects is, therefore, the regulation of intellectual property relations through contracts. Despite the ongoing development of Ukrainian intellectual property legislation, it remains insufficient to fully ensure compliance with the regulatory requirements of the European Union, where intellectual property is considered a key economic resource. The European Union has established a well-developed system of unitary rights, including unitary patents and European Union trademarks, which facilitates the regulation of contractual relations between states. Compared to Ukraine, EU member states possess significantly more advanced judicial systems and more effective mechanisms for dispute resolution, particularly in specialised courts. Within the framework of the Association Agreement, Ukraine is aligning its national legislation on intellectual property with that of the European Union. This process involves updating laws governing the conclusion and execution of licensing contracts, protecting copyrights, and introducing modern methods

of law enforcement. However, additional reforms are required for more effective contractual regulation, such as the establishment of specialised intellectual property courts, the enhancement of legal culture, and the improvement of administrative processes.

Keywords

Intellectual Property, Civil Contracts, Commercial Contracts, Competition, Licensing Contracts, Patent Contracts, Innovations.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo foi examinar as particularidades da regulamentação contratual da interação entre a Ucrânia e os países da União Europeia no domínio da propriedade intelectual. Para esse fim, foram analisadas as legislações nacionais que regulam as relações de propriedade intelectual na Ucrânia, na Alemanha, na Itália e na França, bem como os princípios jurídicos internacionais e pan-europeus aplicáveis a essa área. Uma das estratégias mais importantes para a proteção dos direitos dos autores, titulares de direitos autorais e utilizadores de objetos de propriedade intelectual consiste, portanto, na regulamentação das relações de propriedade intelectual por meio de contratos. Apesar do desenvolvimento contínuo da legislação ucraniana em matéria de propriedade intelectual, esta ainda não é suficiente para assegurar a plena conformidade com os requisitos regulamentares da União Europeia, onde a propriedade intelectual é considerada um recurso económico fundamental. A União Europeia estabeleceu um sistema bem desenvolvido de direitos unitários, incluindo a patente unitária e a marca da União Europeia, o que facilita a regulamentação das relações contratuais entre os Estados. Em comparação com a Ucrânia, os Estados-Membros da União Europeia dispõem de sistemas judiciais significativamente mais desenvolvidos e de mecanismos mais eficazes de resolução de litígios, especialmente por meio de tribunais especializados. No âmbito do Acordo de Associação, a Ucrânia está a harmonizar a sua legislação nacional em matéria de propriedade intelectual com a legislação da União Europeia. Esse processo inclui a atualização das normas que regulam a celebração e a execução de contratos de licença, a proteção dos direitos autorais e a introdução de métodos modernos de aplicação da lei. No entanto, são necessárias reformas adicionais para assegurar uma regulamentação contratual mais eficaz, nomeadamente a criação de tribunais especializados em propriedade intelectual, o reforço da cultura jurídica e o aperfeiçoamento dos procedimentos administrativos.

Palavras-Chave

Propriedade Intelectual, Contratos Civis, Contratos Comerciais, Concorrência, Contratos De Licença, Contratos De Patente, Inovação.

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CONTRACTUAL REGULATION OF INTELLECTUAL PROPERTY RIGHTS: A COMPARATIVE ANALYSIS OF UKRAINIAN AND EU LEGISLATION

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Introduction

In today's globalised economy, IP is vital to governments and businesses' competitiveness. Contractual techniques regulate IP rights by ensuring the effective use and protection of creative creations. IP is becoming more important in media, entertainment, research, and technology, making this topic vital. Careful research and comparison are needed as EU and Ukrainian IP laws converge. Ukrainian law must be harmonised with European law, especially in the study area, to sign and implement international accords. Modernising Ukrainian IP law is underway. New IP protection guidelines and standards assist IP transfer contracts, licensing, franchising, and other techniques. The EU enforces stricter intellectual property rights through copyright and patent regulations that impact national laws. Due to Ukraine's incorporation into European institutions and worldwide economic trends, intellectual property contractual law is relevant for both the EU and Ukraine. This research improves worldwide market integration, commercial and legal environments, and IP rights protection.

As noted in the research of Shyshka (2023), Ukraine adheres to the principle that the transfer of rights to IP objects must be executed through written agreements. This requirement applies, for instance, to copyright transfer agreements and licensing contracts.

Zaitseva-Kalaur and Chernyak (2023) found that in EU and Ukraine, transferring rights to intellectual property (IP) items requires a written agreement to clearly define the terms

of usage. EU licenses might be exclusive or non-exclusive. EU licensing policy protects rights holders and promotes IP commercialisation.

As noted by Kochyna (2020), contractual regulation of IP rights is a fundamental instrument for corporate development, innovation, and the protection of rights in this field. A comparison between Ukrainian and EU legislation reveals that, in order to ensure effective regulation in this area, any state aspiring to integrate into the European legal framework must continue aligning its standards accordingly.

In light of the above, the purpose of this study is to compare Ukrainian and EU legislation concerning the contractual regulation of intellectual property. The research involves the analysis of primary forms of intellectual property contracts (such as licensing, rights transfer, and franchising) under Ukrainian and European law, the examination of the legal consequences of concluding such contracts in different jurisdictions, the study of international agreements and treaties that influence the contractual regulation of IP, and the adaptation of national legislation to meet international and European legal norms.

Materials and Methods

The concept and essence of contractual regulation, along with the key principles governing the contractual regulation of IP rights interaction, constitute one of the theoretical foundations of this field of study. A wide variety of contracts exist within the sphere of intellectual property. Accordingly, an analysis of the legal norms regulating such contracts has been conducted.

Using the formal-legal (dogmatic) method, contractual regulation in the field of intellectual property in Ukraine and EU member states was examined. Legislative norms were compared, including the Civil Code of Ukraine (2003); Law of Ukraine No. 2811-IX "On Copyright and Related Rights" (2023); Law of Ukraine No. 3687-XII "On the Protection of Rights to Inventions and Utility Models" (1994); Law of Ukraine No. 3689-XII "On the Protection of Rights to Marks for Goods and Services" (1994); Law of Ukraine No. 3688-XII "On the Protection of Rights to Industrial Designs" (1994); Law of Ukraine No. 3322-XII "On Scientific and Technical Information" (1993); the German Civil Code (Bürgerliches Gesetzbuch – BGB) (1896); Act on Copyright and Related Rights (Urheberrechtsgesetz – UrhG) (1965); French Civil Code (2006); Italian Civil Code (1942); Industrial Property Code. Legislative Decree No. 30 (2005); Copyright Law of Latvia (2000).

In addition to the national regulatory legal acts of Germany, France, and Italy, pan-European and international instruments were also examined. These include: Directive (EU) No. 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council "On Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market" (2019); Regulation (EU) No. 2017/1001 of the European Parliament and of the Council "On the European Union Trade Mark (Codification)" (2017); Directive No. 2004/48/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council "On the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights" (2004); the European Patent Convention, as amended by decisions of the Administrative Council since the publication of the 17th edition (2020). The study of the legislation of Germany, France, Italy, and Ukraine is of particular importance, as Germany represents the Germanic legal system,

France is a classic representative of the Romano-Germanic legal tradition, Italy also belongs to the continental legal system but possesses its own distinctive regulatory features in the field of intellectual property, while Ukraine is currently in the process of harmonising its legal framework with EU law. Furthermore, these European countries have a wealth of judicial decisions in the area of intellectual property, which may serve as valuable references for the harmonisation of Ukrainian legislation.

The analysis of these regulatory legal acts not only facilitates a deeper understanding of the legal landscape of intellectual property in the selected countries but also contributes positively to the process of harmonising Ukrainian legislation with European standards – an essential step towards Ukraine's integration into the European legal and economic systems.

Results

According to Ukrainian law, one of the most important instruments for the protection, transfer, and disposal of intellectual property (IP) rights is contractual regulation. This is governed not only by the general principles of civil law but also by specific provisions applicable to copyrights, patents, trademarks, and other forms of IP (see Table 1).

Table 1. Ukrainian legislation regulating relations in the field of intellectual property

Regulatory act	Meaning
Civil Code of Ukraine (2003)	Includes provisions on contracts relating to the transfer of intellectual property rights, such as licensing and assignment.
Law of Ukraine No. 2811-IX (2023)	Governs contracts between authors, rightholders, and users of works.
Law of Ukraine No. 3687-XII (1994)	Establishes procedures for concluding contracts for the transfer of IP rights, including licence agreements.
Law of Ukraine No. 3689-XII (1994)	Contains provisions on the disposal of trademark rights and related contractual arrangements.
Law of Ukraine No. 3688-XII (1994)	Regulates contractual relations concerning rights to industrial designs.
Law of Ukraine No. 3322-XII (1993)	Governs the transfer of rights to technologies and scientific-technical developments.

Source: created by the authors.

According to Yarotskiy et al. (2021) and the Civil Code of Ukraine (2003), IP holders and others allowed to grant or receive IP rights can sign contracts. The contract regulates legal activity and is a source of law. The civil law contract implements civil law requirements when parties independently engage in civil legal interactions. This shows how contracts regulate IP interaction. The contract is mostly used to acquire or transfer intellectual property rights. Recognising two types of legal relations relevant to IP relations—dynamics, such as the transfer of IP rights from one entity to another, and statics, such as ownership or possession of relevant IP objects, supports the idea that contractual arrangements should govern IP relations.

Legal rules regulate the first type of legal relations. The established (impersonal) group of obligated subjects, the absolute nature of legal relations, and the historical background of their origin and diffusion drive intellectual property law. Contracts define terms and govern party behaviour. Thus, many intellectual property issues transcend contract law. The national legislation of each state outlines distinct intellectual property rights and their legal protection in light of applicable international agreements. IP rights are limited to categories under the Ukrainian Civil Code (2003). Under these conditions, contractual agreements cannot extend legal protection requirements or create "new" IP rights. The Law of Ukraine No. 2811-IX (2023) does not list all sorts of works protected by copyright, but any object must be the outcome of objectively expressed creative labour. The law does not specify all trade secrets, however material that fails to meet legal standards cannot be considered a trade secret (Civil Code of Ukraine, 2003).

The validity of intellectual property (IP) rights is also assessed under various laws and international treaties. However, it is important to note that this legislative position is not entirely accurate, as such rights are typically governed directly by statutory law. A distinction must be made between the validity of agreements concerning IP rights within the context of absolute legal relations, and their legal legitimacy in this framework. Given that IP rights have historically been regulated by legislation, equating contractual agreements with the establishment of such rights can be misleading.

Legally enforceable IP rights transfer agreements demonstrate contracts' growing regulatory role. In practice, only the contract defines IP object usage rights. A licence agreement or equivalent arrangement gives the licensee IP use rights. The licence agreement describes the licensee's rights, including scope and location. In creative contracts, the parties agree on the work's kind, subject, genre, scope, and deadline. The agreement may also specify how to generate the original work, give a copy to the client, and grant use rights. According to the principle of party autonomy, contracting parties can pick the appropriate legislation for agreements with foreign elements, such as licensing, commercial concessions, or IP rights transfers (legislation of Ukraine No. 2709-IV…, 2005).

Contracts regulate relationships when legislation is incomplete, contradictory, or does not address them. The present statutory framework has discrepancies, according to study. For instance, Article 429 of the Civil Code of Ukraine (2003) allows the employer and employee joint IP rights to an object generated by the employee during a work-for-hire relationship. This provision proposes an implementation framework. However, effective enforcement is difficult with this strategy. Contractual regulation may work in research institutes, IT firms, photo studios, and other industries. Second in IP legal management is the emergence or acquisition of intellectual property rights. IP rights acquisition clauses are the contract's main purpose. Due to its role in IP rights acquisition, the contract is a legal reality. Contracts can be used alone or in conjunction with other legal structures to grant such rights. Contracts for the sale and acquisition of property rights to industrial property objects subject to state registration only transfer the rights to the buyer after registration. In such cases, the contract's legal basis is inseparable from IP rights acquisition.

Exclusive or one-time licences and rights transfer agreements help acquire IP rights. A commissioning agreement can also allow a customer to acquire the creator's IP rights if

it states so. These contracts do not guarantee IP rights succession. IP interaction regulation's third level is IP rights exercise. The authorised party exercises these moral and/or property rights by autonomous legal measures. This implementation benefits the rightholder. Contracts, especially those addressing proprietary rights, are essential for IP protection. IP enforcement is the unilateral use or disposal of IP objects by the rightholder or their authorised representative to protect property interests.

IP rights include copyright, patent law, and others, thus civil law provides a uniform contractual framework for their disposal. Chapter 75 of the Civil Code of Ukraine (2003) distinguishes between contracts for IP rights transfer (alienation) and contracts for IP object use in a specific industry. Contracts to create an IP object can also be used to transfer ownership rights to the product. Other contracts may have IP rights disposal provisions in addition to those openly selling them. These may include IP rights transfer agreements, co-author ownership division contracts, collective rights management organization-copyright and related rights holders agreements, and production agreements. The fourth step of IP interaction legal regulation comprises non-recognition or challenge of such rights in the event of infringement.

In non-regulated agreements to dispose of IP rights, parties may choose a way of protecting their rights under Ukrainian civil law. The predetermined circle of obligated subjects in absolute legal relations with IP rights limits contractual mechanisms' ability to protect IP rights. Since rightholders rarely have direct contractual relationships with possible infringers, the law usually determines their protection. Contracts may include IP protection measures in certain cases. Importantly, contractual agreements cannot change statutory limitation period calculations. However, contractual procedures for IP property conflicts are becoming more important. This trend shows the growing importance of ADR approaches like mediation and arbitration, especially in commercial disputes.

Ultimately, a contract can serve as an effective legal instrument for resolving disputes concerning the infringement of IP rights. There are cases in which the rightholder and the alleged infringer reach an out-of-court settlement. Such agreements, which take the legal form of a contract, may include provisions obligating the infringer to pay compensation to the rightholder for material damage caused by the infringement. By doing so, the parties avoid the costs and delays associated with litigation and subsequent enforcement, even where statutory mechanisms for IP protection are in place. Moreover, as legal proceedings often involve lengthy delays between the initiation of a claim and the enforcement of a judgment, resolving disputes through contractual settlement can offer significant time savings.

In the European Union (EU), a range of legal instruments provide protection for copyright and related rights, patents, trademarks, and other forms of intellectual property. These instruments form the foundation of contractual regulation of IP rights in EU Member States. The regulatory framework is based both on national legislation and on applicable EU directives and regulations (Table 2).

Table 2. European Union legislation in the field of intellectual property

Regulatory act	Meaning
Directive (EU) No. 2019/790 of the European Parliament and of the Council "On Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market" (2019)	Provides guidelines for the use of copyright in the digital space and the conclusion of licensing contracts between platforms and content producers.
Regulation (EU) No. 2017/1001 of the European Parliament and of the Council "On the European Union Trade Mark (Codification)" (2017)	Regulates the procedure for registering and using trademarks across the European Union, ensuring unitary protection.
Directive No. 2004/48/EC of the European Parliament and of the Council "On the Enforcement of Intellectual Property Rights" (2004)	Establishes common principles and procedures for the protection and enforcement of IP rights in cases of infringement.
European Patent Convention has been Amended by the Following Decisions of the Administrative Council since the Publication of the 17th Edition (2020)	Provides the legal framework for the registration and protection of patents, forming a basis for patent law across EU states.

Source: created by the authors.

The analysis of European Union (EU) law enables Member States, as well as countries aspiring to integration – such as Ukraine – to adapt their national legislation in line with European standards. The study of EU regulations and directives provides valuable insights into modern mechanisms for the protection of copyrights, patents, trademarks, and other forms of intellectual property (IP).

EU legal instruments play a significant role in the harmonisation of IP rules across Member States, including Germany. For instance, instruments such as the EU Trade Mark Regulation and the Copyright Directive in the Digital Age have a direct influence on national legislation.

In Germany, the contractual regulation of IP law is grounded in civil law principles. It is primarily based on the German Civil Code (1896) and supported by specialised laws, such as the Act on Copyright and Related Rights (1965). In this legal framework, contracts between parties play a vital role in regulating legal relations concerning the creation, use, transfer, and protection of rights to IP objects.

German parties have substantial freedom to negotiate contract terms. However, contractual changes cannot affect mandatory regulations like author moral rights. Oral agreements are generally lawful in German law, however IP-related agreements, especially rights transfers, must be in writing. Royalties and other fees are common in licensing agreements. Certain IP goods, like patents, require appropriate compensation. German authors keep their moral rights after relinquishing their economic rights. Right to be identified as author and protection from work distortion or misuse. Music collective rights management groups like GEMA simplify the procedure of signing agreements with different rights holders. These institutions streamline licensing and assure equitable compensation, helping contractually regulate intellectual property rights.

Cases involving intellectual property (IP) contracts in Germany are adjudicated in general courts or through alternative mechanisms such as mediation and arbitration. Notably,

Germany has specialised courts that address intellectual property matters, including the German Patent Court in Munich.

Clear legal standards, international harmonisation, and the effective protection of the parties' rights contribute to the success of Germany's contractual regulation of intellectual property relations. This framework creates a favourable environment for the use, transfer, and commercialisation of IP objects at both national and international levels.

France also maintains a comprehensive and structured system of intellectual property protection, which regulates not only the rights of authors and owners but also governs commercial relations. As shown in Table 2, France's approach is based on a combination of national laws, international treaties, and European Union legal instruments.

The primary source of regulation is the Intellectual Property Code (Legislative Part, 1992). Additional key provisions are found in the French Civil Code (2006), which establishes the general principles for concluding contracts. France is also a signatory to major international IP agreements, including the Paris Convention for the Protection of Industrial Property.

Under French law, most contracts in the field of intellectual property must be in written form, and failure to do so may render the contract invalid. According to academic research, French legislation mandates fair remuneration for authors, particularly in the field of copyright. Licensing agreements may include royalty structures based on the volume or extent of use of the protected object.

In cases of breach of contract or infringement of IP rights, the rightholder may seek judicial remedies including: compensation for damages, cessation of unauthorised use of the IP object, and seizure of counterfeit goods. Disputes concerning IP contracts are handled by specialised courts, notably the Tribunaux de grande instance (Industrial Property Courts). France also encourages the use of alternative dispute resolution mechanisms such as mediation and arbitration.

Moreover, France is actively updating its legal framework to address new challenges, particularly in safeguarding authors' rights in the digital environment. Collective rights management organisations, such as SACEM (for musical works), play a key role in the efficient administration of copyright through collective licensing agreements.

France is widely regarded as having one of the most advanced systems for the contractual regulation of intellectual property. Countries aiming to improve their IP legal frameworks – especially regarding authors' rights and equitable contract terms – can benefit significantly from studying the French model.

Latvia, as a Member State of the European Union, possesses a well-developed legal framework in the field of intellectual property, which is fully aligned with EU standards. The principal legislative acts governing this area include the Copyright Law of Latvia (2000). One notable feature of Latvian legislation is the requirement for precise contractual terms. Contracts must clearly define the scope of rights granted, the territorial application of those rights, the duration of use of the intellectual property object, and the amount of remuneration. All licensing agreements related to patents, trademarks, and other industrial property objects may be registered with the Latvian

Patent Office. Although registration is not mandatory, it serves as an important safeguard by enhancing the legal protection of the contracting parties in the event of a dispute.

Latvia places considerable emphasis on protecting copyright in the digital environment. It is actively implementing the provisions of the EU Directive on Copyright in the Digital Single Market, thereby ensuring the effective protection of the rights of authors and other rights holders in the online context.

An important element of Latvia's contractual regulation of intellectual property is its case law, which helps unify the interpretation and application of IP contracts. Latvia demonstrates a consistent effort to strike a balance between the interests of rights holders and users of intellectual property, a principle that underpins the sustainable development of the creative industries.

In Italy, the system of contractual regulation in the field of intellectual property is based on both international treaties – such as the Berne Convention, Paris Convention, and TRIPS Agreement – and national laws that conform to EU standards. This legal framework governs the use, transfer, licensing, and protection of intellectual property rights within contractual relations. The primary legislative instruments include the Italian Civil Code (1942), the Industrial Property Code (Legislative Decree No. 30, 2005).

Italian law is grounded in the principle of freedom of contract, as established by the Italian Civil Code (1942). However, contractual freedom is subject to compliance with mandatory legal provisions. Licensing agreements, assignment agreements, and franchise agreements frequently require written form, and certain contracts – such as those involving the assignment of patents – must be registered with public authorities to be legally effective. Moral rights of authors, including the right to attribution and the right to protect the integrity of the work, are inalienable and cannot be transferred or waived. Contractual arrangements in the field of intellectual property typically provide for remuneration, which may be structured either as a fixed sum or as royalties – deductions from income generated by the exploitation of the IP object. A significant role in the management of copyright in Italy is played by the Società Italiana degli Autori ed Editori (SIAE), a collective management organisation that acts on behalf of authors to administer rights and conclude contracts.

Italy has dedicated courts for intellectual property disputes. Since 2003, the Tribunali delle Imprese (Commercial Courts) have heard IP contract and rights disputes as well as unfair competition cases. Milan, Rome, Naples, Turin, and Florence have these courts. Due to its highly specialised judges and significant amount of IP-related cases, the Milan Tribunal is known for its patent and trademark conflict expertise. However, conventional civil courts can handle copyright, small contractual, and other disputes without expert adjudication. Italian contract law governing intellectual property is influenced by national, European, and international legal traditions. This comprehensive system safeguards IP rights and facilitates commercialisation.

Germany, Italy, France, and Latvia's IP experiences can help Ukraine strengthen its IP law. These countries have excellent legal systems that meet modern economic and digital needs. These EU Member States' best practices could help Ukraine create a more modern, efficient, and EU-compliant intellectual property protection system. Such measures would boost creative sectors, innovation, and Ukraine's globalisation. A thorough assessment

of major legislative acts is needed to guarantee that Ukrainian intellectual property laws meet EU requirements. Modern rights protection measures, digital adaptation, and good author and rightholder interest management should be part of this process. Harmonise Law of Ukraine No. 2811-IX (2023) with Directive (EU) No. 2019/790 of the European Parliament and Council "On Copyright and Related Rights in the Digital Single Market" (2019). This would require clear standards for digital content use and stronger author rights safeguards online. Law of Ukraine No. 3687-XII (1994) should also be updated to comply with Regulation (EU) No. 2017/1001 of the European Parliament and Council "On the European Union Trade Mark (Codification)" (2017). This would help Ukraine fight counterfeit goods and streamline trademark registration.

Discussion

An intellectual property (IP) agreement is a contract between two or more parties that defines the rights and obligations of each party in relation to a specific intellectual property object. This may include copyrights, patents, trademarks, trade secrets, industrial designs, and other protected subject matter. Such agreements serve as the primary legal instrument for aligning the interests of rights holders (e.g., authors or patentees) and users (e.g., licensees or assignees).

According to research conducted by Naim and Chan (2024), it is crucial to adapt IP agreements to the evolving conditions of the digital economy. This includes regulating rights concerning digital content, artificial intelligence (AI), and blockchain technologies. Adapting intellectual property contracts to reflect the realities of the digital environment is an urgent task for Ukraine, particularly given the rapid pace of technological advancement. The use of digital content, AI systems, and blockchain technologies introduces new legal challenges that must be addressed through updated contractual practices. In Ukraine, there is currently no clear legal regulation regarding rights to works generated by AI. Therefore, contractual provisions must explicitly determine the rightful holder of copyright – whether it is the creator of the AI, the user of the system, or the development company. Clarity in this regard is essential to ensure legal certainty and to foster innovation in the digital economy.

According to the study by Grimaldi et al. (2020), it is essential to establish clear procedures for the monitoring and management of intellectual property (IP) agreements. Effective monitoring and control systems are crucial for the proper functioning of contractual relations in the IP sphere. These mechanisms help protect the rights of the parties, ensure adherence to contractual provisions, and minimise the risk of infringement. The authors note that the European Union has established efficient enforcement frameworks, including oversight by competition and IP authorities, to ensure compliance with IP agreements. In contrast, Ukraine's enforcement mechanisms require further development to guarantee adequate protection for the parties involved.

Recent EU judicial and regulatory developments show how digital IP disputes are handled. The EU Court of Justice assessed whether online-platform operators are liable for user copyright infringements in YouTube and Cyando (Court of Justice..., 2021a). In VG Bild-Kunst (Case C-392/19), the Court upheld contractual clauses mandating technological safeguards to prevent unlawful framing of protected works (Court of Justice..., 2021b).

These judgements show that contractual obligations, technological controls, platform duties, and judicial interpretation increasingly affect digital intellectual property regulation.

Because intellectual property contracts often involve secret economic information, technically complicated subject matter, and parties in various jurisdictions, alternative dispute resolution is important. Directive 2008/52/EC offers a general framework for cross-border civil and commercial mediation (European Parliament..., 2008), whereas the WIPO Mediation and Arbitration Rules specialise on IP and tech issues (World Intellectual..., 2021). These procedures may offer greater procedural flexibility, confidentiality, access to specialised decision-makers, and easier resolution of multi-jurisdictional issues than conventional litigation.

Recent EU law has increased digital intellectual property contract regulation. Regulation (EU) 2022/2065 (2022), the Digital Services Act, updates intermediary services and online platforms' requirements, including procedural mechanisms for unlawful digital material and intellectual property infringement (European Parliament..., 2022). Regulation (EU) 2024/1689 (2024), the Artificial Intelligence Act, mandates general-purpose AI model suppliers to implement copyright-compliant procedures and disclose model training content. Contracts for digital platforms, artificial intelligence systems, datasets, and online material cannot be managed merely by copyright assignment and license clauses. Ukrainian legal harmonisation should take these developments into account.

These regulatory disparities have major implications for cross-border licensing, assignment, technology transfer, franchising, and collaborative innovation. Higher harmonisation, unitary intellectual property rights, better judicial practise, and access to specialised courts promote contractual predictability in the EU. Therefore, parties can better appraise the rights granted, define enforcement measures, calculate litigation risks, and shape contractual remuneration. However, disparities in statutory interpretation, limited specialised judicial practise, and weaker enforcement procedures may increase legal due diligence and contract negotiating expenses in Ukraine. Businesses may need to specify ownership, territorial extent, permissible uses, registration, remuneration, confidentiality, liability, applicable law, and dispute resolution.

When negotiating with EU counterparties, Ukrainian writers, inventors, technology businesses, and other rightholders face these differences. Foreign partners may want additional warranties, indemnity agreements, ownership proof, or EU Member State legislation and jurisdiction due to legal uncertainties. This may raise transaction costs and weaken Ukrainian negotiating power. However, inadequate contractual provisions may lead to illegal use, royalty collection issues, employee-created intellectual property disputes, and barriers to commercialising patents, software, databases, trademarks, and creative works.

These disparities mean that formal conformity with Ukrainian law may not always be enough for Ukrainian companies to complete contracts in the EU. Thus, EU and national laws should be considered when drafting contracts, including author protection, industrial property rights registration, competition-law limits, and cross-border enforcement.

Harmonisation with EU standards would reduce transaction costs, strengthen contractual certainty, improve investment and technology transfer, and make Ukrainian intellectual property assets more attractive to European partners.

Conclusions

Legal evolution, integration into international treaties, and national specificities affect the parallels and variations in contractual IP law regulation in Ukraine and the EU. To standardise IP contractual regulation, most countries rely their regulatory frameworks on international agreements like the Paris Convention, Berne Convention, and TRIPS Agreement. Ukraine and EU Member States use universal contracts like franchise, licensing, and rights transfer agreements. Industrial property, copyright, and associated rights are protected by shared principles such written contracts, national authority registration, and trade secret protection.

While Ukraine's IP regulatory structure is evolving, it has not yet attained EU enforcement standards, where intellectual property is a vital economic asset. The EU's unitary rights, such as the trade mark and patent, simplify contractual connections among Member States. In addition, EU judicial practice and conflict settlement, especially in specialised courts, are much better than in Ukraine.

Ukraine is actively harmonising its IP laws with EU law, especially under the Association Agreement. This entails updating license and copyright laws and implementing current enforcement. More revisions are needed to improve contractual regulation. These reforms should establish IP courts, raise legal understanding and culture, and streamline administrative procedures.

In conclusion, contractual intellectual property law in Ukraine is gradually aligning with EU standards, although legislative, administrative, and judicial adjustments are needed. Ukraine can improve its international legal integration by studying EU nations' experiences. Integration will strengthen IP protection and boost innovation.

This analysis is limited by the regular revisions to EU and Ukrainian IP laws. This makes it difficult to establish consistent analysis criteria and may affect the research findings' long-term relevance. Access to several EU national legislative acts and their official translations into English or Ukrainian is limited.

Future research should examine how contractual regulation affects innovation-driven economic development, franchising and licensing agreements' financial viability, and legislative changes on the intellectual property market. These research fields will promote theoretical and practical IP regulation in Ukraine, especially in the context of European integration.

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POST-RAISI IRAN: LEADERSHIP TRANSITION, POLITICAL CONTINUITY, AND THE CONSTRAINTS OF REFORM UNDER MASOUD PEZESHKIAN

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Abstract

This study examines the dynamics of leadership transition and political continuity in post-Raisi Iran following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi in May 2024, focusing on the rise of Masoud Pezeshkian and its implications for domestic and foreign policy. The study aims to assess the extent to which Pezeshkian's reform-oriented agenda may shape policy change within the institutional framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Employing a qualitative descriptive approach based on document analysis, the research draws upon academic literature, policy reports, public opinion surveys, and reputable news sources to analyze the dynamics of political transition in post-Raisi Iran. The findings suggest that although Pezeshkian advocates greater political openness, economic reform, and diplomatic engagement, his ability to implement substantial changes remains constrained by Iran's political structure, particularly the authority of the Supreme Leader and other unelected institutions. Consequently, the transition reflects both elements of change and continuity within the Iranian political system. In foreign policy, opportunities for diplomatic engagement and regional cooperation coexist with structural limitations that restrict major policy shifts. The study concludes that leadership change in Iran does not necessarily translate into systemic transformation, as institutional constraints continue to shape the direction and scope of reform. This research contributes to a deeper understanding of political transition, institutional continuity, and reform prospects in contemporary Iran.

Keywords

Post-Raisi Iran; Leadership Transition; Political Continuity; Reform Constraints; Masoud Pezeshkian.

Resumo

Este estudo analisa a dinâmica da transição de liderança e da continuidade política no Irão pós-Raisi, na sequência do falecimento do Presidente Ebrahim Raisi em maio de 2024, centrando-se na ascensão de Masoud Pezeshkian e nas suas implicações para a política interna e externa. O estudo tem como objetivo avaliar em que medida a agenda orientada para as reformas de Pezeshkian poderá moldar a mudança política no âmbito do quadro institucional da República Islâmica do Irão. Recorrendo a uma abordagem descritiva qualitativa baseada na análise de documentos, a investigação baseia-se na literatura académica, em relatórios políticos, em inquéritos de opinião pública e em fontes noticiosas fidedignas para analisar a dinâmica da transição política no Irão pós-Raisi. Os resultados sugerem que, embora Pezeshkian defenda uma maior abertura política, reformas económicas e envolvimento

diplomático, a sua capacidade de implementar mudanças substanciais continua a ser limitada pela estrutura política do Irão, em particular pela autoridade do Líder Supremo e de outras instituições não eleitas. Consequentemente, a transição reflete tanto elementos de mudança como de continuidade no seio do sistema político iraniano. Na política externa, as oportunidades de envolvimento diplomático e cooperação regional coexistem com limitações estruturais que restringem grandes mudanças políticas. O estudo conclui que a mudança de liderança no Irão não se traduz necessariamente numa transformação sistémica, uma vez que as restrições institucionais continuam a moldar a direção e o âmbito da reforma. Esta investigação contribui para uma compreensão mais profunda da transição política, da continuidade institucional e das perspetivas de reforma no Irão contemporâneo.

Palavras-Chave

Irão pós-Raisi; Transição de liderança; Continuidade política; Limitações às reformas; Masoud Pezeshkian.

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POST-RAISI IRAN: LEADERSHIP TRANSITION, POLITICAL CONTINUITY, AND THE CONSTRAINTS OF REFORM UNDER MASOUD PEZESHKIAN

RIZKI DAMAYANTI

Introduction

The tragic death of President Ebrahim Raisi in a helicopter crash in May 2024 marks a significant turning point in Iran's recent history. As a key figure in the nation's political landscape, Raisi was a prominent conservative cleric and jurist whose presidency was defined by his unwavering ideological convictions, strong grip on domestic affairs, and a nuanced approach to foreign relations. His leadership impacted many facets of Iranian life, influencing economic strategies, social policies, international relations, and nuclear negotiations (Rauf, 2024). With his unexpected passing, Iran now faces the critical challenge of transitioning to new leadership, a shift that will undoubtedly affect the country's direction in the years to come.

In exploring the effects of leadership transitions within authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes, previous research has underscored the crucial role that individual leaders play in shaping policy directions and national priorities (Yazdani, 2019, p. 473). The literature concerning Iran's political landscape highlights the interplay between the presidency and the Supreme Leader, as well as the significant influence of key institutions such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) and the Guardian Council (Forozan & Shahi, 2017, p. 69). Furthermore, scholars have delved into the ideological rifts among conservatives, reformists, and moderates, examining how these factions compete for power within Iran's distinctive theocratic-republican hybrid system (Ghobadzadeh & Rahim, 2016, p. 457).

Ebrahim Raisi's presidency has garnered significant attention from scholars and policymakers alike, primarily due to his initiatives aimed at strengthening Iran's economy in the face of stringent sanctions. His administration is also characterized by conservative social policies and a resolute position on the nuclear agreement. Research indicates that Raisi closely aligns with the vision of Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, a relationship that carries important implications for both domestic governance and Iran's international relations (Forough, 2021, p. 3).

This study aims to investigate the complex effects of Ebrahim Raisi's death on Iran, focusing on a pivotal research question: To what extent can Masoud Pezeshkian introduce policy changes in post-Raisi Iran under the constraints of the Islamic Republic's political system? The underlying hypothesis suggests that this transition will bring both continuity

and upheaval, mirroring the entrenched tensions and dynamics within Iran's political framework.

The primary goal of this research is to conduct a thorough analysis of the political landscape in Iran following Raisi's leadership. This entails examining both the immediate and long-term ramifications of the leadership change on domestic policies, such as economic management, social reforms, and human rights concerns. Furthermore, the study will assess how the new leadership may address Iran's foreign policy challenges, particularly regarding the nuclear agreement, regional conflicts, and relationships with major global powers. Through this exploration, the study aims to project the future direction of Iran's political and policy landscape while also considering the wider implications for stability in the region and beyond.

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative descriptive approach based on document analysis to examine the dynamics of leadership transition, political continuity, and the constraints of reform in post-Raisi Iran. The study focuses on the emergence of Masoud Pezeshkian as president and assesses the extent to which policy change is possible within the institutional framework of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Data were collected from a wide range of secondary sources, including academic journal articles, books, policy reports, official government statements, public opinion surveys, and reputable international news sources published between May 2024 and July 2025. These sources were selected to provide comprehensive insights into Iran's political developments following the death of President Ebrahim Raisi and the subsequent election of Masoud Pezeshkian.

The study applies thematic analysis to identify and examine key themes related to leadership transition, political continuity, institutional constraints, reform prospects, and foreign policy orientation. Particular attention is given to the role of major political institutions, including the Supreme Leader, the presidency, and other influential actors within Iran's political system, in shaping the scope and limits of policy change.

To enhance the validity of the findings, data triangulation was conducted through the comparison of multiple sources, including academic literature, policy analyses, survey findings, and official statements. This approach allows for cross-verification of information and contributes to a more balanced and reliable interpretation of contemporary political developments in Iran. Rather than predicting future developments with certainty, the study seeks to evaluate possible political trajectories and reform prospects under Masoud Pezeshkian based on available empirical evidence and relevant theoretical perspectives.

Leadership Transition, Hybrid Political Systems, and Institutional Constraints on Reform in Iran

According to Huntington (1991, p. 48), transitions in leadership frequently lead to political instability, stemming from shifts in the legitimacy of authority and rivalries among

political elites. This transitional period can significantly impact political stability, particularly in authoritarian regimes that rely on internal agreement and control of power. In Iran, the succession from one leader to another involves critical institutions like the Guardian Council and the Assembly of Experts, which play a vital role in shaping future policies. The death of Raisi presents an opportunity for various political factions to vie for influence over state policy, potentially resulting in efforts to consolidate power or escalating internal tensions (Shahi, 2024).

Linz and Stepan (1996, p. 29) highlight that the stability following a transition largely depends on how well political institutions can adapt to change and maintain their cohesion. In Iran's context, a significant challenge lies in how these institutions can navigate leadership transitions without undermining political stability. Such changes often serve as pivotal moments for authoritarian regimes, where the capacity of political elites to adapt and achieve internal consensus can significantly influence future policy directions (Harris, 2017, p. 36). In light of these factors, power transition theory offers a valuable framework for examining the political consequences of leadership changes in Iran and for making policy predictions amidst the current complexities of its internal politics (Yeşiltaş, 2024).

In the realm of power transition theory, it's crucial to recognize that the process of leadership change encompasses both internal dynamics and external responses to that change (Ehteshami & Molavi, 2013, p. 16). With regard to post-Ebrahim Raisi Iran, the reactions of regional neighbors and global actors will significantly impact the nation's stability and the direction of its foreign policy. Strategic and diplomatic shifts from surrounding countries, as well as influential powers like the United States (US) and the European Union (EU), are likely to affect Iran's internal political landscape. Consequently, power transition theory offers not only a lens through which to analyze domestic political dynamics but also enhances our understanding of the intricate interplay between internal and external factors in the pursuit of regional and global stability (Elias, 2024).

Iran's political system stands out due to its unique blend of theocracy and republicanism. As noted by Levitsky and Way (2012, p. 38), this configuration is classified as a hybrid political system, merging aspects of both democratic and authoritarian regimes. While it permits a degree of political competition, overarching control remains vested in central authorities. Such hybrid systems are marked by elections that, while competitive, are not entirely free and fair, coupled with restricted civil liberties (Mufti, 2022, p. 247). This theoretical framework underscores the interplay between formal and informal institutions that contributes to the stability and legitimacy of the regime, simultaneously allowing for limited political opposition.

In the context of Iran, this theory sheds light on the distribution of power among various institutions, including the President, the Supreme Leader, and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC). It also offers insight into the political dynamics that emerge following the death of Ebrahim Raisi. Officially, Iran is characterized as an authoritarian state infused with elements of an Islamic republic led by clerics. This political architecture features a robust authoritarian framework alongside institutions like elections and parliament, which provide a semblance of legitimacy within a constrained environment. Leadership transitions, particularly those following Raisi's death, illustrate how these institutions adapt and shape the internal political landscape. The future trajectory of

Iran's foreign and domestic policies is significantly influenced by the interactions between these elements and the resulting power dynamics among political elites (Ali et al., 2024, p. 107).

According to Levitsky and Way (2012, p. 51), hybrid political systems create intricate dynamics where various political factions vie for influence. In the context of Iran's leadership transition, conservative, reformist, and moderate factions will significantly impact the direction of policy following President Raisi's tenure. The competition among these groups may lead to shifts in policy or even internal conflicts, depending on how they manage the power transition. Moreover, key institutions such as the Guardian Council, the Assembly of Experts, and the Supreme Leadership play a crucial role in shaping both policy and political dynamics in Iran. Their influence in orchestrating leadership transitions and balancing power among political elites is instrumental in determining the nation’s political stability and the trajectory of future policies.

The theory of hybrid political systems not only sheds light on the characteristics of the Iranian regime but also enhances our understanding of the challenges and opportunities that arise in maintaining political stability amidst ongoing leadership changes (Vakil, 2013, p. 62). Individual leaders play a crucial role in shaping policy direction and ensuring political stability within authoritarian and semi-authoritarian regimes. This theory posits that in systems characterized by weak or underdeveloped political institutions, the traits and actions of individual leaders can significantly affect outcomes. Wright and Escribà-Folch (2012, p. 294) suggest that the personalization of power in these regimes may lead to instability, particularly when there is no established mechanism for succession. While charismatic leaders or those with a compelling vision can bring about transformative policy changes and alter the internal political landscape, their departures often generate uncertainty during leadership transitions.

A comprehensive understanding of political change in post-Raisi Iran requires an examination of the doctrine of Velayat-e Faqih (Guardianship of the Islamic Jurist), which constitutes the constitutional and ideological foundation of the Islamic Republic. According to Mahdavi (2023, pp. 89–94), Velayat-e Faqih places ultimate political and religious authority in the hands of the Supreme Leader, who occupies the highest position within the Iranian political system. This arrangement distinguishes Iran from conventional presidential systems because elected institutions operate within boundaries established by the Supreme Leader and other unelected bodies.

The authority of the Supreme Leader extends beyond symbolic leadership. As noted by Nazif and Darivand (2024, pp. 134–138), the Supreme Leader exercises significant influence over national security, foreign policy, military affairs, and the appointment of key officials. The Supreme Leader also maintains authority over major institutions such as the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the judiciary, and state broadcasting organizations. Consequently, the Iranian president functions within a political framework where ultimate decision-making authority remains concentrated in unelected institutions.

Studies by Mulaee and Moradkhani (2020, pp. 505–510) and Abbasi Fard et al. (2015, pp. 54–58) further demonstrate that although the president is responsible for administering government affairs and implementing policies, the office does not possess unrestricted authority to initiate fundamental political reforms. Presidential initiatives

frequently depend on the approval or acquiescence of the Supreme Leader and other powerful institutions. This institutional arrangement creates significant constraints on policy innovation and reform.

These structural realities are particularly relevant in assessing the presidency of Masoud Pezeshkian. Although Pezeshkian is widely associated with reformist and moderate political currents, his capacity to introduce substantial domestic and foreign policy changes is likely to be conditioned by the broader institutional framework of the Islamic Republic. Therefore, leadership transition alone should not be assumed to produce systemic political transformation.

The concept of Velayat-e Faqih thus provides an important analytical lens for understanding the coexistence of political change and continuity in post-Raisi Iran. While electoral outcomes may alter political rhetoric and policy priorities, the enduring influence of unelected institutions continues to shape the direction and limits of reform within the Iranian political system.

Individual leaders can influence policy priorities, political discourse, and governance strategies, particularly during periods of political transition. However, in hybrid political systems such as Iran, the impact of individual leadership is mediated by institutional structures and power relations. As Salami (2024) argues, leadership change may create opportunities for policy adjustment, but the extent of transformation depends on the broader political environment in which leaders operate.

In the case of Masoud Pezeshkian, the key analytical question is not merely whether he possesses reformist intentions, but rather the extent to which such intentions can be translated into policy outcomes within the constraints imposed by Iran’s political system. This perspective highlights the importance of examining both agency and structure when assessing the prospects for political reform, policy continuity, and foreign policy adjustment in post-Raisi Iran.

Politics, Economy, and Social Discontent in Iran

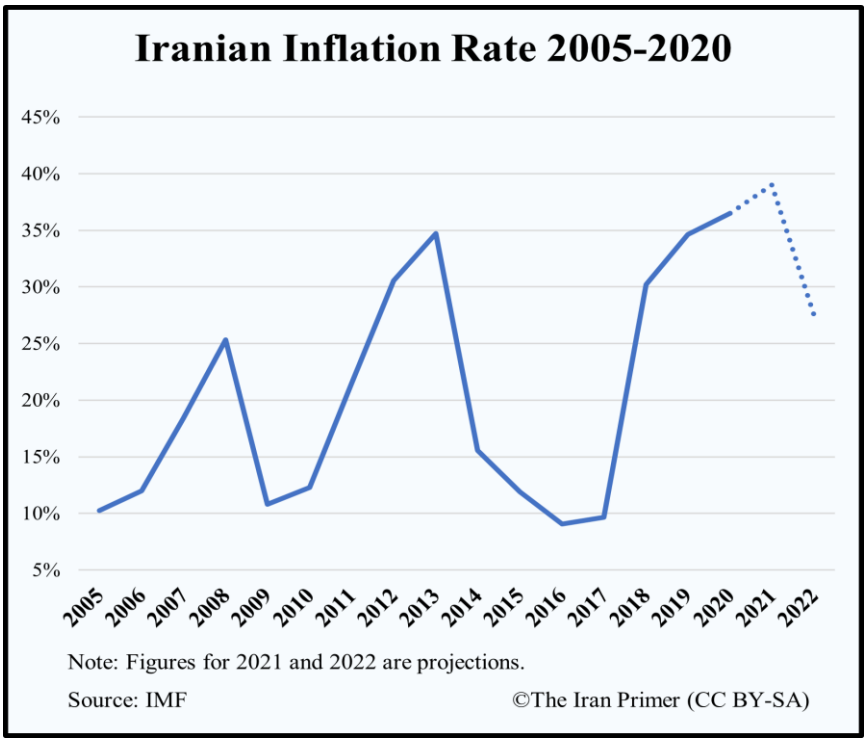
Prior to Ebrahim Raisi's death, Iran's political climate was marked by significant internal strife and external pressures. Serving as President since August 2021, Raisi encountered sharp criticism both domestically and internationally, as his administration was characterized by conservative and authoritarian policies (Sood, 2024). Furthermore, Iran's relations with Western nations, particularly the United States, remained fraught due to ongoing tensions surrounding its nuclear program. The negotiations concerning the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) reached an impasse, leading to heightened economic sanctions that profoundly affected the daily lives of Iranian citizens (Bazoobandi, 2024).

Economically, Iran was grappling with a dire situation before Raisi's death. The sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies severely impacted the national economy, resulting in soaring inflation, increasing unemployment rates, and a plummeting currency. Despite possessing substantial oil and gas reserves, Iran's capacity to export and capitalize on these resources was greatly hampered by international restrictions. Attempts by the government to enhance economic conditions through domestic policies

were frequently obstructed by corruption and bureaucratic inefficiencies (Amuzegar, 2020, p. 17).

To offer a clearer perspective on Iran's economic landscape over the past two decades, the accompanying charts illustrate key indicators: the Iranian Inflation Rate from 2005 to 2020 and the Iranian Unemployment Rate throughout the same timeframe. These metrics shed light on the economic obstacles and trends that have significantly influenced the nation's financial stability and labor market.

Figure 1. Iranian Inflation Rate Trends: 2005-2022



Source: IMF: Iran's Economy Grew in 2020. https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2021/apr/21/imf-iran%E2%80%99s-economy-grew-2020

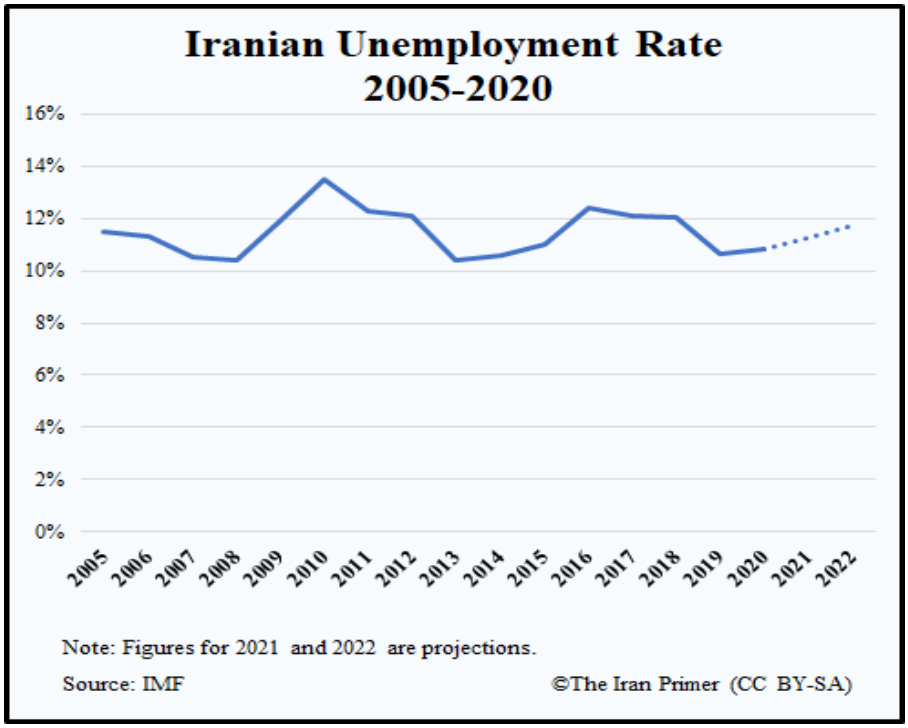
The chart in Figure 1 depicts the inflation rate in Iran from 2005 to 2020, along with projections for 2021 and 2022.

Data from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) reveals notable fluctuations throughout these years, with the inflation rate peaking at approximately 35% in 2013 and again in 2019, periods characterized by economic instability. In contrast, the inflation rate reached its lowest points in 2016 and 2017, falling below 10%.

The projections suggest that inflation will remain high in 2021 before experiencing a sharp decline in 2022, highlighting the volatility of Iran's economy, which is shaped by

both internal policies and external sanctions. Meanwhile, Figure 2 illustrates the changes in Iran's unemployment rate from 2005 to 2020. The data reveals significant variability, including a peak around 2008, likely due to the impact of global economic conditions. This was followed by a relatively stable period between 2009 and 2014, and further fluctuations that peaked again in 2018. Projections for 2021 and 2022 indicate a slight rise in unemployment, underscoring persistent economic challenges and the necessity for targeted policies to enhance employment opportunities in the country.

Figure 2. Trends in Iranian Unemployment Rate: 2005-2022

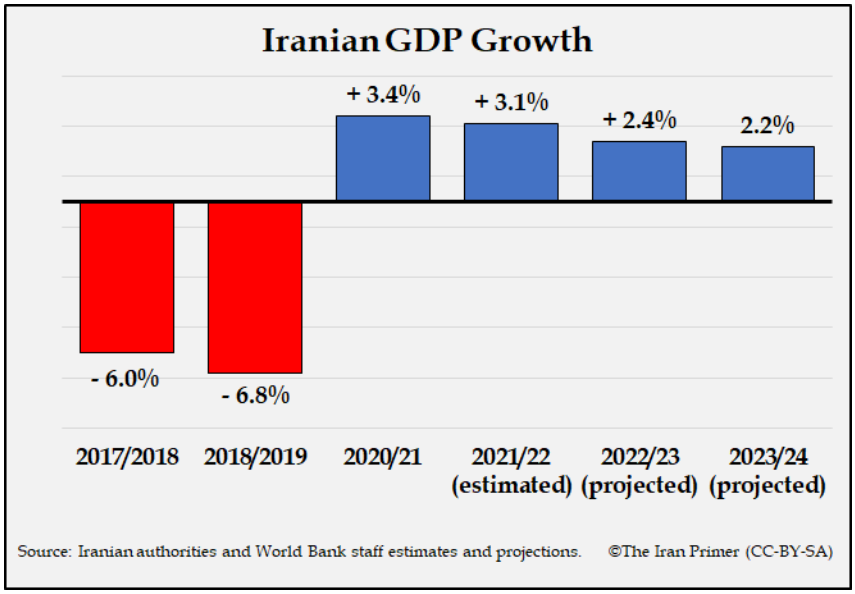


Source: IMF: Iran's Economy Grew in 2020. https://iranprimer.usip.org/blog/2021/apr/21/imf-iran%E2%80%99s-economy-grew-2020

Together, these statistics illuminate the severe economic issues facing Iran and the urgent need for effective policy responses.

To further contextualize Iran's economic challenges and recovery path, the subsequent chart outlines the country's GDP growth from 2017/2018 to 2023/2024, showcasing periods of significant contraction followed by gradual stabilization and projected growth.

Figure 3. Trends in Iranian GDP Growth: 2017/2018 to 2023/2024

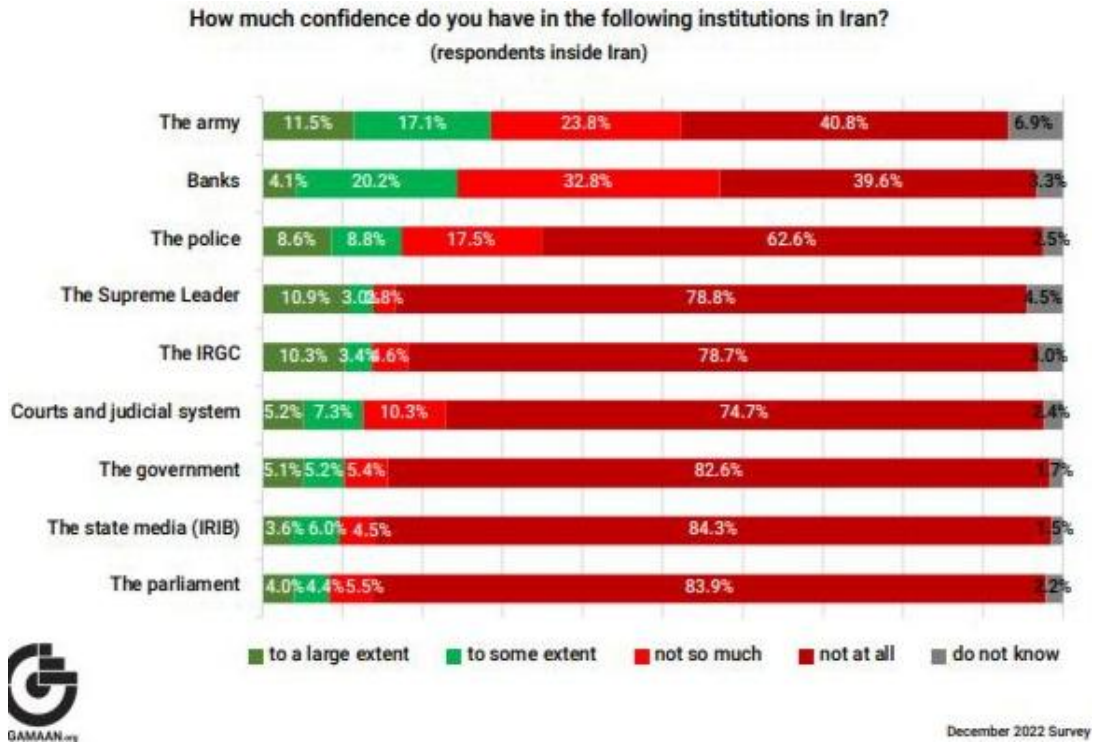


Source: World Bank: Iran's Slow Recovery. https://iranprimer.usip.org/index.php/blog/2022/jan/10/world-bank-irans-slow-recovery

The chart depicts the growth of Iran's GDP from 2017/2018 to 2023/2024, revealing a notable contraction of -6. 0% in 2017/2018, followed by a deeper decline of -6. 8% in 2018/2019. This downward trend was reversed with a recovery marked by positive growth rates of 3. 4% in 2020/2021 and an estimated 3. 1% in 2021/2022. Going forward, growth is anticipated to continue, albeit at a slower pace, with projections of 2. 4% in 2022/2023 and 2. 2% in 2023/2024. This suggests a gradual stabilization of the Iranian economy after the significant downturns experienced in the preceding years. In essence, the chart reflects a period of economic recovery for Iran, following the pronounced GDP contractions of 2017/2018 and 2018/2019. The positive growth rates from 2020/2021 onward imply concerted efforts toward economic stabilization and gradual improvement, though the slower projected growth rates for the upcoming years highlight ongoing challenges and a cautious recovery path.

Beyond economic concerns, Iran's social landscape has been marked by complex challenges. Public discontent with the government has grown, driven by dire economic conditions and political repression. Widespread protests have erupted, calling for change and better living standards. Issues surrounding human rights, particularly women's rights and freedom of expression, have garnered attention both domestically and internationally. The COVID-19 pandemic has further strained the already fragile health system and exacerbated economic hardships faced by the populace (Takian et al., 2020). Additionally, survey data reflecting public trust in Iran's institutions offers crucial insights into the broader socio-political context from which these sentiments emerge.

Figure 4. *Public Confidence in Iranian Institutions: December 2022 Survey Results*

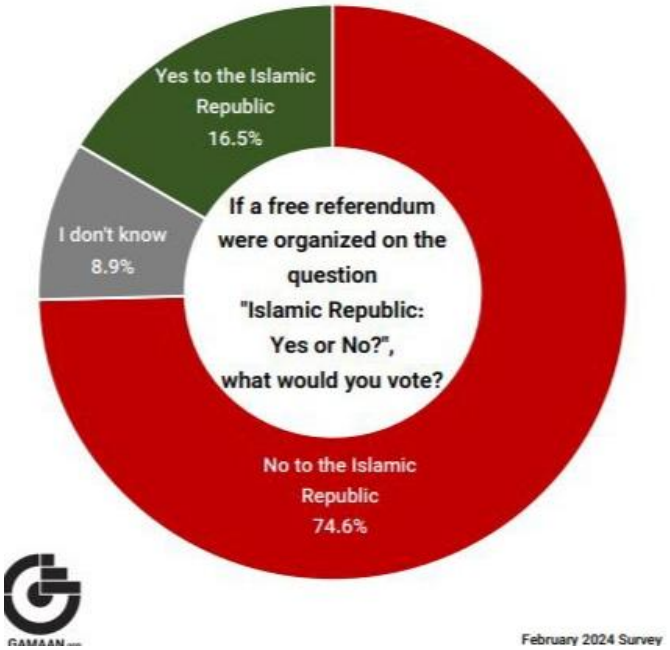


Source: Ammar Maleki & Pooyan Tamimi Arab, Iranians' Attitudes Toward the 2022 Nationwide Protests (February 2023), The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), p. 19. https://gamaan.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/09/GAMAAN-Protests-Survey-English-Report-Final.pdf

The survey results from December 2022 reveal a striking lack of public trust in various institutions across Iran. The government, state media (IRIB), and parliament are at the forefront of this distrust, with over 80% of respondents indicating they have no confidence in these entities. This highlights a significant crisis of faith in the fundamental pillars of governance and information in the country. Even the Supreme Leader and the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), typically viewed as central figures of the Iranian state, face substantial skepticism, as nearly 79% of respondents express a complete lack of confidence in them. While the army and financial institutions perform slightly better, they still experience considerable distrust; approximately 41% of those surveyed do not trust the army, and about 40% extend the same sentiment to the banking sector. Similarly, both the police and the judicial system receive dismal confidence ratings, reflecting a pervasive dissatisfaction and skepticism among the Iranian populace toward key institutions that underpin the state's functionality.

This widespread erosion of trust points to deep-rooted issues within Iran's socio-political landscape, likely driven by economic difficulties, governance problems, and ongoing political turmoil. The subsequent Figure 5, titled "Public Opinion on the Islamic Republic: February 2024 Referendum Survey," provides additional insights into the prevailing public sentiment regarding the broader political system in Iran.

Figure 5. *Public Opinion on the Islamic Republic: February 2024 Referendum Survey*

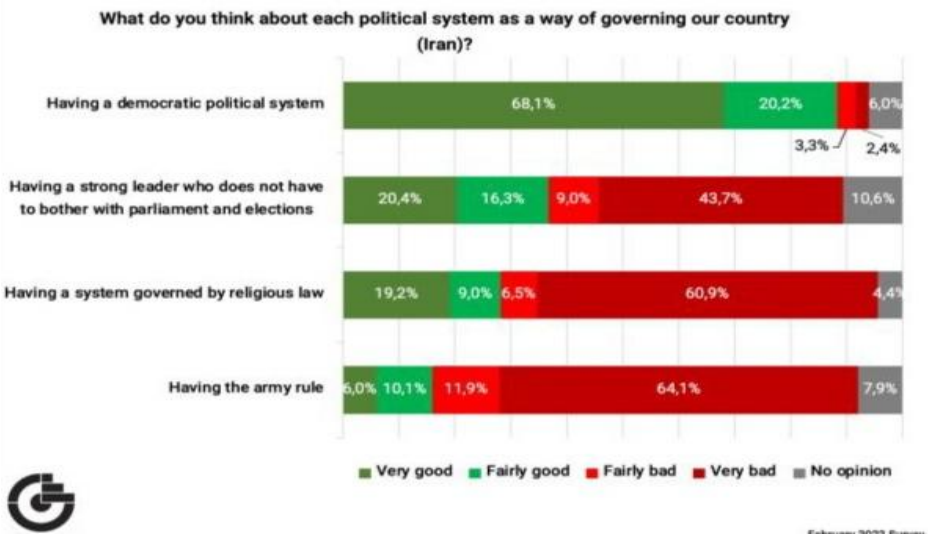


Source: Ammar Maleki, Iranians' Attitudes Toward the 2024 Elections (February 2024), The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), p. 4. https://gamaan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/02/GAMAAN-Elections-2024-Survey-Report-Final-English.pdf

The results of the February 2024 survey reveal a strong sentiment among the Iranian public regarding the Islamic Republic. The data indicates that an overwhelming 74. 6% of respondents would choose "No" if a free referendum were held on the future of the regime. This substantial majority points to widespread dissatisfaction with the current political landscape, reflecting deep-rooted grievances and a strong desire for meaningful change among the Iranian populace. In contrast, only 16. 5% of those surveyed expressed support for retaining the Islamic Republic, while 8. 9% remained undecided. This suggests that a minority either supports the status quo or is uncertain about potential alternatives. These findings underscore a pivotal moment in Iranian politics, where the prevailing unrest could spur demands for reform or possibly a shift to a new form of governance. The significant number of opponents poses potential challenges for the ruling regime as it seeks to maintain its legitimacy and control. Moreover, the undecided group, though smaller, represents a crucial demographic that could influence the outcome of any future referendum or political transition. Overall, the data highlights a palpable tension within the country, as a considerable portion of the population clearly favors moving away from the current Islamic Republic system.

The survey results from 2022 can further elucidate the reasons behind the majority's desire for changes in Iran's domestic political framework.

Figure 6. *Public Opinion on Different Political Systems for Governing Iran: February 2024 Survey Results*



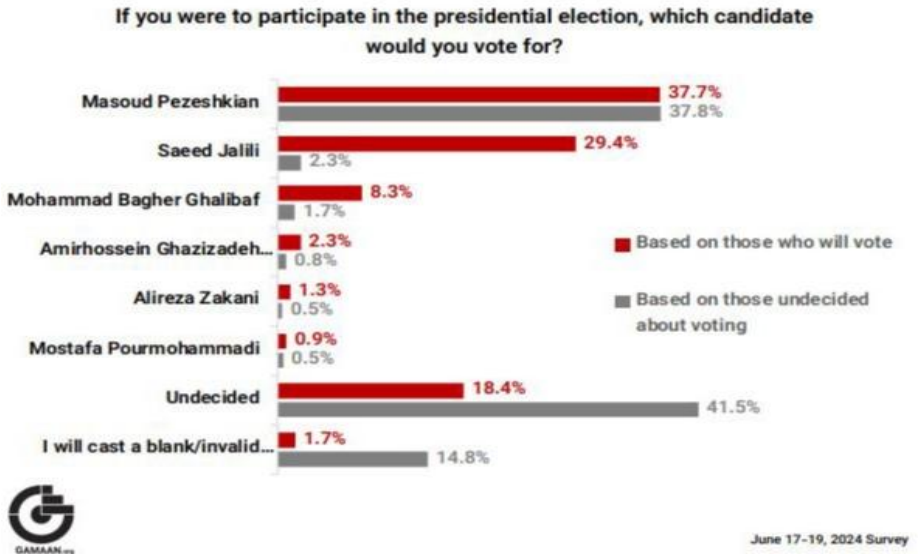
Source: Ammar Maleki, Iranians' Attitudes Toward Political Systems: A 2022 Survey Report (March 2022), The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), p. 5. https://gamaan.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/03/GAMAAN-Political-Systems-Survey-2022-English-Final.pdf

The chart illustrates the findings of a survey conducted in February 2023 in Iran, which explored public opinions on four distinct political systems for governance: democracy, a strong leader unimpeded by parliamentary processes, a system governed by religious law, and military rule. The survey indicates a clear preference among Iranians for a democratic political system over authoritarian leadership, theocracy, and military governance. This support for democracy reflects a yearning for political freedoms, representation, and accountability. Conversely, the significant opposition to religious and military rule highlights concerns over authoritarian governance, restrictions on personal liberties, and potential abuses of power. These insights are vital for grasping public sentiment in Iran, offering valuable context for policymakers contemplating reforms or adjustments to the political structure.

In addition, examining the various survey results, it's evident that Iran was grappling with serious challenges even prior to Raisi's passing. Politically, the nation faces the formidable task of navigating tensions with Western countries while simultaneously addressing domestic calls for reform. Economically, tackling inflation, unemployment, and the effects of international sanctions remains a critical priority that demands innovative and coordinated strategies. Socially, the government is under pressure to respond to societal demands for freedom and human rights amidst the ongoing repercussions of the pandemic. Addressing these multifaceted challenges necessitates strong and responsive leadership to steer Iran toward stability and progress (Mehrabi, 2024). Given these ongoing challenges, it is essential to gauge public preferences

regarding potential leadership candidates in the wake of Raisi's death. The subsequent polling data on public opinion concerning Raisi's successor will provide valuable insights into the leadership qualities and policy objectives that the Iranian populace desires.

Figure 7. Voter Preferences for Iran's Presidential Election: June 2024 Survey Results



Source: Ammar Maleki, Iranians' Attitudes Toward the 2024 Snap Presidential Election (June 2024), The Group for Analyzing and Measuring Attitudes in IRAN (GAMAAN), p. 5. https://gamaan.org/wp-content/uploads/2024/06/GAMAAN-Survey-Report-Snap-Elections-2024-English.pdf

The chart presents the results of a survey on voter intentions for the presidential election in Iran, scheduled for June 2024. From the survey, Masoud Pezeshkian emerges as the frontrunner, garnering 37. 7% of the intended votes, followed closely by Saeed Jalili, who secures 29. 4%. Other contenders, including Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf and Amirhossein Ghazizadeh-Hesani, trail behind with significantly lower support, obtaining 8. 3% and 2. 3%, respectively. Notably, a considerable share of respondents—41. 5%—remain undecided on their candidate choice. Pezeshkian, a reformist politician and former Minister of Health, likely resonates with voters who prioritize social reforms and healthcare initiatives. Conversely, Jalili, recognized for his hardline stance and his former role as Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council, appeals to those who favor a robust foreign policy and stability in security matters. Meanwhile, Ghalibaf brings his experience as the former Mayor of Tehran and Commander of the Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps Air Force, emphasizing a leadership style centered on urban governance and infrastructure development. Other candidates, including Amirhossein Ghazizadeh-Hesani, Alireza Zakani, and Mostafa Pourmohammadi, despite their political backgrounds, have yet to gain substantial traction among voters. The significant level of uncertainty among the undecided electorate underscores the volatile nature of the current political

landscape, indicating that the candidates' campaigns will be critical in shaping the pending election outcome.

The survey results indicate that Masoud Pezeshkian's ability to generate the highest level of voter interest can be attributed to several pivotal factors. As a reformist politician and former Minister of Health, Pezeshkian has established a track record that resonates with many voters who are eager for social reform and enhancements in public health. His experience in the health sector has likely earned him a reputation for both competence and dedication to essential services, which are critical concerns for a large segment of the electorate. Moreover, Pezeshkian's experience in government positions him as a candidate with the expertise needed to navigate Iran's intricate political landscape and implement effective policies. His talent for articulating a clear vision for the future of Iran, along with his reformist credentials, allows him to distinguish himself from other candidates who may appear more traditional or conservative (Toossi, 2024). In summary, Masoud Pezeshkian's appeal stems from his reformist agenda, demonstrated leadership in health administration, and alignment with the progressive values of a significant portion of voters. Collectively, these elements contribute to his robust performance in the voter intention survey.

Iran Political Dynamics after Raisi's Death

The passing of President Raisi has elicited a range of responses from the various political factions and elites in Iran. As a conservative cleric, Raisi had become a key player in Iranian politics, particularly viewed as a potential successor to Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei. His death has created a power vacuum, presenting an opportunity for different factions to vie for influence and to shape the future political landscape of the country (Doucet, 2024). Immediately following his death, political factions—including both reformists and conservatives—began strategizing for the upcoming presidential elections, set to occur within 50 days. The reformist faction sees this moment as a chance to revive their stalled agenda, aspiring to bring about significant changes in Iran's domestic politics and international relations. They are working to rally support from citizens yearning for transformation and are reaching out to moderate groups to solidify their standing (Shahi, 2024).

Conversely, conservative and ultra-conservative factions are keen to uphold the status quo. They have leveraged Raisi's death to reiterate the necessity of adhering to the core tenets of the Islamic Revolution and shielding the nation from foreign interference. These factions stress the importance of stability and national security, persisting with stringent policies towards Western nations. Hardline groups, such as the Paydari Front, are also maneuvering to capitalize on the political void to bolster their influence (Jacinto, 2024). Moreover, clerical groups and military elites, particularly the IRGC, play a crucial role in the leadership succession process. Mohammad Mokhber, the interim president, has strong ties to the IRGC, suggesting that the military's influence over the government may increase. This underscores the IRGC's profound sway over Iranian politics, especially during times of crisis (Azimi, 2024).

During the transition period, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) adopted a cautious approach. They recognized that such times of change can lead to uncertainty, a

situation that could be exploited by both domestic and foreign adversaries of Iran. In this regard, the IRGC plays a crucial role in safeguarding the electoral process, ensuring that there are no interferences or threats from within the country or outside it. Therefore, they advocate for a swift and efficient succession process to maintain a strong, coordinated government. The IRGC often leverages its influence and networks to support candidates it believes are best equipped to uphold Iran's stability and security (Anvari & Goudarzi, 2024).

Within this succession framework, the ulama group wields significant influence. Members of the Expert Council, or Assembly of Experts, play a vital role in selecting the next supreme leader should the succession involve the position of Rahbar or Supreme Leader. However, in the case of the presidential position, they primarily serve as advisors and watchdogs over the morality of potential candidates. Additionally, the Guardian Council—a conservative body charged with overseeing elections and legislation—plays a key role in ensuring that the transition process aligns with their interests. Ayatollah Khamenei's influence as Supreme Leader remains prominent, and his approval will significantly shape the final decision regarding the new leader (Salami, 2024).

Following Raisi's passing, speculation about potential successors intensified. Among the names frequently mentioned is Mojtaba Khamenei, the Supreme Leader's son, who is believed to hold considerable influence behind the scenes. Nevertheless, his potential ascent could trigger controversy and public resistance, given his perceived lack of legitimacy and popularity. Other likely candidates include Ali Bagheri Kani, the chief negotiator in nuclear discussions, and Saeed Jalili, the former Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council. Although these candidates are seen as hard-liners, they will face formidable economic and social challenges, including soaring inflation and widespread public dissatisfaction (Doucet, 2024). In summary, Raisi's death ushers in a new era in Iranian politics, characterized by various factions and elites vying to fill the power vacuum he left behind. The involvement of clerics and military figures in the succession process will be pivotal in determining the country's political trajectory, while the Iranian public remains watchful, hopeful for positive change in the future.

Implications for Iran's Domestic Policy

The 2024 Iranian presidential election, held following the death of Ebrahim Raisi, resulted in the victory of Masoud Pezeshkian, a reformist politician and former Minister of Health. His electoral success reflected public support for a platform emphasizing economic reform, greater social openness, and improved international engagement. However, the significance of Pezeshkian's victory should be understood within the broader institutional framework of the Islamic Republic, where major policy decisions remain influenced by unelected institutions and the authority of the Supreme Leader. Consequently, while his election may signal changes in policy priorities, the extent of substantive policy transformation remains uncertain (Naji, 2024).

In the economic sphere, Pezeshkian has emphasized the need to address persistent challenges such as inflation, unemployment, and poverty through structural reforms. His policy agenda includes reducing Iran's dependence on oil revenues, encouraging economic diversification, and promoting investment in industrial and technological

sectors. He has also expressed support for greater diplomatic engagement as a means of mitigating the economic impact of international sanctions. Nevertheless, the implementation of these policies will depend not only on executive leadership but also on broader political support and external conditions. Therefore, the prospects for economic reform should be viewed within the constraints imposed by both domestic political institutions and the international environment (Toossi, 2024).

In social and cultural affairs, Pezeshkian has advocated greater protection of individual rights and broader public participation in social and political life. His public statements have emphasized the importance of women's participation in politics and the economy, as well as the need to create a more open environment for public dialogue. However, efforts to expand civil liberties and relax restrictions on media and internet access may encounter resistance from conservative actors and institutions that continue to play a significant role in regulating Iran's sociopolitical sphere. As a result, the realization of these objectives remains contingent upon the broader balance of power within the Iranian political system (Geranmayeh, 2024).

Regarding human rights and civil liberties, Pezeshkian has expressed support for greater accountability, judicial transparency, and legal protections for citizens, including ethnic and religious minorities. He has also criticized certain forms of political repression and called for reforms aimed at strengthening public trust in state institutions. While these positions suggest a reform-oriented approach, translating such commitments into concrete policy outcomes may prove challenging given the institutional structure of the Islamic Republic and the influence of security and judicial institutions. Consequently, any assessment of future human rights reforms should take into account both the opportunities created by Pezeshkian's presidency and the structural limitations within which it operates (Toossi, 2024).

The election of Masoud Pezeshkian therefore represents an important moment in Iran's political development, but it should not automatically be interpreted as a precursor to systemic political transformation. Although his administration may introduce new policy priorities and pursue selective reforms, the scope of change is likely to be shaped by the broader institutional framework of the Islamic Republic. This suggests that post-Raisi Iran is characterized by a combination of leadership transition, policy adjustment, and political continuity rather than a fundamental restructuring of the existing political order.

Implications for Iran's Foreign Policy

The 2024 presidential election in Iran marked an important political transition following the death of Ebrahim Raisi and the election of Masoud Pezeshkian. His electoral victory reflected public support for a platform that emphasized diplomatic engagement and a less confrontational approach toward the international community. Nevertheless, the implications of this leadership transition for Iran's foreign policy should be assessed within the broader institutional framework of the Islamic Republic, where key strategic decisions remain subject to the influence of the Supreme Leader and other powerful state institutions.

Pezeshkian has expressed support for improving relations with neighboring countries and strengthening regional cooperation. His public statements have emphasized dialogue and diplomacy, particularly with Gulf states such as Saudi Arabia, following recent efforts to reduce regional tensions. He has also indicated the importance of maintaining constructive relations with Iraq and Syria, countries that continue to occupy a significant place in Iran's regional strategy. However, the extent to which these diplomatic initiatives can be translated into substantial policy changes will depend on broader strategic considerations and the preferences of key political institutions within Iran (Hosseini, 2024).

Foreign policy under Pezeshkian may also influence discussions surrounding the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and Iran's relations with major powers such as the United States, Russia, and China. Pezeshkian has signaled support for diplomatic engagement aimed at addressing the economic consequences of international sanctions and reducing tensions with Western countries. At the same time, significant obstacles remain, including mutual distrust between Iran and the United States and the broader geopolitical dynamics shaping regional security. Furthermore, Iran's strategic partnerships with Russia and China are likely to remain important components of its foreign policy, reflecting long-standing economic, political, and security interests rather than the preferences of any single administration (Vaez, 2024; Byman, 2024).

Pezeshkian has also emphasized the importance of active participation in international and regional organizations, including the United Nations (UN), the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), and the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC). These priorities suggest an interest in expanding Iran's diplomatic engagement and strengthening its international presence. Nevertheless, Iran's positions on major regional issues, including support for the Palestinian cause and broader regional security concerns, continue to be shaped by enduring strategic principles that extend beyond presidential leadership. Consequently, any changes in foreign policy are likely to reflect a combination of policy adjustment and institutional continuity rather than a fundamental reorientation of Iran's international posture (VOA News, 2024).

The presidency of Masoud Pezeshkian may create opportunities for diplomatic engagement and selective policy adjustments in Iran's external relations. However, leadership transition alone does not necessarily imply a significant transformation of Iran's foreign policy. The direction and scope of foreign policy change will continue to be influenced by the institutional structure of the Islamic Republic, the authority of the Supreme Leader, and broader regional and international dynamics. Therefore, post-Raisi Iran is more accurately characterized by a combination of diplomatic adaptation and political continuity than by a complete departure from existing foreign policy orientations.

Challenges and Prospects Facing Iran under the Leadership of Masoud Pezeshkian

Pezeshkian's election heralds the potential for significant shifts in Iran's policy landscape. However, he will encounter formidable challenges that will test his leadership in navigating this complex nation. Among these hurdles are economic difficulties, the need for structural reforms, social and cultural issues, human rights concerns, and intricate

international relations—particularly regarding tensions with neighboring countries and the complicated dynamics with the West.

Iran's economy has faced immense strain due to international sanctions over the past few decades. Pezeshkian is tasked with the difficult mission of stabilizing the economy, curbing inflation, and generating employment opportunities. Immediate economic reforms are essential to attract foreign investment and boost domestic productivity, all while addressing the fundamental needs of society. To tackle these economic issues effectively, Pezeshkian recognizes the necessity of implementing structural reforms, including enhancing the banking system, reducing reliance on oil revenues, and bolstering the private sector. However, achieving these reforms will require considerable political courage and consensus among various political factions, a daunting challenge amid Iran's prevailing polarization (Mehrabi, 2024).

As a more moderate president, Pezeshkian is also expected to advocate for changes in social and cultural policies. Issues such as freedom of speech, women's rights, and family law reform resonate deeply within Iranian society. Despite the widespread hopes for progress, Pezeshkian must confront influential conservative groups that significantly impact Iran's political and social landscape. Additionally, Iran has long faced international criticism regarding its human rights record. Pezeshkian will be under pressure from both domestic and international communities to ameliorate this situation. Initiatives aimed at enhancing civil liberties and respecting individual rights could play a crucial role in mitigating Iran's international isolation and improving its global standing (Toossi, 2024).

In the realm of international relations, Pezeshkian faces significant challenges, particularly with Western nations. Reviving the nuclear agreement (JCPOA) and easing tensions with the United States are critical priorities (VOA News, 2024). Success in these diplomatic endeavors would yield economic benefits and bolster regional stability. Moreover, Iran's relations with its neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, remain fraught with tension. Pezeshkian must strive to enhance these relations through dialogue and diplomacy. Building stronger regional alliances will be pivotal in reducing tensions and fostering cooperation in areas such as security and economic development (Tasnim News, 2024).

The 2024 war between Iran and Israel, triggered by an Israeli attack on the Iranian Embassy in Damascus, has exacerbated tensions across the Middle East, intensifying aggressive rhetoric between the two nations. This conflict has profoundly affected regional stability and diplomatic relations, particularly with neighboring countries. As a result, Iran's ties with its neighbors, especially Saudi Arabia, have grown increasingly strained. Traditional skepticism from Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states towards Iran has led them to reinforce their alliances with the United States and Israel in response to perceived threats (Haid, 2024). In this context, the diplomatic and dialogue efforts of Iranian officials like Pezeshkian will be critical in alleviating these rising tensions.

From an internal political standpoint, achieving domestic stability is crucial for the effective leadership of Pezeshkian. He must skillfully navigate the diverse political factions—from reformists to conservatives—to foster an environment that supports the implementation of vital policies. Building a national consensus will be essential in addressing both internal and external challenges. Additionally, Iran is grappling with

significant environmental issues, including drought, air pollution, and land degradation. Prioritizing sustainable environmental policies will be essential for Pezeshkian to maintain ecological balance and secure long-term prosperity for the Iranian populace (Ozyakar, 2024). Despite these hurdles, Iran benefits from its abundant natural resources, particularly oil and gas. The effective and efficient management of these resources could significantly drive economic growth. However, to ensure sustainable economic stability, it is imperative to diversify the economy and reduce reliance on the oil sector. Under Pezeshkian's leadership, innovation and technology can serve as catalysts for Iran's economic advancement. Investments in education, research, and technological development will enable Iran to compete globally and create high-quality job opportunities for its youth (Elias, 2024).

On the international front, as a key player in the Middle East, Iran holds an important position in regional organizations like the OIC and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Pezeshkian has the opportunity to enhance Iran's standing in these organizations by adopting a more inclusive and cooperative foreign policy. The ongoing Iran-Israel conflict could also serve as a catalyst for Iran to forge new alliances and strengthen regional cooperation. For instance, Iran may benefit from improving relations with countries that share its interests in countering Israeli and U. S. influence in the region. Furthermore, this conflict has the potential to encourage regional nations to pursue peaceful solutions through international forums like the UN and the OIC (Byman, 2024). In summary, the long-term outlook for Iran under Pezeshkian's leadership will heavily rely on the country's capacity to embark on bold and effective reforms. If successful, Iran has the potential to evolve into a more stable and influential economic and political power both regionally and globally.

Conclusion

This study examined the extent to which Masoud Pezeshkian can introduce policy changes in post-Raisi Iran within the constraints of the Islamic Republic's political system. The findings suggest that Pezeshkian's presidency may create opportunities for policy adjustment in both domestic and foreign affairs, particularly in areas such as economic management, diplomatic engagement, social openness, and administrative reform. However, the scope of these changes should not be overstated, as the Iranian political system is characterized by a complex institutional structure in which elected officials operate alongside powerful unelected institutions.

A key finding of this study is that post-Raisi Iran reflects a combination of leadership transition and political continuity. While Pezeshkian has articulated reform-oriented positions and demonstrated a willingness to pursue greater engagement with both domestic constituencies and the international community, the implementation of substantial reforms remains subject to significant institutional constraints. The authority of the Supreme Leader, the influence of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), the role of the Guardian Council, and the broader framework of Velayat-e Faqih continue to shape the direction and limits of policymaking in the Islamic Republic.

Therefore, leadership change does not necessarily produce systemic political transformation in Iran. Although presidential elections may alter policy priorities, political

rhetoric, and governance approaches, the institutional architecture of the Islamic Republic continues to place ultimate authority in the hands of the Supreme Leader and other unelected bodies. As a result, political change in post-Raisi Iran is more likely to take the form of gradual policy adaptation rather than fundamental structural reform.

The study thus concludes that the presidency of Masoud Pezeshkian represents both an opportunity and a limitation. It offers the possibility of selective reforms and diplomatic recalibration, while simultaneously illustrating the enduring resilience of Iran's political institutions. Understanding this interplay between leadership agency and institutional constraint is essential for assessing the future trajectory of Iranian domestic politics and foreign policy in the post-Raisi era.

Future research may further examine how Pezeshkian's policy initiatives evolve over time and how interactions among elected and unelected institutions influence the prospects for reform and political continuity in Iran.

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MOROCCO'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD SPAIN IN LIGHT OF THE 2021 CRISIS

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Abstract

Morocco and Spain are two neighboring countries that share the shores of the Strait of Gibraltar in the western Mediterranean. The relationship between them is one of the oldest in history, known for its commercial, human, and cultural exchanges, as well as its conflicts. It is impossible to deal with the geopolitics and history of Morocco without mentioning Spain, and vice versa. Generally speaking, these relations have been characterized as particularly complex and conflictual. So, it's only natural that Spain has an important place in Morocco's foreign policy (a country with which there are many conflicts and interests). It should also be noted that Morocco also takes an important place in Spain's foreign policy. The two countries have important economic and commercial ties and have entered the same value chain. In terms of security partnerships, Spain considers Morocco a strategic partner in the fight against illegal migration, drug trafficking, terrorism, and cross-border crime. On the cultural front, the two countries work together to promote social and cultural understanding of each other, to overcome mutual ignorance of each other's societies beyond stereotypes, and also to promote the Arabic and Spanish languages. But at the same time, there are conflicts, such as the delimitation of Moroccan maritime territory and the use of geostrategic resources between Morocco and the Canary Islands, claims to Ceuta and Melilla and Morocco's northern islands, agricultural competition, and geopolitical competition in the Mediterranean and the Atlantic, especially with the inauguration of several Moroccan ports. Thus, the past Spanish position against Morocco's high interests regarding the Moroccan Sahara, particularly with Donald Trump's historic decision, represents the main cause of several previous crises and the 2021 crisis. This crisis was an occasion for the two kingdoms to negotiate their relations, based on mutual trust and respect. After the normalization of these relations, we have observed an increase in cooperation between the two states.

Keywords

Moroccan Foreign policy, Morocco-Spain relations, Cooperation, Conflicts, Crisis.

Resumo

Marrocos e Espanha são dois países vizinhos que partilham as margens do Estreito de Gibraltar, no Mediterrâneo ocidental. A relação entre ambos é uma das mais antigas da história, conhecida pelos seus intercâmbios comerciais, humanos e culturais, bem como pelos seus conflitos. É impossível abordar a geopolítica e a história de Marrocos sem mencionar a Espanha, e vice-versa. De um modo geral, estas relações têm-se caracterizado por serem particularmente complexas e conflituosas. Por isso, é natural que a Espanha ocupe um lugar importante na política externa de Marrocos (um país com o qual existem muitos conflitos e interesses). Deve também referir-se que Marrocos ocupa igualmente um lugar importante na política externa da Espanha. Os dois países mantêm laços económicos e comerciais importantes e integram a mesma cadeia de valor. No que diz respeito às parcerias de segurança, a Espanha considera Marrocos um parceiro estratégico na luta contra a migração ilegal, o tráfico de droga, o terrorismo e a criminalidade transfronteiriça. No plano cultural, os dois países colaboram para promover a compreensão social e cultural mútua, para superar a ignorância recíproca sobre as respetivas sociedades para além dos estereótipos e também para promover as línguas árabe e espanhola. Mas, ao mesmo tempo, existem conflitos, tais como a delimitação do território marítimo marroquino e a utilização de recursos geoestratégicos entre Marrocos e as Ilhas Canárias, as reivindicações sobre Ceuta e Melilha e as ilhas do norte de Marrocos, a concorrência agrícola e a concorrência geopolítica no Mediterrâneo e no Atlântico, especialmente com a inauguração de vários portos marroquinos. Assim, a posição espanhola no passado contra os interesses fundamentais de Marrocos relativamente ao Saara marroquino, em particular com a decisão histórica de Donald Trump, representa a principal causa de várias crises anteriores e da crise de 2021. Esta crise constituiu uma oportunidade para os dois reinos negociarem as suas relações, com base na confiança e no respeito mútuos. Após a normalização destas relações, observámos um aumento da cooperação entre os dois Estados.

Palavras-Chave

Política externa marroquina, Relações Marrocos-Espanha, Cooperação, Conflitos, Crise.

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MOROCCO'S FOREIGN POLICY TOWARD SPAIN IN LIGHT OF THE 2021 CRISIS

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Introduction

A foreign policy is the instrument by which a state attempts to shape its international political environment, by which it tries to preserve situations that are favorable to it and to modify situations that are unfavorable to it (Bichr Mohamed, 1991). A country's foreign policy encompasses the strategies it employs to safeguard its national and international interests, as well as the mode of interaction with other states and non-state actors, which can be non-violent or violent (Frazier Brionne, 2021). It is characterized as the raw material par excellence of International Relations (Battistella Dario, 2012).

Decision-making is considered the operational base of foreign policy, through which states strategically arbitrate, prioritize national interests, and deliberate on external diplomatic crises under identified constraints. for assessing systematically this diplomatic behavior, foreign policy analysis relies on theoretical paradigms, notably rational choice theory, in order to understand how decision-makers estimate alternatives, balance risks, and maximize strategic utility.

As for Morocco's foreign policy, it is considered one of the sovereign domains, where it is largely exclusive to the king (Mohammed El Khaldi, 2020). It has undergone a great change over the last 24 years. Since the arrival of King Mohammed VI, it has been characterized by firmness, particularly regarding the Sahara issue (Kerdoudi Jawad, 2021).

Morocco maintains relations with many countries, but Spain remains the country with which it maintains the most relations. Morocco and Spain are two neighboring countries that share the coasts of the Strait of Gibraltar in the western Mediterranean. Relations between them are one of the oldest relationships between states in history, known for their commercial, human, and cultural exchanges, but also for their conflicts. So, these are relations with two determinants. It is impossible to discuss the geopolitics and history of Morocco without mentioning Spain and vice versa. Generally, these relations have been characterized as particularly complex and conflictual (Fatima Lemharhar, 2017).

After Donald Trump's statement, the crisis between the two began to escalate, following Spain's stance on the American decision, but he remained silent. In April 2021, the crisis

escalated following the reception of the Polisario militia leader at Logroño Hospital via a forged passport, which angered Morocco and called into question mutual trust. The 2021 crisis between the two countries highlighted the conflictual nature of their relationship, despite the significant cooperation that had existed prior to this crisis. So, how do the decisions taken by Morocco during the crisis with Spain reveal a logic of containment, appeasement, or strategic redefinition of bilateral relations?

This article will treat the constants and the decision-making process in Morocco's foreign policy. It will also examine the significance of Spain in Morocco's foreign policy. We will therefore examine the areas of cooperation between the two countries, and finally, we will address aspects of the 2021 crisis and Morocco's management of it, using rational choice theory.

For the methodology, this study is based on a collection of academic articles and, to a lesser extent, press articles, as well as a collection of official statements from officials in both countries. This work is also grounded in a personal analysis of Morocco's foreign policy decisions during the 2021 crisis.

Theoretical and Methodological Framework

This analysis led us to study theories of decision-making in foreign policy, namely rational choice theory, prospect theory, polytheistic theory and cybernetic theory. and to show why rational choice theory was chosen in this case.

Rational Choice Theory: Generally, rationality focuses on optimizing a choice under identified constraints (G. Allison et P. Zelikow, 2000). Or, a process is rational when it is intended to optimize the feasibility of the final choice (Valerie M. Hudson, 2014). Allison observed that rationality is based on a strictly Hobbesian notion of consistent calculation or adaptation by maximizing profit within specific constraints; that is, the rational decision-maker prefers the alternative that provides the right results (Allison G. T., 1971).

The fact that actors' actions are guided by profit maximization derives from microeconomics and is a central concept in all social sciences. Focused on Foreign Policy Analysis, the state acts as a rational actor in the sense of pursuing its interests (Frédéric Charillon, 2002). Rational choice theory contributes to explaining the position of states in international negotiations (Jean-Frédéric Morin, 2013). For example, the states that strongly advocate for the fight against illegal immigration are often those that are most vulnerable to this scourge. Spain and Finland do not have the same vision of illegal immigration from the Mediterranean; the Iberian country is more vulnerable, while the Scandinavian country is further from the Mediterranean. The rational choice model is based on four fundamental concepts, which are as follows:

*Goals and Objectives: The utility function reflects a person's interests and reference values. At the moment of decision-making, the actor possesses a utility function that allows them to rank the possible consequences following the actor's values and the goals they have set.

*Alternatives: According to this theory, a rational actor must choose between multiple alternatives. This is represented through a decision tree in decision theory. An alternative



can consist of more than a single action, but it must always be specific enough to be distinguished from other alternatives.

*Consequences: Each alternative has consequences, or results if it has been chosen. At this level, theories are distinguished based on the actor's ability to measure the consequences of each of the chosen alternatives.

*Choices: Rational choice easily aims to choose the alternative that has consequences, which are ranked at the top of the preference in the decision maker's utility function.

Prospect Theory, also known as loss aversion theory, is a psychological theory of decision-making under risk conditions. Developed by psychologists D. Kahneman and A. Tversky in 1979, it is one of the main contributions of the behaviorist school of psychology, which aims to study behavior. The model is used in various fields, notably in the analysis of decision-making in economics and politics, particularly in international relations. Indeed, this theory convincingly demonstrates that most individuals have a particular fear of loss; that is, the psychological pain following a loss is greater than the pleasure generated by an equivalent gain. Prospect Theory distinguishes two phases in the decision-making process: an editing phase, which consists of a preliminary analysis of the proposed prospects, which usually results in a simpler representation of these prospects. In the second phase, which is an evaluation phase, the proposed prospects are assessed, and the prospect with the highest value is chosen (D. Kahneman, and A. Tversky, 1979).

The prospect theory has major implications for foreign policy, such as the delimitation of national borders or international agreements. In international negotiations, a negotiator from country A considers the concessions of a negotiator from country B to be less valuable than any concessions they have made (Valerie M. Hudson, 2014). This theory shows that the gains made must be twice the losses incurred to compensate for them (Morin, Jean-Frédéric, 2013). This fear of losses justifies a state A being more willing to go to war to defend a territory than to conquer it.

Polyheuristic Theory: This theory was developed in the early 1990s by Alex Mintz. His work on this theory remains the most innovative among rationalist interpretations of foreign policy decision-making. It appears to blend rational choice theory, centered on formulating predictions, with cognitive theory, which focuses on identifying the actual processes that govern decision-making. In some circumstances, polyheuristic theory resembles the approach adopted in prospect theory (Alden Chris 2017).

The process of this theory is represented by two successive phases based on distinct cognitive processes. The first phase is called dimensional; it eliminates, from the outset of the process, clearly inadmissible options. Decision-makers move on to the next stage, which is decision-making, once the number of possible options is significantly reduced. This phase corresponds more closely to the logic of rational choice theory, involving maximization to select an alternative from the subset of possible alternatives (Raymond Dacey, Lisa J. Carlson, 2004).

Cybernetic theory: Cybernetic theory aims to help decision-makers simply make decisions by choosing the first satisfactory option, recognizing that decision-makers can choose and maintain policies that do not maximize their utility. Herbert Simon



emphasizes the complexity of the environment and the limitations of human capabilities, making the principle of pure rationality unrealistic.

The cybernetic decision-making process is less exhaustive due to cognitive and motivational constraints. The decision-making process is less complete because not all alternatives are considered across all available dimensions (Mintz, Alex & Geva, Nehemia & DeRouen, Karl. 1994). Decision-makers cannot access all relevant information, process all received information, recognize all possible actions at their disposal, and evaluate all the outcomes of an expected action (Morin Jean-Frédéric, 2013).

According to Herbert Simon, actors navigate the complexity of the real world and choose the first satisfactory option, a process he calls "bounded rationality." In the field of foreign policy, this theory was developed by John Steinbruner in his work "The Cybernetic Theory of Decision: New Dimensions of Political Analysis 1974".

Based on my studies and my perspective, I have adopted rational choice theory because Moroccan behaviour exemplifies it: a graduated pressure that minimizes costs, with the most damaging options deliberately held in reserve—in other words, utility maximization under constraint.

For the methodology, this study is based on a collection of academic articles and, to a lesser extent, press articles, as well as a collection of official statements from officials in both countries. This work is also grounded in a personal analysis of Morocco's foreign policy decisions during the 2021 crisis.

In methodological aspect, this work is a qualitative and a single-case study covering in majority the period between 2020 and 2024, from the Trump recognition of Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara in December 2020, through the April 2021 the beginning of the bilateral diplomatic crisis, and the normalization in Mars 2022, to the consolidation of the normalized of these relations by 2024. This period was taken because it forms a new incident in Morocco- Spain relations and is bounded and well-documented, especially in press articles and official statements. The academic sources were chosen for their direct relevance to Moroccan-Spanish relations and to the foreign policy decision-making theory.

Among the limitations of this work is the lack of direct questioning of those in charge; indeed, the rationale behind the choices is thus deduced from the chronology and the results, not confirmed by internal accounts. There is also the scarcity of academic sources analyzing this crisis. Little quantitative data is available on the real impact of the decisions (economy, tourism, security), beyond a few examples such as Operation Marhaba. The time frame is limited, as the crisis and its normalization are recent (2020–2024). We still lack the perspective to judge whether the redefinition of relationships is lasting or merely temporary.

Moroccan Foreign Policy (constant, decision-making process)

Morocco's foreign policy is considered realistic on the one hand and idealistic on the other; it is one of the sovereign domains. It has undergone significant changes over the past 2 decades. Since the arrival of King Mohammed VI, it has also been characterized by firmness and concrete retaliatory measures whenever Morocco's higher interests are

affected, particularly regarding the Sahara issue (Kerdoudi Jawad, 2021). With the arrival of King Mohammed VI, significant changes have emerged in the strategic orientations of Morocco's foreign policy, as well as in its mode of action, particularly in the management of the Sahara issue, where Morocco has moved from defensive to offensive diplomacy, adopting a more combative foreign policy (Nizar Messari, 2020).

Although Morocco has the Sahara issue as the main objective of its foreign policy, it has worked to achieve several goals. Moroccan foreign policy has enabled it to achieve multiple strategic objectives, including opening up to new geographical areas of the world by pursuing a multifaceted policy of openness, both diplomatic and economic. This is the case with Morocco's orientation toward East and Southern Africa and Latin America, as well as a strategy of alliances with major and medium-sized powers.

Among these objectives, Morocco's integration into the global economy has also become a major player in the global value chain, and it seeks to position itself in the new world order, especially after the COVID-19 crisis.

Regarding its neighbors, Morocco is generally a respectful country, despite its existence in a more or less conflict-ridden environment (Rachid El Houdaigui, 2003). Regarding solidarity, the Kingdom is known for showing solidarity with many countries around the world. We can cite Moroccan donations to many African countries as part of the fight against COVID-19.[1], or the medical and humanitarian aid provided to Lebanon following the explosion in the port of Beirut[2]. Also, it's solidarity with Portugal during the fires in September 2024 (Ghita Zine, 2024), and with Spain following the floods in the Valencian Community (Francis Shwarz, 2024). As well as Morocco's involvement in several peacekeeping missions. All of these elements demonstrate that Morocco presents itself with a perspective of solidarity and sharing.

Regarding partnership, the North African country aims to develop strategic partnerships with many countries around the world in different geographic areas, as well as within the framework of international organizations to combat global challenges. Morocco stands out as a reliable partner among many countries.

The constitution of Morocco defines the constant of Moroccan foreign policy. So, the constitution puts the construction of the Maghreb Union as a strategic option. Also, it puts, as an important points, the deepening the sense of belonging to the Arab-Islamic Ummah and strengthening the bonds of brotherhood and solidarity with its brotherly peoples, the consolidating relations of cooperation and solidarity with African countries, particularly the countries of the Sahel and Sahara, and also strengthening South-South cooperation generally. Furthermore, the constitution places an important place the intensifying close cooperation and partnership relations with Euro-Mediterranean neighboring countries, and expanding and diversifying its friendly relations and its human, economic, scientific, technical, and cultural exchanges with all countries of the world[3].

Morocco, through its constitution, gives primacy over domestic law to international treaties that it ratifies, with respect for its immutable national identity, the publication of

[1] Communiqué du MAECA du Maroc, du 14 Juin 2020, https://shorturl.at/lSKwZ
[2] Communiqué du MAECA du Maroc, du 06 Août, 2020 https://shorturl.at/eDXZO
[3] Moroccan constitution 2011

these conventions in the official journal, as well as harmonization with national legislation.

But before all these elements, Morocco has put the Sahara issue, which is a sacred subject for all Moroccans, at the center of its foreign policy action, which is observed in the daily work of Moroccan diplomacy, this is revealed in the constitution (articles 42 and 59) and in royal speeches, such as the statement of King Mohammed 6 in the speech on the occasion of the 69th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, "I would like to send a clear message to everyone: the Sahara issue is the prism through which Morocco considers its international environment. It is also clearly and simply the yardstick that measures the sincerity of friendships and the effectiveness of the partnerships it establishes."[4].

The Palestinian cause is also one of the constants of Morocco's foreign policy (البلعمشي, 2021). The Moroccan position on the Palestinian question is irreversible. King Mohammed 6, as Amir Al-Mouminine and President of the Al-Quds Committee, places it as a priority of Moroccan foreign policy and puts it on the same level as the territorial integrity of the Kingdom.[5]

Morocco's foreign policy decisions are developed and monitored by several institutions and bodies, but the Royal Institute remains the primary decision-maker (Mohammed ELKHALDI, 2020). Each country chooses its own decision-making and management process. Some countries rely on certain government agencies, while others adopt a closed and centralized decision-making system (Hassan-Yari, 2003).

In Morocco, the foreign policy decision-making system is centralized. According to the Moroccan Constitution, the King has a set of strategic powers and responsibilities in foreign policy matters. Initiatives and broad guidelines are in the hands of the King. He also carries out routine acts regarding the accreditation of ambassadors, as well as ratifying and signing treaties[6].

The counselors of the King have a leading advisory role, participate in certain royal activities, and accompany the King on his visits abroad. Security services can be considered military and security advisors, and provide information, which forms the basis of any relevant diplomatic decision (Mohammed EL KHALDI, 2020).

The government intervenes in the foreign policy decision-making process through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which executes and directs the Kingdom's diplomatic activities and coordinates the external actions of the various Moroccan ministries, institutions, and agencies[7]. Also, the government intervenes through the foreign affairs departments of the various government sectors. The prime minister ensures interministerial coordination in matters of foreign policy, represents the King at high-level summits, and can sign treaties. Parliament plays a legislative role by approving treaties, is Responsible for overseeing the government, and has a diplomatic role where it maintains relations with other parliaments (Mohammed ELKHALDI, 2020).

[4] Royal speech on the 69th anniversary of the Revolution of the King and the People, August 20, 2022
[5] Communiqué of the Royal Cabinet of March 15 2023
[6] Moroccan constitution 2011
[7] Le décret N° 2.11.428 relatifs aux attributions et à l'organisation du ministère des Affaires étrangères et de la coopération

Other institutions that participate in the development of foreign policy, which have a marginal role in the decision-making process, such as Civil society, Political parties, the General Confederation of Moroccan Enterprises (CGEM), Public opinion, and Think-tanks.

Therefore, Morocco's foreign policy decision-making system initially follows a bureaucratic logic, that is, at the time of its development by the highest authority (the King and the Royal Councilors), and an organizational and administrative order in its execution (Government, embassies, etc.).

In terms of diversification of allies, Morocco has an international relations strategy. His history, his strategic position, and his identity allow him to develop relations with several countries and several spaces. At the multilateral level, Morocco is a member of several international organizations (AU, UN, FAO…).

At the bilateral level, Morocco maintains relations with regional groups (EU, ASEAN, VISEGRAD…), and also with States. Morocco has strengthened relations with many African countries. Thus, Morocco has established strategic relations with Japan, India, China, and Russia as part of its strategy of diversification of their allies. This Moroccan strategy is also manifested by the deepening of relations with the United States of America and Latin American countries. Thus, Morocco maintains relations with many European countries, but Spain is the country with which Morocco maintains the most relations.

Relations with Spain

Morocco and Spain are two neighboring countries that share the shores of the Strait of Gibraltar in the western Mediterranean. The relationship between them is one of the oldest between states in history, known for its commercial, human, and cultural exchanges, but also for its conflicts. It is impossible to deal with the geopolitics and history of Morocco without mentioning Spain, and vice versa. So, these are relations with two determinants.

These relations are governed by the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation, signed in 1991 and entered into force in 1993. Morocco and Spain maintain relations within the bilateral and multilateral framework (EU, UN, NATO, UPM, 5+5).

Cooperation with Spain

In Political matters, the two countries hold high-level meetings to discuss issues of common interest and ways to develop bilateral relations, as well as specialized meetings between different ministries. Between the two Kingdoms exist too many official visits from high-level responsible. Also, Spain represents Rabat's interests in Brussels.[8]. Since 2022, Spain has supported the Moroccan position over the Sahara issue. Generally, the two countries have maintained a relationship of prosperity, mutual respect, and cooperation.

[8] MAP, "Catherine Colonna: «la France et l'Espagne sont les "avocats" du Maroc au sein de l'UE»", 05 Décembre 2005, https://shorturl.at/ysUQK

Regarding security cooperation, Morocco is a strategic and important partner for Spain in the fight against illegal immigration, drug trafficking, terrorism, and cross-border crime. According to many Spanish statements, migrant flows to Spain have decreased thanks to joint work with Morocco. Cooperation has expanded from the exchange of information to the organization of scientific conferences on security risks and ways to coordinate to address them. This explains why they have been able to build bridges of trust to address cross-border terrorism, as many terrorist cells have been jointly dismantled. This gives us an idea of the degree of coherence between Morocco and Spain.

In the cultural area, the two countries are working together to promote social and cultural understanding and to address the mutual ignorance between their respective societies. The two states have a common culture, and they want to promote it, also working to promote Spanish in Morocco and the Arabic language in Spain. also, the two-kingdom work to promote scientific exchange.

The economic sector remains the main point of cooperation between Morocco and Spain (A. M EL JOUAD et A. Ouedghiri, 2025), where the Iberic country is Morocco's leading trading partner since 2012, and an important investor in Morocco.

Table 1. Moroccan-Spanish trade Exchange between 2019 and 2023

	Moroccan Imports from Spain	Moroccan Exports to Spain
2019	8.454.045,62	6.962.384,51
2020	7.351.502,48	6.371.727,22
2021	9.499.704,75	7.300.886,07
2022	11.748.223,25	8.692.311,15
2023	12.145.545,10	9.032.160,93

Source: self-elaboration, data from ICEX, www.informesestadisticos-est.icex.es

This table shows the development of trade exchange between Morocco and Spain, which broke records, with bilateral trade exceeding 21 billion euros in 2023[9] (). A new paradigm has emerged in Morocco-Spain relations, with the two countries integrated into the same value chain. Trade between them is largely based on the integration of Moroccan and Spanish companies into the same operations, particularly in the automotive, agri-food, and textile industries (Moreno Luis & Fernández Ana, 2019).

Economic cooperation between them is also evident in other economic areas such as energy, particularly renewable energy, as well as in transportation, where the two countries are well connected: almost all Moroccan airports have connections with Spanish cities. At the maritime level, there are Moroccan ports connected to Spanish ports for the transport of goods and passengers. The two countries are aiming to build an underwater road between the two sides, to boost the exchange of goods between the two countries in particular and between Europe and Africa in general (A. M EL JOUAD et A. Ouedghiri, 2025).

[9] ICEX www.informesestadisticos-est.icex.es

Conflict with Spain

Although Morocco and Spain share many interests, there are conflicts and competition between the two neighbors. There is the former Spanish position over the Sahara, which represents the main cause of several previous crises and the 2021 crisis. Morocco's claim to Ceuta and Melilla and the northern islands of our country, which have been occupied by Spain for over 500 years. Every official visit to these two enclaves by a high Spanish responsible irritates Morocco, which officially protests.

There is also the issue of maritime territorial delimitation (Victor Luis Gutiérrez Castillo, 2022). Following the Moroccan parliament's vote on two bills on this issue in 2020, this decision angered Spain and the government of the Canary Islands, which unilaterally took the same step in 2010. Morocco's goal is to extend its maritime territory to 350 nautical miles (648.2 km) to include the tropical mountain range, which is not included in the Canary Islands' maritime territory. This Maritim mountain is rich in minerals and a geostrategic interest (L.O. Kfouri and All, 2021).

There is also a big cultural misunderstanding between the two peoples, which comes down to historical elements, the impact of the media (in Spain), and other elements. Competition between ports, especially between Tangier Med and Algeciras, which Spain considers Tangier Med port a danger to Spain[10]. There is also a competition to attract foreign investment.

The Agricultural competition is one of the competitions between Morocco and Spain. Since the past five decades, both countries have exported the same fruits and vegetables at the same times of year, to the European and other global markets (Josep M. Jordan Galduf, 1997).

Management of the 2021 Crisis by Morocco

Following Donald Trump's statement, a crisis between the two began to erupt, following Spain's position on the American decision, but he remained silent. The crisis escalated in April 2021 following the reception of Brahim Ghali at the Logroño hospital using a forged passport, which angered Morocco and called into question mutual trust. So, Morocco made some decisions to manage this political crisis with Spain. The following table shows us an illustration of the Morocco-Spain political crisis.

Table 2. An illustration of the Morocco-Spain political crisis

Morocco's Main Decision	➢ It froze relations with Spain (not completely)
Moroccan Foreign Policy Actors (involved 2021 Crisis)	➢ The King (Central Core of Moroccan Foreign Policy) ➢ The King's Advisors ➢ The Ministry of Foreign Affairs ➢ The Moroccan Ambassador to Spain ➢ External Intelligence ➢ The Internal Security Services

[10] Marinas de Andalucia, "Tánger-Med: un «peligro real»", 7 Septiembre 2009, https://marinasdeandalucia.com/tanger-med-un-peligro-real_aa3345.html

Morocco's action	➢ He informed the Moroccan and Spanish public opinion about the existence of Ibrahim Ghali on Spanish soil, with a forged passport. ➢ He accused and protested against Spain through official statements ➢ Morocco suspended dialogue with the Sánchez government ➢ He summoned its ambassador to Madrid ➢ He lifted the control over emigration for two days ➢ He excluded Spain from the African Lion 2021 ➢ He excluded Spanish ports from Operation Marhaba 2021
Actions that Morocco could have taken, but didn't	➢ Suspension of security agreements ➢ Suspension of the fishing agreement ➢ Suspension of economic agreements ➢ Suspension of judicial agreements
Morocco's Desire	➢ Recognition of the Moroccan identity of the Sahara ➢ Respect for the Partnership with Morocco

Source: self-elaboration

Analysis of Moroccan decisions in this Crisis with Spain

According to my analysis, I observe that Moroccan decisions in this crisis are therefore made according to rational choice theory, who is generally focuses on optimizing a choice under identified constraints.

Analysis of Moroccan decisions according to Rational Choice Theory

The following table shows us the Modeling of Morocco's external action according to the CR theory during the 2021 crisis.

Table 3. Modeling of Morocco's external action according to CR theory during the 2021 crisis

Goals and Objectives	➢ Recognition of the Moroccan Sovereignty over the Sahara ➢ Respect for Morocco
Alternatives	➢ Freezing relations entirely ➢ Freezing only political and diplomatic relations
Consequences	➢ In case of "freezing relations entirely", Morocco could suffer significant economic losses even more profoundly if it has frozen economic agreements. ➢ In the 2nd case, the economic losses could be long-term, especially in terms of investment, which always requires strong political relations.
Choice	➢ Freeze only political and diplomatic relations

Source: Self-elaboration

Morocco's decisions regarding the crisis were made according to the rational model, whose objective was recognition of the Moroccan Sahara by Spain, and the main decision was the suspension of relations, but not entirely. Morocco has shown that it is a prudent country, not a reckless one. It did not want to play all these cards from the outset to put pressure on Spain, but chose to do so gradually. It did not use high-impact cards such as the suspension of security agreements, the fisheries agreement, economic agreements, and judicial agreements, which demonstrated the rationality of Morocco's



decision regarding its crisis management, minimizing risks and losses as much as possible, and maximizing profits.

The measures taken by Morocco had an impact on Spain. For example, the losses following the elimination of the Spanish phase of Operation Marhaba amounted to approximately 1.15 billion €[11]. However, they were not as serious as the other actions, which led Spain to calculate the expected losses from the crisis with Morocco if it continued.

Morocco's objective was not the suspension of relations with Spain per se; rather, it was Spanish recognition of its sovereignty over the Sahara and respect for the partnership by the Iberian country. If we follow the chronological evolution of the crisis since its outbreak, we observe that Morocco's steps have been gradual, and the statements of its actors have been fair, reasonable, orderly, and consistent. This is not the case with the statements of the Spanish leaders. In every statement or action, Morocco waited for Spain's reaction, whether Spain would maintain its position or change it. What demonstrates rationality here is that Morocco maintained its prudence and acted in response to Spanish actions and statements.

Undoubtedly, the crisis benefits neither Spain nor Morocco. But sometimes, triggering a crisis can be the best solution to resolve a conflict. crises are opportunity for countries to renegotiate the foundations of their relations. It should be noted that Spain's losses seemed greater. With this crisis, Morocco succeeded in pressuring Spain into negotiations for the new foundations of relations between the two countries.

Bueno de Mesquita, in his utility model, emphasizes that the most common assumption is that a country that initiates a war can only initiate it when it believes the war will produce positive expected utility (G. Allison et P. Zelikow, 2000). If we transpose this to Morocco, Morocco couldn't enter into a crisis with Spain if the losses were lower than the expected gains, in other words, if it was sure that it would achieve its goal.

Normalization and progress of these relations

For Morocco, the normalization of relations depended primarily on a positive and clear position from the Spanish state regarding the Western Sahara issue. Signs of normalization began to emerge, as confirmed by King Mohammed VI in his speech commemorating the Revolution of the King and the People on August 20, 2021. The King confirmed that Morocco and Spain had begun negotiations in a climate of calm, complete transparency, and a spirit of responsibility (Discours royal à l'occasion de la Révolution du Roi et du Peuple 20 Aout 2021).

A telephone call was held between Nasser Bourita and José Albares to discuss the matter (Marruecom, "Marruecos-España: Bourita y Albares han acordado reunirse", 22 septiembre 2021, https://marruecom.com/2021/09/22/marruecos-espana-bourita-y-albares-han-acordado-reunirse/). Spain initiated actions regarding the Western Sahara issue, with Minister Albares meeting twice with Stefan de Mistura and also with Antony Blinken (Europa Press, "Albares y Blinken acuerdan unir fuerzas para resolver el conflicto

[11] Maritime News, "Opération Marhaba: "Le Maroc a porté un coup de 1,15 milliard d'euros à l'Espagne" (médias espagnols)" 9 juin 2021, https://shorturl.at/htqxC



del Sáhara, que dura ya demasiado", 18 enero 2022, https://tinyurl.com/mst6ptr7). Other gestures included the visit of the Spanish monarch to the Moroccan stand at the Fitur trade fair in January 2022. Furthermore, Spain decided to assist Morocco in securing its LNG supply.

On March 18, 2022, the Spanish head of government, Pedro Sanchez, sent a letter to King Mohammed VI, in which supported the plan of the autonomy over the Sahara and he considered it as the basis, the most serious, realistic and credible, for resolving this conflict[12]. This step gave new impetus to the relationship between the two countries and the deepening of their strategic partnerships.

The visit by Pedro Sanchez to Morocco in April 2022 was the occasion to agree on a lot of points and to make a roadmap de 16 points that recognize the importance of the Sahara issue for Morocco. This roadmap will manage the relations between the two states in all areas of cooperation on the basis of understanding and mutual trust. And also, King Mohammed 6 and President Sanchez agreed about the updating of the Treaty of Friendship, Good Neighborliness and Cooperation, signed in 1991[13].

After that, various bilateral meetings were organized between the ministries of foreign affairs of the two Kingdoms, and diverse summits were organized between the Moroccan and Spanish responsible, to prepare for the organization of the 12th High-level meeting between the two governments.

The two countries decided to organize this RHN following the normalization of relations between them. This RHN was held in Rabat on February 02, 2023, and was attended by 15 Moroccan and 12 Spanish ministers. At the summit, both parties expressed their commitment to maintaining the excellent relations between them and confirmed their willingness to constantly deepen them. They also stressed that the summit represented an opportunity to implement the goals of the roadmap agreed between the two countries during Pedro Sanchez's visit to Morocco in April 2022. This meeting had three dimensions: the first is political and diplomatic-strategic, the second economic, and the third cultural and human[14].

For the political and diplomatic-strategic dimension, the two governments demonstrated their commitment to preserving and strengthening Morocco-EU relations. The two countries affirmed their commitment to the fight against terrorism and illegal immigration, border control, and pledged to build an area of peace, stability, and integration in the Western Mediterranean. The two sides also welcomed the results achieved by their cooperation on irregular immigration and the fight against terrorism, as well as their cooperation on regular migration, and their collaboration and coordination on the Marhaba 2022 operation[15].

