

EUROPE

Diplomatic

magazine



THE SIGNAL AND THE NOISE

China warns other countries to stay out of the row over its claim to rule Taiwan



THE WAGNER GROUP

Power, Profit and Denial

Finnish Prime Minister
Sanna Marin

Swedish Prime Minister
Magdalena Andersson

NATO'S ACCIDENTAL MISSIONARY GAINS TWO MORE CONVERTS

*How Vladimir Putin became NATO's
greatest recruiting sergeant*



SAVVIVA

Concierge Services

EFFICIENT PERSONAL SUPPORT IN BUSY TIMES

- Personal assistance
- Private concierge
- Property management



WE ARE AT YOUR SERVICE, 24/7
CALL NOW

Experience Belgium's leading
concierge service

SAVVIVA

www.savviva.be | +32 2 669 07 29 | concierge@savviva.be

IN THIS ISSUE



■ **NATO'S ACCIDENTAL MISSIONARY GAINS TWO MORE CONVERTS**

How Vladimir Putin became NATO's greatest recruiting sergeantp.6

■ **NEWS IN BRIEF:**

From around the Worldp.14

■ **THE SIGNAL AND THE NOISE**

China warns other countries to stay out of the row over its claim to rule Taiwanp.20



■ **UNGODLY ACTS**

Former colonies of Western power seek a new masterp.28



■ **THE WAGNER GROUP**

Power, Profit and Denialp.36

■ **WHAT ABOUT FOOD?**

Possible consequences of the war in Ukrainep.44



■ **EU COUNTRIES PREPARING TO WELCOME THOSE FLEEING**

UKRAINEp.48

■ **ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST HACKER FORUMS TAKEN**

DOWNp.50

■ **WEATHER SATELLITE PREPARES FOR LIGHTNING**p.52



■ **EQUINOR AND NATURGY TEAM UP TO EXPLORE OFFSHORE WIND**

DEVELOPMENT IN SPAINp.53

■ **Books**

Our selectionp.54



“EUROPE DIPLOMATIC MAGAZINE” is characterized by a very open editorial line that allows it to capture all the themes that affect directly or indirectly the European political, economic, social and security issues. Whether piracy in the Gulf of Aden and its threats to the global economy, articles about political leaders, geostrategic situations or technological developments affecting our civilization, Europe Diplomatic Magazine strives to work in comparing opinions and providing an objective analysis based on extensive research. For a wide audience composed of both members of the diplomatic corps, lobbyists, international officials or academics, the magazine gives everyone the necessary and useful information about all topics that make up our daily lives. Covering sensitive issues such as nuclear, the rise of Islamism and energy dependence, the magazine opens its pages to recognized specialists who would like to express first order and exclusive information. But Europe Diplomatic Magazine is not only a source of information on recent topics. It is also addressing older facts with deep thought for further analysis. Whether it's news, security, diplomacy, technology, energy, terrorism, European affairs, no subject is treated superficially. Europe Diplomatic Magazine is an independent media, conveying balanced ideas of openness and analysis based on almost 30 years of experience in the journalistic world.

Visit our site and please give us your comments: <https://europe-diplomatic.eu/> europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com



Nikola Hendrickx

EDITORIAL

ON THE UTILITY OF NATO

"A small step for the military, but a giant leap for the political system"... Speaking about his country's probable membership in the Atlantic Alliance, the Chief of Joint Operations of the Swedish armed forces, General Michael Claesson recently echoed the famous phrase of American astronaut Neil Armstrong when he first set foot on the moon in 1969: "That's one small step for man, one giant leap for mankind."

Sweden's centre-left ruling Social Democrats led by Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, have historically opposed NATO membership and even reaffirmed this position at the party's last congress in November 2021. However, the war in Ukraine has reignited the debate in Sweden and within the party. They have in fact announced that they expect to reach a decision on their country's possible NATO membership by May 24.

According to the latest poll released on 21 April, a majority of 51% of Swedes are now in favour of their country joining NATO. In addition, if Finland also joins the alliance, 64% of Swedes surveyed by the Novus Institute poll said they would support membership.

"Emotional reaction" or "rational fear"?

How to explain the shift in policy of these two historically non-aligned countries, but which have been NATO partners for years? There are certainly some nuances of perspective that should be noted: for Stockholm, neutrality has long been a philosophical choice, while for Helsinki, it has been a pragmatic strategy to maintain the independence of the Finnish state from its large eastern neighbour. In both cases however, it is clear that the brutal and unprovoked invasion of Ukraine by Vladimir Putin's armed forces has pushed public opinion strongly towards the Atlantic Alliance.

Moscow has made no secret of its hostility to Scandinavian intentions, threatening to respond by changing the nuclear balance in the Baltic Sea region. While this reaction was predictable, the Swedish and Finnish stance was also met with reluctance by some Western commentators as well as a number of American military analysts. Some for instance, called the willingness to join NATO an "emotional response" to a threat they believe does not really exist, especially in light of the Russian military's poor performance in Ukraine. On the other hand, while remaining cautious about the timing of joining the Alliance, former Finnish Prime Minister Alexander Stubb spoke instead of "rational fear," citing his country's geography and historical experience.

As for Sweden, the decision to turn to NATO may seem slightly more surprising, as the country has no border with Russia. Until November 2021, Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson's Social Democratic Party had also stated its historic opposition to Sweden joining NATO. However, the first signs of a shift in Stockholm's defence policy were visible long before the outbreak of hostilities in Ukraine, particularly with regard to the Swedish island of Gotland, which occupies a strategic position in the Baltic Sea, 330 km from the Russian enclave of Kaliningrad, a heavily militarized area between Lithuania and Poland.

A few days after the invasion of Ukraine, 4 Russian military aircraft violated Swedish airspace near Gotland. The location of the incident was not coincidental; as Volodymyr Zelensky noted on March 24 while addressing the Swedish parliament via video link, some propagandists on Russian state television had publicly mentioned the long-term occupation of Gotland in order to create a military base there as part of a possible takeover of the Baltic States.

The idea is not new; during military exercises in March 2015, 30,000 Russian soldiers had already simulated the assault on Gotland as well as other islands in the Baltic Sea.

Two months later, 3600 military personnel from 5 NATO countries as well as Switzerland, Finland and Sweden conducted exercises on the Swedish island.

If the current Nordic statements about joining NATO in the very near future may seem surprising to the general public, they are not so to specialist analysts, who, whether in Stockholm or Helsinki, would seem to be more inclined to put it down to "rational fear" than to emotional reactions.

At any rate, following Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine, there has been a sudden shift in opinion in both countries. In Finland, support for NATO has skyrocketed from less than 30% to more than 60%. According to polls, 84% of Finns see Russia as a threat. The Finnish prime minister Sanna Marin has said that no other system could give the country better security guarantees than NATO.

Setback for Putin

If these two Nordic countries were to become members of NATO, that would certainly constitute a very powerful political and civic act. But it would also be a major political setback for Vladimir Putin. His aggression against Ukraine, officially motivated by the fear of seeing Kyiv join NATO, is pushing two more countries into the arms of the Atlantic defence organisation. It is hard to find a more counterproductive move. Moscow is threatening Helsinki and Stockholm with "serious military and political consequences" if they join the alliance.

Russian military planes have already made incursions into Finnish airspace, and several ministerial sites have been the target of cyber-attacks. Both countries fear retaliation, especially during the transition period, when the accession process will still be ongoing. But these threats from Moscow are unlikely to change much; the tide has turned in Finland and Sweden.

Just family quarrels ?

While two of the northernmost countries in Europe may soon become the 31st and 32nd members of NATO, one of the alliance's oldest members is experiencing some serious turbulence in its relations with its other family members.

Turkey will be celebrating 70 years of NATO membership in 2022 and is seen as a pillar of the alliance on its south-eastern flank. A diplomatic crisis began to take shape towards the end of 2019 as tensions crystallized when Ankara launched an offensive against Kurdish forces in northern Syria, on the heels of the unilateral US military withdrawal from that country.

But that's not all. For the past six years, some of Turkey's actions have provoked doubt, even unease, within NATO. When it buys a defence system from Russia, knowing that it is incompatible with those of the Atlantic Alliance, when its ships confront Greek vessels in the eastern Mediterranean, or French ships off the coast of Libya, member states such as France and the United States rightly accuse it of disloyalty and even of undermining NATO.

Therefore, even though Turkey believes it is beneficial to be a member of NATO, Ankara acts suspiciously vis a vis its allies, and does not favour more U.S. presence in Europe. Indeed, this absence allows Turkey to be more assertive, while the Americans are distracted by events in the Pacific and the growing Chinese threat.

By declaring NATO "brain-dead," French President Emmanuel Macron no doubt wanted to emphasize that the lack of American leadership in Europe left room for opportunists within the alliance and that Europe should take greater control of its destiny.

The great virtue of NATO is to raise the defense efforts of member countries, especially in order to be able to ensure the Alliance's nuclear deterrence missions. One of the greatest challenges for Europeans in international security is that many nations have a weakened defence mindset. This reflects the peaceful situation in which the continent finds itself, all other things being equal, since the end of the Cold War. This major advance in peacemaking can nevertheless lead people and political leaders to neglect the defence effort that is necessary to preserve peace and stability.

Trajan Dereville



Allied Defence Ministers meeting at NATO Headquarters on 21-22 October 2021

NATO'S ACCIDENTAL MISSIONARY GAINS TWO MORE CONVERTS

How Vladimir Putin became NATO's greatest recruiting sergeant

Russia has become increasingly alarmed at the growth of the NATO military alliance, which is perhaps not very surprising. Russia and NATO have never been friends, exactly, and NATO was formed to provide protection, initially, from the old Soviet Union. Russian President, Vladimir Putin, has issued gruesome threats about the consequences of any further expansion of the Alliance. What he seems not to understand is that

those very threats, especially after his unmerited invasion of Ukraine, make NATO seem increasingly attractive for neutral countries close to Russia's border, or to the borders of countries supportive of Russia. It offers at least a modicum of protection in the event of Moscow getting over-ambitious. That's why Finland and Sweden, both traditionally neutral countries, now seem certain to apply for NATO membership very soon. Indeed, by the time you read this, they may have already done so.

At the time of writing, rumours are circulating that the two countries may decide to announce their formal applications for membership together, or at least within days of each other, but this is not a foregone conclusion as yet. Finland's Foreign Minister, Pekka Haavisto, has said that no date had been agreed and neither had a final decision been made, despite reports in the media that the two leaders could make an appropriate announcement when they

meet in the middle of May. Sweden's Prime Minister, Magdalena Andersson, wants to read the detailed assessment of her country's options, currently under hurried preparation, before making a definite move. An application to join NATO, possible jointly with Finland, seems a likely option, however. Trust in Russia has dwindled to almost zero. One thing is crystal clear: if Putin had not invaded Ukraine, carrying out terrible war crimes along the way (which he denies, of course), both Finland and Sweden would have remained neutral. That neutrality has partly been to appease the Russian bear next door: if you live next door to a vicious ursine carnivore, you don't go and poke him with a stick. However, if he keeps growling at you over the fence and baring his teeth at your family, you may find a small measure of insurance comforting, and acquiring a pack of bear hounds to support you would no doubt provide some reassurance. NATO allies could be those bear hounds.



Pekka Haavisto, Foreign Minister of Finland



© Wikimedia

Magdalena Andersson Sweden's first female Prime Minister

All of this means, of course, that NATO now looks certain to expand and that this is exactly the opposite of what Putin wants. Indeed, he has warned that if Sweden and Finland sign up to the Alliance there will be, in his words, “detrimental military and political consequences” (“пагубные военно-политические последствия”, as he put it). Given his propensity to attack civilians and bomb non-military targets, there seems little doubt about what he means. The deputy chair of Russia’s security council, Dmitry Medvedev, has already indicated that if the two countries join NATO, Russia will abandon its nuclear-free policy for the Baltic Sea. Getting closer to NATO, it seems, involves getting closer to Russian nuclear weapons, too. Russia has a land border with Finland but also a sea border with Sweden. If Putin’s bully-boy tactics have the anticipated result, it will mean that Russia has a 1,340-kilometre border with NATO, rather than with a neutral country, which would seem to be not exactly in Russia’s – or at least in Putin’s – best interests.

The idea of joining has found support among the populations of Finland and Sweden, however, as they watch the news coverage of the brutal invasion of Ukraine. Nobody wants to invite that kind of hostile interest in their country.

For his part, Putin has insisted that Russia was forced to invade Ukraine because the US and its allies were using the Kyiv government to threaten Moscow with NATO expansion. He did not explain how exactly little Kyiv was threatening mighty Moscow, nor what sort of victory Moscow feared.

The neutrality of the two Baltic countries in the years since the Second World War ended is not quite as straightforward as Western media tends to portray it. The ruling elites of both countries were, like many Western powers, bitter opponents of Russia’s 1917 revolution. Both also collaborated with Nazi Germany and, despite their official neutrality, clearly sided with the United States during the Cold War. In fact, Finland didn’t officially exist as a state in its own right. In the 12th century, Christian missionaries tried to convert the Finns, using force, which sounds like a contradiction in terms. It was subsequently invaded several times, by the Swedes but also by Danish forces. Wars and battles rumbled on and in the 18th century Russia invaded and cut off a piece of southern Finland to keep. From then on, the story gets even more complicated, with the Tsar sometimes granting rights and freedoms and at other times snatching them away. The Finnish Parliament, the Diet, was the first in Europe (and only the third in the world, the others being New Zealand and Australia) to permit universal suffrage and in 1906, women were allowed to vote in national elections for the first time. Shortly after Russia’s revolution, Finnish rulers took stern measures to suppress their own working classes. Finland organised its so-called ‘white terror’ to ensure its workers would pose no further threat, with millions of ordinary Finns dying in one-sided battles against armed troops or in concentration camps.

HAUNTED BY THE PAST, FRIGHTENED OF THE FUTURE

1939 saw the notorious ‘Winter War’ with the Soviet Union, which was heavily criticised by Leon Trotsky, who was no supporter of Joseph Stalin and his nationalist policies, despite his devotion to Marxism. In his “Open Letter to the Workers of the USSR” in 1940, he wrote (and I quote here from the World Socialist Website, WSWWS): “(T)he infamous oppressive regime of Stalin has deprived the USSR of its attractive power. During the war with Finland, not only the majority of the Finnish peasants but also the majority of the Finnish workers, proved to be on the side of their bourgeoisie.” The WSWWS goes on to explain: “This is hardly surprising since they know of the unprecedented oppression to which the Stalinist bureaucracy subjects the workers of near-by Leningrad and the whole of the USSR.”



© NRF

Joseph Stalin in military uniform at the Tehran Conference in 1943

Trotsky was no fan of Stalin, an attitude that was to lead to his later murder with an ice pick by Soviet agents working for Stalin. However, the WSWWS article also points out that neither Sweden nor Finland cares to mention the so-called ‘Continuation War’, in which Finnish Supreme Commander Karl Mannerheim, a former general in the Tsarist Russian army, played a leading part. He was the one who headed the Finnish white army in 1918 when it exterminated Finnish workers. Mannerheim celebrated his 75th birthday with Adolf Hitler, who paid a surprise visit to Finland to mark the occasion in 1942.



© Thomas Nilsen / NATO

The Russian border zone is controlled by the Federal Security Service (FSB), which acts under the direct command of the state leadership

Meanwhile, WSWS points out, Swedish neutrality rested upon its supply of iron ore and other vital raw materials to Nazi forces. Hitler never ordered an invasion because, it's thought, he saw no point in attacking a country that seemed perfectly happy to supply his military needs in return for money. Sweden's apparent fondness for Nazi beliefs continued after the war with the adoption of a policy of eugenics, which is explained on the website of the National Human Genome Research Institute (HGRI) as follows: "Eugenics is an immoral and pseudoscientific theory that claims it is possible to perfect people and groups through genetics and the scientific laws of inheritance. Eugenists used an incorrect and prejudiced understanding of the work of Charles Darwin and Gregor Mendel to support the idea of 'racial improvement.'" It's strange that an enlightened country like Sweden went down such a seemingly unscientific path, but it explains in part Communist Russia's long-term disapproval. Why did the Swedes do it? They seem to have espoused the dreadful idea, kicking around from the early 19th century, that societies could be 'improved' by science: "Eugenists labelled many people as 'unfit,'" the website explains, "including ethnic and religious minorities, people with disabilities, the urban poor and LGBTQ individuals." It's not such a long jump from there to declaring opposition politicians and people who don't vote for you 'unfit', too.

That was then, however, and this is now. Countries change, leaders change, and attitudes do. Until very recently, voters in Finland and Sweden would have been unlikely to support a move to join NATO.



Petteri Orpo



Finnish Minister of Defence Antti Kaikkonen visiting the Cold Response exercise on 26 March this year in Northern Norway. More than 30,000 soldiers from NATO and partner nations have taken part

The leader of Finland's centre-right National Coalition Party, Petteri Orpo, currently in opposition, recently held talks in Washington with President Joe Biden and explained his country's change of heart. "For 16 years, we have supported NATO membership," he said, "and now it's possible," adding ironically: "Thanks, Putin." Analysing that comment, it looks rather odd: 'thank you for frightening us so much that we have been compelled to seek help'. Certainly, simple membership of NATO doesn't provide a complete answer, according to Defense News: "Sweden has decided to examine a range of security-related options," says its website, "including deepening Nordic defense cooperation and urging the European Union to develop enhanced defense policies to offer greater military protection to EU member states that border the highly sensitive Baltic Sea and High North regions." That would appear to be an unlikely development. The EU is a trading body, not one concerned with military matters (at least up to now), despite the mutual defence clause contained in the Lisbon Treaty. That's good, but it's not as powerful as NATO's Article 5, which views an armed attack on one member as an attack on all, leaving allies free to take what the Treaty itself calls: "such action as it deems necessary" and that it includes "the use of military force."

Furthermore, whatever Putin thought he would gain by invading Ukraine, such as the subjugation of the former Soviet state under Russian control, in one sense he would appear to have failed. He has united Western attitudes towards Russian in a way that would have seemed impossible at the start of the year. Poland is supplying Soviet-designed T-72 tanks to Ukraine; Germany – which prefers to remain neutral in inter-country disputes

– is supplying around 50 Gepard anti-aircraft vehicles that deter hostile aircraft with flak; Britain is rushing to send AS90 tracked 155mm howitzers and possibly Army 105 towed light guns in addition. In fact, the race is on to provide Ukraine with the wherewithal to hold out against the Russian attack. Canada, France and the US are similarly sourcing defensive armour.

Even back in December, Finland placed orders for 64 Lockheed F-35 fighters at a cost of \$9.4-billion (€8.82-billion). So, Putin – through his, what? arrogance? misjudgement? sheer ego? fading mental health? – now finds his country facing some of the West's most advanced weaponry. It has also given Finland and Sweden pause for thought.

Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin told a joint news conference that a decision on NATO membership is imminent. "We need to have a view on the future and we are using this time to analyse and also build common views on the future when it comes to security," she said. She also pointed out what must be NATO's main attraction: "The most significant



Prime Minister Sanna Marin met with President of the European Commission Ursula von der Leyen 4 October 2021



© Nrf

The Russian aircraft carrier Admiral Kuznetsov's activity in the Baltic Sea region is coupled with relatively frequent airspace and territorial water violations

effect would be that Finland would be part of NATO's collective defence and be covered by the security guarantees enshrined in Article 5." It provides the sort of defensive measures that some of Putin's former friends – Russia's multi-billionaire oligarchs – must have wished they had as Western powers respond to Putin's brutal savagery by targeting his wealthy pals. And as former Financial Times Moscow Correspondent Catherine Belton exposes in a chilling analysis in her book, "Putin's People", there is no shortage of rather suspect 'nouveau riche' people in Putin's 'siloviki', or inner circle.

ALL PALS TOGETHER

They include such figures as Igor Sechin, listed by Belton as "Putin's trusted gatekeeper", who became known as 'Russia's Darth Vader' for his ruthless methods. It's a long list and it also includes Roman Abramovich, oil trader and Putin protégé, who used some of his ill-gotten wealth to buy Britain's Chelsea Football Club. It did well under his leadership, so the fans were mainly happy. But with his close links to Putin exposed, he was disqualified as a director of the club and then barred from even entering the ground, while a court on the Channel Island of Jersey has now frozen some \$7-billion (€6.57-billion), or roughly half his total wealth. The days of champagne and caviar, if not necessarily over, have certainly hit a rocky patch. Russian malfeasance that Putin seemed sure he could ignore has come back to bite him and his friends in

awkward places. Abramovich shouldn't look for help from Putin, either. Take the case of Yevgeniy Prigozhin, who opened a fast-food outlet on his release from prison and soon had big-name diners on his premises, including Putin. Later, he opened a 'troll factory' for the circulation and promotion of fake news, misinformation and lies. It has been claimed that his trolls helped Donald Trump to get elected. In the old fairy stories trolls were always seen to be evil, and Prigozhin is no exception, it seems.

Viktor Medvedchuk, an oligarch said to have been Putin's main man in Ukraine (also known as 'the Dark Prince'; this begins to sound more and more like an old Russian nursery story) was captured by Ukrainian forces, who offered to swap him for Ukrainian prisoners. Putin declined, despite Putin being godfather



Ukraine's security service posted a photo of Viktor Medvedchuk in handcuffs and wearing military fatigues

to Medvedchuk's youngest daughter. Interestingly, Putin had Medvedchuk lined up to replace Volodymyr Zelensky as Ukraine's leader. Putin accused Zelensky, you will recall, of being a "Nazi" despite him being Jewish. As Zelensky's prisoner, Medvedchuk's prospects for eventual leadership would now seem slim and getting slimmer, and given Putin's refusal to help him, he cannot look forward to a warm welcome if he gets back to Moscow.

Putin's relationship with his 'siloviki' friends is based on money: 'I'll help to make you rich, you give me a cut and don't ever help the opposition.' Coming up against him – as Finland and Sweden seem certain to do – is a dangerous thing. Putin is beyond ruthless. However, it's not all bad news: with Putin no longer trusted by his one-time KGB pals, his support seems likely to haemorrhage away, perhaps even overtaking the speed at which the fear Putin engenders weakens. However, the oligarchs' weakness is probably good news for the rest of us, according to the journalist Alan Trapulionis, writing on the Medium news website. "You think Russia would go to war in the middle of Europe if it was any good at capitalism?" he wrote. "No, it would be quietly making iPhones and Netflix shows just like the rest of us." He's right: Russia can't, which seems to annoy Putin, although he takes no steps to rectify things. Trapulionis blames Russia's economic failure on its ridiculously incompetent, money-obsessed oligarchs. "The new Russians did nothing to put their country on the map," he notes. "They simply took what they could, and the country as a whole stayed poor." According to Trapulionis, Russia is no longer capable of producing its own nails because of its business people's incompetence. Not even Stalin made such a mess of running Russia as Putin has done.

