

GEOPOLITICAL „DANCE” OF THE AGGRESSIVE DICTATORS

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***Abstract:** After studying the geopolitical developments of the last ten years, the author considers, with sufficient arguments, that the subject of this article is of public interest for Romania and its citizens, but also for NATO member states and/or for those of the European Union.*

The developments on the world stage in the last ten years (after the illegal annexation of Crimea by the Russian Federation) determined mainly by the great nuclear powers (USA, Russia, China), and by some emerging powers (Turkey, Iran, Brazil, India and others), have a potential role in seriously endangering world peace, including the security of European member or non-member states of NATO and/or the EU.

I believe that in this complicated and fluid context, Romania must be very careful, determined and focused to counteract, together with the Allies, the military and hybrid risks and threats coming from some state actors with obvious aggressive tendencies.

***Keywords:** USA, Russian Federation, China, Romania, NATO, European Union, threats, risks.*

1. Introduction

Why did I choose the title „GEOPOLITICAL DANCE OF AGGRESSIVE DICTATORS”? Because that's what I think is the "boundless friendship" between China and the Russian Federation, an aggressive couple joined by smaller state actors from Asia, Africa, South America, and even Europe.

All of them accumulated, over time, deep dissatisfaction with their place and role in the world, wanting more and more space and power at the expense of others.

I will try to take them one by one, starting with the two main actors, holders of nuclear arsenals and impressive amounts of conventional weapons.

I think it is appropriate to take a look at the geopolitical map of the world. We will find, without much surprise, that on all continents there are problems between states, some of which have the potential for military confrontation at any moment, and others are already full-fledged war zones, as, for example, it is now in Ukraine after the annexation of Crimea in March 2014 and after the massive invasion launched by the Russian

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Federation on 24.02.2022, a war with devastating consequences for the neighboring state and with negative effects, on multiple levels, on European countries and the whole world.

As if this war was not enough, the military confrontation between Israel and the terrorist groups sponsored and armed by Iran (HAMAS, HESBOLLAH, HOUTH) also began, a confrontation in which other Arab countries in the area intervened, as well as the United States of America.

2. Russian Federation

Based on the actions and events triggered by this state actor, several Romanian and foreign political and military analysts believe, with solid arguments, that the Russian Federation, led since December 31, 1999 by a siloviko-oligarchic clan led by Vladimir Vladimirovich Putin.

He and his team's grievances stem from the dissolution of the USSR at the end of 1991 and the loss of the role of second fiddle (after the US) in world affairs and the sharing of spheres of influence with the overseas competitor.

Russia has been acting since the year 2000 to restore, step by step, the former USSR in the USSR 2.0 version, first by bringing the former Soviet republics back to obedience and then by expanding the political, economic and military influence on the "near abroad", which, at beginning, it may be as far as Berlin and then as far as the Atlantic, as some violent ideologues and propagandists of Moscow claim daily.

More details and information regarding Russia's behavior can be found in the works of authors with experience in the ex-Soviet space¹.

I believe that only the naive and ignorant of geopolitical games on a global scale do not see (or do not want to see) that all political, propaganda, economic, military and cyber actions of the Russian Federation are continuously and aggressively directed against the West, with the assumed objective of destroying the political and military cohesion of the EU and NATO. It is true that in this endeavor they benefit from the services of some Trojan horses from the two organizations.

To achieve its goals, Russia does not shy away from anything, including large-scale military aggression, as it has been doing in Ukraine for more than two years now. It increasingly threatens NATO countries on the eastern flank of the Alliance with military and other strikes (specific to

¹ Mark Solonin, *Butoiul și cercurile*, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2012.

Victor Suvorov, *Spărgătorul de gheață*, Polirom Publishing House, Bucharest, 2011.

Mincu Constantin, „Federația Rusă și restul lumii”, *Revista de Științe Militare*, no. 3/2017;

„Haos Geopolitic Global”, *Revista de Științe Militare* no. 4/2019.

Armand Goșu Interview, „Rusia de la bolșevicii lui Lenin, la silovikii lui Putin”, available at <https://www.hotnews.ro/stiri-opinii-22095955-interviu-armand-gosu-rusia-bolseviki-lui-lenin-siloviki-lui-putin.htm>, accessed on 15.11.2022.

hybrid warfare). More recently, Putin's service propagandists are calling for nuking France and Great Britain (!?).

Note that Russia has recently deployed tactical nuclear weapons (no one can guarantee that they are only tactical) in Belarus and the Kalinigrad enclave. To be more convincing, it recently launched large-scale exercises with the launchers of these destructive weapons, equipped, say the aggressors, only with conventional charges. We can assume, given Russia's traditions of disinformation, that they are lying.