As for the economic dimension, both parties demonstrated their willingness to intensify the economic partnership, through the promotion of greater and mutually beneficial integration of value chains, and the promotion of the significant development of economic

[12] Communiqué Du Cabinet Royal: L'Espagne Considère L'initiative Marocaine D'autonomie Comme La Base La Plus Sérieuse, Réaliste Et Crédible Pour La Résolution Du Différend Au Sujet Du Sahara Marocain Du 18 Mars 2022
[13] déclaration conjointe:Maroc-Espagne du le 7 avril 2022, https://shorturl.at/OfpK3
[14] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[15] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne

cooperation between them, which has given new impetus to trade, favored by geographical proximity and part of the reconfiguration of the global geopolitical context. The two Kingdoms agreed to promote trade and investment, intending to carry out joint development projects on the basis of a win-win partnership, taking advantage of the Moroccan New Investment Charter. A financial agreement was signed between the two Kingdoms of €800 million with the aim of promoting bilateral trade and investment to unprecedented levels[16].

The two countries expressed their appreciation for the importance of cooperation in decarbonizing the economy through joint projects, which will offer significant potential for investors, particularly in renewable energy and energy efficiency. In the water sector, the two countries decided to strengthen cooperation in this area, particularly in water desalination, integrated water resource management, and wastewater reuse[17].

For the cultural dimension and human ties, the two countries have a common and special cultural and human heritage, so they decided to develop a new "human network" through several actions such as town twinning, partnerships between universities, student mobility, joint actions of associative actors, creation of study committees and research institutes, to achieve an inclusive partnership that serves both peoples.[18].

During his last visit to Morocco in February 2024, the Spanish Prime Minister, Pedro Sanchez, declared that the relations with Morocco are on the right road, and the two governments work profoundly to deepen the cooperation between them in all areas, above all in the economic area. Pedro Sanchez stated that Spain would invest 45 billion € in Morocco between 2024 and 2050, and this will be an opportunity for Spanish companies to work in Morocco, especially in infrastructure[19].

After the normalization of the relations between Morocco and Spain, the Iberian country usually defends Moroccan sovereignty over the Sahara. For example, the Spanish government defended its decision well before the Spanish Senate[20], and even before ministers belonging to Podemos, reminding them that foreign policy issues, including the Moroccan Sahara issue, are the responsibility of the Socialist Party, to which the Prime Minister belongs (نبيل درويش، 2024). In addition, the Spanish Prime Minister met with United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres in September 2023, during the 78th session of the General Assembly, where they discussed the progress of the Moroccan Sahara issue[21].

Conclusion

The results of this analysis confirm what the king said in the speech of the Green March on 06 November 2021, "Morocco Will Not Have Any Economic or Commercial Transaction that Excludes Moroccan Sahara."[22], and what he said in the speech of August 2022,

[16] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[17] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[18] Déclaration- Conjointe Du 12 Ème Réunion De Haut Niveau Maroc-Espagne
[19] conférence de presse de Pedro Sanchez, 21 Fevrié 2024 https://shorturl.at/CvgPa
[20] Europa Press, "Albares no aclara el acuerdo con Marruecos y dice que Rajoy ya estaba a favor", https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=tng7sAnsuFw
[21] "غوتيريش يطلع سانشيز على مخرجات زيارة دي ميستورا للصحراء المغربية"، مدار21، https://madar21.com/182317.html
[22] Discours Royal de la Marche verte 6/11/2021

Sahara is the Lens through which Morocco looks at the World[23]. And the Sahara is the barometer of the Morocco-Spain relationship.

We have observed the importance of Spain in Moroccan foreign policy, and how the relations between the two kingdoms have improved after the change of the Spanish position over the Sahara issue. We have looked at how the partnership between the two countries is developed in all fields, above all in the economic area. For example, the trade exchange between the two states scores 21,3 billion € in 2023 and 22,5 billion € in 2024[24].

Morocco and Spain are in the obligation to cooperate and to establish good relations, because they have and they will have common risks. Undoubtedly, Morocco-Spain cooperation will be strengthened by the organization of the 2030 World Cup, which will be co-organized by Morocco, Spain, and Portugal. How will this sports event foster cooperation between Morocco and Spain?

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MINORITY RIGHTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN THE SAMI AND UYGHUR MINORITIES

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Abstract

This study addresses the issue of minority rights, focusing on a comparison between the Uyghur minority in China and the Sami minority in Northern Europe. The study focuses on comparing the impact of political and social factors on minorities, in addition to exploring legal and international mechanisms for their protection. The situation of minorities was analyzed through a comparative approach, based on a theoretical framework that includes liberal theory, multicultural theories, social justice, and communitarian theory, in addition to international laws that dealt with minorities. The study showed that the Uyghur minority suffers from repressive policies under a one-party system compared to the Sami peoples, who enjoyed political and legal protection under countries with democratic systems. Here, the negative impact of the absence of democracy in countries on minorities is evident, confirming the necessity of international cooperation to ensure the protection of minority rights.

Keywords

Human rights, Uyghur minority, Sami peoples.

Resumo

Este estudo aborda a questão dos direitos das minorias, centrando-se numa comparação entre a minoria uigur na China e a minoria sami no Norte da Europa. O estudo centra-se na comparação do impacto de fatores políticos e sociais nas minorias, além de explorar mecanismos jurídicos e internacionais para a sua proteção. A situação das minorias foi analisada através de uma abordagem comparativa, com base num quadro teórico que inclui a teoria liberal, as teorias multiculturais, a justiça social e a teoria comunitarista, além das leis internacionais que tratam das minorias. O estudo revelou que a minoria uigur sofre com políticas repressivas num sistema de partido único, em comparação com os povos sami, que gozam de proteção política e jurídica em países com sistemas democráticos. Aqui, o impacto negativo da ausência de democracia nos países sobre as minorias é evidente, confirmando a necessidade de cooperação internacional para garantir a proteção dos direitos das minorias.

Palavras-Chave

Direitos humanos, minoria uigur, povos sami.

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MINORITY RIGHTS WITHIN THE FRAMEWORK OF HUMAN RIGHTS: A COMPARATIVE STUDY OF CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES BETWEEN THE SAMI AND UYGHUR MINORITIES

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Introduction

Minorities are a vital part of the cultural and social fabric of societies and a common cultural and social phenomenon worldwide, reflecting the diversity of identities and cultures. Minorities are defined as religious, cultural, or linguistic groups whose numbers are smaller than those of the other groups with whom they share the state. This compels them to preserve their identity, and this difference is reflected in conflicts and disputes within society. Despite the remarkable progress in the field of human rights in recent years, the issue of minorities continues to pose a challenge for the countries that include them. Historically, minorities have faced deprivation of their basic rights, citizenship rights, and justice, leading to conflicts within the societies containing these minorities as they strive for recognition of their economic, social, and cultural rights (United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), nd).

Minorities in countries have lived in varying and different circumstances, as countries differ in the way they deal with the minorities present in their countries. In some countries, minorities enjoy legal and political protections while preserving their distinct identities. For example, the Sámi people in Northern Europe have gained recognition of their cultural identity and right to self-determination (Ivan & Nuț, 2015). Meanwhile, minorities in many countries suffer from persecution, oppression, and policies of racial discrimination, with the aim of assimilating them into societies and erasing their identity that is distinct from the majority(OHCHR, 2012), such as the Uighurs in China who suffer from systematic violence from the Chinese government (OHCHR, 2022)The differences in how countries address minority issues arise from both the characteristics of the countries themselves and the specific traits of the minorities, highlighting the need to study these groups and their circumstances for comparison.

The study is based on a comparison between the Uighur minority in China and the Sami peoples in Northern Europe in terms of their conditions in the countries where they live, the factors affecting their conditions, and how countries deal with minorities.

Problem of the study

Despite progress made, minorities around the world still face numerous challenges related to their fundamental rights. In the field of human rights, ranging from cultural, social, and economic rights to political rights, there is sometimes a threat to the existence of minorities and a disruption of ethnic, cultural, or religious diversity in countries with minorities. Some problems related to minorities escalate into persecution and armed conflict, undermining the internal security and stability of countries and simultaneously threatening the existence of minorities. On the other hand, international and national efforts are being considered to enact laws that support minority rights, in addition to developing policies of integration and pluralism in societies. The study aims to analyze the practical realities of the Uighur and Sami minorities from a national perspective, focusing on the political systems in countries that include the Uighur minority and the Sami peoples, particularly the relationship between the Uighur minority in China and the Sami peoples in Northern Europe. This research also aims to explore the opportunities and challenges facing these groups under the different conditions of the two groups in terms of political, social and economic aspects.

Therefore, the study attempts to answer the main question:

How effective are the legal frameworks and international and national efforts in addressing the challenges faced by the Uighur and Sami minorities, and how have the political, social and economic conditions contributed to protecting and promoting minority rights?

This gave rise to a set of sub-questions that the study attempts to answer, namely:

- What are the regional and international legal frameworks that deal with minority rights?
- What political, social, and economic challenges did the Sami minority in Northern Europe and the Uighur minority in China face?
- To what extent has the prevailing political system in countries containing minorities (Uighurs in China and Sami peoples in Northern Europe) contributed to state policy towards them?
- What are the most prominent international efforts regarding the Sami minority and the Uighur minority?

Importance of the study

This study highlights an important human rights issue regarding minorities by presenting an analytical comparison between two cases: the Sami peoples in Northern Europe and the Uighur minority in China. It focuses on the concept of minority rights as part of human rights, thereby enriching the scientific literature on the challenges that minorities face in the countries identified in the study.

- Contributing to comparative studies helps bridge research gaps related to comparing minority rights in centralized systems like China and democratic systems like Northern Europe.

- The study emphasizes the necessity of implementing policies that promote diversity within the country and protect the rights of minorities from persecution.
- This study helps in understanding the challenges associated with conflicts involving minorities, which contributes to the development of the countries.

Study Methodology

This study adopted two methodological approaches: the descriptive-analytical approach and the comparative approach. These approaches were used to achieve the study's objectives, which include examining minority rights within the framework of international human rights law and conducting a comparison between the cases of the Sámi people in Northern Europe and the Uyghur minority in China.

The study employed the descriptive-analytical approach to review and analyze the legal concepts and theories related to minority rights, as well as to examine international conventions and instruments, national legislation, academic literature, and relevant reports issued by international organizations. This approach contributes to explaining the current state of minority rights protection and assessing the effectiveness of international legal rules in this field.

The study also relied on the comparative approach as its primary methodology by conducting a systematic comparison between the two case studies according to a set of criteria. These criteria included the historical background, the national and international legal frameworks, government policies toward minorities, cultural, linguistic, and religious rights, the level of political participation, mechanisms of international protection, as well as the main challenges and opportunities associated with the protection of minority rights.

This approach made it possible to identify the similarities and differences between the two cases, analyze the extent to which states comply with the rules of international human rights law, and assess the impact of national policies on either protecting or restricting minority rights.

The study relied on secondary sources for data collection, which included scientific books, peer-reviewed studies, international agreements and conventions, United Nations and international organizations reports, and relevant legal documents. These sources were analyzed and compared critically to arrive at scientific results based on solid legal and academic foundations.

The cases of the Sámi people and the Uyghur minority were selected because they represent two contrasting models of state approaches to minorities. The Sámi people enjoy a relatively high level of legal and institutional recognition in the Nordic countries (Ivan & Nuț, 2015), whereas the Uyghur minority faces extensive legal restrictions and human rights violations in China (OHCHR, 2022).

Comparing these two cases allows for an assessment of the effectiveness of international human rights law in protecting minority rights in different political and legal contexts, and for drawing conclusions that can contribute to strengthening minority protection at the international level.

Literature review

According to an article by Amira (2020), the Sami people, who live in northern Russia, Finland, Norway, and Sweden, rely on reindeer herding as a traditional way of life, thus forming a close connection with the polar environment of northern Europe, which helped them preserve their distinct cultural identity. They faced policies aimed at erasing their cultural identity through assimilation, the prohibition of their native language, and forced conversion to Christianity. Amira agreed with Steinlien (1989) on the Norwegian government's policy towards the Sami minority, noting its evolution from 1850 onward, shifting from assimilation to multiculturalism. She also stressed the importance of genuine equality for minorities. The article outlines the stages the Sami minority has gone through in defending its rights, highlighting their success in 1984 in securing Norwegian recognition of a Sami parliament and the strengthening of the Sami language. The article by Ivan and Nut (2015) compares the right to self-determination for the Sami minority in Nordic countries. Self-determination is a fundamental principle enshrined in international conventions, and the Sami minority has established its parliament to preserve its identity. Self-determination is considered one of the most important rights for safeguarding minority identities. The studies agreed on the need for minorities to obtain actual equality, not just formal minority status, in addition to the right to self-determination, as it is one of the most important rights that minorities wish to have. This is what the study agrees with regarding the need to preserve the identity that distinguishes the minority through the right to self-determination, in addition to international cooperation and respect for international conventions.

Bouklikha article (2022) examines the policies practiced by China towards the Uyghur minority living in the Xinjiang region. The Uyghurs have faced numerous assimilation policies within the Chinese system through policies of suppressing freedoms, marginalization, and repression of religious freedoms due to the strategic importance of the region and the fear of separatist movements. Ihaddaden and Soualhi (2021) also presented an analysis of the economic and geopolitical dimensions of the crisis's impact on China and the repercussions of the crisis at the international level. Both studies agree with Bouklikha article on the cultural distinctiveness of the Uighur minority from the Han Chinese ethnicity, which has led to an ongoing conflict with the Chinese government. Both studies also confirm that the Uighur minority is subjected to various forms of cultural, religious, and military repression and persecution, in addition to Chinese economic control over the region. Both studies also confirm the repercussions of Chinese policy on the Uighur minority, where repression has led to the violation of religious identity and the erosion of the minority's cultural distinctiveness. However, there are attempts by the Uighurs to preserve their identity. Ghazlan’s (2018) study on separatist movements in Xinjiang highlighted one of the most important challenges facing China, given the region’s economic and strategic importance. However, the region has been subjected to a long period of conflict and tension amid demands for autonomy through many manifestations of violence.

Previous studies indicate that minorities, despite differences in their geographical and political contexts, face similar challenges involving attempts to erode their cultural, linguistic, and religious identities. However, the approaches taken toward these

minorities, as well as their outcomes, vary according to the political and legal systems in place.

The Sámi peoples were subjected to policies aimed at integrating them into Scandinavian societies through the imposition of official languages and the encouragement of conversion to Christianity. This prompted them to struggle to preserve their cultural and linguistic identity and to strengthen the recognition of their rights.

In contrast, the Uighur minority faced more stringent policies, including the imposition of extensive security and surveillance measures, restrictions on the practice of religious rituals, and limitations on the use of their language and culture, as well as arrests and detention in camps. Many international reports have described these measures as serious violations of human rights.

This contrast reveals that differences in the level of protection are not solely related to the existence of rules of international law but are also influenced by the extent to which states are committed to implementing those rules and by the effectiveness of international monitoring and accountability mechanisms. The comparison also demonstrates that legal and institutional recognition, as in the case of the Sámi, contributes to strengthening the protection of minority rights, whereas the absence of political will and effective international oversight leads to the continuation of violations, as is the case with the Uighur minority.

Research gap

Despite the numerous studies that address minority rights, most of them have focused on studying individual cases or have focused on one legal or political aspect independently. Moreover, previous studies have dealt with each of the minorities in the study individually, without making a direct comparison between them in light of the rules of international law. From this standpoint, this study comes to fill this gap through a comparison of the two cases, which contributes to assessing the effectiveness of international law in protecting minority rights and highlighting the challenges and opportunities for both the Sami peoples and the Uyghur minority.

Contribution of the study

The contribution of this study lies in providing a comparative legal analysis of the Sámi peoples and the Uyghur minority within the framework of international human rights law. This allows for a more profound understanding of the factors that influence the effectiveness of the protection of minority rights and contributes to enriching the literature on minority rights through a comparison of two cases that differ in their legal and political contexts.

The theoretical and conceptual framework

The theoretical framework of this study focuses on examining minority rights within the broader context of human rights through a comparison of the Sámi minority in Northern

Europe, which seeks to preserve its identity within democratic systems, and the Uyghur minority in China, which faces violations of its rights within a state where political power is concentrated in a single party. The theoretical framework also aims to analyze the main theories related to minority rights and to apply them in comparing the experiences of the Uyghur minority and the Sámi peoples.

Liberal theory

This theory is based on the idea of freedom to protect individual rights from being violated by the powerful. This freedom provides individuals with the opportunity to free their minds, thoughts, and imagination from restrictions. The role of governments lies in establishing stable institutions and enacting fair laws and regulations that promote democracy, the separation of powers, the organization of social and civic life, citizenship, and the rule of law. Liberal societies also support humanitarian values and encourage greater moderation. In addition, liberalism promotes democracy, peaceful relations, and the preservation of peace and security. These principles are particularly important for states characterized by social and cultural diversity, as they contribute to the protection of minorities within them (Badran, 2021).

Multiculturalism theory

A theory that calls for power sharing among multicultural groups with multiple identities, based on the principles of justice and equality among cultures, the official recognition of these groups, and cooperation among them, and the application of certain policies that are consistent with the nature of pluralism in society and promote cultural differentiation. It does not mean isolation among groups within society but rather preserving pluralism within society, which is what diverse societies need: to maintain their identities while obtaining all their rights (Ashar, 2022).

Social justice theory

This theory, presented by the American philosopher John Rawls, focuses on the fair distribution of resources, ensuring the improvement of less fortunate individuals. This theory connects to the issue of minorities by emphasizing justice in opportunities, viewing justice as fairness. John Rawls proposed the principle of the veil of ignorance and neutrality to formulate the basic principles of justice to ensure a formulation that guarantees the rights of all, including minorities. Rawls also supported maximizing the minimum benefit for the less fortunate individuals in society, with the aim of achieving social and economic justice, in addition to promoting the stability of diverse societies through respect for rights and equality, thus achieving justice as fairness, which contributes to the stability of societies and reduces conflicts between different groups in society (Kchaou, 2019).

Institutional theory

The institutional theory explains how institutions affect the behavior of individuals and organizations, emphasizing the factors that promote the sustainability of social structures over time. Legitimacy stems from social norms and collective acceptance rather than economic efficiency. The state is required to build institutions that respect the rights of minorities and develop policies that protect those rights. Institutions also strive to adapt to values to enhance their legitimacy, and they seek to operate in accordance with the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which means defending the rights of minorities. Hence, the role of institutional theory emerges in issuing laws that are compatible with diversity within societies and preserve group identities (Shanaqer & Mahawa, 2021).

Group rights theory

Group rights theory focuses on the rights granted to groups, not just individuals within those groups. For example, minorities possess unique collective rights to preserve their social and cultural identity. The theory emphasizes that collective identity, such as culture, religion, and ethnicity, cannot be maintained solely by individuals. Protecting individuals lies in protecting the group, preserving diversity, and safeguarding the group's rights from marginalization and racial discrimination. The group determines its destiny in matters related to its culture and education, strives to promote social justice, and guarantees its rights against assimilation. The group defends the interests of its members and makes decisions on their behalf. These are among the demands of minorities (Preda, 2012).

It is clear from the theoretical framework that none of the theories provides a single and comprehensive explanation of the reality of minority protection, but rather each theory attempts to illustrate an aspect of the minority phenomenon. Therefore, this study relies on employing the frameworks in an integrated manner to analyze the political, legal, and institutional factors that led to differences in the level of protection between the Sami peoples and the Uyghur minority.

Conceptual framework

Minorities and indigenous peoples face many complex challenges related to preserving their ethnic, cultural, or social identity. The Uyghur and Sami minorities are among the most prominent minorities that have faced a long history of struggle to preserve their distinct identity, despite differences in living conditions, geography, and politics for each group. This part of the study is based on understanding the concept of minorities in general and then identifying the two groups that are the focus of the study:

The concept of minority rights

Minorities have been defined in various ways. One such definition describes a minority as a group of people who historically inhabited a particular territory and, following changes in borders, became subject to another group while retaining cultural or ethnic characteristics that distinguish them from the rest of the population. Another definition describes a minority as a non-dominant group of citizens within a state that is numerically

smaller than the rest of the population and whose members are connected by ethnic, cultural, religious, or linguistic ties that distinguish them from other inhabitants of the state. Members of such a group also demonstrate solidarity to preserve their distinct identity (Issa, 2021).

These definitions indicate that a minority is a population group that differs from the dominant majority within a state and shares a number of ethnic, cultural, or religious characteristics. Such a minority seeks to preserve its distinct identity in the face of attempts at assimilation or persecution.

Another related concept is that of indigenous peoples, defined as groups of individuals who continue to live in the original areas in which they have historically existed and who still maintain traditional ways of life (OHCHR, 2021). These definitions suggest that minorities are relatively small groups compared with the majority population of a state and are distinguished from the majority by linguistic, religious, ethnic, or cultural characteristics. They face various challenges in preserving the identity that distinguishes them from the majority. This phenomenon exists in many regions of the world, as illustrated by groups such as the Kurds in Iraq, the Druze, the Rohingya, and other minorities distributed across different parts of the world.

Criteria for defining a minority

The concept of differentiation between minorities and majorities is a common factor in definitions of minorities. Some of the criteria by which minorities can be defined are

- Number: The number of the minority can be less than the number of the majority, but this criterion has been criticized due to the absence of a dominant majority in the country (Issa, 2021).
- Non-dominance: The inability of the minority to dominate justifies its need for protection (Issa, 2021).
- The feeling of difference: that the minority is different from the majority in one of the criteria of difference, which are language, religion, culture, and race (Issa, 2021).
- The minority demands the exercise of its special and distinct rights, with members of the group standing together to maintain their uniqueness.

It appears from the above that minorities within states possess a number of distinctive characteristics (Issa, 2021). These characteristics are what provide minorities their importance and distinguish them from other members of society.

Types of minorities

Minorities differ from majorities in many ways; The types of minorities include:

Religious minorities - International agreements have guaranteed religious rights and freedom of belief. Article 18 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights guarantees the

right to freedom of thought and religion, including the freedom to change one's religion and to practice religious rituals in any place of one's choice. Article 18 of the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights also guarantees the right to freedom of religion and thought, as well as the freedom to manifest one's religion either publicly or individually (United Nations, 1948, art. 18; United Nations, 1966, art. 18). A religious minority has been defined as a group distinguished from other ethnic groups within the society in which it lives by its religion, such as the Copts in Egypt and the Uyghurs in China (Bin Ahmed, 2010).

Linguistic minority - It is the minority that speaks a language different from that of the majority in the country. There are many linguistic minorities, such as the Thammy minority in Sri Lanka (Ben Ahmed, 2010).

Ethnic minority - It is a population that differs in biological characteristics from the majority of the country's population, such as physical characteristics (Ben Ahmed, 2010).

The legal framework for protecting minority rights

Numerous international agreements and resolutions have addressed human rights and minority rights, including the following:

- **Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948):** Human Rights presented a framework for ensuring the freedom of minorities, equality, comprehensive justice, and non-discrimination. Several provisions of the Declaration focus on rights relevant to minorities. Article 2 addresses non-discrimination and provides that every individual is entitled to enjoy all rights without distinction based on race, language, or religion. This ensures that minorities are able to exercise their rights regardless of their differences from the societies in which they live. Article 27 addresses cultural rights and recognizes the right of every individual to participate in and enjoy the cultural life of the community, thereby supporting the protection of minorities' cultural heritage. Article 18 concerns freedom of religion and belief and affirms the right of every individual to freedom of religion and belief. Accordingly, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights safeguards the rights and freedoms of minorities through its provisions (United Nations, 1948).
- **International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965):** Convention addresses discrimination based on color, race, or other differences. It condemns racial discrimination by states and affirms that everyone is equal before the law. It also emphasizes the importance of education and efforts to combat discrimination, in addition to preventing incitement to hatred. Accordingly, this international convention protects the rights of minorities from violence and racism (United Nations, 1965).
- **Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National or Ethnic, Religious and Linguistic Minorities (1992):** The Declaration emphasizes the obligation to promote and protect the rights of minorities and recognizes the importance of safeguarding those rights. This includes protecting religious and linguistic identity and creating appropriate conditions to strengthen the identity of existing minority groups. The Declaration guarantees the protection of the cultural,

religious, and linguistic rights of minorities, including their right to use their own language and to exercise religious freedom and other rights without interference or discrimination. It also affirms their right to participate in social, economic, and political life, maintain contact with members of their group, and enjoy the right to education, particularly in their mother tongue. The Declaration further emphasizes the importance of international cooperation in protecting minority rights and ensuring their effective participation in society without discrimination (OHCHR, 2012).

- **The Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities**: It is the first convention for the protection of minorities, which seeks to ensure that states respect the rights of minorities, in addition to combating discrimination and preserving privacy and equality, as well as encouraging minorities to engage in public life (Issa, 2021).
- **The European Charter for Regional and Minority Languages**: The agreement focused on the importance of preserving the languages used by minorities, and at the same time the need to preserve multilingualism (Council of Europe, 1992).

There have been many international efforts to promote global peace and security, and this is where liberal theory is reflected, as it seeks to protect minority rights through power-sharing between the majority and the minority and by safeguarding the rights of minorities. This approach is also reflected in the role of international institutions through the laws and international agreements they establish.

The historical roots of the Sami minority:

They are a small population group living in the far north of Europe (northern countries of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and the Kola Peninsula in Russia). The European Union has recognized the Sami people as the only indigenous people, as they maintain their customs and traditions, their language, and their lifestyle based on reindeer herding (Ivan &Nut, 2015).

- Definition of a Semitic person: They are someone who learns their language as a first language or whose parents or grandparents speak the Semitic language, in addition to other aspects of life and culture, such as lifestyles or handicrafts.
- There are ten Semitic languages, which are a mixture of traditional languages and local languages in the country inhabited by the Sami people, in addition to linguistic skills (Ivan &Nut, 2015).

The Sami people are an indigenous ethnic minority found in Northern Europe, particularly in the northern Scandinavian countries and Russia. They have preserved their culture, lifestyle, and traditional crafts and are distinguished by reindeer breeding and hunting.

The geographical location of the Sami people

The Sami people live in a vast geographical area, estimated at about 400,000 km², extending from the middle of Norway to the middle of Sweden, passing through Finland, and as far as the Kola Peninsula in Russia. However, the Sami people do not live only in the traditional area but have extended to reach beyond the traditional area (Ivan &Nut, 2015).

Figure 1 -Areas of distribution of the Semitic peoples



As Figure (1) shows, the Sami people are spread across the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, Finland, and Russia, which reflects the transnational nature of the Sami minority, which has contributed to complicating the issue of their legal protection, given their spread across several countries and the different legal and political systems of the various countries in which the Sami people are spread.

The socio-political and cultural conditions of the Sami people

In 1751, the borders between the Scandinavian countries were established according to an agreement, which recognized the Sami people as one of the groups with rights to the land and allowed them to continue their traditional ways of life, including hunting, reindeer herding, and moving between winter and summer lands. By the nineteenth century, the borders were closed, which led to a decrease in the area of lands inhabited by the Sami people, in addition to converting areas of grazing lands into agricultural lands. In 1919, the Reindeer Agreement was formed between Norway and Sweden, and the Sami people were displaced from their places of residence. This intervention was called the removal of the Sami people (Spitzer & Selle, 2021). This agreement may have been the beginning of the dispersal of the Sami minority in different countries and the restriction of their freedoms and movement, which prompted countries to impose policies on the Sami.

The Sami ethnic identity is more politicized in Norway, and the Sami right to self-determination is more fundamental in Norway than in other countries. Norway and Sweden appear less likely to exhibit disparities between majorities, especially in terms of income, as they are high-income countries (Spitzer & Selle, 2021).

Norway's principles are consistent with the principles of the nation, freedom and justice. They are committed to developing their language and nationality. In the 1840s, this cultural policy became controversial. It was a kind of basis for promoting the Norwegian language in the Sami regions, but the use of Sami languages was still permitted in religious instruction and local schools. Restrictions were imposed on the Sami language and the Finnish language. The 1889 law on primary schools stipulated that the language of instruction was Norwegian, except in some regions where the use of Sami was permitted as an auxiliary language. In addition, one of the conditions for buying land in Norway was learning and writing Norwegian (Steinlien, 1989).

Throughout the twentieth century, there were attempts to assimilate the Sami people into the societies in which they lived. The Sami people were pioneers in resisting the policy of assimilation. States were afraid to recognize minorities due to fear of consequences, such as the emergence of separatist movements, especially since they contain many minorities, including Roma, Kiffans, and Jews. The Sami minority is considered an indigenous minority in Northern Europe. Finland and Norway recognized the Sami as an indigenous people and not an ethnic minority. In Russia, the Sami people were considered one of the small indigenous peoples in Russia (Ivan & Nuț2015).

The Norwegian government also undertook a hydropower project in the Sámi homeland, which resulted in encroachment on Sámi lands and the gradual disappearance of grazing boundaries. This led the Sámi people to raise complaints regarding encroachment on their lands. In addition, scientific and technological developments resulted in the introduction of technology into the Sámi way of life. Projects and investments on Sámi lands also deprived the Sámi people of their freedom and access to their grazing lands, making their traditional livelihoods less profitable. The Sámi minority also sought to make use of election periods through the media and social media (Steinlien, 1989).

There are no specific seats reserved for the Sámi in Europe, which allows for the achievement of meaningful representation. The Sámi people are not represented in the European Parliament and have only been represented in the Norwegian Parliament, where Sámi participation has developed differently. The establishment of the Sámi Parliament in Sweden also coincided with the emergence of Sámi political parties and interests. The primary objective of the Sámi Parliament is to defend the rights of the Sámi people and to protect their language and culture.

European states regard the Sámi as a distinct people living within a defined territory. The establishment of the Sámi Parliament, which is considered one of the most significant achievements attained by the Sámi minority, together with the recognition of the Sámi as an indigenous people, reflects their right to self-determination and constitutional recognition without separation from the state. It has also enabled members of the Sámi community to participate in the decision-making process (Spitzer & Selle, 2021).

The recognition of minority rights to participate in political life and to establish a parliament that defends their social, political, and cultural rights helps guarantee the

minority's right to self-determination and protects it from assimilation into European society. This also supports cultural pluralism and group rights theory.

International resolutions concerning the Semitic peoples

The Sami people are considered the indigenous peoples inhabiting Northern Europe, and they are covered by Convention No. 169 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples in Independent Countries, adopted by the United Nations General Assembly in 2007. This convention defines the rights of indigenous peoples, including their cultural and linguistic rights, as well as their right to use the land and its resources. Indigenous and tribal peoples have the right to enjoy their land and resources, and no force may be used against their settlements. Furthermore, their cultural and social values and practices are to be recognized and protected (United Nations, Human Rights, https://2u.pw/mLPefyij)

The experience of the Sami peoples indicates that legal and institutional recognition of minority rights can contribute significantly to enhancing their political participation and protecting their linguistic and cultural identity. The availability of political administration and the development of national legislation are key factors in transforming international principles relating to minority rights around the world into a practical reality for the Sami peoples.

Uighur minority

The Muslim Uighur minority lives in the Xinjiang region, also known as East Turkestan. Its area is estimated at 1.65 million km². The region's population is 21.18 million, and the number of Muslims in the region is about 13 million, of whom 9 million are Uighurs, thus constituting a majority. The Uighurs speak Uighur, which is derived from the Turkic language and is written in Arabic script (Ghazlan, 2018). Their culture and civilization also set this group apart. The Uighur minority remained under the control of the Turkic emperor until 334 BC, and maintained its independence until the Chinese launched several attacks in 93 BC, occupying it for a period not exceeding thirty years (Ihaddaden & Soualhi, 2021).

In 555 AD, East Turkestan joined the Gokturkler Empire, which was in a constant war with China. The Uyghur community was under Mongol control until it gained independence from the Mongols and established East Turkestan in 1884, which means the region of Islam. From here came the idea of Uyghur nationalism, whose roots go back to Islam (Ihaddaden & Soualhi, 2021).

Figure 2. Geographical location of the Xinjiang region



Source: Bouklikha (2022)

Figure (2) shows the geographical location of the Xinjiang region, which is inhabited by the majority of the Uyghur minority. The attached map shows its strategic and economic importance, which explains one aspect of the policies pursued by the Chinese government towards the Uighur minority.

The origin of the conflict between the Muslim Uighur minority and the Chinese government

Persecution began after the Manchu dynasty came to power in China. The campaign of persecution against the Uighurs began in 1648, as they were unable to withstand the policy of Sinicization, which led the Muslim Uighur minority to carry out several revolutions, including the Jangq Revolution of 1825 and the Yaqub Bek Revolution of 1845, which lasted 20 years. Although one of the most significant outcomes of the revolution was the liberation of the region, which subsequently received the name Xinjiang, it did not gain international recognition (Bouklikha, 2022).

China divided the region into administrative units, which led to the 1931 revolution and subsequent revolutions. Chinese forces invaded the region after fierce fighting in 1949. The authorities implemented a strict policy against the Muslim population and disseminated the teachings of Mao Zedong. The events of September 11, 2001, were a turning point. After China had been secretly implementing a policy of racial discrimination, the events highlighted the concept of the war on terror, and it proclaimed itself to be combating terrorism in the same manner as America. The Uighur groups were declared to be terrorist groups, justifying the crimes against humanity that they commit against the Uyghur minority (Ghazlan, 2018).

In 2009, the Xinjiang region witnessed protests demanding independence, in which more than 200 people were killed, in addition to giving permission to the police to kill anyone believed to be a terrorist (Ihaddaden & Soualhi, 2021).

The reason for the events between the Chinese and the Uyghurs was the accusation by six young Uyghurs of raping two Han women. The news of the rape was published, and

two Uyghurs died, and 118 people were injured. Many peaceful demonstrations took place, and the police used a lot of violence against the demonstrators. The Han majority carried out acts of revenge against the Uyghur minority, and one million Uyghurs were arrested in the camps that the Chinese call "re-education" (Gunawan, 2019).

The linguistic and religious differences in the Xinjiang region led to the Uighur minority's desire for independence from China, which led to the beginning of the conflict.

Violations suffered by the Muslim Uighur minority

The Uyghur minority has been subjected to numerous human rights violations, including:

- The Chinese government has detained over one million Muslims in camps throughout the Xinjiang region. The Chinese government has described them as being in counter-terrorism centers, in addition to the Chinese government's refusal to consider them as camps. The Uyghur minority is denied their religious freedom, and bearded men and veiled women are arrested and detained in camps where they are subjected to brutality and repression and forced to practice customs contrary to the teachings of Islam, such as eating pork and dancing. International organizations are not allowed to visit the camps (Ihaddaden & Soualhi, 2021).
- China has exploited the wave of fighting terrorism to eradicate Islam in China, as China is updating the data of Muslims in China and monitoring about 5.2 million Muslims in China through digital courts.
- The government has been pursuing those who flee abroad, similar to how it pursued Uighur migrants in Australia, particularly after the 2018 demonstration in Canberra that protested China's policy towards the Uighurs.
- 120,000 Muslim religious scholars were executed in 1952, Uyghur Muslims were prevented from entering mosques, mosques were demolished, Quranic education centers were burned, and mosques were converted into Communist Party centers.
- Children aged 11-12 years are tortured as a result of violence stemming from their illegal religious education, and veiled women are also burned alive.
- Forcing Muslim Uighur women to use contraception, through illegal procedures such as forced sterilization and abortions.
- The Chinese government also pursued a policy of forced assimilation. The government encouraged members of the majority to live in the Uyghur region, to reduce the Muslim majority in the region, in addition to restricting customs and traditions, and encouraging other languages to use Uyghur languages, especially in education and (Ihaddaden & Soualhi, 2021; Bouklikha, 2022).
- In addition to banning the Uyghur language, Uyghur curricula were merged with Chinese curricula, and Uyghurs were forced to learn the Chinese language (Han language). The Chinese government also practiced racial discrimination against Mongolians and Tibetans, as China works to eliminate the cultural, social, and religious distinctiveness of minorities (Gunawan, 2019).

It appears from the above that the Muslim minority in the Xinjiang region suffers from all kinds of oppression and racism, from murder to being deprived of practicing their religious rituals.

International reactions to the Uighur crisis

The Chinese government has practiced all kinds of repression and violence against the Uyghur minority, and there had to be reactions from the international community, including:

- Two letters were sent to the United Nations, the first from the United Nations Human Rights Council, condemning what the Chinese government is doing to the Muslim minority, and the second letter was sent from a number of Islamic and African countries, which praised what China is doing as part of counter-terrorism measures (Ihaddaden & Soualhi, 2021).
- Islamic and Arab countries support China's actions regarding the Muslim minority because of their political and economic interests, particularly following China's Belt and Road Initiative, which aims to rebuild the Silk Road and has caused these countries to abandon Islamic and humanitarian principles (Ihaddaden & Soualhi, 2021).
- In August 2022, the United Nations issued a report on human rights in the Xinjiang region. The report concluded that China was committing serious human rights violations against the Uighur minority. These crimes included restrictions on basic rights and arbitrary arrests. China also pursued counter-terrorism policies in the region to justify repression, and strict restrictions on freedoms and movement continued. One of the consequences of China's policies was family disintegration and restrictions on communication among Uyghur individuals. The report made recommendations, which included investigating the violations, legal reforms, and the release of detainees. China denied the violations and defended its policies. The United Nations expressed hope that the Chinese government would accept the recommendations in the report (OHCHR, 2022).
- Amnesty International also published a report (2021) that confirmed human rights abuses against the Uighur minority, such as a large-scale detention campaign, poor detention conditions, torture, electronic monitoring, movement restrictions with police patrols, and attacks on religious symbols, mosques, Qur'ans, and the Islamic greeting. The report confirmed the existence of a blackout on what is happening in the region and made recommendations to dismantle the detention camps and release the detainees.

The case of the Uighur minority reveals that the existence of international legal rules for the protection of human rights does not necessarily guarantee the protection of minorities but is actually linked to the extent to which states are committed to implementing them and the ability of the international community to activate monitoring and accountability mechanisms when violations against ethnic minorities occur.

The system of government in countries where minorities are prevalent:

- The system of government of the People's Republic of China:
- The Chinese system is considered a unique model of a non-democratic system, namely the Chinese communist system. Power is exercised through the single-party Communist Party. In the absence of pluralism, power is concentrated in the hands of the central government in Beijing, with direct supervision over all administrative levels and national decisions (Ghazlan, 2018; Ivan & Nuț, 2015,).
- The system of government in the Scandinavian countries:
- The Scandinavian countries' system of government is characterized by proportional representation, preventing any single party from monopolizing power. These countries are also described as global welfare states, but they are not open to ethnic diversity. Despite their rejection of diversity, these countries' systems are based on global welfare principles, and they strive to establish comprehensive social welfare systems (Ivan & Nuț, 2015)

This becomes apparent when comparing the political systems of countries with Uyghur and Sami minority groups. The varying levels of protection for minority rights are not due to differences in international legal principles but rather to the nature of a state's political system, the extent to which it adopts the principles of democracy and the rule of law, its commitment to fulfilling its international obligations, and the effectiveness of national institutions and accountability mechanisms.

Results and discussion

This chapter will discuss the main findings, reached through a comparative approach to the human rights challenges faced by the Sami and Uighur minorities, as well as ways to protect minorities from assimilation and dissolution into societies.

Comparing the shared conditions between the Uighur minority and the Sami peoples

Despite the geographical and cultural differences between the Uyghurs and the Sami peoples, literature has shown that there are many common factors between them, and among these common circumstances are

1- Linguistic and cultural diversity: The Uighurs have their own language, which belongs to the Turkic languages, in addition to a culture that is a blend of Turkic, Chinese and Persian heritage. The Semitic peoples also have their own languages and a distinctive culture that reflects their geographical connection to the polar region in which they live.

2- The Semites practice beliefs and rituals associated with natural religions, and although a large part of the Semitic peoples have converted to Christianity, they still retain their religious rituals. The Uighurs, on the other hand, belong to the Sunni

branch of Islam and practice the rituals of the Islamic religion, although the Chinese government exerts pressure to prevent Muslims from practicing their religion and to turn towards Chinese religions.

3- The Uighurs suffer from racial discrimination and persecution, as they are persecuted for practicing their religious beliefs. In addition, there are detention camps where Muslims, both male and female, are subjected to torture and violence. They are also forced to use the Chinese language at work, in an attempt to force them to integrate into Chinese society. Similarly, the Sami peoples in Europe have been subjected to all forms of assimilation and integration into European societies, where their language has been suppressed by imposing the languages of the state on them.

Comparing the differences in conditions between the Sami peoples and the Uyghur minority

Despite the many shared characteristics between the Uighur minority and the Sami peoples, there are also many differences between the two groups, including:

1- The geographical location extended into the northern regions of Norway, Sweden, and Finland, north of Russia, and the Kola Peninsula, and relied on reindeer herding and fishing due to the nature of the region and the climate in the region, while the Uighurs live in the Xinjiang region (East Turkestan), in a desert area that relies on agriculture in the oasis region in addition to working in trade.

2- The majority of Uighurs have adhered to the Islamic religion since the ninth century, and it has become part of the cultural and doctrinal identity component that distinguishes the Uighur people from the Chinese majority. The Uighur people also suffer from racial discrimination and persecution (Ghazlan, 2018; Demirtepe & Bozbey, 2012). In contrast, the Semitic peoples in Northern Europe were influenced by the religious beliefs in Europe, and a large part of them embraced the Lutheran Christian religion, although they retained many of their religious traditions and beliefs. Despite the racial discrimination at the beginning, they enjoy political representation and cultural and international rights (Ivan & Nuț, 2015; Spitzer & Selle, 2021).

3- The Uighur minority tried to gain recognition of their rights, existence, and independence, but they were unable to obtain their rights, except for crimes against humanity, persecution, and deprivation of rights. At the same time, a minority group formed a Sami parliament to preserve their rights and defend their cultural and social distinctiveness.

A comparison of the Semitic minority from the perspective of different theories:

Minorities are considered part of the distinctive social fabric of societies, as they constitute a diverse community in characteristics such as culture, language, and religion.

There are many theories that have attempted to understand the relationship of minorities with the political system and the social system within the state, including the following:

- Liberal theory focuses on the freedom of individuals and their rights within a society protected by a just legal system. Therefore, the Uighur and Sami minorities are supposed to be protected under the law in their respective societies. However, the Uyghur minority is subjected to numerous violations, such as the denial of religious freedom, as well as attacks involving murder, imprisonment, and restrictions on freedom of movement. This situation demonstrates a discrepancy between liberal theory and China's treatment of the Muslim Uyghur minority. In contrast, the treatment of the Sami people may be closer to liberal principles. While there have been attempts to assimilate the Sami minority into mainstream society, their rights have been recognized, including the right to preserve their customs, traditions, and culture. This indicates that countries adhering to the liberal perspective have preserved the rights of minorities, while China has neglected the Uyghur minority and even gone so far as to persecute them.
- The theory of multiculturalism, which calls for preserving cultural diversity and considers it part of the identity of the state or society, has proven that countries that contain the Sami minority have recognized their rights as indigenous peoples in those countries, while the Muslim Uighur minority has been deprived of its rights to practice worship and preserve its culture. From the above, it appears that the situation of the Uighurs is incompatible with the theory of multiculturalism.
- Communitarian theory: The Sami minority is considered part of the state's culture. They are not individuals but rather pressure groups with a right to influence, land, wealth, language, and their culture. This stance was evident in their defense of their right to their own grazing lands. Communitarian theory plays a key role in lobbying to protect the rights of the Uyghur minority in Chinese society.
- The theory of social justice, which advocates for redistribution, envisions a fair distribution of resources, in addition to supporting marginalized groups. This does not apply to the Uighur minority, although despite their presence The Sami minority lives in democratic countries, but they have faced encroachment on their grazing lands to establish electricity generation projects.
- According to institutional theory, the Chinese government, through its institutions and repressive policies, has deprived the Uighur minority of its rights and freedoms, while countries with Semitic populations are trying to recognize their rights and the right to self-determination.
- The same applies to the rights of the group: the Sami minority has the right to manage their lands and determine their own destiny, as well as the right to have a parliament, while the Uighur minority has been deprived of the protection of their rights to worship, education, and movement as a result of repression by Chinese forces.

This comparative study, having examined the different theoretical frameworks, indicates that the situation of the Uighur minority continues to reflect patterns of persecution and

discrimination, alongside limited effective protection of their rights. By contrast, the case of the Sámi people demonstrates that, although they were historically subjected to policies of exclusion, persecution, and attempts to erase their identity, the development of national legislation and the legal recognition of their rights have contributed to improving their situation and strengthening their protection.

This comparison demonstrates that the effectiveness of minority protection is determined not only by the nature of the violations to which minorities have been subjected but also by the extent to which the state responds by developing legal and institutional frameworks that ensure respect for their rights.

A comparison of the Sami minority from the perspective of human rights laws:

Numerous international laws and treaties have been drafted with the aim of protecting minorities and their cultural and political rights. The study examines how the application of these international treaties has affected the Uyghur and Sami minorities and lists some of the agreements that have addressed minority rights.

- The Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948): The Declaration states that all people are equal in rights and dignity and that everyone should enjoy the protection of the law. It also states that everyone is entitled to all rights and freedoms without discrimination, particularly on religious, racial, social, or economic grounds. These rights are consistent with the rights of minorities and what individuals should generally enjoy. However, China's treatment of the Uighur minority violates human rights, as they are subjected to torture, ill-treatment, and inhumane conditions. Furthermore, there is no recognition of the Uyghur minority's legal personality, and individuals should not be arrested or tortured. Everything the Uyghur minority suffers contradicts the Universal Declaration of Human Rights. In contrast, the rights of the Sami people have been recognized as indigenous peoples in Norway, Sweden, and Russia, and they have been granted near-equality with the majority, such as freedom of expression. However, minorities face educational interferences and attempts to assimilate the Sami into other societies, like those in Norway (United Nations, 1948).

- The International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) affirms the commitment of states not to encourage or support any racial discrimination perpetrated by any person or organization. This principle contradicts what China is doing to the Muslim Uighur minority, as well as the world's silence on China's actions, in addition to the support of states for what is happening to the Uyghur minority under the principle of combating terrorism. As for the Sami minority, they enjoy rights against racial discrimination, despite some laws restricting freedoms, but their situation is not comparable to what is happening to the Uighur minority. https://2u.pw/J9wt9).

- Declaration on the Rights of Persons Belonging to National, Ethnic, or Linguistic Minorities (1992): which stipulated the preservation of minority identity and participation in public life, the Uighurs face difficulties in preserving their cultural and

religious identity, in addition to the difficulty of preserving their language, while the cultural rights of the Sami minority and participation in public life were recognized.

- The Framework Convention on the Protection of National Minorities (1995) focuses on the rights of minorities, especially cultural and political rights. Despite the challenges to the use of land by the Sami minority, there are many laws that protect the rights of cultural and linguistic minorities in Scandinavian countries. The Convention assumes that China will give the Muslim minority its rights, but the Muslim minority suffers from persecution of its political and cultural rights.
- The European Charter for Regional Languages (1992): The Sami language is considered one of the regional languages that must be protected in the Scandinavian countries, and its use must be promoted in education, media and the government sector. Despite attempts to dissolve the Sami culture and language in the Scandinavian countries, these efforts ended with the recognition of the minority's rights and their right to preserve their identity.

This comparison shows that international agreements have established an advanced legal framework for protecting minority rights, but the practical application of these agreements remains uneven among countries with minorities. This confirms that the effectiveness of international law depends on the extent to which states fulfill their obligations under international agreements, rather than on the mere existence of legal provisions.

Comparison based on human rights indicators:

Human rights indicators are tools for assessing the extent to which countries respect human rights, whether at the individual or group level, through the analysis of international agreements. Based on these foundations, human rights indicators for the two minorities were measured:

- Civil, religious, political, and cultural rights:

These freedoms can be assessed through indicators such as arbitrary detention. The Uyghur minority has been subjected to arbitrary detention in training centers without a clear legal justification, in addition to restrictions on freedoms such as freedom of expression and freedom of religion, including practices such as prayer and fasting. Chinese culture has also been imposed, while Islamic and Uyghur culture has been suppressed (Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights [OHCHR], 2022).

By contrast, the Sámi peoples have not faced similar challenges, such as detention or deprivation of freedom of expression, with the exception of attempts to impose the national languages of the states in which they live through school education. They have also been permitted to establish Sámi parliaments (Ivan &Nut, 2015).

- Reproductive rights and family life:
- There is no evidence of government interference in the family life of the Sámi peoples. By contrast, the Uighur minority has reportedly been subjected to forced abortions

and compulsory birth-control measures. Children have also been forcibly separated from their families in order to be raised according to Chinese culture (OHCHR, 2022).

- Protection from torture and discrimination: The Uyghur minority is considered a group that has been targeted, discriminated against, killed, and detained (OHCHR, 2022), while the Sami minority has not faced such discrimination as a result of their ethnicity.

These indicators show that the Uighur minority has faced violations of their rights due to justifications produced by China, including the war on terror, given that the Uighur minority is a Muslim minority. The international community has supported these violations out of fear for its trade interests with China and the pretext of the war on terror, in addition to the fact that China's political system is based on a one-party system; therefore, there is no opposition to defend the rights of minorities in China.

While the Sami minority has not faced real violations of its rights, being indigenous peoples in democratic countries that uphold human rights and avoid violations and racial discrimination against minorities, whatever their orientations and types.

A comparison between the two cases reveals that the difference in the level of protection of minority rights does not stem from differences in international legal principles but rather from the nature of the state's political system, its commitment to implementing its international obligations, the effectiveness of national institutions, and the mechanisms for accountability and oversight. While legal and institutional recognition in Scandinavian countries has positively impacted the situation of the Sami people, the Uighur minority has faced significant challenges due to limited practical guarantees for the implementation of international law. This underscores that the effectiveness of international protection is more closely linked to the practical application of these rules than to their mere presence in legal texts.

Conclusion

The issue of minorities is one of the most complex, sensitive, and important issues in the field of human rights, as it involves a difficult intersection between several interrelated issues, namely minority identity, national sovereignty, and human rights. Diversity is one of the most important characteristics that distinguish societies and should therefore be preserved, as it represents a valuable asset to humanity, which makes its preservation necessary for building societies that are more inclusive and diverse. This study examined two different cases: the Muslim Uyghur minority in China and the Sámi peoples in Northern Europe.

The Sámi peoples in Northern Europe represent a positive example of preserving cultural and social identity despite attempts to assimilate them into surrounding societies and restrictions on their grazing lands. Nevertheless, the policies adopted by the Scandinavian states contributed to preserving the Sámi peoples, their traditional way of life, and their traditional occupation. Within the framework of the right to self-determination, they were able to establish their own parliament to defend their rights.

Democratic states also contributed to protecting the minority, in addition to recognizing their right to self-determination.

On the other hand, the tragic situation of minorities in dictatorial states is evident in the challenges faced by the Muslim Uighur minority, who have a long history and a religious culture and have been subjected to the harshest forms of persecution, including restrictions on religious freedoms, detention in camps, house arrest, and deprivation of the freedom to practice their religion. Although the practices of the Chinese government have been justified under slogans such as the war on terrorism, the repressive measures of the Chinese government were viewed favorably by many states that considered the issue part of the war on terrorism. This position was supported by many countries, particularly Islamic countries, despite international reports showing human rights violations.

Through the comparison between the two minorities, the roles played by governments in dealing with minorities, as well as the role of the international community in determining the fate of minorities, become evident. Recognizing minorities and their rights has helped create more harmonious and diverse societies. By contrast, in the absence of democratic policies, repression leads to a deep gap between the minority and the state that is difficult to repair, as illustrated by the case of the Uyghur minority.

In conclusion, the international community, national governments, and civil society organizations should work together to guarantee minority rights and promote justice and equality. The experiences of the minorities examined in this study, including the Sámi and the Uighurs, provide highly significant lessons on how to deal with cultural and religious diversity to preserve social cohesion. Through cooperation, dialogue, and respect for the rights of all, it is possible to build a more humane and inclusive world in which every individual can live with dignity and respect, regardless of religious or ethnic identity.

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GLOBAL SOUTH DIPLOMACY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD: A COMPARISON OF THE AUTONOMOUS STRATEGIES OF INDONESIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Abstract

This article compares how Indonesia and South Africa exercise strategic autonomy as Global South middle powers in a multipolar order, and finds that autonomy is domain-specific rather than uniformly institutionalized or uniformly coalition-dependent. Using a qualitative comparative case study design anchored to 2022–2025, spanning Indonesia's G20 presidency, both countries' foreign policy white papers, and Indonesia's accession to BRICS, the study analyzes six dimensions: diplomatic autonomy, institutional autonomy, coalition-building capacity, economic constraint, normative orientation, and partnership diversification. Evidence from UN General Assembly voting records, BRICS and G20 declarations, and bilateral trade data shows that Indonesia's autonomy is most visible in unilateral positioning, it voted to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine despite its non-alignment doctrine, but its institutional consistency is more contingent on presidential preference than bureaucratic continuity, as its reversal on BRICS membership between the Widodo and Prabowo administrations demonstrates. South Africa's autonomy is most visible in coalition agenda-setting; it secured BRICS's 2023 expansion and placed IMF governance reform on the bloc's agenda during its chairship, but its unilateral positioning is constrained by both doctrine and a shrinking diplomatic budget, evident in its consistent UN abstentions and the Department of International Relations and Cooperation's declining capacity. Both states, however, show a comparable and unaddressed dependency on China in their trade structures, suggesting a shared ceiling on autonomy that neither state's institutional or coalition strategy has yet overcome. The article contributes to Global South diplomacy scholarship by proposing that strategic autonomy be treated as a multidimensional, domain-specific condition rather than a single scalar property, and by demonstrating this through evidence from primary voting and trade rather than doctrinal statements alone.

Keywords

Global South, Strategic Autonomy, Comparative Foreign Policy, Indonesia, South Africa, BRICS.

Resumo

Este artigo compara a forma como a Indonésia e a África do Sul exercem a autonomia estratégica enquanto potências médias do Sul Global numa ordem multipolar, e conclui que a autonomia é específica a cada domínio, em vez de estar uniformemente institucionalizada ou depender uniformemente de coligações. Recorrendo a um desenho de estudo de caso comparativo qualitativo, centrado no período de 2022 a 2025 — abrangendo a presidência da Indonésia no G20, os documentos de orientação da política externa de ambos os países e a adesão da Indonésia ao BRICS —, o estudo analisa seis dimensões: autonomia diplomática, autonomia institucional, capacidade de formação de coligações, restrições económicas, orientação normativa e diversificação de parcerias. Os dados provenientes dos registos de votação da Assembleia Geral da ONU, das declarações do BRICS e do G20 e dos dados sobre o comércio bilateral mostram que a autonomia da Indonésia é mais visível no posicionamento unilateral — o país votou a favor da condenação da invasão da Ucrânia pela Rússia, apesar da sua doutrina de não alinhamento —, mas a sua consistência institucional depende mais da preferência presidencial do que da continuidade burocrática, como demonstra a reviravolta na adesão ao BRICS entre as administrações de Widodo e Prabowo. A autonomia da África do Sul é mais visível na definição da agenda das coligações; o país assegurou a expansão do BRICS em 2023 e colocou a reforma da governação do FMI na agenda do bloco durante a sua presidência, mas o seu posicionamento unilateral é limitado tanto pela doutrina como por um orçamento diplomático em declínio, o que se torna evidente nas suas abstensões consistentes na ONU e na capacidade cada vez menor do Departamento de Relações Internacionais e Cooperação. Ambos os Estados, no entanto, revelam uma dependência comparável e não abordada da China nas suas estruturas comerciais, sugerindo um limite comum à autonomia que nem a estratégia institucional nem a estratégia de coligação de nenhum dos dois Estados conseguiu ainda ultrapassar. O artigo contribui para os estudos sobre a diplomacia do Sul Global, propondo que a autonomia estratégica seja tratada como uma condição multidimensional e específica de cada domínio, em vez de uma propriedade escalar única, e demonstrando-o através de evidências provenientes de votações primárias e do comércio, em vez de apenas declarações doutrinárias.

Palavras-Chave

Sul Global, Autonomia Estratégica, Política Externa Comparativa, Indonésia, África do Sul, BRICS.

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GLOBAL SOUTH DIPLOMACY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD: A COMPARISON OF THE AUTONOMOUS STRATEGIES OF INDONESIA AND SOUTH AFRICA

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Introduction

The end of the Cold War marked a turning point in global governance, characterized by the emergence of a multipolar system in which countries of the Global South began to assert themselves as active participants rather than passive recipients of global policies. This transformation reflects a shift from the dominance of the Global North toward a more inclusive distribution of power, where Southern countries actively shape international norms and institutions. Indonesia and South Africa exemplify this new dynamic. Both nations, once subject to colonial structures, now engage strategically in multilateral diplomacy to promote collective Southern interests (Mpondo, 2024; Qobo & Nyoni, 2021). Their rise illustrates how the Global South has evolved from a reactive to a proactive force in world politics, redefining agency through regional leadership, moral legitimacy, and institutional participation that challenge the historical asymmetry of global governance.

This article argues that Indonesia and South Africa's strategic autonomy diverges by domain rather than by degree. Comparing UN General Assembly voting records, BRICS and G20 outcome documents, foreign ministry budget and staffing data, and bilateral trade statistics between 2022 and 2025, this study finds that Indonesia's autonomy is most demonstrable in unilateral positioning, for example, voting to condemn Russia's 2022 invasion of Ukraine despite a non-alignment doctrine that might have predicted abstention, while its institutional consistency is more dependent on presidential preference than on bureaucratic continuity, illustrated by the reversal between President Joko Widodo's 2023 decision not to join BRICS and President Prabowo Subianto's decision to do so in 2025. South Africa's autonomy, conversely, is most demonstrable in coalition agenda-setting, securing BRICS's first expansion in over a decade during its 2023 chairship and placing IMF governance reform on the bloc's agenda, while its unilateral

positioning remains constrained by both its non-alignment doctrine and a foreign ministry operating under declining budgets and high vacancy rates.

This distinction matters because it reframes what "comparing" Indonesia and South Africa should mean. Prior literature has largely treated the two states as separate country cases loosely connected by the shared label of "Global South agency" (Boisjolie, 2015; Mabera, 2019). This article instead argues that the more useful comparative unit is not the country but the analytical dimension: asking not simply "how autonomous is Indonesia and how autonomous is South Africa" but "in which specific domains does each state's autonomy show up, and what mechanism sustains or constrains it there."

The theoretical framework draws on four established bodies of work: Global South and postcolonial international relations theory, which frames Southern states as constitutive rather than peripheral actors in global order (Acharya, 2021; Tickner & Blaney, 2020); the agency literature in international relations, which treats structural position and actor agency as mutually constitutive (Barnett & Duvall, 2005); alignment theory, concerning how states balance or bandwagon relative to major powers (Walt, 1987); and the strategic autonomy literature, concerning the institutional and material conditions under which smaller or middle powers preserve independent policy space (Korhonen, 2008).

The theoretical framework of this study is predicated on four fundamental pillars. Initially, the theories of the Global South and postcolonialism are examined. These theories emphasize narrative resistance to the dominance of the Global North (Acharya, 2021; Tickner & Blaney, 2020). Secondly, the concept of agency in international relations, as outlined by Barnett & Duvall (Barnett & Duvall, 2005), positions Global South countries as actors capable of influencing global structures. Thirdly, Walt's (Waltz, 1979) alignment theory elucidates the balancing and bandwagoning choices of countries in dealing with major powers. Fourthly, the autonomy framework underscores the significance of strategic independence (Korhonen, 2008). The integration of these four theories enables a comprehensive analysis of how Indonesia and South Africa navigate their foreign policy strategies amid geopolitical pressures and domestic demands.

This study aims to answer two questions: (1) in which specific dimensions do Indonesia's and South Africa's exercises of strategic autonomy converge or diverge, and (2) what mechanisms, institutional, economic, or coalition-based, sustain or constrain autonomy in each dimension. The contribution is twofold. Theoretically, the study proposes treating strategic autonomy as a multidimensional, domain-specific variable rather than a single scalar property, evidenced through six comparative categories rather than asserted through doctrinal language. Empirically, it grounds this claim in primary voting records, summit outcome documents, and trade data rather than relying on secondary characterizations of both countries' foreign policy postures.

Literature Review

Previous literature has largely emphasized the Global South's structural limitations rather than examining these countries' agency. For example, Tickner & Blaney (2020) highlight the normative tendency of international relations studies, while Fitriani (2021) shows that Indonesia's role in ASEAN and the G20 is often positioned as middle power activism

without examining how alignment and autonomy shape diplomatic strategy. Similarly, research by Alden & Schoeman (Alden & Schoeman, 2022) positions South Africa more as a "complement" to China's interests in BRICS rather than an autonomous actor. Another study by Qobo & Nyoni (Qobo & Nyoni, 2021) confirms that South Africa faces a dilemma between maintaining autonomy and building strategic alignment in the BRICS and AU forums. This analytical gap reveals a research void that needs to be filled with comparative studies focusing on the differences between discourse (declarations of non-alignment and autonomy) and concrete practices in multilateral forums.

Furthermore, the study by Li & Carey (Li & Carey, 2021) emphasizes that BRICS offers an alternative financial architecture, even though its legitimacy is questionable. Prashad (Prashad, 2022) shows how the Global South is attempting to counter neoliberal hegemony through political solidarity. Policy data from the Indonesian Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2024), Chatham House (2025), and ISEAS (2025) illustrate a fundamental shift in Indonesian diplomacy towards multi-alignment. Meanwhile, findings from Mpondo (2024), Carnegie (2023), and Nkuna (2024) show that South Africa faces a dilemma between universal values and national interests in a multipolar forum. This necessitates systematically examining how agency, alignment, and autonomy are exercised in practice, not just in discourse.

Theoretically, this study offers an integration of the theories of the Global South, postcolonialism, agency, alignment, and autonomy into a single conceptual framework. Practically, this research can provide input for policymakers in Indonesia and South Africa to navigate foreign policy strategies amid increasingly complex multipolar dynamics. By focusing on a comparison of these two Global South countries, this research is expected to broaden academic understanding of how Southern countries negotiate, adapt, and maintain autonomy on the global stage.

Methodology

Research Design

This study employs a qualitative comparative case study design, using narrative literature synthesis as its method of data treatment. The design is comparative rather than purely descriptive: Indonesia and South Africa are treated not as two independent case narratives but as paired observations analyzed against a shared set of analytical categories (as detailed in the Analytical Framework and Comparative Categories). Narrative synthesis was chosen over systematic review because the research questions concern the interpretation of doctrine, discourse, and institutional practice, material that is heterogeneous in form (white papers, speeches, secondary analyses, multilateral communiqués) and not amenable to the standardized coding protocols systematic reviews require (Snyder, 2019). This choice carries a trade-off addressed directly in the limitation, which is that narrative synthesis affords interpretive depth at some cost to replicability.

Case Selection: Indonesia and South Africa

Indonesia and South Africa were selected using a most-similar-systems logic combined with practical considerations of source accessibility. Analytically, both states share three characteristics that make them comparable rather than merely juxtaposed: (1) each holds a codified, decades-old doctrine of non-alignment predating the current multipolar moment, Indonesia's *politik luar negeri bebas aktif* (1948) and South Africa's post-1994 Ubuntu diplomacy; (2) each occupies a structurally similar "bridging" position between the Global North and South, Indonesia through ASEAN and G20 membership, South Africa as a founding African member of BRICS; and (3) each has recently issued a formal foreign policy white paper that makes doctrine explicit and comparable at the same historical moment. In practice, case selection was also shaped by the accessibility of official documents and secondary literature in English, a constraint that likely biases the evidence base toward internationally circulated policy statements over domestically oriented material, as discussed in limitations. This is a two-case comparison, not a sample intended to generalize to "the Global South" as a category; findings are read as theory-building propositions about institutional embeddedness and coalition dependence, not as representative claims.

Data Sources and Selection Criteria

Three categories of sources were used: (1) official policy documents, including Indonesia's Foreign Policy White Paper 2024–2029 and South Africa's White Paper on Foreign Policy (DIRCO, 2023); (2) institutional and multilateral outcome documents, including G20 Bali Leaders' Declaration (2022), BRICS Johannesburg II Declaration (2023) and BRICS Foreign Ministers' statements, UN General Assembly resolutions and voting records, and DIRCO budget statements; and (3) peer-reviewed academic literature on Global South agency, strategic autonomy, and the foreign policies of both states. Inclusion criteria: sources published between 2018–2025 (allowing pre-2022 sources needed to establish doctrinal continuity); sources directly addressing Indonesian or South African foreign policy, Global South diplomacy, strategic autonomy, or middle-power theory; official government, UN, or multilateral documents, regardless of publication date, where they define doctrine or record a vote still relevant to the analysis. Exclusion criteria: sources addressing domestic policy areas without a foreign-policy or international-positioning dimension.

Analytical Framework and Comparative Categories

This study operationalizes strategic autonomy along six analytical dimensions applied identically to both cases: diplomatic autonomy (independent positioning in multilateral votes and statements), institutional autonomy (bureaucratic capacity to sustain doctrine across administrations), coalition-building capacity (ability to shape rather than merely join coalition agendas), economic constraint (degree of dependency on a single major-power partner), normative orientation (extent to which foreign policy is justified in values-based versus procedural terms), and partnership diversification (number and balance of major-power relationships maintained concurrently).

Data Analysis Procedure

Analysis proceeded in three stages: (1) within-case coding of each source against the six categories above; (2) cross-case comparison within each category, generating the propositional claims presented in Section 4; (3) theoretical synthesis, relating the comparative findings back to the strategic autonomy and Global South agency literatures to identify where existing theory holds, and where the Indonesia–South Africa comparison suggests refinement.

Limitations

Three limitations should be acknowledged. First, narrative synthesis, while suited to interpretive questions, does not permit the same replicability as systematic review protocols; a different researcher applying the same six categories might weight evidence differently. Second, reliance on English-language and internationally circulated sources likely privileges the externally facing dimension of both states' diplomacy over domestically contested or vernacular-language debates about foreign policy. Third, anchoring the study to the 2022–2025 window captures a high-visibility period (G20 presidency, new white papers, Indonesia's BRICS accession) but may understate longer-run historical continuities or discontinuities not visible within a three-year aperture.

Result and Discussion

Agency and Alignment in Indonesia and South Africa's Global Strategies

The transformation of global power configurations after the Cold War has provided unprecedented opportunities for Global South countries to reposition themselves as autonomous actors in shaping the international order. This transformation is both structural and ideational, as Southern states begin to articulate their agency through policy innovation, institutional participation, and strategic alignment. Indonesia and South Africa exemplify this process through their multi-layered diplomatic engagement that blends historical narratives, pragmatic choices, and normative commitments. Both countries employ strategic flexibility manifested in varying forms of alignment and autonomy to pursue national interests while maintaining legitimacy within the broader Global South discourse (Winanti & Alvian, 2021).

Indonesia's diplomatic trajectory illustrates the exercise of *agency through adaptive alignment*. Indonesia has operationalized this principle beyond its historical non-aligned stance by adopting a multidirectional engagement pattern rooted in the long-standing doctrine of politik luar negeri bebas aktif (free and active foreign policy). In contemporary practice, this has evolved into what Wicaksana (Wicaksana, 2024) terms a "partial multi-alignment" strategy allowing Indonesia to deepen partnerships with competing global powers while preserving strategic autonomy. For instance, its proactive diplomacy during the 2022 G20 Presidency underscored a strong advocacy for the Global South by linking domestic priorities such as digital transformation and equitable energy transition to global reform agendas (G20 Indonesia, 2022; Pugu, 2024). This initiative reaffirms Indonesia's

identity as a "norm entrepreneur" that blends developmentalist discourse with pragmatic statecraft (Sidiropoulos, 2020).

Empirically, Indonesia's agency is reflected in its dual function as a regional stabilizer and global bridge-builder. Within ASEAN, Indonesia maintains leadership in managing intra-regional disputes and promoting consensus-based diplomacy. At the same time, its membership in the G20 provides a platform to articulate collective Southern concerns in global economic governance. The Chatham House report (House, 2025) notes that Indonesia's capacity to mediate between conflicting interests among major powers derives from its domestic stability and institutionalized diplomatic culture. The Ministry of Foreign Affairs (2023, 2024) also institutionalized this approach by emphasizing the continuation of inclusive multilateralism and economic diplomacy under the 2024–2029 priorities. Nonetheless, the ISEAS–Yusof Ishak Institute (2025) cautions that Indonesia's growing strategic engagement with China, particularly under Prabowo Subianto's leadership, may recalibrate the balance of its multi-alignment posture; the reversal on BRICS membership between the Widodo and Prabowo administrations, discussed further below, is a concrete instance of this recalibration. Hence, Indonesia's diplomacy exemplifies the dialectical tension between agency and dependency, as pragmatic economic imperatives continually test normative independence.

In contrast, South Africa's global agency is deeply intertwined with its post-apartheid identity and continental leadership aspirations. Its Ubuntu diplomacy, as outlined in the White Paper on Foreign Policy ((DIRCO), 2023),reflects an effort to merge domestic democratic values with an outward-looking South–South solidarity agenda. Within this framework, South Africa positions itself as a normative actor advocating inclusivity, equality, and justice in global governance. However, as Mpondo (2024) notes, internal structural limitations, ranging from bureaucratic fragmentation to inconsistent policy coordination, frequently constrain the translation of these ideals into coherent foreign policy a constraint with a concrete institutional counterpart: DIRCO's own budget fell from R6.9 billion in 2023/24 to R6.57 billion in 2024/25, which the Minister linked to a "very high vacancy rate" negatively affecting operations, with the department even deferring a mission-staffing cycle for lack of funds in 2024. The result is a form of constrained agency wherein domestic institutional weaknesses often undermine external activism.

The BRICS framework represents both an opportunity and a constraint for South Africa's alignment strategy. Through BRICS, South Africa aspires to reform the global financial architecture and amplify developing economies' voices (Acharya, 2021; Alden & Schoeman, 2022; Li & Carey, 2021); as BRICS chair in 2023, it secured the bloc's first expansion in over a decade and placed a concrete institutional demand a third African seat on the IMF's executive board on the table, though that specific ask was not adopted by consensus. Nevertheless, the Russia-Ukraine war has exposed contradictions in its foreign policy. South Africa abstained on the UN General Assembly resolutions condemning Russia's invasion in March and October 2022, citing the need to preserve space for dialogue rather than declaring a position, and its continued energy engagement with Russia provoked skepticism regarding its commitment to democratic values (Mkhize, 2024). The Carnegie Endowment (2023) further argues that this pragmatic non-alignment has eroded the moral capital previously attached to South Africa's global

image. Consequently, South Africa's agency oscillates between value-based diplomacy and material dependency, a dilemma emblematic of broader Global South politics in an era of geopolitical polarization.

Comparatively, Indonesia demonstrates a higher degree of institutionalized agency due to its cohesive diplomatic bureaucracy and stable foreign policy traditions, while South Africa exhibits a more reactive posture influenced by domestic political contestation (Boisjolie, 2015; Mabera, 2019). Indonesia's ability to integrate its developmental agenda with multilateral frameworks illustrates how *agency* can be exercised through institutional legitimacy rather than material power. Conversely, South Africa's fluctuating stance within BRICS reveals how *alignment without autonomy* risks reinforcing asymmetrical dependencies on larger partners such as China and Russia (Mesquita & Seabra, 2020; Taylor, 2009). This institutional continuity, however, should not be overstated as static: Indonesia's own reversal on BRICS membership, detailed in the following section, shows that its doctrine's application is more contingent on presidential preference than its bureaucratic stability alone would suggest.

Both countries, however, utilize historical narratives as strategic capital. Indonesia revitalizes the spirit of the Bandung Conference to project itself as a moral leader of the Global South, emphasizing solidarity and anti-hegemonic cooperation. South Africa, conversely, mobilizes its liberation history as a source of soft power legitimacy in Africa and beyond. These historical identities underpin their pursuit of *symbolic agency*, a form of legitimacy-building that strengthens diplomatic standing in multilateral forums (Agensky & Barker, 2012). The interplay between historical symbolism and pragmatic adaptation illustrates how Southern diplomacy is simultaneously normative and instrumental.

Nevertheless, differences in alignment strategies between Indonesia and South Africa remain evident. Indonesia prioritizes consensus-based diplomacy through ASEAN's institutional mechanisms, while South Africa often navigates between normative commitments and pragmatic necessities, particularly regarding economic cooperation with authoritarian regimes (Rennkamp & Naidoo, 2011). The asymmetry in domestic capabilities further accentuates this divergence: Indonesia's cohesive bureaucratic structure enables continuity, whereas South Africa's institutional fragmentation constrains long-term consistency.

In sum, both Indonesia and South Africa exemplify distinct yet convergent modes of Southern agency in global governance. Indonesia's adaptive multi-alignment model demonstrates that principled flexibility can sustain strategic autonomy, whereas South Africa's moral diplomacy highlights the struggle to reconcile normative leadership with structural dependence. The comparison underscores that agency within the Global South is neither uniform nor absolute, it is a negotiated outcome shaped by domestic capacity, historical trajectory, and the ability to maneuver within the constraints of a multipolar system (Bhattacharya, 2024). Through this lens, both nations illuminate how alignment, when combined with agency, becomes a vehicle for asserting autonomy in a complex and contested international order.

Autonomy and the Quest for Strategic Space in Global Governance

Autonomy has re-emerged as a central pillar of Global South diplomacy in an increasingly multipolar and fragmented world. For countries such as Indonesia and South Africa, autonomy is not merely about the refusal to align militarily with extraordinary powers but building the strategic capacity to negotiate, resist, and innovate within the global order. This understanding reflects a shift from autonomy as isolation toward autonomy as *relational empowerment* a means to preserve national sovereignty while engaging cooperatively with diverse partners. Both Indonesia and South Africa recognize that the pursuit of autonomy requires not only principled diplomacy but also institutional resilience and the ability to adapt to rapidly shifting global contexts (Gindarsah & Priamarizki, 2015).

Since its independence, Indonesia's *politik luar negeri bebas aktif* has provided a normative foundation for maintaining flexibility and independence in international affairs. This principle enables Indonesia to navigate between global rivalries while remaining actively involved in shaping international norms. Over the decades, the "free and active" principle evolved from a declarative posture into a pragmatic diplomatic strategy that blends non-alignment with proactive engagement. Shekhar (Shekhar, 2018) observes that Indonesia's grand strategy in the 21st century reflects this duality, remaining neutral in great power rivalries yet assertive in promoting peace, development, and regional stability. Within this context, autonomy functions as a living principle, allowing Indonesia to pursue economic partnerships with China and the United States while reinforcing its leadership in ASEAN and the Indo-Pacific.

South Africa has pursued a comparable but contextually distinct path. Its post-apartheid foreign policy, guided by Ubuntu diplomacy, emphasizes mutual respect, justice, and solidarity. Within BRICS and IBSA, South Africa leverages its Global South identity to advance reform of global governance institutions, particularly the United Nations and the IMF (Shaw et al., 2009), an agenda given concrete form during its 2023 BRICS chairship, when it secured the bloc's admission of five new members and placed IMF board reform on the agenda, even though that specific proposal was not adopted by consensus. These efforts are part of a broader strategy to assert Africa's collective voice and to enhance the continent's bargaining power. However, autonomy for South Africa also entails balancing its commitment to democratic values with the necessity of maintaining pragmatic ties to major economic partners such as China and Russia. In this sense, autonomy becomes a contested terrain that reflects both a postcolonial state's moral aspiration and the pragmatic demands of survival in a global capitalist system.

The dilemmas of autonomy are most visible in moments of global crisis, and the two countries' responses to Russia's invasion of Ukraine illustrate this with more specificity than a shared "neutral stance" would suggest. On 2 March 2022, when UN General Assembly Resolution ES-11/1 ("Aggression against Ukraine") came to a vote, 141 states voted in favor, 5 against, and 35 abstained. South Africa abstained, alongside Namibia and Senegal, with its UN ambassador explaining the decision on the grounds that the resolution "does not create an environment conducive for diplomacy, dialogue and mediation." South Africa abstained again on the October 2022 resolution condemning Russia's annexation referenda (ES-11/4). This position, while it drew international criticism, was consistent with its long-standing commitment to non-alignment and

diplomatic independence. Western actors interpreted this neutrality as moral ambiguity, while South Africa defended it as an assertion of sovereign decision-making a pattern several commentators have linked to the African National Congress's Soviet-era relationship with Moscow. Wulf and Debiel (2015) suggest that such postures mirror the "club model" of global governance, where emerging powers seek autonomy by forming informal coalitions like BRICS as counterweights to Western-dominated institutions.

Indonesia's position on the same votes was more assertive than the phrase "similar diplomatic posture" would suggest. Indonesia voted in favor of both ES-11/1 and ES-11/4, formally condemning Russia's invasion and the subsequent annexation referenda, rather than abstaining. The divergence narrows on a later, narrower resolution: on the November 2022 reparations resolution (ES-11/5), both Indonesia and South Africa abstained, alongside Brazil, India, and Saudi Arabia, suggesting both states draw a line between condemning the initial act of aggression and endorsing subsequent punitive mechanisms. Read as a whole, the voting record indicates that Indonesia's non-alignment doctrine tolerated unilateral condemnation of a sovereignty violation in a way South Africa's did not, even as both states converged in declining to endorse enforcement measures against a major partner. This refines, rather than overturns, the broader institutional-versus-coalition-dependent framing advanced in this article: Indonesia's institutional stability manifests partly as a willingness to take unilateral positions, while South Africa's coalition orientation manifests partly as a preference for procedural language "dialogue," "mediation" over declarative judgment, consistent with what Agensky and Barker (2012) describe as the "restoration of Southern agency," in which non-alignment functions as an active expression of principled independence rather than passivity. Indonesia's capacity to uphold this position stems from the stability of its domestic institutions and the coherence of its diplomatic apparatus. Rodiyah et al. (2020) further argue that Indonesia's experience with local autonomy and democratic consolidation has strengthened its ability to project consistency in global forums, merging internal legitimacy with external credibility.

Both Indonesia and South Africa have adopted hedging as an adaptive strategy to sustain autonomy amid uncertainty. Hedging enables them to engage with competing major powers while minimizing dependency on any single actor. Indonesia, for instance, maintains strong security cooperation with Japan and the United States, while simultaneously accepting investment from China's Belt and Road Initiative and, since January 2025, holding full BRICS membership (Vinodan & Kurian, 2024). South Africa employs a similar tactic through its BRICS engagement and its trade with Western markets. Nevertheless, hedging is not without risks: when economic dependence on one actor deepens excessively, autonomy can be indirectly eroded. Indonesia's exports to China stood at roughly 25 percent of its total in 2023, with China supplying over 30 percent of its imports; South Africa's trade deficit with China widened to $9.71 billion in the same year, with its export basket increasingly concentrated in raw materials. Neither country's diplomatic hedging has yet translated into a comparable reduction of this economic concentration, which qualifies how much protection either state's diversification strategy actually provides. Marques and Eberlein (2021) warn more generally that transnational business entanglements often reshape domestic decision-making structures, thereby narrowing the policy space of developing states.Multilateral diplomacy thus becomes the principal arena for exercising and expanding strategic

autonomy. Indonesia leveraged its 2022 G20 presidency to position itself as a normative advocate for developing countries, prioritizing vaccine equity, climate governance, and digital transformation. Meanwhile, South Africa continues to use BRICS as a platform to demand reform in global financial governance (Moldicz, 2025), with its 2023 chairship the clearest instance of this to date. These initiatives reveal how autonomy in the Global South increasingly operates through coalition-building and agenda-setting, not isolation. The power to define priorities within multilateral institutions becomes a crucial expression of agency, enabling both countries to amplify their voices while safeguarding independence.

History also plays an indispensable role in legitimizing autonomy. Indonesia consistently invokes the legacy of the 1955 Bandung Conference as the moral foundation for its diplomatic leadership. South Africa situates its global engagement within the narrative of its anti-apartheid struggle. Both employ historical experience as *soft power capital* to assert moral legitimacy in international affairs (Weatherbee, 2014). However, the gap between rhetoric and practice remains a persistent challenge. Declarations of neutrality and anti-hegemony often coexist with economic dependencies or strategic compromises (Hino Samuel Jose, 2022). This contradiction underscores that autonomy in the Global South is inherently relational—constantly negotiated between idealism and pragmatism.

Global South states have strengthened South–South cooperation through frameworks such as IORA, G77, and BRICS+ to address such contradictions. These initiatives seek to construct alternative channels for trade, technology exchange, and policy coordination (Shaw et al., 2009). However, coordination challenges persist, including disparities in institutional capacity and economic development. Rodiyah et al. (Rodiyah et al., 2020) argue that South–South cooperation risks remaining symbolic rather than transformative without a collective vision and diplomatic coherence. Thus, the pursuit of autonomy requires not only solidarity but also strategic coordination and governance innovation that reflect shared Southern realities.

Looking forward, autonomy must be understood as an evolving practice rather than a fixed principle. Indonesia and South Africa's experiences reveal that genuine autonomy lies in the ability to shape global norms while maintaining domestic policy independence. This demands political courage, institutional innovation, and adaptive foresight (Gindarsah & Priamarizki, 2015). As Moldicz (Moldicz, 2025) notes that strategic autonomy today involves balancing foreign policy principles with developmental priorities. Ultimately, autonomy is not isolationism but the art of equilibrium, creating room for maneuver in a tightly interdependent world. By doing so, Indonesia and South Africa reaffirm that Global South actors are no longer mere objects of global politics but active architects of a more equitable and inclusive international order.

Reframing Southern Agency through Strategic Coalitions

In the 21st century, which is increasingly driven by institutional fragmentation and multipolarity, countries from the Global South are increasingly aware that individual cooperation is not enough to strengthen their position in global governance. Economic and geopolitical pressures from the post-pandemic era show that facing the rivalry of major powers individually puts Southern countries in a vulnerable position. Therefore,

there is a growing trend towards flexible coalitions, both in the form of minilateral and South-South formats, which have the potential to expand diplomatic maneuvering space while increasing collective bargaining power (Heiduk, 2024). These coalitions are not merely symbols of solidarity, but practical mediums for incorporating issues such as global vaccine access, just energy transition, and digital governance into the global agenda. Empirical evidence of this can be seen in platforms such as BRICS, G77, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), which attempt to consolidate the voices of Southern countries to address the inequalities of the international system (Iswardhana, 2021; United Nations Office for South-South Cooperation, 2023).

Conceptually, this approach brings about a shift: from placing a single country as the leading actor in international diplomacy to viewing coalitions as collective actors collective agencies capable of changing the dynamics of a global structure that previously favored the North. The literature on minilateralism highlights that small, issue-specific formations with relatively quick decision-making mechanisms can be an effective alternative to slow multilateralism (Adiputri, 2024; Heiduk, 2024; Roy, 2023). In the context of the Global South, such coalitions usually consist of three to nine countries, focusing on technical cooperation or sectoral policies to strengthen joint capacity (Kleinman & Kolb, 2011; Zubaidah et al., 2023). Thus, collective cooperation is not merely normative solidarity, but a pragmatic and adaptive diplomatic strategy: countries such as Indonesia and South Africa can use these coalitions to expand their relative influence, bringing domestic or regional issues to the global level through a collective format with greater negotiating effectiveness.

A prominent empirical example is BRICS and its expansion into BRICS+. This group illustrates how the aggregation of emerging countries can strengthen the Global South's claim to representation while presenting internal challenges. The expansion of membership in 2023–2024 adds demographic, resource, and geopolitical legitimacy dimensions to the collective, but also increases the heterogeneity of interests among members (Cochrane, 2024; Kumar, 2022). For South Africa, BRICS means space to demand reform of the international financial architecture; for Indonesia, it means opportunities to expand markets and influence multilateral economic policy. However, this expansion poses a dilemma: the larger the bloc, the more difficult it is to reach substantive consensus, so that an initially promising agenda-setting can be diluted if coordination and institutionalization mechanisms are weak (Cochrane, 2024; Haryono et al., 2024; Vinodan & Kurian, 2024). In this sense, coalitions are not an automatic guarantee; their success depends on internal structures and the quality of cooperation.

At the regional level, smaller coalitions that are closer to national realities are also essential as "laboratories" for collective practice. IORA emphasizes maritime economic, maritime security, and blue economy agendas, which are highly relevant to coastal countries and can be used as a pathway to strengthen their global position (International Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), 2024). On the other hand, ASEAN, with Indonesia as a key actor, provides lessons on consensus-based diplomacy. Although slow, its mechanisms enable member countries to translate historical leadership into practical influence on environmental, trade, and regional stability issues. This regional experience can then be elevated to the global level, as in Indonesia's 2022 G20 Presidency, which strengthened the regional agenda in the global economic forum (G20 Indonesia, 2022;

Khairunnisa, 2024). Thus, these regional coalitions have two functions: strengthening domestic/regional capacity and expanding into the global arena as mini-bases of influence.

For coalitions to be operational and not merely rhetorical, three key mechanisms are needed: (1) a clear agenda-setting, where issues can unite members and have global influence; (2) adequate technical capacity to develop realistic policy options and joint implementation; and (3) funding sources or resource-sharing mechanisms for concrete projects, not just declarations (UNCTAD, 2022; World Bank, 2022). Southern countries leading coalitions often also provide 'intellectual capital contributions' experts, data, or pilot projects enhancing their discourse's credibility. When these three mechanisms operate simultaneously, coalitions can produce tangible deliverables such as vaccine access mechanisms, green financing facilities, or technology transfer instruments, which global institutions can then adopt or follow up. Without these three elements, coalitions risk becoming symbols of solidarity without real effect, which ultimately weakens the legitimacy of the countries involved.

Of course, coalitions are not without major challenges. The heterogeneity of objectives and disparities in capabilities among members are major obstacles. When coalition members have different economic and political priorities, compromise can be difficult and undermine collective credibility. There is also a risk that Southern coalitions could be 'instrumentalized' by major powers to pursue unilateral agendas a criticism raised, for instance, regarding whether China could use Global South platforms to expand its own influence (Omelicheva & Carter, 2024). Disparities in technical and fiscal capacity among members also create leadership imbalances within coalitions, giving rise to the dominance of stronger parties and eroding the position of weaker countries. Therefore, internal organizational design leadership rotation, transparency mechanisms, dispute resolution is crucial to maintaining the authenticity and sustainability of coalitions.

For Indonesia and South Africa, the lessons learned from the dynamics of these coalitions are practical and actionable. First, it is important to select issue-specific topics that can attract broad support (e.g., green transition financing, vaccine manufacturing capacity, digital data governance) and then become leadership issues within the coalition. Second, invest in domestic technical capacity, think tanks, policy laboratories, coordinated negotiation units, so that the countries concerned are not just signatories to declarations, but have the ability to produce deliverables. Third, establish a concise financing mechanism (pooled funds or facility) at the coalition level as an instrument for implementing pilot projects, as practical deliverables strengthen the diplomatic legitimacy of southern countries (United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2022; World Bank, 2022). Politically, this requires a balance between rhetoric of solidarity and management of domestic interests: the coalition must be designed so that its results can be claimed as tangible benefits for the domestic public, so that diplomacy functions not only as a showcase but also as a fundamental development tool.

Drawing from the comparative insights above, Table 1 summarizes the practical policy levers, primary risks, and key institutional actors shaping Indonesia's and South Africa's coalition diplomacy strategies within the Global South framework discussed above. The comparison is organized so that the same analytical categories apply to both countries

directly, rather than as a standalone summary: each row reflects a point of divergence or convergence already established in the preceding discussion.

Table 1. Summary of Policy Levers, Key Risks, and Main Actors in Coalition Diplomacy

Dimension	Indonesia	South Africa	Policy Implication
Primary coalition lever	G20 presidency (2022); ASEAN consensus diplomacy; new BRICS membership (2025)	BRICS chairship (2023); IBSA; African Union bridging role	Indonesia's leverage lies in convening heterogeneous forums; South Africa's lies in agenda-setting within BRICS specifically
Key institutional risk	Doctrine stable, but application increasingly leader-contingent (BRICS reversal, Widodo→Prabowo)	Doctrine stable, but implementing capacity shrinking (DIRCO budget cut, high vacancy rate)	Different failure modes require different remedies: institutional insulation from leadership turnover (Indonesia) vs. budget/staffing restoration (South Africa)
Main actors	Ministry of Foreign Affairs; Office of the President; G20/ASEAN secretariats	DIRCO; BRICS Secretariat; African Union	Concentration of decision-making in the presidency (Indonesia) versus a resource-constrained ministry (South Africa) are each a distinct point of institutional vulnerability
Unresolved coalition ask	Full G20 consensus condemning Russia (not achieved, 2022)	Third African seat on IMF executive board (raised but not adopted, 2023)	Neither state's coalition leadership has yet converted agenda-setting into a binding adopted outcome on its signature ask

Source: compiled by the authors from G20 and BRICS outcome documents, DIRCO budget statements, and UN Digital Library voting records, 2025.

Theoretically, reframing Southern agency through strategic coalitions requires a paradigm shift: from the state as the sole unit of analysis to coalitions as collective actors capable of shifting the global agenda. In practice, the success of coalitions depends on institutional design, technical capabilities, financing mechanisms, and inclusive leadership. In the future, the most successful Southern coalitions will not be those that atomistically replicate Western structures but combine minilateral flexibility, historical legitimacy (such as the Bandung or anti-apartheid legacies), and a focus on technical deliverables. This combination can transform claims of representational struggle into substantive influence in global governance. Thus, reframing agency through coalitions is not merely a diplomatic strategy; it is an instrument of institutional transformation that gives Southern countries greater room for maneuver in a rapidly changing multipolar order (Acharya, 2018; Heiduk, 2024; Heiduk & Wacker, 2021; United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD), 2022).

Conclusion

Indonesia and South Africa's diplomatic trajectories illustrate how strategic autonomy operates not as an abstract normative claim but as a practice shaped by institutional capacity, historical legitimacy, and coalition strategy. Indonesia's adaptive multi-alignment approach, grounded in the enduring doctrine of politik luar negeri bebas aktif, demonstrates a form of agency in which normative flexibility coexists with pragmatic engagement, sustained above all by a cohesive diplomatic bureaucracy, though the Widodo-to-Prabowo reversal on BRICS membership shows this institutional stability to be more contingent on presidential preference than a purely bureaucratic-continuity account would suggest. South Africa's Ubuntu diplomacy, while normatively resonant and increasingly effective at agenda-setting within BRICS specifically, as its 2023 chairship demonstrates, remains constrained by domestic structural weaknesses, most concretely a shrinking and understaffed foreign ministry, and by a more circumscribed, coalition-mediated form of unilateral positioning, as its consistent UN abstentions on the Russia-Ukraine votes indicate.

This comparison confirms the article's central proposition, that Indonesia demonstrates a more institutionally embedded form of strategic autonomy while South Africa exercises a more coalition-dependent form, shaped by its normative commitments and domestic constraints, while also showing that the distinction is not absolute. The UN voting evidence in particular indicates that Indonesia's autonomy also has an assertive, unilateral dimension not fully captured by "institutional embeddedness" alone, and that South Africa's coalition-dependence coexists with real, if contested, agenda-setting achievements, such as its IMF reform push. Both countries, moreover, share a largely unaddressed vulnerability: deepening trade dependency on China that neither state's diplomatic diversification has yet reduced.

Theoretically, this study integrates Global South and postcolonial theorizing, the agency literature, alignment theory, and the strategic-autonomy literature into a single comparative framework, and demonstrates that within this framework, autonomy is exercised differently, not merely to different degrees, by institutionally embedded and coalition-dependent Global South middle powers. Methodologically, its use of narrative literature synthesis, supplemented in this revision with primary voting records and institutional budget data, allows discursive claims about non-alignment and autonomy to be checked against documented multilateral practice rather than accepted at face value. Empirically, it demonstrates that autonomy in the Global South is not reducible to a single mechanism: Indonesia's case shows autonomy sustained through institutional continuity but tested by leadership-driven reversals, while South Africa's case shows autonomy pursued through coalition agenda-setting but constrained by resource scarcity.

For Global South diplomacy in a multipolar order, the practical implication is that neither institutional embeddedness nor coalition membership is sufficient on its own to guarantee durable autonomy, and that both must contend with a shared economic ceiling that neither Indonesia's nor South Africa's diplomatic strategy has yet lifted. Indonesia and South Africa, as illustrative cases, reveal both the promise and the limits of coalition diplomacy, and point to the value of examining autonomy as a historically situated and institutionally mediated practice rather than a fixed doctrinal commitment. In sum, the pursuit of Southern autonomy is best understood not as a settled condition but as an

ongoing, differently structured negotiation in each case, one that this comparison suggests future research should track through concrete institutional and economic indicators rather than through doctrinal language alone.

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MAPPING RESEARCH TRENDS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE BETWEEN CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW

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Abstract

The South China Sea is a critical region with a complex territorial dispute fuelled by its geopolitical and geostrategic importance and rich natural resources. This dispute is mainly caused by overlapping claims involving China as a main driver and several Southeast Asia claimant states, such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia. Although many studies have discussed the political, economic, legal, and security dimensions of the dispute, there is a lack of a bibliometric analysis of the research landscape. This study uses bibliometric analysis from the Scopus database, obtained after database search and filtering, then processed by using the OpenRefine and VOSviewer software. The results show that 678 Scopus-indexed publications (1975-2025) appear and are used to map the intellectual structure and emerging trends in research on the South China Sea dispute. A finding reveals a significant escalation in academic publications after 2013, aligning with the Philippines' efforts to bring this dispute to international arbitrage. This study also uncovers the most productive authors and journals, the most influential articles, and a country-and institution-wise analysis. Network visualization shows seven main themes, and overlay visualization displays emerging research trends toward regional cooperation, specific bilateral relations such as China-Vietnam, and competition between major powers.

Keywords

South China Sea, Scopus Database, Bibliometrics, Network Visualization, Research Trends.

Resumo

O Mar da China Meridional é uma região crítica, palco de um complexo conflito territorial alimentado pela sua importância geopolítica e geoestratégica e pelos seus ricos recursos

naturais. Este conflito deve-se principalmente a reivindicações sobrepostas que envolvem a China como principal protagonista e vários Estados do Sudeste Asiático que reivindicam a soberania sobre a região, tais como o Vietname, as Filipinas, a Malásia, o Brunei e a Indonésia. Embora muitos estudos tenham abordado as dimensões política, económica, jurídica e de segurança da disputa, verifica-se uma falta de análises bibliométricas do panorama da investigação. Este estudo recorre à análise bibliométrica da base de dados Scopus, obtida após pesquisa e filtragem na base de dados, e posteriormente processada utilizando os softwares OpenRefine e VOSviewer. Os resultados revelam que 678 publicações indexadas na Scopus (1975-2025) são apresentadas e utilizadas para mapear a estrutura intelectual e as tendências emergentes na investigação sobre a disputa no Mar da China Meridional. Uma das conclusões revela um aumento significativo nas publicações académicas após 2013, em consonância com os esforços das Filipinas para levar esta disputa a arbitragem internacional. Este estudo identifica ainda os autores e revistas mais produtivos, os artigos mais influentes e apresenta uma análise por país e por instituição. A visualização em rede revela sete temas principais, enquanto a visualização sobreposta apresenta tendências de investigação emergentes no sentido da cooperação regional, de relações bilaterais específicas, como as entre a China e o Vietname, e da competição entre as grandes potências.

Palavras-Chave

Mar da China Meridional, Base de Dados Scopus, Bibliometria, Visualização em Rede, Tendências de Investigação.

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MAPPING RESEARCH TRENDS IN THE SOUTH CHINA SEA DISPUTE BETWEEN CHINA AND SOUTHEAST ASIA: A BIBLIOMETRIC REVIEW

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Introduction

The South China Sea is one of the most dynamic regions in the world due to several factors. This region is home to a complex dynamic of contesting issues regarding historical conflicts, economic-political interests, and state strategies between China and several Southeast Asia countries. This region is also a battlefield in a long rivalry between the superpower states: the U.S and China, which influences international politics and security issues in this region (Güçyetmez & Kahraman, 2025). The South China Sea has high economic potential, becomes a vital route for energy distribution, and serves as a choke point and as a potential corridor for naval power projection (Jannuzi, 2025). This region also plays important roles in sustaining international trade, in particular maritime trade and becomes a field of offshore hydrocarbon exploration and an important region for the fishery industry (Hensel, 2024). In addition, the South China Sea's rich endowment of offshore oil and natural gas reserves can be taken advantage of establishing energy security for adjacent states in the future (Boquet, 2017; Singh, 2004). In brief, the economic potential of this region is so attractive as it provides many of the resources that states need, which can be important pillars for the economies of the adjacent littoral states.

Aside from comprising abundant natural resources and serving as a vital geostrategic importance, the South China Sea is also an epicentre of disputes and tensions between China and several Southeast Asia countries as claimants such as Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Brunei, and Indonesia, (Yildirim, 2025). The main cause of this dispute is basically caused by the overlapping territorial claims between China and these claimant states over ownership of islands, reefs, and maritime boundaries in the region (Yildirim,

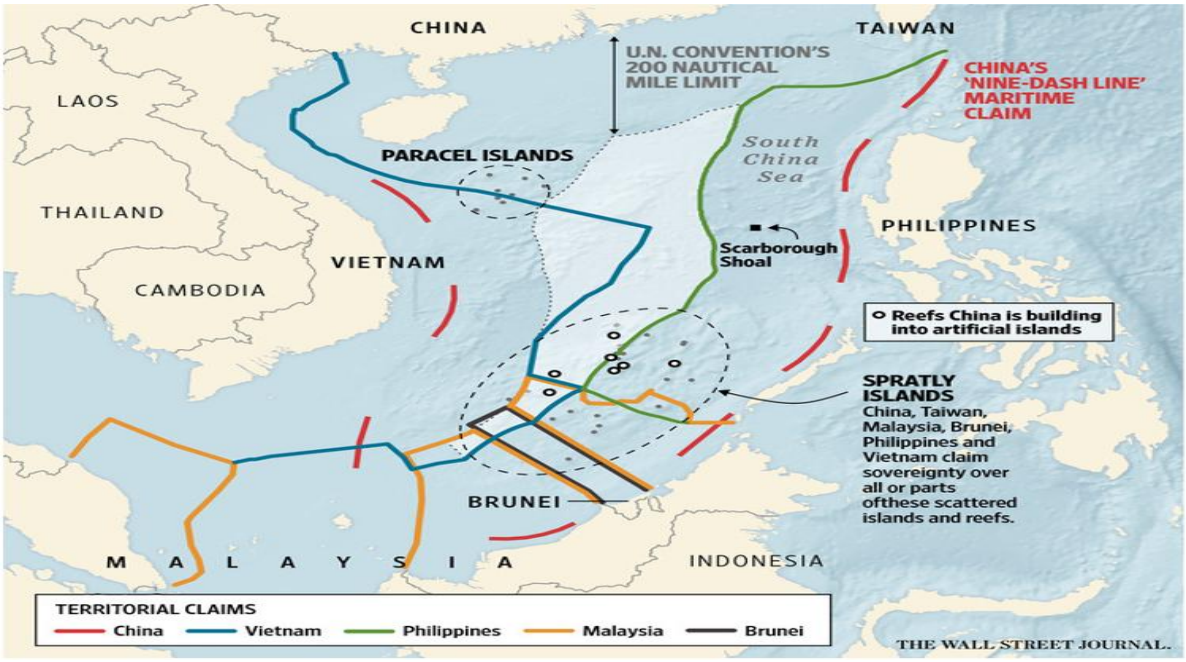
2025). The dimensions of this dispute, in fact, are not limited to China and the claimants. The dynamic of the region is also exacerbated by the presence of a strong intrusive system such as the U.S, which seeks to commit to a "balance of influence" in the region. This maneuver may depict a clear response to China's growing influence and increased military capabilities in the South China Sea, which are distinctly seen as assertive and militaristic actions that have disrupted stability in the region (Chapman, 2017; Masroor, 2018).

Basically, China's territorial claim, called a nine-dash line, is perceived as a primary source of the conflict and tension. The nine-dash line, originally referred to as the U-shaped line or the eleven-dash line, was first officially proclaimed by the China in 1947 to delineate its territorial claims in the South China Sea. Following the establishment of the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1949, the new government adopted the same line and has consistently maintained its sovereignty claims over the entire archipelago and the waters surrounding it (Chung, 2016). Historical legitimacy that narrated that China has "historic rights" to the region, is China's main argument for its sovereignty claims in the region. This claim refers to historical evidence such as several documents dating back to the Han Dynasty showing China's presence and maritime exploration for centuries (Hayton, 2018; Nair, 2022). The key finding of this history-only based argument, then, is embodied in the "nine-dash line", a graphical demarcation of its maritime boundaries.

On this basis, China confidently claimed approximately three-quarters of the South China Sea, asserting what it calls "indisputable sovereignty" over all the islands and surrounding maritime zones (Boquet, 2012). Consequently, China's claim also includes both the Paracel and Spratly Islands. These Chinese claims, however, are not legitimate according to the international law order, particularly as stated by the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) (Engelbert, 2020; Hayton, 2018; T. K. C. Nguyen & Ngo, 2023) and widely perceived to have subverted the interests and sovereignty of claimant states (Cheeppensook, 2020). Thus, many states vigorously rejected China's claim due to its illegal claim. Meanwhile, UNCLOS recognizes the ZEE or exclusive economic zone as an area beyond and adjacent to the territorial sea which is measured as far as 200 nautical miles from the baseline of the coast. Even as its claims were contested, China chose not to withdraw, but rather to expand them in 2023. In the year, China released the new official map that revised its maritime claims from nine to ten-dash line, with an additional segment that officially incorporates Taiwan into the China's core territory and strengthens its claims in Southeast Asia as well (Clayman, 2023).

China's effort to defend and protect the South China Sea are inseparable from the significancy of the region for the fulfilment of national interests. Aside from its abundant natural resources, the South China Sea plays a vital strategic role for China. This region becomes a crucial maritime route for global trade and military operations, sustains China's power-projection capacity, and secures its big maritime interests (Hemmings, 2011; Nair, 2022; Quyet, 2023). The strategic value of this region is also reinforced by China's geographical proximity to key Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOC) and its important role in China's geopolitical objectives of establishing the maritime primacy to balance against the U.S and other powers (Quyet, 2023).

Map 1. China's Nine-Dash Line



Source: Wall street Journal Online in Dipua et al., 2020

Map 2. China's Ten-Dash Line



Source: (Pmfias, 2024)

Vietnam had been involved in more confrontations with China over the Spratly and Paracel Islands than other claimant states. Vietnam principally bases its claims on two grounds: historical evidence or narrative, and international law. Historically, this claim is proven by cartographic evidence from the French colonial period, which elaborated the South China Sea as part of Vietnam's territory (Sasges, 2016). From a law perspective, Vietnam also bases its position consistent with UNCLOS to assert its sovereignty over the Paracel and Spratly Islands and the surrounding maritime zones (H. K. T. Nguyen et al., 2021; Trần et al., 2024). Therefore, Vietnam decisively declared that it has substantial historical documentation and a strong legal base to support its sovereignty claims over these islands.

The Philippines actively opposed China's claims in the South China Sea, particularly through formal ways: legal and diplomatic. In 2013, the Philippines initiated an arbitration process under Annex VII of UNCLOS to contest China's claims based on the U-shape line or nine-dash line (Pemmaraju, 2016). In 2016, the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) ruled in favour of the Philippines. This court finally stated that China's claims to almost the entire South China Sea, including those based on their nine-dash line, unlawful (Engelbert, 2020; Gunawan et al., 2022). The judgment represented a big legal victory for the Philippines' claim, although China rejected the result and continued its activities in the region. China persistently defended its claims and neglected the Philippines' diplomatic protests. In response, the Philippines has sought to grab and build regional and international support to compel China to comply with the outcome. The Philippines has also engaged in various diplomatic maneuvers, including reconciliation attempts with China under the leadership of President Rodrigo Duterte (Boquet, 2017).

Malaysia claimed specific maritime features in the South China Sea according to the principles of the continental shelf and the Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ) in accordance with the provisions of UNCLOS. On this basis, Malaysia has also built and occupied several geographical features in the Spratly Islands and has actively conducted resource exploration and drilling within its claimed maritime zones (Dai, 2024; Erkan, 2025).

Brunei committed relatively more moderate ways compared to other claimant states. Officially known as "Brunei Darussalam", the state bases its territorial claim to the Southern Spratly Islands according to the EEZ-UNCLOS. Brunei's approach is not confrontational. Brunei's maneuver tends to focus more on diplomatic means and legal channels to assert its claim over certain features in the South China Sea (Cheeppensook, 2020; Erkan, 2025).

Unlike other claimant states, **Indonesia**, to some extent, is not an active claimant in the South China Sea dispute. Indonesia's EEZ around the Natuna Islands principally overlaps with China's territorial claims, which in turn have triggered diplomatic tensions (Kaloko & Utari, 2024). In response, Indonesia has consistently engaged in dialogues and cooperations to manage the dispute, preferring soft diplomacy to hard diplomacy. Since the 1990s, Indonesia has actively facilitated informal multilateral dialogues through initiatives such as the South China Sea Workshop and pushed both Southeast Asia countries and China to settle the dispute through a Code of Conduct (Fitriani, 2020; Pedrason et al., 2024). However, Indonesia's approach tends to emphasize peaceful means and compliance with international legal norms, particularly UNCLOS.

There are numerous studies discussing the South China Sea dispute involving China and Southeast Asian countries. Although the existing literature continues to expand, a comprehensive bibliometric analysis is still missing to systematically review and map the landscape of existing studies. Previous studies have basically explored the dispute from political, law, economic, security, and interdisciplinary perspectives. However, a significant gap remains in terms of identifying the key scholars, institutions, countries, and thematic networks that define the research landscape. Therefore, bibliometric analysis allows researchers to capture the evolution and trends in research disciplines by analyzing publications (Quevedo-Silva et al., 2016). By applying this, this study aims to reveal meaningful patterns in how scientific work, such as journal articles, books, etc., has developed over time regarding the South China Sea dispute between China and Southeast Asian countries. Thus, this study addresses the following research questions:

1. What are the publication trends over time in the South China Sea dispute between China and Southeast Asia countries?
2. Who are the leading authors contributing to this research?
3. Which articles and journals are most influential to this research?
4. Which countries and institutions are contributing to this research?
5. What are the themes and future research emerging from this research?

Methodology

The authors use bibliometric analysis to examine scientific data on research trends in the South China Sea dispute between China and Southeast Asia countries. Bibliometric analysis is defined as a quantitative approach widely used to study the evolution of knowledge across various fields of research by analyzing the topics-related publications. Bibliometric analysis is famous for its vigorous and systematic method to explore and analyze a huge number of scientific data. This technique provides valuable insights into core research areas, leading authors-journals-institutions-countries, future themes and emerging trends, etc in a form of certain visualizations (Passas, 2024). This method becomes increasingly popular in recent years in understanding various aspects of scientific and practical fields (Toaza & Esztergár-Kiss, 2024).

The process to conduct bibliometric research basically starts with collecting data from relevant databases, cleaning and refining data, and applying various bibliometric methods to generate valuable knowledge (Ertz & Leblanc-Proulx, 2019). In this study, the authors utilize data derived from the Scopus database. The Scopus database is selected due to its a broad collection of research publications with various selection criteria and its wider journal scope than other scientific research databases (Goh & See, 2021).

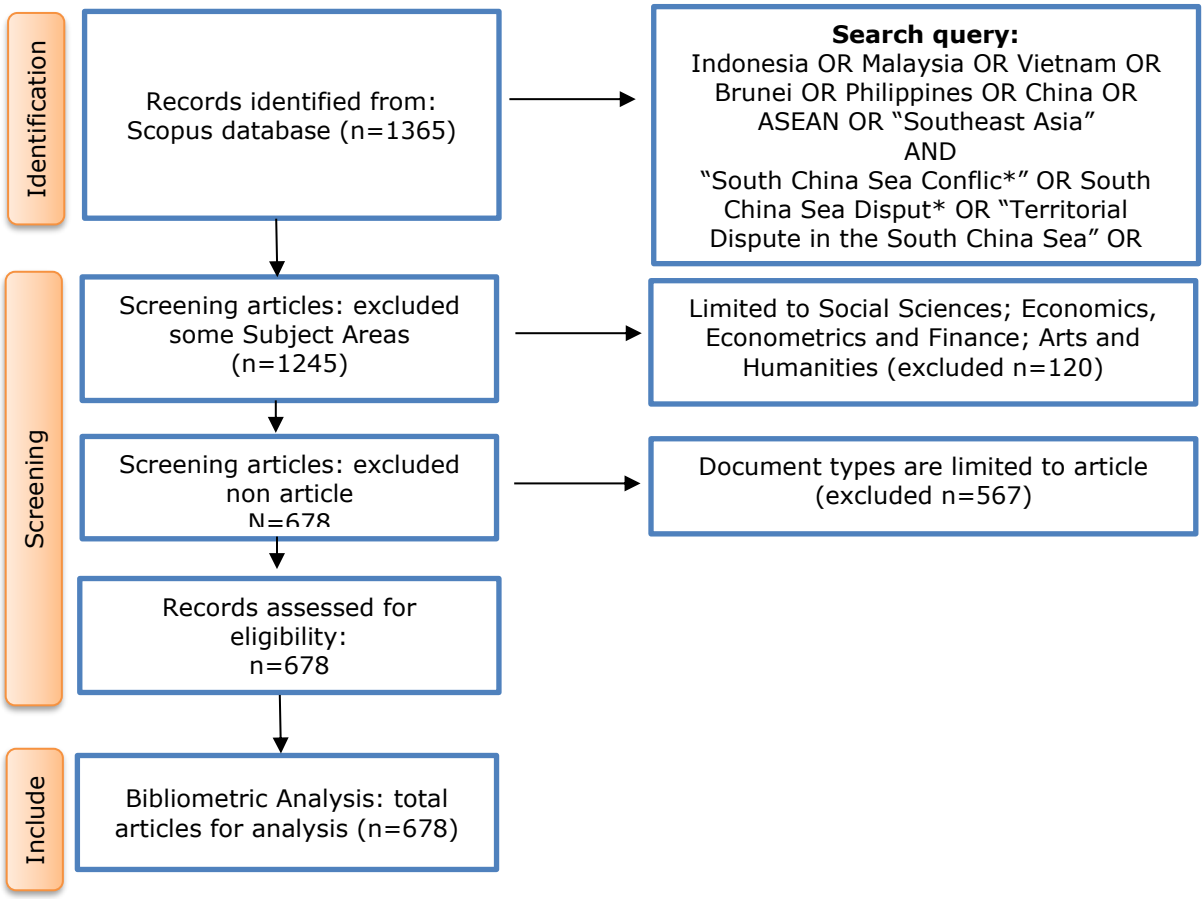
Figure 1 shows that the data tracking process started on October 15th, 2025, with two search strings: Indonesia OR Malaysia OR Vietnam OR Brunei OR Philippines OR China OR ASEAN OR "Southeast Asia" AND "South China Sea Conflic*" OR South China Sea Disput* OR "Territorial Dispute in the South China Sea" OR "conflict in the South China Sea". The first string describes the five claimant countries and China as defendant—

Indonesia, Malaysia, Vietnam, Brunei, the Philippines, and China—involved in the dispute in the South China Sea. Five of them, except China, are members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). The terms "conflict" and "dispute" are often used interchangeably or have similar meanings in this topic. Many scholars also refer to it as a "territorial dispute". The authors apply several filters to refine the search: Limited to Social Sciences; Economics, Econometrics and Finance; Arts and Humanities; Article. Limited to environmental science previously was included but most of the articles discussed about nature, environmental cores etc which have no discussions about the conflict, only South China Sea at glance. The filters include all languages and years. Data only covered (only) until October 15th, 2025. During the identification phase, the search query above yielded 1,365 files; after screening through the filtering process, this resulted in 678 articles that met the study's criteria. Data for these articles are then downloaded in CSV format. In the Scopus database, the authors also use the analysis data processed by Scopus to collect, starting with Research Growth and Trends, Leading Authors, Leading Journals, Most Influential Articles, Institutions-Wise Analysis, and Countries-Wise Analysis. The obtained data are then processed for further analysis.

The authors also utilized two software programmes, namely OpenRefine and VOSviewer, for data extraction. OpenRefine is an open-source tool for data cleaning, transformation, and normalization to handle messy data and convert the data into a structured format suitable for various applications. OpenRefine enables users to import data from various sources and export cleaned data into different formats (Hill, 2016). In this study, the authors undertook data cleaning on the "author keywords" column because many terms or words have the same meaning but are written in different variations (capitalization, spacing, punctuation, abbreviations, or full names), such as ASEAN/asean/A.S.E.A.N, China/PRC/People's Republic of China, the U.S/the United States, or south china sea conflict/dispute ect. Without standardization or harmonization, the system treats these variants as separate entities, causing concept frequencies to be fragmented and the analysis to become inaccurate. The authors used OpenRefine's clustering feature with the key collision and nearest neighbor methods, as well as keying functions ranging from Fingerprint to Beider-Morse, followed by manual verification or the rechecking process to avoid misclassification. As a result, the data became clean, consistent, and ready for analysis with VOSviewer.

After cleaning the data through OpenRefine, VOSviewer was exercised to generate bibliometric network maps. This software is commonly selected due to its proficiency in processing large datasets and generating visualizations of complex research landscapes, which comprise co-occurrence, citation, bibliographic coupling, co-citation, or co-authorship relations (Li & Wei, 2022). In this study, VOSviewer is used to conduct a keyword co-occurrence analysis of a body of scientific literature. Authors set author keywords as the unit of analysis, with full counting applied as the counting method and a minimum threshold of 7 occurrences to display two visualizations: network and overlay. Figure 1 shows the article selection process using the PRISMA flowchart:

Figure 1. Steps in article selection process



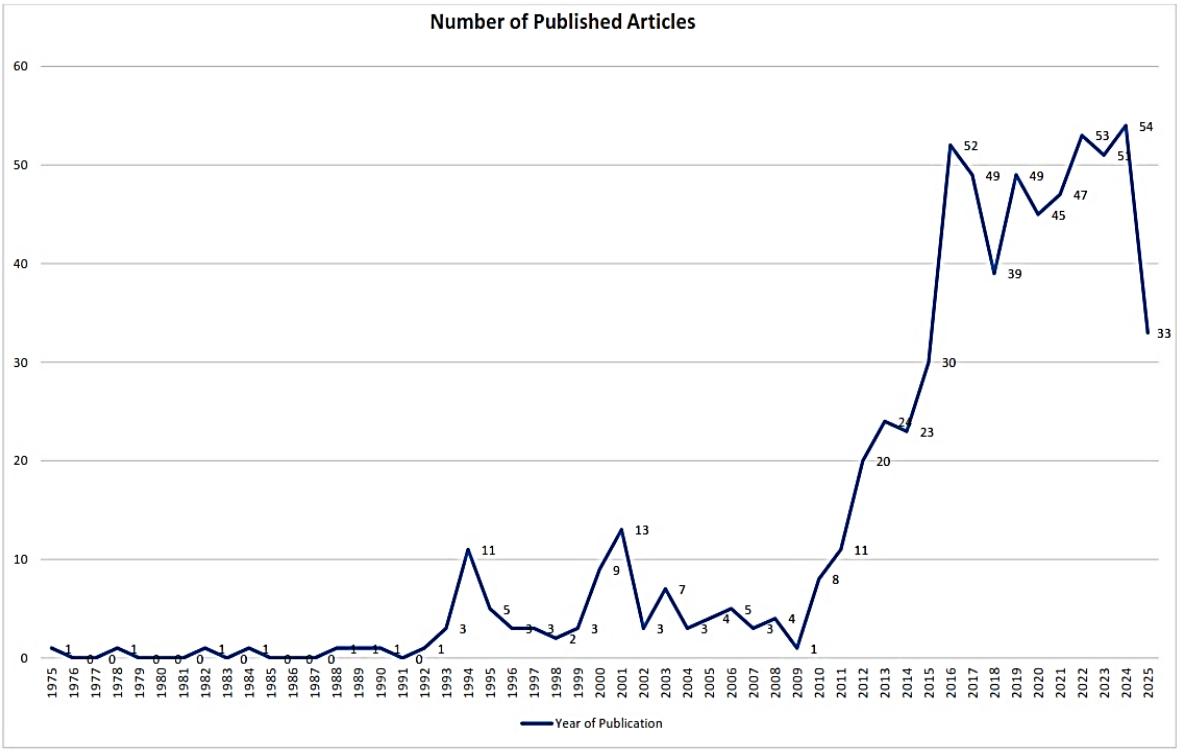
Source: Author's illustration

Result and Discussion

Research Growth and Trend 1975-2025 (October 15th)

Figure 2 shows the growth in total publications on the South China Sea dispute from 1975 to October 15th, 2025, with an average of 13 articles per year. The first article published on the South China Sea dispute was in 1975, entitled "Legal status of the Paracel and Spratly Islands" by Hungdah Chiu and Choon Ho Park. Their article highlighted the dispute over ownership of the Paracel and Spratly Islands between China and Vietnam. According to Chiu & Park (1975), historical evidence supports China's stronger claim over these Islands in its territorial dispute with Vietnam. This argument appeared because the international regime regulating the seas among states, such as UNCLOS, had not been established that year. From 1975 to 2012, academic interest on the South China Sea dispute was relatively low, with no year reaching more than 10 publications in a single year, except 1994 and 2001, with 11 and 13 publications, respectively. In nine different years 1976, 1977, 1979, 1980, 1981, 1983, 1985, 1987, 1990), there were no publications on the topic at all in the Scopus database.