Inexplicably, many Russians remain faithful to him. A young Russian woman I know, resident in the UK, has stopped telephoning her mother in Moscow because the mother believes everything Putin says. "He's our leader," the mother sobs down the phone, "he could never lie to us." She is sure her Oxford-educated daughter must be wrong about the war crimes and brutality she reads about in the Western media and sees on TV news reports. Such credulousness on the mother's part, encouraged by Putin of course, fuels family arguments.



© Kremlin.ru
Press Secretary of the President of the Russian Federation Dmitry Peskov

Returning to the issue of Finland, Sweden and Russia, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov has warned the two potential NATO candidates that the NATO alliance remains “geared towards confrontation”, unlike gentle, peace-loving Russia, presumably. Peskov warned Finland and Sweden that NATO “is not that kind of alliance which ensures peace and stability, and its further expansion will not bring additional security to the European continent.” But then, of course, neither does Russia. He also warned that Russia would be forced to “rebalance the situation” in the event of NATO’s Baltic expansion. You’ll have to guess what that means, I’m afraid. Dmitry Medvedev has talked about placing nuclear weapons there, but he’s not really in a strong position to issue threats. There was a time, not so long ago, when Medvedev was seen as the great hope of Russia’s Liberals, but the need to remain in Putin’s dwindling inner circle seems to have forced a rethink on his part.

PARTY TRICKS

In a blog, Medvedev claimed that Polish antipathy towards Russia stems from the time, 400 or so years ago, when Poland

lost control of the Russian throne. This is a strange point of view and ignores all the things that have happened since, including Stalin’s lengthy and repressive rule over the Soviet Union and his murder of Leon Trotsky (and many others). Radio Free Europe reports that: “Timothy Snyder, a history professor at Yale University who is an author and an expert on the region, called the post ‘grotesque’ and said that Medvedev was trying to position himself as a populist speaking for ordinary citizens in Central and Eastern Europe.” Snyder doesn’t accept Medvedev’s position at face value: ‘But he is himself a caricature of the global elite, wealthy for no reason, trying to dictate to people in a foreign country what they should do and how they should think, endorsing a war of destruction in the name of nothing more, in the end, than his own personal comfort.’ Professor Snyder is clearly no fan of Medvedev, a man thought to be willing to say and do anything his boss, Putin, demands.

As one Kremlin observer said, if Putin says “jump”, Medvedev replies “How high?”

The lies continue, though: Putin told the media that Russia was “forced to invade Ukraine because the US and its allies were using Kyiv to threaten Moscow”, albeit just with a possible NATO expansion, something his own actions have now more or less guaranteed. He has said he wants a cast iron guarantee that Ukraine will never join NATO as a price of peace. Ukraine has already said it will not join, but that’s not enough for Putin, it seems. It’s by no means certain that even a cast-iron guarantee, cast in platinum and gold-plated, would satisfy him. As a schoolyard bully, Putin would not have been satisfied with extracting the money your mother gave you for your lunch; he’d want to take your watch, your fountain pen and possibly even

your shoelaces if he could. It’s this fear of ever-greater demands from Russia that is motivating Finland and Sweden to seek shelter under NATO’s wing.



© Finnish Government
Finish Prime Minister Sanna Marin and Swedish Primer Minister Magdalena Andersson in 2022

Lately, comments have been made about Putin having developed a tremor. The tremor seems to affect his hands and arms, and there have been suggestions that he may be developing Parkinson’s disease. In media footage, he is most often seen sitting down these days, but when moving about he appears to show signs of what’s called bradykinesia: slow physical movements with shuffling steps. It is a terrible disease, almost as distressing for the victim’s loved ones as for the sufferer. A neighbour of mine had it, making conversation both difficult and slow, with him drifting off the point and sometimes seeming incapable of following the conversation. It was very distressing for his wife, too, of course. Putin’s facial expressions seemed to be frozen in place, too, but he has long had a fixed look on his face. I must admit, though, that my neighbour didn’t try to compensate for his deteriorating condition by taking control of the house next door, against the homeowner’s wishes. He never tried to invade Ukraine, either.

At a meeting held this April at the European Parliament in Brussels, between Jens Stoltenberg, NATO’s Secretary General, and the Parliament’s President, Roberta Metsola, together with other political group leaders, Stoltenberg was asked about Finland and Sweden joining and he replied that membership would be almost certainly granted. “It is of course for Finland and Sweden to decide whether they would like to apply for membership in NATO or not,” he said. “But if they decide to apply, Finland and Sweden will be welcomed with open



© Kremlin.ru
Vladimir Putin and Dmitry Medvedev



Jens Stoltenberg, NATO's Secretary General and Sanna Marin, Finland's Prime Minister

arms to NATO. Finland and Sweden are our closest partners. They are strong and mature democracies, EU members, and we have worked with Finland and Sweden for many, many years." Asked if their armed forces would be up to the task, he replied in the affirmative: "We know that their armed forces meet NATO standards. They are interoperable with NATO forces, we train together, we exercise together, and we have also worked together with Finland, Sweden in many different missions and operations. So, if they apply, they will be welcomed, and I also expect the process to be quick and that they can then join NATO after the formal process has been finalised." Not much doubt there, then, it appears.

But there have also been calls for the European Union, which has never been a defence body, to form a suitable defensive alliance of its own: "In these days in the European Parliament, we're also discussing how we can truly establish a proper Defence Union," said Metsola. "This has long been called for, this would mean also that member states can feel secure. We have article 42.7 of the treaty that would cover also those members that are not members of NATO, but again, here we are talking about an alliance, and shared aims, and core values. And when we look at the discussion that is taking place in Finland and in Sweden and the long-term alliance and partnership with NATO, but also in terms of military relevance and security that could be offered also in the Baltic and Northern Europe area that is something also that in Europe and in the European Union, we can look at in terms of even further integration of mutual protection." Putin's tactical error now looks like turning this conglomeration of trading nations (general viewed in much of the popular media as 'rather dull and boring') into a fighting force. It's not what he wanted, I'm sure.



Prime Minister of Georgia, Irakli Garibashvili and NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg

WHERE TO NEXT?

Russia's unanticipated aggression is also giving pause for thought among those countries not in either NATO or the EU, such as Georgia and Moldova. Metsola had reassuring words for them: "This parliament has always welcomed any country that looks to Europe as its home, that that should be the step that is taken," she told the EU/NATO press conference. "In fact, we have invited President Maia Sandu (President of Moldova) to address the European Parliament in a forthcoming plenary session, and she has accepted that invitation. And we are also in constant contact with our Georgian partners and also representatives of the Georgian parliament in order to make sure



NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg and the Prime Minister of the Republic of Moldova, Maia Sandu

that when that step happens, that you mentioned, we are ready to make our commitment and this parliament has never shied away from it." In case Putin would like the message to be clearer, Moldova made a formal application to join the EU just one week after Russia launched its invasion of Ukraine. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has also applied for Ukraine to join the EU, too.

Then there's the case of Georgia. It had said it would not rush to apply for EU membership, but it has changed its mind. On 3 March, Georgia applied to join. Prime Minister Irakli Garibashvili called the decision: "yet another milestone on the path of European integration of Georgia." And, of course, it means that Georgia has joined other former Soviet allies in thumbing its nose at the Kremlin. Stoltenberg, when asked about Georgian membership of NATO, also sounded positive.

"This is about practical support, this is about political support," he said in answer to a question about Moldova and Georgia. "Georgia is a very highly valued partner, and also in close cooperation with the European Union. We are looking into what we can do more to work even closer with our close partners in the eastern part of Europe." As for the more immediate future, partly informed by a growing sense of panic: "Now, let me also add to the question about Finland and Sweden, that I actually speak to the Finnish President later on today, and expect that we will both address the issue of a potential Finnish application for NATO membership, but also the need to find arrangements in this interim period. So, there is no uncertainty about Finland and Sweden's right to choose their own path, because this is fundamentally about the right of every nation in Europe to decide its own future. So, when Russia tries in a way to threaten, to intimidate Finland and Sweden from not applying, it just demonstrates how Russia is not respecting the basic rights of every nation to choose his own path. So, we are in dialogue with Finland and Sweden. And it's their decision, but if they decide to apply, Finland and Sweden will be warmly welcomed and expect the process to go quickly." Yet again, Putin is showing himself to be NATO's most effective recruiting sergeant. He also seems to be turning the EU into a geopolitical power, which few were expecting.



A civilian victim

There is now growing pressure to prosecute Russian soldiers and decision-makers guilty of war crimes, too. “Over the past two months, since Russia’s full-scale invasion of Ukraine,” Ida Sawyer, the director of Human Rights Watch’s Crisis and Conflict division, told an informal meeting of the UN Security Council, convened by the permanent missions of Albania and France, “my colleagues and I have documented the killing of civilians and damage to homes,

schools, and hospitals in Kharkiv, Chernihiv, Mykolaiv, and elsewhere from apparently indiscriminate and disproportionate attacks.”

Because of their reliance on cereal crops from Russia and Ukraine, there are reports that a growing number of African countries are now facing hunger. The human rights abuses would seem to be numerous: “In the town of Bucha and other areas that Russian forces held, we’ve found extensive evidence of summary executions, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence, and arbitrary detentions, all of which could constitute war crimes and potentially crimes against humanity,” Sawyer told the meeting. “In Mariupol, tens of thousands of civilians have been trapped, as their city was turned to rubble, with little to no food, water, medicine, heating, or means of communication, and no safe way to escape. Many have been forcibly transported to Russia.” We have no certain way of knowing if these allegations are true or not; it seems likely that the Kremlin will deny them.

WHICH WAY TO THE EXIT?

Putin seems to have painted himself into a corner. He must by now suspect that total victory in Ukraine is beyond his grasp. His country’s economic future has been irreparably damaged by the various sanctions the West has applied. For instance, no Russian aeroplane can now land, refuel or even fly over the territory of the EU.

But Putin can’t just walk away, either: the blow to his prestige would be enormous and Russian historians would record him with the same sort of contempt currently reserved for Stalin. Or Hitler. He must be offered a face-saving escape route. We must not forget Trotsky’s Open Letter to the Workers of the USSR, in which he expressed the view that Stalinist policies meant that the supposed “workers’ paradise” of Communism had lost its lustre. The World Socialist Web Site (WSWS) expresses the view that Sweden and Finland had long been planning to join NATO but faced internal opposition, which Putin’s actions have swept away. The WSWS refers to Putin’s invasion as ‘reactionary’, but that’s being kind. If Putin is to be able to end the war and withdraw, he must be given something that looks like some kind of victory to show to his citizens. Perhaps some compromise could be reached over the Swedish island of Gotland. In NATO’s hands, it could be a launchpad for attacks on Kaliningrad, but if it’s held by Putin, it could also enable him to place anti-aircraft batteries and other measures there to deter Western powers from reaching or defending the Baltics. There’s certainly no easy solution, although the application of sanctions on Russia’s central bank certainly gives the rest of Europe leverage. However, Putin cannot afford to simply walk away. The trick now is to ply him with enough sweeties to keep him happy and make him look like a winner. He’s not, but triumphalism is not only unattractive but positively dangerous.

Anthony James

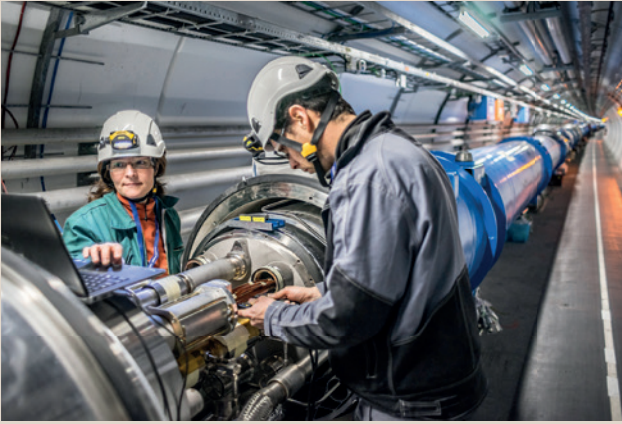




Going for a coffee? ... Lock your desktop first!

NEWS IN BRIEF

LARGE HADRON COLLIDER RESTARTS



Beams of protons are again circulating around the collider's 27-kilometre ring, marking the end of a multiple-year hiatus for upgrade work

The world's largest and most powerful particle accelerator has restarted after a break of more than three years for maintenance, consolidation and upgrade work. On April 22, at 12:16 CEST, two beams of protons circulated in opposite directions around the Large Hadron Collider's 27-kilometre ring at their injection energy of 450 billion electronvolts (450 GeV).

"These beams circulated at injection energy and contained a relatively small number of protons. High-intensity, high-energy collisions are a couple of months away," says the Head of CERN's Beams department, Rhodri Jones. "But first beams represent the successful restart of the accelerator after all the hard work of the long shutdown."

"The machines and facilities underwent major upgrades during the second long shutdown of CERN's accelerator complex," says CERN's Director for Accelerators and Technology, Mike Lamont. "The LHC itself has undergone an extensive consolidation programme and will now operate at an even higher energy and, thanks to major improvements in the injector complex, it will deliver significantly more data to the upgraded LHC experiments."

Pilot beams circulated in the LHC for a brief period in October 2021. However, the beams that circulated today mark not only the end of the second long shutdown for the LHC but also the beginning of preparations for four years of physics-data taking, which is expected to start this summer.

A COMMON RESPONSE TO SERIOUS AND ORGANISED CRIME LINKED TO THE WAR IN UKRAINE

The EMPACT community gathered at Europol to discuss coordinated operational actions for evolving threats linked to the war in Ukraine

Today, Europol hosted an EMPACT meeting to focus on intelligence and operational actions linked to threats of serious and organised crime, which have emerged as a result of the war in Ukraine. This meeting follows the mobilisation of the EMPACT framework by the French Presidency of the Council of the European Union and the European Commission to address these threats. EU Ministers of the Interior endorsed this initiative at the extraordinary Justice and Home Affairs Council on 28 March 2022, as set out in the 10-Point Plan for stronger European coordination on welcoming people fleeing the war against Ukraine. Immediately afterwards, Europol, together with the French Presidency, started organising today's meeting at Europol's headquarters in The Hague to discuss coordinated operational actions.

During the EMPACT meeting at Europol, representatives of the EU Member States, including the drivers of the operational action plans for 15 crime areas, discussed concrete steps to address the development of serious and organised crime threats linked to the war in Ukraine. This includes the gathering of more intelligence, the implementation of emergency operational actions based on EMPACT flexibility and adaptation culture, the possibility of setting up ad hoc joint action days and the potential allocation of additional grants to fund operational activities targeting these crimes.



Initial intelligence analysis of these criminal threats identified crime patterns in a number of areas including human trafficking, online fraud, cybercrime and firearms trafficking. The evolution of the situation in Ukraine may potentially lead to an increase of criminal activities in all 10 EMPACT priority crime areas. Therefore, it is necessary to mobilise resources and increase the preparedness of the EMPACT community in order to respond in a swift and coordinated manner to these evolving threats.

EU Member States and operational partners are actively sharing all available information and criminal intelligence with Europol, which cross-checks and analyses the information and turns it into actionable operational intelligence notifications, such as early warning notifications and threat assessments, which is shared with all partners.

The operational cooperation approach of the EMPACT framework gathers different national authorities together, including police, gendarmerie, customs and border guards, as well as judicial authorities. Non-EU countries, international organisations, and other public and private partners may also be associated. This multidisciplinary approach, which includes both intelligence analysis and operational actions, plays a central role in the joint EU response to the prevention, detection and tackling of serious and organised crime affecting the European Union and its citizens.

The European Multidisciplinary Platform Against Criminal Threats (EMPACT) tackles the most important threats posed by organised and serious international crime affecting the EU. EMPACT strengthens intelligence, strategic and operational cooperation between national authorities, EU institutions and bodies, and international partners. EMPACT runs in four-year cycles focusing on common EU crime priorities.

TRANSPORT INFRASTRUCTURE

37 projects to receive EUR 425 million in EU funding to boost green mobility and to adapt the network for dual civil/defence use

The EU is supporting with EUR 425 million a total of 37 projects that will help deliver a transport network which is environmentally sustainable and with key infrastructure sections fit for dual civil/defence use. The projects have been selected among those submitted under calls for proposals issued under the Connecting Europe Facility (CEF) programme, the funding instrument for strategic investments in transport infrastructure in the European Union.

The EU continues to focus its attention on projects that will help it deliver on its climate objectives as laid out in the European Green Deal and that support the adaptation of its transport infrastructure to ensure it is fit for civilian-defence dual-use.



EU Commissioner for Transport Adina-Ioana Vălean

EU Commissioner for Transport Adina-Ioana Vălean said: *“Europe’s Transport infrastructure is critical for our security, this is why we are taking concrete measures to support investments that make it fit, not only for civilian use, but also for our defence. We are funding projects worth 425 million*

that will facilitate the movement of military troops and assets leading to more efficient deployment of our missions on the ground. In addition, we also decided to advance the 2nd Military Mobility call originally planned for later this year.”

Her comments were echoed by the Director of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA), Dirk Beckers, who stated: *“The EU is committed to the decarbonisation of the transport sector and shows it is sensitive and reactive to the ongoing geopolitical crisis. These new CEF co-funded projects signal the EU’s continued determination to deliver a better transport infrastructure for all Europeans.”*



Dirk Beckers, Director of the European Climate, Infrastructure and Environment Executive Agency (CINEA)

Under the first cut-off date of the Alternative Fuels Infrastructure Facility (AFIF) call for proposals, which closed on 19 January 2022, 15 projects were selected for a total EU support of EUR 86 million. The projects range from the installation of electric recharging stations along the European TEN-T road network to the deployment of hydrogen refueling stations for cars, trucks and buses and the electrification of ground handling services in airports. The call remains open with further cut-off dates at regular intervals until 19 September 2023. The next cut-off date is 7 June 2022.

The Military Mobility call, which was open for the same time-period, will support 22 projects with EUR 339 million and will ensure that infrastructure is adapted to improve jointly civil and military mobility within the EU, making it compatible for dual-use. Examples of projects include railway infrastructure upgrades to allow for circulation of larger and heavier trains, increase of the capacity of ports and airports, and strengthening road bridges. The next Military Mobility call will be launched in May 2022.

FDA AUTHORIZES FIRST COVID-19 DIAGNOSTIC TEST USING BREATH SAMPLES

Test provides results in less than three minutes

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration has issued an emergency use authorization (EUA) for the first COVID-19 diagnostic test that detects chemical compounds in breath samples associated with a SARS-CoV-2 infection. The



© Fda

Jeff Shuren, M.D., J.D., director of the FDA's Center for Devices and Radiological Health

test can be performed in environments where the patient specimen is both collected and analyzed, such as doctor's offices, hospitals and mobile testing sites, using an instrument about the size of a piece of carry-on luggage. The test is performed by a qualified, trained operator under the supervision of a health care provider licensed or authorized by state law to prescribe tests and can provide results in less than three minutes.

“Today’s authorization is yet another example of the rapid innovation occurring with diagnostic tests for COVID-19,” said Jeff Shuren, M.D., J.D., director of the FDA’s Center for Devices and Radiological Health. “The FDA continues to support the development of novel COVID-19 tests with the goal of advancing technologies that can help address the current pandemic and better position the U.S. for the next public health emergency.”

The performance of the InspectIR COVID-19 Breathalyzer was validated in a large study of 2,409 individuals, including those with and without symptoms. In the study, the test was shown to have 91.2% sensitivity (the percent of positive samples the test correctly identified) and 99.3% specificity (the percent of negative samples the test correctly identified). The study also showed that, in a population with only 4.2% of individuals who are positive for the virus, the test had a negative predictive value of 99.6%, meaning that people who receive a negative test result are likely truly negative in areas of low disease prevalence. The test performed with similar sensitivity in a follow-up clinical study focused on the omicron variant.

The InspectIR COVID-19 Breathalyzer uses a technique called gas chromatography gas mass-spectrometry (GC-MS) to separate and identify chemical mixtures and rapidly detect five Volatile Organic Compounds (VOCs) associated with SARS-CoV-2 infection in exhaled breath. When the InspectIR COVID-19 Breathalyzer detects the presence of VOC markers of SARS-CoV-2, a presumptive (unconfirmed) positive test result is returned and should be confirmed with a molecular test. Negative results should be considered in the context of a patient’s recent exposures, history and the presence of clinical signs and symptoms consistent with COVID-19, as they do not rule out SARS-CoV-2 infection and should not be used as the sole basis for

treatment or patient management decisions, including infection control decisions.

InspectIR expects to be able to produce approximately 100 instruments per week, which can each be used to evaluate approximately 160 samples per day. At this level of production, testing capacity using the InspectIR COVID-19 Breathalyzer is expected to increase by approximately 64,000 samples per month.

FRONTEX AND INTERPOL LAUNCH A PLATFORM FOR DOCUMENT CHECKS

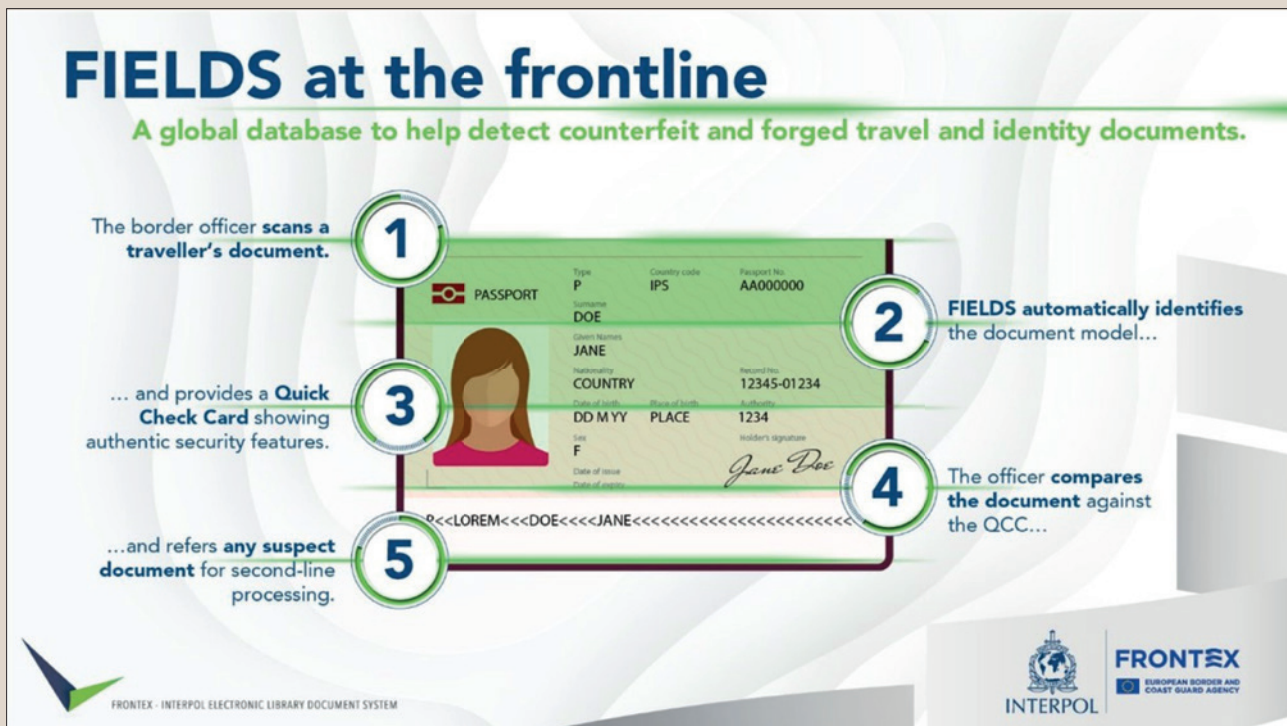
On April 1, Frontex Executive Director Fabrice Leggeri visited INTERPOL to launch Frontex-INTERPOL Electronic Library Document System (FIELDS). Together with the Secretary General of Interpol Jürgen Stock and the Director of French Border Police Fernand Gontier, he took part in a demonstration of the system at the Lyon Airport.

