

# Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review

H.E. Valdas Adamkus, Former President of Lithuania  
on Lithuania's Eastern Policy

H.E. Aleksander Kwaśniewski, Former President of Poland  
on Polish-Lithuanian Relations

Nobel Laureate Robert J. Shiller  
on the Global Economy During the Pandemic

Ambassador Audra Plepytė  
on the UN's 75th Anniversary

Patrick Keller  
on Germany's Role in Deterrence in NATO's Northeast

Chris Miller  
on the Implications of the U.S. Presidential Election



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Linas Kojala, Director of Eastern Europe Studies Centre (EESC), is Editor-in-Chief. EESC is a nongovernmental, non-profit think-tank established in Vilnius, Lithuania, in 2006. It aims to analyze political and economic processes in Eastern Europe and beyond. EESC partners include European Commission, the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme, National Endowment for Democracy, USAID, CEPA, the Foreign Policy Research Institute and others.

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# A NOTE FROM THE EDITOR



It is a privilege to serve as the Editor-in-Chief of Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review (LFPR) for the third year. The aim of the annual journal is to provide insights on the most pressing challenges for Lithuanian foreign and security policy, as well as to discuss global developments. We are grateful for the exceptionally positive response to previous editions of the journal we have received both from decision-makers and the expert community.

2020 is an extremely arduous year on many fronts. Hence, the year's international group of authors with diverse backgrounds and areas of expertise have attempted to shed at least some light on the essential developments. This enables the journal to provide a variety of views and delve deeper into multiple topics.

LFPR is honored that two former heads of state – former President of Lithuania Valdas Adamkus and former President of Poland Aleksander Kwaśniewski – gave exclusive interviews on bilateral Lithuanian-Polish relations, as well as on the future of the Eastern Partnership policy. Both presidents emphasized the common interests, as well as personal friendships, that bind Lithuania and Poland more than ever before.

This issue places a heavy emphasis on the topic of mass protests in Belarus. Laurynas Jonavičius from Vilnius University looks at Lithuania's position to events taking place in this neighboring country that was not perceived as being on the brink of significant changes at the start of 2020. The issue of Belarus is also touched upon in articles by well-known American authors, Daniel Fried and David A. Andelman, who analyze how the global role of the US has evolved through the years of Donald Trump. Finally, with Joe Biden set to take over, Chris Miller looks at the aftermath of the election and the future dilemmas for the Democratic presidency.

I am also happy that the publication is full of well-known names and experienced experts. Audra Plepytė, the Permanent Representative of Lithuania to the United Nations, shares her thoughts on the United Nations and its 75th anniversary. Different aspects of security are covered by Vytautas Keršanskas, who argues for the need to develop better knowledge on dealing with the issue of hybrid threats. Patrick Keller weighs in on German security policy and its presence in the Baltic States. Other contributions are also worthy of reader attention.

This publication would not have been possible without our friends and partners. I am extremely happy that the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania remains a key partner, providing support while ensuring editorial independence. Konrad Adenauer Stiftung and the U.S. Embassy in Lithuania continue to engage in our partnership; these contributions have been essential in making this current issue of LFPR as far-reaching as it is. I am thankful for my colleagues at the Eastern Europe Studies Center for their help.

Finally, Ambassador Rytis Paulauskas, Margarita Šešelgytė, Director at Institute of International Relations and Political Science, Vilnius University and Andžej Pukšto, an Associate Professor at Vytautas Magnus University, formed a great Editorial Board, to whom I extend my warmest thanks.

Please do not hesitate to share LFPR with your friends, colleagues and partners!

Sincerely,  
LINAS KOJALA

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## VALDAS ADAMKUS: SOONER OR LATER, THE SPIRIT OF FREEDOM WILL PREVAIL IN BELARUS



**IMAGE:** Adamkus accepted the award from the hands of Poland's former foreign minister Anna Fotyga (© R. Dačkus/Lithuanian President's Chancellery)

During his two terms as the President of Lithuania (1998 through 2003 and 2004 through 2009), Valdas Adamkus became known for his close attention to Central and Eastern Europe, relations with Poland, and countries like Ukraine and Georgia. He has remained committed to these issues since, and is remembered to this day, internationally, as a leader who not only strengthened democracy at

the national level but also defended the cause of freedom wherever it was only beginning to emerge.

It was these very topics that Adamkus sat down to discuss with Linas Kojala, the editor of the Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review, just before the President's 94th birthday.

*– I would like to ask you about the relationship between Lithuania and Poland, as this used to be one of*

### VALDAS ADAMKUS

served as the President of the Republic of Lithuania from 1998 to 2003 and again from 2004 to 2009. During his years in exile, spent in the USA, he served as a regional administrator of the fifth region of the United States Environmental Protection Agency and was actively engaged in the fight for the cause of freedom of Lithuania from occupation by the Soviet Union.



I still have hope to see new highways and railways built in the near future, meeting modern standards, for our countries to be connected by energy networks, pipelines, modern telecommunication channels. It's been 20 years now, but these links have not been finished yet.