I think we could try, as based on information from public sources, hard to contradict, that the Russian Federation had, has and will have an aggressive behavior, primarily towards its neighbors and not only², like this:

- launching a war of extreme cruelty against Ukraine, with numerous atrocities, clear war crimes and massive destruction of critical infrastructure as well as civilian targets of no military importance (such as the May 26, 2024 attack on a DIY store from Kharkov, soldier with numerous casualties, dead and wounded);
- maintaining and amplifying the conflicts between the states of the Caucasus, former members of the USSR;
- the violent and repeated aggressions against Georgia;
- the continuous aggression of the Republic of Moldova through actions of the hybrid war, but also through the forces deployed in Transnistria;
- the ferocious and cynical destruction of Chechnya and its capital;
- total involvement in Syria in favor of the dictatorial regime of Bashar al Assad, through massive aerial bombardments and military actions on the ground against the civilian population (the Aleppo massacre);
- unscrupulous support for North Korea and Iran to manufacture and possess delivery vectors for nuclear weapons. It is true that these two dictatorships, one communist and the other theocratic, retaliated against Russia by supplying large quantities of weapons and ammunition, including drones provided by Iran;
- the proliferation of explicit threats (in the last two years - weekly) against the Baltic States, Poland, Romania and the Republic of Moldova;
- the opening of new military bases abroad (Syria, Libya, in South America and in some African countries);
- the intensification, without precedent after 1991, of the activity of strategic aviation and nuclear submarines in the vicinity of the borders of the USA, Great Britain and the Nordic countries;

² Mincu Constantin, „Evoluții geopolitice la nivel global și posibile concluzii și lecții de învățat pentru elita politică și militară a României”, *Revista de Științe Militare*, no. 4/2022.

- the almost successful attempt to take control of the Black Sea, also benefiting from the ambiguous game of Turkey, a NATO member country;
- the attempt to unilaterally redraw the limits of the waters of the Baltic Sea at the expense of the riparian countries;
- the intensification of large-scale military applications together with the vassal state of Belarus with tens of thousands of soldiers and large amounts of armaments;
- the expulsion or killing of politicians from the (already weakened) opposition, journalists and secret service defectors. The cases are known to the public³ (Alexandr Litvinenko, Alexei Navalnii etc.);
- In the given context, I think that those interested in the subject could study the analysis made by the author Iulian Chifu "The mosaic of security threats prey to the sudden changes in the trends of evolution, brought down on the Black Sea"⁴;
- Another aspect of major gravity is the fact that Russia has assumed an increasingly aggressive cyber posture (attacks on electrical and communication networks, massive jamming of GPS systems, with potentially lethal consequences for civilian commercial flights in Europe, but also for Black Sea and Baltic Sea vessels Director of U.S. National Intelligence, Dan Coats, can be cited on this subject⁵ and specialist John McAfee, a recognized expert in the US anti-virus solutions industry⁶;
- I don't think we need to lose sight of the recent concerns of the Kremlin team for the training of commandos of saboteurs and subversives in all European NATO and/or EU countries, benefiting from the extensive platform of espionage and freedom of movement from Austria and other countries, some neighboring Romania;
- we must not omit Russia's interference in the Western Balkans, resulting in the destabilization of the young states and culminating in Serbia's involvement in the Eurasian Economic Union;

³ Alan S. Cowell, *Moartea unui spion, povestea lui Alexandr Litvinenko*, Litera Internațional Publishing House, Bucharest, 2009.

⁴ Iulian Chifu, „Mozaicul amenințărilor de securitate pradă schimbărilor bruște a tendurilor de evoluție, pogorâte asupra Mării Negre”, available at <https://adevarul.ro/blogurile-adevarul/mozaicul-amenintarilor-de-securitate-prada-1811087.html>, accessed on 16.11.2022.

⁵ Dan Coats, Directorul US National Intelligence, Summitul Cibernetic, september 2017, Washington D.C.

⁶ John McAfee Interview, moderator Vlad Borza, available at <https://economie.hotnews.ro/stiri-it-21628677-interviu-cum-vede-mogulul-software-john-mcafee-lumea-care-marile-puteri-isi-pun-una-alteia-pistolul-tampla-dar-nu-indraznesc-declansez-razboiul-cibernetice-total.htm>, accessed on 17.11.2022.

- Russia had and has actions to influence the electoral processes in the target states (the Brexit case, the elections in the USA, Germany, Italy, France, etc.);

At the end of this point dedicated to Russia, I think that Western analysts should study more carefully the "boundless friendship" between China and Russia. If it is without limits it means the whole gamut of cooperation, such as the mutual supply of arms and ammunition, China's provision of dual-use electronic components to Russia, joint naval and air exercises in the South Pacific, the East China Sea and in the Sea of Japan. Not to mention the spectacular increase in trade between the two countries, with China being the net beneficiary of Russia's oil and gas supplies at "friendly" prices.