“Frontex’s cooperation with INTERPOL touches upon many areas of common interests. Since Frontex’s new mandate in 2019, this cooperation has intensified. The FIELDS we launch today is one of its most tangible results,” said Fabrice Leggeri.



“Today’s threat landscape is more complex than ever, making strong border management essential. FIELDS will bring global specialist knowledge in an effective, and vital, flow of information to frontline officers,” said INTERPOL Secretary General Jürgen Stock.

FIELDS is a system that provides information on travel documents, such as their security features. This information was collected by Frontex and is used directly for border control and document checks by law enforcement authorities of the Member States. The system is designed to display original and genuine documents and the main forgeries detected on that type of document. It will facilitate the work of first-line border control officers, as it is a fast and easy to use search engine to support immediate operational decision making while performing document checks.



Document fraud is recognised as a global challenge for migration management. It is the driver of many other criminal activities, such as migrant smuggling and trafficking, terrorist mobility, smuggling of drugs or weapons.

Frontex helps EU countries and Schengen associated countries manage their external borders. It also helps to harmonise border controls across the EU. The agency facilitates cooperation between border authorities in each EU country, providing technical support and expertise.

TREAT YOURSELF TO A PIECE OF HISTORY

Be the first to own part of the A380 an aeronautical icon and the first new aircraft of the 21st century

On 27 April 2005, the A380 lifted off from Toulouse-Blagnac airport for its inaugural flight. This global event, remembered by millions, marked the beginning of a remarkable love affair between this exceptional aircraft and people all over the world.

To nurture this passion, Airbus has decided to organise an auction of A380 parts from **23 to 25 June 2022**. This will give enthusiasts the opportunity to buy a real piece of history with parts selected for their technological and often aesthetic interest.

What will be available to buy?

Lamps, bars, stairs, handrails, trolleys, seats, and even the cockpit escape rope: nearly 500 items, the vast majority of which are from the cabin of this iconic aircraft, will be offered for sale during this event, which will be held both in-person and remotely, managed by the auctioneer Marc Labarbe.

Most of the proceeds from the sale will be donated to the Airbus Foundation to help fund its humanitarian

initiatives. Some of those proceeds will also be donated to the AIRitage association, which works to protect aviation heritage.

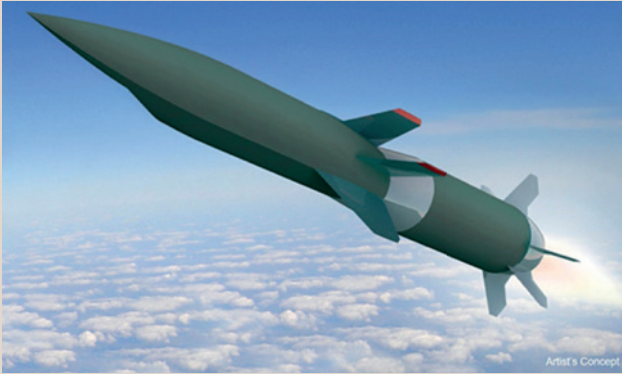
Almost all the parts headed for auction come from the A380 MSN13. This aircraft, which entered service on 23 October 2008, carried up to 489 passengers in a three-class configuration. Other parts, such as the business class seats, have been taken from different A380 aircraft.



The MSN13 was decommissioned in 2021 by Tarmac Aerosave, a world leader in sustainable end-of-life aircraft management, with advanced dismantling and recycling techniques that allow a recovery rate of over 90%.

This auction, and the delivery of the MSN272, the last aircraft ever produced, to Emirates in December 2021, do not mark the end of operations for the A380. The Airbus Superjumbo will continue to operate for decades on multiple routes around the world, to the delight of passengers who continue to enjoy the A380 experience.

SECOND SUCCESSFUL FLIGHT FOR DARPA HYPERSONIC AIR-BREATHING WEAPON CONCEPT (HAWC)



Artist's impression of Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapons Concept (HAWC) vehicle

DARPA and its U.S. Air Force partner recently completed a free flight test of the Lockheed Martin version of the Hypersonic Air-breathing Weapon Concept (HAWC). The vehicle, after release from a carrier aircraft, was boosted to its Aerojet Rocketdyne scramjet engine ignition envelope. From there, it quickly accelerated to and maintained cruise faster than Mach 5 (five times the speed of sound) for an extended period of time. The vehicle reached altitudes greater than 65,000 feet and flew for more than 300 nautical miles.

This is the second successful flight in DARPA's HAWC program. Last September, a different vehicle configuration from another contractor team also reached hypersonic flight.

"This Lockheed Martin HAWC flight test successfully demonstrated a second design that will allow our warfighters to competitively select the right capabilities to dominate the battlefield," said Andrew "Tippy" Knoedler, HAWC program manager in DARPA's Tactical Technology Office. "These achievements increase the level of technical maturity for transitioning HAWC to a service program of record."

Air-breathing vehicles utilize air captured from the atmosphere to achieve sustained propulsion. The speed and maneuverability of such hypersonic cruise missiles allow both evasion of defenses and quick strikes. Their kinetic energy can effectively destroy targets even without high explosives.

"We are still analyzing flight test data, but are confident that we will provide the U.S. Air Force and Navy with excellent options to diversify the technology available for their future missions," said Knoedler.

GREEN DEAL: EU ANNOUNCES €1 BILLION WORTH OF COMMITMENTS TO PROTECT THE OCEAN

At the last the Our Ocean Conference (OOC) in Palau last April, the EU has renewed its pledges towards international Ocean governance. Presenting a list of 44 commitments for the 2020-2022 period for an amount of almost €1 billion, the EU has brought forward its most important commitments ever offered during an Our Ocean Conference, in terms of value.

The Our Ocean Conference is a key moment for countries across the world, civil society, and industry to commit to concrete and significant actions to protect the ocean. The theme of 2022 edition is 'Our Ocean, Our People, Our Prosperity', and it draws global partners to identify solutions to sustainably manage marine resources, increase the ocean's resilience to climate change and safeguard its health for generations to come.

Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius, said: *"The sum the EU is committing today is significant, but not as significant as the role that the ocean plays for our very existence. It provides us clean air, regulates the climate, hosts a large part of biodiversity on Earth and is key for our economy. The ocean is bringing all these benefits to us and we need to protect it. Our future depends upon it."*



EU Commissioner for Environment, Oceans and Fisheries, Virginijus Sinkevičius

At the Our Ocean Conference, the EU has taken commitments covering all the themes of this international event: marine protected areas; tackling marine pollution; confronting the ocean-climate crisis; creating sustainable blue economies; advancing sustainable small-scale fisheries and aquaculture; and achieving a safe, just and secure ocean. The EU has also developed a commitment tracking tool to allow citizens to follow the progress of the implementation of the commitments.

The EU is conscious of the challenges facing the ocean and has put a strong focus this year for protecting and

restoring it, for example by contributing to initiatives such as the One Ocean Summit (in February, Brest) and the forthcoming UN Ocean Conference (in June-July, Lisbon). The EU is also currently updating its International Ocean Governance Agenda to take into account in a comprehensive way ocean challenges and recent developments, but also opportunities presented by the European Green Deal.

The EU remains fully engaged in the Our Ocean process, and stands ready to assume its responsibility in relation to international ocean governance as a firm supporter of multilateralism.

Examples of flagship commitments

Almost €500 million over the period 2021-2023 will go to research, development and innovation in seed funding (i.e. funding to start a business) for the Horizon Mission 'Restore our Ocean and Waters by 2030'. The 'Mission Ocean' will address the ocean and waters as one and play a key role in achieving climate neutrality and restoring nature. It will help achieve the EU objectives of protecting 30% of the Member States' sea area as well as restore marine eco-systems, prevent and eliminate pollution by reducing plastic litter at sea, nutrient losses and use of chemical pesticides, and help the further development of a sustainable and circular blue economy.

The EU has also announced a contribution of €55 million over two years to strengthen marine environmental monitoring and monitoring of climate change, through its satellite monitoring programme, Copernicus, and in particular the WEkEO service that allows the international research community to access in one place all products describing the past, present and future of the earth system together with online tools for environmental science on cloud computing facilities.

THALES AND THEGREENBOW JOIN FORCES TO OFFER A HIGH-SECURITY ENCRYPTION SOLUTION FOR NETWORK COMMUNICATIONS

- A partnership between Thales and TheGreenBow offers a secure communication solution certified by the French information security agency (ANSSI) for critical national infrastructure providers and the defence sector.
- The solution incorporates the Thales Gateways IPsec Mistral range of encryptors and TheGreenBow's Windows Enterprise VPN client.

In today's increasingly connected world, the security of our information systems is more crucial than ever. In response to rapidly changing mobility and security needs, Thales, a leader in the cybersecurity market, and TheGreenBow, a French provider of VPN solutions, have signed an industrial cooperation agreement to provide a secure remote access solution.



The solution includes TheGreenBow's Windows Enterprise VPN client and Thales's Gateways IPsec Mistral encryption technology. The latest version has been certified by French information security agency ANSSI to offer civil and military organisations top-notch protection for their information systems. Combining a very high data rate infrastructure encryptor with a security-certified VPN client¹, Mistral also protects employees accessing these information systems while travelling or working remotely. Mistral is currently the only product capable of protecting information systems at EU Restricted and NATO Restricted level in line with ANSSI's IPsec security recommendations. It is on the cutting edge of developments in the field of security and offers a superior level of performance and quality of service for enterprise networks. This new solution meets the specific need to protect access to information systems for critical national infrastructure providers, local authorities and healthcare services including hospitals and clinics. It provides end-to-end data security from the remote access point to the enterprise information system across all types of networks from satellite links to 10 Gbps real-time datacentre traffic.

Mistral DR gateways draw on Thales's expertise in network encryption and its extensive experience in large-scale deployments and migrations of critical networks. With TheGreenBow's VPN client, the gateways secure data traffic to and from any mobile or remote platform to provide a sovereign, integrated solution allowing users to access sensitive networks from any device. This partnership meets to a growing need for secure, remote interconnection of sensitive information systems.

This partnership will allow Thales and TheGreenBow to offer a cutting-edge cybersecurity solution with the performance needed by critical national infrastructure providers and other economic actors in sensitive sectors in France and internationally. It is an illustration of Thales's ability to integrate third-party solutions with its systems to better meet the needs of its customers and the market at large.
Pierre Jeanne, Vice President Cybersecurity, Thales

"With this new ODM1 partnership, TheGreenBow is continuing its policy of forging alliances to offer the highest possible level of security, performance and quality of service for enterprise networks." **Mathieu Isaia, CEO, TheGreenBow.**



THE SIGNAL AND THE NOISE

China warns other countries to stay out of the row over its claim to rule Taiwan

Perhaps it's no great surprise: countries that once ruled vast territories get annoyed when some small parts start expressing a desire for freedom. All the old colonial powers have experienced it and (albeit reluctantly) have divested themselves of those far-off countries they once controlled. Not before plundering their rich natural resources, of course. The most worrying examples of former masters wanting to get back what they've lost can be seen in Russia's cruel and brutal assault on Ukraine, but also in Beijing's inflammatory attitude to (and comments about) Taiwan. From Beijing's perspective, Taiwan was, is and should forever remain a part of China; it's not so much a case of "reunification" as a denial that the island ever split away in the first place, although the split took place way back in 1895. It is a small island, roughly 161 kilometres off the southeast coast of China and not very far from the Philippines, South Korea and even Japan. You

may think that it doesn't count for much in world affairs, but it does. Certainly, from China's point of view it is "unfinished business": it's where the Kuomintang, the former rulers of nationalist China, fled after their defeat by Mao Zedong's victorious Communist army. But today Taiwan is a huge developer and builder of essential computer and other electronic equipment. More than 50% of the world's semiconductors are made by one Taiwanese company, the somewhat plainly-named Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company, TSMC. Last year it was valued at almost \$100-billion (€92-billion). Beijing would love to get its hands on such a vital supplier: mainland China only has some 5% of the global market at present.

But there's more. TSMC is also a supplier of advanced computer components to the military in the West. Having an ability to interfere with that work, maybe make an alteration or two here or

there, would give Beijing a massive military advantage. It's doubtful if the United States or the rest of NATO would completely trust computers containing components produced in the People's Republic, however. Meanwhile, research suggests that more than half of Taiwan's people consider themselves to be 'Taiwanese', rather than Chinese – they have their own language, for instance – although Beijing is utterly



Established in Taiwan in 1974, Hon Hai Technology Group (Foxconn) is the world's largest electronics manufacturer

convinced that it's not possible to be 'Taiwanese'; they're Chinese, through and through. Research suggests that most of the citizens of Taiwan do not expect military confrontation with mainland China, despite all the warning signs. We should not forget, of course, that most people (myself included) did not expect Vladimir Putin to order his forces to invade Ukraine, but it seems that common sense and the leadership of powerful nations make uneasy bedfellows. As the old saying goes, 'power corrupts; absolute power corrupts absolutely', also dulling the senses, it seems. It reminds me of Lady Macbeth's soliloquy in the eponymous play by Shakespeare: "Make thick my blood, / Stop up the access and passage to remorse, / That no compunctious visitings of nature / Shake my fell purpose." Very much Putin's attitude to Ukraine, perhaps?



Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese leader Xi Jinping

China consistently denies any intention to reclaim Taiwan militarily, but it continues to rattle its sabres over the island. In April 2022 it sent warships, bombers and fighter aircraft to the area around Taiwan. China's military command said it was to counter what it called "wrong signals" sent out by the United States. It also claimed that the moves, which included incursions into Taiwanese airspace, were just military drills, but they were conducted during a visit to Taipei by a delegation from the US Congress, to remind them who is really in control here. It was China's message to the West; the question is: was it the signal or merely the noise? It's often hard to tell them apart, even in the world of electronics, where the expression first arose.

"Distinguishing the signal from the noise requires both scientific knowledge and self-knowledge: the serenity to accept the things we cannot predict, the courage to predict the things we can, and the wisdom to know the difference." So wrote Nate Silver in his book "The Signal and the Noise: Why so Many Predictions Fail – but Some Don't". It's still true, even in China.



A spokesperson for the People's Liberation Army, Shi Yulu, told Chinese state media that: "The US bad actions and tricks are completely futile and very dangerous." He went on to warn that: "Those who play with fire will burn themselves." It could be a useful warning for the Chinese Communist Party (CCP) too. Most people thought Putin's warnings were mere sabre-rattling, so it clearly isn't wise to ignore Shi's words and there have been a record number of incursions by Chinese warplanes and military ships into Taiwan's defence zone over the last few months. China's President Xi Jinping has stated that the "reunification of China with Taiwan", as he describes it, must be fulfilled. He has not ruled out the use of force, either, to achieve that end.

MISDIRECTED IRE

The United States has reason to be concerned at the prospect, and not only because it buys its computer chips from Taipei. Taiwan is in what Washington calls the "first island chain", a list of territories that are friendly towards the US and which are therefore vital to American foreign policy. If China took over Taiwan it would be in a position to threaten US military bases as

far away as Guam and Hawaii. Even so, and despite urgings from Washington, only thirteen countries recognise Taiwan's independence. The Vatican does, too, but it lacks warplanes to support its opinions, along with the will to engage in hostilities, of course. Recognising Taiwan is a hazardous business, and most countries only allow diplomatic offices to use the name 'Taipei', the Taiwanese capital, rather than Taiwan itself. Little Lithuania broke ranks and permitted the opening of a Taiwanese embassy, but this has caused fury in Beijing. Without announcing – or admitting it – China seems to have imposed trade restrictions that remain in place.



Policeman in front of Mao's portrait at Tiananmen Gate in Beijing

There have been reports of imports from Lithuania held up at customs in China, causing very long delays. It is clearly meant as a warning to other EU countries that Beijing won't hesitate to interfere with trade relations concerning any country that shows itself sympathetic to Taiwan's independence. China should, perhaps, recall that not all its decisions, even those that were well intended, have a positive outcome. For instance, in a bid to stop birds from eating the cereals needed by peasant farmers, in the 1950s Chairman Mao ordered them to kill as many sparrows as possible. He had failed to note that sparrows also kill (and eat) insects. Without sparrows as predators, locust numbers soared, and the resulting plague of the

creatures destroyed much of China's rice crop over a very wide area. As Tim Birkhead wrote in his fascinating book, "Birds and Us": "The resulting ecological imbalance contributed to a famine in which between 15 and 45 million people died: one of the worst human-induced catastrophes ever." It was the very thing Mao had been trying to prevent, but he was neither an ornithologist nor an entomologist. His intentions had obviously been sound.

Beijing may be the bully in Lithuania's case but the EU, although not a military power, does have some leverage open to it. Member states could, for example, reduce their diplomatic engagement with China. EU leaders don't respond well to bullying by large military powers. Putin despises the EU and acts as if it doesn't exist, but the EU's economic and diplomatic power is considerable, nevertheless.



Qu Baihua

As it is, relations between China and Lithuania are now at the level of chargés d'affaires only, the lowest kind of diplomatic relationship. Qu Baihua, China's Chargé d'Affaires at its embassy in Vilnius, told a press conference that Lithuania had violated the 'One China' principle. "We call on the Lithuanian government to acknowledge the mistake and not to underestimate the will and determination of the Chinese people to defend the country's territorial integrity and national security." One would imagine that Lithuania (population 2,661,704) would pose little military threat to the security of China (population: 1,453,782,859), but that's how Beijing sees it. Former Lithuanian Prime



Former Lithuanian Prime Minister Andrius Kubilius

Minister Andrius Kubilius, now an MEP for the centre-right European People's Party (EPP), responded that the mistake is China's. "We know that China is very sensitive to this," he told a press conference, "but I think it is time for China to realize that countries have the right to decide on their relationship with the Taiwanese people." Just as in the case of Mao and his sparrows, Kubilius believes China's actions may backfire. "China's pressure, as far as it is now showing towards Lithuania, causes a lot of solidarity and support for Lithuania, both verbally and business-like."

Late last year, a delegation of East European members of parliament visited Taiwan, without making much advance publicity about the upcoming visit. It was led by Matas Maldeikis of Lithuania's ruling Homeland Union party, who reported that the people of Taiwan now look on Lithuania with increased respect. The Lithuanians have demonstrated in the clearest way that they have the courage of their convictions. He also noted in an interview on Lithuanian TV that confrontations between authoritarian and democratic regimes in the world are becoming more frequent. He said that Lithuania is "on the side of democratic forces", adding that: "The more authoritarian regimes there are around us, the stronger they are, the greater the threat to our country. It is simply in our national

interest to support democracies wherever they are in the world." That's not the view of opposition politician Dainius Gaižauskas of the opposition Farmers and Greens Union, who pointed out that it would have easier (and economically safer) to simply call it the Taipei representation, leaving out the word "Taiwan". One can readily see that he has a point. It's not a point that would have been appreciated, perhaps, by Qu Baihua, China's Chargé d'Affaires at its embassy in Vilnius, whom we met earlier. But it's interesting to note that the Chinese embassy would not permit TV journalists and cameras at his press conference. Clearly, China is trying to send a message, but it's somewhat ambiguous, and could be mere noise. In the old Western movies, Native Americans communicated using smoke signals, but if the recipient sees smoke, how is he to know if it means "the cavalry are coming" or "hurry home, our camp is on fire"?

FREE TRADE, BUT WITH CONDITIONS

The EU can deploy sanctions to defend its own producers against deliberately harmful dumping. In April 2022, for instance, the European Commission imposed anti-dumping measures on imports of Chinese-produced graphite electrodes. It followed an investigation into the prices being demanded, which proved to be well below what EU producers could match, suggesting a deliberate ploy by China to put them out of business.



Chinese graphite electrode ready to be shipped



World Trade Organization (WTO) headquarters in Geneva, Switzerland

Graphite electrodes may not sound very exciting in terms of grabbing the headlines, but the Commission insists that they are. An article on the Commission's own website explains: "Graphite electrodes are used in steel production and are an essential component for the world's recycling industry, since they are the only product that can conduct the power and withstand the heat necessary to melt scrap metal." Impressive, but also valuable? Oh, yes: "The EU market for graphite electrodes is worth €765-million." Much the same sort of situation arose over imports of Chinese calcium silicon. An investigation by the Commission found that Chinese imports "are being substantially dumped on the EU market, as a result of which the Commission will impose duties ranging between 31.5% and 50.7% on imports of Chinese calcium silicon." The EU's calcium silicon industry is based in France and Slovakia, but it was being damaged by these dumped imports from China, which is why the Commission stepped in to support continued production of calcium silicon in the EU. The Commission website explained that: "Ferroalloys like calcium silicon are essential for the production of special steels and as such are an important element of the steel production chain and of the EU's economic sovereignty."

As is clear, China doesn't always win in these trade confrontations, although it has expressed its displeasure at EU 'interference' in its trade policies. The EU's trade defence measures are based on rules set by the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and have been tailored to allow small and medium-sized businesses to bring actions against overseas

competitors who break the rules on subsidies and dumping, to the detriment of European companies. Which brings us to the EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment (CAI), currently frozen in a vote at the European Parliament after China sanctioned five members of the European Parliament, three members of national parliaments, two EU committees, and several China-focused European academics for criticising China's human rights record, as well as its actions against the Uighur people in Xinjiang province and against the democratic opposition in Hong Kong. Beijing accuses those it has named of interfering with China's 'internal affairs'.