*Speech by Adamkus in August, 2020. Former President of Lithuania was presented with Lech Kaczyński Prometheus Award for his efforts to further regional cooperation*

*your key foreign policy priorities. While in office, you had some 40 bilateral meetings with your counterpart, President Aleksander Kwaśniewski alone, whom we also interviewed for this Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review issue. There has recently been a yet-another*

warming of bilateral relations, but over the last decade, the two countries have also had their share of tensions and disagreements.

– This had been due to a sincere assessment of the political situation at the time. Poland fully understands the period of the Soviet occupation, the crimes against humanity committed by the regime and the traumas that have yet to heal. So our shared historical past was the point of connection, and it was strengthened by the personal relationship between us, the two heads of state.

This is why we were well-aware of the geopolitical challenges of the day. We shared a strong interest in a mutually-agreed policy towards Russia with the involvement of other Baltic countries, Ukraine, and Georgia, as this was the only means of strengthening our own security. We therefore proposed a number of new international political forums, setting out clear, mutual goals and outlining ways to achieve them.

We understood that close cooperation between neighbouring countries was the only way out of a number of problems we were facing.

– Your 2020 acceptance speech of the Lech Kaczyński Prometheus Award in the Office of the President of the Republic of Lithuania contained the following line: ‘I urge us not to forget our eastern neighbours.’ The region underwent a number of revolutions, from Georgia and Ukraine to Armenia and Belarus. And yet it does not seem as if any one of these countries stand a real chance of joining the EU or NATO. How do you view the situation in Lithuania’s neighbour countries?

We ought to maintain close ties with our eastern neighbours. The Maidan Revolution opened new opportunities for Ukraine in terms of joining the Western world and implementing democratic principles. However, this exam has yet to be passed. Perhaps Ukraine still needs to shake off the economic remains of the Soviet dictatorship that enabled oligarchs and politicians like Viktor Yanukovich, who ultimately fled to Russia.

The influence of the Kremlin remains strong, let alone its military aggression and violations of Ukraine’s territorial integrity. Ukraine’s membership in the EU does not seem very likely at the moment, but I witnessed the enthusiasm for change among both Ukraine’s youth and its political leaders even during my presidency. It is even stronger now.

– How do you view the situation in Belarus today? Do you see any similarities with Sąjūdis (the Lithuanian Reform Movement) or, perhaps, the Maidan Revolution?

– Lithuania has shown the world that we are not only a democratic country but also a country ready to lend a helping hand to others. It is now crucial to support the moral strength and unity of the Belarusian people. The Freedom Way initiative was a very good example here, with tens of thousands of Lithuanians holding hands and sending a clear signal as to whose side they are on in the face of violence on the streets of Belarus.

I am certain that this wave can no longer be stopped. Sooner or later, the spirit of freedom will prevail in Belarus, with its people becoming masters of their own country. Everyone fighting for freedom today will ultimately achieve it.

– We have been hearing fears that the attitude of the United States towards Europe is changing. Americans no longer want to pay all that much attention to Europe and instead prefer to focus on domestic issues or China. In your opinion, will the United States turn away from Europe?

– The US Administration’s policy towards Europe has changed, and this is indeed regrettable. However, we should not forget that there is no shortage of European countries critical of the US, too.

Yet both Europeans and Americans know that transatlantic relations are of utmost importance for global security, so I remain optimistic. Hence, I do not believe that the strategic policy of the US is going to change dramatically. From our point of view, Lithuania may be receiving less attention than before, but I am certain that we will be able to maintain strong and stable relations.

– How do you see the role of China on the global stage? Does it present a security challenge or an opportunity for economic cooperation?

– China is a superpower. We cannot turn a blind eye to this fact. During my time in office, this trend was only beginning to emerge. I think that it presents, first and foremost, a challenge for the West, to our democratic and other foundational values. Especially if China becomes closer with Russia.

– Lithuania marked the thirtieth anniversary of its independence. How do you see Lithuania today?

– Lithuania is on the right path. Certain domestic issues notwithstanding, we achieved a lot of progress on both domestic and international fronts. We are a stable member of the club of democratic countries. I see no danger of us changing course in the future. ■

## ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI: LITHUANIA IS A KEY STRATEGIC PARTNER OF POLAND

**ALEKSANDER KWAŚNIEWSKI**, is the former President of the Republic of Poland (1995–2005). Until November 2013, President Kwaśniewski co-lead the European Parliament monitoring mission in Ukraine to monitor the criminal cases against Yulia Tymoshenko, Yuriy Lutsenko and Valeriy Ivaschenko.



**IMAGE:** Kwaśniewski and Adamkus during a discussion at the Vilnius Book Fare in 2012 (© DELFI / Šarūnas Mažeika)

Editor of the Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review Linas Kojala talks with the President Kwaśniewski on his cooperation with Lithuanian President Valdas Adamkus (in office 1998–2003 and 2004–2009), as well as broader trends of political and economic reform in Ukraine, protests in Belarus, the evolution of transatlantic relations, China and beyond.