3. CHINA

In the case of China, we must start from the realities of today: the Chinese superstate has an area of 9,572,900 km² and a population of approximately 1.4 billion inhabitants, of whom 93% are Chinese, and the rest are Tibetans and Uyghurs.

As a political regime China presents itself as a People's Republic, in reality it is a harsh communist dictatorship, now led by President Xi Jinping, an unscrupulous autocrat, who, for the interest of his country, developed a conjuncture alliance with the Russian Federation. This "boundless friendship" of Xi with Putin seems quite strange given the historical disputes between the two countries and the reality that Russia "still" holds former Chinese territories. A possible explanation could be that the Chinese state is counting on Russia's support for the reintegration of Taiwan and the provision of energy resources of oil and gas at preferential prices, necessary for industrial production, in the explosive development of the economy of this state, which is now the economy no. 2 in the world, after the USA.

As it is known, China has very long-term plans and the typical Chinese patience to wait for the most favorable conditions to recover the Siberian territories now in the possession of the Russian Federation and, of course, by peaceful means or by war - Taiwan. So the "boundless friendship" between Presidents Xi and Putin is not eternal! The future will show that there will be a collision between the partners of now, with serious consequences on a global level.

On China's account we can count a long series of facts against its own population and against some neighbors in Asia, as follows:

- the harsh repression of the Tibetan and Uyghur populations, without caring about the criticism of some democratic states or the provisions of the UN Charter;
- the crushing of any internal opposition;

- large-scale military maneuvers around Taiwan, carried out practically non-stop, by employing impressive naval and air forces (about 20 battleships and 30-40 bombers and fighter planes);
- cyber attacks on countries considered hostile;
- the massive theft of technology from the West, operated through the numerous Chinese diaspora in the US and Europe;
- the economic, military and intelligence support given to the Russian Federation and the vote in the UN Security Council in favor of Russia, in all cases discussed in this forum;
- aggressive economic offensive in Europe, especially in Hungary and Serbia, but also in other European states, with the aim of circumventing the justified protectionist measures of the EU, in the face of the invasion of Chinese industrial products massively subsidized by the communist state;
- coordination with Russia in the "economic" organization called BRICS to determine the member states and those aspiring to this project to get involved in military and security issues as well. So far India, Brazil and South Africa have expressed some reservations. We will see what happens in the near future;
- the unprecedented acceleration of armaments, including through the construction of aircraft carriers and the increase in the number of fighter planes and the forces of the People's Liberation Army (APE);
- undertaking actions to block naval traffic vital to world trade flows, in the South China Sea. China has unilaterally asserted its sovereignty over this sea through the construction of artificial islands and through direct military threats against South Pacific states, particularly the Philippines, Indonesia and Australia.

I believe that the above inventory of political, economic and military developments is far from complete. The stated intention is to show those interested (quite a few) that in the last ten years there have been important movements and transformations that endanger the peace of the world, with major implications for the fragile world balance.

At this point I consider it useful to bring to attention some assessments of the author Yascha Mounk⁷:

- **The last decade** was a good one for the dictatorship. The global influence of the most powerful authoritarian countries, **China and Russia**, has grown rapidly. For the first time since the late 19th century, the cumulative GDP of autocracies now equals or exceeds that of liberal democracies. Even ideologically, the autocrats appear to be on the offensive: at the G20 Summit in June 2019, for example,

⁷ Yascha Mounk, *Foreign Affairs*, no. 5/2019.

Vladimir Putin dropped his usual false claim that Russia lives up to the standards of liberal democracy, declaring instead that modern liberalism is "outdated" (n.a. - in other words, long live dictatorship and aggression).

- **In contrast**, the last decade has been terrible for democracy. According to Freedom House, the world is now in its 13th consecutive year of global democratic recession. Democracies have fallen or been eroded in every region, from Burundi to Hungary, Thailand and Venezuela. Most worryingly, democratic institutions have turned out to be surprisingly fragile in countries that once seemed stable and secure.

- The rise of Donald Trump in the United States, Mateo Salvini in Italy and Jair Bolsonaro in Brazil have shown that populists can win in some of the world's most prosperous and traditionally democratic states. And the rapid erosion in countries like Hungary and Venezuela has shown that populists can indeed turn their countries into competitive authoritarian regimes or even dictatorships.

In the same vein, I would recommend studying the article by the Romanian analyst Dorin Popescu - "Two cold champagnes - Washington and Moscow"⁸.

4. Iran

The establishment of a harsh theocratic dictatorship in Iran, after the ousting of Shah Mohammad Reza Pahlavi in 1979, turned the country from a prosperous state where citizens enjoyed freedoms to the primitive and horrifying reality of self-imposed religious leaders.