It's an unfortunate choice of phrase, seeming to argue that China has the right to torture or sterilise people and force them to carry out unpaid work without anyone having the right to say: "stop!" The Chinese government called on Brussels to "immediately stop interfering in China's internal affairs". It also said Brussels must abandon its "confrontational approach", apparently unaware of the notion that human rights extends beyond national borders and is not just the business of the country where the abuses are taking place. The defence of people's rights is a truly international notion these days, not "an internal affair". Regardless of this, and Beijing's awareness of it (one imagines), Zhao Lijian of China's Foreign Ministry, said: "The unreasonable sanctions imposed by the EU have led to difficulties in China-EU relations. That is what China does not want to see, and the responsibility does not lie with the Chinese side." Of course, China could just stop mistreating its citizens and start respecting their human rights, which would solve the problem, but it seems very unlikely that they ever will. In a statement, Zhao said he hoped that "the European side will move in the same direction as us, with less emotional outburst and more rational thinking." So that's the view from Beijing: to care about human rights and the savage mistreatment of men, women and children is simply an emotional outburst, in need of suppression. The view from the European Parliament

is somewhat different, as you might expect: "While the EU's sanctions target human rights violations and are based on legitimate and proportionate measures embedded in international law," MEPs wrote, "China's sanctions lack any legal justification, are entirely unsubstantiated and arbitrary and target the criticism of such human rights violations."



Chinese President Yuan Shikai in 1915

SLOW TO CHANGE

Chinese governments down the years have been noted for several things, such as ingenuity, artistic endeavour, originality, even spiritual thinking (remember Buddhism, Taoism and Confucianism), but seldom for gentleness or kindness. Certainly, imperial China would have provided a stiff and unbending environment in which to live and raise a family. The removal of the emperors came, for most people, as a relief. But the regime that (eventually, after several false starts) replaced them was not noted for its kindness, either. Only the very oldest citizens are likely to recall that the Kuomintang were neither a gentle nor a very popular government; few tears were shed when Mao's forces drove them out back in 1949. The name 'Kuomintang' translates as 'China's National People's Party', although the party was seen to favour the rich and powerful over the working people beloved of Mao Zedong and his Communists (at least in theory). After overthrowing



© Wikimedia

Peng Min-min

appointed Yuan Shikai as the first President, but he abused his powers, sparking a second revolution that failed. He declared himself Emperor of China but died in 1916 (again, few tears were shed) and in the ensuing vicious squabbling of small parties led by warlords, China effectively broke up before Japan invaded and took over the eastern half of the country. When the Kuomintang fled to Taiwan, it was the government, military and hundreds of thousands of business people who followed them, not the ordinary citizens, who were, in the main, still struggling to survive.

A hero of Taiwanese independence, Peng Min-min, who died this April at the age of 98, was an unlikely standard bearer for the struggle against Chinese aggression. Peng was born on the island, still known then as Formosa, but was more interested in reading than politics (although he also had a passion for baseball) and only became involved because he saw no other option. Taiwan had been ceded 'in perpetuity' to Japan by China's imperial government in 1895, without reference being made to the island's inhabitants, of course. Peng studied law and political science, at which he excelled, even gaining a place at a university in Japan. Not everything went his way: he lost his left arm when American bombers hit a ferry on which he was travelling. Taiwan was returned to China at the end of the Second World War by the victors, but under the leadership of Chiang Kai-shek of the Kuomintang. Chiang's soldiers were a rapacious rabble, inclined to

beat, rape and otherwise mistreat the ordinary citizens. Taiwan's nationalist rulers also spouted nonsense about "reclaiming" mainland China, which could never happen, although they continued to espouse the policy. The Kuomintang arrested Peng for writing a manifesto about self-government and he was given an 8-year jail sentence.

This was later changed to house arrest and he escaped abroad. He eventually returned to Taiwan and although never selected to lead the country, much of his manifesto has been realised, although not – of course – that Taiwan should gain its own seat at the United Nations. The Communist leadership in Beijing still struggles to prevent Taiwan's nationhood from being recognised anywhere. That's how little Lithuania fell foul of China's prickly temper. Beijing does not tolerate disagreement or criticism, however well-deserved. Stating that one disagrees with such things as torture, forced sterilization and forced labour will land you with sanctions. A visitor from outer space might conclude that Beijing actually demands the right to carry out such abuses, whilst in point of fact it simply denies they take place.



Chiang Kai-shek

Dialogue between the two sides has restarted, but cautiously. It's been claimed that President Xi Jinping appeared to be upset, accusing the EU of being emotional, irrational and on a short leash held by Washington.

In defiance of international protocol and normal diplomatic behaviour, China even released its own read-out of the summit before it ended, in an apparent bid to sway the outcome. The hopes of EU negotiators that Beijing could be persuaded to be more constructive in its dealings with Europe were swiftly dashed; they no longer view China as a responsible or even credible partner. There are fears, too, that Xi Jinping may be leaning more towards Vladimir Putin, who can be said to take a somewhat "direct" approach to international relations. China's overreaction to any comments it views as "hostile" (which includes anything other than outright praise, it would seem) is now recognised as a negotiating tactic, related to the technique of schoolyard bullies: "give me your ice cream or I shall kick your head in".

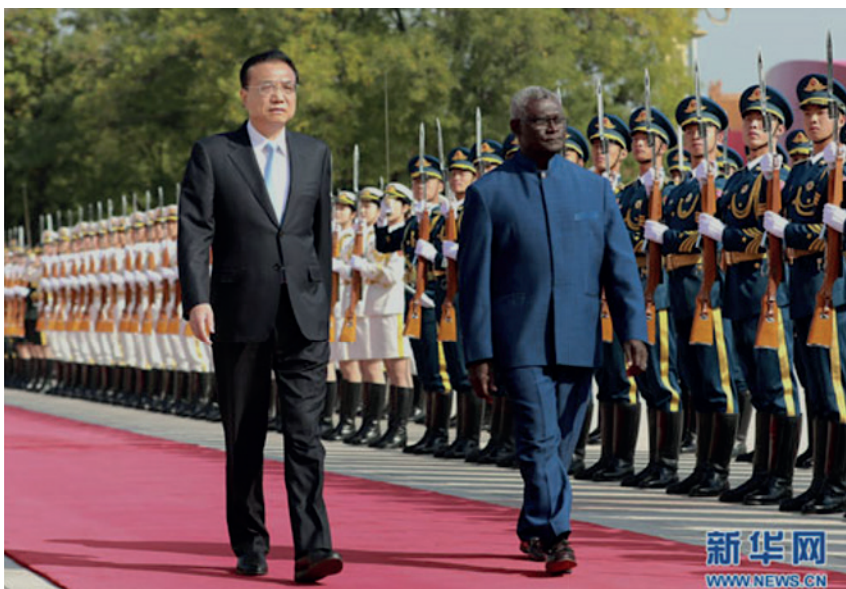


© Wikimedia

Shinzo Abe, former Prime Minister of Japan

OVER-REACTION, UNDER-APPRECIATION

That would explain China's extraordinary response to an article written by Shinzo Abe, the former Prime Minister of Japan, for the Los Angeles Times, in which he likened to situation in Taiwan to that of Ukraine and urged the United States to pledge that it would defend both. China's Consulate General in Los Angeles called the comments "irresponsible". "This serves only to instigate confrontation between major countries," wrote Consul General Zhang Ping. "The situations in Taiwan and Ukraine cannot be compared," Zhang wrote. "Taiwan is an inalienable part of China, where



Chinese Premier Li Keqiang receives Solomon Islands Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare in Beijing, China in 2019

the People's Republic is the sole legal government.” He went on to put the blame for tension firmly on Taipei's shoulders: “The root cause of the tension in the Taiwan Strait is that the Taiwan authorities refuse to recognise the One-China principle.” He then seeks to spread the blame to other Western countries: “Some external forces have condoned and abetted the growth of separatist forces for ‘Taiwanese independence.’” It's worth noting Zhang's use of apostrophes around the expression “Taiwanese independence”. Zhang pledges strong measures against “foreign interference” on behalf of the secessionist activities of what he refers to as “a handful of ‘Taiwanese independence’ separatists.” China has never been noted for listening to the voices of the people, so if he seriously imagines that only a “handful” of Taiwanese want to remain independent, he is either mistaken, misinformed or being somewhat economical with the truth.

Meanwhile, China continues its bid to increase its own influence in the region, for instance with the Solomon Islands, with which Beijing has recently signed a security pact. This has not gone down well in Japan. According to Japan's Foreign Minister, Yoshimasa Hayashi, a senior Japanese official has voiced his country's concerns to the Prime Minister of the Solomon Islands, Manasseh Sogavare, during a meeting there. Sogavare explained to Japan's Vice Foreign Minister, Kentaro

Uesugi, that the move was in line with the Solomon Islands' refusal to allow China to build any military bases there, although according to Beijing's version of events, the deal allows China to deploy forces and dock vessels in the islands. Until 2019, the Solomon Islands had diplomatic ties with Taiwan, but it then switched them to China. Details of the new pact have not been published at the time of writing, but according to the Japanese newspaper, Mainichi, Kentaro Uesugi had warned that the deal “could affect the security of the whole Pacific region”. Japan is monitoring developments “with

concern”, he said. Given the history of Sino-Japanese relations, that is hardly surprising. As reported in Australia's The Age newspaper, the family of an Australian man whose courage helped defeat the Japanese during the Second World War are furious that this pact has been allowed to go through.

Scottish-born Martin Clemens stood bravely against the invasion forces of Imperial Japan while he was working as a civil servant on Guadalcanal, which is the main island in the Solomons group. He was a District Officer for the British colonial administration, and when others fled before the might of Japan, he stood his ground, even after the fall of Singapore and the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbour.

Just 25 years old, he worked with the local islanders and carried around a massive radio of considerable size and weight (it took four men to lift it) to radio Japanese activities to the allies. When his batteries ran flat, he refilled them with citric acid extracted from pineapples. The island was seen as a vital staging post and, just like the Chinese today, Japan wanted it. Helped by islanders, Clemens continued to send vital intelligence to the American marines, helping them to prevent the creation of an airbase, but always crediting the islanders for their bravery and ingenuity. His actions saved the life of a US marine lieutenant who went



Captain Martin Clemens (rear centre), a coastwatcher on Guadalcanal, provided intelligence to Allied forces during the battle for the island (August 1942 – February 1943). The men with him were all members of the Solomon Islands police force



Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen observing a military maneuver

on to become very famous indeed: John F. Kennedy. Clemens was honoured by the US, the UK and his eventual adopted country, Australia. Kennedy's daughter, Caroline, is convinced her father owed his life to Clemens. Surviving members of Clemens' family are furious about the Chinese security pact. Martin Clemens would have regarded today's China much as he did Imperial Japan. The pact would have upset him greatly, his descendants believe. The Age quotes Martin Clemens' daughter, Alexandra, who lives in Melbourne: "I am the daughter of Martin Clemens who valiantly stood his ground on the Allies' behalf alone on Guadalcanal for years before the US finally arrived in 1942." Her view of the deal with China is explicit: "To say I am disappointed and dismayed at the decision would be an understatement," she told The Age. It was a clever trick on Beijing's part: distract world opinion with some very obvious sabre-rattling over Taiwan and then sneak round the back and pull off a masterstroke some 6,000 kilometres away when no-one is looking.

Beijing will not stop there after this tidy little coup; it continues to spread its influence wherever it can. According to Singapore's The Straits Times: "Singapore has been ranked second in the world – behind Cambodia and just ahead of Thailand – in a study measuring China's expanding influence on (other) countries". The newspaper reports that Singapore is especially vulnerable in terms of technology, society and academia, but less so for domestic politics. The report said that

Singapore "was found to be especially susceptible to exposure, pressure and effect of Beijing's influence" in research by the Taiwan-based Doublethink Lab research institute. The index placed the Philippines in sixth place, Malaysia eighth and Taiwan ninth, with Australia tenth. The United States makes an appearance in 15th place.

World leaders have lately been given an unusual warning from an unexpected source. Reported in the Daily Post: "The Leader of INRI Evangelical Spiritual Church, Primate Elijah Ayodele, has warned of an impending war between China and Taiwan." He sounds very certain. "Primate Ayodele urged world leaders to be at alert due to the impending war between China and Taiwan." It comes as no great surprise: while the Taiwanese people – or most of them – still think war with China is unlikely, other people and institutions around the world don't share their optimism.



Xi Jinping

The current situation seems somewhat reversed from when Mao took over in China and the Communists were under threat from the Kuomintang. "The Kuomintang should stay in their own territory and leave us alone," Mao Zedong told the British writer Robert Payne over dinner in a ramshackle hut in Yunnan, not long after Mao's 'Long March'. "They are always committing acts of treachery. Are we supposed to sit back and let them do whatever they please?" Payne asked if that meant that the fighting would continue. "Yes, the fighting goes on," Mao replied. "The people who are fighting us (the Kuomintang) don't want democracy at all. There won't be peace until they learn what democracy is." Some might argue that today's leaders in Beijing have either forgotten what democracy is or never learned it in the first place. Would Mao have approved of Xi Jinping? It's hard to tell. After Mao's mistake in blaming sparrows for his people's hunger, then the ghastly debacle of the Cultural Revolution, I'm no longer sure that Mao really knew what he was doing all the time. He was, above all, a revolutionary who wanted to impose Marxism (or at least his interpretation of it) on the Chinese people. An inspirational leader, certainly, but perhaps not a notably successful long-term planner or politician. Xi is almost certainly cleverer than Mao was, but while history will never forget Mao, Xi may, in the fullness of time, slip down the back of the sofa of history and be forgotten. However much noise he may make, it's far from certain that the signal he's trying to send, if it gets through, means anything at all.

T. Kingsley Brooks

EPIONE

CABINET ELISABETH THURAT

YOUR TRUSTED PODIATRY AND MEDICAL PEDICURE CLINIC IN BRUSSELS



PLANTAR REFLEXOLOGY LASER THERAPY TARGETED AROMATHERAPY



- Uses APIVITA natural French products
- Proposes various treatments using organic essential oils
- Uses the unique Low Level Laser Therapy (manufactured by Erchonia, a US company and world leader in the field of Low Level Laser Therapy)
- Bespoke treatment programs and state-of-the-art equipment
- Spotless hygiene



We provide the best care possible

ELISABETH THURAT CLINIC offers a wide range of care specifically tailored for young children, teenagers, adults, athletes, and people with disabilities.

AT EPIONE CLINIC, YOUR FEET ARE IN GOOD HANDS !

www.cabinet-thurat.be • +32 4 94 04 84 24

Avenue Brugmann 292 • 1180 Uccle • Belgium

Consultations only by appointment • From 8am to 8pm • Monday to Saturday



During the annexation of Ashani (Ghana), Governor Maxwell imposed on the King the removal of his crown and his sandals, and to come forward with the Queen Mother to perform the act of humiliation in accordance with native custom

UNGODLY ACTS

Former colonies of Western power seek a new master

“Imperialism is a negation of God,” wrote Mahatma Gandhi, “It does ungodly acts in the name of God.” Colonialism was always an awful idea, born of wealthy westerners wanting to become even wealthier by stealing the natural resources of other countries (countries they saw as ‘primitive,’ ‘inferior’ and ‘under-developed,’ and therefore not worth worrying about) along with their governance and sometimes even co-opting reluctant native inhabitants into assisting in these acts of blatant theft. Growing up in northern England, I saw in my youth many proud parades by military units, some of them boasting of how their predecessors from an earlier age, with Martini-Henry breech-loading single shot rifles in the massive .577-450 calibre, fought off a far larger force of Zulu warriors, carrying assegais and wood-framed leather shields. Of course, the Zulu forces were armed with assegai spears and the shorter *iklawwa*, a sort of scaled down assegai with a double-sided blade roughly 60 centimetres long, while the fighters sheltered behind *umbumbolozo* shields, made of oxhide that had been pounded to stiffen it.

The massive bullets from the Martini-Henry rifles would have gone through them, however stiff they were, like a hot knife through butter, however. The Martini breech-loading action works very well and I have fired .22 calibre target rifles of that design. Quite a few of the British officers also carried Tranter double-action percussion pistols in .44 army calibre, because pistols were not issued by the War Office and only officers could afford to buy their own, although they were allowed to do so. Tranter, a Birmingham gunsmith of considerable

skill, also sold a lot of handguns to the Confederate army during the American civil war, since the southerners were denied access to America’s own arms manufacturing companies, situated in the Unionist north.

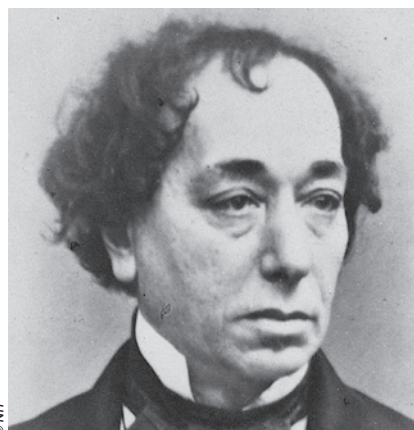
Having clean hands when trading in weapons can’t be easy, although ingenious Southern arms manufacturers did manage to produce a knock-off copy of Colt’s Navy revolver, simplifying it and making some parts in brass to save on costly and hard-to obtain steel. Copies



The defence of Rorke’s Drift during the Zulu War in 1879

© Painting by Alphonse de Neuville - 1875-1885

of that rather handsome handgun are (perhaps unsurprisingly) extremely popular among alt-right latter-day Confederacy and Trump supporters. But contrary to popular belief, more Confederate officers used Tranters. In any case, a Tranter .44 round would have pierced an umbumbolozo without much trouble. And, of course, the American Civil War was mainly about slavery and the South's desire to retain it. A number of Confederate officers undoubtedly had the descendants of captured Africans working on their vast estates. Importing newly-captured slaves became illegal in 1807, so existing slaves were encouraged to breed. More of Gandhi's "ungodly acts" performed in God's name, or at least with His assumed approval.



Former prime minister of the United Kingdom Benjamin Disraeli

But it's worth remembering a speech made in Britain's House of Commons by a 19th century Prime Minister Benjamin Disraeli. "Colonies do not cease to be colonies because they are independent," he said. This, sadly, would appear to have been a perceptive comment. A surprising number of countries, having thrown off the shackles of colonialism, have opted instead for another form of subservience at the hands of either another country or else of a greedy political leader determined to get to the top of the greasy pole and stay there. People, it would appear, like bullies and willingly welcome those responsible for it, as long as the people being bullied are from a different ethnic group or hold different political beliefs. It's clear that in several African countries – former colonies – there resides a degree of admiration for the world's most notorious (and murderous) bullies. In Ethiopia, for instance, government



Flag of the Tigray People's Liberation Front

supporters demonstrated in favour of military action against their own home-grown 'rebels', the Tigray People's Liberation Front, or TPLF. To show their feelings more clearly, they erected a poster showing Vladimir Putin and Turkey's President, Recep Tayyip Erdoğan, smiling together. Throwing off colonialism only to seek out a new colonial master seems a little silly.

The people of Tigray have powerful enemies: their neighbours, the Amhara, for instance. The current conflict comes after the largely Amharan government of Ethiopia's Prime Minister, Abiy Ahmed, had a falling out with the dominant political party of Tigray. Now old scores are being "settled" in the time-honoured way of killing everyone suspected of being on the other side. Both sides are guilty. Into this pit of hatred and mistrust, enter Vladimir Putin. He says he just wants to "co-operate" with African governments, eager to find new diplomatic partnerships beyond Europe. In 2021, Russia signed military cooperation agreements with two of Africa's most populous nations, Nigeria and Ethiopia and the United Nations has accused Russian mercenaries of getting directly involved in conflicts in Libya and the Central African Republic (CAR), although Moscow denies involvement, just as it denies any connection with the so-called "Wagner Group", the paramilitary organisation accused by the UN of committing human rights abuses in Africa.

THE ABUSED BECOME ABUSERS

The people of Russia have been used to hardship and pain for a long time and have blamed their religious faith for some of it. "God of frostbite, God of famine," wrote the Russian poet, Prince Peter Vyazemsky, a century before the Russian Revolution and the victory of Marxism displaced his privileged class from its position of power, "beggars,

cripples by the yard, farms with no crops to examine – that's him, that's your Russian God." It's all very well heaping the blame on "God" when your friends and close relatives indulge in abuses of their own to keep the poor poor. But Vyazemsky was no fan of the privileged either, which can't have endeared him to people of his own class. Earlier in the same poem, he wrote "God of medals and of millions, god of yard-sweepers unshod, lords in sleighs with two postillions, that's him, that's your Russian god." With Putin in charge, it seems that he hasn't gone anywhere either. The Russian people were abused and mistreated down the centuries, and just as children who've been abused sometimes grow up to abuse their own children, so it seems that some Russians (by no means all, of course, and probably only a small minority) now seek to inflict discomfort, poverty, and injuries on those of other countries.



Prince Peter Vyazemsky

It doesn't bode well for Africa. Let's return to Tigray for a moment, where a report from Human Rights Watch and Amnesty International catalogues a wide range of abuses, allegedly perpetrated by security forces and by civilian authorities, all from the neighbouring Amhara area, plus, it's claimed, with help from the Ethiopian federal authorities. The report describes it all as crimes against humanity and war crimes. The report, which took months to prepare, claims that hundreds of thousands of Tigrayans were forced to leave their homes during what was a violent campaign of unlawful killings, rapes, mass detentions without charges or trial and the denial of humanitarian assistance. The report also mentions widespread atrocities, mainly carried out by Ethiopian troops, together with forces from neighbouring Eritrea. Ethiopian federal forces, obviously, deny the allegations most



Eritrean refugees displaced by fighting in Ethiopia's Afar region receive assistance near the regional capital Semera

© UNHCR / Laurence Biron

strenuously It's not all one-sided, either: fighters belonging to the Tigray People's Liberation Front have been accused of committing atrocities even across the border in regions controlled by different regimes. In fact, the report continues, fighters loyal to the TPLF have carried out genocidal activities of their own and have gang-raped dozens of women and stolen a lot of property in the Amhara region.

It's clear that the various countries of Africa have a superfluity of deadly monsters, not only in mythical bestiaries but out in the streets and villages of this vast continent. Why do they need more? If you've already got the Kongamato, said to be a huge flying reptile (not unlike a pterosaur, in fact) that supposedly lives in rivers and swamps around Zambia,



Artist's impression of the Kongamato

© Wikipedia / Tim Berelink



A Russian Sukhoi Su-27SKM

© Wikipedia

Angola and Congo and is extremely dangerous, why would anyone invite Putin into the mix with his "Flanker" (in NATO terms) Sukhoi Su-27 fighters, or the MiG-29 (NATO name Fulcrum)? They're very effective war planes, despite Ukraine's successes in bringing down the occasional one with Western-supplied missiles.