– How do you see the EU and NATO response to the growing Russian threat in the region since 2014? The EU imposed eco-

nomical and diplomatic sanctions, while NATO increased its military presence in Poland and the Baltic States. Is that enough to deter Russia?

– Russia’s aggressive politics and military interventions are as challenging for countries in our region as they are for NATO and the EU. The international community has done a great deal to make such policies costly for Russia – sanctions, exclusion of Russia from international bodies and partnerships, additional financial support for

countries suffering under Russian aggression. The rotating presence of NATO troops in our region has also increased significantly, serving as a military deterrent and symbol of our unity, solidarity and resolve. Is that enough to deter Russia? I think that under the current circumstances, yes. However, if the international situation worsens, the NATO military presence should be significantly expanded. For that purpose, NATO installations are already being enlarged and upgraded throughout Central Europe.

“Lithuania remains one of Poland’s principal partners not only in the region, but also in EU and NATO. To some extent, Vilnius already plays a more significant role than Poland in some of the EU’s foreign policy areas; Lithuanian activity and know-how in Belarus and Ukraine is particularly impressive.

– President Valdas Adamkus always mentions you as a key partner during his time in office, describing it as a “golden age” in Lithuanian-Polish relations. Nowadays, the relationship seems to have improved again, with close dialog on energy (electricity connections, synchronization, Nord Stream 2), infrastructure (Rail Baltica) and security issues (NATO, US presence). What is the place of Lithuania in Polish foreign policy thinking?

– Lithuania was during my time and is still a key strategic partner of Poland. We are bound together by many common interests, some of which you mentioned. We are also bound together by common security challenges and policy vis-à-vis our Eastern neighbors. Our economies have also grown together throughout the years of EU membership, which is so different from the period during which Valdas Adamkus and I were on the scene. Lithuania remains one of Poland’s

principal partners not only in the region, but also in EU and NATO. To some extent, Vilnius already plays a more significant role than Poland in some of the EU’s foreign policy areas; Lithuanian activity and know-how in Belarus and Ukraine is particularly impressive.

Some would say that many historical disputes and contemporary differences – for example regarding the position and rights of the Polish minority – still continue to restrict the full potential of Polish-Lithuanian relations. Undoubtedly, these are serious considerations, but I am certain that pragmatic cooperation and good will on both sides will enable our countries and societies to work out a satisfactory *modus vivendi*.

– Belarus is an important neighbor both for Lithuania/Poland and the EU as a whole. For instance, Lithuania appreciates Poland’s support with regard to the Astravyets Nuclear Power plant in Belarus. On the other hand, there seems to be a strong willingness from Western countries to open

up to Belarus and an attempt to decrease its dependence on Russia. Do you think this is a realistic goal? How can Western countries effectively encourage Belarus to become more transparent and increase its willingness to cooperate with the West?

– A prosperous and peaceful future for Belarus is in the interest of all its neighbors. The wave of popular protests against election fraud and abuse of power has rocked the country in recent weeks in a previously unprecedented way. At this time, I can only hope that Belarusian society, its leaders as well as authorities will find a way to achieve a negotiated political agreement. There are some signs of progress – the constitutional debate launched by Aleksandr Lukashenka is not a bad idea if it brings to one table the most important parties. I think that Lukashenka is aware that retaining presidential power for 26 years is unprecedented in Europe, and that time for a transition will eventually come – in fact it has already come. This is in fact the last bell.



**IMAGE:** Round table talks during the Orange Revolution in Kiev, Ukraine, December 1, 2004. Sitting at the table, second from the left is Aleksander Kwaśniewski, and fourth on the left is Valdas Adamkus, President of Lithuania (© Archiwum Kancelarii Prezydenta RP – www.prezydent.pl)

It is of unequivocal interest to him that this transition is done through a negotiated agreement and not decided through violence on the streets. It would be the worst possible outcome if Belarus follows the Ukrainian scenario from 2014; all parties have to avoid this at all costs.

I think a much more preferable scenario would be like in Poland 1989, when the transfer of power was part of a political settlement that was first negotiated, and then kept by both sides. It enabled General Jaruzelski to remain in his country and be part of society. I believe such a scenario would still be best for Belarus.

– You have been leading a European Parliament monitoring mission in Ukraine together with Pat Cox. How do you evaluate Ukraine today, six years since Maidan? Have the governments of Ukraine managed to meet the expectations of both the Ukrainian people and Western partners in terms of reforms since then?

– Given the challenges, the new political elite has certainly achieved a lot in recent years. Important reforms have been carried out and many deadlocks broken, as in the case of the moratorium on the sale of agriculture land. On the other hand, the expectations were higher if we take into account the level of popularity of President Zelensky at the beginning of his term. Today’s disappointment seems therefore natural and was to be expected. With popularity falling, the question is open whether the political elite will be able to maintain the high pace of reforms. This will define the second part of Zelensky’s term in office and decide his chances for re-election, if he decides to run again.

“In general terms, the reforms in Ukraine have to be assessed very positively – Ukraine today is a different country than it was in 2014. But much remains to be done.