Figure 2. Research Growth and Trend from 1975-2025 (October 15th)



Source: Author Analysis from Scopus Database

The total number of publications in the Scopus database has increased significantly, particularly since 2013, when publications on the South China Sea dispute exceeded 20. The dispute started to attract international public attention after brought to PCA. Chronologically, The Philippines initially submitted a notification and statement of claims to the International Tribunal for the Law of the Sea (ITLOS) under UNCLOS 1982, unilaterally, without involving China on 2 January 2013. On 19 February 2013, China rejected and returned the notification, stating it would not accept or participate in the arbitration. In July 2013, a permanent arbitral tribunal was established by the President of ITLOS, chaired by Judge Thomas A. Mensah, and held its first meeting in The Hague on July 11, 2013. On 30 March 2014, the Philippines submitted a legal memorandum containing 15 claims regarding China's maritime rights and the status of geographical features in the South China Sea. On 7 December 2014, China published a position paper stating that the tribunal lacked jurisdiction because the dispute concerned territorial sovereignty beyond the scope of UNCLOS. From 7 to 13 July 2015, a preliminary hearing on jurisdiction was held; China did not attend. On 29 October 2015, the Tribunal announced it had jurisdiction over 7 of the Philippines' 15 claims. On 30 November 2015, the main proceedings concluded; the final ruling was scheduled for 2016. On 12 July 2016, the PCA issued its final ruling, upholding most of the Philippines' claims and declaring that China's nine-dash line claim was legally baseless; China rejected the ruling. In October 2016, Philippines under President Duterte changed the tone when visiting Beijing, adopting a conciliatory approach through diplomacy and economic cooperation,

which indicated an improvement in bilateral relations (Abc.net, 2016; Apnews, 2016; Cgtn, 2016; Xinhua, 2016).

Figure 3. Timeline of Philippines V. China at the PCA



Source: Author's Illustration via Gemini

Based on the timeline, the surge in scholarly publications since 2013 is strongly correlated with the escalation of the Philippines v. China case at the PCA. Each stage of the arbitration process—from the filing of the complaint in January 2013, to the interim award in 2015, to the final award in July—triggered increased academic attention to the South China Sea dispute. In other words, these international legal developments served as the primary catalyst driving researchers to publish scholarly works. Furthermore, there is quantitative evidence of this correlation: a surge in the number of publications from 30 titles in 2015 to 52 titles in 2016, immediately following the announcement of the PCA ruling. Furthermore, the high average of over 30 publications per year until October 2025 highlights that the ongoing unresolved nature of the dispute keeps this topic relevant and continues to attract academic interest. Thus, these factors collectively reinforce the finding that political and legal dynamics in the region directly shape research trends regarding the South China Sea dispute.

Leading Authors

Table 1 shows the leading authors who have published a minimum of four articles. Leading authors are measured by publication productivity, calculated according to the total number of publications (TP). If two or more authors have the same TP, they are ranked by the total citations (TC). TC is an indicator commonly used to measure the impact and academic significance of scientific work (Tokmachev, 2023). De Castro, R.C, from De La Salle University, the Philippines, is the most productive author with 23 publications, followed by Amer, R., from the Institute for Security and Development Policy, Sweden, with 7 publications. The achievements of De Castro, R.C, from the Philippines may represent the relevance of the South China Sea dispute, in which the Philippines is China's strongest opponent, bringing this dispute to the international tribunal. There are four authors ranked 3rd to 6th, each with 6 publications, but different TCs. Among these authors, Thao, N.H. has the highest TC of 207, followed by Tønnesson, S (TC=123), Emmers, R (TC=102) and Song, Y.H (TC=69). Several authors rank 7th to 11th with 5 publications each and varying numbers of citations. They are Keyuan, Z (TC=190), Li, M (TC=81), Valencia, M.J (TC=66), Gau, M.S.T (TC=45) and Chang, Y.C (TC=31). Ranked 12th to 14th with 4 publications each are Zhang, H (TC=167), Roszko, E (TC=49), and Cuong, N.X (TC=5). According to the data, N.H. Thao from the University of Hanoi has the highest TC of 207, while H. Zhang from Nanyang Technological University has the highest citation per paper (CPP) of 41.8, which is calculated by dividing total citations by total number of publications (TC/TP).

Table 1. Leading Authors Contributing to the South China Sea Dispute Research

Rank	Author (s)	Institutions	TP	TC	CPP
1	De Castro, R.C.	De la Salle University	23	174	7,57
2	Amer, R.	Institute for Security and Development Policy	7	162	23,1
3	Thao, N.H.	Faculty of Law, University of Hanoi	6	207	34,5
4	Tønnesson, S.	International Peace Research Institute	6	123	20,5
5	Emmers, R.	S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS)	6	102	17
6	Song, Y.H.	Inst. of European/American Studies, Academia Sinica	6	69	11,5
7	Keyuan, Z.	University of Central Lancashire	5	190	38
8	Li, M.	S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies	5	81	16,2
9	Valencia, M.J.	Nautilus Institute for Security and Sustainability, Eugene	5	66	13,2
10	Gau, M.S.T.	Institute of Law of the Sea, National Taiwan Ocean University	5	45	9
11	Chang, Y.C.	Dalian Maritime University	5	31	6,2
12	Zhang, H.	Nanyang Technological University	4	167	41,8
13	Roszko, E.	Chr. Michelsen Institute	4	49	12,3
14	Cuong, N.X.	Vietnamese Academy of Science and Technology Institute of Chemistry	4	5	1,25

Note: Minimum of 4 publications.

Source: Author Analysis from Scopus Database

Leading Journals

Leading journals can often shape the research directions and guide researchers towards relevant and impactful topics by highlighting the latest trends and methods (Hussain et al., 2023). Leading journals related to the South China Sea dispute are presented in Table 2. This table lists the top ten journals by the total number of publications on the South China Sea dispute, along with their total citations (TC) and H-Index metrics. The H-index is an indicator of a scientist's performance, calculated by comparing the total number of publications (TP) with the impact of the publications. This H-Index also refers to how often other scholars cite their work, usually called citation impact (Masic, 2016). The ranking is based on TP, TC and H-index. If two or more journals have the same TP, the TC is used to break the tie.

According to Table 2, Ocean Development and International Law is the journal with the highest total number of publications, citations, and H-Index, namely TP=40, TC=1042, and H-Index=21, followed by The Pacific Review with TP=36, TC=574, and H-Index=15. Ranked 3rd and 4th are Marine Policy (TP=31, TC=385, H-Index=12) and Contemporary Southeast Asia (TP=27, TC=859, H-Index=14). Ranked 5th and 6th are the Australian Journal of International Affairs and the Journal of East Asia and International Law, with 14 publications each. However, the Australian Journal of International Affairs has a higher TC and H-Index (TC=161 and H-Index=7). The Journal of East Asia and International Law obtains TC=69 and H-Index=4. Next, Asian Politics and Policy published 13 articles with a total of 92 citations and an H-Index of 7. Ranked 8th to 10th, with the same total number of publications (12), the International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law has a higher TC of 155 and an H-Index of 6, followed by the International Journal of China Studies with a TC of 63 and an H-Index of 4. Meanwhile, the Korean Journal of Defence Analysis has a TC of 42 and an H-Index of 4. The total number of publications is not necessarily proportional to the TC. For example, although Contemporary Southeast Asia has the 4th-highest total number of publications (27), it has a larger TC of 859 than the TCs of the journals ranked 2nd and 3rd.

Table 2. Top 10 Leading Journals Contributing to the South China Sea Dispute Research

Rank	Journal	TP	TC	H-Index
1	Ocean Development and International Law	40	1042	21
2	The Pacific Review	36	574	15
3	Marine Policy	31	385	12
4	Contemporary Southeast Asia	27	859	14
5	Australian Journal of International Affairs	14	161	7
6	Journal of East Asia and International Law	14	69	4
7	Asian Politics and Policy	13	92	7
8	International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law	12	155	6
9	International Journal of China Studies	12	63	4
10	Korean Journal of Defense Analysis	12	42	4

Source: Author Analysis from Scopus Database

The Most Influential Articles

Table 3 elaborates the top 10 most influential journal articles on South China Sea dispute Research. These articles are measured by total citations (TC). The article entitled "China's strategy in the South China Sea" by Fravel (2011), published in Contemporary Southeast Asia, obtained the highest citations (TC=208). This is followed by the article, entitled "China's New Assertiveness in the South China Sea" by Yahuda (2013), published in the Journal of Contemporary China (TC=167), "A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation 'by Glaser (2015), published in International Security (TC=129) and "Creeping Assertiveness: China, the Philippines and the South China Sea Dispute", by Storey (1999), published in Contemporary Southeast Asia (TC=112). The top four articles obtained a TC of more than 100, while those ranked 5th-10th obtained a TC of >60<100. Three of the ten articles were published in Contemporary Southeast Asia.

Most articles (six of ten) explicitly discuss China's strategy, ambitions, and policies in their titles (e.g., "China's strategy", "China's new assertiveness", "China's ambition"). According to the literature, China is considered a key player and the main driver of dynamics in the South China Sea. In contrast, several articles highlight the roles of ASEAN and regional diplomatic efforts, for example, Ruszynski (2003), about the Declaration on Conduct. The idea of multilateral cooperation and peaceful solutions is also represented in the article written by McManus et al. (2010), which proposes a "Spratly Islands International Marine Peace Park".

Table 3. The Most Influential Journal Articles on the South China Sea Dispute

Rank	Author	Title	Journal Name	TC
1	Fravel, M.T (2011)	China's strategy in the South China Sea	Contemporary Southeast Asia	208
2	Yahuda, M (2013)	China's New Assertiveness in the South China Sea	Journal of Contemporary China	167
3	Glaser, C.L (2015)	A U.S.-China Grand Bargain? The Hard Choice between Military Competition and Accommodation	International Security	129
4	Storey, I.J (1999)	Creeping Assertiveness: China the Philippines AND the South China Sea Dispute	Contemporary Southeast Asia	112
5	Beckman, R (2013)	The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea and the Maritime Disputes in the South China Sea	American Journal of International Law	97
6	Morton, K (2016)	China's ambition in the South China Sea: is a legitimate maritime order possible?	International Affair	77
7	Ruszynski, L (2003)	ASEAN, the Declaration on Conduct, and the South China Sea	Contemporary Southeast Asia	76
8	Keyuan, Z (1999)	The Chinese Traditional Maritime Boundary Line in the South China Sea and Its Legal I Consequences for the Resolution of the Dispute over the Spratly Islands	The International Journal of Marine and Coastal Law	69

9	Fangyin, Z (2016)	Between assertiveness and self-restraint: Understanding China's South China Sea policy	International Affair	64
10	McManus, J.W; Shao, K.-T & Lin, S.-Y (2010)	Toward Establishing a Spratly Islands International Marine Peace Park: Ecological Importance and Supportive Collaborative Activities with an Emphasis on the Role of Taiwan	Ocean Development and International Law	64

Source: Author Analysis from Scopus Database

Country-Wise Analysis

Table 4 shows the top 10 countries with highest output of journal articles on the South China Sea dispute, measured by total number of publications (TP). Thus, countries are ranked or based on TP, and if two or more countries have the same TP, TC breaks the tie. The U.S and China rank 1st and 2nd; the U.S (TP=107, TC=1610 and H-Index=23) and China (TP=97, TC=653 and H-Index=13). This rank may represent the rivalry between these two powers over the South China Sea issue and indicate their dominant role in scholarly research output. They are followed by Australia (TP=67, TC=822 and H-Index=18), the Philippines (TP=49, TC=388 and H-Index=11), Singapore (TP=48, TC=883 and H-Index=17), the United Kingdom (TP=46, TC=840 and H -Index=16), Taiwan (TP=42, TC=442 and H-Index=12), Indonesia(TP=42, TC=230 and H-Index=9), Vietnam (TP=34, TC=325 and H-Index=11), and Malaysia (TP=32, TC=176 and H-Index=8).

Three of the ten most productive countries on this list—the U.S, the United Kingdom, and Australia—are not geographically part of the South China Sea region. The U.S dominates in terms of all indicators (TP, TC, and H-Index). The U.S is also the most productive by a wide margin (107), nearly double the average compared to the TP of countries in the Southeast Asia region, the United Kingdom, and Taiwan. Conversely, Singapore and the United Kingdom are the most efficient, achieving the highest average citation per paper (CPP) despite fewer publications (TP) than the U.S and China. Australia ranks 3rd, with a higher H-index than China (ranked 2nd) despite its lower TP.

According to the quantitative findings from the country-wise analysis, qualitative reflections on the role of Chinese academics are certainly important for understanding how scientific narratives are constructed and disseminated in this highly competitive field of study. As shown in Table 4, China ranks second among the most productive countries, with 97 publications and 653 citations, indicating a significant academic works. However, Chinese scholars are not merely passive contributors to the international discourse; they actively shape narratives that align with and reinforce Beijing’s official position through indexed journal articles, e-books, and websites. For example, Li Jinming (2020), Professor Emeritus at Xiamen University, systematically articulated China’s historical and international legal perspectives on maritime boundaries, with the explicit aim of addressing the absence of a Chinese perspective in the international literature (Li, 2020). Similarly, Zou Keyuan, a Chinese maritime scholar affiliated with the University of Central Lancashire, has written extensively on China’s maritime legal system and consistently highlights the historical and legal foundations of China’s claims in the South China Sea (Zou, 2005, 2016).

Table 4. Top 10 Countries Publishing Articles on South China Sea Dispute

Rank	Country	TP	TC	CPP	H-Index
1	United States	107	1610	15,05	23
2	China	97	653	6,732	13
3	Australia	67	822	12,27	18
4	Philippines	49	388	7,918	11
5	Singapore	48	883	18,4	17
6	United Kingdom	46	840	18,26	16
7	Taiwan	42	442	10,52	12
8	Indonesia	42	230	5,476	9
9	Viet Nam	34	325	9,559	11
10	Malaysia	32	176	5,5	8

Source: Author Analysis from Scopus Database

Aside from the contributions of individual Chinese scholars, leading research institutions such as the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) are also actively participating in shaping the discourse on the South China Sea. For example, Wang Junsheng highlights opportunities for China-ASEAN cooperation amid U.S.-China competition, while Zhang Jie identifies U.S.-China dynamics as the primary determinant of stability in the South China Sea and views the Philippines' military buildup on Zhongye Dao as a potential provocation. Xu Liping emphasizes that negotiations on the Code of Conduct should be led by China and ASEAN without foreign intervention. In the legal sphere, Ma Jinxing reviews dispute resolution mechanisms and arbitration cases, while Yang Xiao highlights the successes of China-ASEAN maritime cooperation while criticizing the Philippines' involvement with external powers (CASS, n.d.; Dongfang, 2025; Tass, 2024; Vscs, 2026; Xiaoyan, 2026). Overall, China's academic publications are not merely scientific but form part of a soft power strategy that integrates the intersections of science, diplomacy, and strategy to legitimize territorial claims and influence regional and international perceptions (Borton & Chen, 2025).

Institution-Wise Analysis

According to Table 5, the top 10 most productive institutions for publishing articles on the South China Sea dispute are academic institutions. De La Salle University (TP=31) and Nanyang Technological University (TP=29) are the two most productive institutions. However, Nanyang Technological University has the highest overall impact, with 530 citations (TC), surpassing the most productive institution, De La Salle University. Ranked 3rd is the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (TP=23 and TC=456). Despite having fewer publications, the S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies obtained more citations than De La Salle University. The institutions ranked 4th to 6th have the same TP (12), but different TC: The National University of Singapore (TC=284), The Australian National University (TC=191), and National Chengchi University (TC=66). Ranked 7th and 8th are Academia Sinica Taiwan (TP=11 and TC=168) and Vietnam

National University (TP=10 and TC=169). Ranked 9th and 10th are institutions with fewer than 10 publications: the University of Wollongong (TP=9 and TC=137) and Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia (TP=8 and TC=26). The Australian National University and the University of Wollongong are the only two institutions from outside the Southeast Asia and South China Sea region.

Table 5. Top 10 Institutions Publishing Articles on South China Sea Dispute

Rank	Institution	TP	TC	CPP
1	De La Salle University	31	250	8,065
2	Nanyang Technological University	29	530	18,28
3	S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies	23	456	19,83
4	National University of Singapore	12	284	23,67
5	The Australian National University	12	191	15,92
6	National Chengchi University	12	66	5,5
7	Academia Sinica Taiwan	11	168	15,27
8	Vietnam National University, Hanoi	10	169	16,9
9	University of Wollongong	9	137	15,22
10	Universiti Kebangsaan Malaysia	8	26	3,25

Source: Author Analysis from Scopus Database

Themes and future research

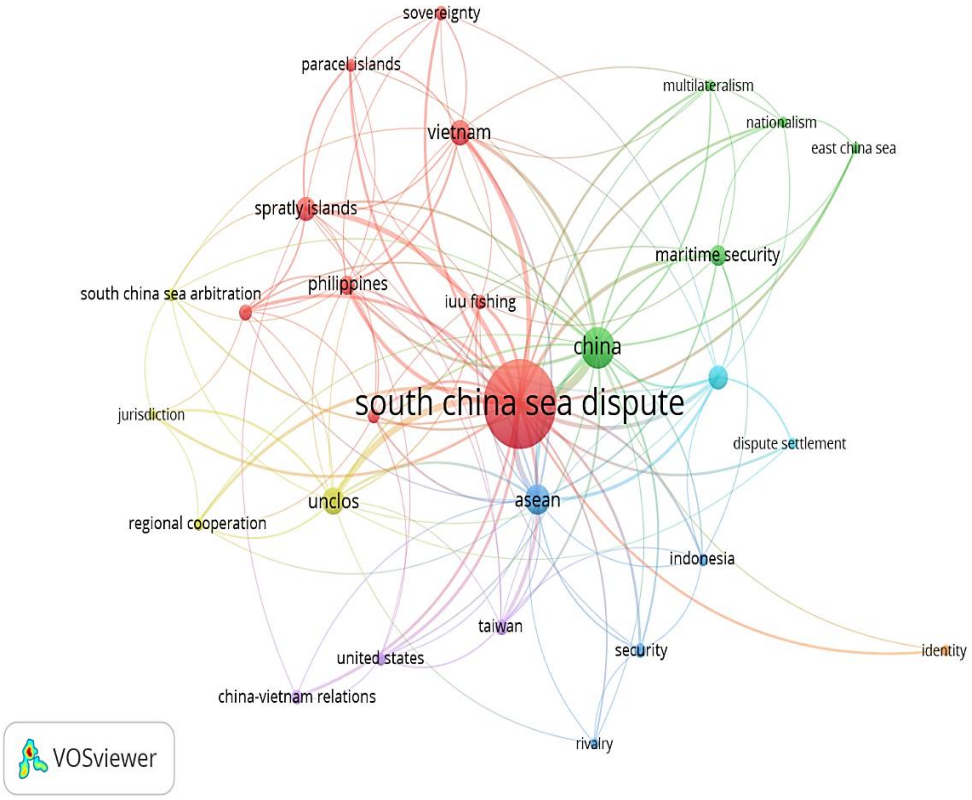
Keywords co-occurrence network analysis is a process of analysing how often keywords appear together in a collection of scientific papers. Essentially, when two keywords are usually found in the same publication, they are considered to have a thematic relationship and are connected by a network line (Deng et al., 2025). This is also used to reveal themes and emerging trends within certain research topics (Lozano et al., 2019). In this study, the authors applied two types of keywords co-occurrence network analysis generated by VOSviewer software, namely network visualization and overlay visualization.

VOSviewer's network visualization creates a graphical map of the connections between items in bibliometric data—like authors, keywords, and institutions (Al Husaeni & Nandiyanto, 2021). This feature also helps researchers find patterns, groupings, and the strength of links between these items and provides important insights into how different topics and entities are related within a research field. Meanwhile, the overlay visualization function is to display the development of bibliometric elements (such as keywords, researchers, and institutions) in a timeline. Unlike the network visualization, which emphasizes relationships or connections, this overlay visualization presents the time dimension through colour variations to reveal the dynamics of research topics over time (Soong et al., 2025; Van Eck & Waltman, 2010).

This network visualization on the South China Sea dispute research is displayed in Figure 4. This visualization is complemented by the structured data in Table 6, which lists all keywords categorized into specific thematic clusters. The results reveal a total of seven clusters are identified through network visualization. Cluster 1 lists 9 nodes (red) focusing

on "geopolitics", "IUU fishing", "Paracel islands", "Philippines", "Scarborough shoal", "South China sea dispute", "sovereignty", "Spratly islands", and "Vietnam". Cluster 2 displays 5 nodes (green) with keywords such as "China", "East China Sea", "maritime security", "multilateralism", and "nationalism". Cluster 3 shows 4 nodes (dark blue) comprising "ASEAN", "Indonesia", "rivalry", and "security". Cluster 4 depicts 4 nodes (yellow-green) containing keywords such as "jurisdiction", "regional cooperation", "South China Sea arbitration", and "UNCLOS". Cluster 5 shows 3 nodes (purple) comprising "China-Vietnam relations", "Taiwan" and "United states". Cluster 6 specifies 2 nodes (light blue) with keywords such as "dispute settlement" and "Southeast Asia". Finally, cluster 7, consisting of 1 node (orange), shows a keyword notably "identity".

Figure 4. Network Visualization generated by VOSviewer



Source: Author Analysis from VOSviewer

Overlay visualization maps scientific disciplines, tracks the evolution of research topics, and identifies new trends in large datasets (Carley et al., 2017). Clusters are grouped according to the average year of publication. The youngest clusters are usually marked in yellow. Overlay visualization is displayed in Figure 5, which reveals distinct trends in recent research about the South China Sea dispute. Keywords such as "regional cooperation", "China-Vietnam relations", "security", "maritime security", "identity", "rivalry", and "geopolitics" appear in recent publications. These topics indicate ongoing interests in issues related to the South China Sea dispute. These keywords reveal two

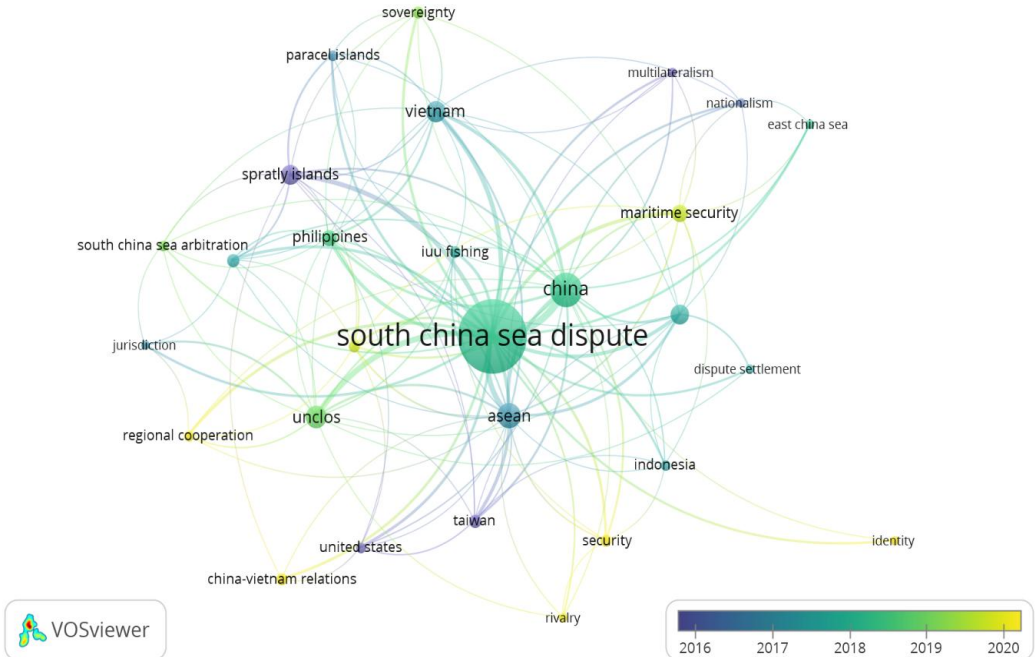
contrasting narratives in regional and geopolitical studies. Concepts such as "regional cooperation" and an emphasis on bilateral "China-Vietnam relations" represent efforts and hopes to resolve disputes through diplomatic channels, dialogues, and confidence-building. On the other hand, keywords such as "rivalry", "maritime security", and "geopolitics" show the reality of tension dominating the region, mainly driven by competition among major powers, overlapping territorial claims, and the race for militarization.

Table 6. Author keywords and themes for South China Sea dispute Research

Cluster 1	Cluster 2	Cluster 3	Cluster 4	Cluster 5	Cluster 6	Cluster 7
Geopolitics	China	ASEAN	Jurisdiction	China-Vietnam relations	Dispute settlement	Identity
IUU Fishing	East China Sea	Indonesia	Regional cooperation	Taiwan	Southeast Asia	
Paracel Islands	Maritime Security	Rivalry	South China Sea arbitration	United States		
Philippines	Multilateralism	Security	UNCLOS			
Scarborough shoal	Nationalism					
South China Sea dispute						
Sovereignty						
Spratly Islands						
Vietnam						

Source: Author Analysis from VOSviewer

Figure 5. Overlay Visualization Generated by VOSviewer



Source: Author Analysis from VOSviewer

Conclusion

Using bibliometric analysis derived from the Scopus database, research related to the South China Sea dispute uncovers several key findings. Publication trends were relatively low and sporadic from 1975 to 2012, then experienced a significant surge after 2013. This surge coincided with the Philippine arbitration case, which escalated in 2016 (after the PCA ruling). Since then, academic interest has remained consistently high with an average of more than 30 publications/year, reflecting that the dispute remains active and unresolved.

The most productive author is De Castro, R.C. (De La Salle University, Philippines) with 23 publications. However, the author with the highest impact in terms of total citations (TC) is Thao, N.H. (University of Hanoi), with 207 citations, and the author with the highest impact in terms of citation per paper (CPP) is Zhang, H. (Nanyang Technological University), with a CPP of 41.8. The Leading journal for the most productive & influential journal is Ocean Development and International Law (TP=40, TC=1042, H-Index=21). Other major journals, such as The Pacific Review, Marine Policy, and Contemporary Southeast Asia, are the other main academic channels for publishing articles related to the topic. The most influential article is entitled 'China's strategy in the South China Sea' by Fravel M.T (2011), published in Contemporary Southeast Asia, which obtained the highest total citations (TC=208). According to leading countries and institutions, the U.S (TP=107) and China (TP=97) are the most significant contributors, followed by Australia, the Philippines, and Singapore. Singapore (18,4) and the United Kingdom (18,26) are the most efficient research impact in terms of citation per paper (CPP). Among leading institutions, De La Salle University (Philippines) and Nanyang Technological University (Singapore) are the most productive institutions, with 31 and 29 publications, respectively. The National University of Singapore and The S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies are noted for their powerful citation impact (CPP=23,67 and 19,83, respectively). Chinese academics and research institutions, such as Li Jinming, Zou Keyuan, and the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS), are actively shaping a scientific narrative aligned with Beijing's official position through publications in international journals and other platforms. These publications are not merely scientific in nature; they also serve as a soft power strategy to legitimize China's territorial claims in the South China Sea and influence regional and international perceptions.

Future themes and research based on keyword analysis reveal seven clusters generated from network visualization. Emerging future trends according to overlay visualization are likely to focus on the dynamics between regional cooperation (e.g., "regional cooperation") and geopolitical competition (e.g., "rivalry", "maritime security'). This study is primarily limited by using the Scopus database as the only source to be analyzed and excluding literature from open-access and non-indexed journals. Therefore, expanding the scope of research to include Google Scholar or Web of Science (WoS) will be the precise recommendation in future studies because this will provide a more comprehensive capture of issues or topics related to the South China Sea dispute.

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RETHINKING HEDGING BEYOND ASIA: MOROCCO'S ASYMMETRIC STRATEGY IN FRAGMENTED GREAT POWER COMPETITION

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Abstract

This paper examines whether and how Morocco engages in hedging behavior in response to great power competition. Despite the expansion of hedging literature, cases outside Asian context remain underexplored, leaving a gap in understanding how secondary states behave when faced with intensifying great power rivalry. Drawing on qualitative analysis of trade flows, investment patterns, and security cooperation, as well as official documents and secondary scholarship, the article demonstrates that Morocco practices a constrained and asymmetric hedging strategy toward the U.S, the EU and China. This strategy is reflected in asymmetric security alignments alongside the diversification of economic partnerships. Furthermore, the Moroccan case highlights hedging in a fragmented, multipolar environment, showing that strategic behavior is contextually adaptive and not confined to bipolar competition (U.S-China). These findings refine hedging theory by demonstrating that secondary states can exercise strategic agency across multiple policy domains, even outside Asia.

Keywords

Morocco, Great Power Rivalry, Hedging Strategy, Foreign Policy, Fragmented Competition.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa se e de que forma Marrocos adota comportamentos de proteção em resposta à competição entre grandes potências. Apesar da expansão da literatura sobre estratégias de proteção, os casos fora do contexto asiático continuam a ser pouco explorados, deixando uma lacuna na compreensão de como os Estados secundários se comportam quando confrontados com a intensificação da rivalidade entre grandes potências. Com base numa análise qualitativa dos fluxos comerciais, dos padrões de investimento e da cooperação em matéria de segurança, bem como em documentos oficiais e estudos secundários, o artigo demonstra que Marrocos pratica uma estratégia de «hedging» restrita e assimétrica em relação aos EUA, à UE e à China. Esta estratégia reflete-se em alinhamentos de segurança assimétricos, a par da diversificação das parcerias económicas. Além disso, o caso marroquino destaca a estratégia de «hedging» num ambiente fragmentado e multipolar, mostrando que o comportamento estratégico se adapta ao contexto e não se limita à competição bipolar (EUA-China). Estas conclusões aperfeiçoam a teoria do «hedging», demonstrando que os Estados secundários podem exercer agência estratégica em múltiplos domínios políticos, mesmo fora da Ásia.

Palavras-Chave

Marrocos, Rivalidade entre Grandes Potências, Estratégia de «Hedging», Política Externa, Competição Fragmentada..

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RETHINKING HEDGING BEYOND ASIA: MOROCCO'S ASYMMETRIC STRATEGY IN FRAGMENTED GREAT POWER COMPETITION

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Introduction

The intensification of strategic competition between major great powers has reshaped global alignments in the world. The rising competition between the U.S and China in a variety of fields including trade, investment and security has reintroduced intense global power rivalry not seen since the end of the Cold War. At the same time, other influential actors such as the European Union (EU) continue to shape regional balances of power, further complicating this environment. In this context, middle and smaller states are compelled to navigate theses spheres of influence while avoiding alignment and direct confrontation with any major power. This raises questions about how states preserve autonomy under such conditions.

Within the International Relations literature, such strategic response is often studied through the lens of hedging. Unlike the concepts of balancing and bandwagoning, that refers to efforts by states to either prevent any single actor from achieving hegemony or aligning with the stronger or rising power in the system to avoid vulnerability (Waltz, 1979, p. 126), hedging is "a behavior that sits in between these two stark alternatives" (Goh, 2005, p. 3). Its purpose is to develop strong relationships with competing great powers and cultivate maximum protection to offset multiple risks under uncertainty, and, ultimately, to keep all options available for as long as possible (Kuik, 2021, p. 301). So rather than committing to one great power, hedging allows states to diversify partnerships, avoid overdependence and postpones definitive alignment decisions. Research on hedging has been mainly focused on Southeast Asia and on U.S-China competition, and less attention was given to how states in different contexts, notably Africa, respond to rivalry involving established Western partners and a rising Chinese presence, particularly countries with a longstanding ties with the EU and the U.S.

In this context, Africa has become at the center of great power rivalry, where economic, strategic and security interests increasingly converge. Historically influenced by Western powers, the African continent has increasingly evolved into "a proxy stage" for great-power interaction (Erzsébet, 2021, p. 68). Within this shifting regional and systemic environment, Morocco emerges as a pivotal state navigating overlapping spheres of influence between the U.S, the EU and a rising China. Once perceived as a peripheral actor in global power dynamics, Morocco has repositioned itself through a strategic doctrine that includes economic development, geographic advantage and political

stability, establishing the Kingdom as an attractive target for these major powers. According to the book "*Great Power Competition and Conflict in Africa"*, Morocco belongs to the top 15 countries with the highest competition potential for the U.S, China and Russia, and ranks 8th in bilateral competition between the U.S and China (Kepe & al., 2023, p. 49)[1].

In this tense landscape, Morocco seeks to diversify its partnerships, to sustain autonomy and avoid vulnerability, as hedging suggests. This strategic response enables the kingdom to navigate great power rivalry between the U.S and China without compromising its ties with the EU, that still stand as a traditional and historical partner. It is worth noting that Morocco also maintains significant economic and security partnerships with other states, including Gulf countries, mainly United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia, as well as African partners such as Senegal and Ivory Coast, and rising partnership with Russia. However, this article focuses specifically on the competition among great powers over Morocco and how the Kingdom navigates these rivalries. The analysis prioritizes the U.S, the EU and China as the primary drivers of hedging dynamics.[2] In this context, the main research question is to understand how does Morocco operationalize hedging across economic and security domains under shifting multipolar dynamics?

Existing hedging literature focuses primarily on Southeast Asia and bipolar power rivalry (U.S-China), offering limited insight into how states in Africa, notably North Africa, deal with multi-actor competition including both traditional Western partners and rising powers. Existing research that address MENA region (Rózsa, 2021, pp. 68-73) or Africa (Oluyemi & Elhudairi, 2025), generally focus on hedging dynamics at the regional level, rather than examining a single state behavior. In parallel, scholarship on Morocco has mainly studied its bilateral relations with individual great powers, for instance the U.S (El Mokri, 2015), (Mouline, 2016) or China (Ezzehouany, 2025) without situating these ties within broader framework of intensifying great power competition. Within this context, this article examines Morocco as a case study to assess the applicability of hedging theory to the North African region, within the context of U.S-China-EU competition to provide a new lens for this concept beyond its traditional Asian focus.

This article contributes to the hedging literature. First, it claims that Morocco's foreign policy reflects a constrained form of hedging, shaped by structural interdependence with Western partners and growing engagement with emerging China. Second, it conceptualizes that hedging operates differently across domains, combining economic diversification with multiple partners and asymmetric security alignments in favor of Western partners. Third, the Moroccan case extends hedging theory beyond its predominantly Asian focus, demonstrating that this concept is contextually adaptive and operates in North Africa under a fragmented great power influence. By examining Morocco, this article contributes to a broader understanding of how secondary states exercise strategic agency in evolving global competition.

[1] The authors provide additional and more specific information on this overall competition's parameters, including: diplomatic, informational, military and economic competition.
[2] Russia is also considered as a potential competitor on Morocco, however this study is limited to China, the EU and the US.

To further develop these ideas, this study is organised as follows. The first part provides an overview of the subject, presents the research question, and outlines the main objective of the study. The second part sets out the theoretical framework of this research, exploring the relevant literature on the concept of hedging and clarifying the indicators applied in this study. The third part describes the methodology followed in this research. The fourth part, analyses Morocco's hedging strategy across economic and security domains. Finally, the fifth part assesses the applicability of hedging theory to the Moroccan case and discusses how extending the framework beyond Asia refines existing conceptualizations of hedging.

Hedging is one of the more commonly used but least studied concepts in international relations.

Theoretical Framework

This study relies on the literature on hedging strategies to analyze how Morocco navigates great power competition between the U.S, China and the EU, emphasizing the ways states maximize autonomy and diversify partnerships under structural constraints. In International Relations (IR), hedging is considered a relatively recent concept. Gaining prominence in scholarly debates from the late 1990s (Lake, 1996), (Manning & Przystup, 1998), it was originally borrowed from the field of finance. The term refers to "a form of investment insurance" through which an investor attempts to reduce exposure to uncertainty by diversifying assets and keeping a balanced position (He & Feng, 2023, p. 6). When applied to IR, hedging depicts a similar reasoning: states seek to minimize strategic risk and preserve autonomy through diversifying partnerships and avoiding exclusive alignment notably in context of geopolitical uncertainty and great power rivalry. The importation of this concept provided a different theoretical frame to study this behavior adopted by many small and medium-sized states. Hedging was introduced first through studies of how states in China's neighborhood reacted to its rise as an economic and military power, describing strategies in which regional states avoided full balancing or bandwagoning, and instead pursued a flexible approach (Haacke, 2019, p. 2).

Hedging can be defined as a form of "state behavior" that maintains relative equidistance in relations with competing powers, combining engagement and containment to avoid taking one side at the expense of another. It represents an alternative to traditional strategies such as balancing and bandwagoning (Korolev, 2019, p. 420). Hedging has been studied in the IR literature with prominent contributions of many authors such as Cheng-Chwee Kuik (Kuik, 2008) and Evelyn Goh (Goh, 2005). Despite its extensive usage by scholars, the concept of hedging remains theoretically contested due to its relatively recent introduction into International Relations and to the lack of a fully developed theoretical framework. It is still underdeveloped and scholars employ this "umbrella term to serve different purposes, leading to confusion (Doung, Kang, & Kim, 2022, p. 59). As a consequence, its defining features, its applications as well as the states more prone to adopt it among others, are still debatable. Therefore, hedging appears as a "fuzzy concept whose key underpinnings are yet to be rigorously and unequivocally framed from a theoretical standpoint" (Figiaconi, 2025, p. 2).

This conceptual ambiguity is partly due to its overlap with related concepts, particularly foreign policy diversification, neutrality, and strategic autonomy, which are sometimes used to describe similar patterns of state behavior. For instance, Vigevani and Cepaluni, as cited in Htet (2026, p. 4), define Foreign policy diversification as an autonomy-seeking strategy through which small and middle states broaden their external partnerships to lessen asymmetries and dependencies in their international relations. It covers various forms of engagement, including relations with great powers, regional actors, international organizations, and South-South partners across multiple political, economic, and strategic domains (Htet, 2026, p. 4). In this sense, diversification appears as a broader concept in scope than hedging, as it comprises the expansion and distribution of a state's external partnerships across different actors and areas of cooperation. By contrast, hedging is associated with how states manage uncertainty and risks arising from great-power competition, military and security considerations constituting particularly important indicators of hedging behavior (Htet, 2026, p. 4).

Strategic autonomy is another concept that shares important similarities with hedging. It is a floating concept whose meaning depends on the context and timeframe in question (Aydın-Düzgit, Kutlay and Keyman, 2026, p. 187). In contemporary foreign policy debates, it generally refers to the pursuit of greater freedom of action by reducing excessive external dependencies and strengthening a state's capacity for independent policy choices, without implying disengagement from international cooperation or major powers. By contrast, strategic autonomy may be pursued through selective partnerships and multilateral cooperation, depending on the specific context (Aydın-Düzgit, Kutlay and Keyman, 2026, p. 187). The relationship between strategic autonomy and hedging is particularly relevant in this regard. While strategic autonomy refers broadly to the pursuit of greater freedom of action beyond security and defense to cover domains such as energy, food, health, digital policies, etc. (Aydın-Düzgit, Kutlay and Keyman, 2026, p. 187), hedging constitutes one possible strategy through which states may seek to preserve or enhance such autonomy, particularly when navigating competing great-power interests.

A further concept closely related to hedging is neutrality. It can be understood as a strategic behavior through which a state chooses not to align itself with any of the competing powers (Figiaconi, 2025, p. 5). Some scholars appear to consider hedging as an intermediate position suggesting that this strategy shares some similarities with neutrality and stands between balancing and bandwagoning, as states avoid choosing a clear side between competitors (Figiaconi, 2025, pp. 2-3).

Figiaconi's article (2025) on Southeast Asian secondary states hedging strategy amid growing Sino-American great power competition, further enlightens this debate and provides insight of its defining features. Building on a review of the existing hedging literature, Figiaconi highlights that the concept of neutrality presents itself under different categories, each one with its own specific features (Figiaconi, 2025, p 6), and concludes that hedging can be considered a category of neutrality. It is voluntarily adopted by secondary states in response to systemic stimuli, such as shifting power ratios between great powers. Rather than being grounded in legal provisions, moral considerations, or idealistic principles, hedging is based on strategic calculation and is typically adopted when a state perceives increasing great-power tensions or a potential transition of power.

Hedging is not publicly declared and states deliberately maintain an ambiguous stance in order to avoid attracting suspicion from competing powers, while amplifying strategic gains. This primarily allows states to navigate great power competition effectively, maintain autonomy and maximize their "chance of survival". (Figiaconi, 2025, pp. 14-17).

Collectively, these insights provide a strong analytical foundation for understanding how states like Morocco manage external competition through hedging. Building on this literature, this study identifies hedging through three observable settings: trade relations, Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) patterns and security cooperation. These meters are applied throughout the analysis to assess whether the kingdom's position reflects hedging rather than bandwagoning or balancing.

Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative case study approach to analyze Morocco's strategic response in the context of great power competition. This paper relies on scholarly works on hedging, which provide indicators such as diversification of partnerships, sectoral alignment and strategic ambiguity, to identify and further analyze Morocco's foreign policy choices vis-à-vis these competing powers. Beyond a purely descriptive approach, by situating the kingdoms behavior within this framework, the paper seeks to offer an analytical assessment of how this country balances competing interests of major powers, and maximize autonomy and strategic gains.

While literature identifies multiple dimensions of hedging, this articles relies on three major elements: investments, trade relations and military cooperation, as they clearly conceptualize great power interest in Africa (Mahmoud & El Baz, 2024, p. 465). In other words, this article focuses on economic diversification and selective security engagement as empirically observable indicators of hedging behavior.

The analysis relies on a combination of secondary sources and(secondary) quantitative data. The sources include conceptual literature on hedging, including major works on this concept, as well as empirical and contextual secondary sources focused on Morocco and Africa as a whole. This offers insight into the kingdom's economic, political and security engagement. Meanwhile, the quantitative data that consist of: trade, investment flows, security cooperation statistics and global indices (for instance, Foreign Direct Investment Confidence Index), are mobilized to concretely translate hedging indicators and provide measurable evidence of the kingdom's strategic behavior. The data are primarily drawn from official reports, websites, and existing studies, as well as from information obtained through specific requests submitted via the Office des Changes of Morocco' platform.

Navigating rivalry: Morocco's hedging strategy under great power competition

This axis examines Morocco's ties with the three competing powers through the economic approach (trade and investment) and security approach, in order to assess whether the kingdom's behavior reflects a hedging strategy.

Morocco's Economic Diversification Strategy

Empirically, the kingdom's trade pattern suggests both structural dependence and gradual diversification. Morocco's trade has historically been dominated by European markets, with EU being its primary economic partner. Between 2012 and 2014, approximately 50% of Morocco's imports originated from the European Union, while around 60% of its exports were directed toward EU markets (Morocco's Office des Changes database). France stands as the leading trade partner of Morocco in this period with an average of 8 billion Euros per year. Soon after, Spain turned into the primary trading partner of Morocco with a value of 20 billion Euros in 2024 (Morocco's Office des Changes database).

Despite its longstanding ties with Europe, and the EU's centrality in its trade structure, Morocco has progressively sought to diversify its international partnerships by expanding its economic outreach to other trade partners in order to reduce its dependence on EU countries, notably France and Spain. A key driver of this diversification has been the strengthening of trade and investment ties with the United States, particularly following the adoption of a free trade agreement between the two nations in 2004 (entered into force in 2006) (Office of the United States Trade Representative, n.d.). The agreement boosted bilateral trade significantly. In fact, the trade value increased from approximately 3 billion Euros in 2012 to a value averaging 8. 4 billion Euros in 2024. Moroccan imports from the U.S rose from 2.34 billion Euros in 2012 to 6.71 billion Euros in 2024, illustrating a broader trend of diversification beyond Europe (Morocco's Office des Changes database). It is worth noting that Morocco has more free trade agreements than any other African country and stands as the only country on the continent to have a free trade agreement with the United States.[3]

Trade relations with China represents an additional pole in Morocco's diversification strategy. The total trade between Morocco and China amounts to 9.4 billion Euros in 2024, which significantly increased compared to the past years (3 billion Euros in 2015), averaging a value closer to the total of importations and exportations between Morocco and the U.S (Morocco's Office des Changes database). China's partnership was elevated when Morocco signed the Memorandum of understanding on the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in 2017,[4] followed by the implementation agreement in 2022, becoming the first North African country to formally join the initiative Ezzehouany (2025, p. 45) argues that, for China "this partnership represents a geo-economic strategy rather than a geopolitical one, positioning Morocco as a key partner". In fact, Morocco recognized structural economic asymmetries in its trade relations with the EU, and considers the BRI a timely opportunity to balance its external dependencies (Feuer & Ayadi, 2019).

[3] Free Trade Agreement with the European Union (FTA); Free Trade Agreement with the United States ; Free Trade Agreement with Turkey ; Free Trade Agreement with the Mediterranean Arab countries (Agadir Agreement), which includes Tunisia, Jordan, and Egypt; Free Trade Agreement with the United Arab Emirates ; Free Trade Agreement with the Greater Arab Free Trade Area, which includes : Morocco, Tunisia, Libya, Egypt, Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Jordan, Iraq, Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, United Arab Emirates, Oman, Qatar, Bahrain, and Yemen and Finally the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA).

[4] The BRI focuses primarily on infrastructure development and the enhancement of connectivity through investments in roads, railways and ports. Its implementation involves Chinese capital and financing as well as technology and companies, and sometimes Chinese labor (Ezzehouany, 2025, p. 45).

It appears that despite the diversification of its trade partners, the EU still occupies a significant position in Morocco's trade with a value averaging 76 billion Euros in 2023, which exceeds by far the total value of trade with the U.S and China (Morocco's Office des Changes database). This suggests that Morocco's hedging strategy in terms of trade is real but remains constrained.

To complement the analysis of trade, it is necessary to examine investment flows as they reflect deeper economic interdependence. Unlike trade, investment flows reveal a slightly different pattern in Morocco's hedging strategy. Morocco's investment flows display more diversified and fluctuating patterns, which makes Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) a stronger indicator of hedging. The development of investment flows and trade between Morocco and the EU has been supported by a series of bilateral agreements, essentially the Association Agreement that came into force in 2000 and enabled the creation of a free trade area for industrial products in 2012, as well as the agricultural trade liberalization agreement in the same year. In this context, EU countries represented more than half of Morocco's FDI inflows during this period (El Mokri, 2015, p. 73). For instance, France was the top investor in Morocco, accounting for 36% of total inflows between 2012 and 2014. This share rose to an average of 52% when other countries such as Switzerland, Spain, the United Kingdom (before Brexit), and Germany are included. Thus, European countries traditionally represented the leading sources of FDI in Morocco.

However, this pattern began to change in 2022, when the United States became Morocco's main foreign investor, accounting for 34.1% of total FDI inflows, with an average value of €706.7 million. This value was ten times higher than in 2021. This increase was due mainly to the signing of a major agreement between Morocco's OCP Group and U.S.-based Koch Ag & Energy Solutions (Moroccan Agency for Investment and Export Development (AMDIE), 2023, p. 22). This partnership indicates an increased presence of American capital in Morocco's industrial and agricultural sectors and reflects the expansion of investment ties between the two nations. From this perspective, some EU countries that traditionally stood among the leading sources of FDI in Morocco have been overtaken by the United States.

China's case in terms of investment is slightly different. A decade ago, Morocco was a marginal actor in China's African strategy, and Chinese investment was minimal compared to other African economies. In fact, North Africa have been traditionally outside of China's interest. Many factors can explain this: geographical distance, social, cultural and linguistic differences, limited historical interactions, etc., (Rózsa, 2021, p. 68). Similarly, China was not accounted in Morocco's economic development strategy or its calculations to attract foreign investors (Ezzehouany, 2025, p. 45). However, investment flows have grown in importance, providing Morocco with an additional pole for diversification, consistent with hedging strategy. Chinese investments in Morocco went from 38 Million Euros in 2015 to 189.6 Million Euros in 2024 (Morocco's Office des Changes database). It is worth noting that Chinese investments are growing fast, recent announcements have been made by several Chinese investors, signaling projects to invest nearly 10 billion Euros in the production of electric batteries and components in Morocco (Aublanc, 2024). These claims highlight the increasing importance of China as a key investor in Morocco, especially through greenfield projects. In 2023, the British magazine, the *Economist*, ranked Morocco among the top five destinations for Chinese

greenfield investments (Aublanc, 2024). According to the World Bank report on Morocco's economic updates, investment in Morocco is going through a new era, with "a robust entry of Chinese investors". The greenfield FDI by international firms more than quadrupled, from 3.5 billion Euros in 2021 to18.9 Billion Euros in 2023, with China accounting for 29% of total capital expenditure over 2022-2023, compared to 53% for European countries and only 1% for the U.S (World Bank, 2026).

This notable volatility in FDI inflows, shows that European partners continue to occupy a structurally dominant position in Morocco's investment landscape. In 2025, France once again ranks as Morocco's top investor (586 Million Euros), confirming the persistence of long-standing EU-Morocco investment ties. In addition, when other EU countries, notably Germany, the Netherlands and Italy, are considered along-side France, the value of total Net FDI inflows averages 1 Billion Euros in 2025.[5] Also, a large share of Morocco's investment flow (about 133 Million Euros in 2022) continues to go to France, reinforcing the partnership with EU (Moroccan Agency for Investment and Export Development (AMDIE), 2023, p. 25). These values suggest that Morocco's investment diversification does not signal a rupture with EU countries, but rather illustrates Morocco's hedging approach, balancing traditional partners with emerging powers.

Morocco's strategy of selective security engagement

While trade relations between Morocco and the United States remain relatively limited compared to EU, their political ties especially the security aspect of them, have consistently been strong. The kingdom was the first country to recognize the independence of the United States in 1777, and the two nations signed the oldest treaty in U.S history (The Treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1787). However, despite the advanced economic presence of EU countries, the political and security cooperation between the U.S and Morocco, is usually perceived as more strategic, particularly when it comes to counterterrorism and regional stability.

The main objective of the United States is to develop close military and economic relations in the Maghreb region,[6] particularly in the field of security. In this context, Morocco occupies a strategic importance in North Africa, and its role has been steadily increasing particularly after the events of September 11. The country became a strategic partner in the U.S security policy to combat terrorism and extremism in the Maghreb and Sahel regions. For the U.S, Morocco represents a model country for the progress it has achieved in improving governance and democracy, suppressing terrorism and adopting religious tolerance, particularly in a region facing diverse and evolving security challenges (El Mokri, 2015, pp. 74-75).

The 2004 Free Trade Agreement with the U.S aims to boost trade and investment between the two countries, as it also implicitly carries significant political and security dimensions. Beyond economic interests, the U.S ambition behind the Agreement was to strengthen its political presence in North Africa, limiting European influence, and control all sources of instability and insecurity in the region (GRAIN, 2008, p. 60). This security

[5] The 2025 data provided by the "Office des Changes" is approximate (from January to September 2025).
[6] North African region composed of Mauritania, Morocco, Algeria, Tunisia and Libya.

approach of the Agreement was explicitly expressed during several official U.S communications, especially by U.S Trade Representative Robert Zoellick during the signing of the free trade agreement in Morocco, where he clearly stated that "Step by step, the Administration is working to build bridges of free trade with economic and social reformers in the Middle East. Our plan offers trade and openness as vital tools for leaders striving to build more open, optimistic, and tolerant Islamic societies" (El Mokri, 2015, p. 75).

In this context, the security cooperation aims to suppress the threat of terrorism, organized crime, arms trafficking and drug trafficking, affecting the stability of the region and decreasing the countries vulnerability (Mouline, 2016, p. 115). The U.S is also interested in preserving secure maritime routes along the North African Coast and the Strait of Gibraltar but also on the Atlantic coast of Morocco, which is vital for trade and military logistics.

For instance, Morocco participates in many programs and operations. "The African Maritime Law Enforcement Partnership program" is one great example. This program enables African partner nations to forge their maritime security capabilities and improve management of their maritime domains through joint real world maritime law enforcement operations (U.S. Africa Command, n.d.). Separately, another major U.S.-led initiative, the "African Lion 25" exercise, was conducted recently on Moroccan territory. Aimee Cutrona, "Chargée d'Affaires" for the U.S Embassy in Rabat said, "African Lion enhances the United States' interoperability with Morocco and other key partners to strengthen our collective ability to address regional security threats." She added "As a major non-NATO ally and historic security partner, Morocco plays a pivotal role in promoting regional stability and security." (Cutrona, as cited in U.S. Department of Defense, 2025).

Beyond its security partnership with the U.S, Morocco also maintains a dense and structured security relationship with the EU. Although Morocco-EU relations are traditionally strongest in the economic field, security cooperation has grown in importance over time. For the EU, Morocco represents a preferential security partner in the region, notably because of its political stability and geographic proximity, and plays a key role in regional security framework. In fact, the Mediterranean region is facing numerous and multifaceted threats. Conflicts and instability across neighboring regions, particularly in the Sahel, such as Mali, and the Horn of Africa, such as Somalia, as well as in Mediterranean countries for example Libya, generate a trans-regional domino effect, with insecurity spilling over into the Mediterranean region, fostering conditions favorable to the expansion of various threats including terrorism, migratory flows, arms and drug trafficking. In this context of persistent regional instability Morocco rises as a security partner with strategic significance. This security cooperation was further reinforced under the "Advanced Status" granted to Morocco in 2008, including possibilities for cooperation in various fields including, border, drugs and organized crime control mechanisms, in addition to immigration policies, CEPOL training and EUROPOL cooperation, etc. (Real, 2018, pp. 109-121).

In contrast with the U.S and the EU, it seems that North Africa remains a secondary theater within China's broader security strategy, as its focus in this field is directed primarily toward Asia. China is considered the second largest arms producer and the fifth

largest exporter globally, and the largest share of its arms export goes to Asia (82%), however it is still the second largest arms seller in Africa (Gouyez Ben Allal, 2025, p. 16). In fact, China's security engagement in North Africa, now and in the near future remains limited and holds that "development comes before security in promoting stability" (Rózsa, 2021, p. 70). China's security engagement is this region is largely driven by the protection of its economic interests, notably access to energy, mineral and strategic resources. China's presence in North Africa is increasingly analyzed through the lens of the U.S-China competition. Many observers anticipate a growing presence of China as a gradual challenge to the U.S's dominant role in the region, and expect a further expansion of Chinese security and military engagement to defend their investments as well as Chinese Labor (human capital) (Rózsa, 2021, p. 70).

In this context, Morocco and China military relations remain limited compared to the U.S and France partnerships. However, Morocco has gradually pursued to diversify its defense partnerships by expanding military cooperation with China, and benefiting from its expertise in this field. This cooperation comes in various forms, such as the purchase of strategic weapons, training cycles, and exchanges of high level visits (Gouyez Ben Allal, 2025, p. 8). This limited security approach with China enables countries such as Morocco to deepen ties with new partners and maintain at the same time a balance with its traditional Western allies, notably the U.S and the EU, thereby promoting a hedging-oriented strategy.

Faced with increasing attention from great powers, Morocco has adopted a hedging strategy to strengthen its influence and secure its interests. This strategy relies mainly on the diversification of its international partnerships, enabling the kingdom to balance great power competition, while maintaining strong ties with its traditional partners. This multifaceted approach allows Morocco to pull economic, political and security opportunities.

Expanding hedging beyond Asia: The Moroccan case

The findings revealed that Morocco's foreign policy reflects a hedging-oriented strategy shaped around economic diversification, selective security engagement and strategic leverage reinforcement. While trade patterns suggest a persistence of a strong EU-Morocco partnership, investment flows reveal a more dynamic and competitive pattern, especially with the rise of China as a strong contributor in greenfield investments. In this context, FDI emerges as a stronger indicator of hedging strategies than trade, reflecting Morocco's attractiveness to great powers. Regarding its security ties, Morocco maintains strong strategic ties with the U.S and a sustained cooperation with the EU, particularly in matters such as regional stabilization. However, China's security interest is still limited, unfolding that Morocco's hedging logic towards China is stronger in the economic field than in the military sphere. These insights into Morocco's behavior suggest four main patterns that would be discussed as follows:

First, while Africa and Middle East have historically been shaped by strong Western influence, China's interest in this region has shifted the balance of power and the perception of great power competition by African states. This statement complies with Kuik's claim that states 'do not hedge against any specific power per se, but against the

general uncertainties embedded in big powers' (Kuik, 2016, p. 158). A state adopts hedging when perceiving a significant rise of great power tensions and a possible power transition. Hedging tends to emerge when secondary states perceive intensifying rivalry between established but relatively declining power and a rising one (Figiaconi, 2025, p. 15). The evolution of FDI in Morocco exhibits such context. While the EU has been an established power in Morocco, the rise of the U.S and China's investment interests introduced new competitive dynamics. This coexistence of a traditional Western influence and expanding Chinese capital creates uncertainty and indeterminateness, encouraging Morocco to hedge rather than align exclusively. However, Korolev's work suggests that this landscape might reduce Morocco's hedging possibility. He argues that hedging space shrinks as great power competition intensifies, leaving little room for ambiguity and pushing smaller states toward clearer realignment (Korolev, 2019, p. 420). While these insights are drawn on Southeast Asian cases, and might not necessarily apply to Morocco, with intensifying great power competition on the African territory, the kingdom would probably face an ultimatum from its Western partners to pick a side.

Second, existing literature on hedging assumes a bipolar context of strategic competition, with the U.S and China serving as the primary poles against which secondary states calibrate their foreign policy. However, the Moroccan case reflects a different structural pattern in which rivalry is multipolar and fragmented rather than strictly bipolar. Morocco navigates overlapping influence from the EU, the U.S, and China, which all shape its foreign policy choices. This suggests that hedging can operate outside the traditional bipolar framing with multiple competing centers of power. In the Moroccan case, hedging is not mainly a strategy evolving around two poles, but about managing relationships with diverse powers whose interests converge and diverge across different domains.

Third, the findings revealed that Morocco exhibits different behavior depending on the foreign policy field. It maintains strong security partnerships with the EU and the U.S, however, nourishes increasing investment ties with China. Following Gonzalez-Pujol, when hedging, a state can exhibit a different behavior, signaling contradictory interests across fields—economic, diplomatic and security—to manage several concurrent interests and maximize benefit (Gonzalez-Pujol, 2024, p. 205). In Morocco's case, this framework helps understand why its partnerships and alignments are not uniform. Economic engagements with one great power can coexist with security cooperation alignment with others, reflecting a deliberate, field-oriented hedging strategy adjusted to the priorities and constraints of each sector rather than through a single alignment choice.

Fourth, Morocco's security cooperation suggests an interesting ground for discussion. In fact, compared to its volatile FDI flows and diversified trade partners, Morocco maintains a stable and Western-centered security cooperation. Morocco diversifies economically but maintains deep security ties with the EU and the U.S. The Moroccan case reflects important similarities with Kuik's work on hedging among Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) states. Kuik argues that states seek to deepen their economic engagement with a rising power and sustain security cooperation with an established one (Kuik, 2016, pp. 12-13). The kingdom's expansion of economic relations with China, notably in greenfield investment projects, is similar to the pattern exhibited by several Southeast Asian states that seek to benefit from China's economic development. Simultaneously, the kingdom nurtures strong institutionalized security relations with the

U.S and the EU, reflecting the persistent centrality of Western partners in its defense policy. However, it is worth noting that hedging for Southeast Asian states is often driven by direct security threat from China, the case of Morocco is rooted in the management of structural uncertainty caused by intensifying great power competition and shared security concerns with Western partners. In this regard, Morocco represents a variation of classical hedging stating that this strategy in not uniform across economic and security domains.

In an attempt to re-characterize hedging behavior in East Asia, Lim and Cooper suggest that hedging is considered most appropriate for states free from binding alliances (for instance security treaties) or major disputes with great powers, as they can maintain strategic ambiguity, allowing security cooperation with both powers (in this case the U.S and China) and avoiding commitments that would clearly reflect alignment with one against the other (Lim & Cooper, 2015, pp. 20-21). This does not fully apply to the Moroccan case. Although the kingdom shares certain characteristics of what Lim and Cooper define as "hedging states", notably the absence of direct disputes with China, the U.S or the EU, as well as the absence of any security treaties (for instance Japan/ U.S), it does not exhibit full-spectrum alignment ambiguity. Security cooperation remains clearly anchored in Western partnership, suggesting that ambiguity is confined primarily in the economic domain. The existing hedging literature emphasizes that security and survival considerations are the core of a state's strategy, while economic motivations may act as complementary drivers for hedging (Figiaconi, 2025, p. 16). In this context, Morocco represents a good example of this theory. This suggests that economic hedging does not reflect a security realignment. Rather, Morocco appears to prioritize stability and security, employing economic diversification as a supplementary strategy to reinforce autonomy without compromising its foundational security partnerships.

Conclusion

This study argued that Morocco's foreign policy reflects an asymmetric hedging strategy employed through trade diversification, investment partnerships and selective security cooperation. By doing so, it demonstrates that hedging is about managing exposure distinctly across domains. The Moroccan case revealed that middle and smaller states can manage risk, maximize strategic autonomy and reduce vulnerability without committing to a single power. Deepening economic ties with one partner does not prevent security consolidation with another, instead, differentiation becomes a mechanism of strategic autonomy. This domain-based approach reveals that asymmetrical alignment is a calculated behavior insuring flexibility in an increasingly multipolar world.

The Moroccan case both validates and extends hedging theory. It confirms existing scholarship in explaining how middle and smaller states seek to navigate systemic uncertainty through diversified engagement rather that rigid alignment. It further extends theory. First, by showing that hedging is not a predominantly Asian phenomenon, but a flexible strategy available for secondary states operating under structural constraint in other regions such as North Africa. Second, the case illustrates that hedging can emerge in fragmented, multi-actor competition, where influence is distributed among several major powers rather than concentrated in bipolar rivalry,

notably U.S.–China competition. Morocco's management of relations with the European Union, the United States, and China therefore demonstrates how secondary states can navigate complex configurations of established and emerging external powers. This opens a broader comparative research agenda on how secondary states outside Asia manage strategic uncertainty and adapt their hedging strategies to different regional configurations of power. Third, unlike many Asian countries where security alignment is motivated by direct threat or binding alliances, Morocco's security hedging is shaped by shared security concerns with the EU and the U.S in the Mediterranean/African region, rather than coercive pressure, providing a new lens into hedging dynamics.

Building on this study's limitations and constraints, future research could expand our study on Morocco by incorporating diplomacy as an additional indicator to study hedging. For instance, examining patterns of voting alignment in international organizations, strategic ambiguity in official statements, summit diplomacy and official visits, would determine whether hedging manifests at the level of discourse and institutional positioning. Other works could focus on exploring why Morocco has emerged as an arena of intensifying great power rivalry. This research would shift the focus from state response to great power motivations, inspecting how geography, regime stability, infrastructures, etc. contribute to Morocco's attractiveness.

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INTANGIBLE HERITAGE AS GEOPOLITICAL CAPITAL: CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN THE ALGERIA–MOROCCO RIVALRY

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Abstract

Cultural practices such as cuisine, dress, and music have traditionally been treated as domains of social identity rather than instruments of international politics. Yet in an era of intensified status competition and symbolic governance, culture increasingly operates as a strategic resource within geopolitical rivalries. Despite growing attention to soft power and cultural diplomacy, International Relations scholarship lacks a systematic framework for analysing intangible cultural heritage as a site of interstate contestation, particularly in post-colonial contexts where recognition and legitimacy remain unevenly distributed. This article develops an integrated theoretical and empirical analysis of heritage-based rivalry by examining the struggle between Algeria and Morocco over the international recognition of shared cultural forms, including couscous, caftan traditions, and raï music. The paper aims to conceptualise intangible heritage as geopolitical capital a form of symbolic power mobilised through international institutions to secure narrative authority, regional leadership, and symbolic hegemony. Here we show that heritage disputes are not peripheral cultural disagreements but structured struggles over recognition, mediated by global governance regimes such as UNESCO. These regimes translate cultural claims into hierarchies of legitimacy that advantage certain state narratives while marginalising others. The article demonstrates that intangible heritage functions as an active terrain of geopolitical competition, where symbolic recognition shapes interstate power relations independently of material capabilities. By repositioning heritage within core debates on power, status, and post-colonial order, this study advances a novel analytical lens for understanding cultural geopolitics and opens new pathways for research on symbolic rivalry in the Global South.

Keywords

Cultural Geopolitics, Intangible Cultural Heritage, Symbolic Power, Heritage Diplomacy, Post-colonial Statehood, UNESCO.

Resumo

Práticas culturais como a gastronomia, o vestuário e a música têm sido tradicionalmente tratadas como domínios da identidade social, em vez de instrumentos da política internacional. No entanto, numa era de competição intensificada pelo estatuto e de governação simbólica, a cultura funciona cada vez mais como um recurso estratégico no âmbito das rivalidades geopolíticas. Apesar da crescente atenção dedicada ao poder suave e à diplomacia cultural, os estudos em Relações Internacionais carecem de um quadro sistemático para analisar o património cultural imaterial como um campo de disputa entre Estados, particularmente em contextos pós-coloniais onde o reconhecimento e a legitimidade continuam a estar distribuídos de forma desigual. Este artigo desenvolve uma análise teórica e empírica integrada da rivalidade baseada no património, examinando a disputa entre a Argélia e Marrocos pelo reconhecimento internacional de formas culturais partilhadas, incluindo o cuscuz, as tradições do caftan e a música raï. O artigo visa conceptualizar o património imaterial como capital geopolítico — uma forma de poder simbólico mobilizado através de instituições internacionais para garantir autoridade narrativa, liderança regional e hegemonia simbólica. Aqui, demonstramos que as disputas sobre o património não são desacordos culturais periféricos, mas sim lutas estruturadas pelo reconhecimento, mediadas por regimes de governação global, como a UNESCO. Estes regimes traduzem reivindicações culturais em hierarquias de legitimidade que favorecem certas narrativas estatais, marginalizando outras. O artigo demonstra que o património imaterial funciona como um terreno ativo de competição geopolítica, onde o reconhecimento simbólico molda as relações de poder entre Estados, independentemente das capacidades materiais. Ao reposicionar o património no seio de debates centrais sobre poder, estatuto e ordem pós-colonial, este estudo propõe uma nova perspetiva analítica para compreender a geopolítica cultural e abre novos caminhos para a investigação sobre a rivalidade simbólica no Sul Global.

Palavras-Chave

Geopolítica Cultural, Património Cultural Imaterial, Poder Simbólico, Diplomacia do Património, Estado Pós-colonial, UNESCO.

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INTANGIBLE HERITAGE AS GEOPOLITICAL CAPITAL: CULTURAL NARRATIVES IN THE ALGERIA–MOROCCO RIVALRY

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Introduction

In contemporary international politics, struggles over power increasingly unfold beyond conventional military and economic domains, extending into symbolic, cultural, and epistemic arenas. While International Relations (IR) scholarship has long acknowledged the relevance of soft power, status competition, and identity politics, it has yet to develop a systematic account of how intangible cultural heritage functions as a site of interstate contestation (Nye, 2004; Chay, 1990; Wendt, 1994; Wohlforth, 2014; Renshon, 2017). Cultural practices such as cuisine, dress, and music are often treated as peripheral to "hard" geopolitics or relegated to the domains of anthropology and cultural studies. This article challenges that division by arguing that intangible heritage has become a form of geopolitical capital a strategically mobilised resource through which states seek international recognition, symbolic authority, and narrative dominance within global institutional frameworks.

The central claim of this article is that contests over intangible heritage are not merely cultural disputes but structured struggles over symbolic hegemony embedded in broader geopolitical rivalries. Intangible heritage becomes geopolitically consequential when it is institutionalised, adjudicated, and internationally validated, most notably through regimes such as UNESCO thereby transforming cultural claims into sources of diplomatic leverage, reputational hierarchy, and status differentiation (Jonathan, 2017). Unlike soft power, which emphasises attraction and persuasion, geopolitical capital refers here to the capacity of symbolic recognition to alter interstate power relations, particularly in contexts where material asymmetries are constrained and legitimacy becomes a key currency of competition.

The rivalry between Algeria and Morocco offers a theoretically strategic case through which to examine this phenomenon (Boukhars, 2019; Fernández-Molina, Feliu , & Hernando de Larramendi, 2019; Thieux, 2018). As neighbouring states with shared cultural repertoires, overlapping historical narratives, and unresolved geopolitical tensions, Algeria and Morocco have increasingly projected their competition into the symbolic domain. Disputes over the ownership and representation of couscous, caftan traditions, and raï music are not isolated cultural quarrels but extensions of a deeper struggle over regional leadership, historical legitimacy, and international recognition. These contests unfold within transnational arenas, heritage conventions, diplomatic forums, and global media, where cultural narratives are formalised, authorised, and

converted into symbolic advantage. The case is neither exceptional nor merely illustrative: it reveals how post-colonial states engage in status competition under conditions of constrained material power, a dynamic with relevance far beyond the Maghreb.

Existing scholarship provides important but incomplete tools for analysing this process. Constructivist and post-structural approaches have highlighted the role of identity, discourse, and recognition in world politics, while post-colonial studies have exposed the enduring hierarchies embedded in global knowledge and cultural regimes. However, these literatures rarely converge on a sustained analysis of how heritage governance functions as a geopolitical mechanism. Heritage studies, for their part, often prioritise questions of authenticity, preservation, and cultural rights, paying insufficient attention to interstate rivalry and power asymmetries (Smith, 2006; Harrison, 2013). As a result, the politicisation of intangible heritage remains undertheorised within IR, despite its growing salience in diplomatic conflict and symbolic competition.

This article intervenes in this gap by conceptualising intangible heritage as a form of geopolitical capital produced through the interaction of three elements: state strategy, international institutional mediation, and post-colonial struggles over recognition. It argues that heritage claims become geopolitically effective not simply through assertion, but through their successful translation into internationally legible narratives that resonate with dominant norms of authenticity, universality, and civilisation. In this sense, institutions such as UNESCO do not merely arbitrate cultural disputes; they structure the symbolic economy within which recognition is granted, contested, and hierarchically distributed. Heritage regimes thus function as arenas of power rather than neutral custodians of cultural diversity (Debarbieux, Bortolotto, Munz, & Raziano, 2023).

The article addresses the following research questions: Under what conditions does intangible cultural heritage become a source of geopolitical capital in interstate rivalry? How do states strategically mobilise heritage narratives to secure symbolic hegemony within international institutions? And how do post-colonial power asymmetries shape the outcomes of these symbolic struggles? By answering these questions, the article advances a relational understanding of culture and power that moves beyond descriptive accounts of cultural diplomacy and situates heritage conflicts within the core concerns of International Relations theory.

Methodologically, the article adopts a qualitative, interpretive approach combining discourse analysis of official statements, heritage nomination files, and diplomatic narratives with contextual analysis of institutional practices surrounding heritage recognition. The focus is not on adjudicating cultural "authenticity" but on analysing how claims are framed, authorised, and politicised within global governance structures.

By foregrounding intangible heritage as a site of geopolitical contestation, this article contributes to broader debates on symbolic power, status competition, and post-colonial order in international politics. It demonstrates that cultural practices, far from being residual or apolitical, constitute a critical terrain through which states negotiate legitimacy, hierarchy, and influence in the contemporary international system.

Theoretical Framework: Intangible Heritage as Geopolitical Capital

The study of culture in international politics has often been marginal, treated either as a soft power instrument or as an anthropological curiosity, leaving the strategic implications of intangible heritage under-theorized (Lapid, 1996). This framework asserts that intangible cultural heritage constitutes a form of geopolitical capital, a relational and hierarchical resource through which states accrue symbolic authority, recognition, and status in the international arena. Unlike soft power, which relies on attraction, or conventional cultural diplomacy, which presumes the neutral circulation of cultural artifacts, geopolitical capital is produced, contested, and operationalized through structured interactions among historical legacies, institutional mediation, and state-society agency, producing observable hierarchies of legitimacy and authority (Cull, 2008). In the Maghreb, this framework enables an understanding of how Algeria and Morocco convert shared cultural repertoires into instruments of regional influence while negotiating post-colonial inequalities in recognition and power.

This distinction should not be read as a matter of degree but of kind. Soft power, in Nye's formulation, denotes an actor's capacity to secure preferred outcomes through attraction, persuasion, or identification rather than coercion or inducement (Nye, 2004); it describes a mode of influence available in principle to any actor possessing appealing attributes. Geopolitical capital, by contrast, denotes the strategically accumulated value that a cultural asset acquires once its recognition can be mobilised within interstate competition to yield symbolic recognition, status, legitimacy, or diplomatic leverage. Geopolitical capital thus presupposes attraction but is not reducible to it: it is the convertibility of recognition into rivalry-specific advantage that distinguishes the two concepts.

Cultural recognition does not automatically constitute geopolitical capital. It acquires this character only once recognition is institutionalised or politically articulated, tied to claims of authenticity, heritage, or identity, acknowledged beyond the domestic sphere, and actively mobilised within an interstate competitive setting. Absent these conditions, international appreciation of a cultural practice remains an instance of attraction, however consequential domestically. It is this conjunction recognition combined with strategic mobilisation within rivalry, that converts cultural attractiveness into a resource capable of generating symbolic, status, and geopolitical advantage, as the cases below demonstrate.

Post-colonial theory provides the structural lens for interpreting these dynamics, emphasizing that colonial legacies continue to shape the circulation, legitimacy, and authority of cultural practices. Following (Quijano, 2000)'s articulation of the coloniality of power and knowledge, French colonial administration created enduring epistemic hierarchies that privilege certain narratives while marginalizing others. In Algeria, settler colonial centralization produced a bureaucratized cultural apparatus capable of monopolizing narrative authority, whereas Morocco's protectorate experience maintained a degree of elite-mediated pluralism (Burke III, 2014), enabling hybridized claims. These asymmetries illustrate that heritage is simultaneously a resource and a field of structured inequality: the capacity to translate cultural claims into internationally legible authority is neither uniform nor incidental but conditioned by the sedimented effects of colonial power.

Bourdieu's notion of symbolic capital operationalizes these insights, demonstrating how recognition, legitimacy, and authority are accumulated and deployed within social and political fields (Swartz , 1997). When transposed to international politics, intangible heritage becomes symbolic capital when institutional validation such as UNESCO inscription, festival recognition, or formal diplomatic acknowledgment translates into geopolitical advantage. UNESCO recognition of couscous, raï music, or caftan traditions conveys not only cultural authenticity but also historical primacy, regional leadership, and moral authority, establishing hierarchical differentiation among competing states. Such mechanisms make the possession and projection of heritage materially consequential for interstate competition, linking cultural valuation to status, leverage, and legitimacy.

The framework further integrates Gramscian understandings of hegemony and narrative control, illustrating that power operates not solely through coercion but by structuring norms, consent, and symbolic hierarchies (Cox, 1983; Femia, 2009). States actively shape the discursive field by selecting, codifying, and promoting particular practices as authentic, thereby asserting moral and historical authority (Foucault, 1991). Yet hybrid identities produced through diasporic circulation, youth innovation, and transnational engagement complicate this picture, creating contested spaces in which state narratives are negotiated, resisted, or reinterpreted (Bhabha, 1994; Hall, 1990). Heritage thus functions as both an instrument of hegemony and a site of sociopolitical contestation, exemplifying the interplay of structure and agency in the construction of symbolic power.

To operationalize this relational framework, three interconnected dimensions are analytically emphasized. First, institutional mediation converts domestic cultural practice into internationally recognized authority, measurable through nomination outcomes, inscription success, awards, and formal acknowledgment in transnational forums. Second, state strategic deployment captures how governments mobilize heritage to assert authenticity, primacy, and moral authority, observable in official discourse, festival programming, diplomatic engagements, and media campaigns. Third, hybrid reception and contestation reveals how diasporic networks, youth participation, and digital platforms mediate and negotiate state narratives, demonstrating that symbolic authority emerges through interaction rather than unilateral decree. These dimensions collectively specify the causal pathways by which intangible heritage is transformed into geopolitical capital, clarifying the mechanisms linking cultural practice to interstate influence, regional legitimacy, and the structuring of post-colonial hierarchies.

This theoretical integration extends the conceptual and analytical repertoire of international relations in three ways. By distinguishing geopolitical capital from conventional soft power, it foregrounds hierarchical, institutionally mediated recognition as a central axis of cultural influence. By explicating the mechanisms through which heritage is mobilized, contested, and validated, it situates culture at the heart of strategic competition rather than treating it as peripheral ornamentation. Finally, by embedding post-colonial structural analysis, symbolic capital, and Gramscian insights on hegemony within a multi-level actor framework, the model captures the relational, contested, and historically grounded nature of heritage disputes, offering a transferable lens for understanding symbolic contests in other post-colonial regions beyond the Maghreb.

Historical and Political Context: Algeria–Morocco Heritage Rivalry

The geopolitical contestation over intangible cultural heritage between Algeria and Morocco can only be understood when situated within a historically layered configuration of colonial epistemic hierarchies, post-independence state-building trajectories, and international institutional mediation that together structure the unequal production and circulation of symbolic authority in the Maghreb (Patricia, 1995; Ageron, 1991; Bennoune, 1988; Ruedy, 2005; Hoisington, 1995; Wyrtzen, 2015). Although the two states draw upon largely overlapping cultural repertoires ranging from shared culinary practices and dress traditions to musical forms rooted in common social histories their capacity to mobilize these repertoires as geopolitical capital has been profoundly shaped by divergent colonial experiences. French colonial rule in Algeria, characterized by settler colonialism, administrative centralization, and epistemic assimilation, produced a highly bureaucratized cultural field in which legitimacy was tightly coupled to state authority, linguistic standardization, and legal codification (Ruedy, 2005; Aissaoui & Eldridge, 2017). By contrast, Morocco's protectorate regime preserved a degree of institutional pluralism by maintaining the monarchy as an intermediary between colonial power and local society, allowing cultural authority to remain distributed across royal patronage, regional elites, and religious institutions (Munson, 1993; Hammoudi, 1997). These contrasting colonial configurations generated enduring asymmetries in post-colonial cultural governance, with Algeria inheriting a centralized apparatus capable of monopolizing narrative production yet constrained in flexibility, and Morocco retaining a hybrid system able to articulate multi-layered and adaptive cultural claims across domestic and international arenas.

In the post-independence period, these structural legacies were further entrenched through divergent state-building strategies that instrumentalized culture as a means of consolidating sovereignty and legitimacy (Pasler, 2022). Algeria's revolutionary regime pursued an assertive project of Arabisation and national homogenization, deploying culture as a corrective to colonial epistemic domination while simultaneously centralizing control over historical narration and heritage policy. This strategy enabled the state to assert authoritative claims over selected cultural forms such as raï music or couscous but also subjected these claims to bureaucratic mediation and political prioritization, limiting their responsiveness to transnational cultural dynamics. Morocco, by contrast, adopted a strategy of managed pluralism in which Arab, Amazigh, and Andalusian references were selectively mobilized to construct a flexible national narrative compatible with both domestic cohesion and external recognition (Mkinsi, 2025). The monarchy's central role in this process endowed Moroccan cultural diplomacy with a capacity for symbolic brokerage, allowing heritage to circulate through elite networks, international festivals, and global cultural markets with fewer institutional bottlenecks (Wüst & Nicolai, 2022). As a result, while Algeria's approach tends to produce concentrated and internally coherent claims of cultural ownership, Morocco's strategy facilitates broader transnational resonance and visibility, even when historical provenance remains contested.

International institutions most notably UNESCO constitute a critical mediating arena in which these asymmetries are converted into differentiated geopolitical outcomes (Ortiz & Jiménez de Madariaga, 2022). Far from operating as neutral mechanisms of cultural preservation, such institutions function as sites of symbolic arbitration where domestic

cultural practices are transformed into internationally legible markers of authority and legitimacy (Lenzerini, 2011). Successful inscription on UNESCO heritage lists confers more than recognition; it establishes hierarchies of authenticity and historical primacy that can be leveraged in diplomatic discourse and regional competition (Eichler, 2021). Algeria and Morocco thus engage in strategic nomination practices, lobbying efforts, and cultural diplomacy campaigns aimed at securing institutional validation that extends their cultural claims beyond national borders. The effectiveness of these strategies varies according to institutional capacity, narrative coherence, and the ability to align domestic representations with UNESCO's epistemic frameworks, thereby rendering heritage recognition an observable and operationalizable dimension of geopolitical capital (Meissner, 2025).

Within the broader geopolitical context of the Maghreb marked by enduring rivalry over regional leadership, unresolved border disputes, and competing claims to post-colonial legitimacy intangible heritage emerges as a low-cost yet high-visibility instrument of power projection. Culinary practices, dress traditions, and musical forms become arenas in which states seek to naturalize national narratives, marginalize rival claims, and structure international perceptions of authenticity and continuity (Lengel, Mechehoud , & Victoria A., 2022). Heritage disputes are therefore not ancillary cultural disagreements but integral components of symbolic competition, intersecting with material power and diplomatic positioning. Taken together, these historical, institutional, and political dynamics establish the structural preconditions through which intangible heritage is transformed into geopolitical capital, providing the necessary analytical bridge between the theoretical framework outlined earlier and the empirical case studies that follow. The Algeria–Morocco heritage rivalry thus appears not as an episodic conflict over symbols, but as a historically sedimented struggle over authority, recognition, and the power to define the cultural grammar of the Maghreb.

Competing Pathways to Geopolitical Capital

The contestation over intangible cultural heritage between Algeria and Morocco reveals with particular clarity how culture operates as a form of geopolitical capital within post-colonial rivalries (Iriye, 1979; Mazarr, 1996). Far from constituting a marginal or symbolic domain, heritage functions as a structured field through which states seek to consolidate legitimacy, assert historical authority, and position themselves within regional and international hierarchies of recognition (Smith, 2006). By examining three emblematic domains couscous, caftan, and raï music this section operationalizes the theoretical framework developed earlier, demonstrating how heritage is mobilized through institutional channels, mediated by transnational networks, and negotiated by a multiplicity of actors whose interventions shape the production of symbolic power.

Couscous, a culinary practice shared across North Africa, exemplifies how ostensibly common cultural forms become strategic instruments of geopolitical differentiation (Durmelat, 2017). The 2020 inscription of couscous on UNESCO's representative list of the intangible cultural heritage of humanity achieved through a joint nomination by Algeria, Mauritania, Morocco, and Tunisia (UNESCO, 2020), was nonetheless framed domestically in Algeria through a state-centered narrative emphasizing rural traditions, communal practices, and national continuity (Le Monde, 2020). This approach reflects a

broader strategy in which centralized bureaucratic authority is deployed to convert cultural practices into internationally sanctioned legitimacy. This process was carried out through official heritage and cultural administration channels responsible for compiling the nomination file, articulating couscous's significance in state-sanctioned terms of rural tradition and national continuity, and representing the claim before UNESCO's evaluating bodies (El Moudjahid, 2020). Civil-society, private-sector, or diasporic actors are notably absent from this account, reinforcing the reading of couscous internationalisation as a near-exclusively state-directed undertaking, in contrast to the more diffuse trajectories examined below. Morocco, by contrast, has pursued a more distributed strategy, promoting regional variations of couscous through royal patronage, international culinary festivals, and tourism-oriented cultural diplomacy (Dines, 2021). The divergence between these approaches underscores how institutional configurations condition the effectiveness of heritage claims: Algeria's centralized nomination process yields strong domestic legitimization but limited flexibility in transnational cultural markets, whereas Morocco's hybridized deployment of state, monarchical, and private actors enhances international visibility and narrative adaptability. In this context, geopolitical capital emerges not simply from recognition itself, but from the capacity to translate recognition into sustained symbolic authority across multiple arenas.

The caftan further illustrates how heritage operates simultaneously as symbolic capital and diplomatic currency. Morocco has positioned the caftan as a globalized cultural brand, embedding it within international fashion circuits, high-profile exhibitions, and UNESCO-oriented heritage dossiers (Jansen, 2016). This strategy aligns with a broader mode of governance in which cultural production is closely integrated into elite networks and diplomatic projection (Africa Intelligence, 2026). This internationalization has been carried less by formal diplomatic directive than by a loosely coordinated constellation of designers, fashion houses, museum exhibitions, and international media coverage that circulate the caftan as a recognisable aesthetic object in its own right (Jansen, 2016; Kozlowski, 2025). These actors operate with considerable autonomy from ministerial oversight, even as their activity is subsequently acknowledged, and at points discreetly supported, by state-adjacent influence campaigns directed at heritage-recognition bodies (Africa Intelligence, 2026), indicating that the state benefits from, rather than originates, much of this circulation. Algeria, by contrast, emphasizes the caftan's regional diversity and artisanal specificity, incorporating it into a pluralized national narrative that foregrounds internal heterogeneity. The comparative outcome of these strategies highlights the role of actor heterogeneity in shaping geopolitical capital. Morocco's multi-level engagement linking state institutions, royal networks, designers, and international markets generates high transnational resonance (Kozlowski, 2025), while Algeria's more centralized approach secures domestic symbolic coherence but struggles to achieve comparable international traction. The caftan thus demonstrates that heritage claims are not evaluated solely on historical grounds, but are conditioned by the institutional and social architectures through which they are promoted (Delmas, 2025).

Raï music introduces a different modality of heritage-based power, one in which youth culture, diaspora networks, and digital platforms play a decisive role (Schade-Poulsen, 1999; Swedenburg, 2015). Originating in Algeria's Oran region, raï has been framed by Algerian authorities as a national cultural export, yet its global circulation has been shaped predominantly by non-state actors operating in hybrid transnational spaces

(Langlois, Music and politics in North Africa, 2009; Jones, 2013). Diasporic musicians, online platforms, and informal cultural circuits have transformed raï into a fluid and adaptive form of symbolic capital, often beyond the direct control of state institutions (Suzanne, 2007). Morocco's engagement with raï, through festivals, artistic collaborations, and digital dissemination reflects an effort to integrate elements of this heritage into a Moroccan-centered narrative of cultural openness and hybridity (Bentahilaa & Davies, 2002). Raï's trajectory cannot be attributed to any single level of agency: it combines Algerian state framing of the genre as national patrimony, diasporic production and circulation concentrated in France and other host countries, digital platforms operating largely outside either state's cultural institutions, and transnational festival and collaboration circuits that further diffuse authorship across Algerian, Moroccan, and diasporic actors alike (Langlois, 2009; Suzanne, 2007). No single one of these levels' alone accounts for raï's international profile, distinguishing it from the more centrally anchored trajectory of couscous and the state-adjacent but non-state-originated circulation of the caftan. Unlike couscous or caftan, raï demonstrates that geopolitical capital can be generated through socially negotiated and digitally mediated processes, where symbolic authority is contingent, contested, and subject to rapid reconfiguration. This case challenges state-centric assumptions by showing that cultural power may be amplified or undermined by actors whose practices escape formal institutional regulation.

Taken together, these cases reveal several underlying mechanisms through which intangible heritage is transformed into geopolitical capital. International institutions such as UNESCO and global cultural markets act as mediators that convert domestic practices into recognized authority, yet they do so unevenly, privileging certain modes of representation and institutional capacity (Wiktor-Mach, 2019; Bendix, Eggert, & Peselmann, 2012). Actor heterogeneity proves decisive, as states, elites, civil society, and diasporic communities participate differentially in shaping which narratives gain legitimacy. Finally, the nature of the cultural form itself conditions its strategic impact: culinary practices are highly codified and institutionally regulated (Chapple-Sokol , 2013; Demirağ, Turgut, & Ongun, 2025), dress benefits from visual diplomacy and elite endorsement (Dubé-Senécal & Goubau, 2023), while music thrives in hybridized and digitally mediated spaces (Shannon, 2024). These dynamics confirm that intangible heritage constitutes a contested terrain of post-colonial power, where historical legacies, policy strategies, and multi-level social engagement intersect to produce observable shifts in symbolic hierarchy and geopolitical positioning within the Maghreb. Across the three cases, these mechanisms crystallise into distinct pathways to geopolitical capital: couscous's international recognition has proceeded through predominantly centralised, state-led inscription; the caftans through diffuse yet publicly visible non-state agency that the state subsequently endorses; and raï's through the sustained interaction of state, market, diasporic, and digital actors across multiple levels at once.

From Cultural Narratives to Geopolitical Capital

The foregoing analysis demonstrates that intangible cultural heritage in the Maghreb functions not as a residual domain of identity politics but as a structured and strategically mobilized form of geopolitical capital through which Algeria and Morocco seek to

accumulate symbolic authority, consolidate domestic legitimacy, and recalibrate their relative standing within regional and international hierarchies (Gutron & Skounti, 2018). The cases of couscous, caftan, and raï music reveal that heritage becomes geopolitically operative only when embedded within institutional circuits of recognition, discursive regimes of narrative control, and multi-level actor constellations that mediate its circulation and valuation (Hamri, 2025; Yelles, 2000). International recognition mechanisms, most notably UNESCO do not merely validate pre-existing cultural practices; they actively convert localized social forms into transnational markers of authority, thereby producing a hierarchy of legitimacy that can be strategically appropriated by states. In this regard, Algeria's predominantly centralized and bureaucratic approach to heritage nomination privileges internal cohesion and sovereign authorship over culture, reinforcing a domestically anchored legitimacy that aligns with its post-revolutionary state narrative, while Morocco's more hybridized configuration combining state institutions, monarchical symbolism, elite networks, and market-oriented cultural diplomacy enhances external visibility and diplomatic reach, particularly in arenas where symbolic capital is accumulated through circulation rather than inscription alone (Jebari, 2024).

Crucially, heritage-derived geopolitical capital is not generated solely through formal institutional success but through the capacity to impose and stabilize authoritative narratives about origin, authenticity, and ownership (Van de Port & Meyer, 2018). Narrative control operates as a mechanism of power insofar as it structures recognition asymmetrically, enabling some actors to define the cultural field (Bourdieu, 1993) while relegating others to derivative or secondary positions (Bendix R. , 1997). Algeria's framing of raï as an indigenous cultural export rooted in specific social histories exemplifies an inward-facing consolidation strategy that prioritizes narrative sovereignty and national coherence (Boukrouh & Kessab, 2010; Langlois, 2017), whereas Morocco's transnational branding of the caftan illustrates a more outward-oriented logic in which heritage is leveraged as a vehicle for regional soft dominance and global cultural insertion. Yet these strategies remain inherently unstable, as symbolic authority is increasingly co-produced by non-state actors diasporic communities, youth cultures, digital platforms, and transnational networks whose practices hybridize, reinterpret, and sometimes subvert official narratives. Raï music, in particular, demonstrates that cultural power in the contemporary Maghreb cannot be monopolized by state institutions (Cremades, Lorenzo, & Ruxand, 2015); instead, it emerges through contested and negotiated processes in which digital circulation, audience reception, and cross-border collaboration generate alternative forms of legitimacy that may reinforce or undermine official claims (Llamas, 2002).

Comparative analysis across heritage types further reveals that geopolitical capital is neither uniform nor universally transferable (Ashworth, Graham , & Tunbridge, 2007). Culinary heritage such as couscous derives its political efficacy primarily from codification, ritualization, and institutional endorsement, rendering it highly dependent on formal recognition regimes and state-led inscription strategies. Dress traditions like the caftan, by contrast, benefit from visual immediacy, market circulation, and elite mediation, allowing them to accrue symbolic value through fashion diplomacy and global cultural economies rather than through institutional certification alone. Musical heritage such as raï operates within an even more fluid terrain, where authority is generated

through affective resonance, youth identification, and diasporic diffusion, making it less susceptible to direct state control and more vulnerable to reinterpretation (Davies & Bentahila, 2006). These variations underscore that heritage becomes geopolitically consequential only when its intrinsic properties align with the institutional and social infrastructures that enable recognition, circulation, and narrative stabilization.

Theoretically, this analysis advances scholarship beyond conventional soft power frameworks by conceptualizing cultural influence as a measurable, contested, and institutionally mediated form of capital rather than as a diffuse resource of attraction. By foregrounding post-colonial epistemic hierarchies, the study demonstrates how contemporary heritage disputes are embedded in longer historical struggles over knowledge production, recognition, and authority, revealing continuity rather than rupture between colonial classifications and present-day cultural geopolitics (Wyrtzen, 2017). Moreover, by integrating state actors with civil society, diasporic communities, and digitally networked youth, the analysis challenges state-centric models of cultural power and shows that symbolic authority in the Maghreb is assembled through multi-level interactions rather than imposed unilaterally. At the regional level, the Algeria–Morocco rivalry thus extends beyond territorial or diplomatic confrontation into a persistent, low-intensity struggle over symbolic legitimacy, where heritage functions as both a resource and a battleground (Liu, Chen, & Chen, 2025). International institutions such as UNESCO emerge not as neutral arbiters but as structuring environments that privilege certain narratives and strategies over others (Liuzza, 2021), thereby shaping the distribution of symbolic capital across the region (Harrison, 2013). Across the cases examined, the geopolitical significance of intangible heritage derives not simply from cultural attractiveness or international visibility, but from the ways in which cultural recognition is mobilised, institutionalised, and converted into symbolic, status, and geopolitical advantage within the Algeria–Morocco rivalry: visibility creates the opportunity for such advantage, but recognition acquires geopolitical value only once it is claimed, narrated, and defended by interested parties.

At the same time, this analysis remains subject to important limitations. The absence of systematic quantitative indicators constrains the ability to fully measure variations in visibility, reception, and impact, while the contemporary temporal focus may obscure longer-term shifts in cultural geopolitics. Additionally, although the Algeria–Morocco case provides a particularly dense illustration of post-colonial symbolic rivalry, its specific institutional and historical configurations may limit direct generalization (Young, 2012). Nonetheless, the mechanisms identified recognition, narrative authority, and actor-mediated hybridization constitute a transferable analytical framework capable of illuminating cultural competition in other post-colonial settings. Taken together, the findings establish intangible heritage as a multidimensional and contingent form of geopolitical capital, whose effectiveness depends not on cultural authenticity alone but on the capacity to navigate institutional regimes, mobilize heterogeneous actors, and stabilize authoritative narratives within an increasingly fragmented symbolic order (Eichler, 2021).

Conclusion

This study demonstrates that intangible cultural heritage in the Maghreb operates as a central instrument of geopolitical strategy, functioning as a form of geopolitical capital that is relational, contested, and deeply embedded in historical and institutional structures. By examining couscous, caftan, and raï music, the analysis shows that heritage is mobilized strategically to consolidate domestic legitimacy, assert regional influence, and secure symbolic recognition within international institutions. These dynamics reveal that cultural authority is neither spontaneous nor neutral but emerges from complex interactions among colonial legacies, state policies, and multi-level actor engagement, including civil society, diasporic networks, and youth-mediated digital platforms, all of which amplify, negotiate, or challenge official narratives.

The findings clarify the mechanisms through which intangible heritage translates into geopolitical influence. First, institutional recognition, exemplified by UNESCO nominations and festival endorsements, converts domestic cultural practices into internationally legible authority, providing measurable leverage in diplomatic and symbolic arenas. Second, narrative control enables states to assert primacy over historical and cultural discourses, consolidating internal cohesion while projecting legitimacy across borders. Third, actor-mediated hybridization demonstrates that symbolic authority is co-produced and contingent: diasporic communities, digital actors, and youth networks can reinforce, reinterpret, or contest state-led claims, highlighting the negotiated nature of cultural power.

Comparative analysis across heritage types underscores the differentiated operationalization of geopolitical capital. Culinary heritage, such as couscous, is highly codified and institutionalized, yielding concentrated domestic legitimacy but variable transnational impact; dress, exemplified by the caftan, benefits from hybridized actor engagement and visual diplomacy, achieving wider international visibility; musical heritage, as illustrated by raï, thrives in digital and diasporic spaces, where youth-mediated hybridization amplifies influence independently of formal institutional endorsement. These patterns reveal that the effectiveness of cultural diplomacy is inherently contingent upon the interplay between the intrinsic properties of heritage forms, the structures of institutional mediation, and the agency of multiple social actors.

Ultimately, the study establishes that Algeria–Morocco heritage disputes are not peripheral cultural disagreements but central arenas of symbolic competition, where historical legacies, state strategies, and multi-level social mediation intersect to produce measurable shifts in regional influence and recognition. By framing intangible heritage as a contested and operationalizable form of geopolitical capital, the research provides a theoretically robust lens for understanding post-colonial power dynamics, the negotiation of identity, and the ways in which culture functions as both a domestic and transnational instrument of strategic authority.

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OS DIREITOS DOS MAIS VULNERÁVEIS EM SITUAÇÕES DE EMERGÊNCIA: A SUA PROTEÇÃO NA REPÚBLICA CENTRO-AFRICANA

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Resumo

A obrigatoriedade ética de proteger os mais vulneráveis tem sido abordada no âmbito dos Direitos Humanos, principalmente devido ao aumento dos conflitos no mundo, nos quais os civis são as principais vítimas. Apesar da existência de importantes instrumentos internacionais de Direitos Humanos, a proteção efetiva permanece distante do reconhecimento normativo dos direitos. O artigo analisa como os instrumentos nacionais e internacionais podem contribuir para a proteção das pessoas em situação de vulnerabilidade. Para esse efeito, adota uma abordagem qualitativa e interpretativa assente na análise documental e no estudo de caso da República Centro-Africana. O estudo articula o percurso de afirmação do ideal humanitário com os instrumentos de proteção e considera quatro dimensões: legitimidade, capacidade operacional, coordenação e responsabilização. O caso analisado evidencia que a existência de normas, mandatos e atores internacionais é indispensável, mas insuficiente para assegurar uma proteção eficaz perante a fragilidade institucional, autoridade fragmentada, limitações operacionais e dificuldades de coordenação. Conclui-se que a proteção depende da articulação entre os níveis local, nacional e internacional e da avaliação dos resultados concretos junto das populações. O artigo pretende contribuir, assim, para os debates sobre a proteção de civis e a governança global, reafirmando a dignidade humana como fundamento e critério das ações nacionais e internacionais.

Palavras-Chave

Direitos Humanos, vulneráveis, proteção, humanitário, República Centro-Africana.

Abstract

The ethical obligation to protect the most vulnerable has been addressed within the scope of Human Rights, mainly due to the increase in conflicts worldwide, in which civilians are the primary victims. Despite the existence of important international Human Rights instruments, effective protection remains distant from the normative recognition of rights. The article

analyses how national and international instruments can contribute to the protection of people in vulnerable situations. To this end, it adopts a qualitative and interpretative approach based on document analysis and a case study of the Central African Republic. The study connects the historical development of the humanitarian ideal with existing protection instruments and considers four dimensions: legitimacy, operational capacity, coordination, and accountability. The case analysed demonstrates that the existence of norms, mandates, and international actors is indispensable but insufficient to ensure effective protection in the face of institutional fragility, fragmented authority, operational limitations, and coordination difficulties. It concludes that protection depends on coordination across local, national, and international levels and on assessing tangible results for affected populations. The article thus contributes to debates on civilian protection and global governance, reaffirming human dignity as the foundation and criterion of national and international actions.

Keywords

Human Rights, vulnerable, protection, humanitarian, Central African Republic.

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OS DIREITOS DOS MAIS VULNERÁVEIS EM SITUAÇÕES DE EMERGÊNCIA: A SUA PROTEÇÃO NA REPÚBLICA CENTRO-AFRICANA

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Introdução

A obrigatoriedade ética de proteger as pessoas em situação de maior vulnerabilidade tem adquirido particular relevância no âmbito dos Direitos Humanos e das Relações Internacionais devido ao aumento e à persistência dos conflitos armados, nos quais as populações civis são as principais vítimas. Mulheres, crianças, idosos, pessoas com deficiência, deslocados e minorias encontram-se frequentemente mais expostos à violência, à privação de bens essenciais e à limitação do acesso à proteção. Embora a Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos, as Convenções de Genebra de 1949 e os seus Protocolos Adicionais de 1977 tenham consolidado importantes mecanismos normativos, existe, ainda, uma distância significativa entre o reconhecimento formal dos direitos e a sua proteção efetiva.

Neste contexto, o presente artigo procura responder à seguinte questão: de que modo os instrumentos nacionais e internacionais de proteção podem contribuir para uma proteção mais efetiva das pessoas em situação de vulnerabilidade em contextos de conflito armado? Sustenta-se que a existência de normas e mandatos internacionais constitui uma condição indispensável, mas insuficiente, para assegurar a proteção. A sua eficácia depende igualmente da legitimidade, da capacidade operacional, da coordenação e da responsabilização dos diferentes atores nacionais e internacionais.

Para analisar esta problemática, o artigo recupera o percurso de afirmação do ideal humanitário, identifica os principais obstáculos e instrumentos de proteção e estuda o caso da República Centro-Africana. A escolha deste particular contexto permite refletir sobre a persistência da vulnerabilidade num território marcado por um conflito armado prolongado, pela limitada capacidade do Estado e pela presença internacional significativa. O artigo pretende, desta forma, contribuir para os debates das Relações Internacionais sobre proteção de civis, intervenção humanitária, operações internacionais de paz e governança global, tendo como principal fundamento o valor ético da dignidade humana.

Metodologia

O artigo adota uma abordagem qualitativa, interpretativa e exploratória, assente num estudo de caso. A investigação baseia-se na análise documental da literatura académica, de instrumentos jurídicos internacionais, de resoluções e documentos das Nações Unidas, bem como de outras fontes relevantes relativas à proteção dos Direitos Humanos, ao Direito Internacional Humanitário, à governança global e à intervenção internacional na República Centro-Africana.

O contexto particular da República Centro-Africana foi selecionado por se constituir particularmente relevante para os objetivos deste artigo. O país combina um conflito armado prolongado, fragilidade institucional, atuação de diversos grupos armados e a presença de múltiplos atores internacionais, incluindo a Missão Multidimensional Integrada das Nações Unidas para a Estabilização da República Centro-Africana (MINUSCA), cujo mandato atribui prioridade à proteção dos civis. Estas características permitem analisar a distância entre os compromissos normativos de proteção e os seus resultados concretos junto das populações.

O estudo pretende identificar e interpretar os fatores que condicionam a transição da proteção normativa para a proteção efetiva, em detrimento das relações causais por meio de análises estatísticas. A análise incide sobretudo no período iniciado com a nova fase do conflito, em 2012, e com a criação da MINUSCA, em 2014, considerando a evolução subsequente da intervenção internacional e dos desafios de proteção dos civis. A análise concentra-se em quatro dimensões: legitimidade, capacidade operacional, coordenação e responsabilização. Legitimidade refere-se ao mandato e aceitação; a capacidade alude aos recursos e respostas às ameaças; a coordenação cinge-se à articulação entre atores; e a responsabilização à justiça, à prestação de contas e à avaliação de resultados.

A principal limitação da investigação decorre da sua natureza documental, uma vez que não inclui entrevistas, inquéritos ou observação direta sistemática das perceções das populações afetadas. Ainda assim, a análise do caso da República Centro-Africana permite extrair ilações relevantes para os debates sobre proteção de civis, governança global e operações internacionais de paz.

Sucessos e obstáculos na afirmação do ideal humanitário

O ideal é um guia da conduta humana num determinado caminho que leva ao limite a separação entre fim e meio. Desta forma, a bondade e consideração dos fins que se pretendem prevalecem sobre os meios e a capacidade de concretização desses mesmos fins[1]. Nesta senda, a procura do ideal humanitário concentra-se na sua finalidade, predominando sobre os meios e capacidade de os alcançar num determinado tempo e espaço. Ao longo do tempo, os sucessos sucederam-se e traçaram um percurso que nos permitiu chegar aos valores[2] humanistas de hoje, que implicam os meios além dos fins.

[1] Calabrò, G. 1997, p.265
[2] De acordo com Calabrò (1997, p. 266) o valor implica a consideração do meio e do fim. Deve exprimir a relação fundamental entre o fim e o meio, pelo que deve sempre relacionar o meio e o fim numa relação interdependente.

O ideal humanitário, intimamente ligado à dignidade humana, tem percorrido o tempo e a História em diferentes dimensões, referindo-se a um fim que guia a conduta humana. De acordo com o que refere Maria do Céu Patrão Neves, em *Contemporary Threats to Human Dignity: Its Interfaces and Erosion*[3], a dignidade humana enquadra-se no respeito incondicional, intrínseco e inalienável de cada um e todos os seres humanos. É ao homem, na sua livre escolha, que cabe o estabelecimento dos valores e das premissas de futuro[4]. Hans Jonas, em *Princípio Responsabilidade*[5], defende que o futuro da humanidade é um dever coletivo de uma civilização que se tornou capaz da destruição do seu meio e da sua natureza. De facto, o poder e o seu exercício incluem o dever e a responsabilidade perante aqueles que representa. Assim, os atores nacionais e internacionais governamentais (ou não) devem exercer a sua responsabilidade perante os mais vulneráveis, tendo em conta a sua condição de fragilidade contextual exacerbada pelo conflito. Portanto, procura-se a esperança ao invés do medo para os mais vulneráveis[6]. Este capítulo assume a proposta de expor a construção humanista, premissa da condução à finalidade da valorização humana.

Sucessos humanistas na defesa e promoção da dignidade humana

Ao longo da história da humanidade, em uniformidade biológica e diferença na singularidade de cada um, sucederam-se avanços racionais na procura da dignidade humana. A palavra dignidade tem a sua origem na palavra latina *dignitas*, que significa ser digno de honra, referindo-se originalmente a uma posição social ou política proeminente. O seu significado essencial é ser merecedor de respeito. A evolução histórica do termo traça um caminho e evolução de significado de distinção e exclusão para um de inclusão e de igualdade. A dignidade ganhou uma dimensão ontológica a par de uma fundação metafísica que lhe garante a universalidade[7].

Nos séculos XVI e XVII, com a Escola Ibérica da Paz, encontram-se progressos nos princípios filosóficos e jurídicos que procuram comprometer povos de geografias, civilizações e culturas diferentes. Bartolomé de las Casas recupera a doutrina estoica de Cícero que considera a igualdade de humanidade em todos os homens como seres racionais. Las Casas combateu a ideia de uma civilização sobre as outras e justifica a legítima defesa dos índios contra a violência dos povos conquistadores[8].

Hugo Grócio promoveu a distinção entre o direito natural e o direito positivo das gentes, advogando a existência anterior de uma ordem moral e regras de justiça universais independentes das leis civis. Espinosa trouxe-nos a liberdade de consciência, direito de opinião e expressão. Locke, por sua vez, tem o direito à vida, liberdade e propriedade. Rousseau contribuiu para a luta contra todas as formas de servidão. Montesquieu trouxe-nos o direito natural e a justiça ideal pré-existente às leis escritas que lhe servem de guia[9]. Constituem-se, igualmente como marcos, as declarações da Virgínia com a

[3] Patrão Neves, M. 2021, p. 58
[4] Weber, M. 2001
[5] Jonas, H. 1979, p. 292
[6] Ibidem p. 351
[7] Ibidem pp. 57-58
[8] Estanqueiro Rocha, A. 2014 p. 97
[9] Este percurso de universalização dos direitos encontra-se associado à evolução da sua fundamentação filosófica e à procura de consensos normativos (Estanqueiro Rocha, 2014).

independência dos Estados Unidos, em 1776, bem como a Revolução Francesa, em 1789, sob o lema liberdade, igualdade, fraternidade. Destacamos a fraternidade, no âmbito dos direitos coletivos, pela sua importância na proteção. A origem da palavra fraternidade provém do vocábulo latino *frater* que confere o significado de irmandade no conjunto da humanidade e corresponde à afeição familiar. Desta forma, ganha sentido a palavra proteção como significado do conjunto de atividades coletivas, preventivas, de socorro e assistenciais destinadas a minimizar os impactos de situações que se pretendem de exceção.

A positivação do Direito Internacional Humanitário (DIH) ocorre em 1820 com o Tratado para a Regularização da Guerra[10], entre o Império espanhol e as forças revolucionárias na Colômbia e Venezuela de Simón Bolívar, com o objetivo de proteger os civis afetados pelo conflito armado. São também exemplos: o *Lieber Code*[11] na positivação das leis da guerra civil americana; as Convenções de Haia, em 1899 e 1907; as Convenções de Genebra, em 1949; e os seus Protocolos adicionais de 1977, com particular interesse para o Protocolo Adicional II, no reforço das garantias de proteção conferidas aos civis nos conflitos internos.

No âmbito da divisão dos Direitos Humanos (DH) em gerações, tratados neste trabalho, importa fazer referência aos DH de primeira geração – direitos civis e políticos[12] – que restringem a intervenção do Estado na esfera pessoal de liberdades. Os direitos de segunda geração – direitos sociais e económicos[13] – reclamam o intervencionismo do Estado. E os direitos de terceira geração – direitos coletivos[14]. Apesar do progresso obtido no reforço solidário à proteção dos mais vulneráveis pelas Organizações Intergovernamentais (OI), Organizações Não Governamentais (ONG) e governança, importa fazer uma nova abordagem para garantir o fim à violência, à garantia do respeito pela dignidade humana[15], os direitos das mulheres, das crianças e das minorias que, pela sua condição, estão mais desprotegidas.

A proteção dos mais vulneráveis em conflitos armados: obstáculos e caminhos

A nova ordem mundial e a atual destabilização mundial evidenciam a emergente procura do direito da humanidade à paz e ao desenvolvimento, em especial dos povos mais afetados pelos conflitos. Neste contexto, as crises humanitárias aumentam em número e severidade, pois os princípios por si só não bastam e urge a sua operacionalização.

Nos conflitos armados, as populações civis são aquelas que mais sofrem por via da constante beligerância no espaço que ocupam, onde a troca de controlo pelos atores armados é imposta pela força. No meio estão os mais vulneráveis, limitados na sua

[10] *Biblioteca Virtual Miguel Cervantes, Tratado de Regularización de Guerra*, https://www.cervantesvirtual.com/obra-visor/tratado-de-regularizacion-de-guerra-1820--0/html/ff86d340-82b1-11df-acc7-002185ce6064_2.html
[11] *Yale Law School, Instructions for the Government of Armies of the Unites Stats in the Field*, https://avalon.law.yale.edu/19th_century/lieber.asp
[12] Incluem-se os direitos de expressão, associação, religião, propriedade.
[13] Incluem-se os direitos à saúde, ao trabalho, à educação e à segurança social.
[14] Incluem-se os direitos pacifistas, ambientalistas, mulheres, minorias.
[15] Patrão Neves, M. 2021, p.61.

capacidade de autoproteção e no acesso a quem os proteja. A violência, o abuso físico e psíquico, o deslocamento forçado, os ataques a crianças, o recrutamento forçado, o rapto, a presença de minas e outros tipos de explosivos e as restrições à justiça constituem sérios riscos à sua integridade.

Nestas circunstâncias, os DH de primeira geração são aqueles que primariamente procuram o respeito pela dignidade humana, pela não discriminação e não estigmatização de qualquer pessoa sob qualquer pretexto. Nenhuma das características particulares define a pessoa, no entanto, todas contribuem para o contexto social onde se inserem e são condição para o desenvolvimento[16]. Nas situações de conflito armado, os não combatentes apresentam especial vulnerabilidade, com particular incidência em crianças, mulheres, idosos e pessoas com deficiência.

Os direitos sociais, culturais e de desenvolvimento do bem-estar da comunidade estão severamente afetados pela agrura imposta pela guerra, subtração de condições e direitos, quer por força da falta de acesso a bens e serviços básicos, quer por força das restrições sociais. Assim, a discriminação imposta, o desrespeito pela liberdade e igualdade condicionam a fraternidade comunitária, onde os mais fracos estão sujeitos, muitas e demasiadas vezes, às suas sortes. A garantia dos direitos de primeira geração está interligada à satisfação dos direitos de segunda geração[17] e de terceira geração, com particular atenção nos conflitos armados onde a irracionalidade grassa.

Instrumentos de proteção dos mais vulneráveis

Os fundamentos éticos e o contexto político social da universalidade dos DH reconhecem a interdependência da ação humanitária, da paz e do desenvolvimento nas situações de conflito armado, onde atores nacionais e internacionais desempenham um papel vital na proteção dos mais vulneráveis. A justiça nacional e global é ferramenta da proteção dos mais vulneráveis e está relacionada com a democracia e os DH, em contextos onde a governança mundial combina o poder formal e informal na procura de soluções no âmbito da proteção. O objetivo deste capítulo é a reflexão sobre a necessidade de operacionalização da justiça para a responsabilização daqueles que violam os DH.

A noção de justiça global

A base da justiça é a igualdade de direitos e deveres para todos e a desigualdade, segundo Hobbes, é definida por contrato. O mesmo refere que se distingue a esfera doméstica da esfera global, no entanto, no último quartel, a justiça doméstica obteve um acentuado alargamento à esfera global. Assim, apesar de não estarem excluídas as obrigações a nível estatal, consideram-se aquelas ligadas a um conjunto mais alargado de possíveis agentes e organizações. Neste debate, os DH são ponto de partida para as discussões sobre a responsabilidade global. A Declaração Universal dos DH inscreve os direitos básicos de todos os seres humanos e, apesar de ser *soft law,* desempenha um papel fundamental no debate das questões de justiça e respeito pelos DH por parte da

[16] Ibidem, p. 60.
[17] Ibidem

comunidade internacional. Acílio Estanqueiro Rocha, em "*Filosofia da Democracia*", refere que o reconhecimento universal dos DH requer que a fundamentação racional seja aceite por via da socialização, da comunicação e posta em prática globalmente[18]. Na questão dos tipos de deveres associados aos DH, defende-se o direito à segurança física a par do direito de subsistência, enquanto direitos básicos[19].