The fighters sound not unlike the Kongamato, or even the Impundulu of African legend, a bird as big as a human, resident in the areas for which it is legendary, and familiar to Pondo, Zulu, and Xhosa folklore. It reportedly attacks people and, vampire-like, drinks their blood, although its eggs and some of its parts are supposed to have healing properties. Even the most boastful egg-stealing enthusiast I met in my far-off youth would have hesitated before going after the eggs of the Impundulu, although the resemblance of one of Putin's warplanes to a Kongamato is perhaps closer. Long-abused peoples, having shed their obeisance to a well-armed colonial power, seem to have an inclination to put themselves at the mercy of another, equally violent, rapacious and unpleasant. I know that many will say there's no comparison between the vicious, greedy imperialist Russia and the former masters, be they French, Belgian, or British. To the poor, downtrodden inhabitants the difference is probably more semantic than altruistic.

In terms of mythical monsters and their resemblance to extant leaders, then my favourite for Putin is the Popobawa of Zanzibar and Tanzania, a demon who is said to look human in daylight but who turns into a one-eyed, bat-winged monstrosity at night, when it attacks and sodomizes males and females alike. He (it?) is especially vicious towards

those who don't believe in him (it?). The comparison with Putin's attitude towards Ukrainians is inescapable in this instance, I feel. The name Popobawa is Swahili for "bat-wing". The creature, deeply feared, is a relatively recent addition to the African mythological bestiary but none-the-less terrifying for its apparent youth. I wish I could find my Swahili-English dictionary, left to me by my father who, while serving in Kenya during the 2nd World War, taught Swahili to newly-arrived British squaddies. He loved the place so much that he was keen to accept the offer of a commission in the Kenyan police and to take my mother and my two elder sisters to live there. My mother, never an adventurous woman, refused to go however, and he remained stuck in the UK instead. It's just as well for me, perhaps; otherwise, I might never have been born.

CREEPING RUSSIAN EXPANSION, FORGOTTEN ALLIES

It's easy to see why the African countries are taking the positions they have chosen regarding Russia's brutal invasion of Ukraine. They need friends, whilst they themselves have often been accused of human rights abuse. What could be better than a large, well-armed ally that doesn't give a jot about human rights, abused or otherwise? Russia's seeming interest in re-engaging with the African continent has already paid dividends. Look at the United Nations General Assembly's vote in March on a resolution calling for the immediate withdrawal of Russian forces from Ukraine. As you know, the vote in support of the motion was overwhelming: of the 193 members, 141 countries supported it, but the picture in Africa was different. Of the



President of Russia Vladimir Putin arrives in Durban, South Africa, on an official trip in 2013

© Kremlin.ru



© Loey Felipe / UN Photo

The United Nations General Assembly overwhelmingly adopting a resolution on March 2, 2022 demanding that Russia immediately end its military operations in Ukraine

54 African nations represented, 28 took Ukraine's side by voting in favour, but Eritrea voted against and the remaining 25 either abstained or simply stayed away. Cameroon, Ethiopia, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Burkina Faso, Togo, Eswatini and Morocco didn't turn up, while Algeria, Angola, Burundi, the Central African Republic (CAR), Senegal, Equatorial Guinea, Congo Brazzaville, Namibia, Sudan, South Sudan, Uganda, Madagascar, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe abstained.

It's an odd response, however much those countries still resent the former colonialists. It's like being asked: "Are you opposed to one huge, nuclear-powered country, invading without provocation, a smaller, less powerful nation?" and giving the answer: "We're not sure." There's another point to bear in mind, too. When I first arrived in Togo – the first African country I ever visited and still one of my favourites, with beautiful scenery and stunningly statuesque and elegant people – I was struck immediately by the energy-sapping extreme humidity. It was like walking under bath-warm water while beathing in steam from an overheated

shower. For anyone used to Moscow's chill, it will come as a huge shock. Moscow is interesting, even magnificent in places, but Togo is simply gorgeous. Chaotic, of course, especially at Lomé airport – but simply wonderful. South Africa in particular, after years of ghastly segregation and oppression, has come in for especially powerful criticism, with Herman Mashaba, leader of the new opposition party, Action SA, saying that it placed South Africa on the wrong side of history. The response from President Cyril Ramaphosa in defence of his government's position was that the resolution paid too little attention to the importance of peaceful dialogue, although Russia sticks to its "we want it all; give it to us or else" approach, which doesn't seem to be helping.

DW news reports a quote from the Angolan political scientist Olivio N'kilumbu, who point out that many in the ANC remain loyal to Russia, at least in its old Soviet Union incarnation. If further proof should be needed, it's worth noting that large numbers of Africans still support Putin's claim to be "de-Nazifying" Ukraine. That Russian claim has been bitterly contested in Germany, according to DW. "Sorry, but we can't keep silent on this one, it's just far too cynical," tweeted Germany's embassy in South Africa. "What Russia is doing in Ukraine is slaughtering innocent children, women and men, for its own gain. It's definitely not 'fighting Nazism'. Shame on anyone who's falling for it," the German reaction runs, ending with a final "PS" in brackets: "Sadly, we're kinda experts on Nazism."

Certainly, the signs are that in some African nations, leaders prefer Russia to the west, perhaps because Russia is perceived as an enemy of the old

colonialists. It also asks fewer questions. There have been demonstrations in some African capitals in which locals brandished banners accusing Ukraine of atrocities in places like Donetsk and Luhansk, which have been fighting their own wars for independence from Kyiv for a decade or more, bringing down an airliner in support of their "cause" (what cause can ever justify mass murder on such a scale?) Of course, the Russian news service Pravda still says the Malaysian airlines flight, a Boeing 777, with its 295 passengers, was brought down by Ukrainian forces, a claim that is hard to square with the celebrations by the separatists at their success in shooting it out of the sky. But, as always, the old adage, whose originator remains unknown, that "Truth is the first casualty of war," remains as accurate as ever. There have been online posts by people who doubt that anyone in Tigray was ever told that "we will erase you from this land", as Amnesty International claims people there were told. Doubts aside, however, ethnic cleansing against Tigrayans has continued.



Kenneth Roth, Executive Director, Human Rights Watch

© Wikipedia

"Since November 2020, Amhara officials and security forces have engaged in a relentless campaign of ethnic cleansing to force Tigrayans in Western Tigray from their homes," Kenneth Roth, Executive Director of Human Rights Watch said, "Ethiopian authorities have steadfastly denied the shocking breadth of the crimes that have unfolded and have egregiously failed to address them." Of course, the authorities are not letting anyone in to check, so no action is being taken on the ground. "The response of Ethiopia's international and regional partners has failed to reflect the gravity of the crimes that continue



© Wikimedia

President of South Africa, Cyril Ramaphosa

to unfold in Western Tigray,” according to Agnès Callamard, Secretary General of Amnesty International. “Concerned governments need to help bring an end to the ethnic cleansing campaign, ensure that Tigrayans are able to safely and voluntarily return home, and make a concerted effort to obtain justice for these heinous crimes.” Not much chance of that, I’m afraid, especially if they have Putin on their team.

MORE, MORE, GIVE RUSSIA MORE! (OR ELSE...)

So why is Putin pursuing his charm offensive in Africa? Well, for much the same reason that the colonialist European powers sought to take over African countries in the past: Africa is blessed (or perhaps cursed?) with the sorts of incredible riches of which most continents can only dream. Ghana has oil, Gabon has manganese, there’s coal in

Mozambique. The African Development Bank Group says that there are some 120-billion barrels of oil deposits, around half as much as Saudi Arabia, plus 600-million hectares of uncultivated arable land, which represents around half of the world’s total. The banks have estimated that Africa’s natural resources should contribute more than \$30-billion (€27.5-billion) per annum over the next two decades.

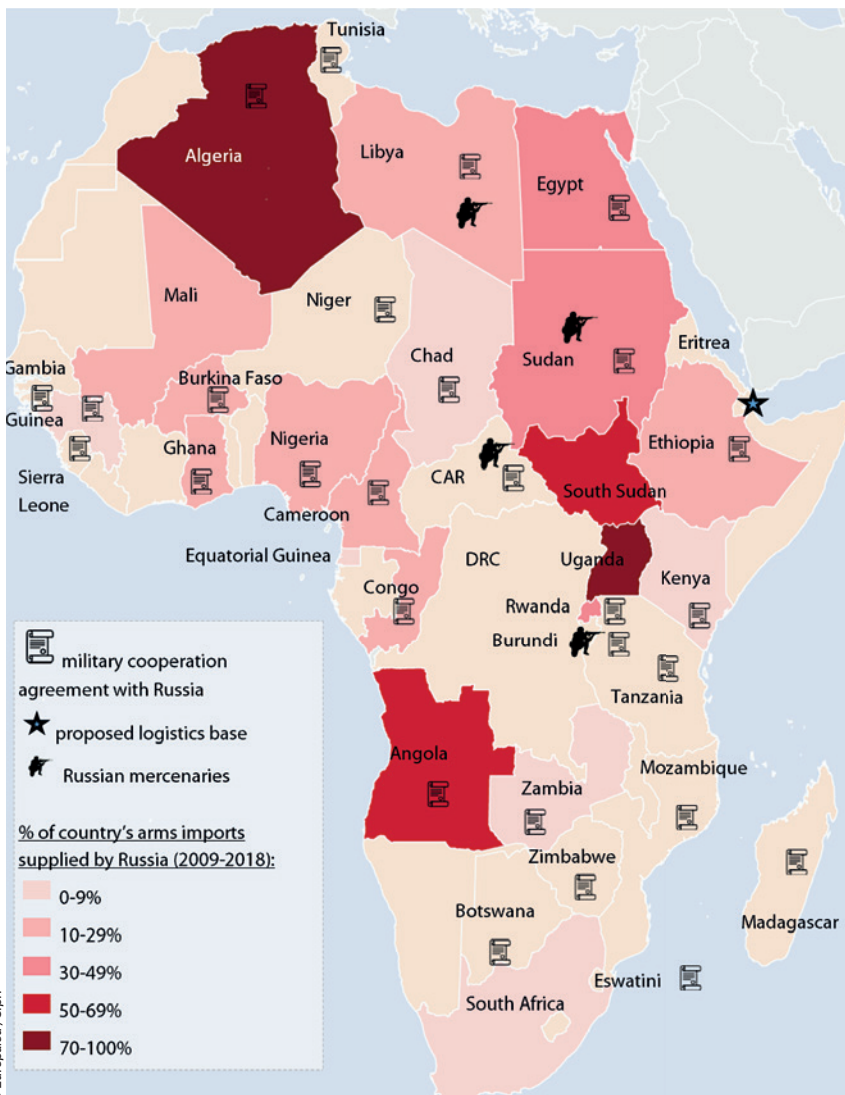
But there are things going in the opposite direction, too: weapons. In 2020, Russia became the biggest supplier of arms to Africa. The previous year, Putin had hosted a Russia-Africa summit, attended by 43 African leaders. Research by the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) calculates that between 2016 and 2020, around 30% of all weapons supplied to sub-Saharan Africa came from Russia. “I want your natural resources; here, have a few Kalashnikovs in payment so you can



Pro Russian demonstration in Bangui

kill your neighbours.” By comparison, China supplied just 20%, France 9.5% and the USA a measly 5.4%. Russian influence has grown especially in the Central African Republic, and it has grown especially since 2017, when Russia delivered Kalashnikovs and surface-to-air missiles. The following year, Russia sent experts to train local troops, in exchange for which a large number of Russian companies were granted licences to mine for gold and diamonds, while the country’s president, Faustin-Archange Touadera has Russian guards to keep him safe. At a pro-Russian rally in Bangui, placards could be seen bearing such slogans as “Russia, CAR is with you” and “Russia: save Donbas”, although it’s doubtful if many CAR citizens could even point out Donbas on a map, let alone claim to have visited it.

The Guinean writer and intellectual Tierno Monenembo has written that it will not end well and that the African countries that have fallen for Putin’s seduction will never get free from his grip, especially since they rely on Russia’s military skills. That’s why they failed to support the UN resolution. “In such a situation,” Monenembo pointed out, “it is difficult for African nations to take a stand. When you are small, when you are weak, if you’re poorly armed and underdeveloped, you don’t just get involved in a conflict between military superpowers. That’s the business of the big players.” Monenembo added a reference to an old Fulani proverb that he felt to be especially relevant (the Fula people are probably the world’s largest nomadic group of people, based mainly in West Africa): “The chicken doesn’t need to discuss the price of the knife. Whoever is in possession of the knife, that is who will cut the chicken’s throat.” Mr. Putin may have been lining up for himself a large number of potential chickens.



Russian military presence in Africa



© Wikimedia

Malian troops stand guard outside Kati Barracks in Bamako, the headquarters of coup leader Amadou Sanogo

The West African country of Mali certainly offers him rather more than chickenfeed. As Human Rights Watch (HRW) reports: “Human Rights Watch investigations revealed that over the course of several days in late March, Malian army forces and foreign soldiers – identified by several sources as Russians, although it remains unproven – executed in small groups several hundred people who had been rounded up in Moura.” That’s not how the Malian government reported the incident, of course. A Malian Defence Ministry statement issued on 1 April (ironically known as “All Fools’ Day” in parts of the West) claimed that from 23 to 31 March, the Malian army had killed 203 “terrorists” and arrested a further 51, acting on intelligence that suggested that armed Islamic terrorists were planning to meet up with other rebel “battalions” to plan hostile acts. While the execution of prisoners based purely on their beliefs is not excusable, its cause is, perhaps, vaguely understandable in this case.

As HRW explains: “The killings occurred amid a dramatic spike in unlawful killings of civilians and suspects since late 2021 by armed Islamist groups linked to Al-Qaeda in the Islamic



© Russian MoD

A Russian special forces soldier

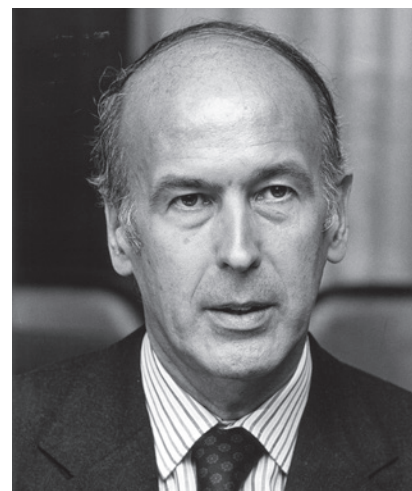
Maghreb (AQIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS), and by Malian government security forces.” Religion yet again rears its troublesome head. All of the survivors and witnesses said that members of the Malian army and “white soldiers” (reported to be Russian but without proof) killed the men. HRW writes of a lengthy fire-fight at a local meat market between Islamist militias and Malian troops, aided by “foreigners”. “Multiple security sources who spoke to Human Rights Watch said the operation involved over 100 Russian troops and numerous other Malian soldiers. Witnesses said the foreign soldiers appeared to be more numerous during the first two days of the operation,” HRW reports. It’s claimed that over a period of four days, the soldiers detained any men they found in groups of up to ten at a time, then ordered them to walk away to areas where they were executed. Or murdered, if that seems a more appropriate word. In some cases, the victims were shot in the head while others were herded into groups and sprayed with automatic fire. One resident told HRW that: “the sound of gunfire rang out in our village from Monday to Thursday.” Exact figures are hard to come by, but it’s widely believed that the operation killed some 300 local people. It was claimed by one witness that a Russian soldier, speaking through an interpreter, told them that they were all Islamist terrorists, even if they had only gone to the market to buy meat.

MONSTERS OF THE PAST AND PRESENT

The proper name for this landlocked country is the Republic of Mali and it is Africa’s 8th largest country, covering more than 1,200,002 kilometres and with a population of some 19.1 million, most of whom are under the age of 25. Certainly, Africa has had its share of brutal tyrants, not all of them European colonists.

Take the self-styled “Emperor Bokassa” of the Central African Republic. In his admiration for Napoléon Bonaparte, he almost bankrupted his country with his ludicrously expensive “coronation” whilst allegedly serving the cooked flesh of his enemies to guests at dinner. He renamed his country “the Central African Empire” and had lots of children by a wide variety of “wives” (some of them his). It’s claimed that if he fancied a married woman, her husband was

locked into an area with a crocodile pool. The crocs were kept hungry while their cannibalistic owner watched the proceedings with glee. Bokassa was also accused of murdering a group of schoolchildren who had thrown rocks at his Rolls Royce as it passed them, protesting at the high cost of new school uniforms they were being forced to wear. Even so, Bokassa was granted political asylum in France for a few years in recognition of his services to the French military, before returning to live what was left of his life in the CAR. The charge against him of cannibalism was never proven, at least not in the eyes of the court, despite his chef testifying that he had often served meat from the “special cold store”, which held the bodies of Bokassa’s departed enemies. He even said he’d served it to former French President Valerie Giscard d’Estaing. I met Giscard on several occasions, and he never struck me as a cannibal, at least, not a willing one. He always assumed I was American for some reason, but he was unfailingly cooperative at giving interesting interviews.



© Wikimedia

Valerie Giscard d’Estaing in 1975

Putin has done more than any other world figure to ingratiate himself with African Leaders, often playing on the old Soviet days, when Russia’s Communist leadership was philosophically (and justifiably) opposed to colonial links and all that they stood for. There is a happy, smiling photo on-line of him with the Ugandan leader, Yoweri Museveni, whom I once interviewed in his palace garden in Kampala. He was very pleasant, open and forthcoming. He even stopped me in a corridor of the European Parliament in Strasbourg

for a brief but friendly chat a few weeks later while he was visiting the place; a poster-boy for EU-African relations. I liked him then; I'm not sure I still would today, given his tenacious, even ruthless, determination to cling to power.

Russia seems determined to make itself indispensable to African governments by supplying them with the latest weaponry. According to some reports, weaponry that's a lot more up-to-date than the weapons being provided for their allies in the breakaway enclaves of Ukraine, even when they've been sent to fight Russia's war in Ukraine. According to a report by Reuters, military conscripts from the Russian-backed Donbas region were sent to fight on frontlines with no training, very little food and water, and most astonishingly, they were armed with Mosin-Nagant rifles from the 1890s. It's worth bearing in mind that Nagant disputes its involvement, and as a result they're often just called Mosins, but the weapons themselves are traditionally well-made five-shot bolt-action rifles chambered in 7.62 calibre. However, it seems more likely that Russia would provide its own home-made version, the carbine, still being manufactured during the Second World War, although the (unverified) photographs appear to show the earlier model being carried, as well as a few 1943 versions. The pictures allegedly originate from both Donetsk and Luhansk, as local militia men train for Russia's Ukraine war. It would appear that Russia doesn't want to spend much on its volunteer fighters nor to risk modern arms falling into the hands of its potential enemies.

SAINT VLADIMIR, ANYONE?

If Putin really wants to ingratiate himself with ordinary Africans, he might like to consider a different route.



Angolan President Joao Lourenco and Russian President Vladimir Putin in Johannesburg in 2018



Lukoil CEO Vagit Alekperov signs an investment agreement giving the company the green light to drill in the Congo shelf in 2018

In the wealthy world, the problem is population shrinkage; in Africa and other poor countries, it's the reverse. Take Nigeria, for instance, which is expected to overtake the United States by 2050 to become the third most densely-populated country in the world. According to United Nations estimates, its population is likely to double to more than 400-million. As John Bongaarts of the Population Council of New York City points out, that means the duplication of every man-made object in the country: "every school, every clinic, every bridge," he told *Scientific American* magazine. And the population continues to produce children to provide tomorrow's security: the next generation will be needed to till the fields, plant the seeds and harvest the crops, after all. In sub-Saharan Africa, the average woman produces around 4.7 children, while in Nigeria it's 5.4. Don't forget that in sub-Saharan Africa, around a quarter of the population – more than 260-million people – do not have adequate food, while 30% of African children there show signs of stunted growth, according to the UN Food and Agriculture Organisation. François Pelletier of the UN Population Division told *Scientific American* that: "The concentration of population growth in the poorest countries could make it harder for some countries to eradicate poverty, combat hunger and malnutrition, expand service in the area of education and health systems, and improve the provision of basic services and infrastructure." The broader the gap between rich and poor, the greater the risk of diseases and waterborne infections spreading. Poverty and overcrowding lead to lower life expectancy, more teen births and higher infant mortality.

Can Putin come forward with the things poor Africa, impoverished by Europe's gluttonous and rapacious colonialists,

needs to catch up, to avoid the spread of disease, pandemics and to establish vaccination programmes? It would seem that Putin isn't interested. He'd rather send weapons and Russian mercenaries to help raise the death rate even higher. He is aware, of course, that Africa is also home to some of the world's fastest-growing economies, but widespread inequalities make it harder to capitalise on this advantage. To help them to realise their aims, a number of African nations have turned to Russia for help, even if it mostly comes out of the barrel of a gun. Russia has a number of private military contractors, who mainly thrive on instability. The more volatile a region is, the less responsible or peace-loving its leader, the more the wealth flows back to Moscow. The notorious Wagner Group of mercenaries (with which Putin has denied a connection) helped to get rid of Libya's Western-backed UN Government of National Accord, fighting those opposed to President Omar al-Bashir.

In return, generous gold mining licences were issued to a company linked to another Russian oligarch, Yevgeny Prigozhin. Russia has denied the involvement of the Wagner group in Africa's armed conflicts, but when French forces withdrew from Mali in February 2022, crowds appeared in the streets of Bamako bearing the slogan, "Merci Wagner". Russia has also sponsored pro-Russian television channels as well as interfering in elections to ensure Russia's friends are in charge and Putin remains popular.

Believers in African folklore may consider Putin to be a tokoloshe, an evil demon figure or water-sprite that can be called upon by wicked people to cause trouble for their enemies, including illness and death. Tikoloshe – or Tokoloshe – is a Xhosa word, used by Zulu people, and the legendary creature can also ravish women and bite off the toes of sleepers. When he is around, make sure women have the weapons handy with which to defend themselves and also keep their shoes on. The only way to get rid of a Tikoloshe is by resort to a Shaman. The trouble is that Putin is responsible for rather more than mere "night terrors"; his terrors can last for much, much longer.