I have met many Ukrainians politicians, ministers and other government employees in recent years. Their enthusiasm and will to change Ukraine was true and honest, but not on par with the preparedness of the administration.

But in general terms, the reforms in Ukraine have to be assessed very positively – Ukraine today is a different country than it was in 2014. But much remains to be done.

– Do you think it is plausible that at least one of the Eastern Partnership countries, namely Ukraine, Georgia or Moldova, will join the EU and/or NATO as a member state in the upcoming decade (until 2030)?

– Yes, I think that it is totally plausible that we will see these countries joining both NATO and the EU. But the political and economic hurdles are much higher today than they were back at the turn of the century. Their membership depends much more on the mood in Western countries than was the case during previous waves of EU and NATO expansion, and will be decided on a “case-by-case” basis. But if the determination of these countries to reform persists, and the numbers and indicators

are correct, I am more than certain that further expansion will take place. That is also a particular obligation for Poland, which always insisted on the “open door policy” in both organizations.

– The EU-US relationship seems to be complicated at the moment. One example is Trump’s announcement that some American troops, currently stationed in Germany, may leave, and some may go to Poland. Could this lead to a broader tectonic shift in NATO? Could it complicate German-Polish relations?

The issue of withdrawing troops from Germany was a subject of public debate long before the Trump Presidency, and reductions in numbers have been ongoing for a couple of decades. It has been unnecessarily politicized by Donald Trump and portrayed as a measure to “punish” Germany for its political “misbehavior” on some political issues important to the US. That is wrong; politics should not overshadow strategic considerations. Although Poland would welcome an increased US presence on Polish territory, it should not take place at the expense of overall NATO capabilities in Europe. NATO troops should be allocated to Central Europe not on a political whim, but as a result of a collective decision based on common strategy, enhanced capabilities and mutual interests.

– China is the “elephant in the room” in any foreign policy discussion. Some say the relationship between the US and China is currently comparable to the Cold War. Most EU countries, on the other hand, seem to be trying to balance their relationship with Beijing. Is there a choice that European countries must make

” 10 years ago I was convinced while in Beijing that the military rise of China was aimed at erasing a painful past (and preventing it from happening again), and not to build a dominant future. But that was during the rule of Hu Jintao, the predecessor of Xi Jinping. I am not certain that I would leave Beijing today with the same conviction as 10 years ago.

*(either the U.S. or China, no middle path?) Or is this debate superficial? Does Poland have a strategy on China?*

– I have observed certain political efforts by the US administration to force particular countries, despite other interests and obligations they may have, to block China in areas like 5G infrastructure. Some countries were resistant to such pressure, such as Germany, some more willing to go along, such as Poland. The problem is that we do not know exactly where is the line between true security concerns and lobbying for one's own products. The explanations put forward by the US are not satisfactory for many governments in Europe, and domestic security agencies provide contradictory data.

What I would like to see is establishing some kind of a EU-wide technical supervisory agency that would issue security certificates for key telecom and energy infrastructure. Such a European body would benefit from the experiences and accumulated technical knowledge of all EU states to supervise the implementation of equipment from both Chinese and other manufacturers in the EU.

In the geopolitical sphere, the question remains whether the further rise of China will truly be a peaceful one. I remember that 10 years ago I was convinced while in Beijing that the military rise of China was aimed at erasing a painful past (and preventing it from happening again), and not to build a dominant future. But that was during the rule of Hu Jintao, the predecessor of Xi Jinping. I am not certain that I would leave Beijing today with the same conviction as 10 years ago.

*– Poland has been in the spotlight in recent years because of its judicial reforms and media regulation. This has complicated the country's relationship with EU institutions; there has even been talk about imposing sanctions on Poland. On the other hand, the Polish population remains very much pro-European. Is this a contradiction? How do you see the situation evolving?*

Yes, that fissure between the attitudes of current policymakers and the population versus the EU can be called a paradox. But the explanation is simple – the issue of the EU was not the principal driver of electorate decisions at the ballot box. The Law and Justice (PiS) party has repeatedly won elections on the basis of social and cultural issues.

PiS divided society into “elites” and “true Poles” and fueled the conflict between those parts of society based on income, education, place of residence, religiosity, etc. So we have another paradox – despite the fact that the transformation has enriched the vast majority of Poles, PiS was effective in convincing those who were relatively less successful that they were in fact losers in the transformation, and that the elites achieved their success through a corrupt political system that disfavored “ordinary” people.

Independent institutions like the constitutional court, media or rule of law were portrayed as politically corrupt organizations that cement social and political inequalities, serving the interests of the “elites.” Therefore, they needed to be “reconquered” by forces that represent the interest of the people, in other words the PiS party. The party and its political will, embodied by party leaders and not institutions, are portrayed as the only guardians of “social achievements”.