No âmbito da justiça global, a discussão centra-se nas condições para uma conduta justa durante a guerra, *jus in bello*. O princípio da distinção entre os combatentes e não combatentes, nos quais se incluem os mais vulneráveis, impõe a interdição do uso da força contra civis e o princípio da proporcionalidade. Desta forma, a intervenção humanitária, contrariando o princípio da não ingerência[20] nos assuntos internos dos Estados, decorre da decisão de intervir militarmente para pôr termo a violações dos DH. Todavia, paira a sombra do imperialismo e a responsabilização dos intervenientes[21] e, como refere João Cardoso Rosas, em *Teorias da justiça e justiça global*, impõe-se o princípio de não prejudicar em consonância com o defendido por Pogge.

De acordo com o princípio da suficiência de Pogge, os requisitos de justiça devem assentar no princípio da suficiência, partindo do pressuposto de que as desigualdades só poderão ser aceites desde que ninguém viva abaixo do que é considerado o mínimo suficiente, onde poderemos incluir a mínima proteção e defende a responsabilidade global parcial. Já Thomas Nagel defende que a moralidade entre os cidadãos é radicalmente diferente da que liga todos os seres humanos e que a justiça global só teria sentido se existisse um estado global[22].

Por outro lado, de acordo com o DI, os indivíduos e grupos detentores do monopólio da violência legítima, em termos sociológicos e num determinado país, são aceites como representantes desse mesmo país, sendo irrelevante a forma como chegam ao poder e o mantêm, seja por via democrática, por golpe de Estado, por corrupção ou por outros meios[23]. Esta legitimação do DI pode por em causa a capacidade e princípios para a proteção dos seus cidadãos, particularmente no decurso de um conflito interno.

A proteção dos mais vulneráveis e a governança mundial

Assistimos hoje à fragilidade do DI com a invasão da Ucrânia, à assimetria entre a política internacional e a normatividade ética, bem como a um processo de desglobalização. Observamos, também, a ingerência de diversos atores com interesses antagónicos nos conflitos internos. O conflito da RCA é exemplo dessa ocorrência, onde existem companhias privadas de segurança com interesses ligados a outros Estados que

[18] Estanqueiro Rocha, A. 2016, p. 36
[19] Gillian Brock e Nicole Hassoun, mencionam Henry Shue, em "*Global Justice*". Brock, G. & Hassoun, N. 2023.
[20] O Diário da República refere-se ao princípio da não ingerência como o princípio que impossibilita os Estados interferirem, direta ou indiretamente, nos assuntos internos de outros Estados. Trata-se de um dever de reconhecer aos outros Estados autonomia para gerir os seus próprios interesses e políticas governativas. Coexiste, em articulação, com os princípios da soberania dos Estados e da autodeterminação dos povos. Este princípio cede, contudo, nos casos em que o Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas entender que a intervenção é necessária para pôr fim a qualquer ameaça à paz. Disponível em https://diariodarepublica.pt/dr/lexionario/termo/principio-nao-ingerencia.
[21] Brock, G. & Hassoun, N. 2023
[22] Rosas, J. C. 2011
[23] Ibidem pp. 122-125

interferem com os elementos da governança mundial. Neste contexto, a preocupação kantiana para encontrar um fio condutor para a universalização e humanidade capaz de estabelecer relações entre povos, nações e culturas à escala planetária está mais comprometida[24]. As Organizações Intergovernamentais requerem-se, de acordo com Kant, fortes embaixadores dos imperativos éticos do primado da paz[25]. As armas de destruição maciça ameaçam o futuro da humanidade pela falta de entendimento na resolução dos conflitos, exacerbando a vulnerabilidade dos civis.

A intervenção com a finalidade de estabilização e assistência humanitária exige soluções globais, através de cooperação internacional. Nesta conjuntura, encontramos com grande relevância atores não estatais que, em complementaridade com os Estados, trabalham em assuntos comuns operacionalizados a diferentes níveis e em estreita coordenação.

Os desafios da governança mundial estão relacionados com a legitimidade e eficiência impostas aos atores, no sentido de terem impacto positivo na vida das pessoas, melhorando as suas condições de vida, mantendo padrões de equidade, respeito e justiça. Assume especial importância a abordagem construtivista na necessidade de cooperação e colaboração que analise as relações de poder e interações sociais dos diferentes atores formais e não formais e os que necessitam de proteção, de forma a maximizar esforços e complementaridade, promovendo a legitimidade, responsabilidade e eficiência.

Em suma, aos atores formais e não formais mandatados a operacionalizar os princípios humanitários impõe-se a conduta que assegure a legitimidade e a eficiência evidenciadas nos resultados que efetivamente tenham impacto na vida das pessoas. Como contributo para a eficiência, propõe-se uma abordagem construtivista que fomente a cooperação e colaboração.

O caso humanitário da República Centro-Africana

Os desafios contemporâneos e atrofiamento de direitos pela erosão da democracia são influenciados pelo ressurgimento de autoritarismos, populismos, destabilização mundial e situações de emergência. Em África, existem trinta e cinco conflitos armados não internacionais. A RCA está envolvida numa série de conflitos armados não internacionais contra um vasto leque de atores não estatais e entre os diferentes grupos armados que potenciam a crise humanitária e a necessidade de proteção dos mais vulneráveis. A escolha do exemplo da RCA incidiu no facto de ser um território com um conflito não internacional com pouca visibilidade, que perdura desde 2012, e onde as Nações Unidas intervêm desde 2014. O território tem uma longa história de pilhagens, de incursões destrutivas e de dominação colonial que liga hoje vários atores a práticas em que a fronteira entre o legal e o ilegal permanece incerta. Desta forma, o presente capítulo pretende refletir sobre os desafios que os atores nacionais e internacionais enfrentam neste território e procurar novas abordagens que permitam proteger os mais vulneráveis.

[24] Soromenho-Marques, 2023.
[25] Soromenho-Marques, 2023

Enquadramento de uma crise humanitária particular: que desafios?

A crise política na RCA está associada a um conflito sectário que resultou em violações dos DH e violência generalizada. No conflito intervêm vários grupos armados não estatais[26] , fações de grupos armados não estatais e as forças armadas do país, originando um conflito armado não internacional. Para compreendermos o conflito, há que compreender a estrutura das relações e entrelaçamento multidirecional cruzado entre os vários intervenientes: humanitários, funcionários das Nações Unidas, atores regionais, políticos centro-africanos, militares e grupos armados não estatais.

As explicações sobre as causas do conflito têm sido ligadas à divisão religiosa, manipulação política ou exploração de recursos. Louisa Lombard, em *State of Rebellion: Violence and Intervention in the Central African Republic*, defende que a violência tem sido útil como elemento da política centro-africana, apesar de lamentada, concomitantemente exacerbada pela forma de envolvimento internacional nos chamados Estados Frágeis[27]. Lombard questiona a soberania, as decisões e o impacto na vida das populações, pondo em causa a definição de soberania de Thomas Hobbes concentrada no Estado detentor da autoridade, resultante da vontade coletiva dos seus súbditos[28]. Acílio da Silva Estanqueiro Rocha, em *Filosofia da Democracia*, refere que Montesquieu, partindo do princípio de que todo o homem que tem poder é levado a abusar dele, compromete os legisladores a estabelecerem um sistema de "freios e contrapesos" pelo Estado ou numa legítima intervenção internacional. Na ausência de capacidade do Estado para impor a ordem, proteger os cidadãos e impedir violações sistemáticas dos Direitos Humanos, incluindo os crimes contra a humanidade, genocídio, crimes de guerra[29] as organizações intergovernamentais podem, por meio das resoluções e dos instrumentos do Direito Internacional, assumir responsabilidades de proteção, como sucede na República Centro-Africana.

Neste contexto, os DH são uma ferramenta indispensável à sobrevivência, premissa de igualdade e convivência dos membros da comunidade. O Direito constitui um instrumento de pacificação dos conflitos, sendo os DH e o DIH fundamentais em situações de conflito. A norma tem por escopo notoriamente a premência da proteção, no entanto, o direito, por si só, não muda a realidade, necessitando do homem para o aplicar.

A intervenção internacional e os impactos junto dos mais vulneráveis

Em resposta à crise que envolve segurança, DH, política e questões humanitárias, foi criada, pelo Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas (NU)[30], a Missão Multidimensional

[26] A *Geneva Academy* (2024) refere que são considerados *"...cada vez mais os grupos armados não estatais estão vinculados ao direito internacional em matéria de direitos humanos se exercerem um controlo de facto sobre algumas zonas."* https://www.rulac.org/browse/conflicts/non-international-armed-conflict-in-the-central-african-republic#collapse1accord.
[27] Lombard, L. 2016.
[28] Ibidem – *Hunting Game: Raiding Politics in the Central African Republic*
[29] De acordo com o Estatuto de Roma o Tribunal Penal Internacional tem competência para processar e julgar estes crimes.
[30] *United Nations Security Council Resolution* 2149 (2014) https://www.un.org/securitycouncil/s/res/2149-%282014%29

Integrada de Estabilização na RCA (MINUSCA)[31], como uma legítima exceção ao princípio da não ingerência[32]. A prioridade principal da Resolução 2149 do Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas é a proteção dos civis, incluindo a proteção específica das mulheres e crianças afetadas pelo conflito armado. Esta prioridade incorpora o princípio da suficiência para a garantia da mínima proteção.

No contexto da intervenção, a comunidade internacional mandatada procura soluções humanitárias desconcertadas e ineficientes. Louisa Lombard refere-se à comunidade internacional como uma multidão, conjunto de pessoas que partilham a mesma localização, com interesses e antecedentes diferentes e que não se relacionam necessariamente[33]. Complementarmente, Susan Park refere, em *International Organizations and Global Problems,* que no debate académico se discute a eficiência das organizações internacionais, condição essencial para a sua existência[34].

Ao conjunto dos atores internacionais associam-se os atores nacionais formais e não formais que incorporam a governança global. Esta funciona assente numa estrutura horizontal em rede de diferentes atores a diferentes níveis[35]. Assim, a cooperação e a coordenação elevam-se com preponderância na eliminação da multiplicação de esforços. A não existência de uma entidade supranacional limita a capacidade de autoridade de coordenação das atividades de proteção, exigindo o recurso ao compromisso e à negociação. A governança global segue um modelo democrático de governança através da mobilização das bases. A criação de mecanismos para investigar e julgar crimes internacionais enfrenta divergências políticas, limitações jurisdicionais e dificuldades operacionais. Além dos tribunais para a antiga Jugoslávia, Ruanda e do Tribunal Penal Internacional, existem jurisdições híbridas, como o Tribunal Penal Especial da República Centro-Africana, criado em 2015[36]. Este tribunal, que reúne magistrados nacionais e internacionais, julga violações graves dos Direitos Humanos e do Direito Internacional Humanitário ocorridas desde 2003. A sua atuação complementa os tribunais nacionais e o Tribunal Penal Internacional, ajudando a combater a impunidade e responsabilizar autores de crimes de guerra e de crimes contra a humanidade.

Para muitos centro-africanos permanece a indignação: tiveram mais intervenção internacional do que qualquer outro país e, no entanto, permanecem entre os últimos nos indicadores de desenvolvimento[37]. Segundo a análise de Lombard, entre determinados setores da população centro-africana persiste a perceção de que alguns atores internacionais beneficiam da continuidade da crise sem traduzirem a sua presença em melhorias suficientemente visíveis nas condições de vida das populações. Esta perceção evidencia uma fragilidade de legitimidade e de responsabilização pelos resultados, independentemente da diversidade de mandatos e formas de atuação dos

[31] A MINUSCA foi criada pelo Conselho de Segurança das Nações Unidas, através da Resolução 2149, ao abrigo do Capítulo VII da Carta das Nações Unidas, tendo a proteção de civis como uma das suas prioridades.
[32] Alex Bellamy (2004) em "*Motives, outcomes, intent and the legitimacy of humanitarian intervention*" defende que a intervenção humanitária é uma exceção legítima à regra de não intervenção.
[33] Lombard, L. 2016, p. 45
[34] Park, S. 2018b
[35] Ibidem
[36] Disponível em https://ihl-databases.icrc.org/fr/national-practice/organic-law-no-15-003-creation-organisation-and-functioning-special-criminal.
[37] Lombard, L. 2016, p. 205

diferentes intervenientes. Depreendemos que a devida responsabilização pelos resultados apresenta fragilidades[38].

O caso da República Centro-Africana evidencia limitações nas quatro dimensões consideradas. A intervenção possui legitimidade formal decorrente do mandato das Nações Unidas, embora isso não assegure necessariamente a confiança das populações. A capacidade operacional é condicionada pela extensão territorial, pela insegurança e pela fragilidade das instituições nacionais. A multiplicidade de intervenientes dificulta a coordenação, enquanto os mecanismos de responsabilização permanecem limitados, tanto relativamente aos autores das violações como à avaliação dos resultados da própria intervenção.

A intervenção deve ser concertada entre nacionais e internacionais apropriados de um objetivo comum nestas geografias duramente frágeis. O Estado deve ser próximo das pessoas e responsável pelas ações, devendo os construtores da paz focar-se na estabilização, capacitação e transição de forma a tornar mais breve a indispensabilidade, evitando redundâncias[39].

Perspetivas futuras: a proteção numa possível nova ordem internacional

A esfera doméstica e a esfera global, mais ou menos cosmopolita, enfrentam desafios globais e internacionais como a pobreza longínqua e absoluta, as migrações internacionais, a crise ambiental, a guerra e o terrorismo que carecem de resposta internacional consentânea com os princípios humanitários[40]. A transformação do sistema internacional e a progressiva consolidação de uma ordem multipolar tornam mais difícil a coordenação da resposta às crises humanitárias. Na República Centro-Africana, os interesses divergentes dos atores externos e as limitações das organizações internacionais condicionam a eficácia da proteção. Embora as Nações Unidas continuem a desempenhar um papel indispensável, a sua atuação carece da complementaridade das organizações regionais e sub-regionais, instituições nacionais responsáveis e mecanismos efetivos de participação das comunidades.

As limitações institucionais e políticas das Nações Unidas dificultam reformas profundas e condicionam a sua capacidade de responder de forma coordenada às crises internacionais[41]. Considerando as Nações Unidas como promotora dos DH, pode a defesa e promoção estar condicionada por força da limitação da sua influência, de fatores associados a Estados não democráticos e à incapacidade de responsabilização aos diversos níveis. Os DH são uma realidade viva, dinâmica e orgânica com momentos de expansão e contração. Importa que os momentos de expansão sejam suficientes para alargar o espetro de Estados promotores dos DH numa tentativa de ampliação, ainda que a diferentes velocidades das gerações de DH. Para tal, urge a ética discursiva, de acordo com Habermas, para a promoção da aceitação universal dos DH que vincule as pessoas ao esforço conjunto pelo respeito dos DH e consequente proteção dos mais afetados

[38] Ibidem pp.218-224
[39] Ibidem 234-235
[40] Rosas, 2011
[41] Karns & Mingst, 2004; Park, 2018b

pelos conflitos: as mulheres, as crianças, os idosos, as pessoas com deficiência e as minorias.

A Declaração Universal dos DH constitui-se como princípio ético para a convivência entre os povos e, como tal, deve ser respeitada globalmente[42], podendo materializar-se como a base de um sistema de justiça global assente em valores. As conceções de justiça são influenciadas pelos contextos políticos, sociais e culturais das diferentes comunidades[43], desta forma, inferimos a necessária adaptação à realidade de cada região. Podemos aqui extrapolar a justiça do Estado, mas não podemos deixar de salientar a necessidade de uma justiça global, ou regional, para além da justiça do Estado, na qual os instrumentos legais vinculem pessoas e Estados.

Tentar acabar com a impunidade é, em última análise, uma procura de valores apoiada na legitimidade, na reciprocidade e na responsabilização que vai para além da simples punição judicial. E, nesse sentido, um compromisso de estatuto-dignidade que poderia, em última análise, revelar-se mais útil do que uma série de julgamentos ou uma comissão de reconciliação[44].

Em países como a RCA encontramos desigualdade, crise, incerteza, corrupção e quebra de confiança, polarização e radicalização como desafios à democracia. Ao criar uma relação direta entre os DH e a democracia na defesa dos ideais da liberdade, igualdade e fraternidade, encontramos terreno fértil para a proteção dos mais vulneráveis, no entanto, alternativas a este modelo são veiculadas, pondo em causa a promoção dos DH e questionando os ideais democráticos. No entanto, para a universalidade dos DH importa adaptar o conceito às comunidades de diferentes geografias, tradições e culturas lutando contra formas de opressão que exponham e não protejam pessoas sectariamente em função do género, idade, etnia, deficiência, geografia, cultura, língua ou qualquer outra forma contrária à diversidade humanista que representa a unidade humana.

Conclusões

A proteção de pessoas vulneráveis em emergências e conflitos é uma exigência ética, jurídica e política. A história consolidou princípios e instrumentos de proteção, como a Declaração Universal dos Direitos Humanos e as Convenções de Genebra. No entanto, as normas internacionais não garantem, por si só, a sua implementação, havendo uma lacuna entre o reconhecimento dos direitos e a efetiva proteção das populações afetadas.

A análise do caso da República Centro-Africana demonstra que essa distância não resulta apenas da ausência de normas ou de mandatos internacionais. Decorre também da fragilidade das instituições estatais, da fragmentação da autoridade, da atuação de diversos grupos armados, das limitações operacionais e da dificuldade de coordenação entre atores nacionais e internacionais.

A MINUSCA e outras organizações têm procurado reduzir determinados riscos, facilitar o acesso humanitário e apoiar o restabelecimento das instituições. Contudo, a persistência da violência e das necessidades humanitárias demonstra que os resultados da proteção

[42] Estanqueiro Rocha, 2014
[43] Rosas, 2011
[44] Lombard, L. 2016, p. 239

internacional permanecem limitados, desiguais, difíceis de avaliar e, por vezes, temporários.

O estudo permite concluir que a proteção efetiva depende da articulação entre quatro condições fundamentais: legitimidade, capacidade operacional, coordenação e responsabilização. A legitimidade é necessária para garantir a aceitação e a confiança das populações; a capacidade operacional permite prevenir e responder às ameaças; a coordenação reduz duplicações e lacunas entre os diferentes intervenientes; e a responsabilização assegura que os atores nacionais e internacionais respondam não apenas pelas atividades realizadas, mas também pelos resultados alcançados. Nenhuma destas condições, considerada isoladamente, é suficiente para transformar os compromissos normativos em segurança efetiva e duradoura.

A intervenção internacional não deve substituir indefinidamente o Estado, mas contribuir para o desenvolvimento de instituições nacionais legítimas, responsáveis e capazes de proteger a população. A apropriação nacional deve, contudo, ser acompanhada pelo reforço do Estado de direito, pela supervisão da atuação das forças públicas, pelo acesso à justiça e pela participação das comunidades afetadas. A proteção deve ser avaliada a partir dos seus efeitos concretos na vida das pessoas, designadamente pela redução da violência, pelo acesso seguro a bens e serviços essenciais e pela recuperação da confiança nas instituições.

A principal contribuição do artigo para os debates das Relações Internacionais consiste em demonstrar que a proteção das pessoas em situação de vulnerabilidade não depende exclusivamente da robustez dos instrumentos jurídicos ou da dimensão da presença internacional. Depende da capacidade de articular normas, instituições e ações operacionais nos níveis local, nacional e internacional. O caso da República Centro-Africana evidencia, assim, os limites de uma governança global fragmentada, mas também a necessidade de preservar e aperfeiçoar os mecanismos multilaterais de proteção.

Conclui-se, por fim, que o ideal humanitário continua a constituir uma referência indispensável perante as transformações do sistema internacional. A promoção e a aceitação universal dos Direitos Humanos devem ser acompanhadas por mecanismos de aplicação, avaliação e responsabilização capazes de produzir resultados sustentáveis. Proteger as pessoas mais expostas aos efeitos dos conflitos significa transformar a dignidade humana de princípio abstrato em critério concreto para avaliar a legitimidade e a eficácia da ação dos Estados, das organizações internacionais e dos restantes atores envolvidos.

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ENTRE A INTEGRAÇÃO ECONÔMICA REGIONAL E A INSTABILIDADE INTERNA: A ADESÃO DA GUINÉ-BISSAU À UEMOA E O CONFLITO ARMADO DE 1998

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Resumo

O presente artigo fornece uma análise sobre o conflito armado de 7 de junho de 1998, na Guiné-Bissau, depois da sua integração econômica na UEMOA. O principal propósito é ir além de narrativas populistas e simplistas que relatam essa guerra como apenas uma tentativa fracassada de golpe de Estado. O estudo foi dirigido por meio de uma abordagem qualitativa, acompanhada de pesquisa bibliográfica, explicativa e descritiva. Assim, o trabalho destaca que esse conflito está repleto de muitas nuances e tensões geopolíticas e que a maioria do relato histórico conhecido por muitos guineenses é apenas a ponta de iceberg. Na base disso, ao longo deste artigo é possível constatar que essa guerra teve causas internas e externas. Parte-se das hipóteses que, endogenamente, as causas que contribuíram para conflito são tensões política (luta pelo poder no seio do partido PAIGC), econômica, militar, étnica e pessoal, já exogenamente, teve influência do conflito na região de Casamansa, a integração do país na UEMOA, e a disputa geopolítico entre França, Senegal, Guiné-Conacri (CEDEAO) contra Portugal, Cabo-Verde (CPLP). Por isso, conclui-se que, a integração da Guiné-Bissau na UEMOA por si só não pode ser considerada a causa da guerra. No entanto, pode ser vista como parte de um contexto mais amplo de tensões políticas, crispações socioeconômicas, tensões étnicas, corrupção, violência estrutural herdada da luta de libertação nacional e que ajudaram a criar um ambiente propício ao conflito.

Palavras-Chave

Conflito Civil; Guiné-Bissau; UEMOA; CEDEAO; CPLP; Senegal.

Abstract

This scientific work provides an analysis of the Bissau-Guinean armed conflict of june 7, 1998, following its economics integration into the West African Economic Monetary Union (UEMOA). The main purpose of this article is to go beyond populistic and simplistic narratives that characterizes the conflict as merely the failed attempt of coup. Methologically, this study was conducted using a qualitative approach accompanied by bibliographic technique, explanatory and descriptive research. Thus, this article highlights that the conflict of june 7, 1998, is fraught with many nuances and geopolitical tensions hiden from the most of the historical account known to many Bissau-guinean that makes it a tip of the iceberg. Based on this, throughout this article, it's possible to understand that the conflict had external and internal causes. It is assumed that, endogenously the causes that contributed to the collision of the conflict are political (the power struggle within PAIGC party), economic, military, ethnic and personal tensions. Exogenously, the conflict in the Casamance region, the country´s

integration into the UEMOA and the geopolitical dispute between France, Senegal and Guinea (Senegal & Guinea - ECOWAS) against Portugal and Cape Vert (CPLP) are the causes. Therefore, it can be concluded that Guinea-Bissau´s integration into UEMOA alone cannot considered and explained as the cause of the conflict. However, it can be seen as part of a broader context of political tensions, socioeconomic tensions, ethnic tensions, corruption and patrimonialism, and structural violence inherited from the national liberation struggle which helped to create an environment conducive to conflict.

Keywords

Civil Conflict; Guinea Bissau; UEMOA; CEDEAO; CPLP; Senegal.

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ENTRE A INTEGRAÇÃO ECONÔMICA REGIONAL E A INSTABILIDADE INTERNA: A ADESÃO DA GUINÉ-BISSAU À UEMOA E O CONFLITO ARMADO DE 1998

IVANILDO CARLOS GOMES

Introdução

Refletir sobre a África sempre demanda muita precaução, dedicação e análises pontuais, pois historicamente é notável que alguns países da África Ocidental às vezes só aparecem e são centros de atenções do cenário internacional situações de crises como: violações das ordens constitucionais, a fome, a violação dos direitos humanos, terrorismo, assassinatos. A Guiné-Bissau, em particular, desde a sua independência, vivenciou diversos episódios de assassinatos, golpes e tentativas de golpes de Estados, sequestros, espancamentos, desaparecimentos de pessoas sem nenhuma explicação, entre outros. Esses acontecimentos transformaram o país não apenas em um território inseguro, contudo, também em um espaço marcado pela subversão de ordem constitucional. No entanto, é importante salientar que essa realidade não se restringe exclusivamente à Guiné-Bissau.

Situada na África Ocidental, a Guiné-Bissau, assim como a maioria dos países africanos, sofreu com o processo de colonização europeia, tendo sido invadida e permanecendo sob domínio colonial português durante muitos anos, até conquistar sua independência em 24 de setembro de 1973, mediante uma luta armada. Diga-se, que o processo da colonização portuguesa na Guiné-Bissau pode ser dividido em dois períodos marcados pelas violências direta, cultural e estrutural. Segundo Gonçalves (2022):

> *[...] O primeiro compreende do "período dos descobrimentos" aos meados de 1879, quando a Guiné-Portuguesa ganha autonomia administrativa em relação à Cabo Verde e é marcado por inúmeros conflitos, mormente violentos, com algumas monarquias locais (que competiam entre si) e alguns países europeus, nomeadamente França e Reino Unido, que lutavam pela "hegemonia colonial" na África Ocidental [...] a conflitualidade desse processo, principalmente o interesse dos franceses nos "domínios" portugueses, em especial na Guiné-portuguesa, vista como um entrave ao projeto imperial francês na região, além de alterar as dinâmicas de poder na região, incitaram aquilo que se pode designar como a ocupação efetiva, o segundo momento da colonização portuguesa da atual Guiné-Bissau, em meados do século XIX, de fato, aliado a alguns acontecimentos marcantes, como a independência do Brasil, e algumas ocorrências no seio da metrópole,*

> *nomeadamente, a guerra civil ou liberal (1832-1834), essas dinâmicas fizeram com que Portugal modificasse a sua política colonial para com a África, Guiné portuguesa neste caso específico, tendo iniciado o processo de ocupação efetiva em meados do século XIX* (Gonçalves, p. 69, 2022).

Após anos de independência e de conquista da autonomia em relação à Cabo-Verde, torna-se pertinente analisar as dificuldades que a Guiné-Bissau enfrenta para se firmar e consolidar como um Estado democrático e pacífico.

De modo geral, ao observar a história da Guiné-Bissau, compreende-se que ela foi marcada por períodos conturbados, caracterizados por golpes e tentativas de golpes de Estados, assassinatos, instabilidades políticas e prisões arbitrárias. Para Gonçalves (2022), e Bottino (2023), esses acontecimentos representam manifestações dos efeitos nefastos do domínio colonial, das práticas violentas desse período e da luta pela descolonização. Tais eventos acabaram deixando raízes profundas nas dinâmicas conflitantes do país, no período pós-independência, ou seja, o que se vive no país no período pós-independência, de modo que os problemas observados atualmente refletem heranças de um processo histórico marcado pela violência colonial e pela luta armada pela libertação nacional.

Escrever sobre esse tema é extremamente importante, não apenas pelo seu marco na história da Guiné-Bissau, mas também pelas profundas consequências na política, na economia, na sociedade e na valorização da memória histórica. No entanto, apesar de seus significativos, a guerra de 1998 continua bastante negligenciada no meio acadêmico. Nesse contexto, torna-se necessário desenvolver estudos que abordem, de forma crítica, como as clivagens internas e interpessoais contribuíram para esse conflito, assim como o papel das disputas geopolíticas na sua intensificação e na dificuldade da sua resolução. Estudos desse tipo são necessários não apenas para estudar e compreender o passado, mas também para alertar sobre os desafios atuais no país. De modo geral, ao propor este estudo, o objetivo deste artigo é ir além de narrativas populistas e simplistas que relatam esse conflito como apenas uma tentativa fracassada de golpe de Estado. O que muitos desconhecem é que esse conflito está repleto de muitas nuances e tensões geopolíticas, sendo que muitos dos relatos históricos conhecido pelo povo guineense é apenas a ponta de iceberg.

A metodologia constitui um elemento fundamental de qualquer trabalho acadêmico, pois orienta o pesquisador na escolha dos métodos mais adequados para alcançar os objetivos traçados e responder às perguntas de pesquisa. Neste sentido, o presente artigo baseia-se em uma pesquisa de natureza bibliográfica, a qual, segundo Fonseca (2002):

> *É feita a partir do levantamento de referências teóricas já analisadas, e publicadas por meios escritos e eletrônicos, como livros, artigos científicos e páginas de web sites. Qualquer trabalho científico inicia-se com uma pesquisa bibliográfica, que permite ao pesquisador conhecer o que já se estudou sobre o assunto. Existem, porém, pesquisas científicas que se baseiam unicamente na pesquisa bibliográfica, procurando referências teóricas publicadas para*

> *recolher informações ou conhecimentos prévios sobre o problema a respeito do qual se procura a resposta* (Fonseca, 2002, p. 31).

Além da pesquisa bibliográfica, este trabalho utilizou abordagem qualitativa, acompanhada de pesquisas de caráter explicativa e descritiva, com objetivo de aprofundar o entendimento sobre o conflito e outros acontecimentos na Guiné-Bissau. Em conformidade com Gil (2008), a pesquisa explicativa tem como a "preocupação principal identificar os fenômenos que determinam e contribuem para a ocorrência dos fenômenos e possibilita mais profundo conhecimento da realidade, porque explica a razão, o porquê das coisas".

Por fim, além da introdução e considerações finais, o artigo está estruturado em duas seções. A primeira seção aborda a trajetória política, geopolítica, econômica e social da Guiné-Bissau, incluindo os períodos mais marcantes da história do país até a colisão do conflito em 1998. A segunda seção concentra-se nas consequências desse conflito e nos impactos que ele ainda exerce sobre o país e sua população na atualidade. Trata-se de um trabalho multidisciplinar, que integra estudos que abrangem diversas áreas como: História, Ciências Humanas, Relações Internacionais e Geopolítica com ênfase nos acontecimentos históricos da Guiné-Bissau e na sua integração econômica.

O conflito civil de 1998 e suas dimensões históricas, geopolíticas e regionais

As dinâmicas históricas e tensões geopolíticas regionais mostram, na prática, como as consequências do colonialismo impactam a África, sobretudo quando consideração o processo de colonização europeia e os conflitos territoriais entre países limítrofes, especialmente na África Ocidental, envolvendo Guiné-Bissau, Guiné-Conacri e Senegal. É evidente que as delimitações territoriais destes três países, assim como os dos restos do continente, foram traçadas à luz dos interesses coloniais durante a Conferência de Berlim. Esse processo acabou desencadeando atritos entre essas nações no período pós-independência.

Para alguns autores como Gonçalves (2022), Laia (2022), Lopes (1994), Bottino (2023), e Gomes (2014), mostram que:

> *De fato, estando "encravada" entre territórios francófonos, o artificialismo das fronteiras impostas à luz dos interesses coloniais, acordo Luso-francês de 18861, afastando famílias/grupos étnicos e levantando barreiras geográficas e políticas, acabou por estar na base dos conflitos fronteiriços entre os recém-países, Guiné-Bissau, Senegal e Guiné-Conacri e teve um impacto significativo na violência armada na região senegalesa de*

[1] "No dia 12 de maio de 1886 a Convenção franco-portuguesa formalizou a cedência da soberania portuguesa sobre Casamansa, que se tornou de fato possessão colonial francesa só em 22 de abril de 1888, pondo fim aos 243 anos da presença portuguesa ao longo do rio Casamansa. Integrada no Senegal recém independente. Casamansa em 1960 passou a ser uma das suas sete regiões administrativas" (Bottino, 2023).

> *Casamansa2, cujas dinâmicas influíram no conflito violento de 1998-1999 na Guiné-Bissau* (Gonçalves, p. 69, 2022).

De facto, falar do legado da colonização europeia na África não se limita somente à aculturação e a assimilação das populações. Trata-se de uma análise que vai além da difusão das línguas coloniais e da pilhagem dos territórios ocupados, implicando a compreensão de numerosas consequências nos diversos setores geopolíticos sub-regionais e nas relações interestatais. Entre esses aspectos, destaca-se a disputa em torno da região de Casamansa, envolvendo o Senegal e as reivindicações de autonomia do Movimento das Forças Democráticas de Casamansa (MFDC). Esse conflito tem impacto particular nas relações entre o Senegal e a Guiné-Bissau, que, no período pós-independências, têm enfrentado divergências relacionadas com a delimitação de fronteiras.

As consequências da colonização europeia na região e nas relações interestatais são evidentes na região de Casamansa, que hoje pertence administrativamente à República do Senegal, mas que, séculos atrás foi colônia portuguesa. A partir de 1645, passou a estar administrativamente dependente da capitania de Cacheu, na atual Guiné-Bissau. A região só passou a ser administrada pela França a partir do dia 12 de maio de 1886, por meio da Convenção franco-portuguesa (ou acordo luso-francês). Neste sentido, Bottino (2023), aprofunda esta questão ao demonstrar que:

> *A presença portuguesa na região de Casamansa remonta aos séculos XV e XVI [...] No alvorecer do século XVII, há relatos de instalações de portugueses em Ziguinchor, provavelmente oriundos de grupos de lançados. No entanto, foi só em 1645 que Ziguinchor entrou formalmente dentro das possessões portuguesas, sendo administrativamente dependente da capitania de Cacheu (Guiné-Bissau). Na ausência de documentação suficiente até meados do século XIX, sabe-se que a influência portuguesa na região de Casamansa perpetuou-se a partir de três polos de transmissão cultural: o português continental, o cabo-verdiano e o guineense fronteiriço. Apesar da ação desse tríplice infiltração luso-falante (e crioulo-falante), Casamansa caiu logo às margens das prioridades coloniais lusitanas [...] A redução do controle português sobre Casamansa coincidiu com um crescente apetite expansionista francês sobre essa mesma região. Depois de algumas décadas de escaramuças entre luso-africanos e franceses devido às ambições territoriais e comerciais da França, somadas a não-demarcação dos limites entre o Senegal francês e a Guiné portuguesa, Ziguinchor, e assim Casamansa e Portugal, capitularam [...]* (Bottino, 2023).

[2] "Casamansa, cuja capital histórica é Ziguinchor, está localizada no sul do Senegal. Em conformidade com o sistema de organização territorial senegalês, Casamansa é atualmente dividida em três macro-unidades administrativas, as regiões de Ziguinchor, Sédhiou e Kolda. No Norte faz fronteira com a Gâmbia e no Sul confina com a Guiné-Bissau, outro país lusófono. Tal como a Guiné Bissau, Casamansa foi longamente um segmento do domínio português na África ocidental" (Bottino, 2023).

Além dessa questão geopolítica e da língua, sobrepuseram-se também a questão étnica, política e sociocultural, nas quais determinados grupos foram mais favorecidos e passaram a ocupar cargos altos, muitas vezes por atuarem como auxiliares dos colonos. Do mesmo modo, Silva (2021), afirma que "depois da conquista da independência, houve uma repulsa por parte do poder político e administrativo estatal em relação aos poderes tradicionais, desprezando estes poderes e os desconsiderando em nome da construção do Estado-Nação". A título de exemplo, o mesmo autor acrescenta que no período "pós-independência houve grande violência do Estado contra um expressivo número de chefes tradicionais em diferentes regiões do país, como o caso do chefe Manjaco Baticã, que foi julgado pelo tribunal popular e fuzilado em um campo de futebol diante da população".

Essa ideia corrobora a afirmação de Gonçalves (2022), segundo a qual essa hierarquização social gerou crispações internas entre os cabo-verdianos, os Fulas, frequentemente considerados "mestiços civilizados" e auxiliares dos colonos, e os guineenses, classificados como "indígenas". Consequentemente, este quadro mostrou-se nocivo para o Partido Africano da Independência da Guiné e Cabo-Verde (PAIGC), tanto no decurso da luta armada quanto no processo da construção do Estado pós-colonial. Além disso, esteve diretamente ligado ao primeiro golpe militar no país, realizado pelo "Movimento Reajustador", em 14 de novembro de 1980.

Assim, após breve contextualização das consequências da colonização portuguesa, passo a dirigir a análise para os acontecimentos na Guiné-Bissau, desde o período pós-independência até ao conflito armado de 1998. Antes disso, é importante destacar que as práticas violentas do colonialismo e da luta armada contribuíram para que o país emergisse a partir de um partido fortemente militarizado (PAIGC), que assumiu a legitimidade de incorporar diversas funções estatais, nomeadamente executiva, legislativa e judiciária, (Goncalves, 2022). Esse quadro é evidenciado no artigo 4 da Constituição da República da Guiné-Bissau de 1973, no qual se estabelece que "na Guiné-Bissau o poder é exercido pelas massas trabalhadoras ligadas estreitamente ao PAIGC, que é a força política dirigente da sociedade" (Constituição da República da Guiné-Bissau, 1973).

Por mesmo ângulo, Nhaslambé (2024) afirma que a própria Constituição da República de 1973 institucionalizou essa centralidade, ao prever PAIGC como única força política e dirigente da sociedade. Tal configuração contribuiu para a geração de instabilidade estrutural e dificultou a consolidação de um sistema democrático plural.

A princípio, é importante destacar que, sete anos após conquistar a sua independência, em 1973, a Guiné-Bissau enfrentou seu primeiro golpe de Estado em, 14 de novembro de 1980, liderado por João Bernardo "Nino Vieira", que pôs fim a chamada I República e a grande parte das suas estruturas político-administrativas. Esse movimento depôs o então presidente Luís Cabral e levou ao colapso do projeto de unidade entre Guiné-Bissau e Cabo-Verde, idealizado desde o período anticolonial.

As justificativas mais conhecidas para esse golpe apontam que: "o golpe de Estado, chamado de Movimento Reajustador, seria uma forma de preservar a memória "tradicional" como contraponto à "modernização" defendida pelo governo de Luís Cabral" e a outra era "a defesa da cultura guineense face à exigência de unidade entre Guiné-Bissau e Cabo-Verde" (Silva, 2021). Embora essas explicações possam, até certo ponto,

parecer convincentes, é possível avançar uma leitura mais crítica, segundo a qual o golpe também refletiu a necessidade de afirmação política por parte dos guineenses. Isso porque, no período pós independência, muitos dos cargos de maior prestígio e influência eram ocupados por cabo-verdianos, tanto na Guiné-Bissau quanto em Cabo-Verde, o que contribuiu para o aprofundamento de tensões internas.

Contudo, esse golpe abriu caminho para quase duas décadas de governança de Nino, período marcado por elevados níveis de violência física e estrutural, incluindo prisões arbitrárias, perseguições e assassinatos. O Nino, só deixou o poder após um sangrento conflito civil que ocorreu entre junho de 1998 e maio de 1999, que ceifou a vida de muitas pessoas (Gomes, 2014).

Além desse golpe, também houve uma alegada tentativa de golpe de Estado, em 1985, conhecida como "O Caso 17 de Outubro[3]". Em 1986, Nino ordenou a prisão de inúmeros cidadãos, muitos dos quais pertencente a etnia Balanta, acusados de participação nesse golpe, culminando em tortura, julgamento e condenação à morte. O episódio ficou marcado pela morte de Paulo Correia, que na época era o Vice-Presidente do Conselho de Estado e Ministro de Estado da Justiça e Poder Local. Além dele, outras cinco pessoas, incluindo Viriato Rodrigues Pã, ex-Procurador-Geral da República, alto funcionário do Banco Nacional e do Ministério das Finanças, foram executadas por traição. Esse episódio fomentou profundas crispações étnico-sociais, pessoais, alimentando ressentimento e vontade de vingança (Gonçalves, 2022), (Carvalho, 2008).

Na verdade, existem estudos que indicam que Nino tinha intenções de se perpetuar no poder, adotando uma estratégia baseada na política de aniquilação de seus oponentes e de consumação alianças internas e regionais. Segundo Gonçalves (2022), "muito por culpa do papel desempenhado pelos Balantas[4] no período da luta armada, o protagonismo que exerciam no alto comando do exército, Nino numa luta pelo poder e protagonismo, embora tenha tido suporte destes no golpe de 1980, tentou limitar influência desse grupo étnico tendo eliminado alguns dos seus maiores nomes, pois os viam como obstáculos para sua permanência no poder".

É preciso não esquecer e não é exagero afirmar que o "autoritarismo de Nino, a sua interferência no exército, seu anseio em "eliminar" os seus opositores e limitar influência dos veteranos da guerra, a corrupção, a deterioração das condições de vida, fomentaram clivagens internas e reduziu o seu apoio por parte do exército" (Gonçalves, 2022). Portanto, é compreensível que esse golpe e a estratégia de Nino de se "perpetuar" no poder o tenham levado aproximar-se mais da francofonia do que da lusofonia, selando-se a "boa" relação de anos e de "unidade" que o país tinha com Cabo-Verde. Outrossim, as complexidades das clivagens regionais, sobretudo os conflitos violentos na Libéria e

[3] "Um dos acontecimentos políticos que envolveu a opinião pública nacional guineense e internacional nos anos 1985 e 1986, foi o dito "O Caso 17 de Outubro", no decorrer do qual 12 pessoas acusadas de fomentar um golpe de Estado na Guiné-Bissau, foram condenadas à morte e 6 acabaram por ser executadas" (Carvalho, 2008).

[4] "Os Balantas desempenharam um papel importante na luta armada pela independência e nos primeiros anos da Guiné-Bissau, principalmente no exército. Além disso, foram um dos principais apoiadores do denominado Movimento Reajustador de 1980 que levou ao poder Nino Vieira. A sua constante marginalização, principalmente depois de 1980 por parte do Nino Vieira, acabou por gerar descontentamento no seio do exército explícito no forte apoio à Junta Militar no conflito violento de 1998-1999" (Temudo, *apud*, Gonçalves, 2022).

Serra Leoa, levaram Nino a procurar aliados regionais na francofonia como forma de garantir a sua permanência no poder (Gonçalves, 2022).

Após a independência, a Guiné-Bissau foi governada por muitos anos pelo PAIGC, que, na altura, era a única força política dirigente de toda sociedade guineense. A democratização do país teve início em 1989, impulsionada por diversas críticas da comunidade internacional, que cobrava mudanças no sistema político, na gestão econômica e na implementação da democracia. Outro fator que facilitou a transição do regime do partido único para multipartidarismo foram as políticas impostas pelas agências Bretton Woods, nomeadamente o Banco Mundial (BM) e o Fundo Monetário Internacional (FMI). Na época, a Guiné-Bissau enfrentava sérias dificuldades econômicas e financeiras, recorrendo a empréstimos junto às essas agências para executar as suas políticas públicas. Esse processo de transição democrática conduziu o país a um novo sistema político, centrado em um pensamento único e de inspiração ocidental, muitas das vezes sem considerar os processos históricos e culturais do país (Silva, 2021).

A situação econômica e financeira do país estava profundamente abalada pelas crises econômicas da década de 1970 e 1980. Como forma de tentar reverter essa situação, o país aderiu ao programa de Programa de Ajustes Estrutural[5] (PAE), um movimento global influenciado pelas novas políticas econômicas do FMI e BM. Já na década de 90, especialmente em 1995 o cenário econômico do país encontrava-se de seguinte modo, conforme Tamilton Gomes Teixeira (2017):

"A situação económica da Guiné-Bissau atingiu, em 1995, um ponto tão crítico que foi preciso o apoio do FMI e do BM. Em 1986, o BM apresentou um relatório confidencial no qual revelava os seguinte problemas econômicos: o excessivo consumo, quer particular quer público, provocando o aumento dos défices das dívidas existentes; produção agrícola mínima devido aos preços dos produtos demasiado baixos-enormes déficits no orçamento do Estado, provocados por um investimento essencialmente não produtivo, pelo aumento das dívidas e pelos atrasos no seu pagamento; grande expansão monetária, provocando inflação e desvalorização; grande dependência da ajuda externa" (Monteiro, 1996, p. 31 apud, Teixeira, 2017, p. 12).

Essa análise evidencia a quão crítica era a situação do país, transformando esse contexto em um momento propício para que o país se subjugue às regras de BM e FMI para poder lograr "ajuda" internacional.

As primeiras eleições gerais (legislativas e presidenciais) multipartidárias, na Guiné-Bissau, ocorreram em 1994, por meio de uma emenda constitucional de 1991, ratificada pelo Presidente Nino. O pleito contou com participação de diversos partidos políticos opositores ao PAIGC, entre os quais destacam-se: Frente de Libertação e Independência

[5] "A Guiné-Bissau experimentou quase uma década de Programas formais de Ajuste Estrutural com o apoio das instituições financeiras internacionais. Esses novos elementos organizados trouxeram novas visões para o país desde que esses programas foram iniciados em 1987. Após a independência em 1974, a Guiné-Bissau tentou implantar um sistema econômico planejado centralmente seguindo o modelo soviético. Assim, o país tornou-se extremamente fechado com um mínimo de comércio internacional. O governo fez alguns esforços para a industrialização com resultados desastrosos. A agricultura foi marcada pelo atraso e baixa produtividade. Os mercados domésticos eram dominados por grandes monopólios estatais e racionamentos extensos e severos" (Aguilar; Stenman, 1997).

Nacional da Guiné (FLING); Partido da Convergência Democrática, (PCD); Partido Democrático do Progresso (PDP); Partido da Renovação Social (PRS); Fórum Democrático (FD) e União Democrática da Oposição (UNIDO). Como era esperado, o PAIGC consagrou a vitória, embora alguns partidos da oposição conseguiram eleger número limitado de deputados (Silva, 2021).

Após o resultado das eleições gerais de 1994, a conjugação de descontentamento social, questionamentos políticos sobre o regime e às clivagens internas levou Nino a buscar aliados regionais, especialmente entre países francófonos. Nesse contexto, em 2 de maio de 1997, a Guiné-Bissau aderiu à União Económica e Monetária Oeste Africana (UEMOA), e passou a utilizar o Franco das Colônias Francesas da África (Franco CFA). Com essa aderência, o país deixou de usar a sua unidade monetária própria, o "Peso", estabelecida em 1976, passando a integrar o sistema monetária da UEMOA (Sadjo, 2019).

A princípio, é importante frisar que todo o processo começou em novembro de 1995, quando a Guiné-Bissau formalizou seu pedido de adesão à organização, e esse requerimento de filiação só foi aprovado formalmente em maio de 1996, pelo conselho da União. De acordo com o que propõe, Aguilar e Stenman (1997), o ponto de virada para a entrada da Guiné-Bissau na UEMOA foi um acordo bilateral firmado com o Senegal em dezembro de 1995. Esse acordo tratava do uso dos recursos naturais comuns na fronteira entre os dois países, especialmente na área marítima estipulando que as reservas de peixe seriam divididas de maneira igualitária, enquanto os recursos minerais e petróleo seriam repartidos de forma desigual, com o Senegal recebendo 85% e a Guiné-Bissau ficando com 15% (Aguilar; Stenman, 1997).

Esse acordo entre os dois países pode ser analisado sob diversas perspectivas, especialmente considerando as abordagens do campo das Relações Internacionais, da geopolítica, da política internacional, e teorias de Relações Internacionais como os conceitos de ganho absoluto e ganho relativo. Do ponto de vista de ganho absoluto, o acordo pode ser considerado benéfico para a Guiné-Bissau, pois permitiu sua entrada em uma organização regional, oferecendo oportunidade para melhorar a economia, enfrentar a crise financeira e ganhar maior apoio político e regional.

No entanto, do ponto de vista do ganho relativo, a Guiné-Bissau saiu claramente em desvantagem. O acordo favoreceu mais Senegal, representando uma perda de poder e uma subjugação regional do país. Esse contexto coloca o país não apenas como dependente do vizinho, mas também como um Estado fragilizado, com capacidade limitada a lidar com problemas internos e pressões externas.

Nessa busca por aliados regionais, Nino decidiu colocar em choque a relação histórica que o país tinha com as forças separatistas de Casamansa. Ademais, com a adesão à UEMOA, o Senegal aumentou a pressão sobre Nino no sentido de impedir o tráfico de armas para Casamansa. Nesse contexto, Nino acusou Ansumane Mané, o então Chefe de Estado Maior General das Forças Armadas, de traficar armas para o MFDC, o que levou a exonerá-lo no dia 5 de junho de 1998. Temendo ser morto ou preso, Mané[6] tentou um golpe apenas dois dias após sua demissão e foi colocada em prisão domiciliar. Esse

[6] "Como o próprio Ansumane Mané disse através da Rádio Bombolom, a revolta foi levada a cabo para se proteger, pois havia sido na semana anterior destituído do cargo de chefe de Estado Maior General das Forças Armadas, sob a alegação de que fazia contrabando de armas" (Sousa, 2016).

episódio desencadeou o conflito armado, que teve início nas primeiras horas de manhã de 7 de junho de 1998, com assassinato de alguns altos funcionários governamentais em uma emboscada numa das estradas que liga Bissau ao aeroporto, inclusive a morte de Rachid Saiegh nas zonas de Polon de Brá. A guerra começou no bairro de Santa Luzia, onde morava o general Mané (Bwock, 2015), (Gonçalves, 2022), (Rudebeck, 2001) e (Silva, Santos, 2014).

O que começou como um conflito de pequena dimensão acabou ganhando proporções muitos maiores, lançando o país numa guerra civil que durou 11 meses. Esse conflito teve consequências devastadoras, com estimativas de cerca de 3.000 mortos e 300.000 habitantes deslocados (os números podem ser subestimados devido à falta de evidências). Além do impacto humano, a economia, que já enfrentava crises e inflação, foi severamente prejudicada, enquanto o caos político e social se instalou no país. A instabilidade gerada por esse conflito prolonga-se, afetando o desenvolvimento e a governança do país até hoje (Silva; Santos, 2014).

Durante o conflito, diversos atores estiveram envolvidos, refletindo uma disputa de interesses geopolíticos tanto no plano regional como internacional. No âmbito interno Nino era suportado pelos "Aguentas[7] ou força governamental" e Mané pelos "Junta Militar"[8], ambas as forças estiveram ativamente no campo de batalha e constituíram o núcleo central do conflito no país.

No âmbito regional, com a adesão do país ao UEMOA, Nino solicitou a intervenção de tropas estrangeiras para reconquistar a sua legitimidade no país, passando a receber apoio dos países francófonos (Senegal e Guiné-Conacri). Por sua vez, Mané contou com amplo apoio do MFDC, o movimento no qual tinha mantido aliança. No plano internacional, era evidente a disputa pela hegemonia entre a França e Portugal, no país. Diga-se que, após o golpe de 1980, a relação entre a Guiné-Bissau, Portugal e Cabo-Verde esfriaram. Nesse contexto, Portugal via esse conflito como uma oportunidade para intervir na Guiné-Bissau e reduzir a influência da comunidade francófona e da França. Já Cabo-Verde, encarava o conflito como oportunidade de depor Nino no poder e "vingar" o golpe sofrido por Luís Cabral. Por outro lado, a França apoiou as forças senegalesas e conacri-guineenses (aliados de Nino) e as missões de paz da Comunidade Económica dos Estados da África Ocidental (CEDEAO), em conjunto com a sua força multilateral o Grupo de Monitoramento da Comunidade Económica dos Estados da África Ocidental (ECOMOG), liderada por países francófonos, visando manter Nino no poder e preservar a influência francesa no país (Gonçalves, 2022); (Silva, Santos, 2014).

Além disso, as análises de Silva e Santos (2014), indicam que, na ocasião, Portugal também "cedeu a Junta Militar um telefone-satélite permitindo-lhe a comunicar com o mundo, num gesto que foi muito mal acolhido pelos governantes bissau-guineenses, considerando que Portugal estava objetivamente a alinhar com a causa rebelde" (Silva e Santos, 2014).

Muito em razão da disputa entre as organizações e países envolvidos na missão de paz na Guiné-Bissau, a coordenação para a construção da paz acabou dificultada, e os próprios grupos em conflito não conseguiram criar confiança nessas instituições. Diversas

[7] Aguentas é o nome dado às tropas aliadas a Nino.
[8] Assim ficou conhecida tropas aliados a Mané durante o conflito.

estratégias de pacificação foram implementadas, entre as quais destacam-se mais a assinatura do "Memorândum de Entendimento entre os beligerantes, assinado a 28 de julho de 1998, e o acordo de cessar-fogo, assinado na capital cabo-verdiana a 26 de agosto de 1998". Com essa iniciativa, a Comunidade dos Países de Língua Portuguesa (CPLP) foi acusada de neocolonialismo, e, considerando o conflito como de natureza regional, a CEDEAO assumiu o controle da gestão da paz. Sob sua supervisão, foi proposto o acordo de Paz de Abuja, em 1 de novembro de 1998 (ratificado algumas vezes), permitindo a formação de um governo de união nacional (Gonçalves, 2022) e (Silva, 2021).

Em 1999, entretanto, ocorreu um conflito que levou Nino a buscar refúgio na embaixada portuguesa e posteriormente exilar-se naquele país. O conflito foi oficialmente encerrado em maio de 1999, com criação de um governo de unidade nacional, liderado por Malam Bacai Sanhá[9], cuja missão principal era organizar novas eleições. O primeiro turno de eleição aconteceu no dia 28 de novembro de 1999, e o segundo turno no dia 16 de janeiro de 2000, elegendo como vencedor o candidato Kumba Yalá (Gonçalves, 2022) e (Silva, 2021).

Essas reflexões permitem compreender que o conflito na Guiné-Bissau não se restringiu apenas em clivagens internas, mas foi amplamente influenciado pelas fortes pressões exercidas sobre o Nino por parte de Senegal e da França para impedir "o tráfico" de armas ao Casamansa. Tremendo perder esses aliados estratégicos, Nino decidiu demitir Mané. Esse conflito pode ser classificado como político e organizacional, em consonância com a abordagem de Ohana et al. (2016). Político porque foram as motivações políticas e institucionais que levaram a colisão e a essa guerra civil no país, ou seja, houve disputa pelo o controle do Estado e mudança de regime, envolvendo grupos organizados e foi conduzida por atores armados organizados, não por civis isolados. E por último, é organizacional porque ocorreu dentro do próprio aparelho do Estado, especialmente no seio das Forças Armadas, além disso, pode ser interpretado como um colapso organizacional do Estado e de suas instituições militares.

Portanto, em termos de métodos de análises de conflito foi utilizado o método de "Mapeamento de conflito[10]", proposto pelo Ohana et al. (2016). Nesta senda, apresenta-se como o mais adequado e ajuda a compreender esse conflito de melhor forma. Os diferentes níveis de análises nesse método permitem entender que esse é conflito de perfil político, causada por questões de interesses políticos, crispações étnico-sociais, e a disputa geopolítica, cuja principais atores são Nino, Ansumane Mané[11], CEDEAO, CPLP e MFDC. Além de ser um conflito de longa duração, de alta intensidade e violento, também pode ser considerado um conflito interestatal, pois abrange mais de dois países.

[9] "Depois de Nino ter sido destituído, Mané tornou-se provisoriamente chefe do Estado até 14 de maio de 1999, data em que Malam Bacai Sanhá, presidente da Assembleia Popular Nacional, foi nomeado presidente da República interino" (Sousa, 2015).
[10] "Este é um método visual para mostrar as relações entre as partes em conflito. Ele oferece a oportunidade de identificar aliados e oponentes reais e potenciais" (Ohana et al, 2016).
[11] "Ansumane Mané acabou por ser morto, juntamente com outros dois militares, durante uma troca de tiros com as forças governamentais na região de Biombo, no dia 30 de novembro de 2000" (Sousa, 2015).

O legado da guerra civil para a instabilidade política na Guiné-Bissau

O conflito civil de 1998 foi o resultado de diversas acusações envolvendo altos dirigentes do país. Por outro lado, essa contenda, assim como outros acontecimentos no seio da política guineense, demonstra como o país carece de mecanismos eficazes para resolução de conflitos por meio do diálogo. Ademais, mesmo após 11 meses de conflito, que causaram perdas irreparáveis, o país ainda não conseguiu se consolidar como um Estado seguro, estável, pacífico e comprometido com o respeito às ordens constitucionais e com progresso. Em toda sua história, apenas um presidente conseguiu concluir seus mandatos de cinco anos sem sofrer golpe de Estado.

Em linhas gerais, as consequências desse conflito armado de 1998 foram responsáveis pela instalação de um quadro de instabilidade na Guiné-Bissau. Essas consequências ficaram marcadas nas estruturas políticas, sociais e econômicas do país, pois, após o conflito observou-se que, a evolução sociopolítica não foi favorável à reconstrução e reconciliação nacional nem ao relançamento económico. Isso ocorreu devido a diversos problemas políticos e aos constantes golpes de Estado, o que obrigou o país a depender fortemente de conjuntura internacional em vez de desenvolver seus próprios projetos de desenvolvimento social (Nhasse, 2022).

Uma das consequências desse conflito está ligada à mudança no paradigma da detenção do poder, marcada pela introdução de discursos étnicos e religiosos nas abordagens políticas durante pleitos eleitorais, bem como pelo uso das Forças Armadas como meio de ascensão ao poder. Essa dinâmica acabou fazendo com que o poder político ficasse refém das Forças Armadas. Além disso, a mudança no paradigma da detenção do poder na sociedade guineense também constitui um factor que influenciou na eclosão do conflito. Neste sentido, tanto Cande Monteiro (2013), quanto o relatório final da Comissão organizadora da conferência nacional (2018), e Koudawo (2001), apontam que a implementação do multipartidarismo e um a difícil adaptação do PAIGC ao novo contexto pluralista são aspectos que contribuíram para esse conflito:

> *[...] A incompleta conversão do PAIGC em partido civil deliberadamente liberto das suas antigas ligações institucionais nas forças armadas nacionais; a difícil adaptação do antigo partido único, ao novo contexto pluralista onde, ao mesmo tempo que às oposições externas, deve fazer face a oposições internas que dão origem a conflitos mal geridos e cada vez mais agudos; os entraves ao surgimento de um verdadeiro Estado de direito com um poder despersonalizado, e instituições a funcionar nos estritos limites das suas competências; a prevalência da má governação com profundas deficiências da administração de Estado, uma ineficiência crônica na utilização dos recursos, uma permanente opacidade na gestão dos bens públicos, etc., conflito de 7 de Junho de 1998 sobrevém na confluência de todas estas causas profundas que durante onze meses, lhe imprimiram as suas marcas para fazerem dele uma crise multidimensional* (Koudawo, 2001).

Nessa mesma linha de pensamento, Barros, *apud* Jarjau (2019), afirma que, "desde o eclodir do conflito político-militar de 1998-99, a Guiné-Bissau passou a confrontar-se com maior frequência com ciclos de instabilidade política e governativa levando à

transição da sua categorização no concerto internacional de um Estado pós-Conflito para um Estado frágil, vivendo uma situação de paz altamente instável [...]". O não término de mandatos por parte dos políticos eleitos constitui um problema oriundo tanto da guerra quanto das formas de resolução de conflitos adotadas no país, desde o período de luta armada pela independência até décadas recentes. Apesar das consequências nefastas deixadas por essa guerra, os altos dirigentes guineenses ainda carecem de capacidades de resolver problemas por meio de diálogo, por isso, testemunha-se frequentes episódios de uso de violência no país.

As consequências dessa guerra podem ser averiguadas nas recentes tensões e instigações de caráter étnico, tendo em conta o apoio que Nino dispunha à época, majoritariamente proveniente da etnia Pepel, em confrontação com Juntas Militares, que contaram com forte apoio de membros da etnia Balanta. Outra questão relevante a ser considerada diz respeito à morte de quadros nacionais, que teriam sido perseguidos e maltratados durante o regime de Nino. Soma-se a isso a "marginalização de alguns setores das forças armadas, dando origem a um descontentamento crescente, que funcionou como motor para a instabilidade política, e para a multiplicação de conflitos político-militares, numa guerra fratricida, os ex-companheiros de luta de libertação nacional" (Jarjau, 2019). Nesse mesmo sentido O´Regan e Thompson, (2013) salientaram que:

> *Aparecimento da discriminação étnica, em especial no seio das forças militares, complicou ainda mais o agravamento das sucessivas crises na Guiné-Bissau. (…) na década de 1980, o Vieira começou a preencher as vagas do Estado com seus apoiantes, levando a sua própria etnia papel, a ter uma representação excessiva nas instituições, embora a questão da etnia fosse raramente nomeada em disputas ou debates políticos* (O´regan; Thompson, 2013).

Portanto, a tensão étnica e uso de pertencimento étnico como instrumento para obtenção de votos nas eleições na sociedade guineense não constituem uma novidade, pois "sempre foi utilizado pelos governantes, sobretudo no regime do Nino quando este temia a hegemonia Balantas nas forças armadas e promoveu os oficiais da sua etnia Pepel nas forças de segurança em detrimento dos valentes combatentes Balantas" (Jarjau, 2019). Essas evidências contribuem para a compreensão das consequências desse conflito e seus impactos na sedimentação do ódio e do ressentimento entre guineenses, refletindo-se ainda hoje, sobretudo nos conflitos observados entre esses grupos étnicos pela disputa da posse da terra.

Ademais, nas últimas eleições realizadas no país, observaram-se episódios marcados pelo uso de linhagem étnica e do pertencimento religioso nos discursos políticos como estratégia de obtenção de votos. Outrossim, o ex-presidente (Sissoco) tem, em diversas ocasiões, baseado suas falas em clivagens étnicas e religiosas. Portanto, constata-se que, na atualidade, ainda se manifestam os efeitos dessa guerra nos comportamentos dos atuais governantes, tanto no percurso de busca de votos durante período eleitoral quanto nos discursos públicos.

A partir de 2015, assistiu-se a nomeação e exoneração sucessivas de primeiros-ministros, evidenciando um quadro persistente de instabilidade política. Em 2019, foi realizada a eleição legislativa, na qual o candidato do PAIGC, Domingos Simões Pereira, saiu vencedor, contudo, não foi investido no cargo de Primeiro-Ministro, sob alegação do Presidente da República de falta de confiança. Em contrapartida, foi solicitado ao partido vencedor que indicasse outro nome, mas as propostas apresentadas continuavam a incluir previamente recusado. Desse modo, a história recente do país tem sido marcada por instabilidades políticas, no qual os governos não conseguem completar seus mandatos de quatro anos.

Ainda em 2019, o país realizou eleição presidencial, da qual saiu o vencedor candidato Umaro Sissoco Embaló, apoiado pelo Movimento para Alternância Democrata (MADEM G15), permanecendo no poder até uma alegada tentativa de golpe de Estado em 2025. Desde a sua ascensão, tem-se observado diversas intervenções consideradas ofensivas à margem da Constituição. Ademais, segundo o relatório da Liga Guineense dos Direitos Humanos (LGDH), que analisa a situação dos direitos humanos no país entre anos de 2020 e 2022, verifica-se uma escalada preocupante da corrupção, que estaria "a dizimar" o sistema de justiça guineense, bem como persistente falta de implementação das leis por parte do Governo.

No relatório, foi destacado algumas questões relacionadas à educação e à saúde, revelando que "28% das crianças em idade escolar não têm acesso à educação, enquanto a taxa de mortalidade materna aumentou, registrando 667 mortes a cada cem mil mulheres de 2020 a 2022". Além disso, o documento aponta que há ainda aponta que há "mais de 809 casos de violência baseada no gênero, sete casos de raptos e espancamentos, além de 82 conflitos impulsionados por acusações de feitiçaria, resultando em 37 mortes" (Dansó, 2024).

Esses números tendem a aumentar, tendo em conta o nível de instabilidade que o país enfrenta. O relatório destaca diversas violações de direitos humanos ocorridos nesse período, sobretudo ataques aos órgãos de comunicação social e jornalistas, sendo ataque à Capital FM um exemplo, além de agressões contra opositores políticos e ativistas políticos e dos direitos humanos, bem como detenções arbitrárias de vários líderes sindicais, entre outros casos. A atual situação vivida pela Guiné-Bissau demonstra como os atores políticos não estão suficientemente engajados com interesses nacionais, nem com o respeito à ordem constitucional e aos direitos humanos.

Por fim, conclui-se que boa parte da população guineense e seus políticos não conseguiram extrair lições significativas do conflito de 1998 e das diversas intervenções militares que marcaram o cenário político. É evidente que presidente Embaló partia de pressupostos semelhantes aos adotados por Nino antes da eclosão do conflito, especialmente em relação a atos como raptos, espancamentos e ataques aos opositores políticos. Essas ações acabam gerando crises políticas que afetam diversos setores cruciais, como o funcionamento efetivo dos órgãos do Estado, a saúde, a justiça e a educação, resultando em retrocessos drásticos e comprometendo gravemente os direitos da população.

Tecnicamente, a situação político-social e econômica que o país ultrapassa é uma das mais graves, devido às atrocidades cometidas. Apesar de ser independente há mais de

cinco décadas, a Guiné-Bissau ainda não se consolidou como um Estado democrático e estável, muito em razão de diversos fracassos ocorridos ao longo dos anos desde a independência. Diante dessa gravidade, o balanço do percurso do país pode ser considerado negativo, considerando os múltiplos fatores que afetam a vida da população guineense. Seria, portanto, utópico pensar no progresso do país sem colocar os interesses do povo como prioridade.

Considerações finais

No presente estudo, foram destacados um dos períodos marcantes da história da Guiné-Bissau, desde o primeiro golpe militar, passando pela adesão ao UEMOA, até a eclosão do conflito armado de 1998. Ao longo do artigo, procurei demonstrar que a entrada da Guiné-Bissau na UEMOA, por si só, não pode ser considerada a causa principal ou direta da guerra. No entanto, ela deve ser compreendida como parte de um contexto mais amplo de fatores, incluindo tensões políticas, crispações socioeconômicas, tensões interétnicas e pessoais, corrupção, violência estrutural herdada de luta de libertação nacional, que contribuíram para criar um ambiente propício ao conflito. O principal estímulo, entretanto, foi um conflito de poder dentro das forças armadas, aliado a uma prolongada crise de governança. Ademais, este estudo revelou que o país enfrentou condicionantes histórico significantes antes de poder integrar a essa organização regional.

Em síntese, a análise da história política e social da Guiné-Bissau evidencia que o país é marcado por ciclos de instabilidades, crises de governança e tensões étnicas, desde período pós-independência até dias atuais. O conflito armado de 1998 e suas consequências expuseram fragilidades estruturais do Estado, revelando a incapacidade das elites políticas de resolver disputas por meio do diálogo e de priorizar o interesse nacional. A recorrência de golpes, intervenções militares e a manipulação de discursos étnicos e religiosos demonstram que a instabilidade política está profundamente enraizada, refletindo-se na precariedade de setores essenciais como saúde, educação e justiça.

Durante esta investigação, constatou-se que, no decorrer do conflito, houve forte disputa geopolítica, sobretudo, entre as duas principais organizações, CEDEAO e CPLP. Essa disputa de interesse entre as partes dificultou qualquer tentativa efetiva de mediação internacional do conflito, bem como a resolução das crises e a consolidação de um Estado democrático. As constantes instabilidades políticas e inseguranças que o país tem vivido impedem que a população experimente um verdadeiro desenvolvimento. Como apontado por Djau (2020), durante muito tempo o país "tornou-se refém de uma classe política que não se entende e sem vontade nenhuma de colocar os interesses do povo ao nível prioritário, tal como é suposto numa democracia, que manipula as forças de defesa e confunde a opinião pública" (Djau, 2020).

Tendo em vista esses fatores, torna-se urgente que os atores políticos guineenses reconheçam a gravidade dos acontecimentos e evitem o uso de discursos de cunho étnico e religioso, passando a priorizar os interesses da população e promoção da união nacional. Além disso, é imprescindível que o Estado guineense valorize e defenda o interesse nacional, sobretudo frente às pressões externas, mantendo-se comprometido

com os direitos humanos. Deve-se compreender, ainda, que a construção da paz e estabilidade exige um ambiente de respeito à ordem constitucional e jurídica, bem como a observação rigorosa das normas democráticas.

Por fim, evidenciou-se que, para que o país pudesse aderir a UEMOA, foi necessário cumprir diversas exigências e acordos de subjugação, o que acabou contribuindo para percepção internacional da Guiné-Bissau como um Estado frágil, incapaz de lidar com seus problemas internos e pressões externas. A integração à UEMOA e as pressões geopolíticas externas evidenciam ainda mais a vulnerabilidade do país diante de desafios internacionais. Nesse contexto, é importante lembrar que a geopolítica exige a existência de um projeto nacional coeso e bem estruturado, capaz de lidar com vizinhos independentemente de governo vigente. Isso inclui possuir uma Força Armada robusta para defender a soberania e os interesses nacionais, um sistema de saúde apto a enfrentar doenças, pandemia ou epidemia, autonomia em relação a soberania alimentar, energética e tecnológica, entre outros aspectos. Em suma, é fundamental que o país seja efetivamente dono do seu próprio destino.

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GUNS, GRIEVANCES, AND GOVERNANCE: EVALUATING THE ECOSYSTEM OF ARMED BANDITRY IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

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Abstract

Nigeria is contending with a complex national problem arising from armed banditry, herdsmen terrorism, and various other kinds of insecurity, posing substantial challenges to the country's national security. This research investigates armed banditry both as an intrinsic manifestation of violence and as a trigger for the reformation of violent conflicts in the changing context of northern Nigeria. Utilising qualitative methodologies, including 31 key informant interviews and 6 focus group discussions across the three most impacted LGAs in Zamfara State, the results indicate that different types of violence are intricately intertwined with armed banditry, underscoring significant implications for understanding the dynamics and pathways of conflict in the area. While the government's anti-banditry initiative, utilising military surveillance and raids, is commendable, practical difficulties, particularly limited knowledge of the area's geography, have hindered its effectiveness. This highlights the significance of local vigilantes and community watch groups, who have enhanced geographical awareness. Nevertheless, these regional systems necessitate sufficient expertise, resources, and oversight to avert abuse and drastic actions. Implementing community-oriented law enforcement, bolstered by local staff and intelligence, appears to be the most feasible resolution. Thus, the research advocates transcending government-focused solutions in favour of community-oriented activities and discussions that address the enduring perceived marginalisation and exclusion of groups vulnerable to bandit recruitment.

Keywords

Armed Banditry, Bandits, State Responses, Zamfara State, Nigeria.

Resumo

A Nigéria enfrenta um problema nacional complexo decorrente do banditismo armado, do terrorismo dos pastores e de vários outros tipos de insegurança, o que coloca desafios substanciais à segurança nacional do país. Esta investigação analisa o banditismo armado tanto como uma manifestação intrínseca da violência como um fator desencadeante da reestruturação de conflitos violentos no contexto em mudança do norte da Nigéria. Recorrendo a metodologias qualitativas, incluindo 31 entrevistas a informadores-chave e 6 discussões em grupos focais nas três LGAs mais afetadas do Estado de Zamfara, os resultados indicam que diferentes tipos de violência estão intimamente interligados com o banditismo armado, o que sublinha implicações significativas para a compreensão da dinâmica e das vias de desenvolvimento do conflito na região. Embora a iniciativa governamental de combate ao banditismo, que recorre à vigilância militar e a incursões, seja louvável, as dificuldades práticas — em particular o conhecimento limitado da geografia da região — têm prejudicado

a sua eficácia. Isto realça a importância dos grupos de vigilância locais e das patrulhas comunitárias, que possuem um melhor conhecimento geográfico. No entanto, estes sistemas regionais requerem conhecimentos especializados, recursos e supervisão suficientes para evitar abusos e ações drásticas. A implementação de uma aplicação da lei orientada para a comunidade, apoiada por pessoal local e informações de inteligência, parece ser a solução mais viável. Assim, a investigação defende que se ultrapassem as soluções centradas no governo, em favor de atividades e debates orientados para a comunidade que abordem a marginalização e exclusão percebidas e persistentes de grupos vulneráveis ao recrutamento por parte dos bandidos.

Palavras-Chave

Banditismo armado, Bandidos, Respostas do Estado, Estado de Zamfara, Nigéria.

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GUNS, GRIEVANCES, AND GOVERNANCE: EVALUATING THE ECOSYSTEM OF ARMED BANDITRY IN NORTHWEST NIGERIA

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Introduction

Nigerian public discourse has focused more on what is referred to as "armed banditry" or "rural banditry" in response to the shifting dynamics of instability across the Sahel. The growing prevalence of rural banditry, especially in the northwestern and central regions of Nigeria, has raised concerns among security professionals, academics, policymakers, and citizens who seek to identify its underlying causes and develop preventive and containment measures. Nevertheless, in the subject of armed conflict and security studies in Nigerian literature, armed banditry, also known as rural banditry, has been an elusive and understudied term despite its prominence. The majority of current evaluations of Nigeria's insecurity still focus on non-state armed groups like Boko Haram or other types of criminality like ethnic or religious violence (Ochu et al., 2023). This study makes a unique interdisciplinary contribution to the subject by focusing on armed banditry and the larger dynamics of insecurity in Nigeria. This study investigates how local populations in the northwestern State of Zamfara experience and respond to insecurity by integrating ethnographic data with theoretical and critical frameworks from geography, geopolitics, and African studies (Adu and Osadola, 2022). This method makes it possible to gain fresh perspectives on what rural banditry is, how it functions, and, most importantly, how it affects common perceptions of resistance, governance, and the role of the State in Nigeria.

The goal of this study is to thoroughly examine the development and patterns of armed banditry in Northwest Nigeria. Our overarching goal is to critically analyse the evolution of armed banditry in Nigeria's Northwest throughout time. In order to do this, the study looks at the trajectories of armed banditry activity by determining the spatial and temporal patterns of banditry activities, tracing the origins and emergence of armed banditry and comprehending the forces behind rising violence and falling poverty, critically analysing the various state responses to the incursion of armed banditry and how this helps to lessen or increase the impacts, and tracing the origins of armed banditry in Nigeria. In doing so, our research examines topics including the paths and characteristics of armed banditry, the State's role in the evolution of armed banditry over time, and how the aims and purposes of combating armed banditry frequently shift.

Literature Review

Armed banditry has emerged as a pressing and substantial threat to Nigeria's national security. Authorities and scholars have repeatedly recognised multiple factors shaping Nigeria's current security landscape. These encompass destitution, disputes between pastoralists and agriculturalists, the presence of warlords, regions lacking effective governance or ungoverned territories, transnational criminal syndicates, and the proliferation of Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) originating in the Middle East and North Africa. These dynamics have been emphasised by analysts and academics like Ojo (2020), Ojo et al. (2023), and Oyewole et al. (2022).

Comprehending the essence of armed banditry in Nigeria and determining whether to classify such entities as terrorism or organised crime is a considerable challenge. The group has adopted specific operational tactics from entities such as Boko Haram, ISWAP, and Ansaru; however, its initial formation was grounded in structured criminal endeavours motivated by economic gain. Nonetheless, a recent transformation has taken place in the entity's operations, strategies, structure, and organisational frameworks. Despite the Nigerian government's designation of the organisation as a terrorist organisation, the entrapment must be assessed in light of its present attributes. Characterising armed banditry requires careful examination (Azeez, 2020; Abdulrasheed, 2021; King'ong'o, 2022; Out, 2022; Ojo, Aina and Oyewole, 2024).

Osasona (2023) asserts that armed banditry constitutes a type of criminal behaviour akin to kidnapping, larceny, armed theft, and vandalism. Armed banditry, when analysed through the lens of organised crime embedded in the illicit economy, is chiefly motivated by financial rewards. Organised crime, often characterised as a type of criminal syndicate, typically involves the intentional devastation of properties, the perpetration of violence against individuals, and the coercive appropriation of victims' possessions. Armed bandits denote criminal organisations that violently seize assets, including cattle and currency, from civilian communities and perpetrate sexual violence. (Ojo et al., 2023)

Ojewale (2023) found that armed bandits exhibit a quasi-organisation marked by a coordinated command hierarchy, akin to that of global militias. These criminals predominantly function in countryside regions and utilise deadly weapons such as AK-47 rifles. Investigating rural affiliations, one might suggest that armed banditry is concentrated in areas devoid of robust state rule. This region demonstrates a scant governmental presence, highlighted by the conspicuous lack of police and other law enforcement entities tasked with maintaining order. In specific areas, informal governance is more prevalent, predominantly coordinated by conventional institutions. This environment serves as a refuge for criminal enterprises that enable unlawful activities motivated by greed.

In a similar vein, Obi & Iwuoha (2023) contended that armed banditry is motivated by the pursuit of economic assets by looting, robbery, intimidation, and violent assaults. Robbers utilise coercion or intimidation to strip individuals of their belongings. It has also included the process of obtaining and managing income sources, such as livestock, which are later marketed in other regions. The main perpetrators of armed banditry in Nigeria, as noted in scholarly works, are the Fulani, Hausa, Kanuri, and many other ethnic factions

that employ Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW) in their activities (Obi & Iwuoha, 2023; Ojo, 2020).

The discussion of the theoretical foundations of armed banditry in Nigeria highlights the significance of multiple perspectives. The interpretation of armed banditry in Nigeria, influenced by diverse perspectives including resource disputes, organised crime, political violence, and ethno-religious factors, remains a contentious issue. Some scholars rely on a single source for its origins, whereas others synthesise these varied perspectives to investigate its historical evolution and trajectory of transformation.

A leading hypothesis links armed banditry in Northwestern Nigeria to resource-driven disputes between Fulani herders and agriculturalists arising from competition for natural resources. Fulani herders in the Sahel region continually seek more fertile lands to sustain their livestock due to droughts caused by climate change. Host villages consist of stationary farmers; however, livestock encroaches upon arable grounds, resulting in disputes between the factions. Moreover, agriculturists cull livestock to safeguard agricultural produce, and nearby populations might engage in cow theft. Incidents frequently lead to discord between Fulani herders seeking to recover missing livestock and farmers whose crops have been damaged (Ojo, 2023).

An alternative strategy emphasises unregulated regions where criminal organisations proliferate due to insufficient governmental control. Unregulated territories are isolated regions where the indigenous population encounters an absence of governmental authority. Inhabitants of these areas are governed by unofficial powers. In this context, regulations are grounded in regional norms and traditions (Ojo, 2020). The struggle for natural resources in lawless regions has resulted in a novel viewpoint of armed bandits in Nigeria. Ojewale (2021) asserts that terrorist organisations partner with sponsors of armed banditry to infiltrate mining regions. It subtly underscores governmental participation in armed robbery. Ojewale (2021) observed that criminal organisations employ violence to forcibly remove local inhabitants, particularly in mining regions, alongside engaging in cattle theft to facilitate their activities.

The collaboration between armed criminals and the Islamic State of West Africa Province (ISWAP) in northwestern Nigeria highlights the gravity of the struggle in assessing the relationship between terrorism and crime. Speculation exists over the partnership between armed marauders and the terrorist organisation referred to as ISWAP. This coalition might provide armed criminals in Nigeria with training, logistical support, recruitment strategies, and operational flexibility (Ojo et al., 2023).

Methodology

The research employed a multi-disciplinary methodology to deliver a comprehensive examination of armed banditry in Northern Nigeria. This includes historical and socio-economic evaluations, as well as qualitative techniques. With respect to the historical inquiry, we examined the relevant scholarly, policy-oriented, and journalistic literature. Nonetheless, due to the ongoing threat of banditry and the scarcity of empirical research on the subject, the review extended beyond peer-reviewed articles to include policy documents, grey literature, and significant news reports in outlining the evolution of

banditry in Nigeria. This was enhanced by an extensive examination of Nigeria's socio-economic environment through the assessment of key international indices and reports, with pertinent socio-economic factors related to banditry systematically outlined to ensure a thorough study.

The qualitative data-gathering initiative was conducted across the three senatorial districts of Zamfara State: Zamfara North, Zamfara Central, and Zamfara West. Consequently, Gusau (ZC), Zurmi (ZN), and Anka (ZW) Local Government Areas exemplify the three senatorial districts. The chosen LGAs of Anka, Gusau, and Zurmi have experienced the greatest impact from armed banditry in the State. A total of 31 purposively selected interviews were conducted with participants from various backgrounds, chiefly traditional leaders, agriculturalists and herders, village and district chiefs, security officials and vigilante unit leaders, journalists, as well as Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) and heads of IDP camps. The investigator frequented the distressed villages several times between June 2024 and February 2025 to observe and perform interviews. From January to March 2025, the researcher conducted six focus group discussions with individuals experiencing internal displacement or those personally impacted by armed banditry, as well as representatives from governmental and non-governmental organisations and journalists who reported on the situation in Zamfara State from January 2023 to December 2024. This was executed to provide immediate validation of the historical and socio-economic elements. This methodology of combining historical inquiry, modern socio-economic evaluation, and interview gathering has yielded a nuanced and comprehensive insight into the fundamental origins and evolutionary paths of armed banditry in Nigeria. It also allowed the research to advance beyond the current literature, which has frequently concentrated on merely one of these domains.

The qualitative material generated from the 31 semi-structured key informant interviews and 6 focus group discussions was transcribed verbatim, with Hausa language recordings translated and cross-verified for semantic accuracy. The qualitative corpus was analysed using reflexive thematic analysis, following the systematic stages of data familiarisation, initial inductive and deductive coding, code collating, and thematic abstraction. An initial codebook was developed around core structural themes, including the historical origins of violence, local perceptions of pastoralist-farmer tensions, community experiences of vigilantism (notably Yan Sa Kai), and appraisals of state kinetic interventions. Emerging codes were constantly compared across respondent categories (IDPs, traditional rulers, community watch leaders, and state officials) to identify convergent patterns and divergent nuances. Direct interview transcripts and group discussions were subsequently triangulated against historical policy documents and secondary data to establish construct validity, while participant anonymity was preserved through anonymised identifiers.

Analysis and Discussions

Origins, Drivers, and Patterns of Armed Banditry in Northern Nigeria

Presently, there exist three discordant hypotheses concerning the evolution, progression, and essence of banditry in Northern Nigeria. The initial perspective saw banditry as an offshoot of terrorism and a perpetuation of the historical Fulani jihad in the twentieth

century, which predominantly aimed at agricultural populations in northern Nigeria. The Global Terrorism Index (2015) contends that the characteristics of terrorism in Nigeria are distinct from those in Iraq and Afghanistan. The terrorist operations in Nigeria resemble the tactics utilised by organised crime groups and gangs, focusing primarily on armed attacks including firearms and knives, as opposed to explosions, which are typical of larger terrorist entities. The Fulani militants, a terrorist organisation originating from Nigeria, were classified as the fourth deadliest terrorist group in 2014. This represents a notable elevation from their former position, as they were not previously classified among the most lethal factions. The number of fatalities attributed to the Fulani extremists surged from 63 in 2013 to 1,229 in 2014 (Gbadeya, 2025).

The second viewpoint presents a divergent and controversial narrative of banditry's development in the area. This perspective asserts that banditry constitutes a crime endorsed by the state with genocidal aims. The institution views banditry as a manifestation of violence bolstered by outside entities aiming to diminish community populations and facilitate the proliferation of Islam in northern Nigeria, particularly in locations lacking a majority of Hausa or Fulani influence. The viewpoint is primarily influenced by widespread discontent with the government's incompetence in handling the crisis (ACAPS, 2020). The third perspective, which appears to be the most dominant, links rural banditry to the mishandling of disputes between agriculturalists and pastoralists in Northern Nigeria. Findings from the comprehensive interviews indicate that rural banditry is intricately associated with the persistent strife between Fulani herdsmen and agricultural cultivators. This dispute could be shaped by overarching elements such as identity politics and intergroup dynamics, particularly the relationships between pastoralist communities and the Nigerian state. Transhumant herders are often perceived as hostile and deliberately armed to challenge unsuspecting agriculturalists. The farmers allege that they intentionally harm crops through their livestock. In contrast, the herders saw themselves as casualties of political marginalisation, devoid of representation in the Nigerian governmental framework (Ojewale et al, 2024).

Preliminary data indicates that the recent surge of armed banditry in Nigeria, particularly in the northern area, commenced in the late 1990s and early 2000s. This era was marked by domestic security issues and strife, including the ethnic and religious turmoil that ignited in the northern city of Kaduna in 2000 and the implementation of Sharia law in other northern states. Gettleman (2018) elucidates that "gang leaders commenced recruiting marginalised young men as assassins in the nascent conflicts concerning religion." Consequently, a connection exists between the involvement of youth organisations and political militia factions in the resurgence of violence in the North and the emergence of armed banditry in the area. This era, sometimes termed the initial phase of the Fourth Republic, was characterised by the dominance of retired military generals in politics and was associated with the rise of vigilante factions, political militias, and ethno-religious entities (Osadola and Emah, 2022). These factions of young individuals were either enlisted by politicians to promote their agendas or utilised as tools to compel the government to address the requests of these diverse interest groups. This led the political elite and security agencies to exploit these factions to stifle opposing groups or dissent in some regions of the nation. Nwokora (2015) notes that the established functions of the various factions within each regime have fostered a familiar trajectory for the employment of patronage systems, corruption, and violence to

consolidate and regulate state authority. These inclinations have perpetuated the existence of non-state armed factions in Nigeria, many of which ultimately engage in illicit activity.

Maiangwa (2018) contends that the interdependent connection between governance and the engagement of both State and non-state violent entities has led to the normalisation of violence as a means of communication and interaction within society. He observes that the prevalence of violence in Nigerian society, characterised by an increasing cultural tolerance for aggression and the government's exclusive control over its interpretation, has profoundly influenced the development and entrenchment of armed banditry in contemporary times. This historical investigation, as highlighted by Baba (2012), reveals the aggravating elements and origins of violence in the North, prompting an analysis of the emergence and timeline of political militias since the reestablishment of civilian governance in 1999, alongside the escalation of violence and banditry, to illustrate the North's standing within Nigeria.

Several factors influencing the progression of banditry in Nigeria include climate change, the increasing availability of weapons, and heightened competition for resources. Initially, advancing desertification in the northern territories has led to more frequent droughts, compelling herders, particularly from the Fulani ethnic group, to relocate southward in search of cultivable land for grazing (Gbadeyan, 2024; Gbadeyan and Osadola, 2023b). This has resulted in increased confrontations with stationary agricultural communities, many of which have established local militias to protect their territory from what they view as "intrusive" herders. These militias, originally established for community protection, have increasingly engaged in illicit activities and banditry.

A significant element thought to contribute to rural banditry in the areas is linked to the smuggling of small arms and munitions. The widespread availability of weaponry has attracted the interest of academics and experts, particularly following the conclusion of the Cold War (Adeleye and Osadola, 2022). Assessments concerning the quantity of criminal factions and outlaws in the Northwestern area have varied. A notable Nigerian scholar on banditry claims that there are around 120 bandit encampments in the area and that the bandits are armed with more than 60,000 AK-47 rifles (Rufai, 2021). A religious leader appointed by bandits to negotiate with the government claims that approximately 100,000 armed bandits exist in the north-western area (The Punch, 2019).

Additionally, a notable community leader from one of the six states affected by the crisis in the Northwest region claimed that an astonishing 30,000 armed bandits are operating independently in Zamfara State. Some groups have considerable armaments and sustain a coalition of individuals who collaborate with them in the security apparatus and the wider community. These groups are financially supported and have a deep understanding of the area's complex geography (GJF, 2021).

The worldwide spread of small guns is considered a catalyst for numerous adverse effects, including civil conflicts, organised crime, and the evolution of tiny insurgents into globally acknowledged terrorist organisations. This is illustrated by the occurrence of armed robbery in Nigeria's Northwest. The escalation of weapon acquisition among civilians pursuing firearms is progressively igniting an internal "arms race" in the area. Armed offenders obtain firearms to attack the Nigerian government and challenge its sole

authority over the application of force by state entities. Also, the fact that adjacent countries like Libya and Mali have been thrown into disarray as a result of civil wars during the Arab Spring has led to the spread of armaments and light weapons in the Sahel region as a whole. Northwestern states such as Kebbi, Zamfara, and Katsina have suffered the spillage of illegal weaponry streaming in from bordering countries, making it increasingly difficult to regulate the operations of armed bandits. It has also been suggested that some of the combatants who fought alongside Muammar Gaddafi in Libya migrated southward into the Sahel and the Lake Chad Basin after his defeat, aggravating the development of armed banditry in these regions. The most recent empirical study, including ICG (2021), reveals that there is a fundamental shift in the character and patterns of armed banditry in Nigeria, with a notable increase in lethality and also in the number of recorded violent acts perpetrated by these organisations in the last two years.

Over time, there has been a fundamental shift in the modus operandi of the bandits in the amount of atrocities committed by them and the number of deaths of the public and ransom activities. For instance, in 2021 alone, there were over 1000 kidnappings for ransom issues as a result of armed bandits in North-west Nigeria, with increasing attacks on military sites, airports, moving trains, and local towns. Its dynamics have turned north-west and north-central Nigeria into an enclave of instability, posing major security challenges (Ojo et al., 2024).

According to the International Crisis Group (ICG), in 2021, the number of people murdered by firearms in north-west Nigeria alone from 2013 to 2021 topped 52,000, although a total of 105,000 guns were confiscated in this region within the indicated time frame (ICG, 2021). Notwithstanding Nigeria's strong weapons control regulations, the prevalence of illicit firearms has undergone a large growth. Gun violence has surpassed all other causes of death for the first time in recorded history, resulting in a drop in the average lifetime of the population in the region. This transition has been particularly evident in the central regions of Zamfara, Kebbi, and, to a degree, Sokoto (Gbadeyan et al., 2024). These predominantly rural and undeveloped regions have witnessed multiple occurrences of mass kidnappings for ransom, conflicts between herder and agricultural communities, and assaults on small towns by armed criminals. It is imperative for the Nigerian government to promptly implement strategies to thwart and incapacitate the operations of these audacious and elusive armed bandit factions before they become more entrenched and possibly amalgamate with larger insurgent entities like Boko Haram in the future.

Categorising Armed Banditry: Actors, Networks, and Modalities

Insights obtained from the field interviews indicated that nomadic Fulani herdsmen, political militias evolved into bandits, and regional criminal factions have emerged as the predominant categories of armed bandits in Northern Nigeria. The Hausa-Fulani, Nigeria's most populous ethnic group, primarily located in the North, have a considerable number of people engaged in pastoralism. A participant asserted that:

> *"The Fulani herdsmen have been involved in several clashes with local farmers over grazing rights and access to natural resources, resulting in the loss of lives and displacement of communities. However, in recent years,*

> *some Fulani herdsmen have become more organised in carrying out pre-meditated attacks on local villagers and, in some cases, engaging in cattle rustling."*

Researchers have noted that there are elements of politicisation and instrumentalisation of the Fulani ethnicity by the political elites in power, to the extent that the Fulani herdsmen are now perceived and categorised as the new face of terrorism in Nigeria (Muhammed et al., 2023; Gbadeyan and Osadola, 2023a). On the other hand, there were several State and non-state-sponsored militias created and armed to address specific political or ethno-religious goals in Nigeria. The most notable of these militias is established in the Middle Belt, a region known for its ethno-religious conflicts and its strategic location between the predominantly Muslim North and the predominantly Christian South of Nigeria. In the voice of one of the participants,

> *"These political militias have now transformed into armed bandit groups, targeting local communities for financial gains and engaging in organised crimes such as cattle rustling and kidnapping for ransom. There were also local criminal gangs that have been identified to be involved in various forms of armed banditry in different states. For example, the "Yan Sa Kai" in Zamfara State originated as a vigilante group established to support the State in providing internal security."*

Nevertheless, the lack of a legal framework for such entities and the endemic corruption in security institutions have caused "Yan Sa Kai" to progressively become one of the most formidable and important armed bandit groups in the State. These regional criminal factions are typically composed of local adolescents who experience disenchantment, a lack of agency, and an absence of affiliation or opportunity. It is broadly asserted that a sustainable approach to armed banditry in Northern Nigeria must confront the underlying elements that foster local criminality.

Correspondingly, the engagement of nomadic Fulani herdsmen in armed banditry within Northern Nigeria has recently drawn scholarly scrutiny (Ojo, 2023; Gbadeyan, Ola, Osadola and Ojo, 2024). The primary facet to grasp is the idea of Fulani identity, characterised by its complexity and variability. In present-day Nigeria, the Fulani are chiefly identified as cattle breeders, and their prominence on the roadways and in the remote regions of northern Nigeria is perpetually recognised. This is frequently termed the 'cattle Fulani' representation. Nonetheless, the Fulani have a more nuanced identity beyond only being cattle breeders. One should acknowledge that there are separations among the Fulani groups between those who regard themselves as indigenous and those who view themselves as newcomers. Native populations have historically been considered the 'guardians of the land' and predominantly engage in farming. This situation has transformed due to the influx of many Fulani individuals into different areas and the formation of a distinct relationship between Fulani herders and local farmers. Nonetheless, there exists a broad array of preconceptions and scepticism regarding the Fulani in Nigeria, which has at times caused these perceptions to infiltrate the academic realm. In Nigeria, Fulani herders have participated in confrontations with indigenous

populations and surrounding ethnic factions, notably within the Middle Belt and Northwest geopolitical areas.

Osadola and Gbadeyan (2023), asserted that the motivations behind these wars are far more complex than just racial or ethnic disputes. The scholarly community appears to be moving away from the historical "identity" rationale for the Fulani's engagement in banditry. A consensus among experts is that the primary impetus behind the Fulani violence, particularly in the Middle Belt, is the conflict for resources such as land and water between herders and local cultivators. Nevertheless, it is difficult to connect those conflicts directly to the wave of fatal attacks perpetrated by the Fulani herdsmen against rural communities. The shifting dynamics of violence perpetrated by the nomadic Fulani herdsmen have become a mounting apprehension for the Nigerian government and the international community alike. A transition has occurred from relying on a "essentialist" perspective grounded in historical Fulani identity to a more adaptable argument that highlights present socio-economic and political factors in interpreting the crime trends related to Fulani herdsmen. As per Adenuga et al. (2023), the pastoral Fulani community and their related organisations and militias were said to be responsible for 70% of the documented ethnic conflicts in Nigeria from 1999 to 2021.

Additionally, political militias have morphed into banditry, which has initiated a cycle of mobilisations, political violence, and the reinforcement of partisan groups that maintain societal fragmentation in Nigeria. In fact, a variety of socioeconomic hierarchies existed throughout the period when Nigeria's political parties were influenced by colonial powers. Consequently, Nigeria was bequeathed a heritage of schisms in belief systems, geographic identities, and ethnic groups. The political elite in Nigeria have acknowledged this societal predicament and have consistently rallied to mend those splits. They secure and enhance their own interests by interacting with, dominating, and influencing these divisions toward factional support. Fundamentally, the prevailing system in Nigeria endows the State with substantial power over the legitimate use of violence, encompassing both defence and policing. Established social constructs exist globally, regardless of the precise type being referenced. This is a result of the fundamental human repulsion of residing in unpredictability. Humanity has historically shown a preference for living in an orderly, distinctly defined social environment. This demand for a framework in human situations clarifies the social system, regardless of whether it is democratic or dictatorial.

In recent years, "local criminal gangs" have established themselves as the most widespread manifestation of armed banditry in Northwestern Nigeria. The formation of regional criminal gangs is linked to the collapse of law and order that began in the 1990s, resulting from the disbanding of a government-sanctioned vigilante force referred to as "Yan Sa Kai" by the northern authorities. The Yan Sakai's overzealous acts diminished its reputation, especially among the Fulani people who were profoundly influenced by the Yan Sakai's existence. Thus, there was an increase in violent confrontations between the Hausas and the Fulanis in the North West region. In response to the conduct of the Yan Sakai, the Fulanis formed an armed force called Yan Bindiga. The triumphant growth of regional crime syndicates is a definitive reflection of the inadequacies and prejudiced political objectives of rural administrative policies. This significant triumph has provoked a sense of trepidation among the "civilised" political elite; in the preceding two years, not

only has the prevalence of gang-related violence intensified, but reports of violent encounters between local gangs and federal authorities are becoming increasingly frequent, resulting in a more justified security crackdown and the establishment of a militarised police state.

Spatial Trajectories and Tactical Adaptations of Armed Bandits in Northwestern Nigeria

Armed banditry in Nigeria's northwest, particularly in Zamfara state, is marked by assaults on rural populations and transport, cattle theft, unregulated gold mining, disputes between agriculturalists and pastoralists, abduction, and various violent acts for ransom. The operational methods of criminals have evolved considerably in recent years, yet their activities have continued to be somewhat erratic and dynamic. In contrast to rebel factions such as Boko Haram, armed bandits appear to lack specific territorial claims and do not actively engage with the Nigerian government or its security apparatus.

Conversely, they have been persistently adjusting to the environment in which they function. Interviews with key informants indicated that bandits in Zamfara State have been fragmenting into smaller factions and adopting a more exploratory approach to their operations. Conversely, the insights acquired from prolonged activities in regions like Birnin Gwari have emboldened specific bandit factions to execute increasingly orchestrated and audacious assaults, such the abduction of tourists or the simultaneous invasion of little rural communities from many angles. The recurrent assault or application of a specific strategy in a region tends to engender profound anxiety and susceptibility among the local populace, hence complicating the recovery of that area. Such techniques may incite and intensify intergroup conflict over time. The interviews and field observations emphasised that contemporary banditry may not constitute a unified social or political force in itself. Nonetheless, there are presently numerous localised and minor civil disputes and struggles for resources, illicit economies, and authority among communities that are frequently exploited by bandits.

The distribution of armed banditry in northern Nigeria has undergone significant changes during the last ten years. During the 1960s and 1970s, criminal activity was predominantly concentrated in the north-western half of the nation, especially in Katsina and Sokoto states. Recent findings indicate a westward shift in armed banditry, with Zamfara state being the new focal point of violence and criminal activity. Ojo et al. (2023) contended that the Northern region encountered a minimum of 909 occurrences of armed bandit assaults, leading to the fatalities of more than 8300 persons from January 2013 to March 2022. Kaduna, Katsina, Sokoto, and Zamfara are the northern states most severely affected, with armed bandits in Kaduna State accountable for the fatalities of 1917 people during 342 assaults. In Katsina State, there were 208 assaults that led to the demise of 1416 individuals. Sokoto State recorded 54 assaults resulting in 644 deaths, whilst Zamfara encountered 275 assaults with 4,114 fatalities. Moreover, armed robbery in the northwest has led to the kidnapping of many individuals and the displacement of hundreds of thousands, as noted by Ojo (2023).

This change in hotspots reflects enduring "push-and-pull" dynamics in banditry, wherein security voids, diminished local governance, and rivalry for resources, such as land

conflicts or livestock theft, compel bandits to vacate one region and migrate to another. A participant in the interview, who is a stakeholder in the security industry, asserted that:

> *"The establishment of "firebases" by security forces in Katsina and Zamfara has also influenced the geographic spread of armed banditry. Such military encampments, which are intended to disrupt armed group movements, have effectively displaced banditry from traditional territories in Katsina and pushed activities further south and west."*

The significance of firebases in facilitating bandit relocation was evident in a recent strategic response by the Zamfara state government, which indicated that proximity to firebases was a primary factor in establishing new police divisions. The geographic distribution is influenced by the changing dynamics of opportunity frameworks for bandits and the endeavours of security forces to dismantle entrenched regions.

Investigations from the FGDs indicated that the bandits in Zamfara predominantly utilise the 'hit-and-run' strategy, a tactic historically used by guerrilla warfare and counter-insurgency factions globally. The strategy enables the factions to maintain pressure on the government and military through relentless, methodical assaults, complicating the State's ability to adequately address the complex issues related to armed banditry. The robbers generally choose routes including 'soft targets' like peasants, vehicles, security patrols, local defence personnel, and transit trains for their assaults. These objectives are typically seen as straightforward targets to assault and disengage from, facing little to no rapid and robust counteraction from the surprised security forces. The bandits deliberately target villages for their rural locations, which typically lack immediate security support or swift intervention by government law enforcement. It is important to recognise that the selection of victims often varies by geography and the kind of armed banditry, since nomadic Fulani herders are known to assault agricultural settlements due to resource disputes and divisions.

Lastly, however certainly not insignificant, another characteristic of the strategies observed in armed banditry is the inclination to plunder and ravage. The interviews and narrative descriptions uncovered in comprehensive discussions have consistently detailed the initiation and escalation of the bandits' attack, culminating in widespread plunder and destruction of victims' assets, provisions, and agricultural areas. The pervasive and marauding behaviours observed during each assault, which are distinctly centred on material gain, have significantly impacted tactical decision-making as the factions have tailored their methods to achieve the intended outcomes of destabilising the State's authority and governance.

The objectives of armed banditry in Nigeria often encompass people, affluent individuals, and essential infrastructure, such as transportation and energy resources. Western captives have likewise been seized, signifying a growing risk to global interests posed by the organisation. The motivations for such conduct include instilling fear and securing extensive media exposure, although they are chiefly driven by economic or material interests. In north-western Nigeria, bandits persist as a varied assortment of economically driven, non-ideological organised criminal factions involved in extensive

cattle theft, sexual assault, extortion, ransom kidnapping, armed robbery, looting, and the intimidation of motorists.

In recent years, an increasing trend of armed criminals has emerged, notably focusing on the theft from gold miners, especially in the State of Zamfara. This State has had a notable rise in artisanal gold production, leading to sporadic finds around the area. Since about 2009, a notable rise in the global value of gold has drawn many young men to gold mining. These folks have primarily been raised in several locations, including Anka, Bin Yauri, Maru, Malale, Gurmana, and OkolomDogondaji (ICG, 2020).

Fieldwork interviews indicated that bandits are drawn to the lucrative cash rewards associated with kidnapping, which serves as a swift and efficient means of acquiring significant capital for weapon procurement or power consolidation. These factions are probably driven by the opportunity to exploit inadequate safeguarding at mining sites and the prospective plunder to be gained. Nevertheless, these elucidations are perhaps more fitting for the conduct of structured and illicit armed factions like MEND than for the opportunistic behaviours of other "professional" offenders. Organisations like MEND and several separatist factions in the Niger Delta and Nigeria have successfully achieved their main goals, including securing significant financial resources through illicit means, while also fostering considerable public awareness and dissatisfaction. This has been accomplished through media-oriented endeavours, including political protests and a prolonged assault on the area's oil and gas infrastructure. This has resulted in considerable financial distress and the forfeiture of millions of barrels of oil from the global market. Although the overt objectives of organisations like MEND may seem politically driven, it is crucial to acknowledge that their activities have substantial economic consequences at both national and global levels.

Evaluating State Interventions and Counter-Banditry Strategies in Northwestern Nigeria

A comprehensive strategy is utilised to evaluate the present government's reactions to armed banditry in Northern Nigeria. Government responses to the intensifying violence perpetrated by bandits and other criminal groups in Nigeria's northwest have mostly fluctuated between kinetic and non-kinetic strategies. Despite the federal government predominantly employing military tactics, state administrations, constrained by federal oversight of security services, have sought to broker peace accords with bandits and other criminal groups. The divergence in policy effectively illustrates the discord between the Federal and State administrations in their attempts to combat banditry. The discord between these two levels of government in addressing banditry is evident in the case of the former governor of Zamfara State, Abdulaziz Yari Abubakar, who publicly denounced his constitutional responsibility as the State's primary security official.

Historically, the approaches of successive Nigerian administrations to combat armed banditry have oscillated between direct military action and efforts to pursue political resolutions to what fundamentally constitutes a social and economic dilemma. Nevertheless, as we elucidate in the subsequent paragraph, the rise of armed banditry as a significant security concern within Nigeria's national and international security framework has coincided with a profound shift in which the Nigerian State has forsaken

non-militaristic approaches to combat armed banditry in favour of a focus on counter-insurgency and military interventions. Primarily, in reaction to the Katsina protest movement advocating for the reclassification of armed banditry as 'terrorism' and the recent assaults on notable political and religious figures in the Northern states, Nigerian President Buhari has increasingly characterised armed bandits as a national security threat rather than merely common criminals, thus distancing law enforcement strategies from the interconnected transnational networks of arms, individuals, and finances that perpetuate banditry. Before his victory in 2015, Buhari and his political party faced allegations of employing appeasement tactics toward armed banditry orchestrated by influential individuals in the North West and North East concerning the incitement of political violence and electoral manipulation.

These military actions and reaction initiatives seek to restrain and weaken the armed factions, reduce their capacities and power, and disrupt and deconstruct their operational frameworks. It is proposed that Nigeria's counterterrorism military efforts have been significantly shaped by external sovereignty and national security interests. The United States government has provided significant training and support to the Nigerian military, perhaps to further its own geopolitical or security objectives in combating terrorism and mitigating instability in the oil-rich Sub-Saharan Sahel (Onuoha 2016). On the one hand, this burgeoning counter-insurgency strategy has achieved notable success in swaying local populations and constraining the operational capabilities of armed bandit factions in the Northern and Northwestern States. However, evidence indicates that appropriately calibrated and strategically directed military operations can effectively undermine the operational capabilities of armed banditry. Military operations have indisputably influenced outcomes, leading to the detention of many persons suspected of connections to herder-aligned paramilitary groups and criminal networks (CDD, 2015).

Furthermore, a considerable number of these persons have been neutralised, numerous forest encampments have been dismantled, and large quantities of weaponry and munitions have been confiscated. Moreover, the armed forces and law enforcement have effectively rescued a multitude of individuals who were before kidnaped. Notwithstanding these accomplishments, security forces have failed to eradicate a varied assortment of armed criminals. Despite the escalated endeavours, the existing resources including personnel, logistics, and equipment are insufficient to swiftly address assaults by armed factions.

Governors from the North-western states have also mobilised to address the rampant banditry. In 2019, the armed marauders and the Governors of Zamfara, Sokoto, and Katsina reached a consensus. The accord included the procedure for disarmament, the release of abducted persons, and the provision of amnesty to criminals. Despite a reduction in fatalities from August to November attributed to reconciliation efforts, there was a recurrence of assaults in 2020 (Dami, 2021). Notwithstanding official refutations, both the Nigerian federal and state administrations have consistently engaged in the payment of ransom to guarantee the safety of victims and facilitate their liberation (Mustapha, 2019). The consistent paying of ransom by Nigerian officials to save the lives of captives and ensure their release has led to mass abductions being a prominent method for financing criminal and extremist organisations (Lamidi, 2024). Nonetheless, this approach furthermore acts as an incentive for criminals to continue their unlawful

endeavours. In October 2016, a governmental peace initiative in Zamfara state culminated in a successful accord with militant factions.

Consequently, a transaction involving weaponry in exchange for development was initiated. In April 2017, law enforcement disclosed that over 1000 armed militants and criminals associated with herders have abandoned banditry and surrendered their firearms in return for financial assurances. This instance exemplifies significant concessions and policy measures enacted at the subnational tier. The initiative in Katsina state resulted in the seizure of 107 AK-47 rifles, 361 Dane guns, and 28,000 stolen livestock, all of which were monetised. In Kaduna state, a campaign led by the former Police Commissioner, Austin Iwar, effectively convinced some 1150 individuals from armed groups to willingly surrender their firearms and other weaponry (Lamidi, 2024). In exchange for amnesty, the individuals took a formal vow on the Quran and the Bible to discontinue their actions as outlaws and offenders. While these agreements initially fostered a phase of tranquillity, they ultimately disintegrated after approximately one year, resulting in an increase in assaults by the mainly herder-affiliated militant factions.

Alternative community-oriented strategies have been promoted and embraced. The national government and law enforcement agencies facilitated the formation of self-defence militias, referred to as "vigilante groups" or "civilian Joint Task Force (CJTF)," within local communities. In 2018, the governor of Zamfara State founded the CJTF, which included approximately 8,500 youths (Mustapha, 2019). These vigilante organisations collaborated with the military and various security agencies to collect intelligence, perform patrols, and ensure local safety. Nonetheless, their roles and actions have sparked debate. Human rights organisations have expressed apprehensions regarding purported extrajudicial executions, mistreatment of detainees, and violations of civil liberties. Moreover, instances of political manipulation and power conflicts have been noted in certain vigilantism activities. Positivist academics have indicated that arming local communities and entrusting self-defence organisations with the monopoly of violence will merely exacerbate insecurity and bloodshed. It is significant that there are demands for more extensive socio-economic and political measures to tackle the governance and development issues in rural regions where armed banditry is prevalent. The efficacy of community-oriented projects is significantly dependent on the dynamics of a clientelist framework, in which political elites frequently appropriate or create organisations to further their own agendas. These problems are fundamentally entrenched in the local power structures and the interactions between the state and society in Northern Nigeria. Conversely, communication and conflict-resolution strategies are essential to the secondary prevention of large-scale crimes and armed conflicts in the North.

In 2019, the Zamfara state government allocated approximately 8.6 billion naira (around $23.6 million) as an economic measure to combat armed banditry, establishing three rural grazing areas, one for Fulani pastoralists in each senatorial zone (Lamidi, 2024). Furthermore, the growing encroachment of agricultural land into pasturelands and livestock pathways has led to a notable rise in tensions with herders. Consequently, the government has resolved to annul all titles and agricultural land allocations issued since 1999, pledging to conduct a comprehensive review. The Zamfara administration has instituted a social intervention initiative referred to as the Zamfara State Social

Intervention Program. This program seeks to assist and provide alternative sources of income for herder-affiliated groups, vigilantes, and other armed personnel willing to relinquish their firearms. The beneficiaries of this initiative, targeting about 18,000 youths, were trained in a variety of competencies to prepare them for lucrative careers or to empower them to become independent business owners. The initial stage began in November 2019, with 8600 participants registered, according to Altine (2020) and Shinka (2020).

Conclusion and Recommendations

Nigeria has undergone a multifaceted national crisis with considerable geographical ramifications due to armed banditry and various other security threats. This research positioned armed banditry not merely as a catalyst for violence but also as a mechanism through which violent conflicts are being reshaped in the evolving context of northern Nigeria. We discovered that several manifestations of violence now converge in multiple ways with armed banditry, which has considerable ramifications for comprehending the spectra and pathways of violent conflicts in the area. The existing administration's anti-banditry initiative, which utilises military surveillance and operations, is praiseworthy. Regrettably, the anticipated alleviation has not materialised due to operational difficulties stemming from insufficient knowledge of the region's geography. This illustrates the significance of local vigilantes and community watch groups, who have a more profound understanding of the locality. Participants in these systems, however, require adequate training, access to essential resources, and vigilant oversight to avert dangerous extremes and misuse. The creation of community-oriented law enforcement, bolstered by local personnel and intelligence, is the most feasible route ahead. Therefore, to discover a sustainable remedy to mitigate the rampant armed banditry in the northwest, the subsequent recommendation should be pursued:

1. The importance of moving beyond purely state-centric responses and understanding banditry as a localised, albeit multi-scalar, security concern, the role of the co-option of state security resources in cases of well-armed and well-connected banditry, and the impact of climate change, particularly on rural economies and livelihoods, in the evolution and reinforcement of banditry. Instead, there should be effective community-based initiatives and dialogues that tackle the longstanding marginalisation and exclusion of many of the populations that have become fertile recruiting grounds for armed bandit groups.
2. Moreover, gun trafficking plays a crucial role in exacerbating the bloodshed caused by armed bandits in northern Nigeria. Ensuring security in the problematic region and beyond requires the essential monitoring of border communities involved in the illicit trafficking of small arms and light weapons (SALWs). Simultaneously, the government should actively include individuals in the process of reorienting their values to cultivate ethical ideals and a deep respect for life and human rights.
3. Given the complex, multidimensional nature of banditry in Northern Nigeria, any effort to address the phenomenon should recognise the need for holistic, comprehensive socio-economic measures rather than placing greater emphasis on military solutions.

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AN ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF POST-STRUCTURALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF CRITICAL REALISM

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Abstract

The aim of this study is to criticize the use of "post-structuralism" as a theory of international relations in the light of "critical realism". In the study, the scientific convenience of the use of post-structuralist analysis in international relations is discussed under critical realism's methodology. In this context, international relations research conducted within the framework of post-structuralism is criticized on the basis of "judgmental rationality" because it does not have a scientific framework suitable for testing. Contrary to the discourse reductionist stance of post-structuralism, the importance of "generative mechanisms" as a methodological tool in international relations is also revealed. Finally, it is emphasized that the anti-causal approach of post-structuralism is not suitable for the field of international relations, because cause-effect relationships exist in international relations, but the fact that generative mechanisms do not always create regularity among social phenomena leads to the erroneous belief that causal processes do not exist. The study found that international relations cannot be reduced to political discourses. There are generative mechanisms that lead to cause-effect relationships regardless of the discourses in international relations, and these relationships can be identified through judgmental rationality.

Keywords

Critical realism, post-structuralism in international relations, judgmental rationality, generative mechanism, causality.

Resumo

O objetivo deste estudo é criticar o uso do "pós-estruturalismo" como uma teoria das relações internacionais à luz do "realismo crítico". No estudo, discute-se a adequação científica da utilização da análise pós-estruturalista nas relações internacionais a partir da metodologia do realismo crítico. Nesse sentido, as pesquisas em relações internacionais desenvolvidas no âmbito do pós-estruturalismo são criticadas com base na "racionalidade judicativa", uma vez que não possuem um arcabouço científico adequado para a testabilidade. Em contraste com a postura reducionista do discurso adotada pelo pós-estruturalismo, evidencia-se também a importância dos "mecanismos gerativos" como ferramenta metodológica nas relações internacionais. Por fim, enfatiza-se que a abordagem anticausal do pós-estruturalismo não é adequada ao campo das relações internacionais, pois relações de causa e efeito existem nesse domínio; contudo, o fato de que os mecanismos gerativos nem sempre produzem regularidade entre os fenômenos sociais conduz à crença equivocada de que processos causais não existem. O estudo conclui que as relações internacionais não podem ser reduzidas a discursos

políticos. Existem mecanismos gerativos que produzem relações de causa e efeito independentemente dos discursos nas relações internacionais, e tais relações podem ser identificadas por meio da racionalidade judicativa.

Palavras-Chave

Realismo crítico, pós-estruturalismo nas relações internacionais, racionalidade jurisdicional, mecanismo generativo, causalidade.

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AN ONTO-EPISTEMOLOGICAL CRITICISM OF POST-STRUCTURALISM IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS IN THE LIGHT OF CRITICAL REALISM

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Introduction

There are four main themes on the agenda of scholarly objections underlying various social theory challenges to mainstream theories of international relations. The first criticism impresses the restrictions of the positivist or empiricist approach in examining politics. The second criticism emphasizes social, historical, and cultural themes in the process by which knowledge is constructed, rather than an epistemological understanding based on rationalism or sense data. The third critism declines the tracing of objective knowledge beyond historical context and social practice as unnecessary. The fourth criticism underlines the insight that reality is constructed through language (George, 1989, p. 272). Post-structuralism brings together social theory and international relations theory, and post-structuralist ontology is based on language. In post-structuralism, language is not treated as a simple mirror of reality. It emphasizes that language constitutes social reality and that there is no social reality independent of language. What is presented in discourse as "real," "eternal," or "universal" is actually considered the imposition of a particular discursive order (Aydın-Düzgit, 2015, pp.155-156).