T. Kingsley Brooks

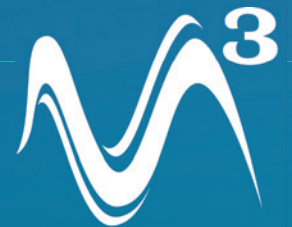


25-26
SEPT
2022

2° EDITION
MONACO SMART
& SUSTAINABLE
MARINA

Design, innovate and
build an ecosystem
that invests
in smart solutions

Organiser:



MONACO MARINA MANAGEMENT

www.sustainablesmartmarina.com

#monacosmartmarina



THE WAGNER GROUP

Power, Profit and Denial

Hardly six days had passed since Vladimir Putin ordered his army into Ukraine that the name of a dreaded group of Russian mercenaries began to circulate again. According to the British daily *The Times*, more than 400 armed members of the Wagner Group were flown in from Africa five weeks previously. Their mission : to assassinate President Zelensky, neutralize the government and prepare the ground for Moscow to take control, in return for a handsome financial bonus. On 26 February, the Ukrainian government learned of the presence of the mercenaries thanks to a note from its secret services. A few hours later, a 36-hour “hard” curfew was declared in order to comb the city for Russian infiltrators and saboteurs. Civilians were warned that they would be seen as Kremlin agents and risked being ‘liquidated’ if they came out into the streets. Opacity, crime, and impunity. This is how the Wagner Group, a private army of mercenaries working on behalf of Russia, could be defined. They are found in countries around the world, where they are employed - officially - as security personnel. Some of their abuses have reached such a degree of violence that the highest international authorities have voiced concern. Especially since journalists who sought to investigate this occult, private army have been murdered.

It is a familiar story. A superpower goes to war and faces a stronger-than-expected insurgency in foreign lands yet has insufficient forces to counter it because of political and military constraints. The superpower decides to hire contractors, some of whom are armed, to support its war effort. The armed contractors prove to be both a blessing and a curse, providing vital security services to the campaign yet at times, killing innocent civilians in their zeal, causing strategic setbacks and damaging the superpower’s legitimacy. Without these contractors, it would be hard for the superpower to wage war, but with them, it is difficult to win.



Russian mercenaries in Syria

It would probably be very useful to clarify at the outset what private military companies (PMCs) and mercenaries are, and the fundamental difference between the two. Mercenaries—from the Latin word *merces* for reward—are individuals who take part in a foreign conflict in exchange for money or any other material gain. Mercenaries are not motivated by parameters such as ethnicity, ideology, religion or political views. The only factor that ties them with the party for which they are fighting is profit.

Mercenary activity has been defined by the UN and is recognised by numerous states as an illegal activity and individuals that fall within this category are prosecuted accordingly under domestic laws. Furthermore, mercenaries are unlawful combatants and thus are not granted prisoner-of-war status if they are captured during a conflict.

Genuine PMCs on the other hand are legal entities providing services that would normally be assigned to the armed forces of a country. PMC work ranges from intelligence analysis and consulting to training on tactics and protection services. There are many instances where PMCs have been actively involved in an armed conflict, acting always on behalf of the legitimate authority of a given state, with rules and terms defined by a mutual contract.

In developed countries, PMCs are a well-established business area, involving tens of thousands of people, and profits often measured in billions of dollars. But in developing countries, PMCs are a phenomenon that go from a "gray" zone, dangerously balancing between service to the state and the status of an illegal armed group. And this is why in many instances, the concept of PMC has been erroneously applied to mercenary groups who fight primarily for profit rather than politics.



The Wagner Group Logo



Wagner Group mercenaries

Be that as it may, the volumes of the world market for PMCs are huge. According to the estimates of the London-based, non-profit organization, War on Want, the market for military consulting services has an annual turnover of \$100 billion to \$400 billion.

PLAUSIBLE DENIABILITY

In Russia, the history of PMCs as we know them today goes back to the 1990s, when the first so-called "Russian volunteers" went to fight on the Serbian side in Yugoslavia.

It is safe to say that the Russians could not go abroad with weapons and combat gear and participate in hostilities without the authorisation of the Russian leadership. Without the participation of Russian intelligence and the Russian government, this would have been quite impossible.

It was under the same scheme that the Kremlin sent mercenaries linked with the intelligence services of the Russian Federation to Transnistria and Nagorno-Karabakh, and later to Chechnya, Crimea, the Donbass region in eastern Ukraine and Syria under the guise of "volunteers inspired by the ideals of protecting Russia's interests".

However, there came a moment when the activities of PMCs in Russia had to be regulated. This would not only legalise the participation of Russians in private military companies, but would also enable the Kremlin to create PMCs legally to achieve its military and political goals outside of Russia.

One of the first attempts to resolve the issue of PMCs and their involvement in Russia's attempts in taking over oil and gas resources overseas was the amendments to the Russian law on arms in 2008, which entitled the

foreign security personnel of giant oil companies such as Transneft, Lukoil and Gazprom to use duty weapons to ensure the security of oil facilities.



A Russian Mi-8 helicopter shot down by Chechen fighters near the Chechen capital, Grozny in 1994

On the eve of the 21st century, Russia was experiencing rather difficult economic and social conditions, and coupled with the general devastation at the turn of the millennium, a civil war began in Chechnya that required significant human resources. This further destabilised Russian society as well as the economy.

It was only after the end of the second Chechen campaign in 2009, when thousands of young men who had volunteered to fight were left out of work, that the idea of organising and supervising PMCs began to take shape within the military establishment. But despite numerous attempts to regulate this tool, the official status of PMCs in Russia remains unsettled at the legislative level.

One of the most talked about and yet most shadowy Russian mercenary units is of course, the private military company known as the Wagner Group.

The Wagner Group – which does not exist on paper – got its name from its purported founder and commander, the elusive Dmitry Utkin who chose “Wagner” as his nom-de-guerre in honour of Adolf Hitler’s favourite composer. His men have told reporters that they have seen him on the Ukrainian front and in Syria proudly wearing Wehrmacht military caps and helmets on a number of occasions. Dimitry Utkin was born in June 1970. He was a lieutenant colonel and brigade commander of a Special Forces unit of the Russian Military Intelligence or GRU until 2013. After retiring, he became the commander of a unit of mercenaries fighting in Syria that lost a battle with Al-Qaeda-linked militants. The Syrian mission ended up in shambles, with

control, with its military intelligence or GRU apparatus.

The Wagner Group is a closed paramilitary structure with a training camp located in the village of Molmino, near Krasnodar in southern Russia. It is situated at a facility belonging to the 10th Special Mission Brigade of the GRU Special Operations Forces. It is highly unusual for any private company to share a base with an elite military unit, and it is particularly odd that GRU personnel guard the road leading to the barracks of a PMC. The fact that Molmino base operates the way it does implies that relations between the two organisations are indeed cordial. After all, Wagner isn’t just a private security company that protects the



A satellite picture showing a precise hit of U.S. Air Force on the Syrian military and units of the Russian PMC Wagner near Deir ez Zor

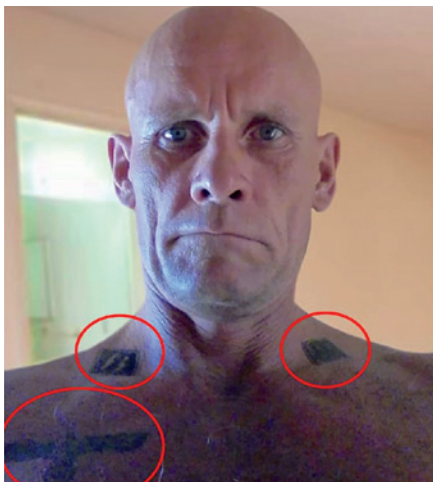
columns of Russian tanks advancing towards the Conoco gas plant. Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), supported by the United States were in charge of protecting the gas facility. Among the killed were hundreds of Russian mercenaries belonging to the Wagner Group.

The Russian government naturally made great efforts to downplay and even ignore this incident. Subsequently, while the most fanciful figures were advanced from all sides, Moscow admitted that “several dozen nationals of Russia and the Commonwealth of Independent States [former Soviet republics] had been killed or injured in American strikes that occurred on February 7 at the Syrian town of Deir el-Zor”. This statement from the Russian Foreign Ministry on February 20 added that the Russian citizens had traveled to Syria “of their own free will and for various purposes”, and were not part of the Russian military force deployed in the country.

Despite a salary of 4,000 euros per month, Wagner combatants feel that they have been used as cannon fodder rather than as elite troops. They are indignant, above all, that Russian law treats them as criminals and threatens them with eight years in prison while they work for the interests of the motherland, and that the Ministry of Defence, they claim, secretly protects them.

YEVGENY PRIGOZHIN: THE BOSS

Yevgeny Prigozhin, the 60 year-old man with the shaven head and wary look on his face, can be described as the Renaissance man of deniable Russian black operations. His knack for profit led him on an unconventional path into Vladimir Putin’s confidence. After serving nine



Dmitry Utkin with Nazi tattoos



Russia’s FSB arresting many of the returning mercenaries and charging them with “unlawful warfare abroad”. This is the requisite crime for mercenary work which is officially illegal in Russia.

By early 2014, however, many of the people who were involved with the mercenaries who fought in Syria were back in demand. As Russia needed quick – and deniable – military presence in Crimea, the concept of a private, legally unincorporated shadow army employing skilled soldiers with prior combat experience appeared to be the perfect solution.

While Dmitry Utkin has been widely presented as the front man of the Wagner Group, there is ample data suggesting that his role was more that of a field commander, and that the mercenaries are integrated in an overall chain of command under central Kremlin

Kremlin’s interests...it is an essential and deniable component of Russia’s warfare strategy.

At the end of their training course, the mercenaries are given weapons, maps and any other tool needed for the task at hand. But they will not ask any questions...they will already have made a signed statement to that effect.

These private soldiers are hired to go into combat and whoever is sending them can, and will deny knowledge or responsibility for the events on the ground, however catastrophic.

This fact was demonstrated in spectacular fashion following what was the most serious confrontation between the United States and Russia since the Vietnam war. In February 2018, a US airstrike in the Deir el-Zor area of eastern Syria targeted groups of pro-Syrian regime fighters, as well as



© Nrf

Yevgeny Prigozhin

years in prison for robbery, fraud and forcing minors into prostitution, he began his legitimate business career in the 1990s by opening a hot dog stand.

As the Soviet Union folded and Russia's private sector burgeoned, he invested in St. Petersburg's first grocery chain and eventually opened a luxury – by Russian standards - floating restaurant where he first personally served Vladimir Putin. The Russian president subsequently named him the official caterer of the Kremlin, thus earning him the nickname “Putin's chef”. But he is much more than someone's cook ; he is an extremely wealthy man.

His official business is a sprawling catering consortium that provides meals to millions of Russian soldiers, policemen, prosecutors, hospital patients and schoolchildren in return for hefty tax-funded payments estimated at \$3 billion at least, since 2011.

In 2019, a London-based Russian media outlet, The Bell, which is highly regarded for its serious journalistic work, called senior Defense Ministry and FSB officials in Moscow to testify, without revealing their names.

They claimed that it was Russian army generals who, in 2012, came up with the idea of creating a private army, "that could be employed to solve problems by force, if necessary". According to the same officials, it was these newly-

recruited soldiers who proposed that the businessman who became wealthy by feeding millions of Russian soldiers should be the one to finance and manage this shadow army. After all, equipping and feeding a private army is very expensive. The Russian media outlet RosBiznesConsulting (RBC) estimated the cost of Wagner's campaign in Syria at \$100 million. Initially, Prigozhin did not want to take on this dangerous responsibility. But in the end, he reportedly relented so as to save his lucrative business with the state.

Prigozhin's operations fit the profile of an authoritarian state's shadow security apparatus : industrial-scale manufacturing of fake-news, intimidating journalists, election interference, political engineering, and actual clandestine military operations. He funds the Internet Research Agency ‘Troll Farm’ and was famously indicted in the US for trying to influence the 2016 elections in favour of Donald Trump, a charge he flatly denies to this day.

His troll-factory generated one of the largest known online disinformation campaigns by churning out 71,000 tweets aimed at presenting Russia's version of events in the downing of Malaysian Airlines flight MH17.

The same troll infrastructure posted thousands of messages promoting Brexit.

Now, a long-running investigation by independent journalists has uncovered that Yevgeny Prigozhin's disinformation, political interference and military operations are tightly integrated with Russia's Defence Ministry and its intelligence arm, the GRU.

Prigozhin's private infrastructure, along with that of other government-dependent entrepreneurs, serves as a deniable veneer and a round-tripping money laundering channel for government-mandated overseas operations.

Stephen Blank, a Russia expert at the Philadelphia-based think tank, Foreign Policy Research Institute sums it up thus : *“The phenomenon of private entrepreneurs – who in reality are not private - in Russian policy goes back to the Tsars, who used people. This gave them plausible deniability and also relieved the stress on the state budget ; they don't have to pay for it...the private entrepreneur pays for it. But this has become ubiquitous under Putin”.*



A cemetery in Moscow where some soldiers from the Wagner group are buried

Wagner's deep connections with Russia's top political leaders distinguish the company from its contemporaries. The contractors' appearance in geopolitical hotspots illuminates close coordination between Prigozhin's commercial aspirations and the Kremlin's pursuit of national interest.

Prigozhin profits by providing services in the countries where Russia is expanding its engagement, while the state maintains plausible deniability by utilizing Prigozhin's private structures. In the process, Prigozhin accumulates prestige and political capital, paving the way for future lucrative contracts.

Professor Kimberly Marten is Chair of the Political Science Department at Columbia University in New York : *“Whether Putin is in power or whether someone else replaces him in the future, the Russian system itself makes these moves unpredictable. That's because decisions in Russia are made by informal networks of people who are connected to each other, maybe because of past employment history, maybe because they grew up in similar towns, but all the decisions are made by these very opaque, hard to figure out networks”.*

At the same time, Prigozhin's attempts to take initiative and leverage his crucial role for personal gain has also resulted in embarrassment for the Kremlin.

First, there was the failed operation to capture oil-wells from the Syrian Defence Forces and the U.S. military in the province of Deir ez-Zor in February 2018.

Wagner mercenaries suffered heavy casualties in a U.S. counter-attack that left the Kremlin scrambling for an appropriate reaction which never came.

And then, on another occasion, Wagner mercenaries posted self-incriminating videos onto semi-





Prigozhin and Vladimir Putin

public online groups, such as a gruesome chronicle of the torture, murder and beheading of a Syrian civilian near the town of Palmyra.

Mohamed Taha Ismail, a 31-year-old Syrian in socks and navy tracksuit, groans in pain, lying on the cement floor of a dilapidated factory. Laughing, a young blond man with sunglasses breaks his hands with a sledgehammer.

Later, another man in a striped tank top separates his head from his dead body with a knife, then proceeds to cut off an arm with a shovel.

"Harder! Break the vertebrae!" shouts another armed man.



Russian Wagner Group mercenaries torturing Syrian conscript Mohammed Taha Ismail al-Abdullah in 2017

These are the torturers; four armed, young Russians in military fatigues, who film the scene with music blaring. Finally, they hang the decapitated man by the legs to a post, then set him on fire while joking about a "barbecue skewer".

In November 2019, former St. Petersburg police officer Denis Korotkov, now a reporter for the Russian opposition newspaper Novaya Gazeta discovered these images. He set about trying to solve the mystery of this anonymous

video that had been circulating on the web since 2017.

In one image, one of the men appeared without a head covering. That's all Korotkov needed to identify him on a social network with facial recognition software. His name is Stanislav Dychko. The journalist looked for the name in a confidential document he had recovered, which listed Russians who fought in the Wagner Group. Dychko was well and truly on the list.

Yet astonishingly, the Wagner Group, like all mercenaries are illegal in Russia.

But that has proved to be a useful lever because it means that the people who are serving in the Wagner Group have a very strong incentive not to break their word of honour in terms of being disloyal to Prigozhin or to the Russian military.

Basically the entire Russian system runs in grey zones. And it works, because then the people who are in charge can make sure that their friends are the ones making a profit and are not arrested for whatever it is that they're doing.

Stephen Blank also has this to say about the system : *"Other businessmen presumably are involved in one way or another in financing these kinds of what you might call gray area phenomena or under-the-radar military operations. But they are military operations; they are part of a broader, national security strategy to upend the West, unhinge Western societies and advance Russian national interests. At the same time, there are thousands of men involved in various paramilitary groups. And they are outside the regular chain of command: they belong to Putin, as does the State ! This is a complex phenomenon which is part of the larger Russian national security strategy of non-linear, fifth generation, hybrid, whatever you want to call it war".*



Wagner Group mercenaries

The Wagner Group's tentacles stretch from conflict zones in Ukraine and Syria to guarding mines in the Central African Republic and other countries. The Kremlin, the Russian military and oligarchs are all involved, though it's hard to pin any of the group's actions on the Russian leadership.

But in December 2016, the Kremlin's deniability of any formal links to the Wagner Group famously came undone after Utkin was spotted during a video broadcast from a reception at the Kremlin.

After initially denying any knowledge of Utkin's existence, Putin's press secretary Dmitry Peskov ultimately acknowledged he had attended the Heroes of the Fatherland gala event at the Kremlin. Subsequently, a photograph was published in which Putin is seen standing next to four, heavily and apparently recently decorated Wagner officers at a Kremlin function.

AFRICA AT THE MERCY OF WAGNER

Since 2014, the Wagner Group's actions, first in Ukraine and then in Syria provided the force with extensive war experience outside Russia's borders. It was now time to shift its attention elsewhere. There is hardly any doubt that Africa is Russia's new-found love.

As Moscow attempts to regain influence that the Soviet Union once had in parts of the Global South, Russia views Africa as a "low-cost, high-profile" opportunities" continent. In various African countries, Moscow is helping Russia-friendly governments strengthen their armed forces while also providing election strategies. The Kremlin is focused on backing African regimes that may face

internal threats, or are somewhat isolated internationally, ultimately referring to this as the “Syria model”.

Stephen Blank of the Foreign Policy Research Institute think tank has studied the phenomenon closely: *“In the Middle East today, the presence of the Russians and their success has not only emboldened Russia to go into Africa, it has enabled them to find enablers like the UAE which makes no bones about it. They are helping them to get into Africa and use the UAE for purposes of getting access to mineral resources or energy contracts or creating long-term, lasting political influence or creating a basis for Russian arms sales to African countries, which is a big deal and of growing importance”.*

As the Kremlin sees it, Russia must build on this history and existing Russian-African networks established in the Cold War era to position Moscow as a capital for African governments to turn to for deeper relations.

Libya’s conflict is one example of the Russian military company playing, what some experts understand to be, a game-changing role.

Beginning in 2019, the Wagner Group, through Yevgeni Prigozhin has been providing a major boost to General Khalifa Haftar’s self-styled Libyan National Army (LNA) amid the commander’s campaign to topple the UN-recognised Government of National Accord, and take over Tripoli.

In November 2018, General Haftar met high-level Russian defence officials in Moscow. In videos and photographs of the event, Prigozhin is seen participating in the meeting. Informed Russian military and diplomatic sources have since confirmed that it was Prigozhin himself who had made the arrangements for this top-level meeting at the Russian Defence Ministry.



© Vorpost/Archive

This recently unveiled statue in Bangui, Central African Republic, features two Russian mercenaries in front, with CAR soldiers behind them to the left and right



© NTF
Russia has delivered four MI-17 attack helicopters to the Malian air force

Only months later, reports came in of Wagner mercenaries supporting the LNA, whose leader the Kremlin has quietly but steadily backed.

Russia has displayed interest in Libyan energy resources, including a 2017 oil offtake deal, and it will probably pursue further investment as opportunities for Libyan conflict resolution emerge.

The Wagner Group, its CEO, Yevgeny Progozhin and its founder, Dimitri Utkin have all been under European sanctions since December 2021. But this has not prevented them from signing contracts in the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of Congo, Rwanda, Angola, Zimbabwe, Lesotho, E-Swatini, Botswana, Madagascar, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau and more recently in Mali, although this has not yet been confirmed by the transitional military authorities in that country.

Even if this fact seems to have been denied by what President Vladimir Putin has said, he was careful not to mention any link with the Russian private military company.

However, the Russian president did implicitly confirm that Russia has a strong military presence on the African continent. There are now about forty military assistance agreements that have been signed with African countries, including the one signed in June 2019 with Mali, to which Vladimir Putin was referring.

It was under this agreement that Russia delivered four MI-17 attack helicopters, weapon and ammunition to Mali in September 2021. The scale of bilateral cooperation between Moscow and Bamako is, moreover quite well known and quantifiable. According to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI) this aid had reached the sum of \$23 million in 2020.

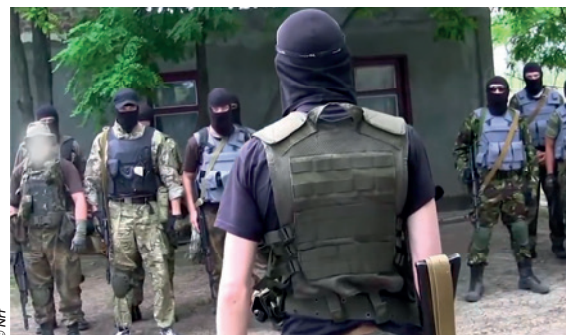
STRANGLEHOLD ON THE CENTRAL AFRICAN REPUBLIC

Fighting between rebel groups in the Central African Republic (CAR) began in 2013 when former president François Bozizé was overthrown by mainly Muslim rebels.

France, the former colonial power intervened militarily under a UN mandate and shortly after that, a UN peacekeeping mission was set up to stop the fighting, before it turned into a genocide.

But French forces eventually retreated from this part of the continent as the US also reduced troop levels.

But there came the concern of Russia and China stepping in to threaten US interests on the African continent.



© NTF
Wagner Group mercenaries in Central Africa

John Bolton who was National Security Advisor under President Trump had sensed the danger in 2019: *“Great power competitors, namely Russia and China are rapidly expanding their financial and political influence across Africa. Across the continent, Russia dances its economic and political relationships with little regard to the rule of law or accountable and transparent governance. It continues to sell arms and energy in exchange for votes at the United Nations, votes that keep strong men in power, undermine peace and security and run counter to the best interests of African people”.*

Russian involvement in the Central African Republic (CAR) also links political support with economic gain. In fact, Russia outthrustled France to obtain an exception to the United Nations arms embargo on the CAR in 2018. Wagner contractors entered the country around the same time

In unstable, conflict-ridden countries with historically weak or failed states such as the CAR, where Moscow and Paris compete to be Bangui’s top partner,



President Faustin Archange Touadera of the Central African Republic and Vladimir Putin of Russia

the Wagner Group's activities aimed at establishing new security environments on the ground have been pivotal to Russian strategies aimed at countering competitors on the international stage.

Hundreds of Russian fighters, referred to as army reservists, have been training government soldiers in preparation for deployment along the borders. And there is no shortage of weapons here; enough to prepare young recruits, many of them former members of rival militia groups. But now, under Russian command, they serve under the same flag.

The Russian trainers, members of the Wagner Group are all masked; they clearly don't want to reveal their identities as they are also providing security for President Faustin-Archange Touadera.

While Russia hopes to appear as a source of regional stability, this aid of course, does not come for free. The CAR has abundant reserves of diamonds, oil, gold, and uranium, and the Russian Foreign Ministry has discussed mining concessions with President Touadera who sees these as a form of payment to Wagner.