Against this background, the belief and trust that Poles have in the EU is not enough to pull them away from the PiS narrative. PiS is cautious in its policy against the EU, balancing “national pride” with utilitarianism, trying to navigate in such a manner that it does not burn bridges with Brussels. Ideas surfaced among the Polish democratic opposition to force PiS to declare its intention to eventually leave the EU (like Brexit) and utilize the pro-European attitudes of the electorate, but they have not succeeded. ■

## NOBEL LAUREATE ROBERT J. SHILLER ON THE GLOBAL ECONOMY DURING THE PANDEMIC: FORTUNATELY, LITHUANIA IS A PART OF THE EU



**IMAGE:** Robert Shiller during a visit to Lithuania in 2015 (© DELFI / Mindaugas Ažušilis)

Lithuanian Foreign Policy Review Chief Editor Linas Kojala talks with Mr. Shiller on the impact of the pandemic on the global economy, as well as economic perspectives for Lithuania.

*– In your book “Narrative Economics” you argue that the economics profession has been slow to recognize the importance of narratives. You describe a narrative as a thought virus spread by “the word-of-mouth contagion of ideas in the form of stories.” Narrative economics is “the study of the viral spread of popular narratives that affect economic*

*behavior,” and the effort to make them more contagious. What are the most important narratives shaping Western behavior during these uncertain times and are these dominant narratives necessarily false?*

– There are dangerous narratives afloat today. Particularly troubling are narratives about conspiracies, like those about the “Deep State” that is supposedly in control but invisible, and narratives about the abundance of “fake news” which make it hard for people to temper their emotions with a sense of realism and fact.

### ROBERT J. SHILLER

is an internationally recognized economist and author, currently serving as a Sterling Professor of Economics at Yale University.

He received his B.A. from the University of Michigan in 1967 and his Ph.D. in economics from the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 1972. He has written on financial markets, financial innovation, behavioral economics, macroeconomics, real estate, statistical methods, and on public attitudes, opinions, and moral judgments regarding markets.

He was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economic Sciences jointly with Eugene Fama and Lars Peter Hansen in 2013 for their empirical analysis of asset prices.

Notably Mr. Shiller is of Lithuanian descent. His Lithuanian roots trace back to the 1800's when Lithuania was ruled by the Russian Czar.

*– The US is the biggest economy in the world. Observers point to an interesting phenomenon: the US stock market has been growing rapidly in recent months, while the macro economic forecasts remain gloomy. For some, it sounds counterintuitive. Is there a solid explanation for it? Is it sustainable?*

– I published a 2020 paper<sup>1</sup> that lists a number of narratives that have become epidemic in recent years that might account for this, especially in the United States. Constellations of narratives were discovered through systematic search by Proquest News and Newspapers that were indicated by keywords “Great Depression,” “secular stagnation,” “sustainability,” “housing

<sup>1</sup> Robert J. Shiller, Popular economic narratives advancing the longest U.S. expansion 2009–2019. Journal of Policy Modeling Volume 42, Issue 4, July–August 2020, Pages 791–798

bubble,” “strong economy,” and “save more.” Everything changed then in 2020 with the pandemic. Keywords for the changes in narratives in 2020, as I listed them in a talk at the City University of New York, are “Coronavirus,” “Pandemic,” “Donald Trump,” “American Dream,” “American greatness,” “Great Depression,” “quantitative easing,” and “trade war.”

– *Rivalry between the US and China seems to be encompassing all major spheres of international relations, from trade and health care to geopolitics and IT. Experts such as Niall Ferguson argue that the US and China are already in a Cold War situation. Do you see it this way?*

– Some are indeed arguing that there is a new “cold war” between the US and China. Voices are heard in the US today that the country cannot allow itself to become dependent on China for goods that they might cut off in a time of international tension. The mistrust in the US and elsewhere that underlies such a consideration is hard to repair.

– *The pandemic has triggered a debate on the strengths and weaknesses of our societies. For instance, there is an urge to decrease Western dependence on China as “the World’s factory”, even if it leads to higher consumer costs and slower GDP growth. Do you think such Western-Chinese economic decoupling is possible and desirable?*

– Unfortunately, the argument for such decoupling has been

strengthened by increasing international mistrust in recent years. We all need to work to improve the sense of international community that will make decoupling unnecessary.

– *Free trade as such is very beneficial for small export-based economies such as Lithuania; however, the rise of protectionist tendencies is clearly noticeable. What impact do these global tendencies have on countries such as Lithuania?*

– Fortunately, Lithuania has been part of the European Union since 2004. A 2019 study<sup>2</sup> showed that free trade within the EU has produced, on average, almost a ten percent increase in real GDP. The 2020 election cycle in the United States may signal a reduction in US-China conflict.

– *International experts predicted that Lithuania’s economy is going to feel the negative consequences of the pandemic and decline by almost 10 percent of GDP in 2020. However, the most recent estimates show that Lithuania’s GDP may only drop by 2 percent this year; a much lower estimate than in many other European countries. Are small countries like Lithuania less vulnerable?*

– The US has already seen a more than 10 percent decline in per capita real GDP in the first two quarters of this year. If this rate of decline were to persist for the rest of year, it would mean a more than 20% decline for the year. But it is unlikely to continue at this rate, and indications are that a rebound

will be seen in the third quarter. I would think it is reasonable, but not inevitable, that Lithuania will rebound too. A 2007 study<sup>3</sup> of 167 countries from 1960 to 2000 found conclusive evidence that smaller countries have more volatile GDP.