The methodological basis of this study, which opens the discussion to the use of post-structuralism as an international relations theory, is provided by the philosophical approach put forward by critical realism on the ontological and epistemological levels. At this point, the study firstly reveals that post-structuralism is not a theoretical framework that can be used as a tool to reach a scientific judgment in terms of the necessity of developing the tools and criteria to be used in explaining the relationships between phenomena. Facts can only be interpreted and defined with the help of hypotheses and theories (Jervis, 1968, p. 457), and the need for theory is inevitable as it is a measure of deciding which data to find among the infinite mass of data and which type of relationships to investigate (Arı, 2018, p. 24). According to Bhaskar (2008, pp. 11-12), science cannot be imagined without transitive objects (scientific premises). Transitive objects of knowledge include "the facts and theories, paradigms and models, research methods and techniques" predetermined for a particular scientific school. Bhaskar (2008, p. 138) states that humans never create knowledge; they merely modify it with their cognitive frameworks. What needs to be modified must first be obtained. In this respect, post-structuralism is not a theory that contains various hypotheses with which to analyze discourses and is not suitable for improvement on the basis of the principle of falsifiability.

Secondly, the study criticizes post-structuralism for ignoring that change and developments are the result of the interaction of mechanisms with certain characteristics. Post-structuralism does not accept the ontological existence of observable or unobservable mechanisms in action and that these (physical, social, psychological or conceptual) shape the phenomena, but makes discourse its own cause. As a leading figure in post-structuralism, Derrida asserted that supposedly stable ontological categories - such as "being, essence, existence, cause, origin, substance, subject, and truth" - are basically epistemological constructs inherited from generations of thinkers. In this respect, post-structuralism cannot offer a clear opposing ontology to critical realism. On the contrary, poststructuralism calls ontology into question by arguing that any ontology is a result of epistemology which is already our socially constructed ways of knowing (Dixon and Jones, 2004, pp. 80-83).

Scientific reality can be defined as a form of relationship between dependent and independent variables in a certain interaction process, which can be repeated more than once in a deterministic or probabilistic sense and is believed to be repeated in the future. Theory is a system that allows us to explain and describe the relationships between facts in a branch of science and to make predictions about the future (Arı, 2018, pp. 7-8). In this respect, thirdly, the study criticizes post-structuralism for lacking causality, as it has a methodology that ignores a theoretical understanding that reveals recurring relationships as an expected feature of a theory. Because, rather than seeking causal relationships and underlying explanatory structures, post-structuralism does not consider reality itself as the object of study; rather, it focuses merely on representations (Boonstra and Rauws, 2021, p. 309). In this respect, this study, which engages in a meta-theoretical inquiry, critically examines the reduction of the field of international relations to representations grounded in subjective discourses.

Critical Realism

Critical realism, as proposed by Bhaskar, is a philosophy of science that argues that the social sciences can be studied in the same way as the natural sciences. Bhaskar believes there is a "methodological unity" between the social and natural sciences, but he also emphasizes the need to develop an alternative scientific approach to positivism (Yalvaç, 2010, p. 5). Bhaskar comes close to positivism in that he opposes the arbitrary, random and irrational nature of scientific progress and its philosophical idealism, as put forward by Thomas Kuhn, and argues that the objects on which scientific assumptions are based have a reality independent of the subject and that it is possible to discover this reality. Critical realism demonstrates that it is possible to achieve scientific knowledge in society, just as it is in the natural sciences. On the other hand, by suggesting for scientific knowledge of causality and unobservable structures, critical realism stands in opposition to positivists like Karl Popper and Imre Lakatos, who consider this principle metaphysical and do not consider it a matter of knowledge (Ülman et al., 2011, p. 26).

Critical realism differs from the ontology of post-positivism as well as positivism. Critical realism suggests a structural understanding of social ontology defined in terms of material relations, unlike post-structuralist, post-modern, hermeneutic and constructivist international relations theories that suggest a linguistic, discursive or interpretative

understanding of reality. According to positivists, reality is defined by sensations; for post-positivist theorists, reality has an intersubjective nature and is defined through language/discourse. In both approaches, being present is associated with "being sensed or spoken about." Because of the priority given to the subject (human) as the basis of reality, Bhaskar characterizes both positivism and post-positivism as "anthropocentric," distinguishing these approaches from the ontological realism of critical realism, which refers to a reality existing outside of the human being (Yalvaç, 2010, pp. 5-6).

According to critical realism, nature has causal structures and generative mechanisms that are independent of the regularity of events. Likewise, events emerge independently of the experiences through which they are comprehended. Just as events become distinct from the experiences through which they are apprehended as realities, structures and mechanisms become distinct from the regularities of events they generate. In this respect, mechanisms, events, and experiences comprise overlapping domains of reality: "domains of the *real*, the *actual* and the *empirical*" (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 46). The empirical domain is pertinent to experiments and observable facts; the actual domain embraces events and experiences; and the real domain includes underlying structures and generative mechanisms that bring on those events and experiences. At this juncture, Bhaskar's view rests on his central critique of the empiricist tradition - which confines the multi-layered nature of reality to a single dimension - and of transcendental idealism, which regards unseen mechanisms as inherently unknowable. Both traditions have a one-dimensional and superficial conception of reality, whereas according to Bhaskar, reality is not one-dimensional (Türk, 2012, p. 195). Bhaskar also argues that the main deficit of the Humean comprehension of law lies in its association of laws with closed systems - systems in which events occur simultaneously. Consequently, it sould be noted that neither the empirical validation nor the practical application of our knowledge can be maintained in the context of open systems. However, when open systems are taken into account, laws can still possess universality if they are understood in a non-empirical sense - that is, if the impact of generative mechanisms and structures are identified independently of any specific pattern of events (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 3).

According to Bhaskar, the existence of causality or generative mechanisms does not necessarily result in an event. Therefore, grasping reality simply by basing it on cause-effect relationships and purely concrete events, would mean consuming reality in the domain of the actual. Bhaskar emphasizes that independent elements, thought to be cause and effect, are assumed to exist within a closed system, and suggests that the concept of "differentiated reality" can transcend the fiction of a closed system. Furthermore, by emphasizing the inexhaustibility of that reality in the domain of the actual, he demonstrates that an open system can also possess causal laws. At this point, causal laws should be considered and analyzed as "tendencies." The lack of knowledge of causal laws as tendencies does not mean they do not exist (Türk, 2012, pp. 196-197).

From the perspective of critical realism, interrelated concepts such as "ontological realism," "generative mechanisms," and "judgmental rationality" play a key role in understanding reality. Ontological realism argues that facts exist in both the natural and social worlds, independently (in the natural world) or relatively independently (in the social world) of what we know about them. Judgmental rationality requires the ability to make judgments about competing or controversial epistemic explanations of reality and

to develop the tools and criteria necessary to arrive at reasonable and accurate explanations of phenomena. Judgmental rationality argues that there are explanatory criteria for social facts, some of which are more reasonable than others, and therefore not all of which are equal (Quraishi et al., 2022, pp. 25-26). A generative mechanism is defined as a non-empirical but real entity that explains why observable events occur. Mechanisms can often be understood indirectly through analytical work (theory building) (Blom and Moren, 2011, p. 60).

Judgmental Rationality and Post-Structuralism in International Relations

Post-structuralism, the post-modern version of constructivism, emphasizes the "linguistic construction" and clearly departs from critical realism by asserting an epistemic break with modernism. Thus, social science is identified with a usage of discourse analysis that challenges the view of causality and allows for the coexistence of multiple interpretations of social facts, each carrying its own results (Bobulescu, 2011, p. 60). Conversely, critical realism suggests that not all explanations hold equal value; rather, there are generally objective grounds for opting one model over another. Judgmental rationality tehereby denotes the capacity of researchers to select viable methods and to evaluate competing explanations through reason and evidence (Brunson et al., 2025, pp. 14-15).

Judgmental rationality is based on the principle of falsification, as introduced by Popper, and this principle is an important way of approaching epistemology. Accordingly, we cannot know that things are true, only that things are not true. Critical realism is based on an adapted version of this falsificationism. In this respect, the theory with the highest explanatory power is selected from among rival theories that try to explain the same phenomenon by falsifying the other theories in terms of their inadequacies (Interdisciplinary Phase, 2023). At this point, it should be noted that the hallmark of poststructuralist analyses is their lack of falsifiability. In terms of the link established between discourses and events, the lack of a criterion for determining at what point discourses do not constitute reality leads to the theory appearing consistent with observations in all cases, which indicates that the theory is designed to support observations in all cases.

Judgmental rationality holds that the meaningfulness of knowledge depends on the meaningfulness of what it refers to - unlike the poststructuralist view that only knowledge is meaningful while the world itself lacks inherent meaning. The importance of knowledge, therefore, originates not merely from epistemological interpretation but from the structure of reality. Knowledge is not just the output of human actions; it also reflects how these actions are positioned within deeper ontological structures. This stance posits the existence of enduring relationships that can be examined and understood. Epistemic relativism recognizes that our knowledge may not indefectibly correspond to reality. However, critical realism asserts that there are rational foundations for preferring certain explanations over others - foundations that originate not from the nature of knowledge itself, but from the nature of the world that knowledge seeks to identify. Judgmental rationality posits that there are valid reasons to prefer some explanations over others depending on initiatives to explain what is happening in the world (Joseph, 2014).

Scientific development consists of the transformation of social products, which are predetermined elements of knowledge that can be regarded as Aristotelian material causes. Certain implications can be derived from this understanding. First, humans never construct their knowledge from scratch. A given product always remains as a social transmission that they must reproduce themselves. Humans never create knowledge; they merely modify it with their cognitive frameworks. Second, in order for something to be modified, it must first be attained. What is attained always takes the form of a combination of both theoretical and empirical insights; therefore, knowledge cannot be confined to individual sensory experience. Science, consequently, is a collective initiative that both precedes and transcends any given generation of scientists or moment of awareness. Its purpose is to reveal knowledge of objectively existing and causally effective mechanisms of nature. Knowledge without premises is inconceivable (Bhaskar, 2008, p. 138).

Conversely, post-structuralism is not able to present an alternative refererence point or framework, as it lacks any independent ontological or epistemological foundation upon which such a reference point could be constructed. Thus, poststructuralism does not offer a "guide" to global political developments because it lacks secure epistemic foundations. While modernists worry about the possibility of infinite interpretation without a transcendent standard to which everyone must adhere, postmodernists point out that everything assumed to be true is open to problematization (Connolly, 2002, pp. 56-61).

Post-structuralist approaches reject master narratives and do not privilege a single narrative (Mease, 2017, p. 17). Post-structuralists incite scholars to adopt a critical standpoint toward universal narratives that intend to convey an objective understanding of the reality, as such narratives are deeply formed by prior assumptions about truth and are often promoted by dominant power structures. Consequently, post-structuralists engage in an evidently critical position toward any theoretical framework that alleges to identify objective facts, suggesting instead that truth and knowledge are inherently subjective constructs that are produced through discourse rather than discovered as pre-existing realities (Mc Morrow, 2018). From the viewpoint of post-structuralism, if reality forms the conditions of human existence, and if the construction of that reality hinges on a particular mode of knowing (episteme) and its associated power relations, then social life is ultimately shaped by power rather than by reality as defined by Platon or Kant. In connection with this view, Habermas states that post-structuralists cannot make an inference about what is just or unjust (Koch, 1993, p. 341).

Post-structuralists argue that abandoning rationalist ontology and embracing an anti-foundationalist epistemology drags us towards a multifaceted analysis of the world. But the fact that an anti-foundationalist theory like post-structuralism breaks with the possibility and desirability of truth contained in the understanding of theory and knowledge represents a move into the world of uncertainty and relativity according to the rationalist and realist view (Hansen, 1997, p. 384). Although accessing reality is mediated through paradigms, theories, concepts, and methodologies, these intellectual instruments do not constitute reality itself but help to uncover aspects of it. A basic principle of critical realism holds that the intransitive objects are independent of our understanding of them. While our knowledge of reality is historically conditional - subject to modifications in epistemes, theoretical frameworks, and methodological approaches -

the underlying basis that such knowledge seeks to comprehend remains constant (Albert et al., 2020, p. 3).

Critical realists highlights a fundamental ontological distinction between the reality of worlds and the knowledge produced about those worlds. Within critical realism, any theory that fails to respect this difference is accused of the epistemic fallacy of reducing or confusing an (intransitive) explanation of the world with the world itself (Willmott, 2005, p. 752). According to Bhaskar (2008, pp. 26-27), this epistemic fallacy stems from the view that statements about existence can be reduced to or analyzed in terms of statements about knowledge; that is, ontological questions can be erroneously translated into epistemological terms.

From a post-structuralist perspective, grasping international politics relies on "abstraction, representation, and interpretation". When we write or speak about "anarchy," "the Cold War," "gendered power relations," "globalization," "humanitarian intervention," and so on, we engage in representation. Even the most "objective" theory cannot escape the need for interpretation (Campbell and Bleiker, 2016, p. 223). In post-structuralist stance, any certain perspective can not claim supremacy over others. The view of an absolute or universal truth is declined; instead, what exists is a plurality of competing interpretations (Devetak, 2005, pp. 163-164). Post-structuralists argue, for instance, that what is perceived as a threat cannot be objectively determined or measured. Rather, the perception of threat is inherently interpretive, formed by discourse and context. Consequently, regarding an issue or an actor as a security threat should not be apprehended as an objective statement of fact, but as a subjective claim that represents particular values, interests, and power relations. According to post-structuralists, there is no objective answer to the questions: *"Are troops crossing the border an aggressive attack, a liberation, or maybe part of a peacekeeping operation? Was Crimea in 2014 annexed by or reunited with Russia?"* (Baumann, 2022, p. 9). Contrary to this approach, the concept of judgmental rationality, which offers valid reasons for preferring some explanations over others, develops an understanding that, while not emphasizing absolute truth, requires the existence of falsifiable propositions on the path to truth.

The judgmental rationality can be explained through such an example: Peace in Europe is a reality, and various competing explanations can be offered. For example, one might offer "reasons" such as states sharing a common interest in forming a united front against a common enemy, as in NATO. But as was experienced during the Soviet Union's intervention in Hungary in 1956, states -even allies- can use violence against each other. It could also be argued that the economic ties between capitalist states would prevent war; but such arguments weakened with the Second World War. Although there have been institutionalist views that various international or supranational institutions that bring states together will prevent war, institutions may remain dysfunctional in cases where peaceful relations do not precede institutions. Some international organizations may have a clear intention of peace, but others, not primarily oriented toward preventing war, merely help resolve the many problematic conflicts of interest that can foster suspicion and hostility. However, war can flare up when the institutions supposed to provide the tools for peaceful conflict resolution fail. While the motivation driving states in Europe toward peace appears to be membership in a common international

organization, it should not be overlooked that the underlying motivation for European Community membership is, in essence, the criterion of democracy. It is well known that individual autonomy and a pluralistic approach in democracies foster the formation of transnational connections among individuals, pressure groups, and state institutions. In this respect, democracy stands out as a more powerful explanatory variable for peace (as put forward by the democratic peace theory) compared to other variables mentioned above (Russett and Antholis, 1992, pp. 415-416; Russett, 1994, pp. 84-87). The importance of this example from the standpoint of critical realism is that the tools of knowledge (theories) that represent reality more imperfectly play an important role on the way to reaching a theory that is as close to reality as possible, and at the same time, they are not of equal value to each other. According to critical realism, knowledge refers to an objective reality and represents it, no matter how imperfectly it may be (Brunson et al., 2025, p. 5). Abandoning the effort to get as close to reality as possible, based on the fact that perfect knowledge cannot be achieved, halts scientific progress.

Generative Mechanisms and Post-structuralism in International Relations

Critical realism is principally concerned with uncovering explanatory mechanisms that account for social facts by inspecting what individuals are capable of obtaining within the structural contexts that condition their actions (Stutchbury, 2022, p. 114). Critical realism assert that reality is ontologically stratified and directed by underlying, non-empirical laws, wherein a multiplicity of mechanisms and structures operate simultaneously (Willmott, 2005, p. 752). From this viewpoint, change emerges through the interplay between relatively enduring mechanisms and the particular properties or causal powers inherent within them. These mechanisms are regarded to exist independently of human cognition or linguistic representation. Moreover, they are not pertain to the physical domain; rather, they may be regarded as social, psychological, or conceptual forms and may be either empirically observable or remain beyond direct observation. Through their interactions, mechanisms produce the events and facts that constitute reality, only a subset of which are empirically observable. Consequently, a mechanism may be understood as a structure with interrelated components endowed with specific forces, powers, or tendencies that account for its capacity to generate particular consequences (Mingers and Standing, 2017, pp. 175-176).

In contrast to the post-structuralist approach's epistemological assumption that knowledge is based on cultural, historical and ideological contexts and its ontological understanding that considers reality as a social construction that gains meaning only within a framework of communication and discourse (Schieder and Spindler, 2014, p. 7), critical realism defends the ontological stance that the reality exists independently of our linguistic structures. Critical realism does not reject the reality of discourses. However, it argues that we can comprehend the social reality if we identify the active structures that generate these discourses (Molinari, 2024, p. 524).

Due to the fact that generative mechanisms embedded within objects and structures are typically unobservable, it is necessary to identify them through processes of abstract and theoretical investigation. For instance, while one may empirically observe buyers and

sellers bargaining on prices and products, the underlying market mechanism that enables such relations remains unseen. Although the mechanism itself is both unobservable and non-deterministic, its impacts are possible to observe empirically, thereby allowing researchers to formulate explanatory accounts of its running (Bygstad et al., 2016, p. 84).

For example, Waltz argues that political systems consist of a range of interacting units and structural features that allows these interacting units to be regarded as a unified whole. (Barkdull, 1995, p. 670) and therefore he brought a structuralist perspective to the theory of international relations. Waltz's theory was inspired by microeconomic theory, which explains how order emerges spontaneously through the self-interested actions of individuals and firms. Accordingly, a decentralized economic market emerges spontaneously and without intention. The market emerges from the actions of distinct entities -individuals and firms- whose goals are not aimed at establishing order, but at pursuing their own internally defined interests by whatever means available. Units act individually for their own sake. The combination of similar units creates a structure that effects and restricts other ones. Once formed, the market becomes a force unto itself, beyond the control of its constituent units. As a factor intervening between units and the consequences they generate, the market conditions their calculations, behaviors, and interactions. A market restrains its constituent units from taking certain actions and directs them to take other actions. Created by self-governing, interacting economic agents, the market selects actions based on their consequences. While the market rewards some units with high profits, it also drives others into bankruptcy (Waltz, 1979, pp. 89-91).

At this point, two fundamental assumptions of structural realism, anarchy and rationality, stand out. Waltz does not hold that states always behave rationally, but his view must assume that if states fail to adjust their behavior in accordance with the system's requirements, they will be penalized by the system itself. The rational-state assumption is central to the entire project of structural realism, as work in this direction involves either an assumption of rationality or an evolutionary mechanism that eliminates states exhibiting irrational behavior (Schmidt and Wight, 2023, p. 159). The discipline of international relations has a longstanding tradition of classifying the distribution of power in terms of the number and relative significance of the principal actors - such as "unipolar, bipolar, multipolar, or dispersed" configurations. This conception parallels the way economists conceptualize market structures as monopolistic, duopolistic, oligopolistic, or competitive. Structure, in this sense, is analytically different from process, which is associated with the patterns of allocation, negotiation, and bargaining behavior that occur within a given power configuration. To draw an analogy with the game of poker, process-related analysis concerns itself with how players strategically play the hands they are dealt, whereas structural analysis focuses on how the cards are distributed at the beginning of the game (Keohane and Nye, 2012, p. 17-18). Under this structural condition, actors will run the risk of incurring high costs to the extent that they "behave post-structuralistly" by denying the existence of an optimal move with the cards they hold.

Some theorists regard systems less as concrete entities and more as classificatory tools for systematizing knowledge about international relations. From this standpoint, one may

refer to an international political, economic or a social system. Systems, therefore, are understood as analytical constructs or intellectual models that help the conceptualization of international phenomena. Consequently, some scholars express skepticism toward regarding a system as a concrete entity equipped with intrinsic properties. Critics drawing on post-positivist or interpretivist stances suggest that reifying such abstractions - that is, attributing real existence to conceptual categories like "the system" - is a type of a methodological fallacy. Neo-structuralist theorists criticize of realism's state-centric and rationalist conception of structure and instead focus on how global processes interact with both state and societal dynamics (Viotti and Kauppi, 2012, pp. 54; 208-209). For instance, Keohane and Nye (2015, pp. 94-96) regard systems as comprising two interrelated dimensions - structure and process - and define "process" as the patterns of interaction through which units relate to one another. They stress that variables such as the degree of international interdependence or the extent of institutionalization of international norms and rules do not vary according to the domestic characteristics of individual states. In other words, these factors remain independent of unit-level attributes, such as the nature of domestic political processes or the type of economic system - whether capitalist or socialist - adopted by a state. In contrast to Waltz's framework, such variables are not considered unit-level factors but rather features of the systemic domain. For Keohane and Nye, concepts such as the effects of increasing cross-governmental linkages on behavior and communication and the role of institutions and values are essential components of systems-thinking in international relations.

In light of the richness of views in mainstream international relations theories, it can be seen that there are dozens of mechanisms that limit human political activity, both on a conceptual and empirical level. Structures based on power relations between actors, such as balance of power and bipolarity, and systems such as security dilemma, democratic peace and interdependence between actors are each a generative mechanism that conditions actor actions. In poststructuralism, analysis is based on discourse, not on a structure; the action of the actor who puts forth the discourse is associated with its discourse. For example, post-structuralists consider security policies as one of the most important practices through which states construct their identities, rather than seeing them as strategies to defend a state or an alliance of states. In security matters, the enemy is defined within security discourses. According to this view, while security is essential for the state, this necessity does not stem from the need to protect states from external threats, as in the traditional understanding. Post-structuralists argue that the state's identity is tied to threats and that a sense of insecurity is necessary for state formation (Hansen, 1997, pp. 374-375). Traditional international relations theories tend to view foreign policy as the (pre-given) responses of states to the outside world. Post-structuralists, however, do not view foreign policy as the actions of the state because reject the assumption that the state is ontologically prior to politics. Accordingly, foreign policy is not the reaction of a pre-existing subject, but the process through which a certain form of subjectivity is consistently reproduced (Ballbach, 2015, pp. 142). As a requirement of the critical realist understanding of science, on the contrary, it is necessary to focus on the structural conditions of all intellectual phenomena such as insecurity, threat, identity or discourse, rather than trying to derive them from each other in a tautological manner. It is the only way to identify the irrational narratives that fuel flawed foreign policies with reference to structure.

Decision makers' usage of knowledge for action within the real world creates feedback depending on the degree of certainty of that knowledge. The process of learning is often most evident when errors emerge, as wrong beliefs uncover the constraints imposed by reality. For example, an individual may suppose that they can move a large rock with their bare hands, however empirical engagement with the world would eventually falsify this belief. This perspective thus avoids the relativism inherent in radical forms of social constructionism, which suggest that reality can only be understood as an intellectual or discursive construction and, consequently, that inquiry is limited to the study of subjective or individualized realities (Brunson et al., 2025, pp. 5-6).

Causality and Post-structuralism in International Relations

Hermeneutic stance suggest that the social world is constructed through shared meanings and interpretive practices, and therefore prioritize understanding over causal explanation. Therefore, establishing causal relationships between phenomena is impossible in the interpretive tradition (Marsh and Furlong, 2010, p. 20). Critical realism, while acknowledging the significance of accurate description, asserts that the main purpose of research is to explain facts by identifying the underlying processes and mechanisms that generate them under specific enabling conditions. In other words, critical realism have the aim of elucidating causality through the running of mechanisms and processes rather than through the observation of regular, predictable covariation (Brunson et al., 2025, p. 9). Based on his view of different ontological levels (real, actual, and empirical), Bhaskar contends that the lack of empirical regularities does not necessarily denote the absence of real or necessary causes running at a deeper ontological level.According to him, causality does not depend on regularities or observability (Kurki, 2009, p. 167). In post-modern approaches, on the contrary, the causal and general regularities of historical development lose their importance and there is a tendency to highlight the particular and the exceptional ones (Yalvaç, 2011, p. 75). Particular and exceptional ones are the basis of the post-structuralist view, which concludes that causality does not exist because general regularity is often absent.

According to Bhaskar (2008, pp. 23-24), causal laws continue to operate normally under conditions that can be described as "open," where no regular sequence of events emerges. Discovered causal laws are categorically independent of the patterns of events produced. The categorical independence of causal laws and event patterns means that the laws continue to operate in open systems where events do not form a continuous pattern. As Bhaskar (2008, pp. 36-37) points out, it is important to remember that a direct correspondence between a causal law and the sequence of events exists only under closed conditions. It is only in the laboratory that permanent natural mechanisms become truly explicit and empirically accessible to humans. In other words, a direct correspondence between a causal law and the sequence of events occurs only under closed conditions.

If the system is open, regularity may not emerge due to the presence of "balancing factors" or "opposing causes." It is a failure to think of the effects of a tendency in the context of their occurrence. In other words, it is a mistake to assume that when a tendency is active, the effect must occur. It is a mistake to assume that when no effect

of a certain type occurs, nothing can be active (Bhaskar, 2008, pp. 88-90). Despite the deep mutual lack of trust, the protracted security dilemmas, the uncertainty in the intentions of both sides, the long history of wars, and the impulsive and unstable relations between the two countries, the credibility of a nuclear deterrent relationship between India and Pakistan based on their assured strike capabilities and doctrinal stances has been accepted by both South Asian rivals. Deterrence has altered the strategic landscape in South Asia, eliminated the possibility of all-out war, reduced the consequences of conventional military conflicts, and finally, limited strategic competition to crises of very small and insignificant intensity (Khan and Ahsan, 2016, pp. 53-54). In this example, the security dilemma mechanism is balanced by the deterrence mechanism, and the necessity of the mechanisms to result in an incident is eliminated. Under open conditions, such networks of relationships that emerge as a result of the clash of opposing causes seem to support the post-structuralist perspective that is reluctant to establish causal relationships between phenomena. However, in the example given, the reason why regularity does not emerge in the deterministic sense is not because the tendencies do not exist but because they balance each other.

A and *B* are complex outcomes shaped by multiple forces, and their interactions are enabled by many other conditions that are significant however may not be easily noticed. But this is still causality, the production of change; it is just more multifaceted and complex. Post-structuralists, while they may want to avoid the concept of causality, repeatedly explain how certain changes or effects come about, unwittingly offering causal explanations. For example, after addressing the performativity (i.e., causal power) of discourse, they explain how racism emerges - that is, why it happens. Post-structuralists argue that they only examine the "how" of power, not the "why," as if the two are separable. Therefore, many post-structuralists think of they can abandon the causality (Sayer, 2012, p. 181).

The concepts of emergence and causal powers play a significant role in Bhaskar's explanation of the ontological distinction that underpins his philosophy of critical realism. Emergence is the formation of a thing's existence through (without reduction to) the existence of things outside of itself. Each entity emerges thanks to the causal power of the preceding entity that created it, maintains its specific power within its own domain of reality, and forms the basis for the emergence of entities in subsequent domains (Karagöz, 2024, p. 91). What these manifestations mean for international relations is that international politics cannot be interpreted anthropocentrically and causality cannot be abandoned. The international policy to be pursued can be inferred from the discourse of a head of state or government officials, but the relevant policy cannot be reduced to their discourses. A relationship can be established between North Korea's dictatorial regime and its foreign policy, but an argument that Kim Jong-Un's discourse has produced a new foreign policy reality does not contribute to international relations theory. The key is to focus on the structural causes underlying these discourses. Political leaders do not construct reality; but the success of their discourses is tested by reference to political reality. The reason for this is that actors receive feedback (reward or punishment) based on whether their discourses point to ideas that align with the rules of reality. At this point, Sayer's (2012, p. 182) reference to Marx is noteworthy: *"We act on nature as one of its own forces. Hence, freedom is not a matter of disengagement from causation (freedom from necessity), but rather a mobilisation of powers in ways that*

take advantage of contingencies. Disengagement from causal powers and their exer cise would leave us like a car whose gearbox had stuck in neutral-unable to move".

Critical realism's standpoint on structures, actors, causal mechanisms, and events reflects a pluralistic conception of causality, acknowledging that multiple forms of causal relations can run simultaneously. This includes linear causality, in which events unfold through direct chains of cause and effect characteristic of relatively simple phenomena, as well as complex causality, which involves reciprocal interactions, feedback loops, or emergent effects. For example, explanations for the outbreak of *World War I* can extend beyond the immediate triggering event - the assassination of Archduke Franz Ferdinand - to encompass intermediate structural conditions, such as the geopolitical alliances among European powers, military escalation, and the arms race between Germany and the United Kingdom. They may also account for broader, long-term factors, including Germany's industrial leap, the relative decline of the Russian and Ottoman Empires, the spread of nationalism and socialism, and several geopolitical tensions (Geels, 2022, p. 6). Unlike post-structuralism, these forms of causality are not multiple perspectives of equal value (and therefore relative); they are explanations of different domains of reality.

Post-structuralism's discursive reductionism leads to relativism in social research. Relativistic approaches stress that social facts, processes, or entities are always understood relative to other frameworks, such as conceptual schemes, theoretical propositions, or sets of meanings and representations. They assert that these social facts are wholly constituted by such discursive constructions. However, this form of discursive reductionism and radical relativism undermines the notion of causality in the social realm, effectively preventing any systematic examination into the consequences originating from the interaction of real causal forces (Iosifides, 2017, pp. 5-6).

Bhaskar opposes the traditional Hegelian grasping of dialectics as a linear, triadic process of negation (thesis - antithesis - synthesis). He challenges the view that dialectics merely entails the interpenetration of opposites within a given structure or system, culminating in their resolution or subsumption into a higher-order totality. Instead, Bhaskar asserts that dialectical processes and configurations do not necessarily result in eliminatory or superseding outcomes at a superordinate level (Creaven, 2002, p. 82). Bhaskar also notes that dialectical processes are not always characterized by opposition or antagonism. In the most general terms, he defines dialectics as any interaction between differentiated but related elements. Hegel privileged unity over difference; Bhaskar reverses this (Dialectical Critical Realism, 2014). Unlike Hegel's dialectics, which focuses on the resolution of contradictions, Bhaskar's dialectics embraces the plurality, complexity and contradictions of the world (Norrrie, 2024, pp. 386-387). This complexity and coexistence prepares the ground for developing a post-structuralist analysis method in which there is no pattern between the phenomena and each of the actors creates their own reality, independent of causality. In this case, critical concepts in international relations such as "occupation," "annexation," "liberation," "humanitarian intervention," etc. lose their meaning and become relativized. However, whether or not the thesis and anti-theses constitute a synthesis, the facts are contradictory and less contradictory compared to each other, and this is the basis of competition - an alternative to totalization in a superior synthesis. Cause-effect relationships should be sought in the competition of

these contradictions, and the unresolved nature of the contradictions should not prevent academic efforts to distinguish between contradictory phenomena.

Conclusion

The findings as a result of the study's review the position of post-structuralism as a methodological tool in international relations in light of Bhaskar's critical realism are as follows:

Post-structuralism lacks a scientific framework that allows for empirical testing. Although poststructuralism's emphasis is on understanding, not explanation, understanding itself inherently requires the existence of *a priori foundational knowledge*, in other words, a conceptualization, perspective, model, or hypothesis that enables cognitive processing of new data which is susceptible to falsification. The fact that knowledge can always be acquired through scientific frameworks does not mean that all of these frameworks are of equal value. Some scientific frameworks are superior to their rivals in explaining reality.

Post-structuralism does not have an accepted methodology regarding the concepts and methods that should be followed in an international relations research. Post-structuralism can only be used as a tool for criticism of the concepts that underpin mainstream theories of international relations (e.g. power, hegemony, threat, security, etc.) rather than as a methodological tool in itself. Post-structuralism borrows the concepts of rationalist international relations theories and criticizes them on the basis of philosophy of language; however, it has not developed a unique concept that would contribute to the thought of international relations. Post-structuralism does not have any testable or falsifiable assumptions regarding international relations.

International relations is a human activity, but it cannot be reduced to that activity. There are unique structures created by human activities that, once formed, transcend human subjective initiative, possessing new characteristics not present in the subsystems that gave rise to their causal existence, and possessing their own autonomy. Post-structuralism, on the other hand, ignores a structure that limits the calculations, behaviors and interactions of actors, rewards and punishes them depending on their decisions, and reduces the distinctive reality of international relations to human subjective views. However, as emphasized above, just as scientific frameworks that better grasp reality are more successful in the scientific arena, discourses that conform to reality are more successful in the international policy arena.

Actors, the units of analysis in the field of international relations, may behave "post-structuralistically", but the method of analyzing them cannot be post-structuralist. International relations is not a closed system. Therefore, assessing the impact of generative mechanisms in a complex international field where many factors interact simultaneously is extremely difficult. Since different mechanisms can cancel each other out, it must be accepted that generative mechanisms will not always generate observable events, and contrary to post-structuralism's denial of their existence, these mechanisms must be considered as tendencies. The existence of discourses that coincide with tendencies in the field of international relations continues to coexist with discourses that

contradict them. Although this complexity and intertwinement are used as a basis for post-structuralism's claim that there is no universal reality, it is a requirement of critical realist international relations science to highlight a research technique that prioritizes the units' receiving feedback from reality in the form of success or failure with reference to generative mechanisms.

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POPULIZACIÓN DISCURSIVA Y POLÍTICA EXTERIOR COLOMBIANA: APROXIMACIÓN COMPARADA A LAS DECISIONES DE DUQUE Y PETRO FRENTE AL REGIONALISMO LATINOAMERICANO

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Resumen

Este artículo examina comparativamente las decisiones de Iván Duque (2018–2022) y Gustavo Petro (2022–2026) frente a organismos regionales (UNASUR, PROSUR, CELAC, OEA y CAN) para identificar expresiones de populismo en política exterior y evaluar sus efectos sobre la integración latinoamericana. A partir de un diseño cualitativo de casos similares y un análisis de discurso y documental, se operacionalizan mecanismos del populismo en política exterior: narrativas dicotómicas, personalización del liderazgo, selectividad multilateral y marcos de legitimación. Los hallazgos muestran que ambos gobiernos desplegaron rasgos de populización, aunque mediante estilos y orientaciones ideológicas opuestas. No obstante, en el caso de Iván Duque, estos rasgos corresponden más a una populización parcial del discurso externo que a un populismo en política exterior en sentido estricto, debido a las continuidades institucionales de largo plazo en la diplomacia colombiana. Se concluye que las decisiones presidenciales contribuyeron tanto a la volatilidad del regionalismo latinoamericano como a la persistencia de patrones estructurales de la política exterior del país.

Palabras clave

Populismo, política exterior, regionalismo, Colombia, América Latina.

Abstract

This article compares the decisions of Iván Duque (2018–2022) and Gustavo Petro (2022–2026) regarding regional organizations (UNASUR, PROSUR, CELAC, OAS, and CAN) to identify expressions of populism in foreign policy and to assess their effects on Latin American integration. Based on a qualitative design of similar cases and a discourse and documentary analysis, mechanisms of populism in foreign policy are operationalized: dichotomous narratives, personalization of leadership, multilateral selectivity, and legitimation frameworks. The findings show that both governments displayed features of populism, albeit through opposing styles and ideological orientations. However, in the case of Iván Duque, these traits correspond more to a partial populization of external discourse than to populism in foreign policy in the strict sense, due to long-term institutional continuities in Colombian diplomacy. It is concluded that presidential decisions contributed both to the volatility of Latin American regionalism and to the persistence of structural patterns in the country's foreign policy.

Keywords

Populism, foreign policy, regionalism, Colombia, Latin America.

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POPULIZACIÓN DISCURSIVA Y POLÍTICA EXTERIOR COLOMBIANA: APROXIMACIÓN COMPARADA A LAS DECISIONES DE DUQUE Y PETRO FRENTE AL REGIONALISMO LATINOAMERICANO

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Introduction

Durante el siglo XXI, el populismo ha reaparecido como un fenómeno político, dejando de ser exclusivo de ciertos sistemas políticos internos y extendiéndose a la política exterior de países de distintas regiones. En América Latina, esta tendencia ha sido evidente en distintos momentos: desde la proliferación de gobiernos de izquierda en la llamada "marea rosa" a principios del siglo XXI hasta las recientes experiencias de gobiernos populistas que han cambiado las dinámicas regionales (Burrier, 2019; Sanahuja, 2024). El populismo en política exterior se caracteriza por la creación de narrativas que enfrentan a "el pueblo" contra las "élites globales", la personalización del liderazgo diplomático y la práctica de un multilateralismo selectivo, donde se priorizan los foros que ofrecen mayor protagonismo al líder y afinidad ideológica, o se construyen espacios alternativos y paralelos (Jaramillo, 2024; Chryssogelos et al, 2023; Plagemann & Destradi, 2019).

En América Latina, el populismo en política exterior se presenta en el contexto de la crisis y la fragmentación del regionalismo. Tras el ciclo del regionalismo posliberal, representado por iniciativas como UNASUR y ALBA, durante la primera década del siglo XXI, la región ha experimentado un retroceso en sus espacios de diálogo y concertación: la superposición de foros, el debilitamiento de organismos regionales y la proliferación de mecanismos presidenciales *ad hoc* (Malamud & Gardini, 2012; Sanahuja, 2019, 2016)

son manifestaciones de esta deriva. En este escenario, la política exterior adquiere un papel central al estar fuertemente personalizada; las estrategias presidenciales pueden redefinir o incluso reemplazar arquitecturas institucionales regionales en función de intereses ideológicos o políticos de corto plazo, pero con repercusiones a largo plazo.

En este contexto regional, Colombia presenta un caso de particular interés. Tradicionalmente caracterizada por una política exterior institucionalista y de alineación con Estados Unidos (Tickner, 2014; Rosero, 2012), Colombia ha experimentado, en la década actual, cambios en su relacionamiento con los organismos regionales. Los gobiernos de Iván Duque (2018-2022) y Gustavo Petro (2022-2026) han adoptado estrategias diferentes frente a espacios regionales como UNASUR, PROSUR, CELAC y la OEA, lo cual podría indicar la presencia de rasgos populistas en sus respectivas políticas exteriores, aunque orientados en direcciones opuestas; mientras que Iván Duque promovió la participación activa del país en el Grupo de Lima, la salida de UNASUR y la creación de PROSUR como alternativa, Gustavo Petro impulsó la revitalización de UNASUR, una participación más activa en la CELAC, la normalización de relaciones con Venezuela y el uso de un discurso integracionista con énfasis en la justicia climática y la paz (Pastrana, et al, 2023).

En ese orden de ideas, la pregunta que busca responder el presente artículo es: ¿en qué medida las decisiones de Iván Duque y Gustavo Petro frente a organismos regionales constituyen expresiones de populismo en política exterior y cuál fue su efecto en la integración regional?, para dar respuesta a esta pregunta, el objetivo general es analizar comparativamente las estrategias de política exterior de los gobiernos de Duque y Petro hacia organismos regionales, identificando elementos de populismo en política exterior y evaluando sus efectos sobre la integración regional.

El artículo parte de la premisa de que las políticas exteriores de Iván Duque y Gustavo Petro presentan rasgos asociados al populismo en política exterior, aunque orientados en direcciones opuestas. En el caso de Duque, dichos rasgos se manifiestan en una estrategia de ruptura y sustitución institucional, ejemplificada por la salida de UNASUR y la promoción de PROSUR. En contraste, Petro ha desplegado un enfoque de reenganche plebiscitario y moralizado, visible en la revitalización de la CELAC y en la normalización de las relaciones con Venezuela mediante narrativas de "paz total" y "justicia climática". Esta caracterización se sostiene en tres observaciones preliminares: i) Personalización del liderazgo: ambos mandatarios convirtieron las decisiones relativas a espacios regionales en señas de identidad de sus gobiernos, vinculándolas directamente con su liderazgo personal; ii) construcción de narrativas dicotómicas: Duque articuló un discurso basado en la oposición entre "democracias" y "dictaduras" para justificar el aislamiento de Venezuela y la creación de nuevos foros, mientras que Petro ha empleado marcos discursivos que contraponen a "los pueblos de América Latina" frente a élites globales de carácter extractivista; y iii) Selectividad institucional: ambos gobiernos recurrieron a prácticas de *forum shopping*, aunque en direcciones opuestas; Duque otorgó centralidad a PROSUR y al Grupo de Lima, mientras que Petro ha priorizado la CELAC y la CAN. No obstante, aun reconociendo estos elementos característicos del populismo en política exterior, se sostiene que, en el caso de Iván Duque, se trata más de un proceso de populización del discurso externo que de una adscripción plena y estricta al concepto de

populismo en política exterior según los criterios establecidos por la literatura especializada.

Fundamentos teóricos y conceptuales

Populismo en política exterior: conceptualización y debates

El estudio del populismo en política exterior (PPE) ha emergido como un campo de creciente interés académico, especialmente ante el auge de líderes populistas con agendas internacionales distintivas. Burrier (2019) define el PPE como la extensión de las lógicas populistas domésticas al ámbito internacional, caracterizado por cuatro elementos centrales: (1) la construcción de narrativas dicotómicas que proyecta al plano internacional la división "pueblo virtuoso" y "élites corruptas" proyectadas al ámbito internacional; (2) la personalización extrema del liderazgo diplomático; (3) el anti-elitismo global que cuestiona a las instituciones y élites políticas y económicas establecidas presentándolas como desconectadas de las necesidades y preocupaciones de la población en general (Destradi, et al., 2022), narrativa que desafía la legitimidad de las estructuras de gobernanza tradicionales y promueve una que prioriza los intereses nacionales sobre la cooperación global (Löfflmann, 2022), y (4) la selectividad multilateral que privilegia foros donde el líder populista puede ejercer mayor protagonismo presidencial y donde encuentra una alta afinidad ideológica (Burrier, 2019).

A modo de complemento, Jaramillo (2024) argumenta que los gobiernos populistas emplean discursos y prácticas específicas para promover configuraciones regionales alternativas, utilizando el regionalismo como plataforma para construir legitimidad tanto a nivel doméstico como internacional. Esta aproximación sugiere que el PPE no es meramente reactivo, mediante la oposición a las instituciones existentes, sino también propositivo, mediante la creación de nuevos espacios institucionales.

Sanahuja et al. (2024) distinguen entre populismo de derecha y de izquierda en sus efectos sobre el regionalismo sudamericano, argumentando que mientras el primero tiende hacia la fragmentación y el bilateralismo, el segundo promueve nuevas formas de multilateralismo regional. Esta tipología resulta relevante en el caso colombiano, donde los gobiernos de Duque y Petro representan orientaciones ideológicas opuestas.

El populismo en política exterior opera mediante varios mecanismos. El primero es el *forum shopping* institucional, en el que los líderes populistas seleccionan o crean organismos internacionales que mejor se adapten a sus narrativas y agendas políticas particulares (Quiliconi & Espinoza, 2017; Clark, 2022). Este mecanismo es evidente en la proliferación de organizaciones regionales en América Latina y en las decisiones de adhesión/retiro de diferentes gobiernos. El segundo mecanismo es la diplomacia presidencial hiperactivada, caracterizada por la concentración de la toma de decisiones en la figura presidencial y la marginación de las burocracias diplomáticas y de los canales institucionalizados. Para Wojczewski (2020), esta estrategia le permite al líder populista mostrarse como el verdadero representante del "pueblo" a nivel internacional. Para Kennedy y Beaton (2016), en la diplomacia presidencial hiperactivada, las decisiones dependen de las relaciones interpersonales entre los presidentes. El tercer mecanismo

es la construcción de alteridad internacional, donde los líderes populistas identifican enemigos externos que refuerzan la cohesión interna del "pueblo", en contraposición con las "elites corruptas" o con entidades extranjeras presentadas como rivales o amenazas a la soberanía e intereses nacionales (Wojczewski, 2020; Wajner & Giurlando, 2024). En el contexto latinoamericano, esto se ha manifestado tanto en la demonización de gobiernos vecinos, como en el caso de Venezuela, como en la oposición a potencias extrarregionales.

Regionalismo latinoamericano contemporáneo

El regionalismo latinoamericano ha experimentado profundas transformaciones en las últimas dos décadas. Nolte (2022) identifica un ciclo de auge y declive del regionalismo posliberal asociado con la primera marea rosa, en el que se crearon espacios como UNASUR, CELAC y ALBA, que enfatizaban una agenda orientada a lo político y a lo social por encima de lo económico. El declive se manifiesta en la paralización de UNASUR, en las intermitentes reactivaciones de CELAC y en el surgimiento de nuevos foros como PROSUR y el Grupo de Lima. Esta crisis refleja no solo cambios en las orientaciones ideológicas de los gobiernos, sino también limitaciones estructurales del regionalismo latinoamericano, entre ellas la dependencia de liderazgos presidenciales y la ausencia de una institucionalización profunda y estable (Briceño & Ribeiro, 2021). Una característica distintiva del regionalismo latinoamericano contemporáneo es la coexistencia de múltiples organizaciones con membresías y mandatos parcialmente superpuestos. Quiliconi y Espinoza (2017) describen este fenómeno como "regionalismo a la carta", en el que los países seleccionan su participación en diferentes foros según sus intereses específicos y sus alineaciones ideológicas. Este solapamiento y fragmentación afectan la efectividad y legitimidad de la integración regional, al facilitar la flexibilidad y la adaptación a preferencias nacionales diversas que pueden cambiar según el gobierno de turno y generar duplicación de esfuerzos y competencia entre instituciones, lo que debilita la capacidad de acción colectiva regional (Barros & Gonçalves, 2021).

El interpresidencialismo y la intermitencia operativa también caracterizan al regionalismo latinoamericano contemporáneo. La fuerte dependencia de los liderazgos presidenciales implica que las decisiones sobre la integración regional dependen de las relaciones personales entre mandatarios y de sus alineamientos ideológicos, lo que genera una alta volatilidad institucional (Kennedy & Beaton, 2016). Varios espacios regionales han experimentado períodos de activación y paralización según los cambios de gobierno en países clave; UNASUR representa el caso más dramático, pasando de ser el principal foro de integración sudamericana a quedar prácticamente inactiva tras los cambios políticos en países como Colombia, Argentina, Brasil y Chile.

Diseño metodológico

La metodología es de naturaleza cualitativa con una estrategia comparativa de casos similares. Este diseño permite el análisis en profundidad de procesos complejos como la formulación de política exterior, que involucran múltiples actores, niveles de análisis y factores causales. También resulta apropiado para estudiar fenómenos contemporáneos

en los que la distancia temporal limita la disponibilidad de datos cuantitativos sistemáticos y facilita la identificación de mecanismos causales específicos que conectan el populismo con las decisiones de política exterior. De manera específica, el diseño se orienta a comparar dos administraciones presidenciales en Colombia: Iván Duque (2018-2022) y Gustavo Petro (2022-2026), particularmente sus respectivas políticas exteriores, que comparten características estructurales similares, pero difieren en orientación ideológica y en estrategias de política exterior hacia los espacios regionales.

Casos de estudio y temporalidad

La selección de los casos se basa en dos aspectos. En primer lugar, por su relevancia teórica: tanto el gobierno de Iván Duque como el de Gustavo Petro tomaron decisiones significativas respecto a organismos regionales, que pueden interpretarse como expresiones de populismo o de populización discursiva en política exterior. La variación ideológica respalda el segundo criterio de selección, al representar Iván Duque y Gustavo Petro orientaciones ideológicas opuestas: derecha vs. izquierda progresista y estilos de liderazgo diferentes, permitiendo evaluar cómo estas diferencias se traducen en estrategias de política exterior.

Técnicas de recolección y análisis de datos

Se emplean dos técnicas de recolección y análisis de la información: el análisis del discurso y el análisis documental. La primera permite examinar las narrativas presidenciales sobre organismos regionales, a partir de los discursos presidenciales en espacios regionales (ONU, OEA, CELAC, PROSUR) y también de declaraciones oficiales sobre decisiones de política exterior y entrevistas presidenciales. El análisis del discurso se orienta a identificar cuatro aspectos del populismo en política exterior: construcciones dicotómicas, como pueblo-élite y democracia-dictadura; las narrativas de legitimación de decisiones sobre organismos regionales; las referencias a la personalización de la política exterior; y los marcos interpretativos sobre la integración regional. El análisis documental permite triangular la información discursiva con las decisiones formales de política, identificando coherencias y discrepancias entre la retórica y la práctica.

Para sistematizar el análisis, se desarrolla una matriz de codificación que operacionaliza los conceptos teóricos centrales; ver tabla 1.

Para la validación y control del sesgo, se definen dos estrategias: i) triangulación de fuentes mediante la combinación de discursos, documentos oficiales, análisis académicos y cobertura mediática para verificar las interpretaciones; ii) triangulación temporal mediante el análisis de la consistencia temporal de las narrativas y decisiones identificadas.

Tabla 1. Matriz de codificación

Dimensión	Indicador	Operacionalización	Fuentes
Populismo en política exterior	Narrativas dicotómicas	Uso de oposiciones pueblo/élite, democracia/dictadura en discursos sobre política exterior	Discursos, declaraciones. Documentos oficiales, entrevistas. Discursos en foros multilaterales
	Personalización	Referencias al liderazgo personal en decisiones internacionales; marginación de burocracias diplomáticas	
	Retorica anti-elite global	Críticas a instituciones multilaterales establecidas; cuestionamiento	
	Multilateralismo selectivo	Críticas a instituciones multilaterales establecidas; cuestionamiento de "consensos" internacionales	
Estrategias hacia organismos regionales	Participación institucional	Nivel de actividad en diferentes organismos; asistencia a reuniones	Documentos oficiales, comunicados. Discursos, declaraciones
	Iniciativas propositivas	Propuestas de creación/reforma de instituciones; liderazgo de iniciativas	
	Retórica de legitimación	Argumentos utilizados para justificar decisiones sobre organismos regionales	
	Alianzas y coaliciones	Patrones de alineamiento con otros países en organismos regionales	
Efectos sobre la integración regional	Cambios institucionales	Creación, reforma, paralización o abandono de organismos	Documentos institucionales. Medios regionales, declaraciones
	Dinámicas de cooperación	Variaciones en proyectos y programas de cooperación regional	
	Percepciones regionales	Reacciones de otros países a las decisiones colombianas	

Resultados y discusión

Gobierno y política exterior de Iván Duque

Perfil ideológico y coalición de gobierno

Iván Duque (2018-2022) logra la presidencia representando una coalición de centroderecha, liderada por el partido Centro Democrático. La coalición se caracterizó por una orientación ideológica conservadora, proempresarial y, en política exterior, alineada con los Estados Unidos, en particular en materia de seguridad y de política antidrogas. En el plano regional, el gobierno de Duque adoptó una posición de confrontación sistemática con el régimen de Nicolás Maduro en Venezuela, convirtiendo esta oposición en un eje central de su política exterior (Borda & Silva, 2023). El contexto regional durante el período de Duque estuvo marcado por el predominio de gobiernos de derecha en países sudamericanos, como Argentina, con Macri; Brasil, con Bolsonaro; y Chile, con Piñera. Esta coincidencia ideológica creó oportunidades para articular una

agenda regional conservadora, lo que facilitó la construcción de alianzas que respaldaron las iniciativas de política exterior del gobierno colombiano.

La crisis venezolana como catalizador: presión internacional y cerco diplomático

La crisis política, económica y humanitaria en Venezuela constituyó el factor contextual más importante para la política exterior de Iván Duque. La migración masiva de venezolanos hacia Colombia, de cerca de 2,8 millones (Observatorio de Migraciones, Migrantes y Movilidad Humana, 2023), generó presiones de actores domésticos —partidos políticos, gremios y opinión pública—, lo que proporcionó justificación para una política exterior activa y protagónica hacia la región. El gobierno de Duque construyó una narrativa que presentaba esta crisis como una amenaza existencial para la democracia regional, legitimando así decisiones como el retiro de organismos regionales y la creación de nuevos foros (Pastrana & Castro, 2015).

Uno de los casos más representativos de la operacionalización del populismo en la política exterior colombiana bajo Iván Duque fue el denominado "cerco diplomático" contra el gobierno de Nicolás Maduro. En 2019, la administración Duque reconoció a Juan Guaidó, al igual que varios gobiernos en la región, como presidente interino y activó una estrategia diplomática coordinada en espacios regionales y multilaterales, como el Grupo de Lima y la OEA, para aislar políticamente al régimen venezolano y presionar por cambios democráticos. Esta estrategia se tradujo en medidas como reconocimientos, declaraciones conjuntas y esfuerzo de coalición, que buscaron configurar un bloque regional de presión frente al régimen de Nicolás Maduro.

A la luz del populismo en política exterior, este cerco revela tres mecanismos: (i) la construcción de una dicotomía moralizante expresada en democracia vs. dictadura, que simplificó el problema complejo de la crisis venezolana en términos de bueno-malo; (ii) la personalización de la diplomacia, con la presidencia ejerciendo un protagonismo directo en la articulación de la presión internacional; y (iii) la práctica de f*orum-shopping*, privilegiando foros y coaliciones que maximizaron el liderazgo colombiano y permitieron la movilización de apoyos ideológicamente afines. Si bien esta estrategia generó resultados visibles en términos de liderazgo y visibilidad internacional a corto plazo, contribuyó también a la polarización regional y a la fragmentación institucional del regionalismo que hemos identificado arriba.

Decisiones clave en organismos regionales

Una de las decisiones en política exterior de la administración de Iván Duque fue el retiro de Colombia de la UNASUR**,** en agosto de 2018, pocos días después de asumir como jefe de Estado. Decisión oficialmente justificada por la "pérdida de legitimidad" de la organización, atribuida a la influencia venezolana y a su "sesgo ideológico" a favor de los gobiernos de izquierda. Al momento de oficializar el retiro, Iván Duque manifestó: "[…] no podemos seguir siendo parte de una institución que ha sido el más grande cómplice de la dictadura de Venezuela […]" (Duque, 2018), señalando que la UNASUR se había

prestado, con su silencio y muchas veces con su complacencia, a que no se denunciaran los "tratos brutales" en Venezuela. Esta narrativa construye una dicotomía entre "democracia", representada por Colombia y sus aliados ideológicos, y "dictadura" en Venezuela y sus simpatizantes, característica central del populismo en política exterior.

La decisión de retiro no fue el resultado de un proceso deliberativo institucional prolongado, sino una decisión presidencial tomada en los primeros días de gobierno, lo que evidencia la personalización extrema de la política exterior (González et al., 2024). Documentos de la Cancillería muestran que la decisión se comunicó a las burocracias diplomáticas como un hecho consumado, sin una consulta previa significativa.

Creación e impulso de PROSUR (2019)

Simultáneamente al retiro de UNASUR, el gobierno Duque lideró la creación del Foro para el Progreso de América del Sur (PROSUR) en marzo de 2019, junto con los presidentes de Chile; Sebastián Piñera, Ecuador; Lenin Moreno, Paraguay; Abdo Benítez y Perú; Martín Vizcarra. PROSUR se presentó como una alternativa democrática y pragmática a UNASUR, y enfocada en temas como migración, seguridad, y cooperación económica.

El lanzamiento de PROSUR en Santiago de Chile fue cuidadosamente orquestado como un momento de liderazgo presidencial. Iván Duque declaró: "[…] Al dar este paso, estamos recuperando el sentido de una integración conceptual más que basada en ideologías, basada en principios en la defensa de la democracia, en la defensa de los derechos humanos […]" (El Colombiano, 2019). Estas expresiones son muestra de bipolarización moral, en donde se asume a la política regional como disputa entre "valores/democracia" (nosotros) e "ideologías/autoritarismo" (ellos). Por otra parte, la retórica fundacional de PROSUR recurrió constantemente a referencias al liderazgo personal de los presidentes fundadores, presentándolos como salvadores de la integración regional frente al "fracaso" de UNASUR.

La estructura institucional de PROSUR refleja características típicas del populismo en política exterior: mínima burocratización, máxima flexibilidad para el protagonismo presidencial y ausencia de mecanismos de integración profunda que pudieran limitar la soberanía nacional. A diferencia de UNASUR, PROSUR carece de secretaría permanente, parlamento regional, o instancias supranacionales, configurándose como un foro puramente intergubernamental.

Con respecto a otros organismos regionales como la OEA y el Grupo de Lima, el gobierno de Iván Duque intensificó la participación colombiana en la Organización de Estados Americanos (OEA), utilizando este foro como plataforma principal para el aislamiento diplomático de Venezuela. Colombia lideró múltiples iniciativas en la OEA, incluyendo la invocación de la Carta Democrática Interamericana contra Venezuela y el reconocimiento de Juan Guaidó como presidente interino.

También Colombia fue un miembro fundador y activo del Grupo de Lima (2017), una coalición de países creada específicamente para coordinar la presión internacional sobre Venezuela. Aunque el Grupo de Lima precedió al gobierno de Duque, este le imprimió un sello distintivo, convirtiéndolo en el principal instrumento de su diplomacia regional.

El uso estratégico de la OEA y el Grupo de Lima ilustra la práctica de selectividad multilateral característica del PPE. Mientras estos foros permitían a Duque ejercer liderazgo y construir coaliciones "anti-maduro", organismos como UNASUR o CELAC fueron abandonados o marginados por no favorecer este tipo de protagonismo. En el caso particular de CELAC, durante el período Duque, Colombia mantuvo una participación formal, aunque de bajo perfil: asistió a reuniones sin proponer iniciativas significativas. Esta actitud contrastó con el activismo en PROSUR y en la OEA, lo que sugiere una estrategia deliberada de marginación de foros en los que Venezuela mantenía influencia.

Respecto a la Comunidad Andina de Naciones (CAN), el gobierno Duque mantuvo la participación tradicional, pero no impulsó nuevas iniciativas de integración. La prioridad se desplazó hacia la Alianza del Pacífico, un foro que se alineaba mejor con la agenda económica liberal y con la orientación del gobierno hacia los mercados globales.

Análisis de rasgos populistas

En cuanto a la construcción de narrativas dicotómicas, el gobierno de Duque construyó sistemáticamente una narrativa que dividía la región entre "democracias" y "dictaduras", con Colombia como líder del campo democrático. Esta narrativa se evidencia en varios discursos presidenciales. En el discurso ante Naciones Unidas en 2019, a modo de síntesis, expresó que la región latinoamericana se encontraba en la disyuntiva entre democracia y autoritarismo, entre libertad y opresión, mediante la expresión: […] "La libre determinación de los pueblos no puede ser manipulada para convertirse en la libre determinación de los opresores" […]. En entrevista con medios de comunicación durante su visita a Chile en el marco de la fundación de PROSUR en 2019, manifestó narrativas dicotómicas en clave amigo-enemigo: "En América Latina existe un debate entre "demagogos y pedagogos" […] frente a Venezuela, esto no es un debate entre izquierda y derecha, sino un debate entre tiranía y democracia" (Jofré, 2019). Esta construcción dicotómica cumple la función típica del populismo: simplificar la complejidad política en una oposición maniquea entre "nosotros", como el pueblo democrático y defensor de las libertades, y "ellos", las élites autoritarias y opresoras. La efectividad de esta narrativa se reforzó con la crisis humanitaria venezolana, que aportó evidencia tangible de las consecuencias del autoritarismo.

En cuanto a la personalización del liderazgo en diplomacia, la política exterior de Iván Duque se caracterizó por ello, con el presidente asumiendo directamente la conducción de los temas regionales más importantes. Sin embargo, cabe destacar que en ambos casos de estudio el diseño institucional del ejercicio de la política exterior en Colombia facilita un alto protagonismo presidencial en esta materia (González, Muñoz, 2020). En clave populista, esta alta personalización se manifiesta en diversos aspectos: concentración en la figura presidencial de las decisiones más importantes en política exterior, como el retiro de UNASUR, la creación de PROSUR, decisiones tomadas en el círculo presidencial inmediato, con mínima consulta a la Cancillería o al Congreso; protagonismo mediático, ya que Duque asumió personalmente la representación de Colombia en todos los foros regionales importantes, convirtiéndose en la cara visible de la política exterior colombiana; y marginalización de burocracias, donde los diplomáticos

de carrera fueron relegados a funciones ejecutivas, mientras las decisiones estratégicas se concentraron en asesores políticos cercanos al presidente.

Por otro lado, respecto al antielitismo selectivo y la práctica de *forum shopping*, Iván Duque practicó un antielitismo selectivo, criticando a aquellas instituciones multilaterales que no se alineaban con su agenda política, mientras fortalecía otras que sí lo hacían. UNASUR fue caracterizada como una institución de "élites ideologizadas" que no representaba los intereses de los "pueblos suramericanos", mientras que PROSUR se presentó como una expresión auténtica de la voluntad democrática regional. Esta selectividad se tradujo en una práctica sistemática de *forum shopping*, en la que Colombia privilegió aquellos espacios que maximizaron su capacidad de influir y liderar. La OEA y el Grupo de Lima fueron fortalecidos porque permitían construir coaliciones antivenezolanas, mientras que CELAC y la CAN fueron marginalizadas por incluir países no alineados con esta agenda.

Efectos sobre la integración regional

Las decisiones del gobierno de Duque contribuyeron a la fragmentación del regionalismo sudamericano. El retiro de UNASUR, junto con decisiones similares de Argentina, Brasil, Chile y otros países, llevó a la paralización efectiva de la organización. Simultáneamente, la creación de PROSUR generó duplicación institucional y competencia entre las organizaciones regionales. Esta fragmentación no fue un efecto colateral indeseado, sino un objetivo explícito de la política exterior de Duque. En múltiples ocasiones, el presidente argumentó que era necesario refundar el regionalismo sobre bases democráticas, lo que implicaba, necesariamente, la destrucción de instituciones influidas por la política venezolana. Por otra parte, la estrategia de confrontación sistemática con Venezuela y la construcción de coaliciones antichavistas contribuyeron a polarizar el regionalismo latinoamericano. Países como México, Argentina, Bolivia y Uruguay, durante los gobiernos de Andrés Manuel López Obrador, Alberto Fernández y Tabaré Vázquez, respectivamente, mantuvieron posiciones más moderadas hacia Venezuela, lo que generó tensiones en organismos regionales. Esta polarización se manifestó en la paralización de iniciativas de cooperación regional que requerían consenso: proyectos de integración energética, de cooperación en seguridad y de coordinación macroeconómica se vieron afectados por las divisiones políticas promovidas por la estrategia colombiana.

En cuanto a las condiciones contextuales, la estrategia de política exterior de Duque demostró una alta dependencia de las coyunturas políticas favorables, debido a la presencia de gobiernos conservadores en países clave. PROSUR alcanzó su momento de mayor actividad durante 2019-2020, cuando coincidieron gobiernos de derecha en Colombia, Chile, Brasil, Argentina y Ecuador. Sin embargo, los cambios políticos posteriores, como el triunfo de Fernández en Argentina, Castillo en Perú y Boric en Chile, debilitaron las coaliciones construidas por Duque, evidenciando la fragilidad de iniciativas regionales basadas en alineamientos ideológicos coyunturales más que en intereses estructurales compartidos. Balance del período Duque: si bien el análisis evidencia que la política exterior de Iván Duque incorporó ciertos elementos asociados al populismo, como la personalización del liderazgo presidencial, la retórica dicotómica entre "democracias" y "dictaduras", y la selectividad institucional expresada en la creación de

PROSUR, estos rasgos no permiten clasificar de manera concluyente su política exterior como populista en sentido estricto.

En línea con Destradi, Plagemann y Taş (2022), el uso de repertorios retóricos o estilos comunicativos populistas no necesariamente equivale a una "política exterior populista", sino que puede representar una "populización parcial" del discurso diplomático en contextos de alta polarización regional. La política exterior del gobierno Duque mantuvo elementos de continuidad institucional característicos del enfoque colombiano tradicional: el alineamiento con Estados Unidos, la prioridad en la seguridad regional y el predominio de tecnócratas en la Cancillería (Tickner, 2014), así como la participación en los demás espacios multilaterales globales. Desde esta perspectiva, más que un caso de populismo consolidado, el gobierno Duque refleja un uso estratégico y acotado de marcos discursivos populistas, instrumentalizados para reforzar la legitimidad interna y proyectar liderazgo regional, pero sin alterar de manera sustantiva las estructuras, los actores ni los principios institucionalistas que históricamente han guiado la política exterior colombiana.

En consecuencia, la categoría de "populismo en política exterior" debe aplicarse con cautela, reconociendo la coexistencia de la retórica populista con patrones de continuidad burocrático-institucional que limitan una clasificación taxativa (Wajner & Giurlando, 2024; Löfflmann, 2022). En cuanto a los posibles efectos de sus decisiones sobre organismos regionales, estas respondieron más a consideraciones de legitimación política doméstica y de construcción de liderazgo regional que a análisis estratégicos de largo plazo sobre los intereses nacionales colombianos. Los efectos de esta estrategia fueron ambivalentes: por un lado, Colombia logró posicionarse como líder regional en la oposición al gobierno de Nicolás Maduro en Venezuela y construir coaliciones para el aislamiento diplomático del régimen; por otro lado, contribuyó a la fragmentación del regionalismo sudamericano y a la polarización ideológica que debilitó la capacidad de cooperación regional en múltiples áreas.

Gustavo Petro (2022-2026)

Perfil ideológico y coalición de gobierno

La llegada de Gustavo Petro a la presidencia en agosto de 2022 marcó un punto de inflexión histórico en la política colombiana, al convertirse en el primer presidente de izquierda en la historia del país. Su triunfo se debió a la coalición denominada Pacto Histórico, que articuló fuerzas progresistas, socialdemócratas y sectores del centro político tradicionalmente excluidos del poder. Esta coalición se caracterizó por una agenda de transformaciones estructurales que incluía la transición energética, la reforma agraria, la "paz total" y una política exterior más autónoma y multilateralista. El perfil ideológico de Petro, formado en la guerrilla del M-19 y posteriormente en la política democrática, combina elementos del socialismo democrático con enfoques pragmáticos de gobernanza. En política exterior, esto se traduce en una orientación hacia el Sur Global, en el énfasis en la justicia climática y en la búsqueda de mayor autonomía frente a Estados Unidos, sin llegar a la confrontación abierta, al menos durante los primeros años de su gobierno. El gobierno de Gustavo Petro se da en un contexto regional marcado

por el retorno de gobiernos progresistas en algunos países latinoamericanos: López Obrador en México, Alberto Fernández en Argentina, Gabriel Boric en Chile, Pedro Castillo en Perú y Luiz Inácio Lula en Brasil. Este contexto abrió oportunidades para la rearticulación de proyectos de integración regional que habían sido debilitados durante el ciclo conservador anterior. Sin embargo, esta nueva ola progresista presenta características distintas de la primera marea rosa de principios de siglo. Estos gobiernos enfrentan restricciones fiscales mayores, sociedades más polarizadas y un contexto internacional más complejo, marcado por la competencia geopolítica entre Estados Unidos y China, entre otras. Gustavo Petro hereda una política exterior caracterizada por el aislamiento de Venezuela, la fragmentación del regionalismo sudamericano y el estrecho alineamiento con Estados Unidos en materia de seguridad. Esta herencia genera tanto oportunidades como restricciones: por un lado, permite presentar cualquier cambio como una normalización de las relaciones; por otro, limita el margen de maniobra debido a compromisos internacionales previos y a las expectativas de continuidad de sectores conservadores domésticos.

Decisiones clave en organismos regionales

La decisión de política exterior de mayor ruptura con la administración anterior fue el restablecimiento progresivo de las relaciones diplomáticas con Venezuela, iniciado poco después de comenzar su mandato. El discurso de legitimación de esta decisión emplea elementos característicos del populismo en política exterior. En la Declaración Conjunta firmada el 1° de noviembre de 2022 entre los presidentes de Colombia y Venezuela, se afirma "[...] es antinatural [...] que Colombia y Venezuela se separen [...] los lazos de sangre nos juntan [...] somos lo mismo [...] estamos mezclados por la historia, por una raíz común, estamos mezclados por la sangre" (Presidencia de la República, 2022a, párr. 2). Esta narrativa construye una dicotomía entre "pueblos hermanos", que naturalmente buscan la unión, y los otros representados en élites políticas que artificialmente los separan.

La normalización con Venezuela no implicó, sin embargo, un respaldo incondicional al régimen de Nicolás Maduro. Petro mantuvo críticas a aspectos específicos de la situación venezolana, pero las enmarcó en un discurso de diálogo constructivo más que en uno de confrontación sistemática. Esta posición matizada refleja tanto consideraciones pragmáticas, como la necesidad de cooperación fronteriza, como restricciones domésticas por parte de la oposición conservadora.

Por su parte, el gobierno Petro impulsó la reactivación de la Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños (CELAC), participando activamente en la VII Cumbre de CELAC, realizada en Buenos Aires en enero de 2023. En su intervención, Gustavo Petro propuso avanzar hacia un tratado regional de migración y convocar a una conferencia latinoamericana sobre este tema, al tiempo que subrayó la urgencia de coordinar esfuerzos para la protección de la Amazonía y la lucha contra el cambio climático (Bloomberg Línea, 2023; Infobae, 2023). Estos compromisos se inscribieron en el marco más amplio de la Declaración de Buenos Aires, en la que los Estados miembros de CELAC reafirmaron la cooperación Sur-Sur y su voluntad de fortalecer los lazos en materia ambiental, energética y social (CELAC, 2023).

En su discurso en la Cumbre de CELAC, Gustavo Petro defendió la necesidad de que América Latina "hable con voz propia" frente a los poderes globales, subrayando que la integración regional debía servir para superar la explotación histórica de sus recursos y posicionar a la región como un actor autónomo en la política internacional (CELAC, 2023). Esta narrativa construye una oposición entre "pueblos latinoamericanos" y "poderes globales", una característica central del populismo de izquierda en política exterior.

Simultáneamente, Colombia reactivó su participación en la Comunidad Andina de Naciones (CAN), promoviendo iniciativas de integración energética, cooperación ambiental y coordinación de políticas migratorias. Esta reactivación se enmarca en una estrategia más amplia de diversificación de la inserción internacional colombiana, que reduce la dependencia de Estados Unidos y fortalece vínculos Sur-Sur.

Una de las iniciativas más ambiciosas del gobierno Petro en materia de integración regional es la propuesta de revitalización de UNASUR, planteada durante la Cumbre de CELAC en Buenos Aires. Petro argumentó que la crisis climática y las nuevas dinámicas geopolíticas globales requieren fortalecer los mecanismos de integración sudamericana, y presentó a UNASUR como el foro más apropiado para este objetivo.

Sin embargo, esta propuesta enfrenta resistencias significativas de países como Brasil, bajo Lula, que prefiere fortalecer CELAC, y Chile, bajo Boric, que mantiene reservas sobre UNASUR. Estas resistencias ilustran las limitaciones del liderazgo presidencial individual para impulsar cambios institucionales regionales sin un consenso amplio.

Por su parte, en cuanto a PROSUR, Colombia mantuvo una participación selectiva y formal, pero con un perfil notablemente bajo en comparación con la época de Duque. Colombia ha asistido a las reuniones del foro, pero sin proponer iniciativas significativas ni ejercer liderazgo en sus actividades. Esta participación de bajo perfil refleja una estrategia de transición gradual: evitar rupturas dramáticas que puedan generar costos diplomáticos, pero tampoco invertir capital político en una institución considerada como instrumento de la agenda conservadora anterior. Documentos de la Cancillería sugieren que la participación en PROSUR se mantiene por "cortesía diplomática", mientras se fortalecen otros foros más alineados con la nueva orientación de la política exterior.

Análisis de rasgos populistas

Gustavo Petro ha utilizado una retórica que remite directamente a los pueblos latinoamericanos como depositarios de una misión histórica de integración y emancipación. En su discurso en la Asamblea General de la ONU (Presidencia de la República, 2022b), responsabilizó al modelo económico global y al "poder mundial" de la crisis climática, enfatizando la condición de vulnerabilidad del Sur frente al Norte desarrollado. Al año siguiente, en la Cumbre Iberoamericana de 2023, criticó que la integración regional fuese "más retórica que otra cosa" (24 Horas, 2023), y en la VII Cumbre de la CELAC planteó la disyuntiva de que "América Latina […] o habla con voz propia y actúa unida, o seguirá dividida" (Presidencia de Colombia, 2023a). Finalmente, su propuesta de reintegrar a Colombia a UNASUR se acompañó del argumento de que "los pueblos de este continente no pueden seguir divididos" (Presidencia de Colombia, 2023b). Estos discursos evidencian rasgos característicos del populismo de política

exterior: la apelación a un pueblo regional homogéneo, el pueblo latinoamericano, en oposición a las élites nacionales y a los poderes globales percibidos como explotadores, junto con la promesa de restaurar la soberanía y la justicia social mediante una integración transformadora.

Esta apelación a "los pueblos" como actor colectivo virtuoso, contrapuesto a élites domésticas y globales corruptas, constituye el núcleo de la narrativa populista de Petro en política exterior. A diferencia de la estrategia discursiva de Iván Duque, que enfatizaba la oposición entre democracia y dictadura, el populismo de Petro construye la dicotomía en términos de justicia social y ambiental.

Un segundo rasgo populista característico de la política exterior de Gustavo Petro es la moralización sistemática del discurso internacional, en la que las decisiones de su gobierno se presentan como un imperativo ético ante injusticias históricas. Esta moralización gira en torno a tres ejes: la justicia climática, la paz total y la justicia social. El eje de justicia climática presenta la transición energética y la protección ambiental como una obligación moral de Colombia hacia la humanidad. El eje de paz total se asume como un imperativo ético que debe extenderse más allá del ámbito doméstico, hacia las relaciones internacionales, mediante el diálogo con todos los actores regionales. El eje de justicia social asume los espacios de integración regional como instrumentos para reducir la desigualdad y promover la justicia social en la región. Esta moralización cumple funciones típicas del populismo: la simplificación dicotómica de decisiones complejas en términos de bien-mal y también brinda una suerte de superioridad moral al líder y a su proyecto, buscando deslegitimar a la oposición como éticamente inferior.

En referencia a la personalización del liderazgo en diplomacia, el estilo de liderazgo de Petro en política exterior se observa como un elemento de personalización carismática. Asume personalmente la representación de Colombia en foros internacionales importantes y convierte sus intervenciones en eventos mediáticos de alto impacto, especialmente en espacios multilaterales globales como la Asamblea General de las Naciones Unidas.

Sobre la selectividad multilateral, al igual que su antecesor, Iván Duque, Gustavo Petro practica selectividad multilateral, pero privilegiando foros alineados con su agenda progresista. CELAC, CAN y, potencialmente, UNASUR se fortalecen como espacios de "integración auténticamente latinoamericana" bajo los preceptos discursivos de Gustavo Petro, mientras que PROSUR es marginado como instrumento de la agenda conservadora. Esta selectividad se justifica mediante narrativas sobre la "descolonización" de la política exterior colombiana y la necesidad de privilegiar espacios de "integración solidaria" frente a foros de "integración subordinada" a intereses externos.

Efectos sobre la integración regional

Las decisiones del gobierno de Petro han contribuido a la recomposición de un bloque progresista en América Latina, facilitando la coordinación entre gobiernos de orientación ideológica similar. La normalización con Venezuela elimina un factor de polarización regional, mientras que la reactivación de la CELAC proporciona una plataforma para

articular posiciones comunes. Esta recomposición se ha manifestado en iniciativas concretas de cooperación: la coordinación de políticas migratorias, proyectos de integración energética renovable y posiciones comunes en foros globales sobre cambio climático y comercio internacional. Sin embargo, la política exterior del gobierno de Petro ha enfrentado limitaciones estructurales similares a las que afectaron a gobiernos anteriores: dependencia de coyunturas políticas favorables, ausencia de mecanismos de integración profunda, competencia entre múltiples organizaciones regionales y restricciones domésticas. Por ejemplo, la revitalización de UNASUR ha encontrado resistencias, incluso entre gobiernos ideológicamente cercanos, que prefieren fortalecer la CELAC o crear nuevos mecanismos. Estas resistencias evidencian que el cambio ideológico no elimina automáticamente los problemas de coordinación y de competencia institucional que caracterizan al regionalismo latinoamericano.

La política exterior de Gustavo Petro ha generado tensiones entre el objetivo de lograr mayores márgenes de autonomía regional y la necesidad de mantener relaciones funcionales con Estados Unidos. Mientras el discurso hace énfasis en la "descolonización" de la política exterior, las decisiones prácticas deben considerar la dependencia económica, de cooperación y de seguridad respecto de Estados Unidos. Estas tensiones se han manifestado en temas como la política antidrogas, donde las propuestas de Petro giran en torno a enfoques alternativos a la guerra contra las drogas, y también en las relaciones con China, donde busca diversificar la inserción internacional sin generar confrontación con Washington, al menos durante los dos primeros años de gobierno.

Balance del período Petro

El gobierno de Gustavo Petro representa un caso de populismo de izquierda en política exterior, caracterizado por la apelación al "pueblo latinoamericano", la moralización del discurso internacional y la selectividad multilateral progresista. Sus decisiones respecto de los organismos regionales buscan revertir la fragmentación generada durante el gobierno anterior y recomponer un bloque progresista regional.

Los efectos de esta estrategia muestran tanto potencialidades como limitaciones: por un lado, ha contribuido a reducir tensiones regionales y facilitar la cooperación entre gobiernos progresistas; por otro lado, enfrenta restricciones estructurales similares a las que afectaron experiencias previas de integración regional.

La sostenibilidad de la estrategia de Petro dependerá de su capacidad para institucionalizar los cambios promovidos, trascendiendo la dependencia de coyunturas políticas favorables que ha caracterizado históricamente al regionalismo latinoamericano. Los primeros dos años de gobierno sugieren avances en la recomposición de las relaciones regionales, pero también evidencian la persistencia de desafíos estructurales que requieren soluciones de largo plazo.

Comparación y discusión

Una vez examinados por separado los casos de Iván Duque y Gustavo Petro, se presenta una comparación sistemática de sus principales decisiones frente a los organismos

regionales, a la luz del marco analítico definido en la matriz de codificación. La Tabla 2 sintetiza esta comparación, organizando, para cada foro regional, las decisiones relevantes de cada gobierno, el mecanismo de populismo en política exterior al que se asocian y sus implicaciones para la arquitectura del regionalismo latinoamericano.

Tabla 2. Matriz comparativa: Duque vs. Petro

Dimensión	**Iván Duque (2018-2022)**	**Gustavo Petro (2022-presente)**	**Análisis**
Orientación ideológica	Centro-derecha conservador	Izquierda progresista	Polarización ideológica completa
Narrativa populista central	Democracia vs dictadura	Pueblos vs élites globales	Dicotomías distintas, lógica similar
Actitud hacia Venezuela	Aislamiento y confrontación	Normalización y diálogo	Reversión completa de estrategia entre ambos gobiernos
Foros privilegiados	PROSUR, OEA, Grupo de Lima	CELAC, CAN, UNASUR	*Forum shopping* opuesto
Estilo de liderazgo	Personalización confrontacional	Personalización carismática	Ambos personalizan, estilos diferentes
Relación con EEUU	Alineamiento estrecho	Autonomía relativa	Continuidad con matices
Efectos regionales	Fragmentación y polarización	Recomposición progresista	Impactos sistémicos opuestos

Fuente: elaboración propia

Continuidades estructurales

A pesar de las diferencias ideológicas y estratégicas, ambos gobiernos muestran continuidades estructurales significativas que reflejan características persistentes de la política exterior colombiana: i) personalización presidencial: tanto Duque como Petro centraron las decisiones de política exterior regional en la Presidencia, marginando a las burocracias diplomáticas tradicionales. Esta personalización refleja tanto la tradición presidencialista colombiana como las características del populismo en política exterior. ii) Volatilidad según los ciclos políticos: ambos gobiernos convirtieron las decisiones sobre organismos regionales en marcas distintivas de sus respectivas administraciones, generando cambios dramáticos cada cuatro años. Esta volatilidad evidencia la ausencia de políticas de Estado consolidadas en materia de regionalismo. iii) dependencia de las coyunturas regionales: los éxitos y fracasos de ambas estrategias dependieron de la presencia de gobiernos ideológicamente afines en países vecinos. Duque se benefició del ciclo conservador 2015-2020, mientras Petro aprovecha una suerte de segunda marea rosa iniciada en 2018. iv) instrumentalización doméstica: en ambos casos, las decisiones de política exterior regional sirvieron a los objetivos de legitimación política doméstica, más que a cálculos estratégicos de largo plazo sobre intereses nacionales.

Patrones de populismo en política exterior

El análisis comparativo permite identificar patrones comunes de populismo en política exterior que trascienden las diferencias ideológicas, como la construcción de dicotomías, la personalización del ejercicio diplomático, el multilateralismo y el antielitismo selectivo. Sobre el primer patrón, se observa que ambos gobiernos emplearon narrativas dicotómicas para simplificar la complejidad regional mediante oposiciones maniqueas que reducen la realidad a lo simple: lo bueno y lo malo. Duque construyó la dicotomía "democracia/dictadura", con Colombia al frente del campo democrático. Petro emplea la dicotomía "pueblos/élites globales" y Colombia como voz auténtica de los pueblos latinoamericanos.

En cuanto al patrón de personalización del liderazgo, tanto Duque como Petro asumieron personalmente la representación de Colombia en foros regionales, lo que convirtió sus intervenciones en eventos mediáticos de alto impacto. Esta personalización trasciende las diferencias de estilo, confrontacional en Duque, carismático en Petro, para constituir un rasgo estructural común. En cuanto a la selectividad multilateral estratégica, se observa que ambos gobiernos practicaron el denominado *forum shopping*, privilegiando organismos que maximizaron su capacidad de liderazgo y coincidían con sus narrativas políticas. La diferencia radica en la dirección de la selectividad: conservadora frente a progresista, no en la práctica misma.

En cuanto al antielitismo selectivo, Duque y Petro fueron críticos de instituciones multilaterales existentes como instrumentos de "élites", ideologizadas en el caso de Iván Duque y globales en el de Gustavo Petro, mientras promovían alternativas presentadas como expresión auténtica de la voluntad popular. Las diferencias entre ambos casos ilustran cómo el populismo en política exterior puede operacionalizarse de distintas maneras según su orientación ideológica. En ese sentido, las orientaciones de las dicotomías, mientras que las dicotomías discursivas de Iván Duque se basaron en criterios político-institucionales —"democracia/dictadura"—, las de Gustavo Petro se orientaron según criterios socioeconómicos y ambientales —"justicia/injusticia, sostenibilidad/extractivismo". En cuanto a las estrategias de legitimación, Duque empleó la crisis venezolana como catalizador para legitimar cambios institucionales, mientras que Petro utiliza la crisis climática y la desigualdad como justificaciones para sus iniciativas.

Efectos sistémicos sobre el regionalismo

Ambos gobiernos han contribuido, de manera diferente, a la fragmentación del regionalismo latinoamericano. Duque promovió activamente el reemplazo de instituciones existentes, como UNASUR, por nuevas alternativas, como PROSUR, generando duplicación y competencia institucional. Por su parte, Gustavo Petro, aunque busca revertir esta fragmentación, mantiene la lógica de selectividad institucional que la alimenta.

La persistencia de múltiples organizaciones regionales con mandatos superpuestos refleja la incapacidad del sistema para alcanzar consensos sobre un modelo único de

integración. Cada cambio de gobierno agrega nuevas capas institucionales sin eliminar las anteriores, creando un "*spaghetti bowl*" organizacional de creciente complejidad.

La comparación entre Duque y Petro evidencia la extrema volatilidad del regionalismo latinoamericano ante los cambios de gobierno en países clave. Las decisiones tomadas por un gobierno son revertidas por su sucesor, lo que dificulta la consolidación de proyectos de largo plazo. Esta volatilidad refleja la ausencia de una institucionalización profunda del regionalismo latinoamericano. Esto también dificulta la capacidad de acción colectiva regional, expresada en proyectos de cooperación que requieren continuidad temporal, como la integración energética, la coordinación macroeconómica y la cooperación en materia de seguridad.

Conclusiones

Esta investigación confirma parcialmente la idea central: tanto los gobiernos de Iván Duque como los de Gustavo Petro muestran rasgos de populismo en política exterior (PPE), aunque con orientaciones ideológicas opuestas. Duque adoptó una estrategia de ruptura y sustitución institucional, mientras Petro promovió un reenganche plebiscitario y moralizado con organismos regionales previamente marginados.

Sobre la personalización de la diplomacia, se concluye que ambos gobiernos concentraron las decisiones relativas a los organismos regionales en la Presidencia, marginando a las burocracias diplomáticas tradicionales y convirtiendo la política exterior en una marca distintiva del liderazgo presidencial.

En cuanto al *foro shopping estratégico, los dos casos muestran una práctica sistemática de selectividad multilateral* que favorece a organismos que refuercen el protagonismo presidencial y se ajusten a narrativas políticas específicas. Esta selectividad provoca una fragmentación institucional y reduce la capacidad de acción colectiva regional.

Las decisiones respecto a organismos regionales sirven principalmente para legitimar políticamente en el ámbito interno, más que por cálculos estratégicos a largo plazo sobre los intereses nacionales de Colombia; la política exterior se instrumentaliza para objetivos domésticos.

Sin embargo, desde un enfoque comparativo y según la literatura especializada, es necesario matizar la interpretación de la política exterior de Iván Duque como un caso pleno de populismo. Aunque presenta rasgos de personalización presidencial, de narrativas dicotómicas y de selectividad institucional, estas características no bastan para definir un patrón populista completo. Como señalan expertos en el populismo de la política exterior, la presencia de elementos retóricos populistas en la diplomacia puede representar una "populización parcial" del discurso más que una transformación estructural de la acción exterior.

Por ello, sería más adecuado hablar de un proceso de hibridación discursiva, en el que el liderazgo presidencial adopta temporal y estratégicamente recursos populistas sin alterar los marcos normativos ni las prácticas institucionalizadas. Este enfoque está en línea con las advertencias de Löfflmann (2022) y Wajner & Giurlando (2024) sobre la necesidad de distinguir entre estilos comunicativos populistas y políticas exteriores populistas en su

sentido estricto. Hacer esa distinción no solo mejora la comprensión del caso colombiano, sino que también enriquece el debate sobre los grados y formas de populización en la política exterior contemporánea, evitando clasificaciones rígidas y fortaleciendo la comparación en los estudios sobre populismo y diplomacia.

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A ATUALIDADE DA TEORIA ESTRUTURALISTA DA DEMOCRACIA EM ÁFRICA E A PARTICULARIDADE DE CABO VERDE: ANÁLISE À LUZ DO PENSAMENTO DE SEYMOUR LIPSET E ROBERT DAHL

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Resumo

Este artigo reinterpreta a Escola Estruturalista da Democracia, destacando a sua relevância contemporânea e aplicabilidade analítica. Fundamentada na suposição de que a democracia funciona de forma mais eficaz em sociedades económica e socialmente desenvolvidas, esta abordagem teórica é aplicada ao contexto africano por meio de uma análise comparativa entre diferentes regiões. O estudo examina indicadores centrais da qualidade democrática, incluindo o nível de desenvolvimento económico, a presença de economias orientadas para o mercado, a governação civil e a robustez da sociedade civil, refletida em fatores como literacia, cultura cívica, capital social e empoderamento económico. A investigação recorre a uma metodologia qualitativa baseada em inferência teórica, análise comparativa e avaliação interpretativa de dados qualitativos e quantitativos, com o objetivo de aferir em que medida os pressupostos estruturalistas se confirmam no contexto africano, com especial atenção ao caso de Cabo Verde. Os resultados corroboram, em grande medida, as principais teses da perspetiva estruturalista. À escala global, as democracias mais consolidadas continuam a localizar-se em contextos altamente desenvolvidos, sobretudo na Europa Ocidental e Setentrional. Em África, os países que apresentam melhor desempenho democrático — como Maurícia, Botsuana, Cabo Verde, África do Sul, Gana e Lesoto — são igualmente aqueles que registaram progressos significativos ao nível do desenvolvimento socioeconómico. Estes resultados evidenciam uma relação persistente entre a qualidade da democracia e as condições estruturais socioeconómicas, reforçando assim o poder explicativo da teoria estruturalista da democracia.

Palavras-chave

Sociedade civil; democracia; escola estruturalista; África; Cabo Verde.

Abstract

This article reinterprets the Structuralist School of Democracy, highlighting its contemporary relevance and applicability. Rooted in the assumption that democracy functions effectively only in potentially developed societies, this theoretical framework is applied to the African context and examined comparatively across different regions. The study employs key indicators of democratic quality—including economic development, the presence of market-oriented economies, civilian governance, and the robustness of civil society as reflected in literacy, civic culture, social capital, and economic empowerment. Through a qualitative methodology grounded in theoretical inference, comparative analysis, and interpretive assessment of qualitative and quantitative data, the research evaluates the extent to which structuralist assumptions hold in Africa, with special attention to the case of Cape Verde.

Findings largely support the claims of the structuralist perspective: the most consolidated democracies continue to be located in highly developed contexts such as Western Europe, particularly in the northern subregion. Within Africa, the countries displaying the strongest democratic performance—Mauritius, Botswana, Cape Verde, South Africa, Ghana, and Lesotho—are likewise those that have registered notable progress in economic development. These results suggest a consistent relationship between democratic quality and structural socioeconomic conditions, offering renewed support for the explanatory power of structuralist democratic theory.

Keywords

Civil society; democracy; structuralist school; Africa; Cape Verde.

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A ATUALIDADE DA TEORIA ESTRUTURALISTA DA DEMOCRACIA EM ÁFRICA E A PARTICULARIDADE DE CABO VERDE: ANÁLISE À LUZ DO PENSAMENTO DE SEYMOUR LIPSET E ROBERT DAHL

ADILSON DE JESUS CABRAL TAVARES

Introdução

Falar de democracia neste artigo implica, em primeiro lugar, esclarecer a que modelo nos estamos a referir e problematizar. Referimo-nos, assim, a de democracia liberal representativa que, não obstante as críticas que lhe têm sido dirigidas quanto à sua eficácia e aplicabilidade fora do espaço ocidental, entendemos ser o melhor entre os modelos anteriores ainda em vigor, bem como em relação aos modelos alternativos e experimentais que foram adotados, mas que não produziram efeitos plausíveis.

É este modelo de democracia que reinterpretamos à luz da teoria estruturalista, uma perspetiva teórica que continua a ser atual quando se analisam os principais indicadores utilizados para avaliar a qualidade da democracia, tais como o desenvolvimento económico, a economia de mercado, a existência de governos civis e de uma sociedade civil forte, seja em termos de literacia, cultura cívica e capital social, seja em termos de empoderamento económico.

Partindo dos indicadores supramencionados, analisamos a consistência, ou não, da escola estruturalista da democracia em África e refletimos sobre a particularidade de Cabo Verde. O objetivo central é verificar se existe uma correlação entre os indicadores sociais, políticos e económicos em África e a referida teoria da democracia. Para isso, recorremos a uma metodologia qualitativa, com ênfase na inferência teórica comparativa entre as várias realidades dentro e fora do continente, bem como na análise interpretativa de dados qualitativos e quantitativos.

Quanto ao itinerário do artigo, no primeiro ponto, procedemos a uma problematização da relação entre sociedade civil, participação política e qualidade da democracia, recorrendo à escola estruturalista da democracia. No segundo, analisámos esta perspetiva teórica aplicada à realidade africana. No terceiro, analisamos a particularidade de Cabo Verde, que se afigura como um caso de estudo com muito ainda por explorar.

Sociedade Civil, Participação Política e Qualidade da Democracia: Reinterpretando a Escola Estruturalista da Democracia

Durante a nossa frequência na licenciatura em Ciência Política e Relações Internacionais, na Universidade Nova de Lisboa, no âmbito da disciplina de Teoria da Democracia, o

professor regente Tiago Fernandes (2007), ao interpretar a Escola Estruturalista da Democracia e recorrendo às contribuições de Dahl (2015) e Lipset (2023), afirmava que "a democracia é para os países ricos". Para um jovem estudante, tal afirmativa parecia paradoxal, sobretudo porque um leigo na matéria tende a ter uma perceção bastante superficial, resumindo a democracia aos aspetos formais e eleitorais. Pelo contrário, a democracia é muito mais do que um mero ato eleitoral (Sartori, 1957; Beetham, 1999; Dahl,1971; Diamond, 1999).

Volvidos muitos anos de investigação, docência e maturação académica, estamos em condições de perceber e fundamentar cientificamente que a democracia e a sua qualidade dependem de um conjunto de requisitos, sendo um deles as condições económicas (Dahl, 2015; Lipset, 2023). Para tal, basta uma interpretação razoável do conceito de democracia, entendida como um regime político que pressupõe atos eleitorais regulares, pacíficos e transparentes, existência de forças políticas concorrenciais, bem como a efetivação dos direitos sociais, civis, políticos e económicos (Schumpeter, 2006; Beetham, 1999; Dahl,1971; Diamond, 1999; Przeworski, Alvarez, Cheibub, e Limongi, 2000). A realização plena destes elementos pressupõe, em primeiro lugar, uma cultura cívica e capital social (Putnam, 1993), indicadores que, no entanto, não se coadunam com a pobreza e vulnerabilidades humanas.

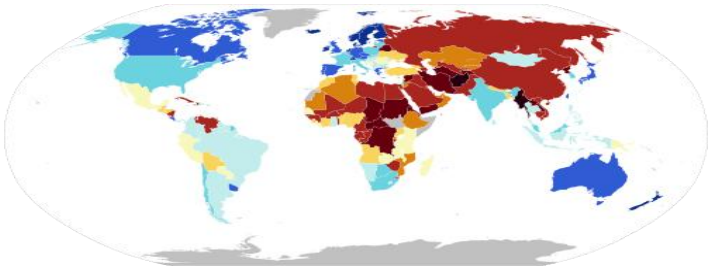
Não se coadunam porque, apesar de, em qualquer parte do mundo, as pessoas afirmarem preferir viver num regime democrático, nos países pobres e em contextos de vulnerabilidade muitos cidadãos não compreendem o que é a democracia, seja em termos conceptuais ou práticos. Para muitos, a democracia resume-se ao ato de votar, mesmo sabendo que, as eleições são muitas vezes fraudulentas. A pobreza e a cultura do assistencialismo são exploradas eleitoralmente pelos políticos; muitos eleitores não analisam os perfis dos candidatos nem as plataformas eleitorais; têm pouca capacidade para diferenciar ideologias partidárias, se é que estas existem, e a literacia política do eleitorado tende a ser baixa. Na pobreza, as preocupações primárias dos cidadãos centram-se na sobrevivência (Stokes, 2005; Jensen e Justesen, 2014; Kitschelt e Wilkinson, 2007; Stokes, Dunning, Nazareno e Brusco, 2013).

Dado que, num contexto de pobreza, as eleições ganham sobretudo no seio das camadas mais vulneráveis, pouco valor têm as ideologias partidárias (Inglehart, 1997; Kitschelt, Wilkinson, 2007; Levitsky e Way, 2010). Neste sentido, prevalece a lógica da "caça aos votos" (catch-all party), parafraseando Otto Kirchheimer (1990). Atualmente, partidos demagogos e populistas adotam práticas exploratórias, apresentando promessas eleitorais pouco exequíveis, mas que são acreditadas pelos mais vulneráveis. Por isso, é comum que, nos países menos desenvolvidos, os partidos tradicionais ou do arco do poder se mantenham no governo por longos períodos, seja devido ao acesso a mais recursos — inclusive estatais —, que utilizam nas campanhas eleitorais, seja por terem meios para criar dependência do eleitorado ou manipular resultados eleitorais (Cheeseman, 2015; Greene, 2007; Levitsky e Way, 2010; Magaloni, 2006).

Quando os teóricos estruturalistas da democracia afirmam que este regime político é funcional nos países desenvolvidos e não nos países pobres, o argumento deve ser reinterpretado à luz do seguinte facto: a base económica não se refere necessariamente ao crescimento económico isolado, pois este pode não se traduzir na melhoria do nível de vida das pessoas. Pelo contrário, o desenvolvimento económico tem um impacto mais

direto na distribuição e redistribuição da riqueza nacional (Jensen, 2002), reduzindo as assimetrias sociais, consolidando a classe média e empoderando, de forma geral, a sociedade civil (Todaro, 1994; Tavares, 2010). Este argumento é empiricamente plausível: basta observar a Figura 1, que evidencia que as democracias mais avançadas no mundo (democracia plena) concentram-se nos países com melhores indicadores de desenvolvimento, como, por exemplo, os do norte da Europa, conhecidos como os países da Escandinávia.

Figura 1



The 2024 Economist Intelligence Unit *Democracy Index* map

Full democracies	**Flawed democracies**	**Hybrid regimes**	**Authoritarian regimes**
9.00–10.00	7.00–7.99	5.00–5.99	3.00–3.99
8.00–8.99	6.00–6.99	4.00–4.99	2.00–2.99
			1.00–1.99
			0.00–0.99

Para além das bases económicas sólidas, consideradas um dos recursos favoráveis à democracia liberal do modelo representativo — diferente da chamada democracia nacional revolucionária (Tavares, 2025; Koudawo, 2001) —, esta também pressupõe a existência de uma economia de mercado (Dahl, 2015; Fukuyama, 2001), por se tratar de um modelo económico mais compatível com o regime democrático, uma vez que consagra o direito à iniciativa privada, considerado por alguns autores como inato (Locke, 2007).

Por outro lado, este modelo, além de contribuir para o fortalecimento do tecido empresarial — essencial para o desenvolvimento —, cria também as bases da competição, promovendo o mérito empresarial e a ascensão social, atribuindo ao Estado o papel de regulador e/ou gestor de uma economia de mercado regulada (Keynes, 2017), em oposição ao monopólio estatal característico das economias de planificação central.

De facto, é uma constatação que os modelos económicos e poderes políticos concentrados afetaram, ou não criaram, condições favoráveis à democracia. Nos regimes políticos centralizados, o princípio da separação de poderes é ineficiente ou, por vezes, inexistente, não obstante a sua relevância num Estado de direito democrático (Locke, 2007; Montesquieu, 1979). Nestes contextos, o poder político tende a ser exercido de

forma autocrática, afetando os direitos, liberdades e garantias dos cidadãos (Tavares, 2025).

Quanto às economias centralizadas, estas, regra geral, não contribuíram para a efetivação da democracia plena por várias razões. Primeiro, não favoreceram a existência de um mercado liberal, devido à ausência das reformas necessárias, o que impediu a inserção das suas economias no mercado internacional no contexto da interdependência complexa (Keohane & Nye, 2001). Segundo, é fácil constatar que estes países enfrentaram dificuldades para se desenvolverem e democratizarem, como os casos de Cuba, Venezuela e Coreia do Norte, entre outros.

Por vezes, de forma enviesada, pode-se considerar que alguns países com regimes centralizados se desenvolveram economicamente, como China e Rússia. Contudo, trata-se de situações distintas: nestes casos, não é a economia que é centralizada, mas sim o regime político. Ainda assim, a China, por exemplo, apesar do seu robusto crescimento económico, não possui uma democracia plena por várias razões: **(i)** as desigualdades sociais são elevadas; **(ii)** os direitos, liberdades e garantias não são plenamente respeitados; e **(iii)** o trabalho infantil é um problema persistente.

Para consolidarmos a reinterpretação da Escola Estruturalista, torna-se importante apresentar a perspetiva contrária, defendida pela Escola de Contingência (Linz & Stepan, 1996). Esta Escola sustenta que a transição e consolidação da democracia dependem da vontade política das elites. De facto, a existência de vontade política pode permitir a liberalização do poder e, paralelamente, a criação gradual das condições materiais para o desenvolvimento económico. Reconhece-se que, em alguns casos, este modelo funcionou.

Sendo assim, a interpretação que propomos é que a Escola de Contingência, através destes argumentos, acaba por convergir com os princípios da Escola Estruturalista: a consolidação democrática depende sempre da existência ou criação de bases económicas adequadas.

Em resumo, não se pretende desvalorizar os argumentos da Escola de Contingência, que em alguns contextos pode ter funcionado, mas o nosso propósito é enfatizar a pertinência dos argumentos da teoria estruturalista, reinterpretando-os: a democracia só é possível quando existem condições materiais favoráveis, seja por já existirem, seja por serem criadas ao longo do processo.

Atualidade da Escola Estruturalista da Democracia em África

Analisando a teoria da democracia em África, ancorada nos argumentos da Escola Estruturalista, importa, em primeiro lugar, realçar as contribuições teóricas de Huntington (1991), segundo as quais a terceira vaga de democratização corresponde aos países que se democratizaram tardiamente, isto é, a partir de 25 de abril de 1974. Este argumento enquadra-se perfeitamente na realidade africana, uma vez que, nos poucos países do continente onde a democracia tem funcionado com alguma razoabilidade, este regime político foi institucionalizado após 1975.

Entre esses poucos países em que o regime democrático funciona, destacam-se os casos de Botsuana, Cabo Verde, Senegal, Maurícias e Seicheles. De acordo com os dados

existentes (ver Fig. 1), é percetível que a maioria dos países africanos apresenta um elevado défice democrático. Vários fatores podem explicar este défice, não de forma isolada, mas sim articulada (Tavares, 2009).

A primeira situação prende-se com a forma como ocorreu a rutura do regime colonial para o pós-colonial. Em alguns casos, esta transição deu-se de forma pacífica e através de um processo negocial, como aconteceu com a descolonização britânica — sendo, aliás, nesse sentido que Botsuana é considerada um dos casos de sucesso. Em contrapartida, houve situações em que a transição resultou de uma rutura violenta, inclusive através de lutas armadas, com destaque para a descolonização portuguesa (Chabal, 2002; Tavares, 2025) e, em alguns casos, da descolonização francesa. Estas experiências de independências constituíram entraves ao processo de liberalização política no período pós-colonial (Tavares, 2025).

Logo após as independências, generalizou-se a retórica política e a prática da institucionalização do denominado socialismo africano (Tavares, 2025; Monteiro, 2001; Senghor, 1964), apresentado como um regime genuinamente africano, supostamente adaptado às realidades sociopolíticas e socioantropológicas do continente. Contudo, este modelo acabou por esbarrar em modelos autoritários, práticas de corrupção, conflitos e dinâmicas de luta pelo poder (Graça, 2005; Tavares, 2009; Tavares, 2025).

A situação supramencionada contrasta de forma significativa com a Escola da Contingência, teorizada por Linz e Stepan (1996), uma vez que se observou, desde cedo, a falta de vontade política por parte das elites dirigentes em criar condições ou ceder em favor da liberalização política. Assim, o processo político africano, de modo geral, tem sido marcado pelo apego ao poder, sendo frequente encontrar líderes políticos a exercerem autoridade política por períodos prolongados. A isto somam-se dinâmicas inconstitucionais, materializadas em frequentes golpes de Estado e na instauração de regimes militares, o que constitui um dos principais entraves à democracia, considerando que um dos requisitos fundamentais para a consolidação de um regime representativo e pluripartidário é a existência de governos civis e não militares (Dahl, 2015).

Os Quadros 1, 2 e 3 apresentam dados empíricos que ilustram a recorrência de golpes de Estado no continente africano, fenómeno que teve início logo após as vagas de descolonização no período pós-Segunda Guerra Mundial. Apenas na costa ocidental africana, num curto período entre 2020 e 2023, registaram-se seis ruturas da ordem constitucional, colocando em causa a própria segurança (sub)regional da África Ocidental. Estes acontecimentos constituem desafios e constrangimentos significativos e levam-nos a projetar cenários, por vezes, pouco otimistas quanto ao desenvolvimento e à consolidação democrática nestes países (Tavares, 2025).

Quadro nº 1. Golpes de Estados e Militarização do Poder Político em África (das independências até 1990)

Países	**Anos em que Aconteceram os Golpes de Estados**
Gana	Fevereiro de 1966
Líbia	Setembro 1969
Uganda	Janeiro 1971
Nigéria	Julho 1975
Seychelles	Junho de 1975

República Centro Africana	Setembro de 1978
Guiné-Bissau	Novembro de 1980
Burkina Faso	1983
Mauritânia	Dezembro de 1984
Sudão	Abril de 1985
Burundi	Setembro de 1987
Total	10

Fonte: Elaboração do autor

Quadro nº 2. Golpes de Estados e Militarização do Poder Político em África (1990 a 2000)

Países	**Anos em que Aconteceram os Golpes de Estados**
Gâmbia	Julho de 1994
São Tomé e Príncipe	Agosto 1995
Comores	Setembro de 1995
Serra Leoa	Janeiro de 1996
Nigéria	Janeiro de 1996
Burundi	Janeiro de 1996
Zaire	Maio de 1997
Serra Leoa	Maio de 1997
Congo-Brazzaville	Outubro de 1997
Níger	Abril de 1999
Comores	Abril de 1999
Guiné-Bissau	Maio de 1999
Costa de Marfim	Dezembro de 1999
Total	13

Fonte: Elaboração do autor

Quadro Nº 3. Golpes de Estados e Militarização do Poder Político em África (2000 a atualidade)

Países	**Anos em que Aconteceram os Golpes de Estados**
República Centro-Africana	Março 2003
São Tomé e Príncipe	Julho de 2003
Guiné-Bissau	Setembro de 2003
Togo	Fevereiro de 2005
Mauritânia	Agosto de 2005
Mauritânia	Agosto de 2008
Guiné	Dezembro de 2008
Madagáscar	Janeiro de 2009
Mali	Março de 2012
Guiné-Bissau	Abril de 2012
Mali	Agosto de 2020
Mali	Maio de 2021
Guiné	Setembro de 2021
Burkina Faso	Janeiro de 2022
Burkina Faso	Setembro de 2022
Níger	Julho de 2023
Gabão	Agosto de 2023

Fonte: Elaboração do autor

Apesar de ser um continente que, em termos geopolíticos, apresenta abundância de recursos naturais, por vezes aparentemente inesgotáveis, bem como um grande mercado

e mão de obra jovem, estas vantagens comparativas, parafraseando os teóricos da estratégia empresarial (Porter, 1990; Ricardo, 2023), não têm sido suficientemente transformadas em vantagens competitivas ou em valor acrescentado. No fundo, o continente dispõe de praticamente todos os recursos, mas carece de alguns ingredientes fundamentais, tais como as integrações nacionais dos Estados e a estabilidade política e governativa (Tavares, 2019; Tavares, 2025).

A ausência de estabilidade política e governativa tem contribuído para a disfuncionalidade dos mercados e, consequentemente, para a não criação das bases necessárias ao funcionamento da democracia liberal. A pobreza continua a ser predominante, as desigualdades sociais e a luta pela sobrevivência enfraquecem a sociedade civil, dificultando a formação de uma cultura cívica e de capital social, como nos ensinam Putnam (1993), ou de um município liberalmente organizado, parafraseando Alexandre Herculano (Branco, 2007). Estes indicadores tornam a perspetiva da Escola Estruturalista — e, consequentemente, as contribuições dos seus autores, como Dahl (2015), Lipset (2023) e Moore (1993) — bastantes atuais na análise da sociedade civil, da participação política e da qualidade da democracia em África. Portanto, esta abordagem teórica pode ainda ser complementada por um estado da arte que vem emergindo no continente sobre a problemática com destaque para autores que atuam nos campos da Sociologia Política e/ou Ciência Política e História Política, especialmente dedicados aos regimes políticos (Gyimah- Boadie, 2004; Bratton e Wale, 1997; Joseph, 1999; Chabal, 2002).

A Particularidade de Cabo Verde

Já em 2007, apesar de os especialistas em Ciência Política convergirem maioritariamente com os argumentos de que a democracia é funcional sobretudo em países desenvolvidos e com uma base económica consolidada, reconhecia-se, à época, que Cabo Verde constituía um caso particular, conforme argumenta Fernandes (2007). De facto, analisando a evolução do processo político deste país, tem-se destacado positivamente, apresentando especificidades que o constituem como um caso de estudo relevante a ser explorado.

Até ao momento, observa-se que as transições políticas têm sido bem-sucedidas, desde o regime colonial para o pós-colonial, através de um processo negociado, uma vez que em Cabo Verde não houve luta armada (Tavares, 2025), seja do modelo monopartidário de matriz nacional-revolucionária (Kowdawo, 2001) para o pluripartidarismo de modelo liberal representativo, seja ainda as alternâncias de poder que se têm verificado entre os dois partidos políticos do arco governativo, o PAICV e o MPD (Tavares, 2019; Tavares, 2025).

Analisando dados internacionais consistentes, como os do *Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index* (2024), Cabo Verde não é classificado como uma democracia plena quando comparado, por exemplo, com os países desenvolvidos da Escandinávia, apresentando antes uma democracia falha. Ainda assim, encontra-se na mesma categoria de países como Portugal e os Estados Unidos da América, ocupando posições cimeiras no continente africano. Tal como os dados apresentados na Tabela 4 demonstram, 71,4% dos cabo-verdianos consideram a democracia o melhor regime político.

Vários fatores explicam este avanço dos valores democráticos em Cabo Verde, os quais, por vezes, convergem tanto com a Escola da Contingência (Linz e Stepan, 1996) como com a Escola Estruturalista (Dahl, 2015; Moore, 1993; Lipset, 2023). Em primeiro lugar, destaca-se o facto de a nação ter existido antes do Estado (Semedo, 2006; Madeira, 2018), aliado à ausência de problemas étnicos e tribais. Sobre este aspeto, teóricos como Dahl (2015) defendem que, quanto mais homogéneo for um país, mais facilitado será o processo de democratização.

Tabela 4. Preferência dos Cabo-verdianos no que Tange aos Valores políticos

	Urban	Rural	Men	Women	Total
Statement 1: Democracy is preferable to any other kind of government.	70,2	74,9	69.2	73.3	71.4
Statement 2: In some circumstances, a nondemocratic government can be preferable.	12,9	10,7	13.2	11.5	12.3
Statement 3: For someone like me, it doesn't matter what kind of government we have.	11,1	6,6	11.1	8.9	9.9
Refused	.1	1.0	.6	.1	.3
don't know	5,8	6,8	5.9	6.2	6.1

Fonte: Afrobarometro (2025)

Também em Cabo Verde, desde cedo, se criou uma pequena elite burocrática, em resultado de uma política colonial portuguesa que considerava os cabo-verdianos como assimilados. Por essa razão, tinham mais oportunidades de acesso à educação quando comparados com os povos das restantes colónias, como a Guiné-Bissau, Angola, Moçambique e São Tomé e Príncipe, que eram considerados indígenas. Estas elites burocráticas eram agentes ao serviço do Estado colonial, que trabalhavam e/ou auxiliavam nas administrações. Por outro lado, emergiram alguns intelectuais que reforçaram este aparelho burocrático.

Esta elite burocrática foi bastante útil, pois constituiu os alicerces da materialização e viabilização do Estado pós-colonial. Embora não se possa considerar que fosse suficiente — até porque o governo logo após a independência começou a investir fortemente na formação e qualificação de quadros para suprir as limitações existentes —, o mínimo de recursos humanos de que o país dispunha foi fundamental para a construção das bases do Estado. Assim, o país possuía o mínimo necessário para constituir uma elite

governamental, bem como os auxiliares da administração pública, e iniciar a governação com um regime de governo civil, que é um dos requisitos básicos para a democracia (Dahl, 2015).

Com a institucionalização do Estado em 1975, foi estabelecido um regime monopartidário de matriz ideológica soviética, ou o "Leviatã crioulo", parafraseando Silva (2001), uma vez que os dirigentes políticos da época entendiam que este seria o mais adequado aos desafios então existentes. Apesar de Cabo Verde, em 1975, já possuir uma nação consolidada do ponto de vista identitário, era ainda cedo para avançar com o multipartidarismo, não só porque se vivia o rescaldo dos grandes regimes autoritários na Europa e a vigência desses modelos no continente africano (Tavares, 2025), mas também porque as prioridades nacionais eram outras, nomeadamente a viabilização do Estado e a materialização do desenvolvimento.

Apesar das críticas que defendiam a adoção do pluripartidarismo nos primórdios da independência, tal opção não se afigurava lógica, sendo antes uma política interna de luxo, sobretudo quando relatórios internacionais apontavam para a inviabilidade do arquipélago enquanto Estado. O desafio principal era, portanto, contrariar essa narrativa e evitar o desperdício de recursos. Talvez se possa criticar a duração da vigência do partido único, que poderia ter sido mais curta, estabelecendo-se um regime transitório e criando-se, mais cedo, as condições políticas e materiais para a realização de eleições pluripartidárias. Contudo, também ficou evidente que não era intenção dos dirigentes liberalizar o poder tão cedo.

Nesse contexto, começaram a surgir episódios de alguma violência política, que mais tarde culminariam na transição política. Apesar da proibição da existência de partidos políticos concorrenciais, surgiu na clandestinidade a UCID e, no seio do partido único (PAIGC/CV), começaram a verificar-se ruturas de pensamento e ideológicas. Importa realçar que uma das dissidências foi o trotskismo, protagonizado por jovens que discordavam modelo monopartidário e que acabaram por ser expulsos, sendo designados como trotskistas (Lopes, 2012; Lopes, 2013). Foi neste contexto que alguns destes dissidentes criaram, em 1982, a Liga Internacional dos Direitos Humanos, com o objetivo de denunciar as atuações do regime (Fonseca, 2025).

Em meados dos anos oitenta, com o advento da *perestroika*, o partido começou a enfrentar dificuldades com o regime económico de planificação central. Se, nos primeiros anos da independência, este modelo económico funcionou e produziu resultados, a partir de meados da década de oitenta começou a revelar sinais de ineficácia (Veiga, 1991; Veiga, 2025). Assim, à semelhança do que ocorreu na União Soviética, onde o presidente Gorbatchov iniciou um conjunto de reformas económicas para garantir a sobrevivência do regime e a sua adaptação aos novos tempos, em Cabo Verde começaram a ser dados os primeiros passos nesse sentido. Foi nesse contexto que, em 1988, o governo do PAICV realizou a primeira reforma económica que permitiu o investimento privado estrangeiro (Fonseca, 2025; Almada, 2011).

Com este enquadramento, sustenta-se que, não obstante a narrativa do PAICV de que teria existido uma vontade política que culminou na negociação e transição para a democracia, uma análise mais meticulosa aponta em sentido contrário, evidenciando reconfiguração política foi, sobretudo, resultado de pressões internas e internacionais

(Tavares, 2010). Convém recordar que este período coincidiu com a queda do Muro de Berlim, o desmoronamento da União Soviética e o triunfo dos valores liberais ocidentais, parafraseando Fukuyama (1989). Cabo Verde era, então, um dos países que mais recebia ajuda pública ao desenvolvimento, tendo sofrido pressões do Ocidente no sentido da liberalização dos regimes internos (Veiga, 2025). Assim, a institucionalização da democracia liberal não foi uma opção voluntária dos dirigentes, mas uma questão de sobrevivência do próprio regime e do país.

Para além das pressões internacionais, verificaram-se igualmente condicionantes internas, provenientes de dissidentes, da sociedade civil e da Igreja Católica (Évora, 2004), a que se somou um marco importante: a visita do Papa João Paulo II a Cabo Verde, entre os dias 25 e 27 de janeiro de 1990. Neste contexto, iniciou-se um debate interno no partido único sobre a possibilidade de abertura política. Embora tenha havido resistência por parte de algumas personalidades, não se registou uma oposição significativa do partido enquanto instituição. Assim, em 18 de fevereiro de 1990, o partido anunciou publicamente a abertura política e a revisão do artigo quarto da Constituição de 1981, visando a institucionalização da democracia.