Iran is a large state if we refer to the surface - 1,648,200 km² and a heterogeneous population of about 75 million inhabitants (51% Persian, 24% Azeri, the rest being Kurds and Arabs). In terms of territory size, Iran ranks 17th in the world and the same place in terms of population.

The political regime in Iran is that of the Islamic Republic, led by a figure re-elected by the citizens (now Ayatollah Ali Khamenei), the president "elected" by him (through fake elections), having a secondary role, without much power.

On account of this theocratic state we can list a series of actions and facts known to the public interested in the Middle East, such as:

- the eight-year war with Iraq resulted in hundreds of thousands of deaths on both sides;

⁸ Dorin Popescu, „Două șampanii la rece - Washington și Moscova”, available at <https://www.contributors.ro/doua-%C8%99ampanii-la-rece-washington-%C8%99i-moscova/>, accessed on 04.06.2024.

- the total lack of civil rights of the entire population and hard-to-understand prohibitions against women (something from the 6th century);
 - the constant threat of erasing the State of Israel from the map;
 - sponsoring and arming terrorist groups such as Hamas, Hezbollah, the Houthi rebels, which it uses for violent attacks against Israel, but also against other targets, such as commercial and military ships transiting the Red Sea and the Gulf of Aden;
 - the use of the Revolutionary Guards, an Army in the exclusive service of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei to control the countries of the Middle and Near East (Iraq, Syria, Lebanon, Yemen, Turkmenistan, Azerbaijan), as well as to ban, at will, navigation in the Persian Gulf and in the southern Caspian Sea;
 - conducting, in recent years, an arms race, through the production of fighter planes, drones, ships, etc., as well as sustained efforts to build nuclear bombs;
 - positioning, unequivocally, on Russia's side in the case of the war of aggression in Ukraine, through political, economic and military support (the supply of weapons, ammunition and combat and surveillance drones);
 - the large-scale application of the death penalty by hanging to a large number of Iranian citizens who did not agree to the terror instituted by the Ayatollahs' regime (through mock trials).
- The above list of the deeds of the Tehran regime is far from complete, new actions will follow against neighboring countries and beyond.

5. North Coreea

Officially called the Democratic People's Republic of Korea, the communist state has nothing to do with democracy, it is a ferocious dictatorship (the toughest in the world), being the third leader of the Kim Dynasty - the so-called Kim Jong Un (after Kim Ir-sen and Kim Jong Il).

The Asian state that shares the Korean Peninsula with South Korea (between the two there is only an Armistice, not a Peace Treaty), has an area of 122,760 km² and a population of approximately 24.1 million inhabitants (99% Korean and 1% Chinese).

If we analyze, even briefly, the political, economic and military behavior of this state, we will find that:

- keeps the entire population in abject poverty and terror, only the Kim family, the top of the Communist Party and the heads of the Army living well;
- allocates enormous sums to the armed forces for the maintenance of large forces, over a million people, for the development of new

- weapons systems, including nuclear weapons and delivery vectors to targets;
- very often utters threats of war against South Korea and of retaliation against the US and other allies of the democratic state in the South;
 - organized a massive theft of technology especially from the USA and Western Europe;
 - cyber attacks government entities, banks and other institutions in states considered enemies;
 - taking advantage of the fact that in the north of the country it has a border with China and on a small portion with the Russian Federation, it receives from the two neighbors vital resources to survive (food, oil, gas and technology), in return retaliating against Russia by delivering of armaments and large quantities of ammunition for the war in Ukraine;
 - Dictator Kim Jong Un eliminates his real and alleged opponents by a method unique in the world, smashing them with four-barreled anti-aircraft machine guns supplied by the former USSR and now by Russia;
 - did not respect and does not respect any UN resolution regarding human rights and the development of nuclear weapons, without caring about the consequences, relying only on the two Northern allies.

We find that the alliance of dictators formed by Russia, China, Iran and North Korea is operating smoothly, threatening the peace of the whole world on a daily basis.

Other states are added more directly or more discreetly to this aggressive quadrilateral: Venezuela, Cuba, South Africa, Hungary, Austria, as well as India and Brazil (the last two as BRICS members).

Finally, a non-rhetorical question can be asked:

How do the United States of America, Canada and the European member states of the EU and/or NATO analyze the severe deterioration of the international climate, what concrete measures do they envisage to counter the aggressors and how do they intend to maintain the unity of democratic states?!

Romania, directly and constantly threatened by Russia, does it or does it not have concrete defense plans in the most difficult situations that may arise!?

These questions and many others must be answered directly and concretely by those who are now and in the near future in power.



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