Risk-sharing across regions in larger countries works better if they have explicit institutions to share risk, such as the Equalization Program<sup>4</sup> in Canada that became part of their constitution in 1982. In contrast, the US has no such explicit program. A 2017 study<sup>5</sup> of the European Union concluded that “Risk sharing through international public transfers is almost non-existent for all periods and countries analyzed.”

– *Countries around the globe are discussing the need to increase investment in public health systems. While the importance is clear, the costs of providing better care, more hospitals and specialists are extremely high. Even countries such as the US seem to struggle to find the right balance between quality and spending. Do you have any advice for decision-makers in Europe and beyond?*

– Income inequality is especially poignant when it comes to health care. The poor tend to die younger, by a substantial margin. A 2012 study<sup>6</sup> in Finland found that men in the highest quintile of income lived 12.5 years longer than men in the lowest quintile. For women, the gap was 6.8 years. There is a major role for government in providing health insurance for its citizens. The US has been a laggard on providing health insurance for its citizens, because of a sometimes over-strong focus on individual choice and responsibility. ■

## UN AT 75. CHALLENGING THE PAST AND FUTURE

### AUDRA PLEPYTĖ

Calling 2020 ‘a historic year’ would be an understatement. It seems clear that we are all living through a major turning point in history, one that will be studied for years to come. In the year of a global pandemic, amidst civil unrest and global turmoil, we also mark the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the signing of the Charter of the United Nations.

This long-awaited celebration of the UN anniversary is different. The landmark 75th session of the UN General Assembly (GA) began on September 15. Yet, the iconic lectern in the General Assembly Hall, from which kings, presidents, ministers and other leaders from the 193 UN member states had addressed the world, stood idle. For the first time in the history of the UN, heads of states and governments did not gather at UN headquarters in New York for the high-level week. UN halls, hallways and other physical meeting spaces, usually ringing with the vociferous multilingual chatter of the diplomatic jet set, remained silent as events were transferred to UN WebTV broadcasts, virtual meetings on Zoom, MS Teams and other platforms. But does it even matter if the world’s political elite cannot meet in New York this year? This unprecedented situation forces us, once again, to



This unprecedented situation forces us, once again, to reflect upon the relevance of the UN today and to ask ourselves if the institution, established some 75 years ago, still serves humanity in the best possible way.

reflect upon the relevance of the UN today and to ask ourselves if the institution, established some 75 years ago, still serves humanity in the best possible way. How should we frame and evaluate the achievements and failures of the UN in today’s world?

In recent years, criticism of the UN, not least in the press, tended to overshadow its real achievements. It is true that there have been (and remain) significant reasons for criticism of the UN. The Organization has not been substantially reformed since its inception. Although its membership has risen dramatically, and major changes in the world’s political

### AUDRA PLEPYTĖ

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### IN SHORT

- In recent years, criticism of the UN, not least in the press, tended to overshadow its real achievements.
- Beyond political façade, there are hundreds of UN programs, commissions, specialized agencies and a range of other associated entities that perform vital daily roles in saving lives, providing humanitarian assistance, promoting human welfare and prosperity, and protecting and promoting human rights.
- Only last year, well over 300 million children and their families received support, assistance, services, and aid provided by UNICEF. The Organization has responded to 281 emergencies in 96 countries.
- Preserving and adapting the multilateral system in today’s world is of significant interest to Lithuania.

<sup>2</sup> Jan in ‘t Veld, The economic benefits of the EU Single Market in goods and services. *Journal of Policy Modeling*, Vol. 41, Issue 5, September–October 2019, Pages 803-818

<sup>3</sup> Davide Furceri, Georgios Karras, Country size and business cycle volatility: Scale really matters. *Journal of the Japanese and International Economies*, Vol. 21, Issue 4, December 2007, p. 424-434

<sup>4</sup> Equalization Program. Government of Canada <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-finance/programs/federal-transfers/equalization.html>

<sup>5</sup> Michela Nardo, Filippo Pericoli, Blanco Maria Del Pilar Poncela, Risk-sharing among European Countries. Publications Office of the European Union, 2017.

<sup>6</sup> Lasse Tarkiainen 1, Pekka Martikainen, Mikko Laaksonen, Tapani Valkonen, Trends in life expectancy by income from 1988 to 2007: decomposition by age and cause of death. *Epidemiol Community Health*. 2012 Jul; Vol. 66, Issue 7, p. 573-578.



IMAGE: A panorama of the United Nations General Assembly taken in October 2012 (© Wikimedia)

map have occurred over the decades of its existence, the UN, and especially its Security Council, is still overwhelmingly influenced by the P-5, the five major global powers from the late 1940s. Prolonged political discussions and lack of political will to commit to long-term reform goals are overshadowing actual achievements of the Organization. While it is true that certain things must be improved, lack of progress on the reform track does not equate to overall inaptitude of the Organization.