A CUT-THROAT BUSINESS

When Prigozhin goes in and provides consulting services, either personal protection services to a dictator or election support services or mercenaries



From left to right : Alexander Rastorguyev , Kirill Radchenko, Orkhan Dzhemal

who can be helpful in guarding certain strategic assets in a given country, he paves the way for other Russian corporations to do business in those countries.

Although Russia has ingratiated itself with Touadera, it has also met with CAR's rebel groups, playing the field to obtain access to resource-rich territory.

Lobaye Invest, a St. Petersburg company closely associated with Yevgeny Prigozhin has already initiated diamond extraction, and Wagner contractors again appear to be guarding the mines. The dividends inherent in Prigozhin's role in Russian geopolitics are paying off, and Wagner provides the muscle to defend them.

This fact was sadly demonstrated when three Russian journalists investigating Wagner's presence in the CAR were murdered in the summer of 2018.

The slain journalists, Kiril Radchenko, Alexander Rastorguyev and Orkhan Dzhemal were tracking Wagner, but on the date of their deaths, they intended to film the Ndassima gold mines, which Prigozhin planned to exploit.

The trio were shot dead after the vehicle in which they were traveling was attacked on a remote road.

The official explanation of their death was that they were victims of rebels or bandits. But that story never quite added up. Nothing of value was raked from the vehicle and their driver survived, unscathed.

In fact, phone records later showed the journalists' driver frequently contacted a CAR police officer with close ties to Wagner, including phone calls on the day of the murder.

The journalists were in the Central African Republic on a trip sponsored by the Centre for Investigation, a now-closed online news organisation funded by exiled Russian businessman, philanthropist and fierce Putin critic, Mikhail Khodorkovsky.

However, given the sensitive nature of the subject of the journalists' investigations, their deaths raised more questions than answers.

Two years after the events, much work had been done to try to shed light on the circumstances of these murders. The Dossier Center which tracks the criminal activity of people associated with the Kremlin and also founded by Khodorkovsky, conducted an in-depth

investigation. Mikhail Khodorkovsky resumed the facts thus: "Today, we can say with full confidence that the slain Russian journalists were working in the Central African Republic under the surveillance of people related to the local authorities, as well as of people related to the Russian citizens who work for the CAR's government.

The extent to which these people played a part in this tragedy remains to be determined.

We know how to determine this. Unfortunately, the official investigation is not following this path, but we are following it.

Today, we can firmly say that involvement took place, it was serious involvement, and we can prove it".

The history of the Central African Republic as well as that of countless other African nations has been marked by deep-rooted poverty, ethnic tensions and pervasive political instability for a long time.

More recently, UN experts have reported on "serious human rights violations" committed by Russian security companies in collusion with local police and the military.

This highlights the atrocities, war crimes and human rights abuses perpetrated by Wagner and other Russian operatives whose methods of fighting against the opposition correlate with those used by the FSB in Russia, including arbitrary detentions and forced disappearances.



Mikhail Khodorkovsky

But contrary to Russia and Syria, the Central African Republic is a State Party to the International Criminal Court and ratified the Rome Statute in 2001. Therefore, the Court has full jurisdiction over crimes committed by all foreign powers including Russian PMCs, rebel factions as well as all government forces in that country.



© Wikimedia

Wagner group mercenaries providing security for the convoy of the president of the Central African Republic, Faustin Archange Touadera

Mahamat Said Abdel Kani, a 50 year-old commander of the Muslim-dominated rebel coalition Séléka, responsible for widespread violence in the country in 2013, was handed over by authorities in Bangui to the custody of the International Criminal Court (ICC) in 2021. Two other suspects in the violence in the CAR are currently on trial at the ICC.

A CULTURE OF IMPUNITY

More than three decades after the Berlin Wall fell, Russia's influence in Africa is far less than what the Soviet Union exercised in the post-Stalin period. Yet Moscow has fully realised how it can capitalise on the history and legacies of Soviet-African relations in the present era through the political, educational, and economic links that outlived the Soviet Union's existence.

This parallels Putin's foreign policy strategies in other regions too, such as the Middle East and Latin America, where Russia has capitalised on its Soviet past to grow its power as it rivals other governments for geopolitical clout.

It took Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov two tries to deny it. "Of course not," he finally said with some embarrassment, during his televised appearance on the Russian TV channel Rossiya 1, in January 2019, while trying



© Kremlin.ru

President of Venezuela, Nicolás Maduro with Vladimir Putin

to refute the idea of the arrival of 400 Russian mercenaries in Venezuela. A Reuters report had earlier located them in Caracas where they have been assigned to protect President Nicolás Maduro. But the mercenaries hastily dispatched to Venezuela will have quite a delicate task this time; to put their hands - on behalf of Moscow - on the billions of dollars of contracts signed by Nicolás Maduro that include \$5.5 billion in mining deals with companies such as Canada's Barrick Gold Corp and China's Shandong Gold.

Through Wagner, Russia offers military support or political stabilization in return for political influence, opportunities for geostrategic expansion, or resource concessions.

Wagner can be considered a private military company only to the extent that it feeds the wealth of a private individual, but the reality of its integration into Russian command structures renders it an entirely different animal.

The European Union is a powerful political entity and it can also take action by applying more pressure on the African Union, the World Bank and various other international institutions to help create a culture of accountability. However, the impact of corruption must never be underestimated.

Roughly 43 per cent of Africans are living in poverty while according to some estimates, US\$50 billion worth of stolen assets flow out of Africa every year.

It's when desperate African dictators begin to give away their countries' resources to Russia in exchange for military and political support that individuals such as Prigozhin and companies such as Wagner promptly appear on the scene.

Prigozhin has not just been cooking and dishing out food to the Kremlin and the Russian military. He has in fact been serving Putin with Africa. He has received no gleaming military awards or monuments, but by deploying Wagner across three continents, Putin has thanked him by facilitating the global extension of his commercial reach.

As long as embattled and inept leaders of politically unstable countries agree to work with Putin and offer sources of profit to Prigozhin, this model of fusing geopolitical pursuits and private enterprise will endure.

According to the United Nations working group on the use of mercenaries, the nature of contemporary conflicts and the involvement private military companies have undermined the implementation of existing norms. These include the African Union (AU) Convention for the Elimination of Mercenarism and the UN International Convention against the Recruitment, Use, Financing and Training of Mercenaries. The latter has not been signed nor ratified by any of the five permanent UN Security Council members.



© Edm

Clearly, the private military company market shows no signs of slowing down. While mercenaries are not a new feature on the world stage, the increasing role they are playing in blurring lines and wreaking havoc might be.

In the weeks leading up to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is believed by military experts that mercenaries from the Wagner group carried out false flag operations in eastern Ukraine to give Russia a pretext to attack.

Today, messages have appeared on Russian social networks recruiting mercenaries by inviting them to "a picnic in Ukraine." However, these mercenary groups have been using other names, such as "The Falcons".

In the end, without a greater willingness from global leaders to engage on the subject, not only might the practice of using mercenaries not improve, but it might even get worse.

Hossein Sadre



© Sereu

Ukrainian wheat fields on fire

WHAT ABOUT FOOD?

Possible consequences of the war in Ukraine

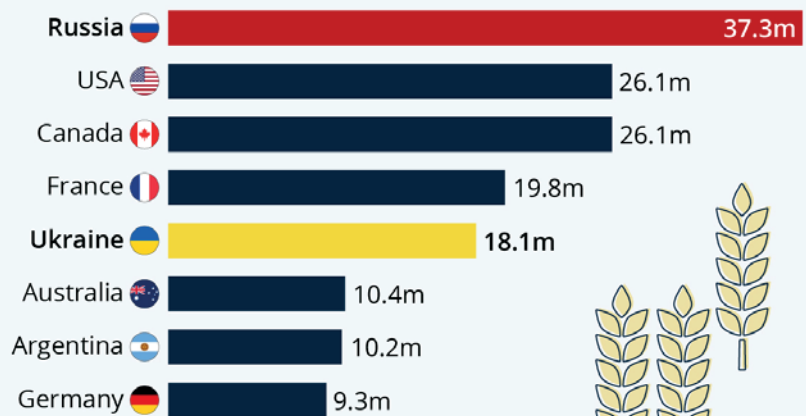
On February 24, 2022 following the Russian invasion of Ukraine, millions of people were forced to flee the country or to relocate to other cities and towns. Since then, roads have been bombed, cities destroyed, and people left isolated with no food or water. In this grim situation, it is impossible to imagine that things can go on as usual in any aspect of everyday life. The people of Ukraine cannot go about their lives normally and life in general has to suffer. The economy too. The rapid economic decline will most likely be felt far beyond Ukraine's borders. The consequences of this terrible war in the middle of Europe will spread all around and beyond the continent, threatening millions with hunger.

Because of Ukraine's important status on the agricultural global market, the present situation may severely affect the welfare of millions, even for years to come. Decisions must be taken now and fast, in order to avoid a greater disaster.

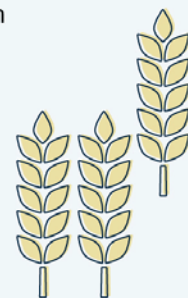
In recent years Ukraine has produced around 10% of all wheat exports and 50% of the sunflower oil exports. That is why the Russian invasion of this

Ukraine Crisis Likely to Push Up Wheat Prices

The world's largest wheat exporters in 2020 (total exports in tonnes)*



* HS Code 1001: wheat and meslin
Source: UN Comtrade Database





© Yang Wenbin/Xinhua

A farmer reaps wheat in a field in Wushi village, Sinan county, Guizhou province, China

country is seen as a major concern not only from a political, military and humanitarian point of view, but also from an agricultural perspective, as it is most likely that it will affect and impact the stability of the global food system.

Wheat is a widely cultivated crop, especially in temperate climates, with a short growing season. Its grains are used to make bread, an essential food all over the world. It is believed that cultivating wheat started in Turkey, about 10,000 years ago. This plant was cultivated for its seeds, from which people started making bread and other foods. Syria, Iraq and later Greece, Cyprus and Egypt became important producers. Egypt is credited to be the first large scale grain producer. Later on, wheat cultivation spread to Europe, China and the Americas. What was originally a 'high-status' food, became gradually a mass consumption good. Over times, the cropping techniques improved significantly and the results became increasingly satisfying. Crop rotation, the use of fertilizers and mechanization made it one of the most cultivated food crops on earth. In order to be used by humans, wheat needs processing. The harvested seeds are turned mostly into flour (three quarters of all crops) and other products, like malt, starch or dextrose. A large variety of present day foods come from wheat: bread, crackers, biscuits, noodles and pasta, muesli, semolina, beer, vodka or breakfast cereals. Wheat is a major source of carbohydrates, with also about 13% proteins and lots of dietary fibers, B vitamins and minerals. Wheat is also an important energy source: 100 grams of wheat provide 324 calories. However, gluten, one of the proteins in wheat, may cause gluten intolerance and problems for people having the Celiac disease.

As one of the most cultivated grains in the world today, wheat has a strategic importance. The global wheat trade is higher than other crops put together. Russia and Ukraine make about 30% of the global wheat trade. While a strict embargo on Russian imports was imposed in many countries as a response to its military actions, one of the top suppliers is out of the stage. So we will now see the consequences. "The price of these sanctions is not just imposed upon Russia. It's imposed upon an awful lot of countries as well, including European countries. Both Russia and Ukraine have been the bread basket of Europe in terms of wheat, for example" said US president Biden on March 24, 2022.

Globally, China is the world's largest wheat producer, with 134,254,710 tons per year. It plays an important role in shaping the grain market dynamics and prices. Russia ranks 3rd, after China and India, with 85,896,326 tons of wheat (Source: Worldpopulationreview.com). These first three producers combined count for 41% of the world's total wheat production. The European Union would rank 2nd on the list, if it were counted as a single market. FAO (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) estimates that Russia is the top wheat exporter, as China and India consume most of their huge production domestically.

In 2020, Ukraine was number 8 on the list, with almost 10% of the market. The majority of its crops are planted in the south-central regions of the country. Ukraine cultivates mostly a type of wheat used for bread making. Over the last few years, Ukraine has increased its production and exports with almost 40%. But considering the current war situation in the country, much of Ukraine's crops have probably been compromised for at least one season. Its

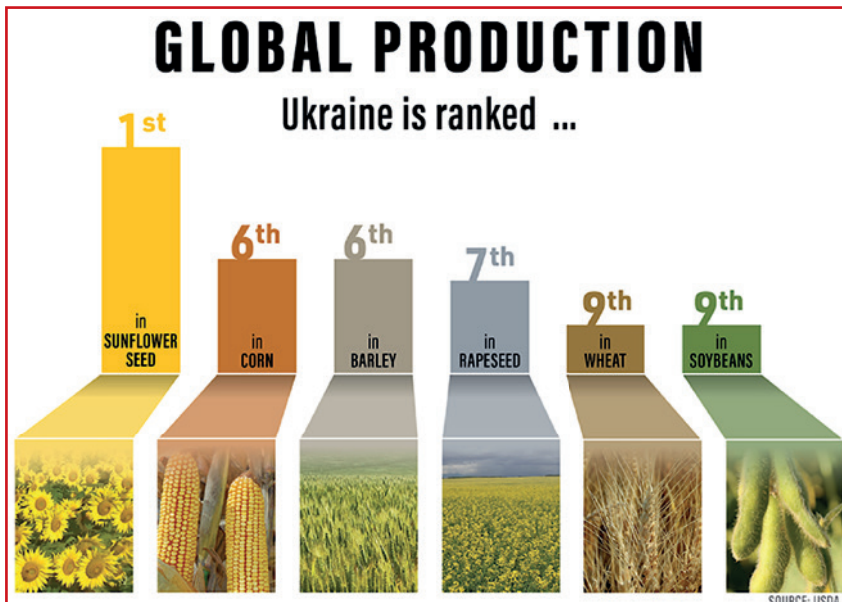
minister of agriculture officially declared that the country has reduced its grain exports to a tenth compared to March 2021. It is also a problem of logistics. Even if the crops were to be harvested with a largely destroyed transport infrastructure, the country will find it terribly difficult, if not impossible, to fulfill its international contracts and agreements. With fuel and fertilizers (which were mostly imported from Russia, as a major producer) in very short supply these days, the Ukrainian farmers who haven't fled the country or gone to war, will find it difficult to continue 'life as usual' and harvest and cultivate crops as in peaceful times. The food chains are also most likely broken.



© Wikicommons

Port of Odessa

Before the war, Ukraine delivered 98% of its grain via the Black Sea. Odessa is Ukraine's biggest port on the Black Sea, and the main gate to Ukrainian foreign trade but it has been completely blocked by Russian warships since early March and has also been bombed for the last few weeks. So, the majority of the commercial ships which were normally to dock there are now heading to Constanta, the largest Romanian port in the region which is already overcrowded. Another option for transporting grains from Ukraine could be by train. With a rail system of around 22,300 km, rail freight might be an option as Ukraine attracted high volumes of goods transiting the country on the 'New Silk Road' from Asia to Europe in recent years. In January 2020, during a speech, China's president Xi Jinping expressed the importance of the Chinese-Ukrainian strategic relationship in this regard. But as war broke out in late February, these transit routes were no longer possible and everyone had to seek alternative routes in order to avoid the devastated country. The Ukrainian



Railways, controlled by the government, entered an emergency mode. The new alternative transport routes for Asia to Europe go through the Black Sea, linking the Georgian port of Poti to Constanta in Romania, from where goods could continue by road to Europe or by ship to other destinations.

Kyiv authorities recently discussed with Romania the possibility of delivering agricultural products to the port of Constanta via the Danube ports, although the whole process is a complex and expensive one. According to the consulting firm APK-Inform, 'the cost of delivering grain from Ukraine to the port of Constanta would be 120-150 Euros per ton. By comparison, before the war, traders paid between 20 and 40 US dollars per ton, to transport grains to Ukrainian ports on the Black Sea.'

The road and train alternatives are not as easy as they seem. Only these days, more than 24,000 wagons of Ukrainian export goods are stranded on the border with Poland due to insufficient number of vehicles and gauge differences between the railways of the two countries. Reuters Press agency noted that about 1,100 grain-loaded train cars were stranded in western Ukraine, near the main rail transit point on the border with Poland, from where they could continue to Gdansk, the Polish port. These difficulties are exacerbated by logistical problems, such as the gauge difference between the railways in Ukraine, a legacy of the former USSR, and those in neighboring countries, such as Poland and Romania. Because the gauge of railways in Ukraine is about 1.5 meters, 10 centimeters larger than in Europe, railway staff has to lift

each wagon and replace the chassis with a suitable one for the railways in the west. An alternative could be to empty the grains from the Ukrainian wagons and put them into new ones, but this procedure could take up to 30 minutes for each wagon. The Ukrainian railway company is working to increase capacity so that within three months, up to 1,100 grain wagons will cross the border into Poland, Romania, Hungary and Slovakia on a daily basis, assured a Ukrainian official. However, the delays, waiting times and costs will probably still be high. Many are pessimistic about the evolution of the situation. They say that even if the country manages to rapidly increase its exports of agricultural products by railway via Danube canals and through the ports of neighboring countries, it would still be only 10-15% of the needed capacity.

In Europe, France (30 million tons), Germany (22 million tons), Poland (12 million tons), Spain (8 million tons) and Romania (7 million tons) are the largest wheat producers, and the European



© NTF
Grain exports at a standstill at Odessa's port due to the conflict

Union hopes that they will be able to compensate, at least partly, the lack of supply from Ukraine.

But one of the major shockwaves on the wheat market will be felt not in Europe, but in Africa! The continent has a very high wheat consumption level and very little cultivated areas, certainly not enough. Egypt is the main wheat producer in Africa, with 9 million tons in 2020, but it is also the largest wheat importer in the world, with around 13 million tons each year. Egypt spends around 4 billion US dollars on wheat imports each year, to feed its 100 million citizens. Morocco produces around 2.6 million tons per year, but these production values are far too little to cover the African needs. Africa imports most of its wheat, vital for survival in many areas, from Russia, France and Ukraine. Wheat imports accounted for almost 1.5 billion US dollars in 2020. Russian and Ukrainian imports cover up to 30% of all African wheat consumption (Source: Statista.com). As prices of wheat are going up, many poor countries cannot simply afford to supply the much needed grains. And this might lead to social unrest and higher migration numbers from these areas to Europe. There is always a close link between soaring food prices and political instability in such areas, as it has already been proven before.

Oil prices are up, so food prices will also go up. Wheat prices have already risen to their highest level since 2008, 20% higher than normal. It is now vital that crops in 2022 will be at least above average, in order to try to compensate the vacuum on the market. The record wheat price was registered on March 7., 2022 but optimistic forecasts of high production levels in North-America and Asia slightly lowered the grain quotations.

Sunflower seeds are another crop which is expected to be affected this year, because of war. Russia and Ukraine have been traditionally the world's top producers for years. In 2019, the total global production was around 56 million tons, with Ukraine and Russia counting for approximately 55% of it. In 2021, Ukraine, the 'sun flower country', was the top global producer, with 17.5 million tons alone. (Source: Statista.com). Argentina, with 3.4 million tons, Romania (which is the leading producer within the European Union), with 3.3 million tons, and China are also big players on this market, but the difference



Destroyed Russian Tank in a grain field in Ukraine

in numbers, as you can easily see, is huge. Ukraine was also the largest sunflower oil exporter. In 2019 they exported oil for around 3.8 billion US dollars worth. Over the last ten years, Ukraine's production doubled. Its main advantage, as compared for example to its neighbor, Romania, is that Ukraine processes almost all the raw sunflower seeds domestically and sells the oil afterwards. Worldwide, sunflower oil is largely used as cooking oil because it has a higher burning point than other kinds of oils. It has been proven that it may lower the risk of heart disease; it lowers the 'bad' cholesterol LDL and raises the good one, HDL. Sunflower oil is possibly not as tasty as olive oil, but it is cheaper. Used daily in many homes, it is almost as essential as wheat. The fear of potential sunflower oil shortages spread quickly in March, after war broke out in Ukraine.

India is the top sunflower oil importer, getting it mostly from Ukraine. European Union also imports significant quantities from outside the Union and the recent events have caused a significant increase in sunflower oil prices, and ultimately led to an 'oil rush' in stores across Europe, similar to the previous ones, related to flour, yeast or even toilet paper during the



Bread is distributed by workers from the United Nations Refugee Agency at a humanitarian aid distribution point in Avdiivka, Ukraine

pandemic. Images on news programs of people buying large quantities or empty shelves in stores became commonplace. Prices went up and are sadly expected to further rise sharply, as the supply is small and the war in Ukraine doesn't seem to be coming to an end soon. Ukrainian farmers must quickly look for reliable alternatives to transport their production, or what's left of it, once it's harvested.

As a response to all the economic sanctions imposed by the West, Russia recently announced new export top quotas of 1.5 million tons on sunflower oil, starting April 15, and banned all seed shipments. The restrictions, announced by the Russian Ministry of Agriculture will be in place at least until the end of August 2022. Russia also imposed a 700,000 tons export quota on sunflower meal (a product obtained from crushing the sunflower seeds). On March 14, Russia announced the first restrictions on grain exports, with its declared purpose to avoid domestic shortages in supplies.

As a forced reaction to the current situation and fears, many food producers declared that they will turn to using palm oil as a replacement, although this is sometimes considered not as healthy, and its production process not eco-friendly.

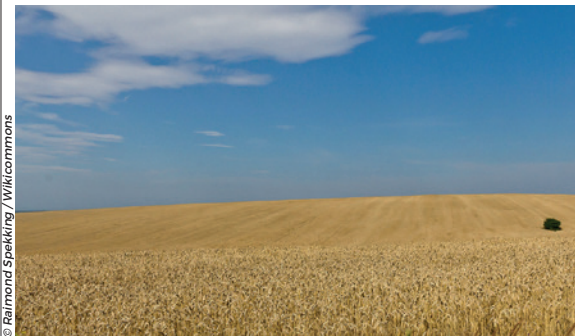
The turmoil on agricultural markets these days causes uncertainty and serious concerns in many political and economic circles. The food supply shortages may cause big troubles, especially in poor countries, with little or no essential crop production. World Food Program (WFP, a 2020 Nobel Peace Prize winner and the world's largest humanitarian organization) estimates that "in 8 out of 10 of the worst hunger crises, conflict is one of the main drivers". They also signaled that "the Black Sea basin is one of the world's most important areas for grain and agricultural production, and the food security impact of the conflict will likely be felt beyond Ukraine's borders".

"We get 50 percent of our grains out of the Ukraine-Russia area; it's going to have a dramatic impact on food costs, shipping costs, oil and fuel. This is a catastrophe on top of a catastrophe", said WFP Executive Director David Beasley in a social media video, posted from Yemen. (www.wfp.org)

But how can we fight or alleviate the current situation?