Num primeiro momento, parecia pretender-se uma abertura limitada, permitindo a participação de grupos de cidadãos nas eleições. No entanto, a oposição foi firme no sentido de exigir uma abertura plena, de modo a evitar que o partido histórico se mantivesse dominante. O PAICV defendia ainda que as eleições presidenciais ocorressem antes das legislativas, numa tentativa de manter o poder político, mas não conseguiu impor esse cenário. Assim, realizaram-se as primeiras eleições multipartidárias em 1991, nas quais o partido recém-criado, o MPD, venceu com maioria qualificada, ficando institucionalizada, de forma bem-sucedida, a transição para a democracia.

Do ponto de vista das teorias da democracia, recorrendo à perspetiva da Escola da Contingência — segundo a qual a transição e consolidação democráticas dependem da vontade dos atores políticos em negociar —, pode afirmar-se que, num primeiro momento, os dirigentes do PAICV não demonstraram não demonstraram interesse nessa possibilidade, tendo sido forçados a avançar. Contudo, a resistência não foi tão intensa como noutros contextos e não contrariou a tendência histórica. No período pós-eleitoral, após a derrota nas urnas, o partido aceitou os resultados com normalidade, evidenciando maturidade política e uma cultura democrática emergente.

Sob a perspetiva da Escola Estruturalista, esta aplica-se, em certa medida, ao caso cabo-verdiano, pois, embora até 1991 o modelo económico fosse predominantemente estatal e planificado, o país não se encontrava ainda num estágio de desenvolvimento médio ou médio-alto como atualmente. Ainda assim, o partido único criou bases materiais que contribuíram para a viabilização do Estado, bem como para estabelecer condições razoáveis de desenvolvimento, permitindo a transição para uma nova fase no contexto da democracia liberal.

Com o triunfo dos valores liberais ocidentais e a transição democrática, o novo governo, liderado pelo Movimento para a Democracia, implementou um conjunto de reformas liberais de natureza económica, com impactos significativos na política interna e na inserção internacional do país. O principal ator político dessas medidas foi o então ministro da Coordenação Económica e vice-primeiro-ministro, Gualberto de Rosário

(Veiga, 2025). Essas alterações permitiram uma maior convergência normativa com o Ocidente: o país aderiu à Organização Mundial do Comércio, assinou a Parceria Especial com a União Europeia, institucionalizou o municipalismo democrático com eleições municipais regulares e competências para a cooperação descentralizada, conferiu à diáspora o direito de participação nas eleições legislativas e presidenciais e reforçou o investimento privado interno e externo.

Em síntese, não obstante as particularidades favoráveis à democracia em Cabo Verde — como a identidade e homogeneidade cultural e uma independência negociada —, o sucesso da democracia cabo-verdiana resulta de um processo politicamente construído, no qual se foram criando, progressivamente, as bases materiais para a sua consolidação. Se, na Primeira República, o partido único criou as bases materiais e viabilizou o Estado, na Segunda República, os sucessivos governos implementaram reformas liberais estruturantes. Consequentemente, o arquipélago tem vindo a convergir, de forma gradual, com os princípios liberais ocidentais, tanto no plano económico como no político-constitucional. Se essas bases não tivessem sido construídas, o país não se encontraria na categoria de democracia falha, ao lado de Portugal e dos Estados Unidos, nem ocuparia posições cimeiras em África, o que reforça o argumento da Escola Estruturalista de que as bases económicas são determinantes para o sucesso da democracia.

Cabo Verde tornou-se um caso de estudo, que tem sido bastante explorado pelos académicos e tem ainda muita matéria para ser analisada. Sendo assim, para além dos autores que já foram citados, outros devem ser levados em consideração como Silveira (2005) e Costa (2011), Santos (2013), Sanches (2013), Pina (2013).

Cabo Verde, a Sua Afiguração como Democracia Falha e os Desafios para Ascensão a uma Democracia Plena: Aspetos Críticos

Cabo Verde possui uma democracia que, em termos comparativos, se situa acima da média africana, seja a nível regional, como no âmbito da sub-região. Contudo, ainda não se configura como um regime democrático plenamente consolidado, à semelhança das democracias da Europa Ocidental e do Norte da Europa, uma vez que o país não é plenamente desenvolvido do ponto de vista económico. Apesar do desenvolvimento notável que se tem verificado desde a independência até ao presente, inclusive o facto de ser classificado como país de rendimento médio-alto, essa graduação ainda não elimina as vulnerabilidades estruturais próprias de um país com escassos recursos naturais, clima semiárido, insularidade e um mercado pequeno e fragmentado.

Essas vulnerabilidades não são necessariamente determinantes, na medida em que podem ser superadas. Por exemplo, Singapura é um país de pequena dimensão, com uma área semelhante à da ilha da Boa Vista (Cabo Verde), que, no início, importava água para consumo do país vizinho, a Malásia, mas que hoje se afirma como uma potência asiática. Cabo Verde apresenta igualmente outras potencialidades que podem mitigar as vulnerabilidades estruturais, como a possível rentabilização do seu posicionamento geopolítico, transformando-o numa plataforma internacional de prestação de serviços e de interligação entre continentes, bem como a especialização do seu mercado no setor do turismo (Estevão, 2014).

Contudo, persistem situações que afetam a qualidade da democracia, nomeadamente as elevadas desigualdades sociais. Por exemplo, desde a legislatura (2016–2021) passando pela atual (2021-2026), foi estabelecido um teto salarial máximo no setor público de trezentos contos e, somadas as regalias de que usufruem os titulares de cargos políticos e gestores públicos, contrastando com uma renumeração mínima de dezassete mil escudos, a análise do leque salarial evidencia discrepâncias significativas nos rendimentos.

Tabela 5. Análise de Políticas Salariais em Cabo Verde

Tabela Salarial	Gestores Públicos	Setor Privado	Setor Público	Projecção do Governo para o salário mínimo em 2027
Salário Máximo (mensal)	300.000$00 e Regalias			
Salário Minimo (mensal)		17000$	19000$	25000$
Leque Salarial				283000$

Fonte: Elaboração própria com base em dados do governo de Cabo Verde (2025)

Isto significa que, em Cabo Verde, ainda existem pessoas que vivem em condições precárias em termos de remuneração salarial, desprovidas de mecanismos de proteção social, uma vez que a informalidade é bastante elevada no arquipélago. Há igualmente indivíduos que vivem em condições habitacionais precárias. São estes segmentos da população que, em contextos eleitorais, acabam por ser manipulados ou passivamente corrompidos em resultado das suas condições de vulnerabilidade.

Também a classe média tem enfrentado alguns problemas. De facto, como defende a Escola Estruturalista da Democracia, este segmento social é fundamental para garantir o equilíbrio socioeconómico e aumentar a qualidade da democracia (Dahl, 2025; Lipset, 2023). Contudo, em Cabo Verde, este grupo social, tem sido cada vez mais afetada pelos impactos das crises e choques financeiros externos, e o poder de compra tem diminuído devido à crise inflacionária importada. Nesse sentido, este estrato da população tem-se tornado progressivamente mais endividada, razão pela qual se tem verificado a emigração de pessoas que se enquadram nesta categoria social.

Outro fator que pode ser considerado um entrave à ascensão de Cabo Verde à categoria de democracia plena prende-se com o bipartidarismo rígido, no qual os dois principais partidos históricos (PAICV e MPD) dominam o sistema. São considerados históricos por terem surgido em contextos de rutura: o PAICV no contexto da independência nacional e o MPD no advento da democracia liberal. Por essa razão, tendem, por si só, a apresentar maior expressão eleitoral. Por um lado, têm contribuído para a estabilidade política e governativa, uma vez que têm permitido a formação de maiorias absolutas de um ou de outro lado. Por outro, não têm dado espaço suficiente aos partidos emergentes, o que tem permitido alguma "arrogância" ou "prepotência" governativa quando um ou outro se encontra no poder (Lijphart, 1984; Hermens, 1941; Lanchester, 1998).

Acresce ainda que estes dois partidos dispõem de melhores financiamentos, inclusive para as campanhas eleitorais. Num contexto de alguma pobreza e precariedade social, conseguem penetrar na geografia e na sociologia eleitoral, devidamente analisadas e mapeadas, retirando daí dividendos eleitorais. Neste quadro, as forças partidárias menores dispõem de reduzida capacidade de influência. Além disso, o código eleitoral não é favorável às pequenas formações partidárias, o que tem dificultado a capacidade destas de constituir grupos parlamentares na Assembleia Nacional.

Outro aspeto relevante é o facto de os sistemas eleitorais de listas fechadas não contribuírem significativamente para a consolidação da democracia, uma vez que os eleitores votam no partido e não necessariamente nas pessoas que são eleitas. Um sistema de listas abertas poderia conferir um maior grau de representatividade.

É também evidente que a sociedade civil ainda é fraca. Apesar de se ter verificado uma evolução considerável da massa crítica e do papel das redes sociais, as organizações da sociedade civil cabo-verdiana continuam a ser pouco reivindicativas. Por um lado, subsiste uma percentagem significativa da população em situação de pobreza, o que leva estas pessoas a centrarem-se prioritariamente na sobrevivência. Por outro, existe receio de reivindicação, pelo facto de o país ser pequeno, com grande proximidade social, onde "praticamente todos se conhecem", e fortemente polarizado entre os dois principais partidos que se alternam no poder. Nesse contexto, as pessoas receiam represálias.

As dinâmicas de insegurança e o crime organizado têm, há muito tempo, constituído uma ameaça ao Estado de direito em Cabo Verde (Tavares, 2016). A localização geográfica do país e as vulnerabilidades decorrentes da escassez de meios no combate ao crime têm estado na origem de diversos problemas, como assaltos violentos, crimes contra a propriedade, homicídios e outros crimes conexos.

A par dos problemas de insegurança, outro fator que tem afetado o Estado de direito em Cabo Verde é a morosidade da justiça. Esta lentidão tem gerado desconfiança das populações em relação às autoridades judiciais, alimentado o sentimento de impunidade dos infratores e incentivado a tendência para a aplicação da justiça privada.

Conclusão

Conclui-se que a escola estruturalista da democracia e as suas abordagens continuam a ser atuais. Para tal, basta interpretar adequadamente os dados mais recentes do *Economist Intelligence Unit Democracy Index* de 2024 para constatar que as democracias mais consolidadas do mundo se encontram nos países economicamente mais desenvolvidos. Por exemplo, os regimes democráticos plenamente consolidados encontram-se maioritariamente concentrados nos países da Europa Ocidental e do Norte da Europa, como a Noruega, a Finlândia e a Suécia, entre outros. Pode-se notar que, nesses países, para além de um bom desempenho económico, são considerados dos mais justos do mundo no que diz respeito à distribuição e redistribuição dos rendimentos, o que significa maior equilíbrio social, menores desigualdades sociais e uma classe média bem consolidada.

Mesmo nos países que se encontram na segunda categoria (democracias falhas), pode-se constatar que alguns apresentam um bom nível de desenvolvimento económico, como

os Estados Unidos da América, a França e a África do Sul, mas que, por razões específicas, não se enquadram na categoria de democracias plenas. No caso dos Estados Unidos, por exemplo, o país perdeu pontuação e desceu para a categoria de democracia falha devido à eleição de Donald Trump e aos discursos políticos e sociais que têm sido produzidos, entrando em conflito com direitos, liberdades e a dignidade da proteção humana.

No que se refere ao continente africano, que constitui o principal objeto da problemática deste artigo, apenas as Ilhas Maurícias são consideradas uma democracia plena, sendo muito poucos os países que se enquadram na categoria de democracias falhas, com destaque para Botsuana, Cabo Verde, África do Sul, Gana e Lesoto. Pode-se notar que estes Estados têm sido os mais bem avaliados no continente no que diz respeito aos progressos económicos e, consequentemente, aos valores da democracia. Destaca-se o caso de Cabo Verde, que se afigura como a terceira democracia mais avançada em África, sendo ultrapassada apenas por Maurícias e Botsuana. As restantes realidades nacionais caracterizam-se, na sua maioria, por regimes híbridos ou autoritários.

Apesar de estes dados serem anuais e apresentarem alguma volatilidade em África, não se têm verificado alterações substanciais. Por exemplo, nos últimos anos e/ou na última década, as Ilhas Maurícias, Botsuana, Cabo Verde e a África do Sul têm obtido avaliações superiores quando comparadas com os restantes países do continente. O desenvolvimento económico, a funcionalidade do Estado de direito, processos eleitorais transparentes e pacíficos, bem como progressos noutros domínios, têm sido as principais razões para esse desempenho. Nos restantes países, as dinâmicas têm sido diferentes, marcadas por práticas inconstitucionais (golpes de Estado), processos eleitorais conturbados, oligarquias institucionalizadas, lideranças autocráticas e contínuas, a que se somam problemas de desigualdade e pobreza.

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HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION AND RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE MERCOSUR REGION

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Abstract

Human rights promotion in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) has long been championed by the Organization of American States system. However, while the democratization wave starting from the 1980s has contributed to the redefinition of human rights at regional and national levels based on the broad notion of social justice, the increasing pace of regionalism has rendered it possible for the region's countries to discuss and develop multilateral human rights policies. The emergence of new priorities in the realm of human rights in the LAC mainly focused on regional issues such as eliminating the income gap, the rights of indigenous populations, and increasing political representation. Nevertheless, international and interstate conflicts of the post-Cold War period, the global discussion on humanitarian intervention, and the developing norm of responsibility to protect demanded that LAC countries define their approaches on these topics. The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) countries have shared their stances with the international community alongside many other LAC countries. This paper explores similarities and contradictions in the approaches of MERCOSUR countries toward the idea of humanitarian intervention in international relations to discuss the possibility of the emergence of a regional approach. The paper concludes that the changing nature of international conflicts, which have evolved into interstate wars with increasing involvement of great powers, the US military interventionism now targeting South America directly, and differing foreign policy goals towards regionalism and cooperation with the Global South hamper the reach of a MERCOSUR-wide consensus on humanitarian intervention for these countries.

Keywords

Brazil, Argentina, Uruguay, Humanitarian Intervention, Responsibility to Protect, MERCOSUR.

Resumo

A promoção dos direitos humanos na América Latina e no Caribe (ALC) tem sido há muito defendida pelo sistema da Organização dos Estados Americanos. No entanto, embora a vaga de democratização iniciada nos anos 80 tenha contribuído para a redefinição dos direitos humanos a nível regional e nacional com base na ampla noção de justiça social, o ritmo crescente do regionalismo tornou possível que os países da região discutissem e desenvolvessem políticas multilaterais de direitos humanos. O surgimento de novas prioridades no domínio dos direitos humanos na ALC centrou-se principalmente em questões regionais, como a eliminação da desigualdade de rendimentos, os direitos das populações

indígenas e o aumento da representação política. No entanto, os conflitos internacionais e interestaduais do período pós-Guerra Fria, a discussão global sobre intervenção humanitária e o desenvolvimento da norma de responsabilidade pela proteção exigiram que os países da ALC definissem as suas abordagens sobre estes temas. Os países do Mercado Comum do Sul (MERCOSUL) partilharam as suas posições com a comunidade internacional, juntamente com muitos outros países da ALC. Este artigo explora semelhanças e contradições nas abordagens dos países do MERCOSUL em relação à ideia de intervenção humanitária nas relações internacionais, para discutir a possibilidade do surgimento de uma abordagem regional. O artigo conclui que a natureza mutável dos conflitos internacionais, que evoluíram para guerras interestaduais com o envolvimento crescente das grandes potências, o intervencionismo militar dos EUA agora direcionado diretamente à América do Sul, e os objetivos de política externa divergentes em relação ao regionalismo e cooperação com o Sul Global dificultam o alcance de um consenso a nível do MERCOSUL sobre intervenção humanitária para estes países.

Palavras-chave

Brasil, Argentina, Uruguai, Intervenção Humanitária, Responsabilidade de Proteger, MERCOSUL.

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HUMANITARIAN INTERVENTION AND RESPONSIBILITY TO PROTECT: PERSPECTIVES FROM THE MERCOSUR REGION

SEGÂH TEKİN

ZEHRA KORKMAZ KÖKDERE

Introduction

Most Southern countries are grappling with social problems caused by failed states, internal conflicts, and deepening income inequalities. The power vacuum in the post-Cold War international order has exacerbated these issues, leading to political and economic problems. The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) region, while an exception in many ways, is not immune to these challenges. The prevalence of food insecurity, urban violence, political instability, and economic issues has forced South American countries to critically reassess the basic norms of the international system and their regional relations and responsibilities. South American countries, Argentina, Brazil, Uruguay, and Paraguay established MERCOSUR in 1991. MERCOSUR evolved from an initial bilateral cooperation between Argentina and Brazil to deepen their relations. Following the Argentina-Brazil approximation in various areas, including nuclear capacity building and security as well as the extension of existing economic relations, MERCOSUR was initially established as an organization targeting the foundation of a common market, also with an ambitious political agenda. Historically, the line that divides the Americas was not drawn between the two sub-continents but between the North America and Latin America which refers to the political, social and economic differences. The first decade of the 21st century witnessed the transformation of this division and the emergence of South America as a region inheriting the idea of integration from Latin America. The establishment of MERCOSUR and its evolvement into a long-lasting and a functional organization has certainly contributed to the emergence of a South American identity and served as a framework for the further expansion and intensification of relations between South American countries. Nevertheless, due to differences in political and economic agendas as well as geographical distances in the vast South American geography, the South American integration project has failed but as a sub-regional integration scheme MERCOSUR sustains.

This study explores the foreign policy approaches of three MERCOSUR member countries, namely Argentina, Brazil, and Uruguay regarding humanitarian intervention and responsibility to protect (R2P) to analyse the similarities and contradictions in the approaches of MERCOSUR countries toward the idea of humanitarian intervention in international relations to discuss the possibility of the emergence of a regional approach.

The other founding member of MERCOSUR, Paraguay, is not included in this research due to its latecomer situation regarding participation in United Nations (UN) peacekeeping, as it started contributing with troops only in 2001 (International Peace Institute, 2016, p. 1). These three countries with their significant contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations for decades, have been instrumental in promoting democracy and human rights at national, regional, and global levels since their transition to democracy starting from 1980s.

Based on official documents, statements, and decision-makers' discourses, as well as the academic literature, this paper explores the national views of these three countries on humanitarian intervention and R2P. The paper is organized in two sections. It firstly explains these concepts' theoretical and historical evolution in contemporary global discussions. Secondly, the paper examines the MERCOSUR region not as an economic bloc but as a smaller circle within the so-called security community of South America, based on the shared understandings of commitment to the UN system, international law, the promotion of human rights and democratic consolidation in the MERCOSUR region. This section focuses on the member countries' stances towards military interventionism and human rights protection by analysing their foreign policies, involvement in UN military operations, and views on humanitarian intervention and R2P. In the final considerations, the paper discusses the similarities, contradictions, and possibility of an emerging regional consensus in the MERCOSUR region.

From Non-Interventionism to Responsibility to Protect: Humanitarian Intervention in Contemporary World Politics

Humanitarian intervention is the intervention of the international community, especially a foreign country or an international organization, in response to human rights violations or mass violence within a country without the authorization of the target country. The main objective of humanitarian intervention is to protect civilians, prevent death and suffering, and protect fundamental rights. Humanitarian intervention refers to the military, diplomatic, or other forms of intervention by one state against another state or within a state aimed at protecting or assisting populations facing grave human rights violations, such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, and mass atrocities. In other words, these interventions are typically a response to large-scale violations of human rights and have become a significant issue in both international relations and international law.

This concept has been broadly discussed in the discipline of International Relations based on the sovereignty of the state and international law. While those defending state sovereignty claim that humanitarian intervention is a violation of this fundamental principle, human rights advocates have stated that intervention is crucial in terms of protecting fundamental human rights. Humanitarian intervention often challenges the principle of state sovereignty, as it involves interference in a state's internal affairs without the consent of its government (Pattison, 2010, p. 46). This has sparked extensive debate regarding the balance between respecting state sovereignty and the international community's responsibility to prevent severe human suffering. Especially with the end of the Cold War in the 1990s, after the tragedies in Rwanda and the Balkans, the international community began to seriously consider how to respond effectively when

human rights are severely and systematically violated. Debates over whether the international community has the authority to intervene in a country for humanitarian reasons and whether such interventions are truly a solution to humanitarian crises have become central topics in international politics (Bellamy, 2011).

Also, another factor that places humanitarian intervention in a significant position is its legitimacy. Humanitarian intervention has become a key issue in international politics because it involves different parties, with one intervening in the sovereignty of another. In other words, humanitarian intervention is defined as "the threat or use of force across state borders by a state (or group of states) aimed at preventing or ending widespread and serious violations of the fundamental human rights of individuals who are not its own citizens" (Holzgrefe, 2003, p. 19). Given its primary objective, humanitarian intervention is carried out without the approval or consent of the targeted state. Therefore, its legitimacy has always been debated. Within this framework, the principle of proportionality becomes essential to its legitimacy. Proportionality ensures that the use of force is appropriate and not excessive in relation to the scale of the human rights violations being addressed. Thus, while humanitarian intervention seeks to protect fundamental human rights, its legitimacy is contingent upon balancing the severity of the situation with the response, ensuring that the intervention does not exceed what is necessary to achieve its objectives (Téson and Vossen, 2017, pp. 98-101) Military force for humanitarian reasons may be required when other methods fail to stop severe abuses. Some argue that all other strategies should be tried first, but when these fail, military intervention becomes a serious option. The effectiveness and necessity of intervention are subjective, often determined by those directly impacted and ultimately, the urgency of humanitarian intervention is relevant not only to the victims but to everyone, especially for those who consider themselves part of a moral and civilized global community (Janzekovic, 2006, p. 2)

While the issue of humanitarian intervention has become an increasingly debated topic in international relations, the legal basis and limits of these interventions also constitute an important area of discussion. Although international law has refrained from clearly defining humanitarian intervention, discussions on the validity and legal basis of interventions question the balance between the sovereign rights of states and human rights violations. In this context, to understand the legal dimension of humanitarian interventions, it is important to look at the regulations in the UN Charter and especially the role of the UN Security Council (UNSC). In this line, the Article 2(4) of the UN Charter obliges states to respect each other's territorial integrity and political independence (United Nations, 1945). By referring to this article, most UN resolutions from 1945 until the end of the Cold War opposed interventions in state affairs, even in cases of human rights violations. This approach reflects the UN's view of sovereignty, largely shaped by a Westphalian perspective. Although the UN Charter establishes the legal framework for interventions, the UNSC makes the final decision on whether an intervention will take place or not, particularly by using military force (Walling, 2013, p. 5; Holzgrefe, 2003, p. 37). To authorize force, the five permanent UNSC members and at least four of the nine rotating members must approve the resolution, which then becomes binding for all UN members (United Nations 1945, Chapter V). Thus, the UNSC is the only UN body with the authority to decide on humanitarian interventions. However, during the Cold War, the Security Council often rejected interventions, even when civilians were attacked, due

to its commitment to the sovereignty principle in Article 2 of the Charter (Walling 2015, p. 384). However, the UN Security Council may authorize military intervention under Chapter VII of the UN Charter in situations where severe human rights violations pose a threat to international peace and security (Binder, 2017, p. 7-9). In other words, another aspect related to sovereignty is addressed in Article 2 (7) of the UN Charter, which states that "nothing in the present Charter shall authorize the United Nations to intervene in matters that are essentially within the domestic jurisdiction of any state or require members to submit such matters to settlement under the Charter; however, this principle shall not prejudice the application of enforcement measures under Chapter VII" (United Nations 1945, Chapter I). While this article restricts the Security Council from intervening in the internal affairs of member states, it does not completely prohibit the use of force. Specifically, Chapter VII outlines actions that may be taken in response to threats to peace, and under Article 51, the Security Council is authorized to take necessary measures to maintain international peace and security (Janzekovic, 2006, pp. 109-110). However, the UN's rules do not provide a clear roadmap for how intervention should occur in the face of human rights violations. While the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, adopted in 1948, and the Geneva Conventions of 1949 outline essential rights, including life, liberty, security, and freedom from slavery and torture. It also establishes political, legal, and employment standards for governments to uphold, and it is widely accepted in democratic countries as a fundamental framework for human rights, no effective intervention mechanism has been developed to address mass human rights violations (MacQueen, 2011, p. 18).

All in all, the concept of humanitarian intervention has become more apparent with the crises that occurred in the 1990s and onwards. The civil war in Bosnia and Herzegovina (1992-1995) and the genocide in Rwanda (1994) led the international community to question its responsibilities regarding humanitarian intervention. The events in Bosnia and Herzegovina brought to the fore the failure of the UN to provide aid and the failure of NATO to intervene (as in the Srebrenica Massacre). Similarly, the massacre of around 800,000 Tutsis in Rwanda highlighted the international community's failure to intervene in time, leading to a genocide (Des Forges, 1999, p. 17; Power, 2002). NATO's military intervention in Kosovo in 1999 was a significant turning point in modern humanitarian intervention. NATO conducted air operations against Serbia without UN authorization to stop human rights violations against Albanians in Kosovo (Wheeler, 2000, p. 242). This intervention has sparked controversy on the grounds that it violated the principle of sovereignty because it was carried out without the approval of the UN. However, this intervention has set an important example of how strongly the international community must respond to massive human rights violations.

By the 2000s, the concept of humanitarian intervention began to be more widely apparent in the international arena and found a more concrete foundation in international law. The "Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) doctrine, developed in 2001 and adopted by the UN in 2005, argues that states have the responsibility to protect their populations from atrocities such as genocide, ethnic cleansing, war crimes, and crimes against humanity, and that the international community has an obligation to intervene in such situations (Evans, 2009, p. 9; ICISS, 2001). While violating the principle of sovereignty, this doctrine emphasizes the need to prevent human rights violations. The adoption of R2P has helped establish a broader understanding of humanitarian intervention, but its

practical implementation remains controversial. Specifically, while the NATO intervention in Libya in 2011, authorized by UNSC Resolution 1973, is often cited as a successful example of R2P, the subsequent chaos and civil war in Libya have highlighted the limits and challenges of applying this doctrine (Bellamy and Williams, 2011, p. 840).

These cases have sparked various debates regarding the successes and shortcomings of humanitarian intervention. Humanitarian intervention and the R2P doctrine have faced numerous criticisms from both theoretical and practical perspectives. First, although promising, the R2P remains slow to progress. For instance, in the case of the Darfur crisis, intervention by the International Criminal Court (ICC) occurred five years after the crisis (Goldhagen, 2012, p. 349). Moreover, many critics argue that humanitarian intervention often becomes a tool for Western powers to pursue their own interests, and that such interventions are shaped more by regional interests and political calculations than by a genuine intent to prevent human rights violations. Thereby, it is claimed that the principle of R2P cannot be neutral, as it grants authority based on protection capacity, favouring certain claimants and affecting internal state politics. Decisions on protection techniques, such as security reforms and redistribution, are inherently political, as they involve choices about who benefits and who sacrifices (Orford, 2011, p. 192-193). Additionally, some critics argue that the international community is highly selective when making decisions about intervention, often rejecting intervention in certain cases, which creates a moral contradiction. Another criticism is that humanitarian intervention violates the principle of sovereignty. Sovereignty of states is considered a fundamental principle in international law. However, humanitarian intervention challenges this principle, with those advocating for the right to intervene suggesting that there is something more important than sovereignty in international law.

To sum up, humanitarian intervention has sparked intense discussions both practically and theoretically since the 20th century, posing significant challenges in finding a balance between international law, sovereignty, and human rights. The role of states and their responses to human rights violations have made these debates even more crucial. Nevertheless, creating clear rules and intervention protocols within international law will enable the international community to act more efficiently and ethically in the future. Humanitarian intervention is a complex issue that requires a careful equilibrium between state sovereignty and the safeguarding of human rights, with the legitimacy of such interventions needing to be evaluated on a case-by-case basis. Moving forward, ensuring that humanitarian interventions are carried out in a transparent, unbiased, and legally sound manner will remain central to these discussions.

Reflections from South America: Views and Criticisms of MERCOSUR Members on Humanitarian Intervention and R2P

The emergence of the idea of establishing a partnership between Argentina and Brazil in the 1980s was mainly the result of the will of the decision-makers at the time to open a new page in the relations of the two countries which was based on rivalry since colonial times and had even evolved into hostility under the military rules in the second half of the 20th century. The democratic turn in Latin America in 1980s as well as the changing and challenging global political and economic environment at global scale hastened the

approximation of the two countries. The foundation of MERCOSUR in 1991 with the participation of their two neighbours Paraguay and Uruguay, thus differs since the very beginning from the overlapping economic integration systems in the LAC region and the Organization of American States (OAS) system which was led by the United States (US).

Within this context, since its foundation, protection and promotion of democracy and human rights has become one of the primary goals and working areas of MERCOSUR as an organization. Nevertheless, considering the political and military environment in South America; the colonial past, legacy of U.S. interventionism in the LAC region, and absence of interstate military conflicts between South American countries for decades, oriented the human rights dimension of the MERCOSUR system as a protective shield against authoritarianism and state-led human rights violations with an extensive focus on the connection between development and human rights. But the interstate and intrastate conflicts of the post-Cold War period occurring in other regions of the world, the global discussion on humanitarian intervention, and the developing norm of R2P demanded that MERCOSUR countries define their approaches on these topics as well as other LAC countries.

Currently, four founding member countries of MERCOSUR; Argentina, Brazil, Paraguay, and Uruguay continue to exist as only full members of the organization. Membership of Venezuela was suspended in 2017 (MERCOSUR, 2017) and Bolivia's adhesion is still under progress. Without omitting the discrepancies between economic, demographic, and military resources of Uruguay and the other two-Argentina and Brazil- these three countries are chosen for analysis since they have been regular contributors to UN peacekeeping operations since the mid-20th century and have contributed to the debate on humanitarian intervention and especially the emerging norm of R2P in the international arena. On the other hand, there has been limited national and international-level discussion on these issues by Paraguayan decision-makers. The most recent official view of this country can be summarized from a statement delivered by Paraguayan diplomats at the UN General Assembly in 2017, reiterating the country's "respect for international law and particularly humanitarian and human rights law" (Statement by Paraguay, 2017) with no specific view on either humanitarian intervention or the emerging concept of R2P.

Brazil

Brazil's traditional foreign policy approach, based on respect for international law and peaceful resolution of international conflicts, is accompanied by non-interventionism and respect for the sovereign rights of states in the country's constitution, which was prepared following the transition to democracy in the late 1980s. The 1988 Constitution has a specific article (Art 4) regarding foreign policy to determine the founding pillars of the country's foreign relations. Non-intervention, self-determination, peaceful solution of conflicts, and equality among nations are among them and reflect the traditional Brazilian foreign policy approach (Constituição da República Federativa do Brasil, 1988).

Nevertheless, the new international insertion of Brazil under Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and Dilma Rousseff's Worker's Party (PT) governments (2003-2016) required change to bring Brazil closer to its long-desired great power status. Their "new foreign policy" motto did

not refer to a significant alteration in foreign policy goals but to a change in the means to approach the traditional goals of ascendance to the great power status and fulfilling the requirements of complete socio-economic development. Thus, during two consecutive terms of Lula's presidency, Brazil's foreign, security, and economic policies were re-designed to reach these goals through extending and deepening South-South relations starting from LAC, African, and Arab countries as well as other emerging powers of the 21st century. Rousseff's one-and-a-half term presidency, interrupted by a civil coup to impeach her, continued as a weaker version of Lula's foreign policy.

Brazil focused on increasing its activism in international organizations starting from the UN (Abdenur, 2014, p. 1879) and tried to advocate concerns and demands of the Global South starting from the LAC region. Brazilian calls for a change in the UNSC membership compound, Brazil's BRICS membership, a renewed interest in South-South cooperation with middle and small powers to overcome developmental problems and promote expertise sharing, and even the foundation of The Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC) as an all-encompassing LAC organization without the shadow of the US exemplify Brazil's desires for a new global order and Brazil's place in it.

Within this context, firstly, Brazil has reoriented its constitutional and traditional principle of non-intervention not legally but politically to approach Southern countries with a developmental focus. Brazil's version of non-indifference, which originates from the African continent (Brussi, 2016, p. 297), was thus born into primarily Brazil-South America relations to legitimize Brazil's increasing political and economic interest in the region. Secondly, among MERCOSUR members, Brazil has been the most vocal in criticizing US-led armed interventions in the Middle East. Brazil tried to benefit from the diminishing interest of the US in South American affairs since the end of the Cold War, which was marked by US military and political interventionism in the LAC region throughout most of the 20th century and tried to approach Arab countries as an economic and political partner. Based on the idealist discourse of the PT governments on anti-imperialism and global solidarity, such vocal criticism also pragmatically served Brazilian diplomacy to approximate with Middle Eastern countries and disseminate its ideas on a future global security order.

As a traditionally renowned country for the capabilities of its diplomats, Brazil has tried to promote peaceful mediation of international conflicts, from South America to the Palestinian Israeli conflict. Brazil presented this endeavour not as a "magic solution" to the problems but as bringing "new perspectives" and "fresh ideas" (Amorim, 2011). The Friends of the Venezuela Group, led by Lula's efforts to resolve the tension between Hugo Chavez and the US, the Side by Side initiative, which tried to contribute to a solution of the conflict in Palestine, and the Turkish-Brazilian joint initiative of the Tehran Declaration are examples of Brazil's efforts to promote peaceful conflict resolution in the regional and global arenas (Tekin, 2018). Followingly, Brazil made some alterations in its approach to international peacekeeping. It has been an active participant in UN activities and UN Peacekeeping Missions since the foundation of this organization. Brazil's participation in international peacekeeping can be even dated earlier than the foundation of the UN, considering the country's service during the Leticia Dispute in the 1930s under a League of Nations mission. Despite being a contributor to international peacekeeping for almost a century, Brazil has always been reluctant to participate in the combatant cadres of

these missions. However, realizing that to reach its assertive foreign policy goals, Brazil needed more military commitment to international peacekeeping.

Eventually, during the post-2003 period, Brazilian decision-makers tried to contribute to and somewhat dominate the debate on R2P by introducing two approaches: non-indifference vs. non-intervention and responsibility while protecting (RwP) vs. R2P. Brazil benefited from its new approach of "non-indifference" and started to play a leading role in specific missions, such as the MINUSTAH in Haiti and UNIFIL in Lebanon. Nevertheless, Brazilian diplomats negotiated with the UN on the aims and scopes of these missions and tried to highlight the social and economic contribution of these missions to the peacebuilding efforts (Harig and Jenne, 2022, pp. 656-657). In this way, non-indifference which was used by Brazil as a facilitator of its engagement in South America (Saraiva, 2010, p. 161), was extended in scope by the decision-makers. Non-indifference is a framework from Africa and promoted by the African Union as a regional approach to R2P (Sharpe, 2017, pp. 11), which Brazil shares with African countries. It provides Brazil a framework combining developmental support with protection of human rights. Brazil has launched the place of non-indifference in its foreign policy in 2004 as a justification for sending many troops to the UN mission MINUSTAH in Haiti, which it would also command, not as a significant alteration but a continuation of the constitutional non-intervention principle (Spektor, 2012, p. 57).

Regarding military interventions with or without humanitarian justifications, Brazil has not been supportive during the 20th century. Brazil was a temporary member of the UNSC and abstained when the Resolution 1973, which would later serve as the basis for NATO intervention, was voted (Arredondo, 2015, 81). However, despite their previous criticism of US military interventions in the Middle East, the then President of Brazil, Rousseff, did not object to the intervention in Libya and accepted R2P with reservations, though her predecessor, Lula administration, had criticized the emerging norm of R2P following its launch as a UN initiative in 2005 (Spektor, 2012, p. 57). The RwP proposal, an authentic Brazilian amendment in R2P, aimed to redefine the criteria for initiating military interventions with humanitarian objectives. This proposal, closely linked to Brazil's call for reform in the UNSC's structure and operations, was of global significance. The RwP raised crucial questions about the conditions under which the UN can authorize the use of force. Regarding RwP, which Brazil adopted in 2011 to express its concerns about the military dimension of R2P, the onset of the Syrian Civil War in the same year was a crucial turning point. RwP, launched by President Rousseff at the UN General Assembly in 2011, was not a substitute for R2P, but a more refined version (Siquiera and Luz, 2023, p. 135). Unfortunately, Brazilian rejection of the possibility of a Libyan-style military intervention in Syria (Spektor, 2012, p. 58) did not coincide with the general air of the moment, which at the time diminished Brazil's prestige, although such humanitarian intervention never occurred.

Considering non-indifference and RwP, the first one was abandoned soon after at first during Temer (Serra, 2016) and then Bolsonaro presidencies after 2016. Although Lula retook office in 2023, political changes in Brazil, along with the changing nature of international conflicts, limited the country's ability to actively engage in peace promotion. The ongoing Russo-Ukrainian War and the recent Iran War are conflicts between

independent states and involve great powers. Despite trying to contribute to resolving these conflicts, Brazil found little space to manoeuvre.

Under the third Lula government, regarding international conflicts, Brazil has been most vocal about the Israeli-Palestinian conflict without leaving its traditional commitment to the two-state solution. In the immediate aftermath of the October 7 attacks, President Lula, on an X post, made a call to the UNSC and the international community and demanded a "humanitarian intervention" to protect both Israeli and Palestinian children (da Silva, 2023). However, even the social-media posting without a solid and official diplomatic initiative and Brazil's not going far from showing solidarity at a symbolic and discursive level with the Palestinians reveal Brazil's diminishing involvement in the global discussion on the protection of the vulnerable. The reasons vary depending on the nature of the conflict and Brazil's political and economic interests. Nevertheless, the main factors are the US involvement in ongoing global conflicts and increasing US interventionism in the LAC region, which Brazilians have reflected on ambiguously. Although the Lula government openly condemned the US military interventionism in Venezuela and Iran as well as its threats towards Cuba, the desire to comply with the regional and global interests of the US which is reflected previously in Jaír Bolsonaro government as well as the current Javier Milei government in Argentina has certainly affected Brazilian stance on humanitarian intervention and R2P by making the official policies more vulnerable to domestic political changes and the changing nature of international conflicts.

Argentina

The traditional foreign policy of Argentina, regarding non-intervention and self-determination, is like that of Brazil, albeit with exceptions. Argentina has been active in UN peacekeeping operations since 1958. Like Uruguay, Argentina's long-term commitment to international peacekeeping was mainly limited to observer missions. The situation changed in the 1990s, and the country started to send troops in increasing numbers (Pereira, 1996, p. 2-3). The Argentinian Navy participated in the First Gulf War in 1990-1991 as a non-combatant contributor under the presidency of Carlos Menem, who sought to establish close cooperation with the US. In the 1990s, the Menem government declared its desire to become a permanent member of the UN. As a result of its close collaboration with the organization in peacekeeping, Argentina finally sent troops abroad for the first time to participate in the UN mission in Croatia in 1991 (Colombo, 2019, p. 23; Pereira, 1996, p. 6-9).

During the 2000s, while continuing its traditional non-interventionist approach, Argentina became an early contributor to the work of the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS). Following this, Argentina's leftist president Cristina Fernández de Kirchner's consecutive two terms between 2007 and 2015 witnessed the country's support for the emerging R2P, and Argentina even became a member of the "Group of Friends of R2P" at the UN (Serbin and Serbin Pont, 2015: 26).

Regarding the discussion on R2P, Argentina questioned the proposal without criticizing its legitimacy. Argentina's concerns mainly revolved around the implementation phase and how it can be conducted without committing more human rights violations. Despite its concerns, Argentina participated in the UN General Assembly sessions on R2P and

voted in favour (Colombo, 2019, p. 25-27). Argentina's main concern about the R2P proposal was the third pillar, which paves the way for a response authorized by the UNSC based on the permission to resort to force under Chapter VII of the UN Charter. The country was also in favour of multilateralism within the UN system for such a military intervention, stressing the potential consequences of unilateral actions and the need for a responsible, collective approach (Arredondo, 2015, p. 77). Without omitting the international community's responsibility to solve the crisis in either Libya or Syria, Argentina criticized the NATO intervention in Libya based on concerns regarding the legitimacy and protection of civilians. It expressed concerns for the fate of a similar interventionist approach in Syria. Argentina also supported Brazil's RwP proposal during an informal discussion at the UN in 2012, in its capacity to address questionable parts of the original R2P proposal and contribute to its further development (Arredondo, 2015, p. 82-83). Argentina's support for the R2P and its participation in the related activities continued under the center-right Mauricio Macri government. (Statement by Argentina, 2017). Actually, despite foreign policy changes under different governments, Argentina continued to participate in the activities of the Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect and is a member of the Global Network of R2P Focal Points alongside the two other MERCOSUR member states, Paraguay and Uruguay (Global Centre for the Responsibility to Protect, 2022). Argentina also continues its membership in the Group of Friends of R2P alongside Uruguay.

Current Argentine foreign policy under the liberal Milei government focuses primarily on "returning to the side of the West." This is being achieved through the strengthening of partnerships with the U.S. and Israel, as well as NATO-member European countries. The government's commitment to the realization of the EU-MERCOSUR deal on free trade and the continuation of the traditional claim of the country on the sovereignty of the Falklands/Malvinas are clear indicators of this focus. Equally important is the government's commitment to the traditional proactive approach to overcoming its peripherical geopolitical location through its dedication to involvement in international organizations at global and regional scales (La Oficina de Información Diplomática, 2025, p. 3). Although Milei has committed his government to reorienting Argentine foreign policy, with limited interest in cooperation with both the MERCOSUR region and the Global South (Frenkel and Maresca, 2026) the country continues to work within the UN system to contribute to the development of R2P (Global Centre for Responsibility to Protect, 2026).

Uruguay

Uruguayan foreign policy, just like Argentina and Brazil, prioritizes multilateralism. Uruguayan participation in UN peacekeeping operations started in 1949, and the number and composition of the personnel sent have considerably increased over the last decades. Having relied on contributing to UN peacekeeping as a tool for international engagement and reaching specific diplomatic and economic goals, Uruguay still needs to fulfil its aims. On the contrary to Brazil, the country, as a small nation, does not have space for leverage to determine the location, scope, and goals of a mission (Gonnet and Hernandez, 2007). Unlike Argentina and Brazil, Uruguay's foreign policy goals linked to participation in UN peacekeeping have been limited. The country has mainly benefited from sending troops

abroad for domestic economic reasons and reorganizing civil-military relations throughout the democratic consolidation process after military rule (Guyer, 2014, pp. 33-34). Uruguay was a committed supporter of the R2P initiative in the UN alongside Chile, Colombia, and Peru from South America (Colombo, 2019, p. 24).

Uruguay's support for the R2P continued under different presidencies, albeit with different focuses. In a recent note by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, the country reminded that it has supported the principle since its adoption by the UN in 2005. It highlighted the importance of developing conflict-prevention capacity and the need to prevent crisis escalation to protect at-risk populations. (Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Uruguay, 2025).

Uruguay's current foreign policy takes an active stance on regional and international developments. At the international level, Uruguay is currently the annual president of the G77 and China bloc. Uruguayan President Yamadú Orsi is also the President pro tempore (current rotating chair) of MERCOSUR from July to December 2026 and the President pro tempore of CELAC for 2026-2027. These responsibilities certainly affect the Orsi government's foreign policy approach. Prioritizing the LAC over the MERCOSUR sub-region, deepening ties with the Global South, and maintaining a cautious relationship with Argentina's Milei government define the Orsi government's priorities (Fernández Luzuriaga, W. and Cingia Mascaró, G., 2025: 25). In this context, on different occasions, Uruguay's Foreign Minister Mario Lubetkin has reiterated the country's commitment to multilateralism, non-interventionism, and respect for international norms as an anchor for coping with challenges at the regional and international levels (Lubetkin, 2025; Ministerio de Relaciones Exteriores de Uruguay, 2026).

Final Considerations

The paper claims that three significant reasons lie behind the shared hesitation of the MERCOSUR-member South American countries toward military humanitarian intervention and their preference to focus on contributing to the debate on R2P instead. The first one is their colonial past, which resulted in a strong emphasis on autonomy in their legal and political traditions. The second one is the notorious history of US military interventionism in LAC. Moreover thirdly, the legacy of domestic military intervention and human rights violations overshadows the goal of reaching humanitarian solutions through military means. The paper concludes that complications in the contemporary relations with the US and differing foreign policy goals hamper the reach of a MERCOSUR-wide consensus on humanitarian intervention for these countries. Emerging interstate conflicts in the international arena also cause fluctuations in their prioritization of military means for humanitarian protection over non-military means. Secondly, the legacy of the foreign policies of these three countries and Paraguay depends on respect for international law, taking part in the UN system, and peaceful solutions to conflicts. Considering the three countries' active involvement in UN Peace Missions since the mid-20th century and Paraguay joining them, it can be claimed that UN authorization for a military intervention is a condition of legitimacy for these countries.

Regarding the international discussion on R2P, Uruguay's position favoured the norm's development. At the same time, Argentina's and Brazil's views represented their demand

for revision in R2P without rejecting its goals and humanitarian stance. However, Brazil's RwP remained a vague proposal with limited prospects of addressing the realities of conflict situations. It is also not surprising that even R2P, with solid backing from the international community, has not evolved into an international norm set aside from Brazil's contribution to the matter. Although Lula's third term, which started in January 2023, evoked new hopes regarding the return of Brazil as Lula promised after the election victory, the country's selected silence on the Venezuelan crisis and its humanitarian dimension before the US intervention, proved that both non-indifference and RwP promotion have always had limited promise for Brazilian foreign policy.

Considering the overall response from the LAC region, Argentina and Brazil played a distinguished role among Latin American countries, which were divided as strong supporters and critics of the proposal. It is worth noting that apart from Uruguay's unconditional and Paraguay's not-so-vocal commitment to R2P, MERCOSUR's big partners questioned the proposal without total rejection. The Pacific Alliance members were mainly the applauders, while ALBA-TCP members Venezuela and Cuba were the critics (Colombo, 2019, pp. 24-25; Serbin and Serbin Pont, 2015, p. 27). It can be concluded that Argentina and Brazil tried to develop a generalized approach limiting military interventionism in international relations. Nevertheless, this approach results in most of the time not distinguishing between humanitarian causes of an intervention and interest-based ones.

MERCOSUR countries were more vocal about sharing their views on the R2P a decade ago. However, their activism in this area has diminished due to national, regional, and international changes. At the national level, these three countries shared both hesitations regarding supporting the increasing military interventionism at the global level and the leftist notion of solidarity with the Global South. This contradiction resulted in advocating for respect for the non-intervention principle of international law without omitting the international community's responsibilities in protecting human rights and preventing violations. They also shared a critical view on US-led and possibly unilateral military interventionism by prioritizing the prevention of military interventions instead of the protection of human rights, with giving little thought to humanitarian and non-humanitarian causes of interventions. Today, domestic political changes challenging previous foreign policies, along with the changing nature of regional security issues and international conflicts, have shifted MERCOSUR countries' foreign policy priorities and their relations with one another, even though they have not revoked their commitment to the UN system or their participation in peacekeeping operations. Given the region's political situation, the need to sustain stable relations with the US amid US military interventionism targeting South America, and differing foreign policy goals, a MERCOSUR-wide consensus on humanitarian intervention remains elusive.

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AI GOVERNANCE AND THE INTERNATIONAL TAX ORDER: ALGORITHMIC BASE EROSION UNDER THE OECD TWO-PILLAR SOLUTION. A LEGAL-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNATIONAL CORPORATE TAXATION

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Abstract

This article advances a single, defensible claim: the OECD/G20 Two-Pillar Solution, though the most ambitious reform of international corporate taxation in a century, rests on nexus and profit-allocation concepts that are structurally misaligned with the way generative artificial intelligence creates value. The argument is developed doctrinally rather than through synthesis of institutional reportage. Pillar One ties reallocated taxing rights to identifiable market jurisdictions and a narrow set of the very largest in-scope multinationals; Pillar Two floors the effective rate at fifteen per cent but preserves a substance-based income exclusion keyed to payroll and tangible assets. Both design choices presuppose that profit can be traced to human labour and physical presence located somewhere. Generative-AI value, by contrast, is produced through globally sourced training data, distributed inference infrastructure, and model weights that are non-rival and near-costless to relocate. The result is a form of 'algorithmic base erosion' that the current architecture neither captures nor prohibits — legal in form, corrosive in effect. Engaging the scholarship on algorithmic accountability (Pasquale; Barocas and Selbst; Coglianese and Lehr), on jurisdiction and regulatory diffusion (Ryngaert; Svantesson; Bradford), and on the taxation of AI specifically (Oberson; Carvalho; Turina), the article shows why interpretive extension of existing rules is insufficient and identifies three doctrinal pressure points — the data-input nexus, the substance carve-out, and the autonomous-agent taxable person — where reform must concentrate. It builds on, but is distinct from, the emerging critique of the substance-based income exclusion's tangible-asset bias: the contribution here is to show that this bias is not a general drafting flaw but a structural mismatch with the specific production function of generative AI. The result is a focused legal diagnosis, not a general governance framework.

Keywords

International corporate taxation; OECD Two-Pillar Solution; generative artificial intelligence; nexus and profit allocation; base erosion; fiscal sovereignty; algorithmic accountability.

Resumo

Este artigo defende uma única tese defensável: a Solução de Dois Pilares da OCDE/G20, embora seja a reforma mais ambiciosa da tributação internacional das empresas neste último século, assenta em conceitos de nexo e de repartição de lucros que estão estruturalmente desalinhados com a forma como a inteligência artificial generativa cria valor. O argumento é desenvolvido de forma doutrinária, em vez de através da síntese de relatórios institucionais. O Primeiro Pilar vincula os direitos de tributação reatribuídos a jurisdições de mercado identificáveis e a um conjunto restrito das maiores multinacionais abrangidas pelo âmbito de aplicação; o Segundo Pilar estabelece um limite mínimo de 15% para a taxa efetiva, mas

preserva uma exclusão de rendimentos baseada na substância, indexada à massa salarial e aos ativos tangíveis. Ambas as opções de conceção pressupõem que o lucro pode ser atribuído ao trabalho humano e à presença física localizada num determinado local. O valor da IA generativa, em contrapartida, é produzido através de dados de treino de origem global, infraestruturas de inferência distribuídas e pesos de modelos que são não rivais e cuja relocalização tem um custo quase nulo. O resultado é uma forma de «erosão da base algorítmica» que a arquitetura atual nem capta nem proíbe — legal na forma, corrosiva no efeito. Recorrendo à literatura académica sobre a responsabilização algorítmica (Pasquale; Barocas e Selbst; Coglianese e Lehr), sobre jurisdição e difusão regulatória (Ryngaert; Svantesson; Bradford) e sobre a tributação da IA especificamente (Oberson; Carvalho; Turina), o artigo demonstra por que razão a extensão interpretativa das regras existentes é insuficiente e identifica três pontos de pressão doutrinários — o nexo de entrada de dados, a exclusão com base na substância e o sujeito passivo como agente autónomo — nos quais a reforma deve concentrar-se. Baseia-se, mas distingue-se, da crítica emergente ao viés dos ativos tangíveis na exclusão de rendimentos baseada na substância: a contribuição aqui consiste em demonstrar que este viés não é uma falha geral de redação, mas sim uma incompatibilidade estrutural com a função de produção específica da IA generativa. O resultado é um diagnóstico jurídico específico, e não um quadro geral de governação.

Palavras-chave

Tributação internacional das empresas; Solução dos Dois Pilares da OCDE; inteligência artificial generativa; nexo e repartição de lucros; erosão da base tributária; soberania fiscal; responsabilização algorítmica.

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AI GOVERNANCE AND THE INTERNATIONAL TAX ORDER: ALGORITHMIC BASE EROSION UNDER THE OECD TWO-PILLAR SOLUTION. A LEGAL-THEORETICAL PERSPECTIVE ON INTERNATIONAL CORPORATE TAXATION

IKROM ABDURASULOVICH ERGASHEV

Introduction

Artificial intelligence has moved from experimental application to core economic infrastructure with unusual speed, and tax administrations have followed. Data collected in the OECD's 2024 *Inventory of Tax Technology Initiatives*, summarised in the OECD's 2025 report on tax administration digitalisation, record that seventy-two per cent of tax administrations now deploy AI in some function; among those administrations, the most common application is the detection of tax evasion and fraud, undertaken by three quarters of them (OECD, 2024). Those figures describe administrations using AI as a tool of enforcement. They say nothing about the harder question this article addresses: how the economic value generated by AI itself is to be located, characterised, and taxed under the rules of international corporate taxation.

The distinction matters because the two questions are routinely conflated. A large and growing literature treats 'AI and tax' as a story about smarter audits, chatbots, and compliance analytics. The fiscal problem that AI poses is different in kind. When a generative model is trained on data drawn from users across the world, developed by engineers dispersed across several jurisdictions, hosted on cloud infrastructure that spans many more, and sold as a service to customers everywhere at once, the settled categories of international tax law — source, residence, permanent establishment, and the arm's-length allocation of profit — lose their purchase. The value is real and large; the place where it is taxed is increasingly a matter of corporate structuring rather than economic substance.

The international community has not been idle. The OECD/G20 Inclusive Framework's Two-Pillar Solution, endorsed by 136 member jurisdictions on 8 October 2021 and by 139 as of June 2023 and elaborated through 2026, is the most far-reaching attempt in a century to re-fit international corporate taxation to a digitalising economy (OECD, 2021). Pillar One reallocates a share of taxing rights over the largest and most profitable multinationals to the market jurisdictions where their users and customers are located, irrespective of physical presence. Pillar Two establishes a fifteen per cent global minimum effective tax rate through the Global Anti-Base Erosion (GloBE) rules, constraining the

tax competition that has driven a decades-long decline in headline corporate rates (OECD, 2026b).

This article makes one claim and defends it. The Two-Pillar Solution, for all its ambition, is built on nexus and profit-allocation concepts that are structurally — not merely operationally — misaligned with the way generative AI creates value, and that misalignment produces a distinct and under-recognised phenomenon that I call algorithmic base erosion. The phrase denotes value that escapes taxation not through illegality but through the interaction of a genuinely novel production process with rules designed for a different one. The claim is narrow by design. It is not that AI 'disrupts public finance' in general, nor that a comprehensive new governance framework is required. It is that two identifiable design features of the leading reform — the market-jurisdiction nexus of Pillar One and the substance-based carve-out of Pillar Two — fail in specific, demonstrable ways when confronted with AI-generated profit, and that the failure is doctrinal rather than administrative.

A word on scope is needed at the outset, because it is easy — and, as a reviewer of an earlier version rightly warned, tempting — to treat 'artificial intelligence' as a single object. It is not. Deterministic rule-based systems, whose outputs follow transparently from encoded logic, raise no novel tax question: the value they produce remains tied to identifiable human design and deployment, and the existing categories reach it. Deep-learning models trained on large datasets begin to strain those categories, because value migrates from the human function to the data and the trained parameters. Autonomous agent-based systems, which act and transact without contemporaneous human direction, strain them further still. The argument of this article is deliberately confined to the second and third of these — generative and large-model systems whose economic value is dominated by training data and model weights rather than by locatable human labour. It is precisely this class, and not automation in general, for which the nexus and substance concepts of the Two-Pillar Solution break down; the distinctions among system types are therefore not a caveat to the argument but part of its architecture, marking exactly where the claim bites and where it does not.

The argument proceeds in five further steps. Section 2 sets out the doctrinal and theoretical framework and locates the claim precisely within the existing scholarship on the taxation of AI — distinguishing it from proposals to tax AI directly and from the general critique of the substance carve-out's tangible bias. Section 3 analyses the market-jurisdiction nexus of Pillar One and shows why the data-input character of AI value defeats it. Section 4 turns to Pillar Two's substance-based carve-out and demonstrates how a payroll-and-assets test rewards precisely the relocation that AI makes costless. Section 5 examines the question of the taxable person once autonomous agents transact at scale, and the coordination problem that follows. Section 6 states the limits of the claim and its implications. Throughout, the method is legal-doctrinal: the article reads the operative instruments closely and tests them against a clearly specified economic process, rather than surveying the field.

Framework: Nexus, Substance, and the Limits of Interpretive Extension

The doctrinal inheritance

International corporate taxation rests on two allocative ideas whose lineage is older than the digital economy. The first is nexus: a state may tax the business profits of a non-resident only where that enterprise has a sufficient connection to the taxing jurisdiction, historically a physical permanent establishment. The second is the arm's-length principle: profit is allocated among the affiliates of a multinational group as though they were independent parties transacting at market prices. Both ideas assume that economic activity has a locatable centre of gravity — a place where people work, assets sit, and functions are performed. The transfer-pricing apparatus that dominates practice is an elaborate machinery for finding that centre of gravity and attributing profit to it.

Fiscal-federalism theory supplies the normative intuition behind the design. In the tradition running from Musgrave's account of the fiscal functions to Oates's analysis of decentralisation, a recurring tax-assignment principle holds that highly mobile bases should be taxed at higher or more coordinated levels of government, because a mobile base taxed locally simply migrates, generating a race to the bottom (Musgrave. 1959) The principle is sound, but it presupposes that mobility is a property of the taxpayer's choices rather than of the tax base's intrinsic nature. AI value strains that presupposition: the base is not merely mobile but, in an important sense, placeless, because the inputs that generate it — data and model weights — are non-rival and can be replicated or relocated at near-zero cost.

Why interpretive extension is not enough

The instinctive response of tax lawyers to a new business model is interpretive extension: read the existing concepts generously so that they reach the new case. This has worked before — the concept of the 'significant economic presence' was an attempt to stretch nexus to digital platforms. But interpretive extension succeeds only where the new activity differs in degree, not in kind, from the paradigm the rule was written for. Coglianese and Lehr, analysing administrative decision-making in the machine-learning era, draw exactly this distinction between adapting existing legal categories to a faster or larger version of a familiar process and confronting a process whose logic the categories were never built to describe (Coglianese, 2017).The argument of this article is that generative-AI value creation falls on the far side of that line for two of the Two-Pillar Solution's load-bearing concepts.

The reason is best stated through the scholarship on algorithmic opacity. Pasquale's account of the 'black box' describes systems whose internal operations are not merely complex but resistant to external reconstruction, so that outcomes can be observed while their generative process cannot be audited (Pasquale, 2015). Where the value-creating process itself cannot be reconstructed by an outside authority, the transfer-pricing method — which depends on identifying the functions performed, assets used, and risks assumed by each affiliate — has nothing stable to grip. Barocas and Selbst make the complementary point in the discrimination context: the resulting harm is, in their own characterisation, almost always an unintentional emergent property of the algorithm's

use rather than a conscious choice by its programmers, which is what makes it unusually hard to identify or to explain to a court (Barocas and Selbst, 2016). Transposed to taxation, their insight explains why algorithmic base erosion is invisible to an enforcement-centred lens: nothing unlawful occurs. The erosion is a property of the rules meeting the technology, not of any single actor breaking them.

Jurisdiction as the deeper stake

Beneath the technical question lies a jurisdictional one. Ryngaert's work on jurisdiction in international law shows how states increasingly rely on a territorial 'hook' — the importation of a product, the provision of a service to residents — to regulate conduct that is in substance transnational (Ryngaert, 2015). Pillar One is a fiscal instance of exactly this move: it manufactures a taxing nexus out of the location of the market rather than the location of production. Svantesson's analysis of the internet-jurisdiction problem explains why the move is fragile: once the relevant activity has no natural physical locus, any territorial hook is a chosen convention that competing states may decline to accept, and enforcement across borders becomes the binding constraint (Svantesson, 2017). Bradford's account of the 'Brussels Effect' supplies the countervailing dynamic — a large market can export its regulatory choices extraterritorially through the practical necessity of market access, which is why the EU's fiscal and AI-regulatory choices carry weight beyond its borders (Bradford, 2020). Read together, these literatures frame the Two-Pillar Solution not as a neutral technical fix but as a contested allocation of jurisdictional authority over a base that resists natural location — precisely the setting in which structural misalignment, rather than mere drafting imperfection, should be expected.

The state of the debate, and this article's place in it

The claim advanced here does not enter an empty field, and it is important to say precisely what is new and what is not. A body of work has already asked how AI interacts with taxation, and it divides into three strands that this article must be distinguished from in turn.

The first strand proposes taxing AI itself. Oberson's pioneering study of taxing robots — later expanded into a full treatment of the taxation of artificial intelligence, and most recently into a dedicated handbook chapter on the subject — argues for taxing the use of automation, or AI systems directly, as a response to the erosion of labour-based tax bases, and examines the compatibility of such taxes with existing international tax rules (Oberson, 2019). The second strand asks who the taxpayer is once systems act without human direction. Carvalho, writing in *Intertax* in 2019, posed that question concretely for what he termed autonomous artificial intelligence, identifying the twin problems of 'disappearing income' — the absence of legal personality — and 'powerlessness to tax' — the absence of residence, and proposing a general attribution of taxable personality together with a two-tiered assessment of residence (Carvalho, 2019). The third strand is broader still: Turina has argued that the debate on the tax challenges of the digital economy has shifted progressively from a narrow base-protection rationale toward a pretext for overhauling the international tax regime itself, and the recent literature

reading that debate forward to AI holds that value attribution, nexus thresholds and source rules will all require new frameworks (Turina, 2020).

Most pointedly for the present argument, a recent critique by Tomazela Santos in the *Bulletin for International Taxation* has examined the substance-based income exclusion of Pillar Two and identified its conceptual shortcomings, its allocative distortions and its bias toward tangible-intensive business models, arguing that the formula inadequately reflects economic reality (Tomazela Santos, 2026). The problem, in other words, is being seen.

This article's contribution is narrower and sharper than any of these, and it is defined against them. It is not a proposal for a new tax on AI or robots, as Oberson's is; it is a diagnosis of why the existing reform fails. It is not a claim about the tax personality of the machine, as Carvalho's is, although Section 5 takes up that question at its own boundary. And it is not a general claim that intangibles strain the substance carve-out, as the tangible-bias critique is; that critique is correct but generic, applying equally to pharmaceutical patents, software licences, and brand value. The claim here is specific: that the substance carve-out and the market-jurisdiction nexus fail in a distinctive way for generative AI because of the particular character of its inputs — training data drawn from a population that is neither market nor residence, and model weights that are non-rival and relocatable at near-zero cost. Where the existing critique says 'the formula under-weights intangibles', this article says 'the formula, and the nexus beside it, cannot in principle locate value whose origin is a globally sourced, non-rival input'. The difference is between a calibration problem and a structural one, and only the latter resists repair by adjusting the exclusion percentages or reading the nexus generously.

Pillar One and the Failure of the Market-Jurisdiction Nexus

Pillar One's central innovation, Amount A, reallocates a portion of the residual profit of the largest and most profitable multinationals to market jurisdictions, defined by where revenue is sourced: twenty-five per cent of a group's profit above a ten per cent margin is redistributed, with an in-scope group treated as connected to a market jurisdiction once its revenue there passes a low monetary threshold (OECD, 2023). Two design parameters bound its reach. The scope threshold — global turnover above €20 billion and profitability above ten per cent — means that only a small number of the world's largest groups fall within it, predominantly large technology and consumer-facing platforms; the OECD has described the in-scope population as comprising the very largest and most profitable multinationals rather than a fixed count, and the convention itself contemplates a later reduction of the turnover threshold contingent on successful implementation. The mechanism operates through a multilateral convention layered onto the existing network of bilateral treaties, an architecture whose administrative complexity, and whose requirement of ratification by thirty jurisdictions accounting for at least sixty per cent of the relevant ultimate parent entities, has repeatedly slowed entry into force (OECD, 2023b) Both parameters matter for the AI case, but the deeper problem lies in the nexus concept itself.

The market-jurisdiction nexus works by treating the location of the user or customer as the anchor for taxing rights. For a streaming platform or a social network this is coherent:

the service is consumed in an identifiable place by an identifiable market, and the revenue can be sourced there. Generative AI complicates each link in that chain. First, a substantial part of the value is created upstream of any market, in the training phase, where the model ingests data contributed by people who are neither customers nor, in any tax-relevant sense, participants in the market where the service is later sold. The jurisdiction whose residents supplied the training data has, on the current design, no claim at all: it is neither the residence of the developer nor the market of the sale. This is the first vector of algorithmic base erosion — value drawn from a population that the nexus rules render fiscally invisible. The erosion is not marginal. As models scale, the share of value attributable to training data — and thus to the jurisdictions whose residents generated it — grows relative to the share attributable to any locatable human function, so that the very trend driving the frontier of the technology is the trend widening the gap between where value originates and where the nexus permits it to be taxed. What earlier debates approached as the taxation of the 'digital nexus' or the monetisation of data reappears here in its sharpest form: not as a platform booking advertising revenue in the wrong country, but as a productive input — data itself — whose contributing jurisdiction the allocation rules cannot even name.

Second, the 'market' for a general-purpose model is not stable in the way Amount A assumes. The same model weights serve consumers, enterprises, and downstream developers who embed the model through an interface, so that the revenue booked in a given jurisdiction reflects contractual routing and API architecture as much as any underlying economic locus. Where the taxable footprint can be reshaped by re-routing an interface, the nexus is not tracking economic substance; it is tracking a structuring decision. Barocas and Selbst's lesson recurs here in fiscal form: the outcome is produced by neutral technical design choices that are entirely lawful, which is exactly why an enforcement posture cannot reach it (Barocas and Selbst, 2016).

Third, the scope threshold interacts perversely with AI industry structure. Because Amount A captures only the very largest groups, a model developer can remain outside scope while nonetheless generating precisely the placeless, data-derived profit the reform was meant to reach, simply by falling below the turnover or profitability line, or by distributing activity across entities. The reform thus reaches a handful of incumbents while leaving the structural gap open beneath them. None of this is an argument that Pillar One was badly drafted. It is an argument that a nexus built on market location cannot, even when drafted well, capture value whose origin is a globally sourced input and whose situs is a matter of architecture.

Pillar Two and the Substance Carve-Out Paradox

If Pillar One fails at the nexus, Pillar Two fails at the carve-out. The GloBE rules impose a fifteen per cent minimum effective rate, computed jurisdiction by jurisdiction, with a top-up tax collected where the effective rate falls below the floor; the Inclusive Framework has consolidated its interpretive guidance into successive editions of a Consolidated Commentary, most recently that of 2026 (OECD, 2026). The rules have advanced toward implementation more smoothly than Pillar One; the European Union adopted a directive requiring member states to give effect to the minimum tax for groups

with consolidated revenue of €750 million or more, and numerous other jurisdictions have enacted conforming legislation (Council Directive 2022/2523) Yet a specific feature of the design — the substance-based income exclusion — turns against the reform's purpose in the AI context.

The substance-based income exclusion carves out from the top-up tax a return computed on two factors: a percentage of eligible payroll costs and a percentage of the carrying value of eligible tangible assets in a jurisdiction. The rationale is intelligible and, for a traditional economy, defensible: the exclusion is meant to protect real economic activity — factories, workforces — from the minimum tax, targeting the charge instead at profit that is purely the product of tax planning. The carve-out therefore rewards the presence of people and physical things in a jurisdiction, and expressly excludes intangibles from the asset base.

For an AI developer this incentive structure is close to inverted. The production function of a frontier model is dominated by intangible inputs — data, model weights, and compute contracted from third parties — and requires comparatively little payroll and few owned tangible assets relative to the profit generated. A group can therefore locate the modest payroll and tangible footprint that does exist in a low-rate jurisdiction, claim the substance exclusion there, and shelter a slice of exactly the intangible-derived profit that the minimum tax was designed to reach. The carve-out, intended to distinguish real activity from planning, cannot perform that function where the 'real activity' is itself intangible and mobile. This is the second vector of algorithmic base erosion, and it is sharper than the first because it operates through an express statutory allowance rather than a gap. The recent tax-policy literature has independently observed that the exclusion is biased toward tangible-intensive business models and reflects economic reality poorly (Tomazela Santos, 2026). That observation is correct but general; it holds for any intangible-heavy firm. The argument here is the narrower and, I think, more consequential one: for the generative-AI developer the mismatch is not a matter of degree but of kind, because the value-generating inputs are not merely under-weighted by the formula but are of a type — non-rival, placeless data and weights — that no payroll-and-assets proxy can track at all.

The point can be put as a paradox. Pillar Two was built to stop the migration of paper profit to low-tax jurisdictions. The substance carve-out was built to ensure that genuine activity would not be caught in the crossfire. But when the genuine activity consists of assets that are themselves weightless and relocatable, the carve-out ceases to separate substance from planning and instead supplies a lawful channel for the planning it was meant to exclude. The design assumption — that payroll and tangible assets are a reliable proxy for immobile, genuinely local value — holds for the twentieth-century firm and breaks for the model developer. Here, too, the failure is structural: no adjustment of the exclusion percentages repairs a proxy that has stopped tracking the thing it was chosen to measure.

The Autonomous-Agent Taxable Person and the Coordination Constraint

A third pressure point is more speculative but follows from the same logic. International tax law presupposes a taxable person — a natural or legal person to whom income is

attributed and on whom a liability is imposed. As autonomous systems increasingly transact without contemporaneous human direction — executing trades, negotiating and concluding contracts, allocating resources — the attribution of the resulting income becomes contestable. This is not a hypothetical raised here for the first time. Carvalho has posed it as a concrete question of international tax law, identifying the absence of legal personality and the absence of residence as the twin obstacles to taxing income attributable to an autonomous system, and proposing a general attribution of taxable personality together with a two-tiered residence test (Carvalho, 2019). Oberson, responding to that proposal, suggested that the jurisdiction whose labour market is most seriously affected by such a system's activity might itself furnish a residence criterion — a suggestion that is instructive here precisely because it reaches for an impact-based connecting factor once the conventional ones fail (Oberson, 2019). The question is not the science-fiction one of whether an algorithm should be a taxpayer; it is the concrete one of which human or corporate principal is treated as earning income that an autonomous agent generated across several jurisdictions in ways none of them separately controlled. The existing answer — attribute to the deploying entity — is workable only so long as the deploying entity has a stable location, which returns the analysis to the nexus problem of Section 3.

This is not a settled crisis and should not be overstated. It is flagged here as the natural extension of the article's claim rather than as an established doctrinal failure, and it marks a boundary of the argument: the misalignment demonstrated for Pillars One and Two is present-tense and concrete, whereas the taxable-person problem is emergent. Treating them as equivalent would repeat the error the reviewers rightly identified in the literature — asserting more than the evidence supports.

Whatever the doctrinal response to these three pressure points, it must clear a coordination constraint that the jurisdictional scholarship makes unavoidable. Because the base resists natural location, any unilateral fix invites the double taxation and trade retaliation that Svantesson's and Ryngaert's analyses predict when states assert competing extraterritorial claims over the same conduct (Svantesson, 2017). The proliferation of national digital-services taxes — adopted by several jurisdictions pending a multilateral solution, met by threats of trade retaliation, and in several cases since withdrawn or amended under external pressure — is the observable symptom of that constraint. The United Nations initiative toward a framework convention on international tax cooperation reflects a parallel dissatisfaction, particularly among capital-importing states whose residents supply training data but whose treasuries capture none of the resulting value: the General Assembly's resolution of 22 December 2023 established an ad hoc intergovernmental committee to draft terms of reference for such a convention, and the Assembly returned to the subject a year later to carry the process forward (United Nations General Assembly, 2023). The coordination constraint does not resolve the doctrinal question; it disciplines the range of admissible answers, ruling out purely national reform.

Implications and Limits of the Claim

The analysis supports three focused conclusions and, equally important, marks what it does not establish. First, the misalignment between the Two-Pillar Solution and generative-AI value creation is structural, located in the market-jurisdiction nexus of Pillar One and the substance carve-out of Pillar Two, and is therefore not curable by administrative tuning or generous interpretation. Reform, if it comes, must engage the concepts themselves: a data-input dimension to nexus that recognises the jurisdiction supplying training data; a re-specification of the substance test so that it ceases to treat relocatable intangibles as local activity; and, prospectively, a rule of attribution for autonomous-agent income.

Second, the phenomenon is lawful, which is why it demands a doctrinal rather than an enforcement response. The seventy-two per cent of administrations deploying AI, three quarters of them for the detection of evasion and fraud, are equipped for a different problem entirely (OECD, 2025). Algorithmic base erosion is not evasion; it is the predictable output of a genuinely new production process meeting rules written for an older one. Barocas and Selbst's central lesson — that lawful, neutral design can generate systematically distortive outcomes as an unintended emergent property — is the correct frame, and it explains why the problem has been under-recognised by a literature oriented toward compliance and audit (Barocas and Selbst, 2016).

Third, the coordination constraint means that the reform space is genuinely international, not national, and that the distributive stakes are real: on the current design, states whose populations supply the data that trains frontier models have no fiscal claim on the value that data helps create. That is a defensible normative concern, but it is raised here as a consequence of the doctrinal analysis, not as an independent programme.

The limits of the claim should be equally explicit. This article does not offer an integrated governance framework spanning tax, expenditure, and international law; it deliberately abandons that ambition in favour of one defensible thesis about corporate taxation. As Section 1 made explicit, it does not treat 'artificial intelligence' as a single object: the argument concerns generative and large-model systems whose value is dominated by data and weights, and applies only weakly, if at all, to deterministic or narrowly deployed systems whose value remains tied to identifiable human functions. And it does not claim that the Two-Pillar Solution is a failure; it claims that a specific and important slice of value falls outside its reach for structural reasons. Whether the political will exists to close that gap — through a data-sensitive nexus, a reformed substance test, or a UN-centred instrument — is a question this article poses rather than answers. What it establishes is narrower and, for that reason, more secure: that the gap is real, that it is structural, and that it will not be closed by reading the existing rules more generously.

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INDIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS ON CHINA'S 'BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI)' IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION (IOR) AND COUNTER-DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES

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Abstract

This research paper examines the implications of the expansion of China's BRI in the IOR on India's geo-strategic interests and thereby emerging counter-diplomatic responses to balance a favourable regional power architecture. Launched in 2013, the BRI seeks to integrate China's economy with the global system through extensive infrastructure connectivity, and has since attracted participation from a majority of countries, with cumulative investment surpassing USD 1 trillion. Within the IOR, both China and India emerge as pivotal actors vying for influence; however, China has deliberately concentrated its investments in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives to dilute India's traditional strategic primacy in the region. This recalibration of power dynamics is reshaping the regional order, thereby challenging India's longstanding geopolitical stakes. Employing an analytical-interpretative methodology complemented by a case study approach, this study draws upon primary and secondary literary sources to contextualise and interrogate its research objectives. The analysis concludes that India has responded through multifaceted counter-diplomacy at the foreign policy level, notably by forging institutional alliances such as the QUAD and INSTC, alongside strengthening bilateral partnerships with key regional actors.

Keywords

India, China, Sri Lanka, Pakistan, USA, South Asia, BRI, DTD, IOR.

Resumo

Este artigo de investigação analisa as implicações da expansão da Iniciativa «Um Cinturão, Uma Rota» (BRI) da China na Região do Oceano Índico (IOR) para os interesses geoestratégicos da Índia e, consequentemente, as respostas diplomáticas contrárias que estão a surgir para equilibrar uma arquitetura de poder regional favorável. Lançada em 2013, a BRI visa integrar a economia da China no sistema global através de uma ampla conectividade de infraestruturas e, desde então, tem atraído a participação da maioria dos países, com um investimento acumulado que ultrapassa os 1 bilião de dólares americanos. Na IOR, tanto a China como a Índia surgem como atores fundamentais na disputa pela influência; no entanto, a China concentrou deliberadamente os seus investimentos no Paquistão, no Sri Lanka e nas Maldivas para diluir a primazia estratégica tradicional da Índia na região. Este reajustamento das dinâmicas de poder está a remodelar a ordem regional, desafiando assim os interesses geopolíticos de longa data da Índia. Recorrendo a uma metodologia analítico-interpretativa complementada por uma abordagem de estudo de caso, este estudo baseia-se em fontes bibliográficas primárias e secundárias para contextualizar e questionar os seus objetivos de investigação. A análise conclui que a Índia tem respondido através de uma contra-diplomacia multifacetada ao nível da política externa, nomeadamente

forjando alianças institucionais como o QUAD e o INSTC, a par do reforço das parcerias bilaterais com atores regionais-chave.

Palavras-chave

Índia, China, Sri Lanka, Paquistão, EUA, Sul da Ásia, BRI, DTD, IOR.

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INDIA'S SECURITY CONCERNS ON CHINA'S 'BELT AND ROAD INITIATIVE (BRI)' IN THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION (IOR) AND COUNTER-DIPLOMATIC INITIATIVES[1]

MULE ROHIT ASHOK

Introduction

According to the IMF Report (2024), China has emerged as one of the leading economic powers by attaining a GDP value of USD 18,273 billion, which is next to the USA's 29,167 billion. Principally, the Economic Modernisation Program (1976) was responsible for the substantial economic results in the 1990s, when China could achieve a double-digit growth rate. In recent times, several macroeconomic issues have surfaced in China that have lowered its growth rate drastically (Clover, C. et al., 2017). Undoubtedly, the past four decades of an economic trajectory have helped China to figure out its global vision for the twenty-first century, which is indeed reflected in a policy document entitled *'A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions (2023)'*.[2] The process envisioning the philosophy of the shared future of humanity was already undertaken through the development of various projects such as the BRI, the Global Development Index (GDI), the Global Security Initiative (GSI), the Global Civilizational Initiative (GCI), etc. Among all these projects, the BRI has evolved as the functionally most dynamic and geographically well-reached across the region. Details of it have been thoroughly illustrated in a document titled *The Belt and Road Initiatives: Progress, Contributions and Prospects.*[3] (BRI, n.d.).

Among all regions, the development of the BRI in South Asia, or the IOR, has led to certain issues relating to national security and the Balance of Power (BoP). In the 21st century, India has emerged as a major actor possessing significant political-economic stakes in the IOR, claiming that BRI's expansion through China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), the Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor (BCIMEC), and the China–West Asia Economic Corridor (CWAE) is threatening its position, especially

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Conflict of Interest: The author indicates that there is no conflict of interest involving any parties.
[2] To read the full document: Full Text: A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the People's Republic of China
[3] To read the full document: The Belt and Road Initiative: Progress, Contributions and Prospects | english.scio.gov.cn

by monopolising strategic assets of the countries in the region through Debt Trap Diplomacy (DBT). Therefore, the structure of the political equilibrium or BoP in IOR appears to be shifted in favour of China and its ally, Pakistan. Such a developing power structure has created a security complex situation for Indian policymakers to deal with in the future context. There has been substantial academic literature added on the topic of the BRI and South Asia. Prof. Brahma Chellaney articulated well about China's strategic intention behind BRI in South Asia in his self-written article titled "China's Debt-Trap Diplomacy" and "China's Creditor Imperialism" during 2017 (Chellaney, B. 2017; Chellaney, B. a2017). Additionally, Prof. Shrikant Kondapalli has also expressed enough critical views on China's BRI project in South Asia and claims that China is more aggressive in bringing India under the BRI ambit to facilitate projects across the corridor smoothly, but India is strategically denying game-politics (Kondapalli, S. 2021). Mukesh Bharati, in his article, also illustrated the expansion of the BRI in South Asia and rising economic challenges to India (Bharati, M. 2024: 21). Bhumika Chakama has also analysed India's position on BRI activities in Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. She has taken the position that the Indian government has not appeared aggressive in the context of counter-BRI in South Asia, as the policy is being implemented so rapidly (Chakama, B. 2019: 184). Michal Himmer has led his investigation to determine whether DBT is a reality or a myth (Himmer, M. 2023). This literature has not adequately addressed the dynamics of changing BoP in IOR as BRI is expanding; additionally, Pakistan also joined it to counter India. This research article will connect the gap in understanding BRI expansion, IOR and India's strategic concerns by focusing on DTD. However, the study will also examine India's counter-diplomatic initiative to counter China in the region. This article is divided into four sections, such as: First, the BRI and China's global vision; Second, a case study of countries from the IOR where China focused and application of DTD; Third, Understanding the shift in BoP and India's strategic Concerns; Fourth, India's counter-diplomatic initiatives.

Research Methodology

This research study has used an analytical-interpretative method. However, a case study approach has been used to decode the dynamics of BoP in IOR through BRI investment in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives. However, the concept of Debt-Trap Diplomacy (DTD) would be essential to explore China's intention to target India's strategic position by crushing the country's economic sovereignty. In the context of the time framework, this article will focus on the period from 2014 to 2025 to analyse India's evolving counter-diplomacy. This study has relied on primary literature, such as government policy documents and reports, as well as secondary sources, including newspaper articles and journal articles, to achieve the intended objective.

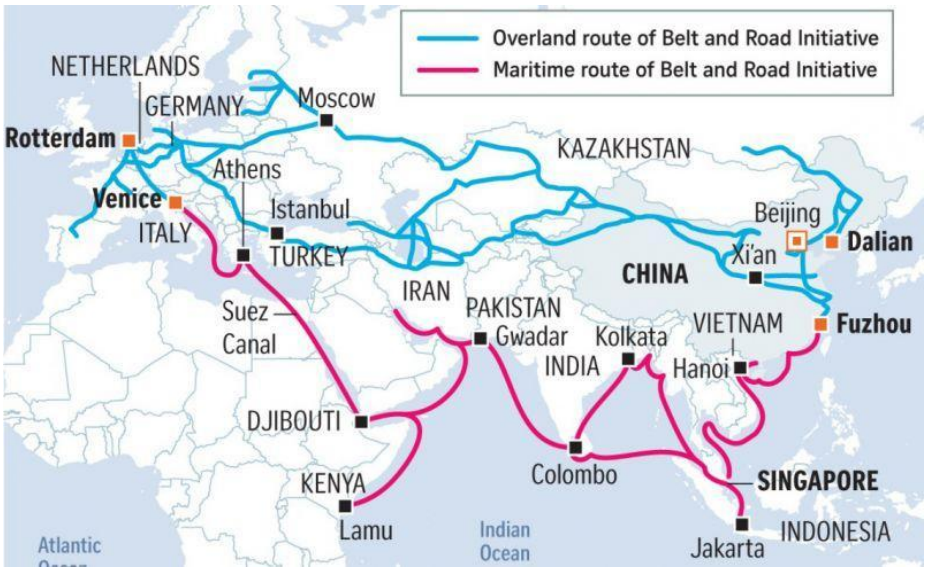
Result and Discussion

21sr Century China's Global Vision: The Belt and Road Initiatives

The global economic system is undergoing a significant shift, as China has emerged as one of the major economic players in Asia, alongside the USA and Europe. Currently,

China's purchasing power parity (PPP) is the highest globally and statistically, it needs to bridge only a USD 10 trillion gap to surpass the USA's economy. Such an economic transformation is an outcome of the Modernisation Economic Policy pursued by President Deng Xiaoping in the mid-1970s. Therefore, Zhu Min, a former deputy chief of the IMF, speculated that 'China is expected to surpass the US economy by 2035' (Xueying, Li, 2024). On the contrary, a recent economic recession[4] in the Chinese economy led one another prediction that if China's economic growth declines below 5 per cent would make it impossible to overtake the US until 2060 (Sharma, R., 2022). This rise of its economic footprint on the global economy motivated the Chinese leadership to define its role for the welfare of global humanity. As a result, President Xi Jinping, in an address at Moscow State Institute of International Relations (2013), raised a common concern about humanity by asking: *Where is humanity headed?* And further stated, *"building a shared future is the guiding philosophy to lead global humanity towards achieving common political, economic, cultural, and ecological stability and prosperity"* (Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC, 2023). Afterwards, at the UNGA 70th Session (2015), he further stressed the agenda of welfare of humanity by proposing five points, such as Equal Treatment; Common Security; Win-Win cooperation; Respect diversity; Green and Low-carbon development (Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC, 2015). Finally, a philosophy of shared future was taken to concrete shape in the form of a white paper titled *"A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions (2023)",* which fundamentally focused on the common aim of the Sustainable Development of Humanity (Ministry of Foreign Affairs PRC, 2023). It unwittingly assigned China a status of a responsible actor, besides the USA, in the current global order. Recently launched policies, such as the BRI/OBOR (2013), the Global Development Initiative (2021), the Global Security Initiatives (2021), and the Global Civilisation Initiative (2023), are a reflection of a dream of a shared future of humanity.

Map 1. Belt and Road Initiative



[4] To get the details of China's economic trajectory, see the link: GDP growth (annual %) - China | Data

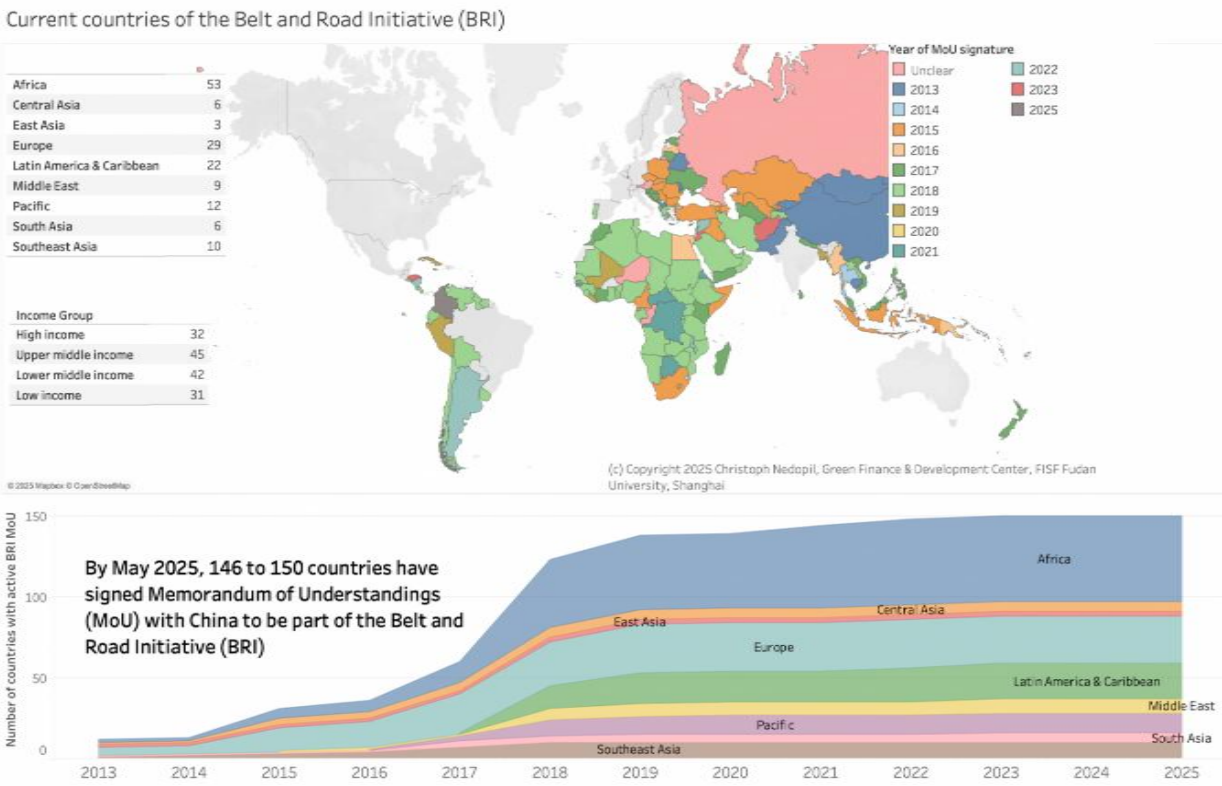
The BRI or OBOR, which is highly acknowledged globally and an important focus topic of this paper. Thus, the section illustrates the nature and scope of the BRI. The BRI, launched in 2013, is an ambitious global 'infrastructure connectivity' policy that was launched by reviving the century-old concept of 'Silk Road'[5], aimed to integrate China's economy with the global economy, vice versa (Bharti and Kumari, 2024: 3-4; Ibrahim, S and A. Kizito, 2021: 71). It vision document titled *"Vision and Actions on Jointly Building the Silk Road Economic Belt and 21st-Century Maritime Silk Road (2015)"*[6] provides a comprehensive outlook of initiative, which defines the aim is *"to promote the trade, investment, and connectivity networks across regions"* (BRI Portal, n.d.). Five strategic pillars are choreographed, which includes: a) To focus on expanding trade routes and opening up new markets for Chinese goods; b) To enhance global infrastructure for reducing transportation costs; c) To ensure resource security strengthen China's supply chains; d) To build economic diplomacy with partnering nations; e) To position China as a key leader in global economic development, etc. (FDI China, 2025). A 'Joint Cooperation Framework (JCF)' was developed specifically for its branding across the region, which mainly looks after priorities, such as Policy Coordination, Facilities Connectivity, Unimpeded Trade, Financial Integration, and People-to-people bonds. The win-win cooperation is the focal doctrine of bilateral or multilateral agreements. Positively, by 2025, nearly 146-150 countries joined it, most of them from the developing and underdeveloped global south bloc, where the world's almost 2/3 population lives, and deficit with infrastructure. Thus, the prediction is that the BRI will be a beacon for development of the Global South (Nedopil, 2025). Diplomatic outreach of the BRI has truly assigned it a global character and made it the world's most expensive endeavour in modern history (Rolland, Nadege, 2017: p. ii). The outcome of the BRI is that it will reduce transport times along economic corridors by 12 per cent, trade will increase by 2.7 per cent to 9.7 per cent, increase income by up to 3.4 per cent, and lift 7.6 million people out of extreme poverty (World Bank Group, 2018).

The BRI encompass five major functional components, such as the Silk Road Economic Belt (SREB), the Maritime Silk Road (MSR), the Digital Silk Road (DSR), the Health Silk Road (HSR) and the Green Silk Road (GSR), etc. First, the SREB is a *"Chinese Dream"* of development of a strong network land infrastructure along six corridors: New Eurasian Land Bridge Economic Corridor (NELBEC); China-Mongolia-Russia Economic Corridor (CMREC); China-Central Asia-West Asia Economic Corridor (CCWAEC); China–Indochina Peninsula Economic Corridor (CIPEC); The Bangladesh–China–India–Myanmar Economic Corridor (BICMEC); The China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) (Economy, Elizabeth, 2018; Kumar, Sudeep, 2022; BRI Portal; OBOReurope, n.d.). According to Sophia Nina Burna-Asefi, the SREB has revived the Cold War strategic 'corridor' approach, which depicts aspects of the 'politics of territory' played by both superpowers to broaden their respective ideological blocs. It constituted three major things: a) the territorialization and projection of state power across time and space; b) the spread of civilisation across time and space; c) the extension of the state's manufacturing production and its circulatory system across space. China's facsimile of the corridor approach has predicted

[5] Historically, the Han dynasty (206 BCE – 220 CE) applied the concept of 'Silk Road'. To know more see: Silk Road | Facts, History, & Map | Britannica
[6] To read further: Full Text: Vision and actions on jointly building Belt and Road - Belt and Road Forum for International Cooperation

that it would likely pose an existential threat to the U.S.-led status quo (Burna-Asefi, Sophia, 2024).

Map 2. Map of countries of the BRI in May 2025



Source: Nedopil 2025

Second, the Maritime Silk Road is another important component of BRI. 'Affordability' is a crucial factor for promoting the ocean trade, which is now operating more than 80 per cent of the volume of international trade commodities, and sustains the livelihoods of billions of people (United Nations, 2016). The MSR is aiming to promote approximate $1.2 trillion 'Blue Water Economy', which would serve range of interests, such as, improving food and energy security, diversifying and securing sea lines of communication (SLOC), upholding territorial sovereignty, and shifting international discourse on major powers, and dominance in Asia (Ghiasy, R. et. al., 2018: 2). Map No. 1 provides details informatio about extension of MSR, which stretched from China's (Guangzhou[7], Quanzhou, Ningbo, Nanjing, Fuzhou, Yangzhou, Penglai, and Liujia) to Southeast Asia (Port of Brunei and port of Singapore), South Asia (Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, Pakistan's Gwadar Port), Gulf and Africa (port of Djibouti, Yemen's Port of Aden, Israel's Port of Haifa, Egypt's Port Sokhna), and Europe (Greece's Piraeus Port). Through the MSR, nearly 50 ports are under heavy financial investments across the region that making China the world's largest seaport operators and constructors. In Asia, no doubt, the ports infrastructure will ensure China's trade dominance over the South China Sea,

[7] To know more about these port cities, see: Maritime Silk Road Route, History, Map, Tour 2025

Strait of Malacca, Indian Ocean, Gulf of Bengal, Arabian Sea, Persian Gulf and the Red Sea (Mingxin, Ma & Jian, Liang, 2024: 1). In 2017, the appendix to the MSR was the 'Polar Silk Road (PSR)' attached, referring to the Northern Sea Route (NSR), which was officially mentioned in the White Paper titled 'China's Arctic Policy'[8]. Its blueprint has vowed to increase China's active participation in Arctic affairs in the near future through the development of an ambitious PSR (Xiao, A., & Yifie, D., 2023). Erdem Lamazhapov and others have argued that Chinese officials have taken no significant policy steps to implement the PSR in Russia after 2023 because of emerging challenges from the intensification of the Russia-Ukraine conflict (Erdem Lamazhapov et. al., 2023). Mingxin Ma and Jian Liang jointly argued that 'in future China's major focus will be on building strong port infrastructure in Southeast Asia and South Asia, while Europe will be a lesser focused area because of interrelated factors of 'distance' and 'developmental priorities (Mingxin, Ma, & Jian Liang, 2024: 7).

Third, the innovation of Artificial Intelligence has stretched the arms of BRI to the Digital Silk Road or the Information Silk Road (2015), which encompasses the development of telecommunication networks, artificial intelligence capabilities, cloud computing, e-commerce, mobile payment systems, surveillance technology, smart cities, and other high-tech areas in the partner countries (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.). Ajeje Lele and Kritika Roy have succinctly argued that the DSR is an outcome of China's long-standing technological development process since 1949, which transformed the country from an innovation-driven economy to a global technological powerhouse. Therefore, China accounts for almost 40 per cent of global e-transactions, with e-commerce standing at 15 per cent, 32% of global ICT goods exports and 6% of ICT services exports (Lele A. & K. Roy, 2019). Resultantly, China no longer remained only the *'world's traditional manufacturing workshop'* but emerged *as a 'highly professional economy'* (Burna-Asefi, Sophia, 2024). After its integration, a 'Soft Power' has become a dominant component within the foreign policy agenda to promote a 'China-centric digital connectivity network' (Adee, S., 2019). A hot debate, whether through DSR, China is aiming to shift the centre of digital innovation from the West to the East, with Beijing at its centre, is at the centre of the US academic circle (Blogger, Guest, 2019). For example, recently, the debate on 'DeepSeek' technology is very relevant for contextualization tech-race between the USA and China (Allen, Gregory, 2025). Against DSR, the USA has spread a narrative that Chinese tech corporations are posing an unpredictable risk to national security through the mishandling of countries' intelligence data and promoting 'Chinese Authoritarianism', thus persuading allies to ban the entry of Chinese digital corporations. Despite such a narrative, the Global South is positive to welcome China's DSR because of the factor of needs (Singer, D. et al., 2019; Losavio, Joseph, 2019).

Fourth, in early 2017, a new initiative, the HSR (Jiankang Sichou Zhilu), with the motto *health for all humanity',* was launched to prevent infectious diseases through information sharing about modern and traditional medicine, which was also endorsed by the World Health Organisation (WHO) (An Baijie, 2017). Its principal commitment is to strengthen international cooperation in health through 'sharing of epidemic information, the exchange of prevention and treatment technologies and the training of medical

[8] China's Arctic Policy - BELT AND ROAD PORTAL

professionals [which will] improve capability to address public health emergencies jointly' (Rolland, N., 2024, p.23). China has taken responsibility for providing medical assistance and emergency medical aid to partner countries, as well as for carrying out practical cooperation in maternal and child health, disability rehabilitation, and the control of major infectious diseases, including AIDS, tuberculosis, and malaria. Now, the BRI is not merely an infrastructure-building plan, but also extended to cover domain of humanity (Rolland, Nadege, 2017: 2). The National Health Commission of China has also claimed for promotion of health cooperation by: a) Development of a health network with the BRI countries; b) Increase China's soft power in regional; and c) global health governance mechanisms.[9] In a speech at the 73rd World Health Assembly in May 2020, he referred to China's responsibility to ensure 'not just the life and health of its own citizens, but also global public health' as part of its vision for this shared future (Xi Jinping, 2020). During the COVID-19 pandemic, China offered great medical help to a large number of countries. Additionally, China convened a High-Level video conference with partner countries to deepen cooperation for combating the COVID-19 pandemic and promoting economic recovery (Ministry of Foreign Affairs, 2020).

Fifth, the Green Silk Road was launched in 2015 to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by promoting renewable energy projects, environmental sustainability, and climate-friendly policies globally, and became part of the BRI strategy (BRI Forum, 2017). This has ensured objective climate sustainability while ensuring economic prosperity (Yayan, H., 2024). In 2023, the Green Silk Road Development Report was released, which demonstrated China's key achievements from 2015-2023 in partnering countries on the development of green infrastructure, green energy corridors, green transport, climate change adaptation, and green finance (Yayan, H., 2024). Notably, China established the BRI International Green Development Coalition[10] in April 2019, marking the first international climate-sustainability organisation to guide various projects internationally. The first GSR flagship project is the 'Green Infrastructure Project: Mombasa-Nairobi Railway' co-built by China and Kenya, connecting Kenya's capital, Nairobi, with Mombasa, the largest port in East Africa (GCA, 2024). The second project is 'the Tema New Container Terminal project in Ghana', situated on the west coast of Africa, off the Gulf of Guinea (Xinhua, 2022). Heydays, China's economy has grappled with certain macroeconomic issues, which have led to a slowdown pace of investment across the region; therefore, specific economic challenges are before China. In response to that, in 2021, President Xi Jinping unveiled the BRI's "Small and Beautiful (S&B)" model, which prioritises sustainable, medium-sized investments that meet the developmental objectives of partner nations while preserving Chinese influence through technological collaboration as opposed to debt-based leverage (IFPP, 2025).

The BRI in the IOR: A case of Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives

In the 21st century, the IOR region has emerged as one of the major geo-politically contested hotspots. The reason is that it connects Asia, Africa, and Europe, which will be

[9] The key areas for cooperation include infectious disease prevention and control, public health emergencies, maternal and child health, traditional medicine, health system and policies, and capacity building and personnel training.
[10] To know more about, see: BRI International Green Development Coalition

crucial for trade and commerce. The Malacca Strait and the Hormuz Strait are two important choke points that belong to the IOR and carry nearly 50 per cent of the world's oil shipments. Therefore, it became a prerequisite for China to ensure dominance over the IOR region for strategic purposes, such as expanding trade and commerce, expanding military partnerships, containing India, countering US influence, and ensuring the security of sea lines of communication, etc. As China has begun to dream one of the global powers, especially after the launch of the BRI. It motivated China to pursue a strategic goal of establishing a significant footprint in the IOR, competing with rising India and the USA. (Kannangara, P. et al, 2018). China's strategy in the IOR is specified to control strategic assets of the countries such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives and Bangladesh, etc, which will be critical for China in pursuance of strategic goals. This section will analyse China's expansion of the BRI through controlling strategic assets of the countries through DTD.

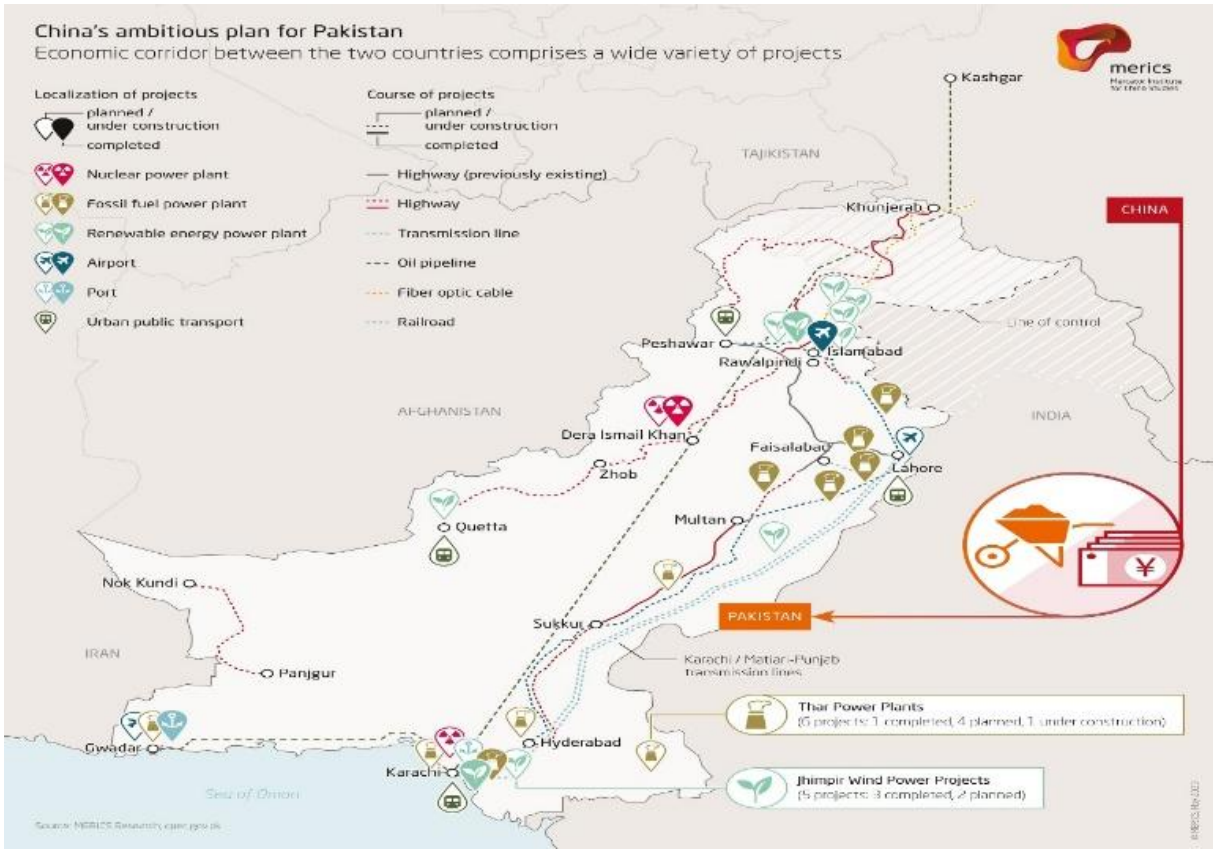
Pakistan: The Gwadar Ports and Karakoram Highway

This map, no.3, provides an overview of the scope of the infrastructural projects ongoing under the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). The estimated total cost is USD 62 billion, which includes construction of highways, ports, energy, health health-related projects. Since its inception has been entangled with certain security-related objections from the regional actors, that is, India. The major objection raised by India is the compromise of its security stakes in the region because of ongoing projects such as the Gwadar Port and the Karakoram Highway, which traverses from the disputed PoK (Chaudhary, Fatima, 2024; Tiwari, S., 2024). India has territorial conflicts with both Pakistan (over J&K) and China (over Ladakh), which are linked to post-independence history (1950s). India observes that both adversaries are exploiting such a conflicting scenario against it through developing the collaborative platform of CPEC. The politics behind such strengthening partnership between China and Pakistan is tends to shift the BoP in the South Asia in their favour, with inflicting India's geo-political and geo-economic stakes. Consonance over geo-political adversary such as India can be presumed one of major reason for receiving constant politico-economic support to Pakistan from China. The certain development on the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between two further widened the scope of their bilateral relationship, while created strategic insecurity for India (Bhaumik, Anirban, 2025).

Map No. 3 shows that under the umbrella of the CPEC, various projects have been planned in all major cities of Pakistan, such as Kashgar, Khunjerab, Islamabad, Rawalpindi, Peshawar, Lahore, Multan, Sukkur, Quetta, Hyderabad, Karachi, and Gwadar. A huge amount of investment in CPEC by China raised expectations of Pakistan for an economic boom in future, but in reality, issues of terrorism, internal political instability, youth protests, and rising fundamentalism have impeded progress (ABC News, 2025; ABC News, a2025). Very important among all ongoing projects are the Gwadar Port and the Karakoram Highway, on both of which India has shown its disapproval (Economic Times, 2025). Definitely, the completion of these projects would help China to reduce dependence on traditional trade routes of the South China Sea and the Malacca Strait, for trading with Africa, West Asia, and Europe. However, there will be a significant reduction in cost and time of trading with these regions of the world. The

Gwadar Port is located near the Strait of Hormuz, one of the world's busiest oil transit points, thus providing China a strategic advantage in regional trade. This access would strengthen China's economic foothold in the region and establish Pakistan's position as a key transit hub for global trade. Therefore, China is very interested in seeking its strategic interests by ensuring its monopoly over the Arabian Sea via Pakistan. However, Pakistan is offering China direct access to the Indian Ocean, bypassing potential maritime conflict with Western powers. This reduces trade risks and enhances China's energy security, ensuring uninterrupted supplies of oil and raw materials. This is the reason for China is highly focused on these two flagship CPEC projects on a priority basis (Sun, Q. and S. Awale, 2025; Hashmi, N., 2025). However, the Karakoram Highway goes through the disputed PoK region, which is India's sovereign territory, and it will go against international legal norms. The outcome of CPEC, India observes more threats to its geopolitical standing and make tough to pursue its interests. Because, undoubtedly, it will be easy for both India's adversaries to contain its interests. And, the success of these two projects would help China to establish a sole hegemon in the region.

Map 3. China-Pakistan Economic Corridor



Source: Council of Foreign Relations

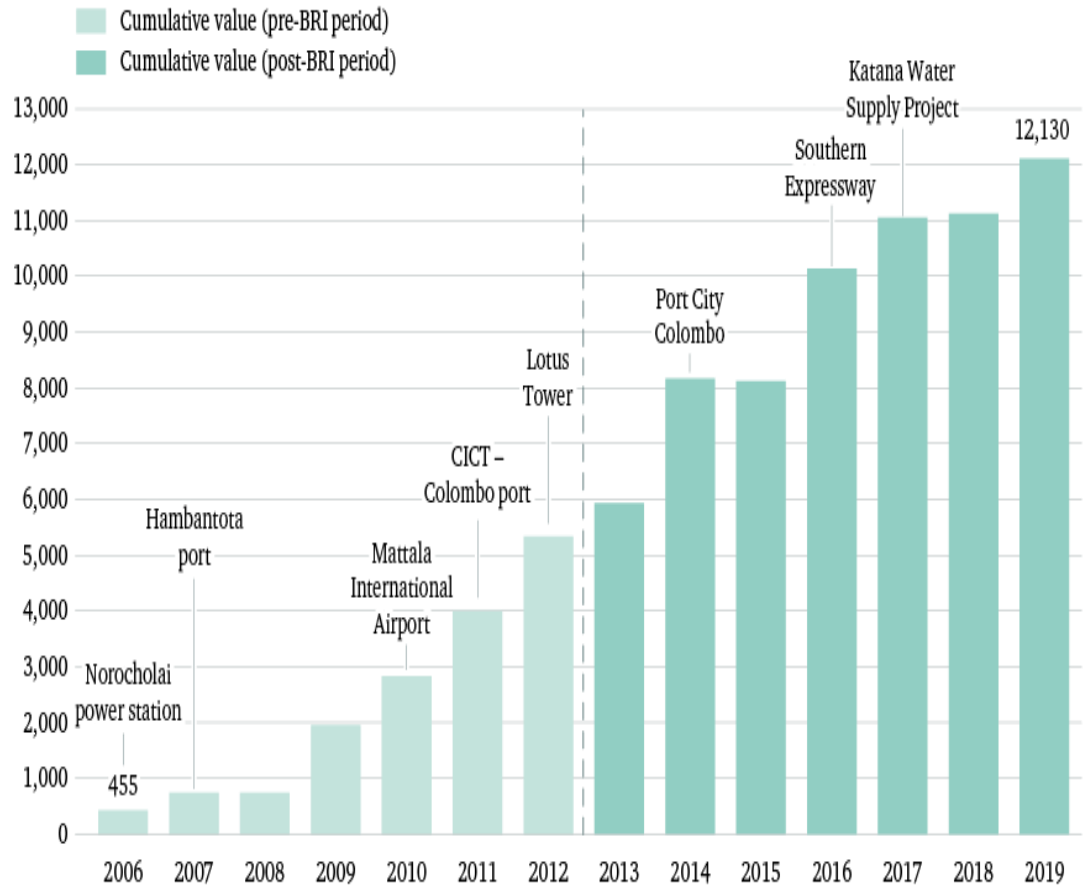
Sri Lanka: The Hambantota Port

Sri Lanka has emerged as one of the important partners of China in the IOR. China's first infrastructure investments in Sri Lanka took place in the 1970s in the form of outright grants, which included the construction of a convention centre.[11] Then, in the regime of President Mahinda Rajapaksa (2005-2015), the relationship was upgraded to a commercial model of interest-bearing loans for infrastructure development. As a result, several projects of transport, energy, and telecommunications with Chinese support were initiated, including the coal-fired Norocholai power station in 2006, the Hambantota port in 2007, the Mattala International Airport in 2010, the Colombo International Container Terminal (CICT) at the Colombo port in 2011, and the Lotus Tower in 2012. After the formal involvement of Sri Lanka in BRI in 2013, followed by extensive investment of China in several road and expressway projects, water and sanitation projects, and further investments in existing projects such as the revised Hambantota port deal in 2017 (Wignaraja, G. et al, 2020: 4).

The following chart clearly shows trends of China's investment in Sri Lanka from 2006 to 2019. Before BRI, China's investment was not as heavy as after the BRI. In 2006, investment was merely USD 455 million and by 2012 reached a level of more than USD 5000 million. Within five years since 2013, the investment was more than double, which was USD 12000 million. This upscaling trend of investment from China is showing the importance of Sri Lanka for BRI expansion in IOR for certain geopolitical and geo-economic motives. In January 2025, Sri Lanka's newly elected ideologically leftist President Anura Kumara Dissanayake showed a politically tilting attitude by preferring to visit China after the election to have agreements for widening the scope of businesses with China. Several MoUs were signed between stakeholders to facilitate BRI investment. The visit resulted in China's offer to invest $3.7 billion in building the refinery in order to enhance its business footprint in the smaller countries in South Asia. Experts have argued that these projects would likely be debt traps for host countries, which are then forced to give control of the strategic asset to China. However, Sri Lanka has already experienced such a debt trap with the Chinese project of Hambantota port (Economic Times, 2025). Debt to China is partly blamed for an unprecedented financial crisis, which led Sri Lanka to default on its USD 46 billion foreign debt in 2023. In 2017, unable to repay a huge Chinese loan, Sri Lanka allowed China Merchants Port Holdings to take over the port at Hambantota. The deal, which gave the Chinese company a 99-year lease, raised fears about Beijing's use of 'debt traps' in exerting its influence abroad. Professor Mick Moore from the University of Sussex and former consultant on Sri Lanka for the Asian Development Bank said even though it looked like Sri Lanka was struggling from the effects of global economic problems, it was "emphatically not that" and "This is the most man-made and voluntary economic crisis of which I know" (Hoskins, P., 2022). Early last year, Sri Lanka leased a white-elephant international airport built with Chinese loans to a joint venture between India's Shaurya Aeronautics and Russia's Airports of Regions Management Company, as the island nation's bankrupt government sought to offload loss-making assets. The airport is named after former President Mahinda

[11] The iconic Bandaranaike Memorial International Conference Hall.

Rajapaksha, who borrowed heavily from China for infrastructure projects that quickly became commercial failures (Economic Times, 2025).



Source: Chathamhouse.org

China's expanding footprint in Sri Lanka is a cause of concern for India because any Chinese strategic foothold in IOR threatens India's interests. China was once seen as having the upper hand in Sri Lanka through its huge loans and infrastructure investments. While China remains the country's largest bilateral lender, Sri Lanka's economic collapse provided an opportunity for India, which stepped in with massive financial and material assistance, including food, fuel, and medicines. For years, China has been trying to expand its influence in Sri Lanka, which it considers part of its strategic backyard. Dissanayake's visit to the Chinese capital can be seen as an effort to navigate the rivalry between India and China, which his party traditionally has leaned toward. In New Delhi, President Dissanayake Met PM Modi and said he would not allow Sri Lanka to be used in "a manner that is detrimental to the interest of India" (Economic Times, 2025).

The Maldives's Strategic Partnership with China

The Maldives, an archipelago in the Indian Ocean, has become embroiled in the regional power rivalry of India and China. For both countries, the Maldives is a crucial location for security purposes and to maintain regional strongholds through controlling international sea lanes. Hence, in India's Neighbourhood First policy and MAHASAGAR policy, the Maldives has consistently held a very strategic position. But the newly elected President, Mohamed Muizzu, in January 2024, has preferred to distance the country from India and to be closer to China. Therefore, to strengthen bilateral ties, China was chosen as the first destination for an official visit then India, when he signed twenty new agreements with Beijing that included financial and military assistance (Regan, H., 2024). Since the election's the political campaign, he garnered an agenda of "India Out" on the issues of treatment of the Indian minority since the BJP-led PM Modi held power in India (Jain, K., 2025). The alignment shift to China has sparked fresh concerns within India about the expansion of China's maritime influence in the IOR. However, since the Maldives joined with BRI in 2014, the country has received around USD 1.4 billion from Chinese banks, which now makes up 20 per cent of its public debt (Woo, R. and J. Cash, 2024). This percentage of external debt raised concerns about China's DTD, but the Maldives ambassador Fazeel Najeeb, in an interview with Yeping Yin, said that "The idea of so-called debt-trap is misleading and does not accurately reflect the dynamics inherent in the Maldives-China partnership…The Maldives has benefited much from the BRI, and we look forward to continuing this partnership into the long term" (Yeping, Y., 2025). China has made several large infrastructure investments in the Maldives through BRI, including the USD 200 million China-Maldives Friendship Bridge, which connects the islands of Hulhule and Hulhumale with the capital, Male (Yeping, Y., 2025). The upgraded relationship also offers potential benefits to China. The Maldives sits along one of the busiest maritime trade passages in the Indian Ocean, through which nearly 80 per cent of Chinese oil imports flow (Kaushik, Krishn, 2024). All these economic engagements led to the upgradation of China's partnership with the Maldives to a Strategic level in 2024 (The President's Office, 2024; PRC China, 2025).

India's Strategic Concerns on BRI in IOR

Indeed, the BRI has notably filled infrastructure development gaps in countries belonging to the Global South because most of its corridors are concentrated on their development. Morever specifically, experts are pronouncing for Asia as "*The Dawn of the Asian Century"* because of pace of economic development of region is high*,* on contrary, according to estimate of the Asian Development Bank (ADB), the region require around USD 22.6 trillion fund by 2030, or USD 1.5 trillion per year, to tackle poverty and malnutrition, and other kinds of non-traditional security challenges. In light of such funding requirements for Asia, the BRI would be a beacon for bridging development gaps (Agrawal, N., & Bhardwaj, A., 2024; PPIAF, 2025). Asia's geo-economics and geo-politics have taken more binary lens; India and China are indeed playing a leadership role. Their politics are intensely concentrated on the agenda *'who gets what'* at the regional level, as Gabriel Almond defined. In the context, China's BRI platform has evolved into a major to gain more stakes in the region, which has created insecurity for India. Historically, these two countries have been good adversaries in the region to challenge each other's stakes.