Too often in the public discourse, understanding of the UN is limited to the decisions of the UN Security Council or high-level political discussions in New York or Geneva. But beyond political façade, there are hundreds of UN programs, commissions, specialized agencies and a range of other associated entities that perform vital daily roles in saving lives, providing humanitarian assistance, promoting human welfare and prosperity, and protecting and promoting human rights. The UN contribution to world security, peace and prosperity is best seen in retrospect. During the last 75 years, the United Nations has provided the international community with a global platform for dialogue and enabled concerted

actions that have resulted in remarkable progress in such areas as peacekeeping and peacebuilding, human rights and the Rule of Law, combating extreme poverty, ensuring food security and providing assistance in health services, education and sanitation. Agenda 2030 and a set of 17 Sustainable Development Goals are milestone agreements in fostering social cohesion, addressing inequality and ensuring that no one is left behind. Through the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, two Covenants and numerous conventions, the UN made a rather revolutionary commitment that has been translated into international human rights law, with the protection of individual rights and freedoms at its core. This has in turn inspired a tremendously rich body of legally binding international human rights treaties through which human rights are expressed and secured. The work of the specialized agencies and programs of the UN makes the biggest difference on the ground and is proof of the UN's capability to deliver. Only last year, well over 300 million children and their families received support, assistance, services, and aid provided by UNICEF. The Organization has responded to 281 emergencies in 96 countries.



During the last 75 years, the United Nations has provided the international community with a global platform for dialogue and enabled concerted actions that have resulted in remarkable progress in such areas as peacekeeping and peacebuilding, human rights and the Rule of Law, combating extreme poverty, ensuring food security and providing assistance in health services, education and sanitation.

This huge amount of work globally is a constant lifeline, ensuring that more children's lives are saved and their quality of life improved, while providing them with opportunities for a better future. Since 2019, Lithuania has been a member of



IMAGE: The five permanent members of the Security Council (China, France, Russia, United Kingdom, and United States) enjoy the privilege of veto power (© Astrid Riecken for CTBTO)

the Executive Board of UNICEF and will hold the Presidency of the Board in 2021. The Board collectively provides guidance for UNICEF activities.

Being a member-state owned and driven organization, the UN not only has to deal with its own internal challenges and strive for efficiency, it is also a reflection of global geopolitical currents and transformations. Today's shifting geopolitical sands have created the space for a new age of great power competition. The U.S. is turning a cold shoulder to the UN, disengaging from international agreements and leaving the UN's specialized organizations. In the meantime, China, which has been extending its influence worldwide during the last decade via its development aid, investments in strategic and infrastructure projects, etc., appears more than eager to fill this void. Bolstered by technological developments and its unrivaled export economy,

China has made a significant shift from its guiding philosophy of "Hide your strength, bide your time, never take the lead" to a real effort to increase its presence and influence in the multilateral system by obtaining important first-level positions and second-level postings in UN bodies. Putin's Russia is also taking advantage of current geopolitical shifts, not least by cementing its convenience-led alliance with China at the UN Security Council and thus further paralyzing the work of the UNSC.

This is bad news for the United Nations and its smaller member states, such as Lithuania. The jungle of great-powers competition means less global stability and increasing global insecurity, as well as devaluation of power from multilateral institutions. Preserving and adapting the multilateral system in today's world is of significant interest to Lithuania. Yet, it is important to stress that it cannot be generally assumed



Putin's Russia is also taking advantage of current geopolitical shifts, not least by cementing its convenience-led alliance with China at the UN Security Council and thus further paralyzing the work of the UNSC.

that multilateralism in any form automatically contributes to a more stable and secure world. Today's global challenges to multilateralism come not only from actors that are actively contesting the underpinnings of the rules-based multilateral order, it is also driven by the clash between democratic and authoritarian regimes. In order to restructure and reinforce multilateral order in today's world, values and principles must be restored as a core consideration for how democratic nations consider membership and participation in the range of multilateral institutions, fora, and coalitions.

The 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the UN provides us with a reality check: from the pandemic and issues of inequality, to the climate emergency, battles over new technologies such as 5G and the virtual UNGA. Just as the pandemic has forced us to rapidly change the way we do business, the UN cannot continue "business as usual" either. The UN's ability to adapt is slow, yet as long as this Organization remains capable of reinventing itself, I will remain optimistic about its future. ■



# COVID LEAVES PUTIN UNDETERRED

DAVID A. ANDELMAN

For Russia, and Vladimir Putin, the novel coronavirus would appear, at first blush, to have been the opportunity of a lifetime. On the one hand, while so many of Russia's long-held targets were all but prostrated by the sweep of this pandemic across their nations, Russia and Putin were in the rather enviable position of being able to work their will on their foes, and clasp their friends even closer.