Besides the obvious, immediate need to stop the war in the region and help Ukraine rebuild the country, the world should concentrate on maximizing other existing agricultural areas. Boosting the existing crops and redirecting them with priority to where they are most urgently needed should be on the top of the list of decision makers worldwide.

Environmental activists warn that exploitations of new areas through further, disastrous deforestation should be avoided. They advise that using bio-energy instead of Russian gas, redirecting the bio fuel crops to human consumption for a short period and reducing the great amount of food waste are viable, efficient and quick possible solutions. "I only feel anger when I see waste" said Mother Theresa a long time ago. Today, about one-third of the total food produced in the world for human consumption (approximately 1.3 billion tons) is lost or wasted each year.



Wheat field in midsummer (August) in Lviv Oblast, Ukraine

People everywhere, and especially in rich countries which do not face the lack of food yet, should be aware of what food really means, of its importance and real value. Waste and overconsumption are problems that have been insistently reported for years. Out of the world population, one in nine still does not have enough to eat and 44 million people are at risk of famine. In the long run, this will lead to even more ecological disasters as well as social unrest and greater forced migration. Nobody knows when and how the war in Ukraine will end, as daily discoveries of war crimes and ongoing situations seem to undermine all planning. In difficult times such as the present one, there is a real need for true solidarity between countries.

"The Earth is what we all have in common" (Wendell Berry, American novelist).

Alexandra Paucescu

EU COUNTRIES PREPARING TO WELCOME THOSE FLEEING UKRAINE

Member States to offer comprehensive assistance

The EU is giving constant support to Member States in meeting the needs of those fleeing the invasion of Ukraine. It offers assistance at the border, reception and civil protection. It helps Member States ensure access to education, healthcare, accommodation and jobs for those arriving from Ukraine.



KEY AREAS OF SUPPORT

Support for border management

The Commission has issued operational guidelines helping border guards in Member States to manage arrivals at the borders with Ukraine efficiently and reduce waiting time, while maintaining a high level of security. EU agencies are also providing extra staff and expertise to support Member States.

Support for health systems

The Commission has set up a dedicated European system for swift transfers of persons in need of medical care among EU Member States, supported by the EU Civil Protection Mechanism. The Commission is also working

hand-in-hand with the European Centre for Disease Prevention and Control and the European Medicines Agency to provide public health guidance and training, monitor the supply of medicinal products and provide appropriate support to Member States.

Protection of children

The EU Strategy on the Rights of the Child provides a comprehensive framework for the protection and the fulfilment of the rights of the child. National coordinators now in place under the European Child Guarantee have a key role to play in galvanising and coordinating the effort at a national level and with regional and local authorities. The Commission is also preparing dedicated Standard Operating Procedures for transfers of unaccompanied minors.

Access to education

The Commission will bring together Member States to start sharing experiences and identify what is needed to continue the education of displaced children. The School Education Gateway will serve as a one-stop shop to link to educational material from Ukraine and Member States' material in the Ukrainian language. Flexibility in the Erasmus+ funding programme will also be used to support the education of refugee students and the integration of staff of higher education institutions who are fleeing the war.

Access to accommodation and housing

To meet immediate needs for suitable accommodation, a new “safe homes” initiative will support Europeans who are making their homes available. The Asylum, Migration and Integration Fund, as well as Cohesion Policy funds, will be mobilised to strengthen public reception systems. In the longer term, the European Regional Development Fund will help to provide social housing for families and individuals in the community. The European Social Fund can support community-based services and accommodation, especially for those with special needs, disabilities, children and older people.

Access to jobs

Member States are invited to take measures to swiftly help those arriving to take up their right to work, as well as vocational training. The Commission has added the Ukrainian language to the **EU Skills Profile Tool** for non-EU nationals and will also pilot a new Talent Pool to match skills with job vacancies. The Commission is also working on developing new guidelines to facilitate recognition of professional qualifications obtained in Ukraine and working with social partners to help inform the private sector about the rights under temporary protection and the programmes available.

OPERATIONAL GUIDANCE

New operational guidelines on the Temporary Protection Directive will help those arriving to the EU, enjoy a consistent and effective level of rights. It will help Member States to shoulder their new responsibilities. The guidelines will be regularly updated to support Member States in meeting the day-to-day challenges and new situations they are confronted with.

SOLIDARITY IN ACTION

The Commission has set up a Solidarity Platform, bringing together Member States and EU Agencies, to coordinate support to Member States in need.

The platform will help organise the transfers of people within the EU to the Member States that have reception capacity. It can also help establish pathways towards non-EU countries that already host significant Ukrainian communities, such as Canada or the United Kingdom. Particular attention will be given to the most vulnerable cases, in particular children.



FAST AND FLEXIBLE SOLUTIONS TO FINANCE SOLIDARITY

The Commission has taken immediate action to help mobilise financial support to Member States hosting those fleeing the war against Ukraine.

The EU's Home Affairs funds for 2021-27 will provide substantial resources for Member States to ensure adequate reception facilities and effective asylum procedures for people fleeing the invasion.

Following the Commission's proposal “Cohesion's Action for Refugees in Europe” (CARE), Member States have the possibility to use remaining funds from cohesion funds of the 2014-2020 programming period to provide emergency support to people fleeing Ukraine and arriving to their territory. This includes investments in education, employment, housing, health and childcare services, but also basic material assistance like food and clothing.

In addition, the Commission has proposed to increase by €3.4 billion the total pre-financing from the Recovery Assistance for Cohesion and the Territories of Europe (REACT-EU). Once adopted by co-legislators, this immediate injection of liquidity will speed up Member States' access to funds to spend on infrastructure, housing, equipment and services in employment, education, social inclusion, healthcare and childcare.

The Commission has also adopted a Temporary Crisis Framework enabling Member States to use the flexibly allowed under the State aid rules to support the economy in the context of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, while protecting the level playing field in the Single Market.

https://ec.europa.eu/info/strategy/priorities-2019-2024/stronger-europe-world/eu-solidarity-ukraine/eu-countries-preparing-welcome-those-fleeing-ukraine_en

ONE OF THE WORLD'S BIGGEST HACKER FORUMS TAKEN DOWN



The illegal marketplace 'RaidForums' has been shut down and its infrastructure seized as a result of Operation TOURNIQUET, a complex law enforcement effort coordinated by Europol to support independent investigations of the United States, United Kingdom, Sweden, Portugal, and Romania. The forum's administrator and two of his accomplices have also been arrested.

Launched in 2015, RaidForums was considered one of the world's biggest hacking forums with a community of over half a million users. This marketplace had made a name for itself by selling access to high-profile database leaks belonging to a number of US

corporations across different industries. These contained information for millions of credit cards, bank account numbers and routing information, and the usernames and associated passwords needed to access online accounts.

These datasets were obtained from data breaches and other exploits carried out in recent years.

TURNING THE TABLES ON THE HACKERS

Operation TOURNIQUET, coordinated at the international level by Europol's European Cybercrime Centre, was the culmination of a year of meticulous planning between the law enforcement

authorities involved in preparation for the action.

The partners have been working closely together within the framework of the Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT) hosted at Europol to identify the key targets and establish a coordinated strategy to prepare for the final phase of the investigation.

This intense exchange of information enabled the investigators to define the different roles the targets played within this marketplace, i.e.: the administrator, the money launderers, the users in charge of stealing/uploading the data, and the buyers.

The Head of Europol's European Cybercrime Centre, Edvardas Šileris, said:

Disruption has always been a key technique in operating against threat actors online, so targeting forums that host huge amounts of stolen data keeps criminals on their toes. Europol will continue working with its international partners to make cybercrime harder – and riskier – to commit.

The following authorities have taken part in this investigation:

- Sweden: Swedish Police Authority (Polisen)
- Romania: National Police (Poliția Română)
- Portugal: Judicial Police (Policia Judiciária)
- Germany: Federal Criminal Police Office (Bundeskriminalamt)
- United States: US Secret Service (USSS), Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI), Internal Revenue Service Criminal Investigation (IRS-CI)
- United Kingdom: National Crime Agency (NCA)
- Europol: European Cybercrime Centre (EC3), Joint Cybercrime Action Taskforce (J-CAT)



Edvardas Šileris, Head of Europol's European Cybercrime Centre

How to avoid MOBILE SIM SWAPPING?



WHAT IS A SIM SWAPPING ATTACK?

In a SIM swapping attack, an attacker takes over your mobile phone number by asking the mobile telecom provider to link your number to a SIM card under the attacker's control.



1 Collect victim's personal data
Via phishing, data breaches, social media searches, malware

2 Carry out the fraudulent SIM swap
In-store, contacting company's representative over the phone or online through the provider's app or portal

3 Exploit the swapped SIM
The fraudster receives calls or messages addressed to the legitimate user to make bank transactions and accessing email accounts, sites and social media

WHAT ARE THE WARNING SIGNS?

- **Before the attack:** You receive strange phone calls asking you to share codes or SMS messages that you have received from your mobile telecom provider.
- **During the attack:** Your phone loses network connection for a longer period, and you are not able to make or receive phone calls.
- **After the attack:** You may see suspicious transactions in your banking accounts, or lose access to your social media or email accounts, or see other activity you do not recognize.

WHAT TO DO IF YOU ARE A VICTIM?

If you experience any of the above signs, contact your telecom provider as soon as possible.

If it confirms the SIM swap, immediately contact your bank and change the passwords to your online accounts. Furthermore, report the fraudulent activity to the police.

HOW TO PREVENT THE ATTACK?

- Avoid providing any personal information to someone pretending to be representative of the telecom provider.
- Never communicate, over the phone, the one-time passwords you receive from your mobile operator.
- Choose app-based 2-factor authentication, instead of two-factor via mobile phone or SMS.
- Be cautious with the personal information that you share on websites and social media.
- Do not open suspicious hyperlinks or attachments received through email or SMS



WEATHER SATELLITE PREPARES FOR LIGHTNING

As one of the last milestones before liftoff at the end of the year, the first Meteosat Third Generation weather satellite is being fitted with its Lightning Imager. From geostationary orbit, 36 000 km above Earth's surface, this state-of-the-art European instrument will continuously monitor lightning over more than 80% of Earth's disc for early warnings of dangerous storms. Remarkably, it is capable of imaging relatively weak lightning events in full sunlight.



Following on from the first and second generations of Meteosat satellites, the Meteosat Third Generation (MTG) mission will deliver essential data for weather forecasting from geostationary orbit for the next two decades. The MTG mission comprises two types of satellite: four MTG-Imagers and two MTG-Sounders.

With the first MTG-I, MTG-I1, scheduled for liftoff at the end of the year, it's full steam ahead to get this new satellite fit and ready for shipping to the launch site at Europe's Spaceport in French Guiana.

MTG-I1 has already been equipped with one of its instruments, the Flexible Combined Imager, which will deliver a full image of Earth every 10 minutes to monitor and forecast the weather. It can also zoom in to deliver images of selected regions every 2.5 minutes.

Now it's time for MTG-I1 to be fitted with its other main instrument, the Lightning Imager.

Lightning, which can occur from cloud-to-cloud or cloud-to-ground, is a sure sign of turbulence in the atmosphere and can be used in meteorological modelling as an early indicator of the development of severe weather events. The earlier they can be detected, the better.

The continuous monitoring for lightning by the all-new Lightning Imager will do just this – it will allow for the early detection of severe storms and therefore be key for issuing timely warnings, and it will also be particularly relevant for air traffic safety. Its detectors are so sensitive that relatively weak lightning events can be detected, even when it is full daylight.

The Lightning Imager was developed at Leonardo in Florence, Italy, and has now been delivered to the Thales Alenia Space's facilities in Cannes, France, where it is being integrated into the MTG-I satellite.

Despite a relatively simple instrument architecture, with no moving parts, the complexity of the Lightning Imager is in the resolution and speed of the detectors, and the subsequent image processing of the data on board, which automatically rejects any data that are not related to lightning.

Paul Blythe, ESA's Meteosat Programme Manager, explains, "At the heart of the instrument are four optical heads which each have detector arrays of more than 1.2 million pixels. These arrays are sampled every millisecond to measure the energy emitted in their respective fields of view.

"For each of the more than 4.8 million pixels, these signals are then compared to a reference image of Earth to determine if a lightning flash has occurred. With this number of pixels and a sampling rate of 1 millisecond the raw data rate of the instrument is enormous, at several Gbits a second. This is then reduced by over a factor of 250 through clever logic in the front-end electronics followed by advanced signal processing in the state-of-the-art single board computer provided by Thales Alenia Space.

"The net result is an output from the instrument of around 30 Mbit a second, so that only relevant data are transmitted to the ground stations for further analysis."

This European capability will add to and exceed the capability of the US Global Lightning Monitor, which is carried on the GOES satellites, and has shown significant contribution to the overall nowcasting capability.

What is also interesting is that imagers, which detect rapid and localised energy emissions, could be used for other applications such as potentially tracking meteorite events.

Source : ESA



Meteosat Third Generation Imager-1's Lightning Imager during testing at Leonardo's facilities in Florence, Italy. The Lightning Imager will provide a new capability for European meteorological satellites. It provides a continuous monitoring of more than 80% of the Earth disc for detecting lightning discharges taking place either between clouds or from cloud and ground

EQUINOR AND NATURGY TEAM UP TO EXPLORE OFFSHORE WIND DEVELOPMENT IN SPAIN

Equinor and Naturgy partner up and enter a development agreement prior to Spain's first upcoming offshore wind auction off the coast of the Canary Islands.



© Ole-Jørgen Bratland / Equinor ASA

Dudgeon Offshore Wind Farm off the Norfolk coast

The Spanish government aims to transform its energy mix and plans to develop up to 3 GW offshore wind by 2030. The first Spanish offshore wind auction is expected to be in the Canary region in 2023 and here Equinor and Naturgy are jointly assessing the opportunity to develop and construct a floating offshore wind project.

The cooperation is in line with the two companies' joint ambition of utilizing their complementary capabilities to develop renewables in Spain, starting with commercial floating wind projects. With more than 90% of the Spanish offshore wind areas being deep waters, Spain has an exciting opportunity to spearhead the next wave of floating offshore wind in Europe.



© Equinor

Jens Økland, Senior Vice President of business development in Renewables

The Spanish energy company will contribute with its experience from onshore wind in Spain and Equinor with its proven capabilities in floating offshore wind technology and development.

"We are very pleased with the agreement reached with the Norwegian energy company Equinor, because it allows us to promote the commitment to renewables, contributing with our experience in the development, construction and operation of onshore wind energy, as well as extensive knowledge of the Spanish market," says Jorge Barredo, managing director of Renewables, New Businesses and Innovation in Naturgy.

"It is great to see the deployment of offshore wind in Spain. 3GW by 2030 is an ambitious target, with floating offshore wind it is doable. Equinor has a long history in Spain and Naturgy is a well-known partner for Equinor. Together we now want to contribute long term to the country's renewable energy plans and start off by developing the first commercial floating offshore wind farm in Spain," says Equinor's senior vice president for business development in Renewables, Jens Økland.

Spain plays a key role in the supply chain for offshore wind in the rest of Europe and Equinor has a long history of working together with the Spanish offshore supply industry. Key components like floating substructure, the tower, and the mooring at Equinor's Hywind Scotland floating wind farm were produced in Spain.

"As operator and developer of floating offshore wind farms we know the technology works, and we believe our floating experience makes us uniquely qualified to contribute to the development of floating offshore wind in Spain in a safe, sustainable and efficient way together with our partner. We look forward to collaborating further with the Spanish industry. Collaboration with ocean users is important to ensure co-existence with this developing industry," says Sonja Chirico Indrebø, vice president Floating Offshore Wind.

"The development of floating wind opens a window of opportunity for Spain, allowing it to take advantage of locations away from the coast, with excellent wind resources, acting as a tractor of the economy through key sectors such as naval or civil. It is an energy and industrial opportunity, so Spain would seize this through the reconciliation of all interests linked to maritime activities," says Barredo.



BRAZEN

By Julia Haart

MY UNORTHODOX JOURNEY
FROM LONG SLEEVES TO LINGERIE

From the star of the Netflix reality series *My Unorthodox Life*, a riveting, inspiring memoir of one woman's escape from an extremist religious sect and an extraordinary rise from housewife to shoe designer, to CEO and co-owner of the

modeling agency Elite World Group.

"An irresistible read... Written with great intensity and rare candor, *Brazen* is a story of longing for more and manifesting that vision." - Tommy Hilfinger

Ever since she was a child, every aspect of Julia Haart's life—what she wore, what she ate, what she thought—was controlled by the dictates of ultra-Orthodox Judaism. At nineteen, after a lifetime spent caring for her seven younger siblings, she was married off to a man she barely knew. For the next twenty-three years, her marriage would rule her life. Eventually, when Haart's younger daughter, Miriam, started to innocently question why she wasn't allowed to sing in public, run in shorts, or ride a bike without being covered from neck to knee, Haart reached a breaking point. She knew that if she didn't find a way to leave, her daughters would be forced into the same unending servitude that had imprisoned her.

So Haart created a double life. In the ultra-Orthodox world, clothing has one purpose—to cover the body, head to toe—and giving any thought to one's appearance beyond that is considered sinful, an affront to God. But when no one was looking, Haart would pore over fashion magazines and sketch designs for the clothes she dreamed about wearing in the world beyond her Orthodox suburb. She started preparing for her escape by educating herself and creating a "freedom" fund. At the age of forty-two, she finally mustered the courage to flee the fundamentalist life that was strangling her soul.

Within a week of her escape, Haart founded a shoe brand, and within nine months, she was at Paris Fashion Week. Just a few years later, she was named creative director of La Perla. Soon she would become co-owner and CEO of Elite World Group, and one of the most powerful people in the fashion industry. Along the way, her four children—Batsheva, Shlomo, Miriam, and Aron—have not only accepted but embraced her transformation.

Propulsive and unforgettable, Haart's story is the journey from a world of no to a world of yes, and an inspiration for women everywhere to find their freedom, their purpose, and their voice.



WE WANT EVERYTHING

By Nanni Balestrini

Introduction by Rachel Kushner

A NOVEL

The explosive novel of Italy's revolutionary 1969.

It was 1969, and temperatures were rising across the factories of the north as workers demanded better pay and conditions.

Soon, discontent would erupt in what became known as Italy's Hot Autumn. A young worker from the impoverished south arrives at Fiat's Mirafiori factory in Turin, where his darker complexion begins to fade from the fourteen-hour workdays in sweltering industrial heat. His bosses try to withhold his wages. Our cynical, dry-witted narrator will not bend to their will. "I want everything, everything that's owed to me," he tells them. "Nothing more and nothing less, because you don't mess with me."

Around him, students are holding secret meetings and union workers begin halting work on the assembly lines, crippling the Mirafiori factory with months of continuous strikes. Before long, barricades line the roads, tear gas wafts into private homes, and the slogan "We Want Everything" is ringing through the streets.

Wrought in spare and measured prose, Balestrini's novel depicts an explosive uprising. Introduced by Rachel Kushner, the author of the best-selling *The Flamethrowers*, *We Want Everything* is the incendiary fictional account of events that led to a decade of revolt.



LONDON COUTURE AND THE MAKING OF A FASHION CENTRE

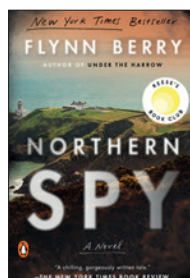
By Michelle Jones

How design collaboration, networks, and narratives contributed to the establishment of a recognized English couture industry in the 1930s and 1940s.

In the 1930s and 1940s, English fashion houses, spurred by economic and wartime crises, put London on the map as a major fashion city. In this book, Michelle Jones examines the creation of a London-based couture industry during these years, exploring how designer collaboration and the construction of specific networks and narratives supported and shaped the English fashion economy. Haute couture—the practice of creative made-to-measure womenswear—was widely regarded as inherently French. Jones shows how an English version emerged during a period of economic turbulence, when a group of designers banded together in a collective effort to shift power within the international fashion system.

Jones considers the establishment of this form of English design practice, analyzing the commercial, social, and political factors that shaped the professional identity of the London couturiers. She focuses on collaborative activity that supported this form of elite, craft-based fashion production—from the prewar efforts of the Fashion Group of Great Britain to the wartime establishment of the Incorporated Society of London Fashion Designers, modeled loosely after French fashion's governing body, the *Chambre Syndicale de la Couture Parisienne*.

It was these collective efforts by couturiers that established and sustained London's place as an internationally recognized center for creative fashion.



NORTHERN SPY

By Flynn Berry

A NOVEL

The acclaimed author of *Under the Harrow* and *A Double Life* returns with her most riveting novel to date: the story of two sisters who become entangled with the IRA.

A producer at the BBC and mother to a new baby, Tessa is at work in Belfast one day when the news of another raid comes on the air. The IRA may have gone underground in the two decades since the Good Friday Agreement, but they never really went away, and lately bomb threats, security checkpoints, and helicopters floating ominously over the city have become features of everyday life. As the news reporter requests the public's help in locating those responsible for the robbery, security footage reveals Tessa's sister, Marian, pulling a black ski mask over her face.

The police believe Marian has joined the IRA, but Tessa is convinced she must have been abducted or coerced; the sisters have always opposed the violence enacted in the name of uniting Ireland. And besides, Marian is vacationing on the north coast. Tessa just spoke to her yesterday.

When the truth about Marian comes to light, Tessa is faced with impossible choices that will test the limits of her ideals, the bonds of her family, her notions of right and wrong, and her identity as a sister and a mother. Walking an increasingly perilous road, she wants nothing more than to protect the one person she loves more fiercely than her sister: her infant son, Finn.

Riveting, atmospheric, and exquisitely written, *Northern Spy* is at once a heart-pounding story of the contemporary IRA and a moving portrait of sister- and motherhood, and of life in a deeply divided society.

EUROPE *Diplomatic* magazine

YOUR ESSENTIAL MONTHLY
NEWSMAGAZINE



Offer a printed edition subscription to a friend
Contact us : europediplomaticmagazine@gmail.com

BY YOUR SIDE IN MONACO FOR MORE THAN 100 YEARS

Discover our solutions in Private Banking,
Retail Banking and Corporate Banking.

privatebanking.societegenerale.mc

**THE FUTURE
IS YOU**  **SOCIETE
GENERALE**

The present document has been distributed in Monaco by Societe Generale Private Banking (Monaco) S.A.M., located 13/15, bd. des Moulins – 98000 Monaco – Principality of Monaco, governed by the *Autorité de Contrôle Prudentiel et de Résolution* and the *Commission de Contrôle des Activités Financières*. The financial products marketed in Monaco can be reserved for qualified investors in accordance with the Law No. 1339 of 07/09/2007 and Sovereign Ordinance No 1.285 of 10/09/2007. Further details are available upon request or on www.privatebanking.societegenerale.mc. © Getty Images.