India has perceived the BRI as a regional architecture that is reshaping trade routes, transforming investment flows, and altering security patterns in Asia (CBBF, 2025). As mentioned above, because out of six economic corridors, four are specifically dedicated to invest in Asian economies, such as CCWAEC (USD 150 billion), CIPEC (USD 200 billion), BICMEC (USD 11 billion in Bangladesh, USD 4 billion in Sri Lanka, USD 15 billion in Myanmar), and CPEC (USD 62 billion in Pakistan) (Belt and Road Initiative, n.d.). Undoubtedly, such a marvellous economic inflow in Asia would go on to transform the region's economic landscape more in favour of China by compromising India's interests.

Even within Asia, the IOR region is the most significant for India for economic and security reasons. However, the IOR is also emerging as pivotal in China's foreign policy because major trade routes are situated along this maritime region. Of course, dominance over it would safeguard China's strategic interests in the region. Investments in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, Bangladesh, and the Maldives have shown that these countries have fallen into China's economic-diplomatic traps, either due to investment loans or a lack of counter-capabilities. The BRI outreach in the IOR has raised a major criticism from Indian policymakers on its objectives, which are not purely 'economic' but rather 'strategic' and directed against India. 'Debt-Trap Diplomacy (DTD)' or 'Cheque-book Diplomacy' is a major critical argument emerged from the side of Indian policy experts. Indian scholar and diplomat Brahma Chellaney, in a self-authored article titled "China's Creditor Imperialism" (2017), articulated that the DTD is China's new foreign policy tool closely linked to the BRI, which is particularly committed against India's security interests in the region by monopolising partner countries' policy decision-making autonomy (Chellaney, Brahma, 2017). He warned the Indian intelligentsia to recognise in early China's economic incursion into its periphery through the DTD, therefore need to build a counter policy. The DTD is a policy of intentionally lending excessive loan amounts to low-income states for a specific period. Suppose the country is unable to return debt dues in time, then China forces countries to relinquish ownership of its strategic assets for an extended period until the debt is repaid. In South Asia, nearly all small countries are victims of China's strategy and, in turn, aim to curtail India's strategic interests in the IOR (Chellaney, Brahma, 2017).

By 2025, Sri Lanka's total external debt is USD 57 billion, of which 20 per cent belongs to China (Trading Economics, 2025). In 2015, it was around USD 40 billion, Sri Lanka was facing certain issues of political-economic stability, and Colombo found it challenging to repay China's debt. At the time, China compelled Sri Lanka to lease the Hambantota port for 99 years in place of returning the debt amount. In July 2017, Sri Lanka signed a USD 1.1 billion deal to sell a 70% stake in the port to China (Sanyal, Ankita, 2023). The New York Times journalist Kai Schultz described it as a deal that *'threatens the country's sovereignty'* (Schultz, Kai, 2017). Immediately after the agreement, Brahma Chellaney blatantly criticised the agreement and called it a '*closed strategic threat for India*' (Chellaney, Brahma, 2017). Because China is obsessively monopolising the high-value assets with strategic importance on key Indian Ocean trade routes to ensure India's containment in the region (Chellaney, Brahma, 2017). Unlike Sri Lanka, China's loans to Bangladesh and Nepal are not posing a risk factor for India. Because Bangladesh's public debt remains 'sustainable' with a 'low risk of external and public debt distress', it is unlikely to face a similar fate to that of Sri Lanka and Pakistan (World Bank, 2022). Most of Nepal's external debt (USD 7.83 billion) is owed to multilateral agencies, such as the

World Bank and the ADB (Sanyal, Ankita, 2023). Recently, U.S. officials have also raised concerns over China's DTD in the Indo-Pacific region. Therefore, in May 2019, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused China of using DTD, as it involved corruption techniques and non-transparency, aiming to influence the given state's critical infrastructure to undermine its political functioning by creating enormous debt (Panda, A., 2019) and many depicted it "China's neo-colonialism in the twenty-first century" (Rana P.B. & Xiabai, 2020: 2).

Another concern is raised by India on China's exploitation of Pakistan's strategic location to target India's stake in the region. Historically, India has had conflicts with Pakistan over land boundary issues. A political aphorism, 'Enemy's enemy is friends', has been applied by China against India. China and Pakistan have built good strategic ties, particularly after the inclusion of Pakistan in the BRI, and CPEC is being particularly dedicated to Pakistan. The CPEC is primarily responsible for intensifying strategic competition between India and China in the IOR. Along the CPEC, two major infrastructure developments are disturbing India, such as the Gwadar port-building and the Karakoram-Himalaya highway routes. Through it, China is attempting to influence regional political dynamics to target India's geo-economic and geo-political stakes. The Himalayan highway traverses a politically sensitive area, over which both India and Pakistan have conflicting claims (Samuel, A., 2018: 97). China's significant investments in the Gwadar Port in Pakistan, the Hambantota Port in Sri Lanka, and the Chittagong Port in Bangladesh have established a direct trade partnership with the entire West Asia (or Middle East)[12] region, which has sent a clear security signal to India. Pakistan's Gwadar Port holds significant strategic and economic importance due to its location, situated on the Arabian Sea and serving as a bridge connecting South Asia, West Asia, and Central Asia. However, Pakistan's political standing in regional politics against India has appeared enhanced. Furthermore, Gwadar's proximity to the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz allows Pakistan to effectively monitor vital sea lines of communication (SLOCs) (Payeng, Y., 2024). Such investment has provided China a legitimate strategic ground to establish 'logistic bases' in the IOR region (Samuel, A., 2018: 97), thereby shifting the security architecture of the IOR in favour of China, which has created significant security apprehension among Indian policymakers about compromising India's stake there (Faruque T., 2018, pp. 4-5). In the region's politics, it has become apparent that China has expanded its footprint by aligning with countries through the BRI to overtake India in both economic and security dimensions (Bajpayee, C., 2017: 117).

India's counter-diplomacy against the BRI

In the contemporary phase of the global order, India has emerged as one of the major powers due to its economic development, participation in global politics, and demography. India is considering a major responsibility to play a vital political-economic role in Asia, specifically. China is one of the challenges for India in securing its geopolitical and geo-economic stakes. Both countries' power politics have become more visible across

[12] The term West Asia is very new in academic therefore unfamiliar, which is used as an alternative to Middle East. The term West Asia show India centric orientation towards the region, while the Middle East show the Western inclination towards the region. Author has prescribed to the Orientalist framework behind using the term of the West Asia.

the IOR because of the BRI. India has found itself more in diplomatic difficulty in securing regional stakes as China, through BRI, is taking control of strategic assets, such as ports, straits, and choke points. It has compelled Indian policymakers to place a diplomatic framework to counter China's influence in the region. Nevertheless, India's Foreign Policy in the 21st century has appeared quite pragmatic in comparison to the last century in taking substantial policy steps to forward its strategic interests against China. For example, the boundary issues with China, on which India has been proactive. In recent times, the Doklam controversy (2017), where India never retreated from its political stance. Beyond the contestation over the boundary, against the BRI at the regional level, India has strategised its 'Pragmatic Multi-alignment policy' to preserve geopolitical and geo-economic interests in the IOR by aligning with different regional actors according to strategic preference (K.H. Mohammed, 2025). The 'Pragmatic Multi-Alignment Policy' has led to India's involvement in different regional initiatives such as the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), and the QUAD partnership, etc., which is a relevant part of the discussion in India's counter-diplomatic initiative against BRI.

The International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC)

The INSTC (2000) is a strategic multi-modal trade route connecting India with Central Asia, Russia, and Europe through sea, rail, and road networks was signed mainly among India, Iran, and Russia, and more than 13 countries joined it later on. Its vital objectives were enhancing trade and transport connectivity among the countries along the routes (Aliyev, N., 2024). Therefore, India's Ministry of Foreign Affairs found that the potential outcome of INSTC would lie in enhancing India's geo-strategic connectivity with Central Asia and the Eurasian region and vice versa (MEA, 2023). Over the period, India has been more enthusiastic about the developmental initiatives in the project, but certain regional conflicting issues, such as Israel-Iran, US involvement in the region, and the Russia-Ukraine conflict, have slowed its progress. But the INSTC has once again come into focus of India's Foreign Policy agenda due to China's hyper-involvement in the region through the MSR via Pakistan (Taneja, N. et al, 2024, p. 3). Another reason was that, in 2021, India's nearly 300 container ships were stopped in the Suez Canal for six days, which caused disruptions in trade and led to heavy losses for shipping companies. These frequently occurring incidents also created an urgency for India's policymakers to find alternative routes for trade. There are three strategic advantages in operationalising INSTC: first, it offers an alternative to the Suez Canal route; second, it provides India an opportunity to explore the untapped export potential that exists in the INSTC member countries, especially the Central Asian Countries; and India would be able to place a counter-strategy against BRI (Taneja, N. et al, 2024, p. 3). The Chabahar Port project in Iran, which connects all members of the INSTC, is a centrepiece for India's regional strategic ambitions. Therefore, focal in India's counter CPEC strategy. Scholars have also argued that perhaps it is more important than the Bandar Abbas Port (the original Iranian Port that was part of the INSTC), because of its proximity, which provides more direct and cost-effective access to Central Asian countries via Afghanistan and as a key access point to the eastern and western flanks of the corridor. Although Afghanistan is not part of the INSTC, it has acceded to the TIR convention. To provide acceleration for

development, recently, in May 2024, India and Iran signed a 10-year agreement for the management and development of the Chabahar Port, thereby advancing the INSTC (Taneja, N. et al, 2024, p. 4). However, India's funded construction of the road network linking the Zaranj border crossing between Afghanistan and Iran aims to create a similar link between the Chabahar port and Central Asia (Lodhi & Bilal, 2019, p. 233). Iran-US conflict (2026) has created confusion over the development of the Chabahar Port as Iran is facing strict US sanctions. Official authorities from both sides have conveyed several dialogues to find alternative legal ways to continue access to the port (FPJ Journal, 2026).

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD)

The QUAD is a diplomatic partnership between India, the United States, Japan, and Australia that has emerged as a key forum in the evolving strategic architecture of the Indo-Pacific region. Currently, the Quad has jumped to prominence; it developed in two distinct stages. The origin of Quad 1.0 lies in the devastating 2004 Indian Ocean Tsunami, when four countries formed the "Tsunami Core Group" to coordinate the emergency response and humanitarian assistance. In the subsequent years, there were efforts to institutionalise the Quad, spearheaded by Japanese PM Abe Shinzo, during 2006-2008. Abe's rationale for the Quad was to defend the international rule-based order, implying that China had become a threat to that order. By 2017, with the rise of China's assertive military behaviour in the East and South China Seas, as well as along the border with India, a returned Abe resurrected the idea of the Quad. Abe had begun advocating for a democratic security diamond to preserve the 'common good' in the Indo-Pacific as early as 2012 (Fraser, D., 2023). That transformed QUAD into a platform for regional resilience and cooperation. Two frameworks are often invoked to interpret this transformation: Strategic balancing and containment. In the current century, India is one of the main epicentres in regional security architecture in the Indo-Pacific region; however, India's participation in it is to counter rising China's influence in the IOR. China's growing economic and military influence in the Indo-Pacific region has been a significant factor in shaping the aims and objectives of QUAD. Expansion of China's strategic footprint in the region by giving economic promises to partnering countries has created strategic concerns for the like-minded democratic countries in the region. Major concern is that small countries' sovereignty has been under threat because of economic dependencies, which is also called as DTD. That has directly impinged on its sovereignty and territorial integrity as it creates an imbalance in India's neighbourhood through the String of Pearls strategy (Trigunayat, A. & A. Khemka, 2024).

In the recent QUAD Foreign Ministers' Meeting (July 2025), they announced key initiatives to strengthen maritime and transnational security, economic prosperity and security, critical and emerging technology, and support humanitarian assistance and emergency response across the region. In the context of maritime security, the two most essential frameworks are the Indo-Pacific Partnerships for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) and the Maritime Initiative for Training in the Indo-Pacific (MAITRI), which aims to assess the capability gaps in the region and enhance maritime capabilities in consultation with regional partners (MEA, 2025).

Conclusion

The BRI has helped China to shift its image globally as one of the emerging 'major actors' alongside the USA in the 21st century (Wang, C., 2025). It has truly envisioned China's global vision that was choreographed in the document "A Global Community of Shared Future: China's Proposals and Actions", which aims for the betterment of global humanity. On the line, other policies, including the GDI (2021), the GSI (2021), and the CGI (2023), were also launched. This paper has purposefully focused on the illustration of the profile of BRI, which currently involves partnerships with more than 150 countries, with an estimated value of USD 1.175 trillion. Though experts claim that such an extensive global footprint of China may displace the centre of economic activities from the Atlantic region to Asia. But, right now, as China's economy is slowing down may be impossible to prove the claim at least for a few decades. No doubt, developing countries in Asia and Africa have significantly benefited from the BRI investments in basic infrastructure facilities. Like the success stories elsewhere, India has raised prominent concerns against the BRI outreach in the IOR because of the threat to its strategic interests and autonomy in the region. China is strategically using Pakistan, the Maldives and Sri Lanka to contain India's geo-political and geo-economic stakes. Therefore, India has taken effective countersteps to contain China's BRI and secure its own stakes in the IOR. Aftermath, the IOR has become a geopolitical hotspot because of rising strategic competition between India and China. The stand includes collaboration with the USA in the Indo-Pacific region through QUAD, enhancing partnership with Iran on Chabahar Port through the promotion of INSTC, and increasing collaboration with the South Asian countries. India's strategic engagement with the countries in the IOR is called as the 'Necklace of Diamonds', which includes building Changi Naval Base in Singapore, Chabahar Port in Iran, the Assumption Islands in Seychelles, and Duqm Port in Oman. In addition, India has also built strong ties with Vietnam and Mongolia to counter the Chinese 'String of Pearls' strategy. China's enhanced political leverage in South Asia would not only pose a threat to India but also to the United States' stakes in the Indo-Pacific. Thus, the USA has also initiated a counter-policy in the Asia-Pacific Region, i.e. the "Asian Rebalance Strategy" by actively including India in such strategic game diplomacy. India, at its own level, opted out of all three BRI forums (in 2017, 2019, and 2023) to show its reluctance against China's unnecessary interference in the region (Rafi & Amna, 2018, p. 106).

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OPERATIONALISING DETERRENCE BY DENIAL: ALLIANCE NETWORKS, FORWARD POSTURE, AND THE MARITIME FOUNDATIONS OF U.S. STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

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Abstract

This article examines how the United States operationalises deterrence by denial in the Indo-Pacific and argues that contemporary maritime power rests on systemic resilience, rather than platform concentration. As precision strike systems, pervasive surveillance, and anti-access capabilities erode the survivability of concentrated fleets, effective deterrence increasingly depends on distributed forward posture, dense alliance networks, and resilient maritime infrastructure. The study advances the concept of a maritime denial architecture to explain how alliance integration, spatial dispersion, and logistical depth collectively prevent rapid, low-cost coercive gains. Drawing on contemporary patterns of Indo-Pacific maritime competition, the analysis demonstrates that deterrence is becoming structural rather than episodic, embedded in enduring networks of access, sustainment, interoperability, and infrastructural connectivity. By bridging deterrence theory and maritime strategy, the article shows how equilibrium can be maintained under conditions of constrained escalation without reliance on escalation dominance.

Keywords

Deterrence by Denial, Maritime Strategy, Alliance Networks, Logistics Infrastructure, Strategic Competition.

Resumo

Este artigo analisa a forma como os Estados Unidos concretizam a dissuasão por negação na região do Indo-Pacífico e defende que o poder marítimo contemporâneo assenta na resiliência sistémica, em vez da concentração de plataformas. À medida que os sistemas de ataque de precisão, a vigilância generalizada e as capacidades anti-acesso minam a capacidade de sobrevivência das frotas concentradas, uma dissuasão eficaz depende cada vez mais de uma postura avançada e distribuída, de redes densas de alianças e de infraestruturas marítimas resilientes. O estudo propõe o conceito de uma arquitetura de negação marítima para explicar como a integração das alianças, a dispersão espacial e a profundidade logística impedem, em conjunto, ganhos coercivos rápidos e de baixo custo. Com base nos padrões contemporâneos de concorrência marítima no Indo-Pacífico, a análise demonstra que a dissuasão está a tornar-se estrutural, em vez de episódica, incorporada em redes duradouras de acesso, sustentação, interoperabilidade e conectividade infraestrutural. Ao estabelecer uma ponte entre a teoria da dissuasão e a estratégia marítima, o artigo mostra como o equilíbrio pode ser mantido em condições de escalada limitada, sem depender do domínio da escalada.

Palavras-chave

Dissuasão por Negação, Estratégia Marítima, Redes de Alianças, Infraestrutura Logística, Concorrência Estratégica.

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OPERATIONALISING DETERRENCE BY DENIAL: ALLIANCE NETWORKS, FORWARD POSTURE, AND THE MARITIME FOUNDATIONS OF U.S. STRATEGY IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

TALHA LATIEF TANTRAY

Introduction

The character of maritime security competition in the Indo-Pacific is undergoing a structural transformation (Tsailas, 2025). For decades, U.S. Sea power strategy rested on the assumption that command of the sea achieved through superior fleets, concentrated strike power, and forward dominance was the central mechanism through which major powers deterred conflict and preserved order (Till, 2013). Today, this model is increasingly strained. Precision missile proliferation, long-range surveillance, cyber vulnerability, and anti-access systems have rendered concentrated naval superiority more exposed, costly, and politically escalatory. At the same time, revisionist challenges in contested maritime regions of the Indo-Pacific have grown more persistent yet remain deliberately calibrated below the threshold of open war. The strategic problem facing the United States, therefore, is not how to win a large-scale naval battle, but how to prevent incremental coercion and faits accomplish, in an environment where escalation dominance is uncertain and the political costs of major war are prohibitive (Li, 2009). This dilemma places deterrence by denial, rather than deterrence by punishment, at the centre of contemporary U.S. maritime strategy.

The puzzle is operational as well as theoretical. The United States seeks to deter aggression and preserve regional stability in the Indo-Pacific, without relying on immediate escalation or large-scale force concentration that could trigger rapid conflict expansion (Frederick et al., 2020). Traditional deterrence models emphasize the ability to impose overwhelming retaliatory costs. Yet maritime disputes today unfold in grey zones of coercion, limited clashes, and persistent presence operations where decisive punishment is either implausible or strategically counterproductive. The challenge, then, is to operationalize deterrence by denial to construct a posture that convinces potential challengers that objectives cannot be achieved in the first place. This is the logic of denial. But denial at sea is uniquely difficult. Oceans are vast, mobile, and porous; naval forces are episodic rather than permanently territorial (Vego, 2018); and maritime infrastructure is globally networked yet unevenly defended. How, then, can denial be made credible and sustainable across the Indo-Pacific's dispersed maritime geography?

This article argues that U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific has shifted from a paradigm of control toward a paradigm of denial built upon a distributed and networked maritime

architecture. Rather than concentrating power in a small number of high-value platforms designed to dominate sea space, emerging strategy disperses capabilities across alliance networks, forward posture arrangements, logistical nodes, surveillance systems, and rotational forces. Deterrence by denial, in this view, is not primarily a function of individual weapons systems, but of a resilient system of systems that complicates an adversary's operational planning and reduces the feasibility of limited, rapid gains. Denial becomes a property of strategic structure rather than of platform superiority. The ability to sustain presence, reinforce rapidly, maintain logistics under pressure, and operate across allied territories collectively forms what can be described as a maritime denial architecture (Conway et al., 2008).

This transformation reflects both technological and political realities. Advances in long-range strike and sensing capabilities have eroded the survivability of concentrated fleets and forward bases, making traditional sea control strategies more vulnerable. Simultaneously, alliance politics has become foundational to maritime stability in the Indo-Pacific. Regional partners increasingly provide access, basing, intelligence integration, and logistical depth that extend operational resilience (Tow, 2020). Infrastructure- ports, prepositioned stocks, repair facilities, fuel networks, and data systems, has emerged as a strategic variable equal in importance to combat power. The operational question is no longer simply how many ships can be deployed, but how long they can persist, how quickly they can disperse and recombine, and how effectively they can draw on distributed support under contested conditions (Mansouri et al., 2010). Denial, therefore, is sustained not by decisive battle but by endurance, redundancy, and alliance-enabled integration.

This reorientation raises three interrelated research questions that structure the analysis. First, how is deterrence by denial operationalized in U.S. maritime strategy in the Indo-Pacific? Second, what roles do alliance networks, forward posture, and maritime infrastructure play in enabling denial to function as a credible deterrent mechanism? Third, how does a distributed maritime architecture alter the dynamics of escalation and stability compared to traditional models of naval dominance? Addressing these questions requires bridging theoretical debates in deterrence studies with the practical evolution of maritime posture and alliance integration. Deterrence theory has long recognized denial as a distinct pathway to stability, yet it has often treated the problem in abstract terms of force ratios and defensive capabilities (Zagare, 1996). Maritime strategy, by contrast, has focused on operational art, sea control, and fleet employment, frequently without embedding these practices in broader deterrence frameworks (Vego, 2017). The intersection between these fields remains underdeveloped, particularly regarding how denial can be institutionalized across alliance networks and logistical systems rather than confined to tactical defence. The article's central claim is that deterrence by denial in the Indo-Pacific is not primarily a weapons problem but a networked strategic system. Weapons matter, but they function within a broader maritime foundation that integrates alliance cooperation, forward dispersion, and logistics infrastructure. This system distributes risk, multiplies operational dilemmas for potential aggressors, and lowers the likelihood that limited coercive actions can succeed quickly or cheaply. By embedding forces within allied territories and integrated support networks, maritime denial complicates targeting, enhances resilience, and signals long-term commitment without necessitating immediate escalation. Stability in the Indo-Pacific thus depends less on

visible dominance and more on the structural capacity to sustain contested presence and deny operational breakthroughs.

Conceptually, the article advances the idea of a "*maritime denial architecture*" to capture this transformation. This term refers to the integrated web of alliance networks, forward posture arrangements, logistics chains, sensing systems, and rotational deployments that collectively operationalize denial. It emphasizes structure over platform and system over sortie. By focusing on architecture, the analysis highlights how deterrence emerges from the interaction of political, operational, and infrastructural components rather than from any single capability. In an era when infrastructure can be as decisive as firepower, denial becomes a question of systemic design.

The contribution of this study is two-fold. Theoretically, it reconnects deterrence by denial with maritime strategy, demonstrating how abstract deterrence concepts are translated into operational and institutional forms in the Indo-Pacific. It extends deterrence theory by showing how denial can be constructed through alliance networks and distributed posture rather than static defence's alone (Mirkovic et al., 2003). Empirically and analytically, it provides a framework for understanding U.S. maritime strategy as a coherent denial architecture rather than a collection of isolated deployments. By foregrounding alliance integration, forward dispersion, and infrastructural depth as maritime foundations of strategy, the study offers a lens for assessing resilience, escalation control, and the long-term sustainability of deterrence in the Indo-Pacific.

Theory -The Logic of Deterrence by Denial

Deterrence by denial rests on a simple but demanding strategic logic: conflict is prevented not because an adversary fears punishment after the fact, but because it doubts it can achieve its objectives in the first place (Stein, 1991), especially through rapid, limited action designed to present others with a fait accompli. Classical deterrence scholarship often privileged punishment, yet a parallel lineage from analyses of conventional defence in Europe during the Cold War to contemporary studies of limited aims strategies has consistently shown that denial becomes decisive when revisionist actors seek quick, low-cost gains under the shadow of escalation constraints (Barrash & Nieman, 2025). In such settings, the credibility of retaliation is politically and militarily uncertain, but the feasibility of success can still be directly undermined. The strategic interaction turns not merely on material balances, but on expectations of operational friction, endurance, and the defender's capacity to prevent consolidation of initial gains. At sea particularly across the dispersed geography of the Indo-Pacific, where sovereignty is often ambiguous and presence episodic, this logic becomes both more difficult to operationalize and more strategically necessary.

The core claim of denial theory is psychological, but structurally grounded (Rathbun, 2007): deterrence succeeds when the challenger believes that even a well-planned, limited operation will become protracted, costly, and operationally uncertain. What matters is not the absolute balance of power, but the perceived likelihood that early advantages can be translated into durable control. This insight situates denial within broader bargaining and war termination theory. Limited coercive strategies rely on speed, ambiguity, and asymmetry (Sechser, 2010); they aim to alter facts before defenders can

mobilize political will or military capability. Denial erodes precisely these enabling conditions. By introducing delay, friction, and the prospect of stalemate, it transforms an apparently manageable probe into a risky and potentially self-defeating enterprise. In this sense, denial is less about static defence than about structuring the operational environment so that consolidation becomes improbable.

To operationalize this logic in maritime strategy requires translating psychological expectations into institutional and infrastructural form. Three interlocking mechanisms perform this function: resilience, redundancy, and sustainment. These are not discrete capabilities but systemic properties. Resilience refers to the capacity to absorb an initial blow without operational collapse (Kahan et al., 2009). In deterrence terms, resilience undermines the expectation that a surprise move can paralyze response (Wilkinson, 2020). Redundancy multiplies defensive nodes-bases, access points, logistics hubs complicating targeting and reducing the payoff from striking any single point. Sustainment ensures that a contest can be prolonged, converting a short-war gambit into a drawn-out struggle (Hepola, 2024). Together, these mechanisms reshape the cost–benefit calculus of aggression by attacking the temporal dimension of coercion: they deny the possibility of rapid consolidation.

Maritime strategy provides a particularly revealing arena for observing how these mechanisms are embedded in forward posture and alliance networks. Unlike territory on land, the sea is not permanently held; control is episodic and contingent on presence, access, and logistics. Resilience in this environment extends beyond hardened defence; it requires the ability to maintain operations despite disruption to ships, bases, or communications networks. Distributed basing exemplifies this principle. When forces are spread across multiple locations rather than concentrated in a few large hubs, the operational system can absorb strikes or political denial of access without ceasing to function. The degradation of one node does not translate into systemic paralysis. From a deterrence perspective, this signals to a potential aggressor that even a well-executed opening move will not prevent sustained defensive response. Historical experience reinforces this logic: naval campaigns in both world wars demonstrated that fleets dependent on narrow forward facilities were vulnerable to operational shock, whereas dispersed networks of repair, resupply, and access enabled endurance under pressure (NSO, 2025).

Redundancy operates at the level of political geography as much as military deployment (shown in Table 1). Alliance access networks create multiple pathways for presence, reinforcement, and sustainment (Cranmer et al., 2012). While alliance theory often emphasizes signalling resolve, its structural contribution to denial is equally significant. By multiplying sites of access- ports, airfields, logistics hubs- alliances generate a web rather than a line of defence. This networked geography complicates adversary planning: no single strike or coercive action can decisively foreclose defender options (Reid, 2025). Coalition maritime operations over recent decades illustrate how access agreements, rotational deployments, and shared infrastructure create layered operational depth (Kaushal, 2019). In deterrence terms, alliance-enabled redundancy increases uncertainty about where, how, and through whom defenders will respond. It embeds commitment in institutional arrangements, thereby raising the threshold for successful limited aggression without relying exclusively on formal treaty triggers.

Table1. United States Strategic Military Presence in the Indo-Pacific, 2025

Facility / Command	Location	Type of Presence	Strategic Role
Camp H. M. Smith	Oahu, Hawaii (US)	Headquarters / Command	Headquarters of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM) (regional command & control)
Naval Base Guam	Guam (US Territory)	Naval Base	Key logistics and submarine support base; supports Pacific Fleet and 7th Fleet units
United States Fleet Activities Yokosuka	Yokosuka, Japan	Navy Base	Home port for U.S. 7th Fleet and regional naval operations
Naval Support Facility Diego Garcia	Diego Garcia (British Indian Ocean Territory)	Naval Support Base (leased)	Deep-water support facility; key for Indian Ocean operations
U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (INDOPACOM)	Oahu, Hawaii (US)	Geographic Combatant Command	Integrates U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines & Space Forces in region
U.S. Naval Forces Japan / Korea	Japan & South Korea	Subordinate Naval Commands	Support naval operations and alliance integration
Special Operations Command Pacific	Oahu, Hawaii (US)	Special Operations	Regional SOF coordination & rapid response
Naval Medical Research Unit Indo Pacific (NAMRU-2)	Multiple SE Asian countries	Research / Support	Biomedical research supporting Navy & regional health security)

Source: Council on Foreign Relations

Sustainment, the third mechanism, anchors denial in maritime foundations. Many contemporary coercive strategies assume that political and logistical constraints will limit the defender's ability to fight for long (Smetana & Ludvik, 2019). If operations can conclude quickly, external intervention may be deterred or delayed. Sustainment directly contests this premise. Robust maritime logistics fuel distribution, munitions stocks, repair capacity, protected supply chains enable forces to persist in contested environments (Fleming et al., 2024). Theoretical work on protracted conflict underscores that endurance can substitute for initial superiority; the side able to remain engaged shapes bargaining outcomes. At sea, underway replenishment, prepositioned supplies, and diversified port access transform presence from a symbolic gesture into a durable strategic condition. Denial thereby removes the attacker's confidence that time is on its side.

These mechanisms are mutually reinforcing and collectively constitute what may be termed a maritime denial architecture. Resilience without sustainment merely postpones erosion; redundancy without integration can be defeated sequentially; sustainment without dispersion remains vulnerable to disruption. Denial thus emerges not from isolated capabilities but from the interaction of alliance networks, distributed forward posture, and infrastructural depth. This reframes the central theoretical move: deterrence by denial should be understood as a structured system rather than a concentration of force. Traditional naval thought often equated deterrence with visible mass carrier groups, large formations, forward dominance (Speller, 2023). Yet in

environments characterized by precision strike and surveillance, concentration can invite targeting and accelerate escalation. A systemic denial posture distributes capability across space, institutions, and networks to ensure that no single loss becomes strategically decisive.

This perspective also refines debates on the offense–defence balance. Denial does not require impermeable defence; it requires sufficient systemic resilience that offensive gains cannot be consolidated (Demchak, 2021). The analytical focus therefore shifts from platform-centric metrics- numbers of ships, missile ranges to relational qualities: connectivity, interoperability, and depth. Exercises, shared command-and-control, logistics integration, and alliance coordination become central determinants of deterrent credibility. A state with fewer platforms but dense alliance networks and robust maritime infrastructure may present a more formidable denial problem than a numerically superior but brittle adversary.

Empirical patterns in recent maritime competitions illustrate this dynamic. Where defenders lack dispersed access or logistical depth, challengers have exploited local superiority and political hesitation to alter facts incrementally. Conversely, theatres characterized by layered access and persistent presence have proven more resistant to rapid change. Limited probes become entangled in broader systems of response, increasing uncertainty and raising the risk of protracted contestation. The strategic effect is not to eliminate rivalry but to bound it transforming sharp probes into managed competitions. This is precisely the equilibrium denial seeks to produce: a setting in which aggression appears unlikely to yield decisive advantage (Mazarr et al., 2021).

Understanding denial as systemic architecture also clarifies its relationship to escalation control (Collins, 2012). Because denial operates through prevention rather than retaliation, it allows states to signal resolve through enduring posture and integrated infrastructure rather than dramatic force surges. Distributed and networked arrangements embed commitment in everyday operations. At the same time, the visible density of alliances, access agreements, and logistics nodes communicates that coercion will encounter sustained and collective resistance. Deterrence is achieved not through threats of annihilation but through the steady demonstration that the strategic environment is structured against rapid success (Michaels, 2024).

The logic of deterrence by denial at sea therefore hinges on structuring expectations about time, feasibility, and endurance. Through resilience, redundancy, and sustainment, operationalized via alliance networks, distributed forward posture, and maritime infrastructure, defenders construct an environment in which limited aggression cannot remain limited in its strategic effects. The adversary confronts not a single defensive line but an interconnected system whose unravelling would require prolonged escalation. Denial thus becomes an emergent property of architecture rather than of mass. This systemic conception provides the theoretical foundation for analysing how U.S. strategy in the Indo-Pacific translates deterrence by denial from abstract principle into operational practice.

Alliance Networks as Denial Multipliers

Alliances have re-emerged as central instruments of maritime strategy not merely as diplomatic alignments or signalling devices, but as structural multipliers of deterrence by denial (Çubukçuoğlu, 2016). In an era defined by precision strike, surveillance saturation, and the diffusion of anti-access capabilities, the strategic value of geography depends less on physical distance alone than on how political relationships convert space into operational depth (Krepinevich et al., 2003). Denial understood as the ability to prevent an adversary from achieving rapid, low-cost gains becomes credible when maritime defenders operate within dense alliance networks that disperse forces, sustain continuity under pressure, and embed commitment across multiple states. Alliances do not merely aggregate capabilities; they restructure the strategic environment by thickening it transforming maritime space from open maneuver terrain into a layered, interconnected defensive system.

The first mechanism through which alliances multiply denial is base access, which translates political alignment into spatial dispersion. Traditional basing models concentrated forces in a limited number of large facilities optimizing efficiency but creating vulnerability (Silva et al., 2019). Contemporary precision-strike environments render such concentration increasingly risky. In the Indo-Pacific, U.S. access arrangements across Japan (Yokosuka, Sasebo, Kadena), South Korea (Busan), Australia (Darwin rotational presence), the Philippines (expanded EDCA sites), Singapore (Changi Naval Base), and Diego Garcia collectively create a distributed basing lattice rather than a linear chain. This network reduces the probability that an opening strike kinetic or political, can neutralize forward presence. From a deterrence perspective, dispersion undermines adversary confidence in achieving paralysis through decapitation or pre-emption. The strategic map becomes elastic rather than fixed (Glaser, 1992). Even if one node is degraded, access elsewhere preserves operational continuity. Geography, in this configuration, is no longer a static constraint but a dynamic product of alliance relationships.

This dispersion is reinforced through multinational exercises (given in Table2) that institutionalize access and demonstrate interoperability. Exercises such as RIMPAC (biennial), Malabar (annual), Talisman Sabre (biennial), Balikatan (annual), and Super Garuda Shield (annual) routinely integrate naval, air, and amphibious forces across allied territories. In RIMPAC 2024, for example, more than two dozen navies participated in complex maritime warfare drills spanning the Central Pacific, illustrating both scale and coordination depth. Such repeated, institutionalized interaction converts nominal access into operationalized readiness. The deterrent signal lies not merely in participation but in routinized coordination across dispersed theatres. A challenger must account not only for U.S. forces but for a coalition accustomed to joint operations across multiple maritime subregions.

Table2. Major U.S.-Led and U.S.-Participating Naval Exercises in the Indo-Pacific Region

Exercise Name	**Primary Participants**	**Frequency / Schedule**	**Most Recent Instance (Year)**	**Region / Notes**
RIMPAC (Rim of the Pacific)	USA + Pacific allies	Biennial (even years)	2024	Largest multilateral maritime warfare exercise; Pacific waters.
Malabar	USA, India, Japan, Australia	Annual	2025	Quad naval exercise covering Indo-Pacific waters.
Talisman Sabre	USA + Australia + others	Biennial	2025	Large multi-domain warfighting exercise in/around Australia, significant naval component.
Super Garuda Shield	USA + Indonesia + multiple partners	Annual	2025	Major U.S.–Indonesia multinational land/naval exercise (Indo-Pacific focus).
Pacific Vanguard	USA + Allied navies	Annual	2025	Cooperative maritime operations including ASW and surface drills.
Balikatan	USA + Philippines (+ other partners)	Annual	2025	Combined USA-Philippines joint drills including maritime scenarios.
Resolute Force Pacific / REFORPAC	USA + Allies	Annual	2025	Large Pacific contingency response exercise with maritime air & strike aspects.

Source: Compiled by the author from official releases of the U.S. Department of Defense, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command (USINDOPACOM), U.S. Navy press briefings, and exercise fact sheets (RIMPAC, Malabar, Talisman Sabre, Balikatan, Pacific Vanguard, Super Garuda Shield).

The second mechanism is interoperability, which converts dispersed presence into coherent capability. Contemporary alliance cooperation extends beyond symbolic exercises toward integration of command-and-control systems, data-sharing architectures, logistics procedures, and operational doctrines (Toroi, 2024). Interoperability reduces friction in coalition operations, allowing allied units to function as components of a unified maritime system (Pope, 2001). In the Indo-Pacific context, U.S.–Japan integrated air and missile defence coordination, shared maritime domain awareness initiatives in Southeast Asia, and coordinated anti-submarine warfare drills among Quad partners illustrate how distributed forces are knitted together into functional cohesion. Without such integration, dispersion risks fragmentation. With it, redundancy becomes resilience.

The theoretical significance is straightforward: interoperability lowers the threshold for collective action. A distributed denial posture must operate under conditions of disruption; if one partner's infrastructure is degraded, others must be able to compensate. Shared communications standards, cross-servicing agreements, and logistics interoperability ensure that coalition forces can plug into one another's supply chains and sensor networks. In deterrence terms, this complicates segmentation

strategies, efforts by an adversary to isolate a single actor or theatre. A coercive move against one state risks activating an integrated response system. Denial therefore emerges not solely from treaty commitments, but from embedded operational connectivity.

The third function is political commitment, which anchors the material components of alliance-based denial. Classical alliance theory highlights credibility dilemmas and free-riding concerns (Morrow, 1994). Yet the contemporary Indo-Pacific environment demonstrates increasing institutional thickening: expanded defence cooperation agreements, rotational deployments, joint infrastructure investments, and long-term basing arrangements. The 2023 expansion of U.S.–Philippines access under EDCA, the permanent stationing of U.S. naval assets in Yokosuka, and sustained rotational Marine deployments to Australia reflect embedded commitment rather than episodic signalling. From a deterrence perspective, such entanglement raises both reputational and operational exit costs. Disengagement would require dismantling shared infrastructure, undoing interoperability arrangements, and reversing visible deployments steps that are politically costly and strategically conspicuous.

Political commitment also internationalizes risk. When multiple states host facilities, participate in patrols, or contribute to maritime domain awareness, aggression against one node reverberates across the network (Durham, 1998). The presence of allied forces in contested waters, whether through joint patrols in the South China Sea or coordinated freedom of navigation operations diffuses stakes and complicates escalation management. A challenger contemplating limited coercion cannot confidently assume localization. Even calibrated probes risk triggering broader operational entanglement. This uncertainty strengthens denial by expanding the perceived scope of response without requiring automatic escalation.

These three mechanisms- spatial dispersion, operational integration, and embedded commitment interact to produce what can be conceptualized as alliance integration density. This refers not merely to the number of allied states, but to the thickness of institutional, logistical, and operational connections linking them. In the Indo-Pacific, alliance density is visible in the concentration of access agreements, multinational exercises, intelligence-sharing frameworks, and logistics cross-servicing arrangements. The denser the network, the more difficult it becomes for an adversary to identify decisive targets, sever coordination, or exploit political hesitation. Complexity itself becomes a defensive asset. Instead of confronting a singular defensive line, an aggressor encounters a mesh that must be penetrated simultaneously at multiple points an operationally and politically demanding task.

Empirical patterns reinforce this logic. Where maritime actors lack alliance-backed access or logistics depth, coercive probes have altered facts incrementally. Conversely, areas characterized by layered access and persistent multinational presence have proven resistant to rapid strategic shifts. Multinational patrols, maritime domain awareness cooperation, and shared logistics infrastructure such as fuel storage and maintenance facilities across allied ports extend operational endurance (Campion, 2008). Infrastructure cooperation transforms geography into collective strategic depth. The result is not elimination of competition, but bounding of it precisely the equilibrium denial seeks to establish.

At the theoretical level, alliance-based denial challenges the dichotomy between national and collective defence. The system operates through distributed contributions that may appear individually modest but collectively generate systemic deterrent effect. This aligns with broader arguments in security studies regarding networked power and the declining utility of singular dominance (Denmark, 2010). Alliances transform maritime space into a shared strategic commons in which defensive capacity is pooled and diffused. Such diffusion enhances resilience under shock and strengthens endurance under pressure.

Ultimately, alliances multiply denial because they reshape the geometry of conflict. They stretch defensive depth across thousands of nautical miles, weave operational capabilities through interoperable systems, and embed political resolve across multiple sovereign actors. An adversary contemplating limited maritime aggression must therefore reckon not with a single opponent, but with an integrated architecture whose response pathways are numerous and whose logistical foundations sustain persistence. As alliance integration density increases, so too does the uncertainty surrounding rapid coercion. Denial becomes credible not through concentrated force alone, but through the layered, networked structure of alliance cooperation that converts geography, infrastructure, and political alignment into a coherent strategic barrier.

Forward Posture - From Concentration to Distribution

The evolution of forward military posture in maritime strategy reflects a deeper transformation in how security, survivability, and deterrence are conceptualized in an era of precision warfare and persistent competition (Raska, 2019). For much of the twentieth century, naval power projection relied on concentration. Large formations centred on high-value platforms- aircraft carriers, major surface combatants, and fixed forward bases symbolized both capability and resolve. Command of the sea was demonstrated through visible dominance, and deterrence rested on the capacity to bring overwhelming force to bear at decisive points (Work, 2005). This model was grounded in technological and operational conditions that favoured mass: detection was imperfect, strike ranges were limited, and concentrated firepower provided mutual protection. Under such assumptions, centralized fleet dominance appeared both efficient and strategically persuasive.

Contemporary maritime environments, particularly in the Indo-Pacific, have eroded the foundations of this paradigm. Advances in long-range precision missiles, space-based surveillance, unmanned systems, and cyber-enabled targeting have increased the vulnerability of concentrated forces and fixed installations (Patil et al., 2024). Anti-access/area-denial systems are specifically designed to hold large platforms and major bases at risk. A limited number of forward hubs, however formidable now present identifiable and lucrative targets. As a result, forward posture has begun shifting from concentration to distribution a transformation not merely in deployment patterns but in strategic logic. Survivability, persistence, and adaptability increasingly outweigh sheer mass at a single point. This transformation is also a response to the increasingly sophisticated Chinese counter-denial challenge. China's development of long-range precision-strike capabilities, particularly the DF-26, has expanded the geographic reach of its ability to hold U.S. and allied maritime forces at risk, including through its reported

anti-ship ballistic-missile role. At the same time, the continued expansion and modernization of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) is increasing China's capacity for sustained maritime presence, long-range operations, and contested-access missions. Recent PLA activities, including carrier operations and exercises oriented toward blockade, area denial, and joint maritime operations, indicate that the challenge is no longer confined to defending China's immediate coastal approaches. The implication for U.S. forward posture is therefore not simply that individual platforms require greater protection, but that the architecture supporting them must remain functional under sustained attack and disruption. Distributed basing, mobile capabilities, alternative access points, and redundant logistics consequently serve not only as measures of survivability but as mechanisms for preventing Chinese counter-denial capabilities from converting localized operational advantages into systemic paralysis.

In the Indo-Pacific, this shift is empirically visible. Rather than relying solely on a few dominant bases such as Yokosuka or Guam, U.S. and allied forces now operate through rotational deployments in Darwin, expanded access sites in the Philippines, distributed facilities across Japan's southwest islands, and diversified logistics nodes stretching from Singapore to Diego Garcia. These arrangements do not replace high-end platforms; they embed them within a broader network designed to absorb disruption. Distribution thus transforms geography into strategic depth.

At its core, distribution seeks to complicate an adversary's targeting calculus. Modern targeting depends on integrated kill chains linking sensors, communications, and precision strike systems. Concentrated forces simplify this process by presenting clear, high-payoff objectives (Tan et al., 2025). Distributed forces, by contrast, multiply nodes across space. Smaller units operating from diverse locations introduce ambiguity, saturate surveillance systems, and increase the coordination burden required for simultaneous strikes. The attacker must search, discriminate, track, and allocate resources across a dispersed battlespace. This increases operational friction and the probability of incomplete suppression.

From a deterrence perspective, such targeting complexity generates structural uncertainty. If an aggressor cannot confidently neutralize forward elements in a single disabling blow, the attractiveness of rapid escalation diminishes. Distributed posture denies clarity. It does not seek invisibility; it seeks survivability through multiplicity. Even partial survival of dispersed elements preserves the capacity to reinforce and contest space, undermining expectations of swift consolidation (Zagare & Kilgour, 1995). In this sense, distribution operationalizes deterrence by denial through architecture rather than intimidation.

Distribution also mitigates systemic fragility by avoiding single points of failure. Centralized basing models co-located logistics, maintenance, command functions, and operational assets, generating efficiency but also vulnerability. The degradation of a major hub risked cascading operational paralysis. Distributed posture fragments these functions across multiple facilities and mobile platforms. Smaller austere sites, rotational forces, expeditionary logistics, and prepositioned stocks reduce dependence on singular nodes (Vollmer, 2021). The system becomes modular rather than monolithic. Degradation at one location does not equal systemic collapse.

This modularity reflects broader theories of resilience in complex systems. A resilient system absorbs disruption and reconfigures without catastrophic breakdown. Applied to maritime posture, resilience entails the capacity to continue operating despite missile strikes, cyber interference, or temporary denial of access. Alternative ports, airfields, and logistics pathways provide flexibility under stress. The strategic signal is one of endurance. An adversary contemplating limited aggression confronts not a brittle structure vulnerable to decisive early defeat, but a flexible network capable of regeneration.

Sustained presence under contested conditions constitutes the third pillar of distributed forward posture. Contemporary maritime competition rarely begins with large-scale fleet engagements; it unfolds through persistent pressure, grey-zone tactics, and incremental moves (Grey & Sadoff, 2007). Presence operations- patrols, joint exercises, maritime domain awareness missions shape perceptions of control and commitment. Concentrated posture risks withdrawal under localized threat, creating political and operational vacuums. Distributed posture, by contrast, enables continued engagement across sectors even if individual elements face pressure. Smaller, dispersed unit's complicate attempts to expel defender's wholesale.

This persistence directly counters the strategic logic of the fait accompli (Tarar, 2016). If defenders remain operational in contested waters despite coercive action, aggressors cannot easily transform temporary disruption into political finality. Distributed posture therefore extends the temporal horizon of competition. It buys time for reinforcement, coalition coordination, and diplomatic signalling, thereby denying rapid strategic closure. Presence becomes not symbolic demonstration, but sustained operational continuity.

The shift from concentration to distribution also affects escalation dynamics. Concentrated high-value assets create incentives for pre-emption; delay increases vulnerability, generating "use-it-or-lose-it" pressures. Distributed forces reduce the decisiveness of any single loss. This diffusion of vulnerability can enhance crisis stability by lowering the perceived need for immediate escalation. At the same time, routine dispersed deployments communicate commitment without dramatic surges that may appear escalatory. Distribution embeds resolve in steady posture rather than episodic mobilization.

Critics contend that distribution risks diluting combat power and sacrificing efficiency. Yet such critiques presume decisive battle as the dominant scenario. Contemporary Indo-Pacific competition is more likely to involve limited probes, maritime militia activity, or coercive demonstrations. Under such conditions, survivability and endurance may matter more than concentrated firepower. Distribution does not abandon high-end capability; it integrates major platforms, submarines, unmanned systems, and expeditionary assets within a layered framework. The result is not dispersion for its own sake, but structured flexibility.

Technological change further reinforces this model. Advances in networked command-and-control, data fusion, and integrated fires enable dispersed units to mass effects without massing physically (Arthur et al., 1999). Distributed maritime operations rely on connectivity to synchronize sensing, strike, and logistics across distance. Connectivity transforms spatial separation into operational synergy. Distribution without integration

would fragment capability; integration without distribution would invite targeting. Together, they produce survivable coherence.

Ultimately, the move from concentration to distribution represents adaptation to an environment characterized by persistent vulnerability and continuous rivalry. Forward posture in the Indo-Pacific is no longer primarily about showcasing dominance through visible mass, but about constructing a force capable of enduring, manoeuvring, and operating across contested maritime spaces. By complicating targeting, reducing systemic fragility, and sustaining presence under pressure, distributed posture strengthens deterrence by denial. It signals that attempts at rapid coercion will encounter a system too resilient to suppress and too persistent to dislodge quickly. In this way, distribution transforms forward presence from a potential liability into a foundational element of a maritime denial architecture.

Maritime Infrastructure, System Integration, and the Strategic Logic of Denial

The effectiveness of deterrence by denial at sea ultimately rests on foundations less visible than fleets and platforms (Wu, 2017). Maritime infrastructure- the network of ports, logistics hubs, repair facilities, supply chains, fuel depots, and communication systems constitutes the material backbone that enables forces to endure, regenerate, and persist in contested environments. Platforms project power; infrastructure sustains it (Alessandro & Secchi, 2023). Without resilient logistical architecture, even the most advanced naval assets become transient instruments capable of demonstration but not prolonged contestation (Reed, 2025). Because denial hinges on convincing an adversary that rapid victory is unattainable, endurance becomes decisive. Endurance, in turn, is an infrastructural function.

In the Indo-Pacific, the scale of maritime space intensifies this requirement. Operating distances routinely exceed several thousand nautical miles; supply chains span from Hawaii to Japan, Southeast Asia, Australia, and the Indian Ocean. Sustained naval presence across such expanse depends on diversified access agreements and distributed logistics nodes. Port access therefore constitutes the first pillar of denial infrastructure. Access is not merely diplomatic accommodation; it converts sovereignty into operational depth. Ports enable refuelling, replenishment, crew rotation, maintenance staging, and logistics throughput (Klopott et al., 2023). When access is diversified across Japan's multiple naval facilities, Singapore's Changi Naval Base, rotational Marine deployments in Darwin, expanded access sites in the Philippines, and Indian Ocean facilities such as Diego Garcia, the operational map becomes elastic rather than fixed.

This elasticity directly shapes deterrence calculations. An adversary seeking to exclude forward forces must now contemplate multiple dispersed nodes rather than a singular hub. Coercion against one port does not expel forces from theatre; operations shift laterally across the network. From a deterrence perspective, such redundancy undermines confidence in achieving exclusion through early pressure. Infrastructure thus transforms maritime geography into shared strategic space, complicating attempts at rapid consolidation.

Repair and resupply networks deepen this logic by enabling regeneration under attrition. Naval operations impose constant mechanical strain; high-tempo deployments and contested conditions accelerate wear, battle damage, and system degradation (Ray et al., 2001). The availability of regional maintenance facilities, spare parts distribution chains, munitions storage, and forward-deployed logistics vessels determines whether a fleet remains persistent or must withdraw for reconstitution. In the Indo-Pacific context, submarine support facilities in Guam, maintenance infrastructure in Japan, afloat logistics platforms, and prepositioned stocks in allied territories collectively reduce turnaround times. This shortens the cycle between disruption and restoration.

The theoretical implication is significant. Attritional strategies rely on cumulative erosion-degrading presence gradually until withdrawal becomes unavoidable. If damaged platforms can be repaired and resupplied in theatre, cumulative pressure loses strategic momentum. Regeneration stabilizes effective strength over time, undermining expectations that incremental coercion will yield decisive advantage (Van et al., 2020). Infrastructure therefore converts losses into manageable setbacks rather than irreversible decline. The adversary's task shifts from defeating platforms to dismantling an integrated logistics ecosystem a far more demanding undertaking.

Undersea communication systems represent a third, less visible but increasingly critical component of denial infrastructure. Submarine fiber-optic cables carry the data flows that underpin command-and-control, intelligence fusion, financial transactions, and logistics coordination (Tantray, 2025). In the Indo-Pacific, where allied coordination depends on real-time data integration across vast distances, communications resilience is as strategically consequential as fuel supply. Disruption of undersea cables or satellite links can fracture coalition coordination, degrade situational awareness, and introduce decision latency. Contemporary debates over critical seabed infrastructure underscore the vulnerability of this domain. Protecting, redundantly routing, and diversifying communications networks therefore becomes integral to operational continuity. Secure data pathways ensure that distributed forces remain synchronized across space (Dittmer, 2018). Maritime domain awareness initiatives linking Southeast Asian partners, integrated missile defence data-sharing arrangements with Japan, and multilateral intelligence cooperation all depend on infrastructural connectivity. If dispersion is the spatial dimension of denial, connectivity is its informational dimension. Infrastructure in the digital domain thus reinforces the capacity to absorb shocks without systemic fragmentation. Taken together, these elements reveal a central proposition: deterrence by denial collapses if logistics networks fail. Numerical superiority in platforms is insufficient without fuel, munitions, maintenance, and communications. When supply chains falter, attrition translates directly into strategic erosion. Conversely, robust infrastructure transforms vulnerability into resilience. The adversary confronts not a fleet alone, but a layered support architecture that sustains operational continuity. Infrastructure thus functions as latent power, shaping outcomes through endurance rather than spectacle.

This infrastructural logic integrates directly with alliance networks and distributed posture, forming what may be conceptualized as a maritime denial architecture. Alliance density provides access points, shared facilities, and institutional commitments (Starr & Siverson, 1990). Distributed posture disperses forces across this political geography,

complicating targeting. Infrastructure resilience sustains those forces over time, ensuring that dispersion translates into persistent presence rather than temporary scattering. The interaction is multiplicative. Alliances without logistics cannot support endurance; dispersed forces without repair capacity cannot regenerate; infrastructure without political access remains unusable. Weakness in any dimension undermines systemic coherence.

Reframed in architectural terms, deterrence becomes a stress test of integration rather than a measure of mass. The critical question is not how many ships are deployed, but whether the system can function under degradation. Can supply chains reroute if a hub is struck? Can maintenance be conducted forward? Can communications remain intact under cyber or physical disruption? Maritime denial architecture is therefore a dynamic network designed to prevent rapid consolidation of gains. Its strength lies in cohesion and redundancy across political, operational, and logistical layers (Tsailas, 2025).

The strategic implications are substantial. First, infrastructuralized denial can dampen escalation incentives. Because the posture aims to prevent success rather than threaten overwhelming retaliation, resolve is signalled through durability rather than surge. Routine, distributed presence supported by resilient logistics reduces the pressure for pre-emptive escalation. Stability derives from visible endurance. Second, infrastructure-centered denial favours protracted competition. It is calibrated not for swift decisive victory, but for sustained contestation in which rapid breakthroughs are denied. This aligns with contemporary Indo-Pacific maritime rivalry, characterized by grey-zone pressure, maritime militia activity, incremental territorial assertions, and legal contestation rather than fleet engagements. Infrastructure ensures that such incremental moves encounter persistent resistance rather than episodic responses.

Finally, this logic shifts maritime strategy from dominance to equilibrium maintenance. Absolute command of the sea may be unattainable or politically escalatory in contested regions. Denial architectures accept this constraint. They seek instead to preserve a balance in which no actor can alter the status quo quickly or cheaply. Stability emerges from mutual recognition that rapid consolidation is structurally improbable. Maritime denial thus represents adaptation to an era of constrained escalation and dense interdependence, where the objective is not exclusion but prevention of destabilizing advantage. By foregrounding infrastructure and system integration, the concept of maritime denial architecture captures the contemporary reality that endurance, connectivity, and alliance-enabled logistics underpin effective deterrence at sea. Platforms remain visible symbols of power, but their strategic significance depends on the less visible architecture that sustains them. When allied access, distributed posture, and resilient infrastructure operate in concert, maritime space becomes structurally resistant to rapid conquest. Denial, in this sense, is not a moment of strength but a condition of systemic design.

Conclusion

This study has examined how deterrence by denial is operationalized in U.S. maritime strategy in the Indo-Pacific through the interaction of alliance networks, distributed forward posture, and resilient maritime infrastructure. The analysis demonstrates that

contemporary maritime deterrence increasingly depends not on the concentration of platforms alone, but on the ability of a wider strategic system to remain operational, connected, and sustainable under pressure. The study conceptualizes this system as a maritime denial architecture, in which resilience, redundancy, and sustainment collectively reduce an adversary's ability to achieve rapid and low-cost strategic gains.

The findings provide three principal conclusions. First, deterrence by denial is operationalized by making the achievement and consolidation of an adversary's objectives increasingly difficult rather than relying primarily on the threat of punishment. Distributed capabilities, resilient logistics, and sustained presence increase operational friction and reduce the prospects of a successful fait accompli. Second, alliance networks, forward posture, and infrastructure are mutually reinforcing components of denial. Alliances provide access and political depth, distributed posture reduces vulnerability and complicates targeting, while infrastructure enables forces to persist, regenerate, and operate across the Indo-Pacific. Third, this distributed architecture can contribute to escalation management by reducing dependence on vulnerable concentrations of force and by allowing deterrence to be expressed through persistent presence and resilience rather than episodic escalation.

The study therefore suggests that the strategic value of maritime power should be assessed not simply through the number or sophistication of platforms, but also through the connectivity, redundancy, and endurance of the system that supports them. In this sense, the maritime balance is increasingly shaped by access agreements, logistics networks, repair capacity, communications infrastructure, interoperability, and alliance cohesion. The objective is not necessarily to establish absolute command of maritime space, but to create conditions in which rapid and inexpensive coercive success becomes increasingly improbable.

At the same time, the study recognizes important limitations. Its analysis is primarily conceptual and analytical and does not quantitatively measure the causal relationship between particular elements of maritime denial architecture and deterrence outcomes. It also focuses principally on the U.S. strategic posture in the Indo-Pacific. Future research could therefore develop measurable indicators of alliance integration, infrastructural resilience, logistical depth, and distributed operational capacity, while comparative case studies could examine how such architectures perform across different maritime theatres and against different forms of coercion. Further research should also consider the vulnerabilities created by dependence on interconnected infrastructure, including cyber disruption, attacks on critical maritime networks, contested logistics, and pressures on alliance cohesion.

Overall, the study argues that the future effectiveness of maritime deterrence will depend increasingly on the capacity to distribute, connect, sustain, and regenerate rather than simply to concentrate force. Deterrence by denial is consequently best understood as a continuing condition of strategic resilience: a maritime architecture designed to prevent rapid strategic breakthroughs while maintaining stability amid persistent competition and constrained escalation.

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INTRA-ALLIANCE POLITICS AND ALLIANCE SECURITY DILEMMA: MAKING SENSE OF SAUDI ARABIA'S ALLIANCE FORMATION WITH PAKISTAN

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Abstract

This study aims to examine the strategic rationale behind Saudi Arabia's decision to form a formal alliance with Pakistan in September 2025, despite its longstanding security alignment with the United States. The main argument is that the increasing intensity of the alliance security dilemma in Riyadh–Washington relations—manifested through fears of abandonment and entrapment—motivated Saudi Arabia to pursue additional alliances. Employing Snyder's alliance security dilemma approach, the study systematically investigates three independent variables: alliance commitment, alliance dependence, and alliance interest convergence, enabling a nuanced understanding of the kingdom's alliance calculus. The case study reveals that the informal nature of the U.S.–Saudi alliance, the structural asymmetry favoring U.S. security provision, and the post-2023 divergence in threat perceptions—particularly Israel's expansionist policies—heightened Saudi security anxieties, prompting alliance diversification through a formal, symmetric alliance with Pakistan, which mitigates uncertainty, preserves strategic autonomy, and reinforces regional deterrence capacity.

Keywords

Alliance Politics, Alliance Security Dilemma, Saudi Arabia, Pakistan and the US.

Resumo

Este estudo tem como objetivo analisar a lógica estratégica subjacente à decisão da Arábia Saudita de formar uma aliança formal com o Paquistão em setembro de 2025, apesar do seu alinhamento de longa data em matéria de segurança com os Estados Unidos. O argumento principal é que a crescente intensidade do dilema de segurança da aliança nas relações entre Riade e Washington — que se manifesta através de receios de abandono e de ficar encurralado — motivou a Arábia Saudita a procurar alianças adicionais. Recorrendo à abordagem do dilema de segurança das alianças de Snyder, o estudo investiga sistematicamente três variáveis independentes: o compromisso com a aliança, a dependência da aliança e a convergência de interesses da aliança, permitindo uma compreensão matizada do cálculo de alianças do reino. O estudo de caso revela que a natureza informal da aliança EUA-Arábia Saudita, a assimetria estrutural a favor da garantia de segurança por parte dos EUA e a divergência pós-2023 nas

perceções de ameaça — em particular as políticas expansionistas de Israel — intensificaram as ansiedades de segurança sauditas, levando à diversificação das alianças através de uma aliança formal e simétrica com o Paquistão, que atenua a incerteza, preserva a autonomia estratégica e reforça a capacidade de dissuasão regional.

Palavras-chave

Política de alianças, Dilema de segurança das alianças, Arábia Saudita, Paquistão e EUA.

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INTRA-ALLIANCE POLITICS AND ALLIANCE SECURITY DILEMMA: MAKING SENSE OF SAUDI ARABIA'S ALLIANCE FORMATION WITH PAKISTAN

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Introduction

Since the end of World War II, Saudi Arabia and the United States have been allies. A strategic partnership has persisted between the two nations for decades. During the Cold War, Saudi Arabia sought strategic cooperation with the United States to ensure its security in the face of regional and global threats. In return, the United States prioritized the security of Saudi Arabia due to its vast energy resources and proximity to vital maritime chokepoints. Although there have been occasional intra-alliance disagreements, tensions, and disputes over the years, both parties have generally perceived the continuation of the alliance as serving their mutual interests. However, following the Hamas attack on September 7, 2023, Israel's expansionist foreign policy in the Middle East has called the long-standing alliance into question. Under the conditions of an increasingly uncertain security environment, Saudi Arabia's decision to establish a formal alliance with Pakistan in September 2025—includes mutual defense commitment—constitutes a notable development. This move is particularly puzzling when situated within the evolving strategic landscape of the Middle East, in which shifting threat perceptions, realignments among regional actors, and the recalibration of external security partnerships have altered traditional patterns of alliance formation.

The research seeks to explain the strategic rationale underlying Saudi Arabia's pursuit of an alliance with Pakistan, despite its longstanding security alignment with the United States. The main argument of the study is that the primary rationale behind Saudi Arabia's additional alliance-seeking tendency is the increasing intensity of the alliance security dilemma in Riyadh-Washington relations. Concerns over the potential ineffectiveness of security commitments of the US to provide the desired security support against increasing Israeli aggression have prompted the Kingdom to diversify its existing alliances. Following the Hamas attacks on October 7, 2023, Israel launched a series of ground and air strikes targeting several states around Saudi Arabia, including Lebanon, Syria, Palestine, Yemen, Iran, and Qatar. The United States' explicit support for these aggressions severely undermined its reliability in the eyes of the Saudi leadership. Israel, adopting an increasingly expansionist regional policy, has come to be perceived by Saudi Arabia as an aggressive actor that poses a significant threat to regional security and stability. These developments have triggered a fundamental shift in Saudi Arabia's threat perceptions and alliance politics. Consequently, confronting with growing fears of both

abandonment and entrapment, Saudi Arabia moved to formalize an alliance with Pakistan to mitigate risks stemming from heightened anxiety, uncertainty, and perceived unreliability. The successive military attacks on Qatar by both Israel and Iran in 2025 led Saudi leadership to regard U.S. security commitments as increasingly ineffective amid a regional conflict environment dominated by Tel Aviv's agenda.

This study develops an intra-alliance dispute analysis model (Table I) based on Glenn H. Snyder's alliance security dilemma approach (1984; 1996) in order to provide a complementary theoretical perspective. The Intra-alliance dispute analysis model consists of three parameters—alliance commitment, alliance dependence, and interest convergence—and includes eight hypotheses developed in this study. The model is employed in a complementary manner to offer a more comprehensive and nuanced explanation of Saudi Arabia's recent alliance patterns. Snyder's alliance security dilemma approach offers valuable insights into the growing concerns and declining confidence within Saudi Arabia regarding its existing alliance with the United States. Taken together, this framework enables us to identify and analyze the key variables underlying the formation of the Saudi–Pakistan alliance, especially in the context of evolving regional threat perceptions and alliance (in)security dynamics.

The remainder of this study is organized into three main sections. The first section establishes the theoretical framework underpinning the case analysis, drawing primarily on Snyder's alliance theory to develop a cohesive analytical lens for understanding alliance formation and management. The second section applies this framework to a case study of Saudi Arabia's alliance-seeking behavior, aiming to elucidate the kingdom's recent strategic decisions and evolving alliance politics. Finally, the third section presents the study's conclusions, offering a general evaluation and discussion of the findings, reflecting on their broader implications.

Theoretical Framework: Alliance Security Dilemma

In an anarchic international system, there is no overarching authority capable of guaranteeing state sovereignty. For this reason, within the anarchic structure of the international system, states seeking to preserve their survival tend to adopt balancing strategies in response to emerging threats (Waltz, 1979, p. 119-128; Mearsheimer, 2001, p.30). Snyder (1997, p.52) underlined that alliance with other states may reduce the pervasive insecurity of anarchy. Alliances are among the foreign policy toolkit that states frequently employ in the international politics. Whether strong or weak, states rely on alliances to deter and defeat threats. Waltz (1979, p.126-127) argued that states achieve defensive and deterrent strength to dissuade adversaries from attacking by forming alliances. Therefore, alliances have two primary functions against adversaries: deterrence and defense (Snyder, 1961, p.9-40). When an alliance becomes incapable of performing one of the core functions—deterrence and defense—it gradually loses strategic coherence among allies and undermining its reliability and durability. Furthermore, once an alliance is formed, two important dynamics come into play: alliance management and alliance competition. On the one hand, states seek to strengthen the strategic cohesion of their own alliances (inter-alliance dispute); on the other, they seek

to undermine the strategic cohesion of rival or adversarial alliances (intra-alliance competition) (Izumikawa, 2020; Crawford, 2021; Akdogan, 2025; Akdogan, 2026).

Snyder (1984) accounts for the deterioration of strategic cohesion among allies by employing the alliance security dilemma approach. According to this approach, the establishment of alliances inherently generates an alliance security dilemma between allies. The main reason states find themselves under this dilemma is that they simultaneously experience fears of entrapment and abandonment (Snyder, 1997, p.187). The fear of abandonment stems from a state's concern that its ally may or may not fulfill its security commitments when needed, while the fear of entrapment drives from a state's concern that it may be drawn into a conflict/war due to its ally's strategic interests (Mandelbaum, 1988, p.101; Mandelbaum, 1981, p.52-55). Allied states, due to the security commitments they have previously made to each other, may be compelled to act in accordance with the strategic interests of their allies even when it is not in their own interests. The harsh stance or reckless behaviors of a state toward another may give rise to the risk of entrapping its ally (Snyder, 1997, p.181). Meanwhile, the severity of the alliance security dilemma is not constant but subject to change over time. According to Snyder (1997, p.186), three parameters are decisive in determining the fluctuations of the dilemma: alliance commitment, alliance dependence and alliance interest convergence.

The Degree of Alliance Commitment

Walt (1997, p. 157) emphasizes that the defining feature of any alliance is the commitment for mutual military assistant against an external threat in a certain circumstance. Alliances are founded upon some specific security commitments. In the absence of such a commitment, the formation of alliances would not be possible. The alliance commitment delineates the conditions under which allies assume responsibilities and obligations. Alliances, however, target potential or actual enemies and is based on solidarity, cooperation, and coordination among allies against security threats. Wolfers (1959, p.268). defines alliances as promises of mutual military assistance between sovereign states. According to Friedman (1970), alliances are the central feature international political arena. National security is the primary incentive for states to form alliances (Lalman & Newman, 1991, p.239). Liska (1962, p.3) underlines that "it is impossible to speak about international relations without referring to alliances." Alliances are one of the main means by which states seek cooperation with other states in order to increase their power to achieve their interests (Osgood, 1968, p.17). Similarly, Morgenthau (1959, p.185) considers alliances as a necessary element of balance of power politics. Alliances in international relations are generally seen as the product of mutual security interests between states that result in a formal agreement, either explicit or implicit, to collaborate on national security issues (Holsti, Hoppman & Sullivan, 1973, p. 4).

Alliance commitment constitutes a key variable in determining the intensity of the security dilemma among allies (Snyder, 1984, p. 473). Allies' fears of abandonment and entrapment are shaped by both the nature and the type of alliance commitments (Snyder, 1997, p. 181). More importantly, the defining criterion for assessing whether a

particular form of cooperation between two or more states qualifies as an alliance lies in the presence of an alliance commitment. Accordingly, an arrangement can be considered an alliance only insofar as it entails a certain level of security commitment between at least two states, even when such commitment is unilateral.

The impact of the security commitment parameter within an alliance on the alliance security dilemma can be assessed based on four core criteria. These are the mutuality, contractuality, certainty and reliability. Examining these factors allows for the identification of the degree of security commitment embedded in an alliance. Fundamentally, evaluating alliances through these criteria facilitates their classification and enhances our understanding of their qualitative characteristics.

First, alliances are commonly divided into two categories: formal and informal. Walt (1997, p. 157) argues that "an alliance is a formal or informal commitment for security cooperation between two or more states." The classification of an alliance as formal depends on the simultaneous fulfillment of three core criteria in security commitments: mutuality, contractuality, and certainty (Snyder, 1990, p. 105). Accordingly, a formal alliance refers to cooperative arrangements in which two or more states enter explicit and reciprocal security commitments through a written and legally binding treaty. The existence of a written contract and an explicit mutual security commitment among allies constitutes the principal defining elements of a formal alliance (Singer & Melvin, 1966, p. 2). When one or more of these constitutive elements is absent, the resulting arrangement is considered an informal alliance. The codification of security commitments in a written treaty endows alliances with formal binding force. Moreover, the certainty of security commitments clearly specifies the conditions under which allies are expected to fulfill particular obligations. When the conditions anticipated by a clear alliance agreement materialize (casus foederis), allies expect one another to honor their commitments (Snyder, 1997, p. 182). By contrast, in ambiguous alliances, allies' expectations remain uncertain due to the lack of clarity regarding who is obliged to act, under which conditions, and in what manner.

Secondly, the reliability criterion is used to evaluate alliance commitments, allowing an alliance to be classified as either reliable or unreliable. The formal codification of security commitments in a written treaty does not necessarily imply that allies will unequivocally fulfill these obligations. Allies' adherence to alliance commitments provides important information about both the reliability of the alliance and the credibility of its members. States tend to form and sustain alliances with partners perceived as reliable in honoring their security commitments (Crescenze et al., 2012, p. 260). By contrast, the presence of an unreliable ally may embolden an expansionist state that poses a security threat to adopt more aggressive behavior (Miller, 2003, p. 55). In such cases, the alliance fails to perform its primary function of deterrence. States' past attitudes and behaviors shape their reputation in the eyes of other states (Mercer, 1996, pp. 14–43). This reputation, formed through prior conduct, enables other states to anticipate their future actions (Crescenzi et al., 2012, p. 262; Miller, 2003, p. 54). Failure to fulfill alliance commitments when the casus foederis arises leads allies to devalue the alliance, even if it formally remains intact (Snyder, 1997, p. 182).

When an allied state fails to deter or defeat a security threat, its reputation among its allies is damaged, and its credibility regarding whether it will assume responsibility in the

face of future threats erodes (Schelling, 1966, pp. 35–91). Moreover, states make judgments about the reliability of their allies' security commitments by observing whether those allies honor alliance obligations in their relations with other partners. Consequently, states begin to question both the reliability and the competence of allies that violate alliance commitments or fail to adequately fulfill their responsibilities (Leeds, 2003, p. 805; Smith, 1998). States allied with partners whose credibility has gradually weakened tend to adopt additional security measures in response to emerging threats (Henry, 2020, p. 56). Furthermore, when alliance commitments are ambiguous, weaker states closely monitor whether their allies are reliable (Mattes, 2012, p. 684). Consequently, in order to systematically assess the dynamics of alliance commitments, I propose the following three hypotheses:

Hp.1: In formal alliances, states are expected to face low levels of concern about abandonment and high levels of fear about entrapment.

Hp.2: In informal alliances, states are expected to face high levels of fear about abandonment and low levels of fear about entrapment.

Hp.3: A decline in alliance credibility is expected to reinforce existing abandonment fear in both formal and informal alliances.

The Distribution of Alliance Dependence

Alliances inherently includes a relationship of dependence. When the variable of alliance dependence is considered, alliances can be divided into two categories: symmetric and asymmetric (Snyder, 1984, p. 473). Accordingly, the primary factor shaping whether an alliance assumes a symmetric or asymmetric structure is the level of dependence of the allies on the alliance. Each alliance provides allied parties with both benefits and costs (Walt, 1997, p. 158). The benefits are primarily measured in terms of enhanced security, whereas the costs are largely assessed in terms of conceded autonomy (Snyder, 1997, p. 43). In other words, states are required to bear certain costs in exchange for the benefits they obtain (Johnson, 2015, p. 666). Altfeld (1984, p. 528) argues that states confronting rising threats purchase security support from a great power at the expense of their own autonomy. Similarly, Morrow (1991, p. 905) emphasizes that weak states aligning with a great power tend to make concessions in return for security provision.

In an alliance, it is generally expected that the level of security provided to a partner corresponds to the amount of security received. However, this is not always the case. When a state is unable to supply its ally with a level of security equivalent to that which it derives from the alliance, it is compelled to concede a degree of its strategic autonomy in return. Strategic autonomy determines the scope of a state's room for maneuver in foreign policy. A loss of strategic autonomy implies that the ally with lower alliance dependence acquires influence over the foreign policy decisions of the state with higher alliance dependence (Schroeder, 1976, p. 197). In this way, the security–autonomy trade-off within alliances is shaped. Ultimately, every alliance is built upon a particular security–autonomy balance, and this balance may evolve over time (Morrow, 1991, p. 913).

The primary factor shaping states' alliance dependence is their individual security environment (Blankenship, 2023, p. 20; Snyder, 1997, p. 180). Each state possesses a distinct security environment at any given point in time. In addition, every alliance

relationship is established within a specific security context. Moreover, states' security environments evolve over time. Two principal factors determine a state's security environment: the distribution of power and the level of threat (Snyder, 1984, p. 472). With respect to the former, states' power capabilities define their international status. For states struggling for survival in an anarchic system, power constitutes the primary currency (Morgenthau, 1948; Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). The greater a state's share of the international distribution of power, the more favorable its security environment becomes. This is because states with higher power capabilities face a relatively lower probability of being subjected to the use of force by others. Consequently, within an alliance, a state possessing greater power capacity is expected to enjoy a stronger security environment.

However, the distribution of power, while necessary, is not sufficient for shaping a state's security environment. The other determining factor must also be incorporated into the analysis. Each ally faces a distinct level of threat, which, like power capabilities, may vary over time. The level of threat perceived by allies is influenced not only by their own power capabilities but also by the geographical proximity, offensive capabilities, and aggressive intentions of the threatening state (Walt, 1987, p. 23). Accordingly, these variables differentiate allies' threat levels and jointly shape their security environments. Even when states share a common threat perception, they may not experience the same degree of security threat from the adversary. This divergence plays a decisive role in shaping allies' degrees of alliance dependence (Blankenship, 2023, p. 20–21). Consequently, alliances can be classified as symmetric or asymmetric based on the security environments of the allies. In asymmetric alliances, the security–autonomy balance is weighted in favor of one side. In other words, asymmetric alliances emerge when a state with a weaker security environment aligns with a state enjoying a stronger security environment. In asymmetric alliances, the weaker ally gains more security at the cost of greater loss of autonomy (Morrow, 1991, p. 911), whereas the stronger ally gains autonomy by providing security (Rothstein, 1968, p. 118).

When a state's security environment improves, its dependence on the existing alliance decreases, prompting demands for greater autonomy; conversely, when its security environment deteriorates, it generates demands for additional security (Morrow, 1991, p. 917). If these demands are not met, there is a tendency toward weakened strategic alignment within the alliance and an intensification of the alliance security dilemma. This dynamic may lead the dissatisfied ally to pursue hedging alliance relationships. This is because an ally with a higher share of alliance dependence faces both a greater loss of strategic autonomy and an increased risk of strategic isolation. Consequently, holding other variables constant, I develop the following three hypotheses regarding the distribution of alliance dependence:

Hp.4: In symmetric alliances, both allies experience concerns about abandonment and entrapment at roughly equal levels.

Hp.5: In asymmetric alliances, the more dependent state is likely to face heightened concerns about both abandonment and entrapment.

Hp.6. In asymmetric alliances, the less dependent state is likely to face reduced concerns about both abandonment and entrapment.

The Level of Alliance Interest Convergence

Another variable influencing states' fear of abandonment and entrapment is the degree of overlap in allies' shared interests (Snyder, 1984, p. 474). States' primary common interest lies in deterring (deter) and, if necessary, defeating a state perceived as a common threat. Therefore, the principal incentive for states to form alliances is the presence of an external threat within an anarchic international system (Walt, 1989, p. 4; 1985, p. 4). Accordingly, alliances emerge as states pool their capabilities in response to shared threats. The presence of a common enemy or external threat is widely regarded as the single most important factor—the raison d'être—underpinning the formation and cohesion of alliances (Weitsman, 1997, p. 160). Moreover, interest alignment determines the level of strategic coordination among allies within an alliance. Thus, the greater the degree of interest alignment, the higher the level of intra-alliance cohesion. Strong alliance cohesion not only prolongs the lifespan of an alliance but also enhances its effectiveness in confronting threats.

The shared threat perception that exists at the state of alliance formation may change over time. Such change implies a divergence of interests and may place the continued existence of alliances at risk (Berkowitz, 1983). Three conditions can lead to shifts in threat perception. The first is change in power capabilities of states. An improvement in a state's power capacity may transform a previously shared threat into one that the state can manage independently. In this case, the state may no longer require its ally to the same extent for deterring and defeating the threat. The second condition is the weakening or disappearance of the common threat. A state previously identified as a source of threat may, for various reasons, cease to constitute a power center that endangers the security of others.

Third, a new threat may emerge that requires one ally's primary attention. A newly arising aggressive and expansionist state may not be perceived as a serious threat by all allies. When one ally prioritizes balancing this emerging aggressor, the alliance's strategic alignment centered on a shared threat may shift. Concerned that it may not receive support from its existing ally against the emerging threat, the state is likely to seek additional alliances to balance the threat (Castillo & Downes, 2020, p. 4–16). In doing so, the state whose threat perception has diverged may preserve its relationship with the existing alliance to minimize fears of abandonment, while simultaneously pursuing an alliance with another state that shares its perception of the new threat (Morrow, 1993, p. 213). About the alliance interest convergence, I advance the following two hypotheses. The two hypotheses (Hp.7 and Hp.8) were developed in the author's previous co-authored work on alliance politics (Akdogan and Küpeli, 2026). Accordingly, this study provides a further test of these hypotheses.

Hp.7: A decrease in shared threat perception is expected to heighten concerns about both abandonment and entrapment among the allies.

Hp.8: An increase in shared threat perception is expected to diminish concerns both abandonment and entrapment among the allies.

Table I. Intra-Alliance Dispute Analysis Model

Independent Variables	Dependent Variable: Severity of Alliance Security Dilemma	
	Sub-dynamics	Hypotheses
Alliance Commitment	1. Mutuality: Unilateral, Bilateral and Multilateral Alliances 2. Contractuality: Formal and Informal Alliances 3. Certainty: Certain and Uncertain Alliances 4. Credibility: Reliable and Unreliable Alliance	Hp.1: In formal alliances, states are expected to face low levels of concern about abandonment and high levels of fear about entrapment. Hp.2: In informal alliances, states are expected to face high levels of fear about abandonment and low levels of concern about entrapment. Hp.3: A decline in alliance credibility is expected to reinforce existing abandonment fear in both formal and informal alliances.
Alliance Dependence	1. The distribution of power 2. The level of threat perception	Hp.4: In symmetric alliances, both allies experience concerns about abandonment and entrapment at roughly equal levels. Hp.5: In asymmetric alliances, the more dependent state is likely to face heightened concerns about both abandonment and entrapment. Hp.6. In asymmetric alliances, the less dependent state is likely to face reduced concerns about both abandonment and entrapment.
Alliance Interest Convergence	1. Interest convergence 2. Interest divergence	Hp.7: A decrease in shared threat perception is expected to heighten concerns about both abandonment and entrapment among the allies. Hp.8: An increase in shared threat perception is expected to diminish concerns both abandonment and entrapment among the allies.

Source: The Table I was formed by the author based on Snyder and Morrow's studies.

Case Study: Saudi-the US Alliance Security Dilemma

This study seeks to explain why Saudi Arabia felt the need to form an alliance with Pakistan despite being allied with a superpower state, the United States. The analysis interprets Riyadh's inclination to establish an additional alliance and to pursue alliance diversification as an indication of a serious problem emerging within the Saudi–US alliance relationship. This assessment rests on the following core assumption: when one party of an existing alliance establishes an additional alliance with another state, this signals an intensification of the alliance security dilemma between the original allies. Accordingly, the central argument of the study is that the escalation of the alliance security dilemma in Saudi–Washington relations prompted the Saudi leadership to reassess its existing security policy and to pursue a hedging alliance relationship with an alternative power center. This orientation culminated in Saudi Arabia's signing of an alliance agreement with Pakistan in September 2025.

The intra-alliance dispute analysis model outlined above (Table I) can explains why Saudi Arabia is inclined toward alliance diversification. In line with this approach, the source of the observed increase in the intensity of the security dilemma within the Riyadh–Washington alliance can be identified by examining three parameters: the degree of alliance commitment, the distribution of alliance dependence, and the level of alliance interest alignment. The structure of these parameters is expected to lead to a variation in the severity of the security dilemma within the existing alliance patterns. An intensified alliance security dilemma, in turn, results in heightened fears of abandonment and entrapment among allies. Accordingly, the study defines the rising intensity of the alliance security dilemma in Saudi Arabia–U.S. relations as the dependent variable, with three parameters shaping its severity as the independent variables.

Saudi-American Alliance Security Commitment

The first variable that must be examined to understand the increase in the alliance security dilemma between Saudi Arabia and the United States is the level of alliance commitment. By assessing the degree of commitment, it is possible to identify the nature of the alliance relationship between the two countries. This, in turn, allows for an evaluation of whether the characteristics of the security commitment embedded in the existing alliance have contributed to the recent rise in Saudi Arabia's security concerns.

Saudi Arabia and the United States have maintained alliance ties since the early Cold War. The 1945 security cooperation agreement between King Abdulaziz bin Saud and President Roosevelt formally established their partnership (Memorandum of Conversation, 1945), laying the foundation for a lasting strategic relationship. In 1951, the Mutual Defense Assistance Agreement further strengthened ties, with the U.S. providing military training, arms, and establishing the Dhahran Base (Memorandum for Mutual Security, 1951). Subsequent agreements enabled Saudi Arabia to enhance its military capacity through U.S. equipment, ammunition, and heavy weapons (Sick, 2018). During the Gulf War (1990-1991), Saudi Arabia and the United States cooperated against Iraq, jointly conducting Operation Desert Shield and Operation Desert Storm. (Lippman, 2018, p. 297–298).

In the post–Cold War era, Saudi Arabia aligned with the U.S.'s Dual Containment policy toward Iran and Iraq (Gause III, 1994; Akdogan, 2020). Relations weakened after the September 11 attacks and the U.S. invasion of Iraq (Gause III, 2016) but regained momentum during Trump's first administration (2017–2021) (Al-Rasheed, 2017; Al-Rasheed, 2018). The 2017 Joint Statement outlined a new strategic partnership to ensure regional security and stability, primarily focused on countering Iran's expansionism (Joint Statement, 2017). As bilateral relations were making progress in such an atmosphere, the Khashoggi affair occurred and strained Washington–Riyadh relations. However, the Khashoggi affair, which occurred in October 2018, did not fundamentally undermine the existing security relationship between the United States and Saudi Arabia. Although this diplomatic crisis, which unfolded during the first Trump administration, prompted members of the U.S. Congress to question the security and defense cooperation between Riyadh and Washington, President Trump viewed the crisis as an opportunity to extract new commercial and economic concessions from the Saudi leadership (Kragie, 2018).

Despite the U.S. Congress advocating the suspension of arms sales and military supplies to Saudi Arabia, the Trump administration refrained from taking concrete measures in this direction. At that time, the Trump administration, which was pursuing a policy of maximum pressure against Iran, regarded Saudi Arabia as a key regional ally (Trump, 2018). The Trump administration's reluctance to adopt measures specifically targeting Saudi Arabia in response to the Khashoggi murder prevented the crisis from causing significant damage to the alliance between Washington and Riyadh.

In the post-Arab Spring period, Iran's aggressive regional policy was viewed as a shared threat. In May 2025, a U.S.–Saudi defense cooperation agreement committed $142 billion in weapons, equipment, and ammunition (Al Jazeera, 2025). In November 2025, the Strategic Defense Cooperation Agreement reinforced U.S. support, including F-35 fighter jets and main battle tanks, strengthening Saudi Arabia's military capacity (The US-Saudi Strategic Defense Agreement, 2025). Nevertheless, a formal alliance with mutual, contractual, and certain security commitments remains absent. U.S. presidents, including Trump, have offered verbal assurances, designating Saudi Arabia a "major non-NATO ally" (TRT World, 2025). This absence of formal guarantees renders the alliance informal and sustains Saudi Arabia's fear of abandonment (Hp.2).

Another issue that must be assessed under the alliance commitment parameter concerns the reliability dimension of the Saudi–American alliance. As emphasized in the theoretical framework, the reliability of an alliance is determined by the extent to which allies consistently demonstrate commitment to their security obligations through their attitudes and behaviors. States assess their allies' degree of reliability not only by observing whether they fulfill security commitments owed to them, but also by closely monitoring whether those allies honor their security responsibilities toward third states. Perceptions of ally reliability may therefore change over time depending on observed conduct.

In the case of the Riyadh–Washington alliance, recent years have witnessed a marked erosion of alliance reliability (Al Lawati, 2025). Following the Hamas attack of 7 October 2023, Israel's increasingly aggressive and expansionist foreign policy in the Middle East functioned as a critical litmus test for alliance reliability within the Saudi–American alliance (Jeffrey & Dent, 2025). During this period, two major events significantly weakened Saudi confidence in the United States. First, Israel conducted an airstrike against Qatar in September 2025 (Al Jazeera, 9 September 2025), and second, Iran retaliated by striking a U.S. military base in Qatar in June 2025 following Israeli and U.S. attacks on Iran (Al Jazeera, 23 June 2025). Despite its alliance with Qatar, the United States did not take a clear deterrent or punitive action in response to either attack. These developments reinforced Saudi concerns that the U.S.–Saudi alliance might fail to deter or defeat threats arising from Israeli aggression (Gause III, 2026). As a result, Riyadh's trust in U.S. security commitments declined, further undermining the reliability of the alliance (Gordon and Karlin, 2026). Consequently, combined with the informal nature of the partnership (Hp.2), this erosion of confidence heightened Saudi Arabia's fear of abandonment to an advanced level (Hp.3).

Saudi-American-Alliance Dependence

The second variable determining the intensity of the alliance security dilemma in any security cooperation arrangement is the level of allies' dependence on the alliance. To understand why the alliance security dilemma has intensified in Saudi–American relations, it is necessary to identify the existing distribution of dependence within the alliance. To do so, one must first assess the allies' individual security environments. Two factors define an individual security environment: the distribution of power and the level of threat. By taking these two factors into account, it becomes possible to evaluate the individual security environments of Saudi Arabia and the United States and, in turn, to determine each side's degree of alliance dependence.

When assessed in terms of the distribution of power, the Saudi–American alliance appears as a bilateral alliance constructed between a superpower and a regional power (Ehteshami, 2014). Given the absence of any significant change in the parties' power status, it can be argued that the intra-alliance distribution of power has remained largely unchanged since the alliance's inception. Due to this disproportionate distribution of power, the alliance has retained its asymmetric character over time. From the perspective of threat levels, while the United States does not face an aggressive or expansionist state in its immediate abroad, Saudi Arabia has consistently been surrounded by regional powers pursuing expansionist policies. From past to present, the Saudi leadership has perceived regional states adopting expansionist strategies in the Middle East—such as Egypt, Iraq, Iran, and Israel—as proximate threats to its national security (Hinnebusch, 2002, p. 29–54). The primary driving force motivating Saudi Arabia to form an alliance with the United States has been the need to balance these expansionist states (Miller, 2017). In this sense, Saudi Arabia derives direct security benefits from its alliance with the United States.

The alliance serves a functional role for Saudi Arabia both by facilitating internal balancing aimed at enhancing national power capacity and by enabling external balancing to deter adversarial states. By contrast, the security benefits the United States derives from its alliance with Saudi Arabia are more indirect. For Washington, the core strategic concern in the Middle East lies in preventing the regional balance of power from shifting in favor of rival or hostile states and ensuring that energy resources and strategic maritime chokepoints do not fall under their control (Mearsheimer & Walt, 2016). In this respect, the alliance with Saudi Arabia carries strategic significance for the United States.

Saudi–American security cooperation constitutes an asymmetric rather than a symmetric alliance. Alliance dependence is structured against Saudi Arabia, as it cannot provide security contributions equivalent to the protection it receives. Consequently, Saudi Arabia bears the cost of security through reduced autonomy in foreign policy. This imbalance favors the United States and diminishes Saudi strategic autonomy while heightening fears of entrapment. The asymmetric nature of the alliance suggests that Riyadh experiences elevated risks of both abandonment and entrapment (Hp.5).

Following 7 October 2023, Israel's aggressive foreign policy shifted the regional balance of power (Fantappie & Nasr, 2023). With unwavering U.S. support, Israel violated the sovereignty of Iran, Syria, Yemen, Lebanon, and Qatar, directly threatening regional security (Dalay & Vakil, 2025). Viewed through the lens of alliance dependence, two

implications emerge for Saudi Arabia. First, U.S. involvement in Israel–Iran confrontations on Israel's side may draw Saudi Arabia into unwanted conflict. This risk stems from Riyadh's asymmetric dependence on the United States, limiting its ability to avoid entanglement. In a regional war scenario, Saudi Arabia would likely face U.S. demands for access to its bases and airspace, difficult to reject due to the kingdom's asymmetric dependence. This restricts strategic autonomy and exposes Saudi Arabia to potential Iranian retaliation. Iran's June 2025 attack on Qatar during the Twelve-Days War illustrates this vulnerability, and Saudi Arabia could face similar threats, given Tehran's repeated warnings to regional states in response to U.S. force. Indeed, in February 2026, Iran retaliated against the joint U.S.–Israeli military offensive against it by launching ballistic missiles and armed unmanned aerial vehicles against Gulf states, including Saudi Arabia. This incident was a striking contemporary example, for Saudi Arabia and other Gulf states, of falling into the trap resulting from an asymmetric alliance relationship with the United States. Therefore, this development provided evidence of the practical manifestation of the entrapment dimension of the hypothesis 5. Second, Saudi efforts to balance and restrain Israel's aggressive policies have largely failed to elicit meaningful action from Washington. As the more dependent ally, Saudi Arabia struggles to persuade the United States to prioritize balancing Israel. This, however, should be regarded as an evidence confirming the prediction of hypothesis 5 concerning the abandonment dimension. These dynamics collectively intensify both fears of abandonment and fears of entrapment for Saudi leadership, highlighting Riyadh's constrained position within the alliance (Hp.5).

Saudi-American Alliance Interest Convergence

The third variable driving the intensification of the alliance security dilemma in the Saudi–American alliance is the change in the level of alliance interest convergence. As outlined in the theoretical framework, alliances are built upon shared interests, the most important of which are common security threats. The degree of interest convergence determines the level of strategic cohesion within an alliance. State interests are not fixed; rather, they evolve over time. Accordingly, as interests change, the degree of strategic alignment between allies also shifts.

When examining the Saudi Arabia–United States alliance, the preservation of the regional balance of power in the Middle East during the Cold War constituted the main driving force that led the two countries toward security cooperation (Fürtig, 2007). The Soviet Union's efforts to establish political and military influence in the Middle East were perceived by both Riyadh and Washington as a security threat, necessitating coordinated action. This situation transformed the Middle East into a theater of global power competition between the United States and the USSR (Raberson, 2002, p. 55–70). At the same time, the region also contained regional powers pursuing aggressive and expansionist foreign policies, namely Nasserist Egypt (1952–1970), Ba'athist Iraq (1963–2003), and post–Islamic Revolution Iran (after 1979). The aggressive and expansionist foreign policy behaviors of these regional powers were regarded by Saudi Arabia and the United States as common security threats, and security cooperation was strengthened with the aim of deterring and defeating these threats (Gause III, 2002, p. 193–212).

In the post–Cold War period, the dissolution of the USSR in 1991 and the significant loss of Iraq's power capacity following the Gulf War removed these two actors from the category of imminent threats. However, Iran's regional expansionism, which began in 1979, continued into the post–Cold War era and sustained the shared threat perception between Riyadh and Washington. The outbreak of the Arab Spring in 2011 and the power vacuum created by the U.S. withdrawal from Iraq enabled Iran to pursue its aggressive and expansionist regional policy more effectively (Nasr, 2025b, p. 131). At the same time, Iran's substantial progress in nuclear technology and its ballistic missile program, which significantly enhanced its power capacity, posed a serious challenge to the regional balance of power (Barzegar, 2014).

When the alliance interest convergence variable is taken as the analytical baseline, 2023 emerged as a critical historical turning point that inaugurated a new phase in both the regional balance of power and Riyadh–Washington alliance relations (Kabalan, 2026). In that year, two major developments fundamentally reshaped Saudi Arabia's threat perception. The first was the historic agreement signed in Beijing in March 2023, under China's mediation, in which Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic relations and pursue security cooperation (Baghernia, 2024). For a full two decades—from the U.S. invasion of Iraq to the signing of the Riyadh–Tehran normalization agreement (2003–2023)—the Middle East had been the primary arena of an intense regional hegemony struggle between Iran and Saudi Arabia (Hiro, 2020; Mabon, 2018). This agreement effectively brought to an end the increasingly confrontational regional rivalry and conflict environment that had intensified especially after 2010, while opening the door to cooperation aimed at ensuring regional security and stability (Divsallar, 2023). Indeed, relations strained by Iran's regional expansionism had previously led the Riyadh administration to completely sever political, commercial, and diplomatic ties in January 2016. The new agreement, however, signaled a critical decision by both parties to open a new chapter in bilateral relations that explicitly included security cooperation. Iran's provision of assurances to Saudi Arabia regarding the maintenance of regional security and stability, combined with the oversight of China as a rising great power, significantly reduced Riyadh's perceived threat level vis-à-vis Iran and altered its threat perception calculus (Nasr, 2025a). Consequently, the China-brokered normalization agreement served to decouple Saudi Arabia's perceived level of threat about Iran from that of the United States (Walt, 2023).

The second major development that reshaped Saudi Arabia's perception of security threats in 2023 was Hamas's launch of military attack against Israel. This attack generated two strategic implications that profoundly altered regional dynamics. First, it led to the collapse of Iran's 'resistance axis' constructed across the region during the 2003–2023 period (Maloney, 2025). Capitalizing on the Hamas attacks, Israel carried out devastating military campaigns against all Iranian-aligned proxy forces in the region, significantly weakening Hezbollah in Lebanon, Ansarullah in Yemen, Hamas in Palestine, and the Baath regime in Syria through extensive air and ground operations (Nasr, 2025b, p.135). Having achieved operational success across these theaters, Israel then shifted its focus directly toward Iran, initiating strikes aimed at degrading Iran's nuclear and ballistic missile capabilities. In June 2025, Israeli attacks on Iran triggered the outbreak of the Twelve-Day War, during which the United States joined the conflict on Israel's side, culminating in the Hammer Operation that inflicted damage on Iranian nuclear

facilities. As a result, Iran's military capabilities were substantially weakened and its regional influence markedly diminished (Tabaar, 2025). A second strategic implication of the 7 October attacks was Israel's adoption of an overtly expansionist and aggressive regional foreign policy, as Israeli authorities pursued territorial expansion and increasingly violated the sovereignty and territorial integrity of multiple regional states. Through ground operations in Gaza, southern Lebanon, and the Golan Heights in Syria, Israel engaged in territorial occupation, ultimately emerging as the primary actor undermining security and stability in the Middle East (Dalay & Vakil, 2025).

Taken together, these emerging regional dynamics indicate a shift in Saudi Arabia's strategic threat perceptions, with Iran perceived as a less significant threat and Israel emerging as the primary source of threat. For Riyadh, the primary source of security threat has thus shifted from Iran to Israel (Dalay & Vakil, 2025). However, my argument that Israel has emerged as the primary security threat in the strategic view of Saudi Arabia in the post-2023 period does not mean that Iran poses no threat any more. After October 7, 2023, it is possible to understand, by looking at the statements of Saudi political elites and the official statements of Saudi institutions, that Israel has become the regional country posing the main security threat due to its foreign policy attitudes and behavior (Jones, 2025). In order to assess the deteriorating regional security environment following October 7 and discuss the measures to be taken, an extraordinary Arab-Islamic Summit was held in Riyadh in November 2024 at the invitation of the Saudi King. The final communiqué issued at the end of the summit identifies Israel as the principal state undermining regional security and stability through its aggressive and expansionist behaviors. The communiqué also emphasizes that Israel is an aggressive state that threatens the sovereignty and territorial integrity of Palestine, Lebanon, Syria, Iraq, and Iran (Minister of Foreign Affairs, 2024). Following Israel's military attack on Qatar in September 2025, Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman stated that Israel is a country that threatens regional security and that Arab and Islamic countries need to take measures to prevent this (Arab News, 2025). On September 15, an extraordinary Gulf Cooperation Council summit was held with Israeli aggression agenda. At final statement of this summit, which Saudi Arabia also attended, it was decided to activate the mechanism containing the GCC's defense commitments in order to prevent Israeli aggression (Al Jazeera, 2025). The final communiqué issued at the extraordinary Arab-Islamic Summit held in Doha on September 15, 2025, attended by Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, stressed the need to stand against Israel's aggressive policies in the region, warning that such efforts pose a direct threat to regional and international security (Anadolu Agency, 2025).

By contrast, the United States continues to regard Israel as a loyal and functional ally and to identify Iran as the principal security threat (Haass, 2024). This divergence signals a clear split in shared threat perceptions between Saudi Arabia and the United States. Such divergence in interests undermines strategic coordination in addressing security challenges within the Saudi–American alliance (Gordon & Karlin, 2026). In essence, while Saudi Arabia now views Israel as the main security threat and expects U.S. support to restrain it, the United States prioritizes Iran as the primary threat and seeks Saudi cooperation in containing it. This shift in perceptions regarding the common threat increases both partners' fears of abandonment and entrapment vis-à-vis one another (Hp.7).

Overall, when the three variables incorporated into the intra-alliance dispute analysis model are jointly assessed, a clear pattern emerges. The informal nature of security commitments in the alliance, the persistence of an asymmetrical distribution of alliance dependence to the detriment of Saudi Arabia, and the weakening level of alliance interest convergence have collectively intensified the Saudi leadership's fears of both abandonment and entrapment. Throughout this process, the erosion of U.S. allied reliability has further reinforced these two anxieties. Accordingly, the study reaches findings consistent with the expectations of hypotheses Hp.2, Hp.3, Hp.5, and Hp.7 developed within the theoretical framework. Therefore, from 2023 onward, the intensity of the alliance security dilemma in Saudi Arabia–United States relations has demonstrably increased.

This reality, in turn, pushed the Saudi leadership to pursue initiatives aimed at increasing its strategic autonomy vis-à-vis its ally and reducing the risk of strategic isolation in the face of adversary states. In an environment characterized by rising uncertainty and unreliability, Riyadh initially sought to elevate its informal alliance with its existing ally to a formal status by pursuing a binding defense cooperation agreement (Singh, 2024; Gause III, 2024). The failure to achieve a swift compromise in negotiations over a strengthened defense alliance, combined with the continued deterioration of the regional security environment, compelled the Saudi leadership to search for an acute and immediate remedy (Gordon & Karlin, 2026, p.152). To this end, Saudi Arabia opted to establish a hedging alliance without terminating its existing alliance with the United States. Accordingly, in September 2025, Saudi Arabia concluded a formal alliance with Pakistan, a nuclear-armed state, to balance Israel, another nuclear-capable actor. The Mutual Defense Cooperation Treaty signed between the two countries stipulates that the use of force against one party shall be considered as an attack against the other (Blank, 2025). The alliance with Pakistan is formal in terms of security commitment and symmetric in terms of alliance dependence.

Although it falls outside the main focus of this study, it is nevertheless worth briefly addressing the reasons underlying Pakistan's decision to form an alliance with Saudi Arabia. Pakistan's motivations for forming an alliance with Saudi Arabia can be grouped under two broad considerations. The first is the need to overcome its economic and financial constraints. Despite possessing nuclear capability and a powerful military, Pakistan remains heavily dependent on foreign investment and external financial assistance. In this context, capital from the Gulf, particularly from Saudi Arabia, can play an important role in maintaining economic stability (Nawaz, 2025). Saudi Arabia has provided economic and financial assistance to Pakistan since the early years following its independence (Ahmed and Faisal, 2014). Islamabad therefore has a strong interest in not only maintaining but also expanding Saudi investment and financial assistance to Pakistan. The alliance with Saudi Arabia can serve this purpose by reinforcing the economic ties between the two countries. Second, Pakistan's motivation stems from its desire to address its security needs. Pakistan regards neither Israel nor Iran, but rather its neighbor India, as its principal adversary. Since the two states gained independence from Britain in 1947, they have been engaged in a serious dispute over competing claims to the Kashmir region. Pakistan has pursued a balancing strategy towards India, whose military capabilities have expanded alongside its growing economic power. An alliance with Saudi Arabia can be expected to contribute to Pakistan's balancing strategy in two

important aspects. First, Pakistan may seek to constrain India's ability to expand its political and commercial relations with Saudi Arabia, thereby limiting India's diplomatic influence in the region. Second, by encouraging Saudi Arabia to provide substantial assistance and investment in Pakistan's defense industry, Pakistan may strengthen its military capabilities against India. Third, the strategic rapprochement between India and Israel in recent years has intensified Pakistan's security concerns. (Irrum, 2026)

Conclusion

This study focused on identifying the principal variables underlying Saudi Arabia's strategic decision to form an alliance with Pakistan. In this context, the core argument is that the intensity of the alliance security dilemma in Riyadh–Washington security relations has increased, and that this escalation has driven the Saudi leadership toward the establishment of a hedging alliance. Proceeding from this argument, the central analytical task of the study has been to explain why this dilemma has intensified, since understanding this dynamic also enables a clearer explanation of why Saudi Arabia attempted to ally with Pakistan. By adopting Snyder's alliance security dilemma approach, the study sought to account for the rise in the alliance security dilemma between two allies. Drawing on the alliance security dilemma literature, I developed a total of eight hypotheses, four of which were found to be empirically valid in the examined case. The study's main findings fall into three categories based on the independent variables.

The first group comprises findings related to the alliance commitment variable. Most notably, the study identifies the Saudi–U.S. alliance as characterized by a weak level of alliance commitment and confirms the expectations of Hp.2 and Hp.3. The informal nature of the alliance between Saudi Arabia and the United States generates a high level of abandonment fear on the part of Riyadh (Hp.2), primarily because no written, formal treaty containing explicit mutual security commitments has been concluded between the two states. The analysis demonstrates that the military and defense cooperation agreements signed by the parties aim at enhancing Saudi Arabia's defense capacity rather than establishing reciprocal security obligations, and that U.S. security assurances have largely remained verbal. Moreover, Washington's overt support for Israel's aggressive and expansionist foreign policy behavior after 2023 has significantly undermined alliance reliability from the Saudi perspective. In particular, the failure of U.S. security commitments to function effectively when Qatar was exposed to the use of force by both Israel and Iran dealt a severe blow to perceptions of alliance reliability. The erosion of alliance reliability, in turn, reinforced Riyadh's abandonment fears (Hp.3). When examined through the lens of the alliance security dilemma, the Washington–Riyadh alliance reveals a dual dynamic: Israel's attack on Qatar heightened Saudi Arabia's concerns about abandonment, whereas Iran's attack on Saudi Arabia intensified its concerns about entrapment.

The second group of findings concerns the alliance dependence distribution variable. The study finds that alliance dependence in Riyadh–Washington security cooperation is asymmetric and structurally disadvantageous for Saudi Arabia. The security–autonomy balance of the alliance operates in favor of the United States, compelling Saudi Arabia to

concede autonomy in exchange for security provision. This pattern constrains Riyadh's strategic autonomy in foreign policy and limits its capacity for independent decision-making, indicating a high level of entrapment fear (Hp.5), while simultaneously increasing the risk of strategic isolation. Following the 7 October 2023 attacks, the hardline posture adopted by the United States and Israel toward Iran, including the use of force, further intensified Saudi Arabia's entrapment concerns. At the same time, Washington's unwavering support for Israel's aggressive and expansionist conduct solidified Riyadh's abandonment fears.

The third group consists of findings related to the alliance interest convergence variable. The study observes a marked weakening of interest convergence in the Saudi–U.S. alliance in the post-2023 period. After the Arab Spring of 2011, Riyadh and Washington had largely converged in viewing Iran's increasingly aggressive and expansionist regional behavior as a shared threat and in adopting balancing security measures. However, 2023 constituted a critical turning point, as Saudi Arabia and Iran, under China's mediation, overcame their disputes and reemerged as two regional powers capable of cooperation. When this development is considered together with Israel's severe weakening of Iran's resistance axis after 7 October, Iran ceased to represent an immediate security threat for Saudi Arabia. By contrast, due to its increasingly aggressive behavior in the region, Israel emerged as the primary source of security threat requiring urgent countermeasures from Riyadh's perspective. In effect, Israel replaced Iran as Saudi Arabia's foremost security concern. Consequently, the United States' dual posture of backing Israel's aggressive conduct while prioritizing the use of force against Iran heightened Saudi Arabia's fears of both abandonment and entrapment (Hp.7).

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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

SOVEREIGNTY AS CAPACITY, NOT CONSTRAINT: TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL GOVERNANCE AND THE U.S. DESIGNATION OF THE PCC AND CV. THE CASE OF PRIMEIRO COMANDO DA CAPITAL (PCC) AND COMANDO VERMELHO (CV) IN BRAZIL

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Introduction

On 28 May 2026, the United States designated Primeiro Comando da Capital (PCC) and Comando Vermelho (CV) as Foreign Terrorist Organizations (FTOs) under Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act and as Specially Designated Global Terrorists under Executive Order 13224 (U.S. Department of State, 2026). The decision transformed an emerging policy debate into a concrete legal and diplomatic issue. It also revived a familiar question in Brazilian strategic thought: does the extraterritorial reach of foreign security law diminish national sovereignty, or can it expand the practical capacity of the Brazilian state to act against organizations whose networks cross borders?

The answer cannot be derived from the label alone. PCC and CV originated as criminal organizations and remain primarily profit-seeking rather than ideological actors. Yet both have developed capabilities that exceed the conventional image of localized gangs: territorial coercion, prison-based coordination, transnational trafficking links, financial intermediation, and the ability to disrupt public order. These developments matter because sovereignty is not exhausted by formal independence. It also depends on the state's capacity to enforce law, control coercion, protect the population, and regulate flows through its territory.

This article argues that foreign designation regimes can reinforce effective sovereignty only conditionally. They may increase access to financial intelligence, asset-blocking mechanisms, and cross-border prosecution. At the same time, an FTO designation can blur the analytical distinction between organized crime and terrorism, expose legitimate actors to broad compliance risks, and create friction when foreign measures are not coordinated with Brazilian institutions. The relevant contrast is therefore not sovereignty versus cooperation, but cooperative capacity versus unaccountable substitution.

The analysis proceeds in six stages. After setting out the methodological approach, it explains the legal effects and jurisdictional limits of the U.S. designations; situates PCC

and CV within the literature on criminal governance and territorial control; considers organizational adaptation and transnational expansion; evaluates the crime-terror nexus without equating criminal violence with ideological terrorism; and develops a framework of operational sovereignty and the safeguards required for bilateral cooperation. The conclusion summarizes the theoretical and policy implications.

Methodological Approach and Scope

This is an analytical and reflection article based on qualitative documentary analysis; it does not report original empirical research. The source base was selected purposively according to four criteria: legal authority, institutional reliability, scholarly relevance, and direct connection to the article's concepts or cases. Primary materials include the Brazilian Constitution, U.S. legislation, the official 2026 designation statement, and official security statistics. Secondary materials comprise peer-reviewed scholarship and academic books on sovereignty, criminal governance, organized violence, transnational networks, and the crime-terror nexus, together with reports from the United Nations system.

The analysis combines legal-institutional interpretation with a structured reading of the literature. Sources were used to distinguish three analytical levels: the formal legal effects of designation; the documented organizational and territorial capacities of PCC and CV; and the conditions under which international cooperation may enhance or constrain Brazilian state capacity. Preference was given to official or peer-reviewed sources, and claims not supported by judicial records, official investigations, or corroborated scholarship were treated as risks or hypotheses rather than established facts.

The article is not a systematic literature review and does not seek to measure the causal effects of the May 2026 designations, which remain too recent for robust outcome evaluation. Its purpose is interpretive and theory-informed: to clarify the relationship between foreign legal measures and sovereignty, identify plausible mechanisms and risks, and formulate conditions for sovereignty-enhancing cooperation. This scope limits causal inference but is appropriate for examining the immediate legal and strategic implications of a recent policy development.

To increase analytical consistency, the sources were read through a common matrix organized around authority, mechanism, exposure, and safeguard. Authority concerns the institution legally competent to classify conduct, obtain evidence, impose sanctions, or employ coercion. Mechanism identifies how a designation may produce effects, such as asset blocking, criminal liability for material support, compliance screening, or prioritization by enforcement agencies. Exposure concerns the actors and transactions that connect Brazilian criminal networks to jurisdictions, currencies, companies, or infrastructures affected by U.S. law. Safeguard refers to the domestic and bilateral controls required to preserve legality, proportionality, and Brazilian decision-making. This matrix prevents the analysis from treating diplomatic language, legal effects, and operational outcomes as if they were equivalent.

Legal and Institutional Framework

The U.S. FTO regime is grounded in Section 219 of the Immigration and Nationality Act. In general terms, designation requires a finding that an organization is foreign, engages in terrorism or terrorist activity as defined by U.S. law, and threatens the security of U.S. nationals or the national security of the United States (United States, 1952). One of its most consequential effects arises under 18 U.S.C. § 2339B, which criminalizes the knowing provision of material support or resources to a designated organization (United States, 1996). The parallel designation under Executive Order 13224 supports the blocking of property and interests in property subject to U.S. jurisdiction and facilitates financial sanctions.

These measures are foreign legal acts. They do not alter the legal classification of PCC or CV under Brazilian law, confer policing authority on U.S. agents in Brazilian territory, or displace Brazilian courts. Their immediate force is greatest within U.S. jurisdiction and in networks exposed to U.S. financial, commercial, immigration, or criminal-law controls. Because dollar clearing, correspondent banking, and multinational compliance systems have global reach, however, their practical effects can extend far beyond U.S. territory. This is an example of what Farrell and Newman (2019) call weaponized interdependence: states positioned at central nodes of global networks can use those networks for coercive or regulatory purposes.

The two designation instruments should also be distinguished. The FTO framework has criminal-law and immigration consequences, including the material-support prohibition, whereas Executive Order 13224 operates principally through economic sanctions and the blocking of property interests within the reach of U.S. jurisdiction. In practice, the combination matters because it joins prosecutorial risk to financial exclusion. Banks, insurers, logistics providers, digital platforms, and commercial intermediaries may adopt preventive controls broader than the minimum legally required. Such private compliance decisions can increase pressure on facilitators, but they may also affect parties whose connection to designated organizations has not been established in a court. The analytical issue is therefore not only what the law authorizes, but how regulated actors translate legal risk into operational restrictions.

The sovereignty question therefore has two dimensions. The first is formal authority: who decides, investigates, prosecutes, and uses coercive force within Brazil? The second is effective capacity: can Brazilian institutions trace assets, obtain evidence, arrest suspects, and disrupt networks operating across several jurisdictions? A foreign designation leaves the first dimension formally intact but may affect the second positively or negatively, depending on how cooperation is structured.

Brazil and the United States already possess formal channels for mutual legal assistance in criminal matters under the bilateral agreement promulgated by Brazil through Decree No. 3,810/2001 (Brazil, 2001). Such channels can reduce jurisdictional gaps when evidence, proceeds, suspects, and communications are dispersed across countries. They can also generate asymmetries. Information may flow unevenly; foreign compliance decisions may affect Brazilian individuals or businesses before domestic adjudication; and the terrorism label may encourage legal shortcuts inappropriate to ordinary criminal

conduct. For this reason, the designation should be treated as a tool within a negotiated framework, not as a self-executing substitute for Brazilian policy.

The mutual legal assistance framework provides a lawful route for requests involving testimony, documents, searches, seizures, and other evidentiary measures, subject to the procedures and authorities of each state (Brazil, 2001). Its relevance lies in converting political willingness into reviewable institutional action. Intelligence may identify a target or transaction, but intelligence alone does not necessarily satisfy the evidentiary standards required for prosecution or asset recovery. Effective cooperation therefore depends on a chain that connects actionable information, properly formulated requests, admissible evidence, judicial authorization where required, and subsequent enforcement. A designation can accelerate attention to a case; it cannot repair deficiencies in attribution, custody of evidence, or procedural legality.

The Colombian experience illustrates both the potential and the limits of external assistance. Plan Colombia combined security aid, counternarcotics measures, institutional support, and extensive U.S.-Colombian cooperation. It contributed to improvements in state reach and security capacity, but it also attracted sustained criticism concerning militarization, human rights, displacement, and policy dependence (Isacson et al., 2010; Tickner, 2007). It is therefore not evidence that external classification automatically strengthens sovereignty. Rather, it shows that outcomes depend on domestic ownership, institutional controls, policy design, and the distribution of costs.

Organized Crime, Violence, and Territorial Governance in Brazil

Brazil's security environment combines a long-term decline in some national violence indicators with persistent regional concentration and high levels of lethal violence. In 2024, the country recorded 44,127 intentional violent deaths, a rate of 20.8 per 100,000 inhabitants (Fórum Brasileiro de Segurança Pública [FBSP], 2025). The national decline is important, but aggregate improvement does not eliminate local environments in which criminal groups regulate everyday life, dispute territory, and challenge public authority.

PCC and CV differ in organizational history, internal arrangements, and territorial strategies. Treating them as interchangeable would obscure important variation. Even so, both demonstrate that contemporary organized crime may exercise forms of governance rather than merely conduct illicit transactions. In areas of entrenched influence, criminal actors may regulate retail markets, impose behavioral rules, punish residents, control access, and mediate disputes. Misse (2011) conceptualizes related processes through the commodification of political goods, while Arias (2017) shows how armed networks in Latin American cities can become embedded in political and social arrangements.

The differences between the organizations are relevant to the expected effects of designation. PCC is frequently analyzed as a network whose prison-based norms, distributed responsibilities, and commercial connections support coordination across distant locations (Dias, 2013; Feltran, 2010). CV emerged from a distinct historical and territorial environment in Rio de Janeiro, where armed control, factional rivalry, and

relationships within specific communities have played a prominent role (Misse, 2011). These are simplified analytical tendencies rather than fixed organizational essences, but they caution against a single enforcement model. Measures directed at transnational finance and brokerage may affect networked commercial functions differently from territorially embedded armed structures. The designation names two organizations, but operational policy must identify the particular actors, functions, and vulnerabilities present in each case.

Criminal governance weakens public authority through more than visible confrontation. It can change the incentives of residents, public officials, businesses, and service providers by making compliance with informal rules appear safer or more predictable than reliance on state institutions. This process may coexist with policing and formal administration rather than eliminate them completely. Arias (2017) demonstrates that criminal orders are often produced through relationships among armed actors, political networks, and communities, while Lessing (2017) shows that violence can be calibrated to influence enforcement. Consequently, territorial recovery cannot be measured only by arrests, seizures, or temporary occupation. It also requires durable access to justice, protection for witnesses, reliable public services, legitimate policing, and the reduction of opportunities for corruption and coercive brokerage.

Episodes of coordinated violence reveal another dimension of this capacity. The sharp increase in lethal violence in Ceará between 2016 and 2017 occurred amid factional competition and changing criminal alliances (FBSP, 2018). In January 2019, coordinated attacks in the state targeted transport, public buildings, and infrastructure. The strategic significance of such episodes lies not only in the number of attacks but in their signaling function: criminal organizations can impose costs on governments, synchronize action, and affect the routine provision of public services.

Lessing (2017) explains why criminal organizations sometimes use violence not simply to defeat rivals but to shape state behavior. This form of coercion remains analytically distinct from terrorism when it is driven principally by illicit-market incentives and bargaining over enforcement. Nonetheless, its effects can be political. Criminal violence may influence prison policy, policing choices, electoral behavior, and the population's willingness to cooperate with authorities.

A security issue becomes strategically relevant when its scale and organization exceed routine institutional management. Buzan's (1991) account of securitization helps explain why governments may move an issue from ordinary policing into exceptional security frameworks. Yet securitization is itself a political act and must be scrutinized. Describing criminal governance as a threat to sovereignty can mobilize resources and coordination; it can also justify disproportionate force or weaken procedural safeguards. The analytical task is to recognize the strategic challenge without allowing the category of national security to erase legal distinctions.

Organizational Adaptation and Transnational Expansion

The trajectory of PCC illustrates the evolution of a prison-based organization into a decentralized network capable of operating across territorial and functional domains. Its

internal divisions, commonly described as sintonias, coordinate areas such as finance, discipline, legal support, logistics, and external relations (Dias, 2013; Feltran, 2010). Decentralization can make the organization resilient: the removal of individual leaders does not necessarily dismantle routines, reputational mechanisms, or distributed operational ties.

Professionalization is not limited to weapons or tactical capability. Complex criminal networks require bookkeeping, communications, legal representation, procurement, transport, concealment, and money laundering. They may exploit legitimate companies and regulated markets to disguise ownership, circulate proceeds, and connect illicit revenue to lawful economic activity. The resulting interface between licit and illicit spheres complicates enforcement because the most important vulnerabilities may be found in corporate records, payment systems, logistics contracts, and beneficial-ownership structures rather than at street level.

This functional specialization also explains why organizational disruption should not be equated with the removal of prominent leaders. Networks can replace individuals when routines, trusted intermediaries, financial reserves, and access to infrastructure remain intact. Conversely, targeted action against apparently peripheral services may impose significant costs if those services are difficult to substitute. Financial investigation, corporate transparency, port integrity, customs cooperation, and analysis of communication and transport patterns therefore complement conventional policing. The potential contribution of the U.S. designations is strongest at precisely these transnational interfaces. Their limitations are equally clear: sanctions may displace activity toward less transparent channels, while aggressive pressure on one node can redistribute routes, partnerships, and risks without reducing the underlying criminal market.

Transnational expansion intensifies these challenges. Cocaine supply chains linking South America to European markets depend on ports, containers, maritime routes, brokers, and partnerships in transit jurisdictions. The UNODC (2023) documents the diversification and globalization of cocaine trafficking routes, including the strategic role of Atlantic connections. Brazilian organizations participate in this environment through flexible arrangements rather than necessarily exercising hierarchical control over every stage of the chain.

The distinction matters for policy. A monolithic-cartel model may lead authorities to overestimate centralized command and underestimate brokerage, subcontracting, and temporary alliances. Networked enforcement should therefore target functions and chokepoints: financial facilitators, corrupt access to logistics, document fraud, encrypted coordination, weapons supply, and cross-border laundering. Designation can assist with some of these nodes, especially those exposed to U.S. jurisdiction, but it cannot replace prison governance reform, territorial policing, prosecutorial capacity, or anti-corruption measures in Brazil.

The Crime-Terror Nexus: Convergence Without Equivalence

The crime-terror nexus provides a useful but easily misused framework. Organized criminal groups and terrorist organizations may share routes, financial services, weapons suppliers, document forgers, or tactical knowledge. Criminal organizations may also use spectacular violence, intimidation, and attacks on infrastructure. These similarities establish possible functional convergence; they do not by themselves establish equivalence of purpose, identity, or legal category.

The distinction between motivation and method is central. PCC and CV have historically pursued control of illicit markets, organizational survival, profit, and bargaining leverage. Terrorist organizations are ordinarily defined by the use of violence connected to political, ideological, or religious objectives, although legal definitions vary. The UNICRI (2024) accordingly treats the nexus as a range of relationships and overlaps rather than a claim that all organized crime is terrorism. Its framework supports case-specific analysis of cooperation, appropriation of tactics, and shared enabling systems.

A disciplined use of the nexus concept requires at least three separate questions. First, is there evidence of direct cooperation between identifiable organizations, or merely use of the same route, intermediary, or illicit service? Second, is the relationship sustained and organizationally authorized, or opportunistic and temporary? Third, does the observed convergence concern methods and resources, or does it extend to strategic objectives? These distinctions affect both legal qualification and policy design. A shared money launderer may justify a focused financial investigation without supporting a broader claim of organizational alliance. Similar attacks on infrastructure may reveal tactical learning without demonstrating ideological convergence. The evidentiary threshold should rise with the breadth and political consequence of the claim.The Tri-Border Area of Argentina, Brazil, and Paraguay has long attracted attention because smuggling, informal commerce, and cross-border financial flows can create opportunities for illicit actors (Amaral, 2010). Evidence of a permissive environment, however, should not be converted into an assumption that every criminal network operating there is linked to terrorism. Sound analysis requires identifying the actors, transactions, duration, and direction of any relationship.

Claims concerning the transfer of drone expertise or battlefield knowledge from external conflicts require the same discipline. Such adaptation is plausible, given the global diffusion of commercial technologies and online instructional material, but plausibility is not proof of an organizational program. Unless supported by judicial records, official investigations, or independently corroborated evidence, these claims should be framed as risks to monitor rather than established facts.

The 2026 U.S. designation thus creates a legal classification under U.S. law but does not settle the social-scientific debate. For analysis and policy, it is more precise to describe PCC and CV as transnational criminal organizations capable of criminal governance and selective tactical convergence. This formulation recognizes their strategic significance while preserving the evidentiary threshold needed to distinguish crime, insurgency, and terrorism.

Operational Sovereignty and the Conditions for Bilateral Synergy

The Brazilian Constitution identifies sovereignty as a foundation of the Republic (Brazil, 1988, art. 1). Article 4 combines principles that must be read together, including national independence, non-intervention, repudiation of terrorism, and cooperation among peoples. Article 144 defines public security as a duty of the state and a right and responsibility of all. The constitutional framework therefore does not establish a simple opposition between autonomy and cooperation. It requires public authority to preserve domestic competence while using lawful cooperation when necessary to protect society.

A capacity-based conception of sovereignty clarifies the issue. Formal sovereignty concerns recognized authority and juridical independence. Effective sovereignty concerns the ability to implement decisions across territory, institutions, and relevant networks. Krasner (1999) demonstrates that the practices associated with sovereignty have always contained exceptions, bargains, and inconsistencies. In a highly interdependent environment, absolute insulation may preserve the appearance of autonomy while reducing the state's practical ability to control transnational flows.

Operational sovereignty can therefore be evaluated through observable state functions rather than rhetorical assertions of autonomy. Relevant indicators include the capacity to define national priorities, initiate and direct investigations, protect sensitive information, obtain admissible evidence abroad, block and recover criminal assets, prosecute according to domestic law, and maintain legitimate presence in affected territories. Cooperation strengthens sovereignty when it improves these functions while leaving Brazilian institutions accountable for decisions made within Brazil. It weakens sovereignty when access to external capabilities becomes a substitute for domestic capacity, when foreign classifications determine Brazilian enforcement without independent assessment, or when the distribution of information and costs prevents reciprocal decision-making.

The U.S. designations can support Brazilian capacity in three main ways. First, financial restrictions may raise the cost of accessing institutions and intermediaries exposed to U.S. jurisdiction. Second, material-support investigations may generate evidence about facilitators located outside Brazil. Third, the designation may increase bureaucratic priority and encourage cooperation among agencies. These benefits are not automatic. Criminal networks can migrate to cash, alternative currencies, informal transfer systems, opaque companies, or jurisdictions with weaker enforcement.

The designations also carry material risks. Overcompliance may exclude lawful Brazilian businesses or communities from financial services. Broad material-support rules may complicate humanitarian, journalistic, academic, or legal activity. Intelligence asymmetries may allow foreign priorities to dominate the bilateral agenda. Most importantly, the terrorism frame may redirect resources from the institutional conditions that allow criminal governance to persist, including prison control, corruption, slow asset recovery, weak local protection, and uneven public-service provision.

International cooperation will strengthen rather than weaken Brazilian sovereignty when five conditions are met: Brazilian institutions retain operational and prosecutorial control within national territory; evidence is shared through lawful and reviewable channels; measures are targeted at demonstrable conduct and financial links; cooperation is

reciprocal and aligned with priorities defined by Brazil; and human rights, due process, and judicial oversight remain binding. Under these conditions, external tools supplement domestic authority. Without them, the same tools may create dependency, legal uncertainty, or political escalation.

These conditions can be translated into a practical bilateral agenda. Joint work should begin with agreed priority targets and clearly assigned institutional responsibilities. Requests for evidence should identify the intended judicial use and the legal basis for collection. Financial measures should distinguish designated actors and proven facilitators from sectors or communities exposed only through geography or commercial proximity. Periodic review should assess not only the number of investigations, arrests, or blocked accounts, but also evidentiary quality, assets effectively recovered, displacement to new routes, unintended effects on lawful activity, and the degree to which Brazilian agencies gained lasting capability. Such review would make cooperation adaptive and reduce the risk that exceptional measures continue without evidence of effectiveness.

The appropriate policy architecture is therefore layered. Domestic measures should focus on prison governance, territorial presence, witness and community protection, anti-corruption controls, beneficial-ownership transparency, financial investigation, and rapid asset recovery. Regional cooperation should address borders, ports, extradition, and shared criminal markets. Wider international cooperation should target global finance, maritime logistics, communications, and facilitators. The designation is potentially useful within this architecture, but it is not the architecture itself.

Conclusion

The 2026 designation of PCC and CV as FTOs and Specially Designated Global Terrorists should neither be celebrated as a complete solution nor rejected solely as an affront to sovereignty. It is a foreign legal measure with significant transnational effects. Its value for Brazil depends on whether those effects are incorporated into a strategy controlled by Brazilian institutions and directed at empirically demonstrated vulnerabilities.

The Brazilian case supports an operational understanding of sovereignty. State authority is weakened when criminal organizations regulate territory, coerce populations, penetrate lawful markets, and move resources across borders with limited constraint. Cooperation can strengthen sovereignty when it helps the state recover these capacities. Yet cooperation becomes sovereignty-eroding when it substitutes external priorities for domestic decision-making, bypasses legal safeguards, or treats contested analytical categories as settled facts.

The crime-terror nexus must therefore be used with precision. PCC and CV are transnational criminal organizations with governance capacity and the ability to employ politically consequential violence. Functional overlaps with terrorism may exist in tactics, logistics, or enabling networks, but those overlaps do not erase differences in motivation and organizational purpose. Maintaining this distinction improves both scholarship and policy.

A sustainable response combines domestic institutional strengthening with targeted international action against financial and logistical networks. Brazil should use the opportunities created by the U.S. designations while negotiating safeguards, demanding reciprocal intelligence value, and preserving exclusive authority over coercive action on its territory. Sovereignty, in this sense, is neither isolation nor passive legal status. It is the demonstrable capacity to govern, protect, decide, and cooperate on terms consistent with national law.

The principal implication is that the success of designation should not be inferred from the severity of the label. It should be assessed through verifiable changes in criminal access to finance and logistics, the quality of cross-border evidence, the recovery of assets, the resilience of Brazilian institutions, and the protection of lawful activity and individual rights. This shifts evaluation from symbolic alignment to institutional performance. It also preserves the distinction between recognizing the strategic gravity of criminal governance and importing a foreign legal category without domestic scrutiny. A sovereignty-enhancing strategy is thus selective, evidence-based, reciprocal, and subject to continuous political and judicial control.

Future assessments should compare these criteria over time and examine whether the designations produce durable disruption or merely short-term displacement. Particular attention should be paid to organizational adaptation, changes in financial intermediaries and trafficking routes, the conversion of intelligence into admissible evidence, and the institutional learning retained by Brazilian agencies. This research agenda would permit a more rigorous judgment once sufficient post-designation evidence becomes available.

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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

DIGITAL CROWDS AND THE FREEDOM OF ASSOCIATION: CONSTITUTIONAL REFLECTIONS ON A CONTEMPORARY PHENOMENON

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Introduction

The era of digitalisation has permanently altered and transformed various areas of human life, including the ways in which constitutional freedoms and rights are exercised. The continuous development of digitalisation leads to the need to re-evaluate and interpret existing legislation - including constitutional considerations. The significance of digitisation for the existence and development of the state remains unquestionably important - including in the area of the tasks of a democratic state operating within the framework of the rule of law. This state of affairs necessitates a redefinition of the concepts and values attributed to the individual. The fundamental area of analysis undertaken for the purposes of this thesis remains the freedom of association through so-called „digital crowds" based on the conditions of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland (Sejm of Poland, 1997). Freedom of association is one of the main values enabling the individual to fulfilmen a political nature. This phenomenon is part of the democratic methods of human interaction with the state.

The term "digital crowds" is relatively new. This term has received some clarifications. It is described as follow: 'Digital crowds comprise pooled human resources—knowledge, expertise, and enthusiasm—that are distributed all over the globe and made available online. (...) Crowd members thus either aim to stand out from others for their own good, or they stand up with others for the greater good. Both competition and collaboration involve a high degree of interaction.' (Jaouat, 2023, p. 5,8). In that definition some common values and features with the freedom of association.

The crucial research problem remains to determine whether actors embedding themselves in so-called "Digital Crowds" constitute a subject of constitutional freedom of association and whether such forms of voluntary participation in digital groups can constitute an expression of freedom of association.

Firstly, the term Digital Crowds is analysed and an attempt is made to embed it in legal terms. Subsequently, the focus is on the analysis of the essence of freedom of association together with an assessment and an attempt to redefine this term in the face of digitalisation. In the third part, reference is made to selected practical manifestations of

the realisation of the needs of the individual in the area of the Internet - juxtaposing such participation with the new definition of freedom of association. The considerations enabled the presentation of *the lege lata* postulates.

Digital Crowds as Emerging Actors in Democratic Processes

Human cyberspace activities remain an indispensable part of an individual's everyday life. Nowadays, the relocation of political and social activities into cyberspace can be found more and more frequently. Discussions with a social dimension also take place in this sphere. Furthermore, the term 'electronic democracy' can also be found in the literature. This view essentially pays attention to the functions of cyberspace for democracy - as a vehicle that enhances human participation in the process of political influence. It therefore represents both a relatively new area of action, a new direction and a dimension of individual activity (Porębski, 2010, p. 159-160). Thus, individuals have the instruments to implement actions in the democratic process. One of the terms emerging in the sphere of activities in cyberspace is the so-called 'Digital Crowds'. These remain understood as actors realising themselves around a certain goal, idea, premise, theme - all in the online plane.

The phenomenon of the kooperation of individuals is strongly reflected in the statement that: 'What makes a crowd a crowd, and not just a collection of unrelated individuals, is their collective behavior as an entity. Offline, crowds can assemble anywhere there is space for them, but on the Internet they typically come together on a platform—and a platform only becomes one when they do. Platforms make crowds, and crowds make platforms.' (Duan & Grimmelmann, 2024, p. 13.). Such places become the first area of gathering of individuals in cyberspace. The possibility of assigning a certain form of identification to a group arises from certain factors around which people congregate. In this regard, it is possible to point to: 'If the group is part of a larger identity ecosystem, such as a gaming community or a political group, the shared content ties people to that broader context, reinforcing and building a crowd.' (Beyer, 2024, p. 30). Thus, the crowd may represent some concentration of individuals in relation to an issue.

In the reveleant literature it generally acepted that civil society can be implemented in cyberspace. It is also named as Democracy 2.0. (Lakomy, 2013, p. 155). The possibilities for people to take action online remain very wide - through individual activities as well as those that will take a more organised form.

A significant impact on the deepening process of Digital Crowds took place during the Covid-19 pandemic. As aptly indicated by the Vaibhav Saria and Pooja Satyogi: 'This lack of social collectivity can be seen most clearly in online avatars—in other words, individuals gathering in cyberspace.' (2022, p. 6). This state of affairs influenced the - forced - transfer of the realisation of the individual's needs to a sphere that remained accessible and also made it possible to participate in various spheres of action together with third parties - but in an online format. Through accessibility, this sphere remained one of the key factors influencing social life.

Constitutional Aspects of the Freedom of Association

The freedom of association under the Polish Constitution is regarded as a freedom to which every individual is entitled. It remains classified as a freedom of a political nature. Through it, subjects may group together for the pursuit of a chosen goal. The literature on the subject identifies its source with the social nature of man - which is a component of human dignity.

The need for the individual to live in society and the constitutional regulations, i.e. 11-13 of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, together with the clarification of freedom pursuant to Article 58(1) of the Constitution of the Republic of Poland, confirm its importance not only for the individual, but also for the state. Undeniably, the functioning of various associations is included in the principle of civil society, which remains an element of a democratic state under the rule of law (Article 2 of the Constitution). The Polish legislator has adopted an open catalogue of associations (Article 12 of the Constitution), which allows a broad view of the area of the exercise of freedom of association (Article 58(1) of the Constitution). Formalised structures are in fact not necessary for the existence of an association. It is generally accepted that the most important constituent elements are voluntariness, a chosen goal and cooperation. So far, the literature has concentrated on the consideration of this freedom by focusing on real - and not virtual - activity. However, it remains to be established whether public participation in various groups in the digital sphere also remains an element of this freedom and whether it enjoys constitutional protection.

Therefore, generally, the grouping of individuals should be contrasted with the components of freedom of association. The literature defines that: 'An association is a structure formed by people, based on voluntary membership, created for the purpose of pursuing jointly agreed objectives, achieved through chosen means.' (Florczak-Wątor, 2023, p. 216). The first element remains the group of people. As a rule, a group is assumed to be a collective of at least three people, which also corresponds to the Latin paremia Tres faciunt collegium. The subjective conditionality confirms the collegiality that is the essence of the co-operations being circulated. The very term Digital Crowds represents a supra-individual dimension. The framing of the term by the phrase 'crowds' represents the necessity of a larger number of individuals. The Oxford Learner's Dictionary shows the term 'crowds' as 'a particular group of people' (The Oxford Learner's Dictionary, 2025). That interpretation aligns with the idea of freedom of association - especially because it can be defined as a group of people who are a specific subject of this freedom. They can be identified within the group.

Another element is voluntariness. Voluntariness is usually understood as the absence of compulsion. However, this dimension also remains significant in terms of possible consequences for the associated subject - it means that an individual cannot suffer gratification or stigmatisation because of membership in a given association. (Sokolewicz & Wojtyczek, 2016, article 58). In the dimension of virtual grouping, individuals have a full range of possibilities for deciding whether or not to join a given formation. Moreover, it seems that the dimension of group participation also remains widely available, e.g. to children. Although the content of Article 48(1) of the Polish Constitution should be left in the field of consideration, parents also decide themselves how much freedom they leave

their children to use the Internet. Thus, in the formula of digital associations, the possibilities for freedom of participation remain very wide.

Another element of this freedom is the scope for common purpose. The use of the Internet is a platform that can span many areas of an individual's life. In this scope, it is the participant who sets the goal of his or her activity. This can be a dimension of independent activity, but also of shared activity. When a person groups with others by defining a given objective for the collective - even indirectly - then this common area of interest will remain crucial in establishing the link in question between group members. Participation via the Internet will not be significantly different from that which takes place in the real world - in the target assumptions dimension. The actions of individuals in a group - whether 'live' or in remote form - can lead to the realisation of objectives as well as the actual achievement of a goal. Thus, goals can also be set and realised in cyber sphaere. Sometimes the thematic ties that occur while online relations also lead to the formation of a certain assumption for the joint actions of individuals.

A troublesome element in determining whether freedom of association can also constitute a form of participation on the Internet is the question of anonymity. Nevertheless, taking into account the constituent elements of freedom of association - under Article 58(1) - it is impossible to point to the necessity of disclosing personal data. However, it is also worth noting the content of Article 13 of the Constitution Act, where it is indicated that: 'Political parties and other organisations referring in their programmes to the totalitarian methods and practices of Nazism, fascism and communism, as well as those whose programme or activities presuppose or permit racial and national hatred, the use of violence to gain power or influence state policy, or provide for the secrecy of structures or membership, shall be prohibited.' Thus, the potential presence of anonymous individuals in a group remains an important issue to assess. The legislator has indicated a prohibition on the existence of an organisation when the programme or activities provide for secrecy of structures or membership. The crucial question is whether it is possible to assume that an organisation - including, above all, an informal (unregistered) one - will have such a programme. Thus, it is crucial to distinguish firmly between the question of anonymity and secrecy of structures or membership. The fundamental purpose of Article 13 of the Constitution is to protect democracy - it is therefore impossible to treat this provision without reference to the principles of a democratic state under the rule of law. Under Article 13 of the Constitution, the assumption of secrecy of structures or membership remains forbidden within the internal organisation (Zubik & Sokolewicz, 2016, article 13). Hence, it is essentially a matter of the direction taken by the organisation in question assuming such an area. Only the juxtaposition of this issue - i.e. anonymity in an organised group and the assumptions of a democratic state - will be the basis for an answer. It would therefore seem that the fact of anonymity does not preclude the acceptance of associations in the dimension of Digital Crowds - as an acceptance of the prohibition of the existence of such organisations. Such an interpretation would appear to remain excessive and out of step with current social and civilisational developments.

Contemporary Examples and Legal Challenges

The transformation of the meaning of freedom of association in the modern world remains evident in the example of self-organised communities in the digital formula. There are various areas of such activities. It should be pointed out that Digital Crowds can be realised in particular in different digital infrastructures, i.e. e.g. social media platforms (e.g. Facebook), online forums (e.g. Reddit), collective communication platforms (e.g. Discord), streaming platforms (e.g. YouTube, Twitch), online games (e.g. Roblox, Minecraft).

One expression of this phenomenon remains so-called crowdsourcing groups. An element of crowdsourcing is considered to be: 'the use of social network theory, in which the behaviour of an actor in the public sphere is interpreted according to certain patterns of relations, relationships both interactional and structural, with particular reference to Durkheim's principle of solidarity.' (Kinal, 2017, s. 119). Examples of such groupings are, for example, purposeful self-organised groups solving missing persons incidents. Such groups can be found, for example, on platforms X (used to be Twitter), Discord, Reddit as well as Facebook. Essentially, these are purpose-driven groups - dedicated to solving a specific incident, analysing available data, gathering and acquiring other information. They usually remain open to a community with the same purpose. Such an arrangement provides confirmation of the purposefulness and voluntariness of such self-organised groups. Individuals grouped in such communities primarily pursue their own social needs, but also interact with areas of public authority - e.g. by collecting data and providing it to law enforcement agencies. They constitute, therefore, an area of political influence. In principle, such groups do not have a formal structure. Nevertheless, they have a dedicated purpose. Such elements of participation remain consistent with Article 58(1) of the Polish Constitution. For this dimension of participation and social influence in this view remains significant. However, formalised groups are not necessary for the exercise of freedom of association - as Article 11 of the Constitution Act implies, they can also be 'other voluntary associations'.

Other types of digital groups - no longer classified as crowdsoucing, but which have the characteristics of associations - are in particular: communities of people grouped around influencers, in especially Facebook and TikTok. It can also be noted that such groups very frequently have their own rules, as well as specific administrators who are regarded as group presidents. A structural dimension is therefore emerging. These groups organise both online and stationary meetings (fan meetings, events). In general, the objectives of such groups can also be set, e.g. support for a particular influencer. Without a doubt, this also represents a dimension of the realisation of the needs of society - most often of the youngest people and being one of the most accessible forms of realisation of the freedom of association for the youngest.

In the digital area, it is also possible to find various closed communities that group together in a specific thematic or ideological area. Such groups can most often be found on Discord, Reddit and Facebook. Various worldview groups are emerging, which very often have specific structures. They also organise events that take place in real life as well as online. These correspond significantly to the classic view of associations.

Then, the so-called "Roblox masses" can be pointed out. These kind of events were popular in 2024 in Poland. 'The Roblox masses' were a form of children, young people

and even adults grouping together in a specific group in a digital game for mass scenes. These forms were gaining strong popularity. They were distinguished by a certain repetitiveness - the frequency of the meetings. Moreover, such e-meetings involved a specific community - members of a specific group. Also they had a purpose - by imitating the Catholic Mass. In particular, they could be found in Roblox as well as Minecraft[1]. They were informal, as well as to some extent symbolic. Such groups had their own goals, which, however, can only partly be contrasted with freedom of religion. Such groups have some structural elements and are repetitive. In order to assess the possibility of attributing such events to the nature of association, it remains necessary to assess the sustainability of such groups. In view of the fact that such meetings often remain linked to a certain range of trends, they nevertheless possess the attributes inherent in freedom of association for a certain period of time.

The presented examples of cooperative activities of people in the digital sphere confirm the importance of e-activity as an expression of freedom of association. They also perform roles and functions that remain consistent with the essence of this constitutional freedom. Even short-lived forms of participation in the groups concerned fulfil the prerequisites of freedom of association.

Conclusion

It is important to note that the concept of freedom of association is currently undergoing a transformation. For its existence, it does not need to assume a particular type of organisation - also in a non-digital dimension - in order to be legally relevant.

The idea of freedom of association is a form of realisation of individual needs, which can be realised in a specific group. By creating a broad dimension of associations (Article 12 of the Constitution), the legislator has in fact made it possible to undertake associational activities without restricting them as to form. It seems that, in view of the unquestionably constant participation of the cyberspace sphere in the life of every individual, forms of association as Digital Crowds are the fastest developing form of association. It is the closest and most common to human beings. The needs of the individual, including the objectives pursued by groups, remain consistent with the principles of freedom of association. And the transfer of activities to cyberspace does not limit the possibility of realising the essence of this freedom. It therefore appears that the current definition of freedom of association should remain focused not only on participation in the real dimension, but also in the cyberspace setting, and as such, it is also subject to protection. Digital Crowds may facilitate the emergence of democratic mechanisms in cyberspace.

To summarise the importance of grouping in cyberspace and the necessity of considering this form also as a manifestation of freedom of association, the affirmation to this effect reflects General Assembly United Nations in Resolution A/HRC/RES/24/5 as: 'Reiterating the important role of new information and communications technologies in enabling and facilitating the enjoyment of the rights to freedom of peaceful assembly and of association, and the importance for all States to promote and facilitate access to the

[1] Such groupings often remain dictated by temporal trends. In addition to the forms of Catholic masses, there have also been e-meetings imitating parliament in Poland.

Internet and international cooperation aimed at the development of media and information and communications facilities in all countries' (United Nations General Assembly, 2013).

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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

THE ILLUSION OF REGIONAL HEGEMONY? CRITICAL ANALYSIS OF SAUDI ARABIA'S POST-OIL TRANSITION UNDER THE POLITICAL ECONOMY PRISM

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Introduction

Widely renowned for its petroleum wealth, The Dessert Kingdom of Saudi Arabia, is undergoing an enormous economic reorientation. This oil-dependent economy reduced the need for political liberalization or economic diversification as it enabled the state to disperse riches through public employment, subsidies, and social welfare. Recent developments worldwide have persuaded the ruling House of Saud that strengthening the country's economic base is crucial to future prosperity. Given how heavily reliant on oil, the state is now, a substantial drop in demand would cause Saudi Arabia's GDP to fall precipitously. Vision 2030, introduced in 2016, is the overarching strategy to avert this and moderate the country.

A worldwide roadmap for economic diversification, Vision 2030, reflects Riyadh's desire to break the 'resource curse' and reclaim its economic identity through technological modernization, diversification and industrialization[1]. This move becomes especially urgent given the hurdles of the global energy transition, the decrease in oil paychecks and the evolving geopolitical climate[2]. Massive projects like NEOM, Qiddiya, and the kingdom's burgeoning green hydrogen and semiconductor enterprises have the potential to spearhead the change to an economy powered by information and innovation[3].

Nevertheless, the shift raises significant worries about whether such a change could be implemented in a rentier structure that's highly authoritarian. However, this change beyond oil is not merely economic; it is fundamentally political. The new era of Saudi Arabia comprises traversing authoritarian modernization avenues, recalibrating the

[1] Jane Kinninmont, 'Vision 2030 and Saudi Arabia's Social Contract. Austerity and Transformation', *Policy Commons*, no. July (2017).
[2] Hazem El Beblawi, 'The Concept of "Rentier States" Revisited', in *The Middle East Economies in Times of Transition* (Palgrave Macmillan UK, 2016), https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-137-52977-0_8.
[3] Rivlin, P. (2011) 'Steffen Hertog: Princes, Brokers and Bureaucrats Oil and the State in Saudi Arabia', *Middle Eastern Studies*, 47(4), pp. 693–694. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/00263206.2011.586149.

nation's role in industrial policy and revising rentier social contracts[4]. Vision 2030's success is contingent upon institutional endurance, global economic links and political legitimacy alongside its financial investments.

This study incorporates rentier state theory, state-led developmentalism and green political economy to critically evaluate Saudi Arabia's post-oil transition from a standpoint of political economy. By examining flagship projects and modifications to policies, it raises the query of whether Saudi Arabia is truly turning away from rentierism and embracing financial dominance, or if it is simply rebranding its rentier-seeking business under the facade of modernity.

Literature Review

Beblawi and Luciani argued, according to Rentier State hypothesis, the state's accumulation of oil wealth stands in the way of democratization and the development of a viable non-oil economy. States that rely on overseas income, such as oil revenues, have been attributed to limited economic diversification and repressive regimes[5]. Rent can be seen as a worthless 'gift of nature'. This system has historically applied to Saudi Arabia, leveraging its oil money and patronage to safeguard political stability. Recent analysis, however, demonstrates that Vision 2030 contradicts this wisdom by trying to foster a productive economy. Since 2016, with the ultimate objective of diversifying away from oil, Saudi Arabia has been involved in an unparalleled economic, if not political and social, restructuring endeavor[6].

Although market capitalism has undisputed advantages over state capitalism, Bremmer contends that state capitalism will not be rapidly overthrown since it has been an essential component of Gulf diversification efforts, where it favors the powerful[7]. This is clearly shown by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund (PIF), which makes major expenditures in technology and infrastructure. To encourage the kingdom's economic diversification strategy, PIF has exhausted its cash reserves and pulled off its global portfolio; nonetheless, the fund continues to be on track to exceed US$1 trillion by 2025 and US$2 trillion by the end of the decade. However, detractors claim that such initiatives may only be corporate disguises supporting rentierism[8].

According to Van de Graaf T., pressure to adapt has been imposed on petrostates amid the global shift to renewable energy. It is time to revisit the geopolitics of oil; its abundance generates both winners (such as the United States and import-dependent economies) and losers (specifically petroleum-dependent states having few competitive industries outside fossil fuels)[9]. Investments undertaken by Saudi Arabia in green and

[4] Hidayat, N.A., Machmudi, Y. and Soekarba, S.R. (2022) 'VISION 2030: SAUDI ARABIA'S MODERNIZATION', *Jurnal CMES*, 15(2), p. 137. Available at: https://doi.org/10.20961/cmes.15.2.62857.
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solar hydrogen (such as the NEOM Green Hydrogen Project) represent an effort to remain relevant in a world that's rapidly decarbonizing[10].

The reforms enacted in Saudi Arabia are a classic instance of "authoritarian modernism" which asserts that political liberalization is not crucial to economic development. As an illustration, the NEOM megacity showcases technocratic governance but lacks democratic accountability.

Theoretical Framework

Saudi Arabia's post-oil economic transition has been determined by the intricate interplay of political economy, global energy dynamics, and industrial growth. To critically evaluate the kingdom's evolving economic model in the context of Vision 2030, this paper integrates three fundamental theoretical frameworks:

The Rentier State Theory: The Historical Anchor

The rentier state theory provides the structural and historical bases of Saudi Arabia's pre-2030 economic and political architecture. This notion, which was initially put forth by Mahdavy (1970) and then expounded upon by Beblawi and Luciani (1987), posits that states that are primarily funded by foreign rents, notably oil, have a tendency to exhibit:

- Reliance on foreign streams of income compared to local manufacturing,
- Weak taxation structures and minimal social and government oversight,
- Rentier legislatures construct welfare-dependent citizens while upholding authoritarian governance by allocating wealth through patronage networks rather than through productive economies[11].
- Elites' rejection of reforms that imperil rent distribution renders economic diversification sluggish[12].

Saudi Arabia has long been a prime example of these traits. Given its economy's substantial reliance on oil exports, the monarchy managed to repress calls for political liberalization, subsidize domestic consumption, and distribute wealth. In exchange for political stillness, the state granted benefits and employment in lieu of the fundamental rentier bargain. In addition to leveraging oil and tribalism to sustain their dictatorship, Saudi leaders additionally employ globally recognized approaches in economic restructuring, finance, and urban planning. From this perspective, Saudi politics doesn't

[10] Meckling, J. *et al.* (2022) 'Why nations lead or lag in energy transitions', *Science*, 378(6615), pp. 31–33. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1126/science.adc9973.
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seem to be extraordinary as rentier state theory indicates[13]. By stimulating the expansion of the private sector, a few scholars contend that Vision 2030 rejects rentierism[14].

Developmental State Theory: Industrial Policy and State Capacity

The ambitious economic diversification of Saudi Arabia can be examined through a comparative lens offered by developmental state theory. Woo-Cumings (1999) and Evans (1995) state that the developmental state is described by:

- An autonomous bureaucracy with the ability to successfully design and carry out industrial regulations[15],
- Upgrading innovation capabilities through strategic state-business collaboration,
- Industrialization concentrated on exports, whereby productivity rises instead of mining resources.

Saudi Arabia follows a top-down industrialization paradigm in its quest to build a semiconductor market, retake the forefront for manufacturing green hydrogen and establish smart cities like NEOM. Yet, unlike the developmental republics of East Asia, Saudi Arabia lacks a meritocratic, decentralized bureaucracy[16]. According to Hertog (2010) and Gray (2019), royal patronage networks persist to erode bureaucratic autonomy in Saudi Arabia's political economy that is still clientelist and fragmented.

Developmental state theory questions whether Saudi Arabia's industrial policy might be successful without the institutional components that have long encouraged Asian GDP growth, such as a robust civil service and an inclusive innovation ecosystem.

Green International Political Economy: Energy Transition as Geopolitical Reorientation

As defined by Falkner (2021), the discipline of Green International Political Economy explores the way developments in the global environment shape financial opportunities and power architectures. This approach highlights how the energy transition is an economic alongside geopolitical realignment.[17]

Besides aiding in the diversification of finances, Saudi Arabia's investments in carbon-neutral technology, renewable energy, and green hydrogen are fueled by the need to maintain the kingdom's standing as a major player in the world energy market. Saudi Arabia intends to continue to be an influential energy exporter as the globe moves away

[13] Baumann, H. (2019) 'The Transformation of Saudi Arabia's rentier state and "The International"', *Globalizations*, 16(7), pp. 1165–1183. Available at: https://doi.org/10.1080/14747731.2019.1573870.
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from fossil fuels, but this time in sustainable energy. Putting the kingdom as a key supplier of the future energy markets be the aim of the Helios project in NEOM and other green hydrogen endeavors. Saudi Arabia's environmental campaigns are strategic rather than normative, as green IPE highlights. Saudi Arabia's green pivot is a geopolitical hedge against the decreasing value of oil rather than environmental stewardship as a whole.

Table 1. Synthesis: Transitional Developmentalism or Hybrid Political Economy?

The combined application of these theories reveals a hybrid transformation:

Theory	**Key Insights**
Rentier State Theory	Even if the rents could originate from the oil and digital markets, Saudi Arabia preserves its centralized distributive logic.
Developmental State Theory	The kingdom lacks the political inclusivity and bureaucratic depth of traditional developing scenarios
Green International Political Economy Theory	Saudi Arabia's pivot is more of an expression of geopolitical pragmatism than environmental leadership

As such, Vision 2030 is neither an abrupt change from the past nor an ordinary example of effective progress. Rather, it reflects what Gray (2019) alludes to as "authoritarian modernization," in which economic change enhances rather than eliminates authoritarian power systems.

Methodology

This study uses a qualitative case study research design to perform an analysis in terms of critical political economy concerning Saudi Arabia's post-oil transformation laid out in Vision 2030. The design is suitable for a deep, nuanced, and holistic probing of a complex real-world phenomenon in the natural illumination of its contemporary milieu.

Research Design

Qualitative Case Study: The research underlines the distinctive characteristics of Saudi Arabia's economic transition and emphasizes the kingdom as a singular, unique case. This analysis is embedded, evaluating several analytical components within the case, involving budgetary policies, flagship projects (green hydrogen, NEOM), and institutional frameworks.

Critical Analysis: This approach is critical rather than neutral, which aims to determine the underlying power architectures, inconsistencies, and likely disparities between the theoretical precepts of Vision 2030 and real-world implementation.

Sampling

For conducting this particular research, purposive sampling has been used.

Data Sources

This research uses a triangulation of data sources to guarantee thoroughness and authenticity.

Primary Data Sources: Official Saudi government publications, such as Vision 2030 annual reports, PIF financial disclosures, and Saudi Arabian Ministry of Investment (MISA).

Secondary Data Sources:

Academic Literature: Academic publications on the rentier state theory (e.g., Luciani, Beblawi), green political economy (e.g., Falkner), and developmental state theory (e.g., Woo-Cumings, Evans).

Industry Analysis: Specialist publications reporting on FDI figures, project delays, and energy market growth.

International Reports: Data from the World Bank, BloombergNEF, and PWC.

Data Analysis

Thematic Analysis: Recurring patterns and themes, involving "strategic posturing," "institutional fragmentation," "rentier paradox," and "authoritarian modernization," have been identified by coding and evaluating the data.

Process Tracing: The causal relationships coupling Saudi Arabia's rentier past to its contemporary reform programs, along with prospective outcomes in the future, are investigated utilizing this method.

Comparative Analysis: Saudi Arabia's organizational capacity and industrial policy are strongly contrasted with the past models of East Asian developmental states in an effort to bring attention to challenges and deficiencies.

Empirical Examination: Vision 2030's Transformative Potential and Persistent Challenges

The Enduring Rentier Paradox: Intermittent Diversification Masking Structural Consistency

A granular assessment of Saudi Arabia's fiscal architecture uncovers a crucial discrepancy in Vision 2030.

In comparison to the baseline of 2016, non-oil revenues rose by 113% to $137.29 billion. The GDP contribution via the private sector has increased to 47%. The revised 2030 target was raised to $2.67 trillion, and PIF assets reached $941.3 billion in 2024. The PMI for August 2025 rose to 56.4. On September 4, 2025, total FDI stock increased by 24.2%, hitting approximately $32.2 billion, and Vision 2030 has attracted 660 global company headquarters to relocate to Saudi Arabia[18].

The construction industry, primarily propelled by oil-funded giga-projects like NEOM and Qiddiya, has already become a significant economic engine, with a market value of

[18] *Saudi Arabia: A Global Investment Hub*. (2025). Ministry of Investment. https://misa.gov.sa/

$65.58 billion in 2023 and an estimated annual growth rate (CAGR) of 2.75% to reach $75.12 billion by 2028.

Additionally, by offering **possibilities for employment** to both domestic and foreign workers, the industry makes an enormous contribution to job creation. The estimated cost of production is still too high for business without subsidies[19]. In spite of having discovered that 83% of new chances are in the private sector, 61% of Saudi youth prefer to pursue careers in the public sector[20]. Women's labor force participation stood at 36.2% in the third quarter of 2024, having stood at 17%. The Saudi government's dedication towards improving living standards is determined by its aim to increase home ownership from 62% in 2020 to 70% by 2030[21].

Saudi Arabia, in the Heart of Sustainability, is becoming a pioneer in renewable energy and green building. Boosting the capacity of renewable energy from 4.9 GW in 2021 to 58.7 GW by 2030 serves as one of the lofty targets outlined from the administration. Saudi Arabia stands at 108th on the Environmental Performance Index, dropping 13 spots from the baseline position[22].

This trend supports Luciani's (2020) observation that rentier territories perform better at "accounting diversification" through ingenious sectoral categorization than through actual sectoral change. SMEs barely make up, and the private sector's GDP contribution is still plateauing at 41.7% by December 2024, much below the 65% target[23]. Only oil revenues can constantly fund sectors like real estate, infrastructure utilities that require massive capital expenditures, thereby accounting for 78% of its domestic portfolio. PIF subsidies monopolize the entire value chain (from NEOM construction to future tourism ventures, for instance), driving out private competitors, as per vertical integration changes PIF 2023.

The Green Mirage: Strategic Posturing Versus Energy Reality

Three vital perspectives ought to be used to examine Saudi Arabia's extensively documented renewable energy attempts:

a) ***Capacity vs Output Disparities:*** Despite owning 3.7 GW of installed renewable capacity in 2023, actual generation only took up 1.2% of the electricity mix because of suboptimal capacity factors (18% for solar relative to the global average of 25%) and issues with grid integration.

b) ***The Gambit on Hydrogen:*** "Transnational Resource Nationalism" is best expressed by the $8.4 billion NEOM Green Hydrogen Project:

[19] Annex, M. (2023) *Renewable Energy Investment Hits Record-Breaking $358 Billion in 1H 2023*, *BloombergNEF*.
[20] PWC (2023) *Middle East Workforce Hopes and Fears survey 2023*.
[21] Zerqane, R. (2025) *For European investors and entrepreneurs, Vision 2030 offers opportunities to participate in the kingdom's modernization and shaping its future*.
[22] *Vision 2030 2024 Annual Report* (2024). Available at: https://www.vision2030.gov.sa/en/annual-reports (Accessed: 6 July 2025).
[23] World Bank Group (WBG) (2025) *World Bank Enterprise Survey 2022*. Available at: https://microdata.worldbank.org/index.php/catalog/6499 (Accessed: 6 July 2025).

- Dependent on foreign technology (Thyssenkrupp electrolyzers, distribution of Air Products),
- It was originated for export markets (Europe and Asia) rather than regional decarbonization.

c) ***Continued Hydrogen Submersion:*** Concurrent occurrences disclose clashing priorities-through 2027, Aramco will invest $40 billion a year on capital projects, including: greater capacity of 1million bpd and the biggest carbon capture project in the world (44 MtCO2/year by 2035) allows continual extraction.

Institutional Paralysis: The Never-Been Developmental State

Saudi Arabia's industrialization push, centered on futuristic urban (e.g., NEOM), semiconductor manufacturing, and green hydrogen, has taken encouragement from booming East Asian countries. However, the dearth of a diversified industrial base, minimal regulatory independence, and inadequate institutional capacity keep impeding the establishment of a self-sustaining rising state. Structural flaws have been identified through the comparison of institutional assessments to East Asian models:

a) ***Deficits in Bureaucratic Capacity:*** Royal extended families account up 67% of prominent economic policymakers.

In the case of project implementation***,*** Vision 2030 megaprojects usually encounter 3.2-year delays because of: multiple phases of approval (NEOM contracts demand 14 signatures) and constant adjustments to royal court directives (recorded in 38% of cases).

b) ***Innovation Ecosystem Failure:*** Even though $22 billion had been spent on R&D since 2016, 72% of patents are small-scale advances of already-existing technologies. 42% of STEM graduates opt for work overseas.

Responses from Other Mighty Powers & Perception as a Threat

China: Selective Competition +Strategic Partnership

China views Saudi Arabia as a key energy supplier and more of a partner for infrastructure projects and green energy. The flow of Saudi capital (PIF) and market access to China in return for construction services, manufacturing, and technology has been increasing. The relationship is very much transactional, as China welcomes the Saudi supply of green commodities and investment, and cooperates on tech projects and infrastructure. Vision 2030's urge for technology, investment, and technology perfectly match the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and the "going out" policy. Chinese corporations are heavily engaged in NEOM and other projects.

Threat Perception: China does not perceive Saudi economic aspirations as an immense risk but as an opportunity. Saudi Arabia permits China to expand its influence and hold in the Middle East, build new markets for goods and services, and secure energy interests (even in a post-oil period), all in an attempt to weaken US influence in the region.

The United States: Partnership+ Cautious Strategic Optimism

The US considers Saudi Arabia a critical strategic ally in regional security and energy. A stable and wealthy Saudi Arabia with reduced dependency on oil income supports long-term US economic interests and security in the region. American corporations gain significantly from massive projects and contracts in technology transfers. Nevertheless, Washington is tensed with Saudi aspirations in strategic high-tech industries (semiconductors, advanced materials) as these intersect the US national security and its interest in maintaining a lead in technology.

Threat Perception: It is unrealistic to view Saudi Arabia as a direct challenger to American hegemony in the global system. However, any strategic rearrangement that deepens Riyadh's connections with its adversaries- Russia and China, Washington will surely take that into account. The United States is more preoccupied with geopolitical realignment than economic rivalry. Rather, the US frequently reacts by curbing the critical technology sharing while fostering business collaboration.

Regional Middle-Eastern Nations: Rivalry & Competition

The UAE: To the UAE, Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is an immense risk to its economic diversification models (e.g., "Dubai's Hub Model"). This heightened competition for foreign investment, talent, and a regional "Giga-Project Marathon."

Iran & Rival States: Iran views Saudi Arabia's advanced regional projection with suspicion and geopolitical concern. Saudi Arabia's economic clout has the power to influence politics that challenge Iran's goals.

Smaller Arab Countries: Although many smaller Arab nations welcomed Saudi investments; yet, they are wary of getting dependent on it since they suspect that Saudi projects might overtake local businesses and dominate regional markets.

Threat Perception: Saudi Arabia is viewed as an existential economic threat by its regional adversaries. Its sheer scale and monetary resources enable it to subsidize industries, outmatch competition, and meddle in the regional political and economic leadership. To Iran, the growing significance of Saudi Arabia's economy only accelerates them as geostrategic and sectarian antagonists, solidifying their position as rivals.

Thus, the notion of "threat" is contextual as well as domain-specific: Saudi Arabia tends to be an economic and political challenger in the Gulf balance-of-power perspective, not an overall menace or universal threat.

Strategic Policy Imperatives: A Blueprint for Authentic Transformation

Institutional Overhaul: Formation of a Capable Developmental State

a) Amending Meritocratic Bureaucracy:

- Build an Independent Civil Service Commission founded on the Public Service Division of Singapore,

- Adopt rigorous tests for every position involving requiring proficiency higher than grade 12,
- Promote streamlined governance in special economic zones (King Abdullah Economic City, 5-year pilot),
- Reduce political interference in economic decision-making for enhancing policy coherence and execution.

b) Restructuring Public Investments:

- Mandate PIF portfolio diversification by limiting real estate and infrastructure at 40% of total assets,
- Set conditions for private co-investment: new giga-projects must include at least 30% of private capital,
- By 2026, ensure compliance with Sovereign Fund Transparency Index.

Energy Transition: Transforming Phraseology into Practice

a) Binding Decarbonization Policies:

- By 2035, 60% of the nation's electricity shall come from renewable sources, and progress shall be reviewed every three months,
- 50% of Aramco's dividends should be spent toward domestic renewable production plants,
- By 2027, set a $40/ton carbon levy for industrial polluters.

b) Rethinking the Hydrogen Strategy:

- Make domestic fertilizer production of green ammonia a top priority in order to supplement the 2.5 million tons of imported fertilizer annually,
- Create joint ventures with major corporations (Siemens, Cummins) to spur native electrolyzer manufacturing,
- Establish a hub enabling regional hydrogen trading in Yanbu Industrial City.

Empowering Private Sector: Eliminating the Rentier Mentality:

a) Actions for Market Liberalization:

- Abolish 70% of existing economic licenses (2,100+ deemed to be outdated),
- Introduce negative listing approach: each sector is open unless strictly forbidden,
- Launch a SME Stock Exchange with flexible listing regulations.

b) Labor Market Revolution:

- Alternative wage subsidies based on for Saudization quotas,
- Convert TVTC vocational centers into German-modeled dual education facilities,

- Give ten-year tax breaks to new firms in significant sectors, (biotech, renewables, AI).

Managing the Transition via Political Economy Adjustments

a) *Progressive Fiscal Reforms:*

- Propose a 0.5% annual municipal property tax to diversify sources of income,
- Lower energy subsidies by a certain percentage (20% per year for the top 20% of earners).

b) Measured Political Adaptation:

- Grant local development projects more authority to be accepted by the municipal council,
- Set up an Economic Social Council comprised of both the labor and private sectors.
- By 2028, test out constrained party politics in the NEOM special jurisdiction.

Conclusion: Navigating the Transitional Crossroads

Saudi Arabia's Vision 2030 is an ambitious and intricate attempt to rewrite the kingdom's economic future. The accomplishment of developmental states elsewhere is not being flawlessly duplicated, nor is it an all-encompassing shift from the past. Rather, it symbolizes a hybrid political economy that has its foundation in rentier traditions while aspiring for technical modernity and universal significance.

Although Vision 2030 has been successful in commencing large-scale projects and diversified businesses, it has yet to tackle three key structural contradictions: a political system utterly hostile to wider participation, institutions that are bound by centralized authority, and an economy that is completely reliant on oil wealth. Because of complex fiscal recycling processes, the economy remains wedded to hydrocarbon earnings, and non-oil growth is disproportionately concentrated in state-subsidized corporations.

In the end, Saudi Arabia's post-oil transition will be fruitful if it has the willingness to correct its institutional flaws and reevaluate its political accord with society. Vision 2030 bears the risk of transforming into another example of authoritarian modernization without these profound adjustments; it might appear revolutionary on its outside and brittle on its interior.

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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

INDIA'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN THE EMERGING MULTIPOLAR ORDER: BALANCING THE QUAD, BRICS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

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Introduction

The shift from a unipolar to a multipolar international order has opened up certain substantial strategic new opportunities for the rising powers. India, with its fast emerging economy and military capacities and ever-changing diplomacy, is steadily becoming a leading figure in world politics. The country attempts to strengthen its position within the current international structure; at the same time it strives to influence proactively the architecture of the regional security arrangements to its advantage.

Since its independence, India has helped to position itself as an advocate of strategic autonomy, a principle deeply embedded in the ideology of the Non-Alignment Movement in the Cold War era. In response to the changing geopolitical dynamics, India has adapted itself with the demands of multipolarity by dealing with different centres of power. Contemporary Indian foreign policy encompasses now participation in various multilateral institutions, such as the Quad, BRICS, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and G20.

The current research study makes use of the qualitative research design that is based on interpretive policy analysis and the theory of realist international relations. It uses documentary research of primary and secondary sources between 2020-2025 to study India's strategic autonomy.

The central research question that is followed for this inquiry is How does India balance its aspirations for strategic autonomy and engages with competing geo-political blocs?

Theoretical Framework Strategic Autonomy and Middle Power Diplomacy

Strategic autonomy is conceptualised in terms of the degree to which a state is free to formulate and implement its foreign policy without outside obligations or pressures to

coerce it into policy choices. This concept has a strong place in the field of international relations, especially in the context of middle power states.

From a realist perspective, in order to maximize their national security and diplomatic leverage, states crave strategic autonomy. Conversely, a liberal institutionalist view holds that joining intergovernmental political groups such as the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation could add a member state's influence to its power base while maintaining its strategic independence.

India's diplomatic attitude in modern context is portrayed with a hybrid aspect. Rather than identifying with any one strategic bloc, Indian foreign policy is increasingly taking on a multipolar slant, moving in a direction of a tailor-made coalition for particular issues, and going for ambitious bilateral partnerships with a wide range of actors.

India and the Quad: Security Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific

India's foreign policy has various dimensions, and one of the emerging ones is the Quad, a dialogue with the United States, Japan and Australia. Quad group members have all joined together to discuss issues of maritime protection, freedom of navigation and containing China's growing influence in the Indo-Pacific region.

India's participation in the Quad is driven partly by Chinese military expansion and Ladakh border stand-off. Nonetheless, India has wisely refrained from calling the Quad in a formal military alliance. Instead, it has defined cooperation as an economic and security partnership based on maritime connectivity, energy security, humanitarian assistance, disaster relief, counter-terrorism and sustainable development.

This strategic orientation, which has been called 'defensive diplomacy', allows India to cooperate on security issues without annoying its main rivals.

Engagement with BRICs and the Global South

While India is intensifying cooperation with countries in the West, it maintains close engagement with institutions that are attuned to emerging market economies. In particular, the BRICS group provides a platform for India to effect changes to the International Monetary Fund's reform and bilateral cooperation among the states in the group.

Through BRICS, India is supportive of other initiatives, like the New Development Bank, which aims to make available alternative sources of infrastructure funding for developing countries.

India also emphasises on leadership within the Global South underlining priorities like climate justice, development finance and technology transfer. The idea of India as a conduit between the developed and developing worlds is still relevant to G20 considerations.

Strategic Relations with Russia and Europe

India's foreign policy has traditionally had a strong affinity for Russia. While simultaneously improving the relation with Western powers, India has continued to have substantive relationship with Russia with focus on defence and hydrocarbon sectors.

A recent aspect that has characterised India's strategic journey is the growth of economic and technological linkages with the European Union. This expanded association represents India's determination not to limit itself to a narrow structure of bilateral relations and avoid getting stuck in the tight corset of a bilateral alliance.

Challenges to Strategic Autonomy

Attempts to support India's aspiration towards great power status with more vigorous diplomacy, alongside its increase in participation in the multilateral institutions that form the contemporary global order do not however automatically transition to an elevation of strategic autonomy for the country. The geopolitics of the region in which India is located-the constant volatility being induced by Pakistan, China's growing influence, unstable political dynamics of the neighbouring states, the volatilities in the energy market, and the long-term economic challenges-are still eroding the capacity of India to exercise an absolutely autonomous course of action. Moreover, India's efforts to interact with a wide range of major powers, at the same time aiming at having an independent role in the world order, are other constraints that limit New Delhi's ability to act with maximum autonomy in response to the evolving regional and global environment.

Regional Security Pressure

One of the main challenges that India faces in its quest for strategic autonomy is its extremely complex regional security environment. Located in South Asia, India's geographical location brings it close to a number of contemporary zones of instability, conflict and armed confrontation as well as long - standing territorial disputes and a multiplicity of border issues with its neighbours. Rising Tensions in the Indian subcontinent has been going on for a long period of time. In addition to the emerging competition between major world powers in the Indo-Pacific, the Indian subcontinent itself is slowly getting overloaded with more and more militarisation, which tends to increase the security predicament for India in the region. The most serious security issue facing the country emanates from the rivalry between India and China, especially the ongoing border disputes along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) between India and China that was aggravated by the skirmishes in the Galwan Valley on 15 June 2020. This event has created mistrust and war-like conditions between the two states. China has continually developed capacities to strengthen its claims along the LAC and modernise the infrastructure based near its borders. Its naval expansion within the Indian Ocean has also materially changed the security dynamics of India's neighbourhood, which has led India to counterbalance this development by enhancing defence cooperation with like-minded states, especially through the quadrilateral security dialogue (Quad). However, this strategy has played a significant role in curtailing the neutrality of India on the security front. China is not the only cause of tension for India; the fact that it has

a longstanding dispute with neighbour Pakistan including the Kashmir dispute and periodic skirmishes at the border continue to pose big challenges. In February 2019, a terrorist attack on Indian security forces in Pulwama in Indian controlled Kashmir, in which at least 40 Indian personnel were killed brought the two countries near to all-out war. In reprisal for Indian aerial strikes against alleged terrorist camps within Pakistan, Pakistan's air force intercepted Indian aerial systems, an Indian fighter jet was shot down, after which the pilot landed safely within Pakistani territory. Owing to these security threats, India has expended a large share of its budget on defence aiming to protect its borders against the ever-present militant pressures and 'rival nuclear power' countries which distracts it from its role as a global power. Decades of efforts to promote a stable relationship with Pakistan seem to have reached an impasse, while the regional instability within Afghanistan and the larger Indian Ocean is adding complications that will likely be relevant in India's response to the upheaval triggered by the Taliban's takeover of Afghanistan in 2021. Ongoing instability in the region that extends into the Indian Ocean continues to require India's response while seeking to maintain a free foreign policy approach in South Asia.

Economic Constraints

The impetus behind the vigorous engagement of India with the current world order is not only due to the fact that it is the world's fastest growing major economy - though it is some five percent ahead of Brazil and has a rapidly growing middle class - but also because it has become clear that, despite the great strides being made along the path to socio-economic development, poverty and the lack of resources still exist at a considerable level, precluding any really decisive impact on the world stage. India is indeed a rapidly rising economic power in a historically changing world system; however, its socio- economic growth hardly hides its overall reliance on outside actors though its diplomatically and geopolitical efforts are often limited to just attempts at mediocre intervention. An independent role in international politics depends not only on political acumen but for most states it is inseparable from economic performance, technological advancement, and volume of development assistance. India has become a major economic power, developed its diplomatic reach and has an active engagement in multilateral fora and modernises its defence capabilities. Nevertheless, its economy is still plagued by a variety of structural challenges, such as increasing disparities in income, high levels of unemployment, lack of infrastructure development and severe developmental gaps in the various parts of the country. These critical development issues require a high level of state investment to bring material progress. Given current constraints on resources any kind of significant external intervention is only possible at the expense of great sacrifice domestically. One of the major challenges faced by India is in the area of technological and industrial strength. While India has made remarkable strides to establish itself as an information-technology hub and has a fairly well-established space programme, India is still reliant on advanced defence technology, energy resources, and highly technological products and materials from countries such as Russia and other global suppliers. The spectrum of goods and resources ranging from crude oil, natural gas, high-technology defense systems, and high-tech industrial machinery shows the extreme limitations in domestic production capacity within India and as a result of this the country remains highly dependent on imports from foreign

markets. This dependence compromises the ability of India to take strategic decisions with conviction and firmness during times of increasing political volatility and other disruptions that pervade the global system. An additional constraint is that India has an ambition to be a significant actor in multilateral institutions and make a meaningful contribution to global governance.

India will need a tremendous amount of financial resources to support different aid initiatives, climate change mitigation investments, and other aspects of global governance, such as development aid and infrastructure projects throughout the developing world. Although, undeniably, India is an economic power in the modern era, its economic capabilities are far behind China and further afield from the economic resources once held by global power leaders like the United Kingdom in the interwar, post-war and imperial era. Consequently, India is not yet in a position to invest enormous amounts of capital in the efforts to foster a powerful global leadership role. Meeting its goals in global governance and other multilateral and plurilateral settings will require a competitive distribution of resources in Indian policymaking, which will further limit the ability of Indian leaders to operate as autonomous actors or to enjoy what some scholars call "strategic autonomy."

With the upsurge of great power competition, the international political activities are characterized by the strong competition between the United States and China. Rising tensions between these preeminent powers create higher levels of competition for global leadership and influence international relations through changing political alliances, commercial ties and new forms of governance. India has to tread a fine path while dealing with this ongoing competition.

India has been looking to cement its strategic partnership with the United States in the areas of defense cooperation, technological cooperation, and a shared agenda on security issues in the Indo-Pacific region. In recent years, the bilateral defense relationship has been deepened through memorandum of understanding, defense agreements, joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing arrangements, and cooperative participation in multilateral forums such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue and the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation framework.

India's strategy for multilateralism, regional security in trade and competitiveness has to be calibrated that balances its competition with China without undermining policy autonomy. The country is still wary of entering binding alliances and its economic and diplomatic relations with China still have many faces and an inherent complexity. India also has centuries old civilizational ties with Russia which continue to provide it defence requirements as well as energy security.

India's task is to handle these diverse relationships without being coerced into a restrictive geopolitical box. The fact that the world arena is divided into well-defined competing camps leads to the doubling of the pressure on individual states to join certain blocs. India's challenge, therefore, is to maneuver through this complex web of relationships without triggering any adverse reaction from major global actors through its policies.

The Indo-Pacific region is undergoing a transformation in its geopolitical composition, which makes the competition among major powers more competitive and intense. The struggle for influence is being played out in areas such as infrastructure development,

technological standards, supply chain logistics, and maritime security. India has to calibrate its geopolitical response to the changing Indo-Pacific space in a manner that is to its strategic interests but keeping in mind the principles of its strategic autonomy.

India's strategy is part of a wider shift in international relations, in which new power holders pursue business and diplomatic strategies that are very different from those of the past. Instead of being tied to mutually exclusive blocs and alliances, emerging nations increasingly look for a variety of partnerships in a spectrum of multilateral organizations.

Thus, India's commitment to strategic autonomy is its alternative diplomatic model in a multipolar world. By keeping the relations among competing blocs under control, India seeks to maximize its influence while preserving its policy independence.

India's foreign policy is marked by pragmatism and flexibility in reacting to the changing global dynamics. Membership in strategic groupings such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, BRICS and the G20 give India an opportunity to bridge engagement with capitals in a Western world and Global South partners.

The pursuit of multilateralism and pursuit of a strategic alignment strengthens India's ability to play a substantive role in global affairs and hence increases India's external strategic autonomy. Nevertheless, the challenges presented by the distribution of power across the world continue to hamper India's attempts at stabilizing the regional security environment, and even the success of India's multilateral alignment strategy is not definitive.

In the recent development, the international system is gradually inclining towards the direction of multipolarity. Major developing countries, especially those emerging from the Asia-Pacific region, are considering innovative mechanisms to cope with this growing multipolarity in the current global affairs. Indian foreign policy may provide a relevant point of reference for the study of these dynamics, for both academics and practitioners.

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NOTES AND REFLECTIONS

THE EFFECTIVENESS OF PUBLIC INTERNATIONAL LAW

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Introduction

The international community has witnessed several radical shifts and changes over the past two decades, whether in the international affairs and issues or in the crises and conflicts it faces.

The War on Terror after 2001 and the move towards a multipolar world have resulted in instability in international relations and a failure to resolve many conflicts. Furthermore, states, especially major powers, have evaded their international obligations with impunity.

Public international law plays a prominent role as the presumed regulator of international relations. Never can an international system remain static without adapting to these transformations. This necessitates increasing the effectiveness of international legal rules, particularly in terms of their binding nature and the ability to prevent their violation, to address the challenges and difficulties they face.

Hence, the importance of choosing this topic to highlight the challenges facing the effectiveness of public international law, in an attempt to address the following question: To what extent is public international law effective? That leads to the following questions:

1. What challenges does the binding force of public international law face?
2. What are the underlying causes of these challenges?

Methodology

To address this issue, we adopted a deductive (inferential) approach, which starts with the assertion of a general rule and proceeds from there to a guaranteed specific conclusion. Deductive reasoning moves from the general rule to the specific application by examining general legal rules, international agreements, and treaties. We also employed an analytical approach by presenting the actions and violations committed by states in contravention of international charters and resolutions, and by analyzing their actions and violations of public international law.



It is essential to note that the world is currently experiencing international crises, especially after international relations have become increasingly intertwined and complex. Sensitive and diverse international issues and conflicts have emerged, threatening the entire world with a new world war. The reason for this is not a lack of international legal rules, but rather the establishment of a new logic imposed by dominant states, based on power, influence, and control. This study aims to highlight the effectiveness of public international law and demonstrate the challenges it faces.

Study Hypotheses:

a. Double standards in the application of international law reduce its effectiveness and credibility at the international level.

b. The reliance of states, especially major powers, on the logic of force in their international relations by imposing their will on other states will lead to more international conflicts.

c. The more effective and fairly applied international law is, the greater the confidence of states in the international system and the greater its legitimacy.

This study is significant because, in light of the political, economic, environmental, and technological changes the world is witnessing, public international law remains the effective guarantor for preventing wars and aggression, regulating the use of force, protecting human rights, and, in general, regulating relations between subjects of this law, primarily states.

Despite the importance and complexity of the topic, the study adheres to specific scientific and methodological boundaries. It focuses solely on the legal aspect, without addressing political or economic dimensions except to the extent that they serve the legal analysis. The timeframe for the international practices to be analyzed is defined, so that the study focuses on the contemporary international situation, and the most famous cases or those that raise broad legal controversy.

Previous Studies:

Al-Jashami & Al-Azzi (2020). The Concept of Effectiveness in Public International Law - This study analyzes the concept of effectiveness in public international law, its fundamental limitations such as the absence of a supreme authority and the imbalance of international power, and the impact of these factors on the ability of international legal rules to be focused and influential.

Kiladze (2022), The Effectiveness of Public International Law: A Need for Paradigm Change - This study focuses on the significant challenges to the effectiveness of public international law despite its development. And it proposes restructuring methods for enhancing compliance and implementation.

The term "effectiveness" has been used since the mid-20th century, more often with ambiguity and varying meanings. Effectiveness refers to actual observance, distinct from the binding force of the law. (Taki, 2021) The process of creating rules in international law differs from that of domestic law. In democratic states, the people elect their

legislators through voting. After elections, legislators create legal rules without requiring the consent of their constituents. (Kantorowicz-Reznichenko, 2020)

While all individuals are subject to domestic law, international legal rules govern relations between various subjects of public international law. The international community lacks the presence of a fully empowered legislative body, unlike parliaments in domestic systems. Even UN General Assembly resolutions are not entirely binding.

Public international law faces the challenge of fragmentation, which reduces its effectiveness, due to the absence of neither a standardized system for setting norms nor a single institution for creating legal rules. (A/CN.4/L.702, 18/7/2006)

The effectiveness of public international law is affected by the decentralized nature of its mechanisms for creation and enforcement, due to the lack of a standardized enforcement mechanisms. Although there are diverse international courts and tribunals, but each one has its own legal system, which prevents the establishment of a unified system of courts; International court decisions are based on specific agreements, which grant it the right to operate within the narrow scope of these agreements.

Therefore, it is necessary to present the reasons behind the challenges to the effectiveness of public international law, which can be summarized as follows:

A. State Motives: States are concerned about their international reputation, acting in good faith, based on reciprocity, or believing in the fairness of a particular rule, but in some cases, they act according to their self-interest, which violates specific international obligation, thus damaging their reputation. In other cases, their interests may align with compliance with a particular legal rule. The obligation of weaker states to adhere to an international legal rule is sometimes due to fear of sanctions or concern that other states will not fulfill their obligations based on the principle of reciprocity.

State motives can remain obscure, making it impossible to know the reason or reasons behind their compliance with or violation of public international law. They vary from one rule to another and from one state to another. So, it is essential to consider each case individually.

B. Law and Politics: Sometimes, politics can be more useful than public international law as a means of communication between nations. Sometimes, the parties involved agree that a "fundamental change of circumstances" has occurred, and collectively agree to dissolve the agreement as they reach a consensus through compromise. In the world of politics, compromise is not something to be viewed negatively. Rather, it can achieve positive outcomes in maintaining stability in international relations (Onuma, 2003). Clearly, law and politics can never be separated. As state politics strive for competition, conflict, and supremacy to achieve survival, influence, and control. And public international law aims for harmony, conflict resolution, and the establishment of a framework for balancing interests (Shaw, 2014). Politics must be considered a primary factor in understanding why states choose to join or not join, or to comply with or not comply with, the rules of international law.

C. Cooperative and Coordinating Law: The structure of public international law is described as horizontal due to the absence of a supranational authority. Although states are considered subjects of this law, which governs their relationships, the hierarchical relationship is not clearly defined because states are described as the



legislators of public international law. (Vos, 2013) States establish their own standards and abide by them; therefore, it is a cooperative, coordinating body of law with other states. It is not a law subordinate to an authority capable of enforcing the rules, although some mechanisms exist for the proper application of international legal rules. This coordinating nature negatively impacts the effectiveness of public international law.

D. Lack of Enforcement Means: The international community generally lacks a means of enforcing international legal rules. However, the Security Council's role as an important body in enforcing international law is limited to issues that threaten international peace and security.

There is still considerable debate regarding whether the collective security system must be compatible with the principle of the prohibition of the use of force and Article 2, paragraph 4, of the UN Charter. (D'Aspremont, 2015) To date, a military staff has not been established, and the implementation of military operations under Chapter VII resolutions depends on contributions from states' armed forces.

E. In general, individuals are not directly affected by public international law. Any violation of their rights at the international level can be brought against the offending state through the diplomatic protection offered by their own state or the international organization to which they belong, which then becomes a party to the case, making the individual and their interests the subject of the proceedings. However, further developments in the international legal system have granted individuals certain rights at the international level concerning human rights and international criminal responsibility.

The challenges facing the binding force of public international law manifest themselves in several ways:

A. At the legislative level: The absence of a single international legislator that holds a monopoly on legislating and establishing international legal rules. Sources of international law include treaties, international custom, and other instruments, as stipulated in Article 38 of the Statute of the International Court of Justice. These rules are only established with the consent of the state parties and without objection or reservation. The states that establish these legal rules are themselves subjects of public international law, which are supposed to be addressed by these laws.

Therefore, the enactment of international legal rules is contingent upon the consent of states, and the absence of a legislative authority could transform the international community into anarchic.

B. At the enforcement level: Public international law lacks an executive authority, leading to double standards. States implement international rules and decisions in accordance with their interests and in pursuit of their objectives.

Compelling non-compliant states to implement international law requires international force, which only major powers possess, as they often deploy when it serves their interests. The absence of an executive authority has led to difficulties in implementing and enforcing public international law.

C. Judiciary: Recourse to international courts remains optional, not mandatory. Despite the supremacy of international law, international courts do not possess compulsory authority to force states to submit to their jurisdiction, which requires the state's acceptance or consent.

D. International Sanctions: States impose sanctions unilaterally, and the effectiveness of the sanctions regime is linked to the power of the states imposing them.

Although the UN Charter stipulates coercive measures that can be taken, these actions require Security Council resolutions under Chapter VII, which pertains to breaches of international peace and security. It is well known that such resolutions are subject to the veto power of the permanent members of the Security Council, and thus are only adopted if they align with their interests.

E. Personality of Punishment: Imposing sanctions on a state affects all its citizens, even though the rulers of that state, not the people, are responsible for violating the law. Smaller states are also more affected by it than larger ones. (Bouboush, 2020)

The absence of such institutions and authorities poses a challenge to the effectiveness of public international law. Its application becomes contingent on its moral merit and the desire of states to maintain their good reputation within the international community.

Thus, we see that the states that violate international law are the very ones that legislate it. Naturally, they exploit these laws to support their own policies, economic and security interests, and other objectives, and to evade their internationally imposed obligations. This demonstrates that some states are not subject to the provisions of these rules on an equal footing with others.

Furthermore, sanctions against states that violate the rules of public international law are imposed only by the major powers themselves. It is therefore natural that these states would not impose sanctions on themselves. (Al-Jashami & Al-Azzi, 2020)

In contrast, international legal rules emerged to regulate the international community and international relations. The binding force of these rules arises when subjects of public international law recognize the importance of this regulation. Therefore, this concept does not entail specific formal requirements for these rules.

It is important not to confuse between legislation and law, as custom has an unwritten source, and the rules of international law are fundamentally customary. The legal character of such laws, such as English law, cannot be denied.

The absence of a sanction does not invalidate a legal rule in its formation; rather, it guarantees its effectiveness. The judiciary serves as *a posteriori* function relative to the legislative process, predicated on the principle that the court’s mandate is strictly adjudicatory rather than generative.

The preceding analysis clarifies that the juridical validity of public international law is beyond reproach; its authority is characterized by an axiomatic binding that is presumed to command universal adherence across the international community

However, the practical reality of public international law often reveals such acute systemic fragility that it calls into question the very ontological existence of a global legal order. The lack of accountability for international violations by the international

community is glaringly apparent, such as the genocide that occurred in Gaza, Palestine, and the massacres in Qana, Sabra, and Shatila, Lebanon. To this day, no accountability has been imposed on Israel or its military personnel who committed these crimes.

Even the international resolutions issued after the July 2006 war, which mandated that Israel pay compensation to Lebanon for the oil spill resulting from its bombing of the Zahrani refinery, have not been implemented.

However, this situation is unacceptable, especially since most countries still adhere to the universally accepted and recognized rules of international law. Any violation of these rules is an exceptional case.

Finally, the recognition of international law by states, international governmental and non-governmental organizations, and even individuals is fundamental and cannot be invalidated by exceptional circumstances where some powerful states have violated international legal rules. Over time, and as a result of the strengthening of international law institutions, the practices of states under the auspices of the United Nations have become more effective. (Karmakar, 2021)

Conclusion

It is clear that the current system, under the auspices of the United Nations, has not proven to be a failure, as long as a global war does not occur that threatens all of humanity. However, current public international law, including its legal texts and enforcement mechanisms, cannot resolve all the problems arising from relations between the subjects of this law.

Therefore, the mere existence of law is insufficient to guarantee justice; it requires the power and mechanisms to protect it. When violations of legal rules decrease, they become more stable and enduring. Conversely, the more these violations increase, the less respect they receive from the parties involved.

Results

1. International law lacks a supreme authority to compel states to comply, making adherence to it optional and subject to the political calculations of states.
2. Obligating violating states to implement international law requires international power, which only major powers possess, and which they often provide when it is in their interest.
3. The enactment of international legal rules is contingent upon the consent of states.
4. Violations of international legal norms and the absence of accountability foreshadow wars and military conflicts, potentially leading to a world war.

Recommendations

1. The binding nature of public international law should not be contested by states and should be respected by the international community as a whole.

2. Providing positive incentives to states that adhere to international law, such as technical, financial, and technological support, will encourage effective compliance
3. Encouraging the participation of civil society and non-governmental organizations in monitoring the implementation of international law and pressuring governments to comply with it.

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CLIMATE DIPLOMACY: A METHODOLOGICAL CHALLENGE

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Climate diplomacy refers to the study of international negotiations to address climate change, yet it poses methodological challenges. Climate change is a well-known topic of discussion today, where everyone agrees on some level of change, yet disagrees on how to address it until it serves their best interests. This makes it hard to build consensus on an international platform such as the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (hereafter, UNFCCC), which helps implement policies at the domestic level within the state first, and then extend them to inter-state practices. To define climate diplomacy, it is essential to understand the concept of diplomacy and its usage in the international context. In international relations, diplomacy is used to conduct negotiations through dialogue, persuasion, and compromise with opponents or, ideally, to end a conflict. The concept applies to climate diplomacy when a crisis, such as climate change, becomes a threat (external) to states (internal) in the international system, and it is hard for them to reach a consensus to address it. Thus, climate diplomacy is more closely associated with the empirical, systematic, and to a large extent technical efforts of sovereign states and international organisations to manage, mitigate, and adapt to climate change. In this context, positivism emphasises objective, measurable data, such as temperature targets (below 2 degrees Celsius), greenhouse gas emission levels, and financial commitments, which stand as a basis for negotiations and for policy evaluation or implementation.

A Methodological Challenge

By comparing levels of climate vulnerability, historical emissions, and current adaptation methods, this note highlights the need to incorporate the voices of marginalised communities, climate activists, and state actors to explore justice and reparation claims. Within these countries, Bangladesh and the Maldives explicitly emphasise climate justice, where national-level policies often lack justice-oriented frameworks. Moreover,

reparation is widely discussed in international forums in the context of climate finance and historical accountability, but loss and damage finance remains under-addressed. Due to this limitation of climate finance, adaptation falls disproportionately on local communities, especially indigenous groups, women, and the poor. This paper uses Commonwealth South Asian countries as a regional lens, often ignored in the climate justice literature, alongside the Global South and the Pacific islands. It also aims to bridge the gap among climate science, political economy, and justice theory through an integrated approach to climate reparations.

The importance of climate diplomacy also lies in the Anthropocene epoch, an unofficial interval of geological time defined by human activity that profoundly influences Earth's surface, atmosphere, oceans, and biogeochemical nutrient cycling. This has resulted in humans' excessive use of Earth's resources (land, energy, fuels, etc.) and growing populations, which have dramatically accelerated climate change by altering the carbon cycle. This critical issue of climate change must be addressed urgently. As science developed, even the social sciences were shaped by the philosophy of science. By examining Earth's vulnerabilities, such as rising pollution, melting Himalayan glaciers, and the conversion of forests into deserts, multiple scientific groups produced evidence that climate change is very dangerous to human civilisation. Reluctant at first, but gradually, leaders of different states, politicians, business groups, as well as the scientific community raised an alarm that this climate change needs to be discussed at a high level, such as in diplomatic terms, at the international level. The most important platform for climate diplomacy is the UNFCCC, established through an international environmental treaty that aims to stabilise greenhouse gas concentrations to prevent dangerous human-induced climate change.

Table 1. Key milestones in the history of climate diplomacy

1992 Earth Summit (Rio)	The UNFCCC was adopted, establishing the framework for climate negotiations.
1995 (COP1)	The first conference in Berlin launched negotiations to strengthen the global response and initiated annual meetings.
1997 (COP3)	Adoption of the Kyoto Protocol, which set binding emission targets for developed countries.
2010 (COP16)	The Cancun Agreements formalised pledges to limit the temperature rise to 2°C.
2015 (COP21)	The Paris Agreement was adopted, marking a major shift in international climate action.
2021 (COP26)	The Glasgow Climate Pact focused on strengthening climate commitments.
2023 (COP28)	Reached a landmark agreement to transition away from fossil fuels.
2023 (COP28)	Held in Belém, Brazil, with a focus on the implementation of commitments.

Source: Author's Conceptualisation

In total, there have been 30 international annual sessions of the Conference of the Parties (COP) to the UNFCCC. These annual conferences are the primary venue for climate diplomacy, where representatives gather for preparatory meetings, working groups, and subsidiary body sessions; they also support the main decisions. While the UNFCCC is a central body, climate diplomacy may occur through smaller minilateral groupings,

bilateral agreements and other international forums. Since climate change is an international phenomenon, stronger states with sufficient resources or technology also remain vulnerable and cannot tackle it easily on their own. Climate diplomacy requires broader thought in the negotiation process and policy implementation.

Climate Justice Intervention

The "climate justice" concept first emerged at COP6 (the Conference of the Parties 6) in 2000 and sought environmental justice by focusing on the unequal impacts of climate change (The Guardian, 2014). This concept framed the perception of the whole world through the global North-South debate, in which the North is perceived as exploitative towards the South for many decades. The argument is that developed economies are the culprits behind the problem by burning hydrocarbons and releasing greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. India claims the right to increase its emissions now in the name of lifting people out of poverty and providing electricity to its 300 million citizens who currently lack it. It asserts that the 'polluter pays' principle should be applicable (Vickery, 2015).

The "Equity in Climate Change" research paper highlights four equity-based proposals: per capita allocation, historical responsibility for emissions, ability to pay, and future development opportunities (Mattoo & Subramanian, 2010). This report identifies several large, poor developing countries, including India, but excludes China based on business-as-usual emissions. However, there can be no so-called "climate justice" when the per capita emissions of many developed countries are measured in metric tons, compared with those of India. Another argument is that, if all nations continue their emissions growth, it would certainly not lead to fairness in climate change and would exceed the 2° Celsius target. Also, there is a perception of 'free rider' countries, where India falls, that without making any contribution, can get satisfactory benefits.

Loss and Damage or Climate Reparation Turn

Climate reparations call for financial assistance from developed countries to developing or underdeveloped countries to address the historical contribution of developed countries towards climate change. The "Loss and Damage Fund" was further conceptualised at COP27 in Egypt in 2022 and now aims to provide financial assistance to developing states vulnerable to the adverse effects of climate change. COP28 saw progress toward launching the fund, with the World Bank serving as its interim secretariat. This was expected to be followed by COP29 in Azerbaijan, focusing on the fund's financing mechanisms and ensuring its resources grow to meet the projected costs and damages of approximately USD 1 trillion by 2050. This fund can be a significant contribution to the broader demand for reparations. The IPCC explicitly acknowledge the connection between colonialism and climate change. From a South Asian Commonwealth member, India actively discusses loss and damage, which holds it historically responsible.

Climate change has significantly threatened National Highways (NH), a vital transport link in the Himalayas, by increasing extreme rainfall, causing landslides and erosion, and disrupting connectivity, posing dangers to human lives. For example, NH 10, which connects to small towns such as Kalimpong, Darjeeling, and Gangtok, is completely



washed out by this year's rainfall. Currently, a landslide at Seti Jhora has halted traffic, and the road will remain closed until further notice. Every year, people who use this highway have complaints about its poor condition. Even the 2023 flood in Sikkim was confirmed to be due to climate change, which caused a catastrophic Glacial Lake Outburst Flood (GLOF). The lake grew due to glacial melt, and its expansion over decades amplified the impact of the permafrost thaw, leading to widespread damage and fatalities. It is said that, to date, people have become homeless, and such damage can only be addressed through collective financial assistance. This year, 2026, flood damage in Assam is a typical example. Thus, discussions about climate finance are essential to support mitigation and adaptation actions, especially in South Asia, which has suffered from it.

Case Study of the Commonwealth Countries

Out of 56 Commonwealth member states, five are from South Asia – Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka - a voluntary association that is a successor to the British Empire. South Asia is also known as a densely populated region that depends on fossil fuels and other non-renewable resources, where Climate Change has directly or indirectly affected up to 800 million people living in the region (The World Bank Group, 2021, p. 2). According to IPCC (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change) estimates, approximately 3.6 billion people are highly vulnerable to climate change, with 45 per cent of the world population continuing to be affected by floods, droughts, or extreme weather (Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, 2023). For this reason, funds are required for loss and damage. According to the United Nations Environmental Programme, the cost of adapting to climate change in developing countries may range from USD 56 billion to USD 300 billion by 2030.

The susceptibility of South Asia to climate change has been evident for a significant period. Increasingly severe flooding threatens coastal regions in Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. In 2018, the Kerala floods in India affected people disproportionately, with many women losing their homes and livelihoods. The flood in Pakistan killed nearly 1500 people and displaced more than 30 million, resulting in calls for climate reparations. Terms such as "climate reparations," "loss and damage," and "climate justice" seek to redress the climate imbalance that threatens us all (Dearing, Dec. 7, 2023). However, reparations are generally understood as an effort to redress the harm through acknowledgement of wrongdoing (Chapman & Ahmed, 2021, p. 86). In other words, it accepts the responsibility, followed by an undertaking to repair the societal injustices and widespread harm

To address these issues, the Commonwealth tends to address climate change and its impacts through various initiatives that support member states, particularly Small Island Developing States and other vulnerable countries. The program, such as the CCFAH (Commonwealth Climate Finance Access Hub), established in 2015, aims to help small and vulnerable member states bid for and gain access to climate finance (The Commonwealth). As of September 30, 2023, CCFH has assisted with approximately USD 310 million in climate finance for adaptation, mitigation, and cross-cutting projects in beneficiary countries (The Commonwealth, 2023, p. 7). The World Bank's climate funding for South Asian states has risen from USD 1.4 billion in 2017 (fiscal year July 1, 2016-

June 30, 2017) to USD 3.7 billion in 2021 (fiscal year July 1, 2019-June 30, 2021) (World Bank Group). Under the Paris Climate Agreement, the need to supply climate change-related finance under the category of "loss and damage" stands distinct from financing for adaptation (efforts to adjust to the effects of climate change) and mitigation (an effort to reduce greenhouse gas emissions and limit global warming) needs (Perry, 2020, p. 12).

However, in the social world, climate change challenges the philosophy of social science to bridge climate diplomacy with ecological systems, moving beyond purely technical solutions to address the ethical, political, and structural drivers of environmental hazards. This shift focuses on moving from purely empirical, positivist approaches to critical, interpretive methods that examine power structures, justice, and societal values. Thus, climate diplomacy now seeks a climate governance platform that shifts from positivist to interpretive approaches, aiming for social action to be effective and solution-based. This intersection of climate diplomacy involves examining the social, cultural, and political drivers of climate actions, as well as the normative frameworks that shape and are shaped by global climate governance.

Climate change poses an existential threat to the Commonwealth member states of South Asia, where disproportionate exposure to climate impacts intersects with deep-rooted social inequalities and colonial legacies. Despite historically contributing minimally to global greenhouse gas emissions, these nations bear the brunt of intensifying climate-induced disasters, sea-level rise, and resource insecurity. Justice and reparations in this context are moral imperatives and essential frameworks for equitable climate action. Thus, reparative measures must address both historical injustices and current adaptation needs, empowering communities, especially marginalised and Indigenous populations, to lead resilient futures. Justice and reparations in this context are moral imperatives and essential frameworks for equitable climate action. The purpose must be to assess their engagement with climate justice frameworks and evaluate the discourse and implementation of reparative measures in both domestic and international climate negotiations.

This paper has discussed the intersection of climate change, climate justice, and climate reparations in the case of the Commonwealth member states of South Asia – Bangladesh, India, the Maldives, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka. Also, to be effective, climate reparations should go beyond aid, recognising the rights of affected communities to climate resilience, development, and environmental sustainability. Mechanisms such as the 'Loss and Damage Fund' within international frameworks must be expanded and made more accessible, transparent, and locally responsive. Thus, a just climate future for South Asia's Commonwealth countries requires transformative global cooperation, grounded in historical responsibility, regional solidarity, and an inclusive vision that centres justice at every level of climate governance. Only then can we hope to achieve sustainable, green, and fair development.

Due to rising concerns about the North-South divide, ethical issues such as the polluter-pays principle, climate justice, and hurdles to technology transfer, climate diplomacy shifted from a purely scientific assessment to a global response, with complex, value-laden, and multi-actor implementation. In other words, climate governance is now recognised as a multi-scale (from local to international) and multi-actor (state and non-

state) process, with a deeply embedded, top-down approach that moves from expert-driven models to models that include perspectives addressing ethical issues. Thus, the methodological challenge in climate diplomacy is how deeply it incorporates social and ethical issues into climate negotiations. The core methodological flaws stem from incommensurable metrics, in which standardised tools struggle to bridge local/regional adaptation needs with global carbon-emission targets. There are huge power asymmetries between haves and have-nots, where wealthy nations control data standards, impose financial conditionalities, and easily marginalise vulnerable states. So, we need to answer some important questions about our methods. How sustainable is the climate solution coming from each climate negotiation, whether it involves value-based choices or just objective scientific measurement? How effective are state-centric diplomatic models when dealing with cross-border climate risks?

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STRATEGIC TURKIC REGIONALISM: TÜRKIYE, THE ORGANIZATION OF TURKIC STATES, AND THE RECONFIGURATION OF EURASIAN GEOPOLITICS

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Introduction

The Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has emerged as a central platform for regional cooperation among Turkic-speaking countries at a time of profound geopolitical transformation (Çetinkaya&Demirel, 2023). As the international system shifts from U.S.-led unipolarity toward a multipolar order characterized by the strategic rise of China, Russia's assertive regional posture, and the growing agency of middle powers (Sakes, 2017), regional institutions like the OTS increasingly serve as arenas for both identity-based solidarity and pragmatic strategic engagement. Türkiye, leveraging its unique geostrategic position linking Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, has sought to consolidate influence in the region through a combination of economic connectivity, soft power, and infrastructural initiatives—including the Middle Corridor, trans-Caspian energy networks, and trade facilitation projects (Yılmaz, 2019; Özkan, 2020). Yet despite shared linguistic, historical, and cultural affinities, Turkic states continue to pursue multi-vector foreign policies, reflecting both the limits of identity-driven regionalism and the enduring salience of national interests (Ünal & Ertem,2022). By examining Türkiye's engagement with the OTS through a multi-theoretical lens integrating constructivism, neofunctionalism, and intergovernmental perspectives, this study illuminates the dynamics of emerging regionalism, the constraints and opportunities for middle-power agency, and the evolving role of Turkic states within Eurasia's multipolar geopolitical landscape (Bayat, 2023).

The study of regional cooperation among Turkic-speaking states has gradually expanded within the broader literature on Eurasian regionalism and post-Soviet international relations. Scholars have examined the emergence of the OTS primarily through three overlapping analytical lenses: identity-based cooperation, geopolitical strategy, and institutional regionalism (Organisation of Turkic States, 2021). Constructivist perspectives emphasize the role of shared cultural and linguistic identity in shaping cooperation among Turkic-speaking states. The OTS is seen as an institutional manifestation of historical and cultural solidarity, reinforced through educational exchanges, cultural diplomacy, and symbolic political discourse (Bayat, 2023). However,

the literature also highlights the limits of identity-driven cooperation: divergent domestic priorities and national interests constrain political integration (Karimov &Akhmetov, 2021). Realist and geopolitical analyses situate the OTS within the broader Eurasian power landscape (Hughes & Snegovaya, 2022). Türkiye's engagement is interpreted as a strategy to expand strategic autonomy, enhance economic connectivity, and strengthen political influence amid competition from Russia, China, and the EU (European Union, 2025). Concurrently, institutionalist analyses, drawing on neofunctionalism and intergovernmental theory, examine how functional cooperation in trade, transport, and infrastructure may spill over into broader institutional coordination, though the OTS remains largely intergovernmental (Ünal & Ertem, 2022).

Existing research, however, tends to emphasize cultural or historical narratives over contemporary strategic dynamics and Türkiye's middle-power role. This study contributes by integrating identity, institutional, and geopolitical perspectives to assess the OTS's evolution and Türkiye's role in shaping Eurasian regionalism. This study employs a multi-theoretical framework to analyze the OTS and Türkiye's strategy in Central Asia. Constructivism highlights the importance of shared linguistic, historical, and cultural identities in providing the symbolic foundations for Turkic cooperation, while neofunctionalism explains the potential for functional economic and infrastructural integration to produce institutional spillovers (Özkan, 2020). Intergovernmental and liberal intergovernmentalist approaches contextualize the OTS as an arena where member states pursue national interests while negotiating collective action (Bayat, 2023) often constrained by multi-vector foreign policies and external geopolitical pressures. This hybrid theoretical lens allows for an integrated analysis of identity, strategy, and institutional dynamics in the Turkic regional order. A qualitative case-study methodology is employed, combining process tracing, document analysis, and comparative contextualization. Primary sources include official OTS documents, summit declarations, and policy statements from Türkiye and member states (Organization of Turkic States, 2021). Secondary sources include scholarly literature on regionalism, Turkish foreign policy, and Eurasian geopolitics. Process tracing identifies causal mechanisms linking shifts in the international system to Türkiye's strategic initiatives and the institutional evolution of the OTS. Comparative analysis situates the OTS alongside other regional platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization and BRICS, highlighting the organization's unique characteristics and constraints in the multipolar Eurasian context.

Türkiye's Strategic Engagement and the Organization of Turkic States in a Multipolar Eurasia

The evolving global geopolitical environment—characterized by the relative erosion of U.S. influence and the intensification of great-power rivalry between the Euro-Atlantic bloc led by the United States and the Eurasian axis associated with China and Russia—has encouraged regional actors to reassess their strategic orientations (Özkan, 2020), across much of the Global South, states have increasingly moved from isolated action toward the formation of more cohesive regional frameworks, whether through formal organizations or consultative mechanisms, in order to enhance collective agency and reduce vulnerability to external domination. In Central Asia, this dynamic is particularly

evident as Turkic states seek to navigate major-power competition while simultaneously advancing intra-regional economic and infrastructural integration as a means of building resilience against systemic shocks, including the war in Ukraine, instability along the India–Pakistan frontier, and mounting tensions in the Western Pacific (Bölükbaşı, 2025). Within this context, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) has emerged as an increasingly important regional platform pursuing greater strategic autonomy amid deepening global rivalry. Since 2021, the OTS has sought to evolve from a primarily cultural association into a more consequential political, economic, and security-oriented grouping, reflecting the broader aspiration of Turkic states to consolidate regional influence while balancing pressures emanating from major powers. By drawing upon shared linguistic and cultural ties, together with their strategic geography and resource endowments, OTS member states are asserting a more prominent role in the shifting balance of power across Eurasia (TIKA,2023). Against this backdrop, Türkiye has pursued an increasingly proactive regional strategy, identifying Central Asia as a central pillar of its wider foreign-policy agenda. As a member of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) and a state occupying a distinctive geostrategic position at the intersection of Europe, the Middle East, and Central Asia, Türkiye has advanced a range of connectivity initiatives, including the Middle Corridor, the Trans-Anatolian Natural Gas Pipeline (TANAP) the Trans-Caspian energy corridor, and Trans-Caucasian trade routes (Demir, 2022). These projects not only deepen Türkiye's economic interdependence with the region but also reflect its broader ambition to establish itself as a key trade, logistics, and manufacturing hub across Eurasia. Türkiye has become one of Central Asia's leading trade partners, with bilateral trade reaching US$13 billion in 2023—an increase of tenfold over the previous decade (TIKA,2023).

In parallel, Türkiye has expanded its influence through a multidimensional soft-power strategy encompassing media, education, healthcare, and diplomatic outreach. The Turkish Cooperation and Coordination Agency (TİKA) has played a particularly important role in development assistance, while educational exchange initiatives such as the Orhun Process have reinforced cultural and academic linkages. As a NATO member, Türkiye has also engaged in defense cooperation and regional security dialogue, thereby consolidating its role as a strategically consequential actor within the OTS framework. Taken together, these efforts underscore Ankara's determination to strengthen relations with Central Asian states, capitalize on shared cultural affinities, and enhance both regional integration and its own geopolitical standing (Bayat, 2023). Türkiye's engagement with Central Asia, however, is far from uncontested. Despite enduring historical, linguistic, and cultural affinities, the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) continues to face substantial constraints in terms of institutional development, internal cohesion, and functional capacity. At its current stage of evolution, the OTS remains closer to an ethno-linguistic and civilizational framework—comparable in certain respects to la Francophonie or the Community of Portuguese Language Countries—than to a fully fledged strategic alliance capable of articulating unified positions on defense, security (Ünal & Ertem, 2022). Member states continue to prioritize national interests over collective commitments, resulting in differentiated foreign policy orientations, particularly in relation to major external powers including Russia, China, and the European Union (European Union, 2025) While Türkiye seeks deeper strategic coordination, Central Asian

states remain cautious about excessive alignment, instead favoring multi-vector foreign policies that preserve room for maneuver and policy autonomy (Koçak, 2023).

Türkiye's position is further complicated by intensified competition from other external actors. China's Belt and Road Initiative and associated infrastructure investments, Russia's longstanding political and security influence, and the European Union's €12 billion Global Gateway package for Central Asia—focused on critical raw materials, transport connectivity, and the green energy transition—each constitute powerful alternatives to Turkish initiatives. Internal institutional weaknesses also remain pronounced (European Union, 2025) In Türkiye, the absence of a robust organizational infrastructure dedicated to the OTS continues to constrain long-term strategic planning and the elaboration of a coherent vision for the Turkic World 2040 agenda (Turkic World Vision- 2040). Without deeper institutionalization—through the establishment of specialized think tanks, academic centers, and strategic planning units equipped with effective feedback mechanisms—Türkiye's regional influence may be increasingly challenged by more coordinated and better-resourced external actors, as illustrated by the first EU–Central Asia Summit in Samarkand, Uzbekistan, on 3–4 April 2025. Accordingly, Ankara must do more than expand its economic and diplomatic presence; it must also cultivate stronger political solidarity, strategic coherence, and institutionalized action within the OTS, moving beyond soft power alone (Najiyeva, 2025).

> *The subsequent sections of this article analyze the evolution of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) within the broader framework of Türkiye's geopolitical strategy in Central Asia. It examines the ways in which Ankara deploys economic, cultural, and strategic instruments to consolidate its regional presence while simultaneously confronting significant structural constraints and navigating complex interactions with major global powers. By assessing Türkiye's engagement with regionalism through the OTS framework, the study seeks to illuminate the potential trajectories of Eurasian geopolitics and the prospective role of Turkic states within an increasingly multipolar international order* (Karimov & Akhmetov, 2021).

Roots and Frameworks: Türkiye, Central Asia, and the Emergence of Turkic Regionalism

The idea of Turkic unity—understood as the pursuit of solidarity, cooperation, and a shared political identity among Turkic-speaking peoples—has long occupied an important place in Türkiye's foreign-policy imagination toward Central Asia, with intellectual and strategic roots extending to the late Ottoman period. Although Turkish nationalism acquired greater domestic prominence after the 1950s, Türkiye did not develop a consistent or comprehensive regional policy for much of the post-Soviet era, nor during the Cold War (Özkan, 2020). This relative strategic ambivalence stands in notable contrast to Mustafa Kemal Atatürk's earlier activist vision, which anticipated the eventual independence of Turkic republics and envisaged them as "our own brothers and sisters of one language, one faith." In contemporary terms, the emergence of the Organization of Turkic States (OTS) may be interpreted through multiple international relations

perspectives: from a constructivist standpoint, it reflects the institutionalization of shared identity, historical memory, and cultural affinity; from a realist perspective, it serves Türkiye's broader search for influence, strategic depth, and balancing capacity in a contested geopolitical environment; and from a regionalist perspective, it represents an evolving framework for political coordination and interdependence among states seeking greater autonomy within a multipolar order (Ünal & Ertem, 2022).

Early initiatives toward Turkic outreach in Türkiye began to take shape after the 12 September 1980 coup, particularly under the liberalizing agenda advanced by Turgut Özal's government from 1983 onward, which coincided with the ascendance of new Turkish political and intellectual currents. In this context, some strands of strategic thinking drew on Cold War-era geopolitical frameworks associated with Zbigniew Brzezinski and Nicholas Spykman, especially the notion that the consolidation of Turkic and Islamic identities could help offset the influence of resurgent Eurasian powers, notably Russia (Brzezinski,1997) Spykman's Rimland thesis, in particular, suggested that the geopolitical weight of the Eurasian heartland could be constrained through control of the surrounding coastal belt, including strategically significant states such as Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, and Pakistan. Yet this early orientation remained fragmented, ideologically uneven, and only weakly institutionalized, limiting its policy continuity and practical effectiveness (Hughes, Snegovaya, 2022).

From the perspective of international relations theory, this trajectory can be interpreted in several ways. Constructivism emphasizes the role of identity formation, historical memory, and cultural affinity in shaping Türkiye's evolving imagination of the Turkic world. Neofunctionalism highlights the potentially cumulative logic through which limited cooperation might generate broader spillover into political and institutional integration, even if such dynamics remained muted in the early period (Bayat,2023). Liberal intergovernmentalism and intergovernmentalism, by contrast, underscore the primacy of state preferences, domestic constraints, and bargaining among sovereign actors, helping explain why Türkiye's engagement with Central Asia remained selective and strategically cautious. During these years, Türkiye's attention remained firmly oriented toward the European Union, while Central Asia was often viewed less as a space of immediate strategic value than as a geographically distant and politically peripheral region with limited tangible returns, rather than as a community of cultural kin (European Union, 2025).

Since the 2010s, Türkiye's approach has undergone a notable transformation, reflecting a more strategically oriented vision that extends beyond cultural affinity and accords greater agency to Central Asian states. A conjunction of developments—not least the heightened securitization of Turkish politics following the failed coup attempt in 2016—enabled the AKP-led ruling elite under President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, together with its nationalist coalition partner MHP under Devlet Bahçeli, to place renewed emphasis on closer relations with Turkic Eurasia, the Caucasus, and Pakistan (Çetinkaya, Demirel, 2023). This reorientation infused the Turkish-Islamic synthesis of the 1980s and 1990s with more opportunistic and revisionist undertones, while also reinforcing Erdoğan's pursuit of "agency, independence, and leadership" for a "New Turkey" ostensibly free from external tutelage. In this context, Central Asia was no longer conceived merely as a transit corridor or a remote peripheral space, but increasingly as a strategic arena in

which Türkiye sought recognition as an autonomous actor within an emergent Eurasian order (Özkan, 2020).

This strategic reorientation has been shaped by broader geopolitical realignments, including Türkiye's growing disenchantment with the European Union accession process, persistent instability in the Middle East, the structural limitations of partnerships with Gulf Arab states, and a more pronounced pivot toward Eurasia through the Ministry of Foreign Affairs' "Asia Anew" (Yeniden Asya) initiative. This policy framework seeks to engage systematically with the rising influence of Turkic states and the expanding role of China in the region. As the late scholar Mert Bayat of the Turkish Naval Academy observed, contemporary Turkish strategic thought synthesizes multiple traditions of geopolitical analysis to position Türkiye as a critical connector between the Eurasian continental heartland and maritime trade corridors in the Mediterranean (Lee, 2025). This orientation underscores Ankara's expanding ambitions in Central Asia and beyond. Given Central Asia's landlocked geography and limited access to southern seas, the region has a strong incentive to cultivate relationships with states possessing maritime capabilities, particularly Türkiye. In this context, Türkiye's seaborne connectivity reinforces its capacity to function as a reliable transit hub, linking Central Asia to European markets (Kahveci & Bonnenfant, 2023)

Conclusion

The OTS exemplifies how regional organizations in Eurasia navigate the intersection of identity, strategy, and geopolitics. Türkiye's engagement highlights the potential for middle-power agency, combining economic, infrastructural, and soft-power initiatives to consolidate influence. However, structural constraints—including limited institutional capacity, multi-vector member-state policies, and external geopolitical competition—require Ankara to pursue deeper institutionalization, stronger policy coordination, and expanded intellectual infrastructure. By balancing leadership with respect for member autonomy, Türkiye can strengthen the OTS as a credible platform for regional cooperation, contributing to the broader reconfiguration of Eurasian geopolitics in an increasingly multipolar world.

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MAYER, JORGE (2026). À ESPERA DA ESPERANÇA? EDITORIAL AO, 160 PP.

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Introdução

Falar de pessoas refugiadas é falar de histórias interrompidas, famílias separadas, perdas, resistência e resiliência, mas também da procura de um lugar onde seja possível reconstruir a vida em segurança e com dignidade. É, igualmente, refletir sobre direitos humanos, desigualdades, solidariedade e responsabilidade coletiva perante aqueles que, por diferentes circunstâncias, foram obrigados a abandonar os seus territórios de origem.

É neste contexto que se situa a obra *À espera da esperança?*, de Jorge Mayer (2026), um livro que nos aproxima da realidade do campo de refugiados de *Kakuma*, no Quénia, através de experiências pessoais e profissionais profundamente marcadas pelo contacto com pessoas em situação de deslocação forçada.

Mais do que descrever as condições de vida num campo de refugiados, a obra procura dar visibilidade às pessoas, aos seus percursos, dificuldades e capacidades de resistência perante circunstâncias particularmente adversas. Através de três conversas, nas quais se cruzam experiências, testemunhos e reflexões, o leitor é convidado a conhecer uma realidade que, frequentemente, nos chega através de notícias, números e imagens de conflitos internacionais.

A leitura revela-se particularmente pertinente para a compreensão das migrações, do refúgio e dos direitos humanos, ao evidenciar que a deslocação forçada não se limita à perda de um território. Envolve também a rutura de referências, a reorganização das relações familiares, a reconstrução de identidades e a procura de novas formas de pertença.

No prefácio, Luís Faria contextualiza esta problemática, convidando-nos a olhar para as pessoas refugiadas e deslocadas que fogem de guerras, perseguições e catástrofes naturais, procurando proteção e oportunidades para reconstruir o futuro. A sua reflexão destaca, igualmente, o valor estratégico das migrações para o futuro do mundo (p. 9).

Com uma estrutura simples e uma linguagem acessível, a obra interroga o significado de viver entre refugiados e o sentido de um lugar designado como «nenhures». Apresenta, posteriormente, três conversas que permitem compreender diferentes dimensões da experiência humanitária, articulando questões geopolíticas, familiares, culturais e espirituais. São testemunhos que revelam as marcas da adversidade, mas também a persistência da esperança.

Conversas sobre viver entre refugiados

Jorge Mayer apresenta *Kakuma* como expressão de uma das contradições da proteção humanitária: estruturas concebidas para responder a situações de emergência podem transformar-se em lugares de permanência prolongada. Criado em 1992 para acolher populações que fugiam dos conflitos no Sudão, o campo passou a receber pessoas provenientes de diferentes países africanos.

A sua trajetória evidencia a distância entre a natureza temporária das respostas humanitárias e a duração efetiva das situações de refúgio. Embora a assistência assegure necessidades fundamentais, não garante, por si só, condições para reconstruir uma vida autónoma.

A espera ultrapassa a dimensão temporal. Interfere na educação, no trabalho, nas relações familiares e nas expectativas de futuro. A perda do território de origem acompanha-se frequentemente da fragilização dos vínculos sociais e das referências quotidianas. Reconstruir a vida implica, por isso, mais do que encontrar abrigo e proteção: exige recuperar relações, oportunidades e capacidade de decisão.

Embora centrados no contexto português, Rodrigues e Bracons (2026, p. 12) apresentam uma reflexão pertinente para esta análise ao afirmarem que «Ser migrante, por si só, não implica vulnerabilidade». Esta perspetiva permite compreender que as situações de vulnerabilidade não resultam necessariamente da condição migratória, mas podem ser produzidas ou agravadas pelas desigualdades sociais, pelas barreiras institucionais e pelas condições de acolhimento. Sem equiparar a realidade das migrações em Portugal à experiência do refúgio em *Kakuma*, importa reconhecer que a proteção efetiva depende não apenas da resposta às necessidades imediatas, mas também da criação de oportunidades de participação, autonomia e exercício de direitos.

A diversidade cultural presente em *Kakuma* constitui outro elemento relevante. Diferentes línguas, religiões, identidades e trajetórias coexistem num mesmo espaço, sem que essa proximidade assegure necessariamente o diálogo ou a compreensão mútua. A intervenção intercultural exige, assim, atenção às diferenças, mas também às desigualdades, às relações de poder e às experiências de violência que atravessam a vida das pessoas refugiadas.

Onde é «nenhures»?

Ao apresentar a origem e a evolução de *Kakuma* (pp. 15–18), Mayer situa o leitor perante uma realidade em que a proteção humanitária convive com a precariedade e a incerteza. Particularmente expressiva é a referência ao significado de *Kakuma*, apresentado na obra como «nenhures».

Esta designação adquire uma dimensão simbólica que ultrapassa a localização geográfica. Remete para a experiência de quem se encontra afastado do seu território, das suas referências e, frequentemente, da possibilidade de decidir sobre o próprio futuro.

O campo constitui, simultaneamente, um espaço de proteção e um lugar de espera. Esta ambivalência convida a questionar os limites de respostas humanitárias que, embora indispensáveis à sobrevivência, nem sempre se traduzem em soluções duradouras.

Numa perspetiva dos direitos humanos, proteger não significa apenas assegurar condições mínimas de existência. Implica reconhecer a dignidade de cada pessoa, valorizar os seus conhecimentos e experiências e criar possibilidades concretas de participação e construção de um projeto de vida.

Três conversas
Ver a guerra, os refugiados e a geopolítica

A conversa com a jornalista Cândida Pinto relaciona a experiência do refúgio com os conflitos internacionais, os interesses geoestratégicos e a responsabilidade da comunicação social.

A reflexão sobre a guerra na Síria evidencia como a visibilidade do sofrimento humano pode depender da natureza dos acontecimentos, da cobertura mediática e dos interesses políticos envolvidos. A condenação da utilização de armas químicas, embora indispensável, não deve obscurecer o sofrimento provocado por outras formas de violência.

Esta abordagem convida a questionar a desigual atenção atribuída às vítimas dos conflitos e a reconhecer que a dignidade humana não pode depender da localização geográfica, da visibilidade mediática ou dos instrumentos utilizados para provocar a morte.

A narrativa suscita ainda uma reflexão sobre o papel do jornalismo na representação do sofrimento. Comunicar a realidade das pessoas refugiadas implica ultrapassar a exposição de imagens dramáticas e procurar compreender os contextos, as experiências e as consequências humanas dos conflitos.

A obra recorda-nos, assim, que conhecer acontecimentos relacionados com o refúgio não significa necessariamente conhecer as interpretações que as próprias pessoas refugiadas fazem das suas experiências.

Viver num campo de refugiados nos seus aspetos pessoais e da família

A conversa com Maria João Mayer Branco, doutorada em Filosofia, introduz uma dimensão mais pessoal e relacional da vida num campo de refugiados.

Os afetos, as relações familiares, as diferenças culturais e o sentimento de pertença permitem compreender que a experiência do refúgio não se esgota na satisfação de necessidades materiais.

Particularmente relevante é a reflexão sobre a possibilidade de construir relações de proximidade e amizade em contextos profundamente marcados pela desigualdade. Os testemunhos demonstram que a intervenção humanitária não se reduz à execução de projetos ou à disponibilização de recursos. Envolve também a capacidade de escutar, compreender e estabelecer vínculos de confiança.

A consciência das diferenças entre as condições de vida dos profissionais humanitários e as das populações refugiadas introduz uma importante interrogação ética sobre os privilégios, as relações de poder e as motivações da ajuda.

A proximidade humana não elimina as desigualdades, mas pode contribuir para evitar que a intervenção se transforme numa relação distante ou paternalista. A solidariedade adquire maior significado quando reconhece o outro como sujeito de direitos, com conhecimentos, experiências e capacidade de decisão.

Nas páginas 64 e 65, a reflexão sobre a fé, Deus e o sentido da existência acrescenta uma dimensão filosófica e humanista à narrativa. A afirmação «A vida só faz sentido com os outros» sintetiza uma ideia particularmente expressiva: a existência humana constrói-se na relação, na partilha e no reconhecimento da humanidade comum.

Esta perspetiva assume especial significado perante a experiência do refúgio, frequentemente marcada pela perda de vínculos familiares, comunitários e territoriais. A esperança não se alimenta apenas da expectativa de um futuro melhor, mas também da presença, do cuidado e da possibilidade de estabelecer novas relações.

A obra convida-nos, deste modo, a reconhecer que a dignidade humana se afirma não apenas nas condições materiais de existência, mas também na reciprocidade, na pertença e no reconhecimento do outro.

Partir em missão. E onde anda Deus num campo de refugiados?

A conversa com o Padre Luís Ferreira do Amaral introduz uma reflexão sobre a fé, o sofrimento e o sentido da presença humana em contextos de extrema adversidade.

A interrogação sobre o lugar de Deus num campo de refugiados ultrapassa a dimensão estritamente religiosa, convocando questões sobre a responsabilidade, a solidariedade e o compromisso perante o sofrimento humano.

Particularmente significativa é a conceção de Deus que emerge do diálogo: não uma entidade distante, que transforma a realidade independentemente da ação humana, mas uma presença que se manifesta através das pessoas, da sua disponibilidade para ajudar e do compromisso com aqueles que sofrem.

A fé surge, assim, como uma possível fonte de sentido, resistência e esperança, sem substituir a necessidade de respostas políticas, sociais e institucionais.

Os relatos de pessoas que, apesar das perdas, da violência e das experiências traumáticas, preservam a capacidade de sorrir e acreditar na vida constituem momentos especialmente marcantes da obra. Revelam a força humana perante a adversidade, sem que essa capacidade de resistência deva servir para minimizar o sofrimento ou naturalizar a privação.

A reflexão permite compreender que a esperança pode persistir mesmo quando as circunstâncias parecem negar qualquer possibilidade de futuro.

Para o Serviço Social, esta dimensão assume particular relevância. A intervenção deve reconhecer a diversidade das convicções religiosas e espirituais, respeitar a liberdade de consciência e valorizar os recursos pessoais e comunitários, sem substituir os direitos pela generosidade ou pela assistência.

A solidariedade ganha consistência quando se traduz em reconhecimento, participação e transformação das condições que produzem sofrimento e exclusão.

Como surgiu e o que foi o projeto em Kakuma?

O anexo dedicado ao projeto desenvolvido em *Kakuma* apresenta a dimensão prática da cooperação humanitária.

A parceria entre a EDP e o Alto Comissariado das Nações Unidas para os Refugiados, iniciada em 2009, integra soluções relacionadas com a energia e o ambiente, nomeadamente através da utilização de energia solar.

Esta experiência permite compreender como as decisões técnicas e as infraestruturas podem influenciar diretamente as condições de vida das comunidades, libertando recursos e contribuindo para responder a necessidades quotidianas.

Contudo, a apresentação do projeto suscita também questões relevantes: de que forma participaram as populações na identificação das prioridades? Que condições asseguram a continuidade dos benefícios? Como são valorizadas as capacidades e os conhecimentos locais?

A cooperação humanitária não deve ser avaliada apenas pelos recursos disponibilizados ou pelos resultados técnicos alcançados, mas também pela sua capacidade de fortalecer a autonomia, promover a participação e criar oportunidades duradouras.

Reflexões finais

A principal qualidade de *À espera da esperança?* reside na capacidade de aproximar o leitor de uma realidade distante, através de uma linguagem acessível e de testemunhos que articulam diferentes dimensões da experiência humana.

A conjugação entre geopolítica, vida familiar, diversidade cultural, espiritualidade e cooperação humanitária permite compreender que o refúgio não constitui uma realidade única ou homogénea. Cada pessoa transporta consigo uma história, uma identidade, relações, perdas e expectativas que não podem ser reduzidas à condição de refugiado.

A obra apresenta, contudo, uma limitação que importa reconhecer: as conversas privilegiam as perspetivas de pessoas que observaram, acompanharam ou intervieram naquela realidade, sendo menos evidente a presença direta das vozes das próprias pessoas refugiadas. A inclusão dessas narrativas poderia aprofundar a compreensão das suas experiências, necessidades e formas de interpretar o mundo.

Esta observação não diminui o valor dos testemunhos apresentados, mas reforça a importância de reconhecer as pessoas refugiadas como protagonistas das suas histórias e não apenas como destinatárias de proteção ou assistência.

A leitura suscita igualmente uma reflexão sobre os limites da solidariedade quando não é acompanhada por políticas públicas, garantias de direitos e oportunidades concretas de participação. A ajuda humanitária é indispensável, mas não pode constituir uma resposta permanente à ausência de soluções duradouras.

É nesta tensão entre proteção e autonomia, assistência e reconhecimento, sofrimento e esperança que a obra encontra particular relevância.

A partir de uma perspetiva humanista e intercultural, o livro convida-nos a olhar para além dos números e das imagens que habitualmente representam as crises humanitárias, reconhecendo as pessoas na sua singularidade e na sua capacidade de reconstruir percursos de vida.

Em síntese, *À espera da esperança?* é uma obra que nos interpela sobre o significado de proteger, acolher e reconhecer o outro. Recorda-nos que a esperança não se esgota na sobrevivência, nem pode permanecer indefinidamente suspensa numa promessa de futuro. Constrói-se nas relações humanas, no reconhecimento da dignidade, na solidariedade e na possibilidade de participar nas decisões que dão sentido à existência.

Talvez a maior interrogação que esta leitura nos deixa não seja apenas saber como vivem aqueles que esperam, mas compreender o que fazemos, individual e coletivamente, para que a esperança deixe de ser uma espera e se transforme numa possibilidade real de vida.

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