For decades, oil had been the lubricant enabling all varieties of Russian adventures and efforts to expand or solidify political, diplomatic and military red lines critical to Putin's strategic vision in Russia's near abroad and further afield as well. Now, however, with the global shutdown of business, travel and all varieties of economic activity, the need for oil began to dry up. Prices began to plummet, from a high of \$63 a barrel for the benchmark WTI crude in January 2020 to \$14 three months later. By early April, the pain had become so intense that Russia and Saudi Arabia agreed to substantial oil production cutbacks and OPEC quickly ratified the action, all in an effort to restore some equilibrium in supply and demand and return oil prices to some vestige of pre-pandemic levels. This may have

put some brakes on the plunge – by September prices had leveled off at the low \$40s per barrel, still a third lower than at the start of the year. By then, Russia was hardly feeling the pain.

Years of coping with sanctions and fiscal isolation had left Russia's economy in relatively good shape. Unable to borrow abroad even before the pandemic, its largest corporations were all but debt-free, their coffers bulging with cash they could not spend fast enough. And Russia was virtually self-sufficient in agricultural output. At the same time, Putin was insulating himself from the toxic effects of the pandemic that had begun to spread all but unchecked across Russia. Covid-19 did force Putin to postpone the nationwide referendum on a change in the Russian constitution that would allow him effectively to serve as president for life, a referendum that he would eventually win. Meanwhile, Russia was being ravaged by the coronavirus. By September 1, the country had passed the 1 million mark in the number of confirmed cases, the world's fourth largest after the United States, Brazil and India, and more than double the nearest country in Europe (Spain). And the cases were rising at the

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## IN SHORT

- Russia also had no apparent strategy for controlling the Covid-19 spread, especially in the vast territories outside of Moscow. Much of this could be attributed to some core tenets of Putin's governance
- Russia seemed often simply to be trying to take advantage of the global chaos triggered by the pandemic to push some of its central goals
- The glass-is-half-full perspective is that the pandemic will at some point – and we have certainly not reached the end game by any stretch of the imagination – force dictators like Putin to restrain their appetites and adjust their goals while they deal with a virus in their own territories that respects no edict or fist, no matter how firmly clenched.



For decades, oil had been the lubricant enabling all varieties of Russian adventures and efforts to expand or solidify political, diplomatic and military red lines critical to Putin's strategic vision in Russia's near abroad and further afield as well. Now, however, with the global shutdown of business, travel and all varieties of economic activity, the need for oil began to dry up.

rate of 5,000 per day.<sup>1</sup> As a result, Russia sealed its borders to outside visitors.

Russia also had no apparent strategy for controlling the spread, especially in the vast territories outside of Moscow. Much of this could be attributed to some core tenets of Putin's governance. From the beginning, he stepped back from what rapidly seemed to be turning into the greatest single challenge to his presidency. Officials did manage to contain somewhat the spread of the virus in Moscow. Elsewhere, however, Putin chose to place the administration of the crisis largely in the hands of provincial governors and mayors, most of whom owe their

<sup>1</sup> WHO Coronavirus Disease (COVID-19) Dashboard, WHO, 2020



**IMAGE:** US President Barack Obama and Russia's President Dmitry Medvedev signed the START treaty on nuclear weapons in 2010 (seen here in 2009, @Mika Stetsovski)

jobs to him and could not avoid shouldering the blame for the spread of the pandemic to their regions. In August, Russia proudly proclaimed it had developed the world's first coronavirus vaccine. But without any valid clinical trials, it was largely rejected beyond Russia as being of questionable effectiveness.

## RUSSIAN ADVENTURISM

The catastrophic surge of the pandemic across Russia might have deterred another leader from some of the more blatant "adventures," but in the case of Putin and Russia, that did not appear to have been the case. Campaigns ranging from broad disinformation



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to ongoing support of strategic and military activities in regions of the world long viewed as strategic by the Kremlin continued unabated.

Indeed, Russia seemed often simply to be taking advantage of the global chaos triggered by the pandemic to push some of its central goals. And in the age of the pandemic, Putin's actions were proving increasingly flagrant.

Putin's toxic circle, particularly of disinformation, began, not surprisingly, closest to home. As early as mid-March, the Russian state-dominated news agency Sputnik was proclaiming that "very smart biologists and pharmacists" in Latvia invented the Covid-19 virus.<sup>2</sup> As the pandemic continued to spread, other threads of the Russian manipulation machine did not cease to spin and indeed only continued to expand. In late July, in a classified briefing for members of Congress, top American counterintelligence officer William Evanina reported that Russia was again, as it had in 2016, making every effort to boost the fortunes of Donald Trump and destroy his opponent, Joe Biden.<sup>3</sup> Later, at the height of demonstrations in neighboring Belarus, seeking to topple that nation's autocratic president, Aleksandr Lukashenko, after a clearly manipulated election, Putin warned in a broadcast on Russian state television that these protestors should not push too hard. He had created, he said, a "certain reserve of law enforcement officers" prepared to intervene. The specter of Hungary in 1956 and Czechoslovakia in 1968 was still all too fresh. One Belarus investigative journalist Hanna Liubakova suggested<sup>4</sup> Putin was

already resorting to measures that his military had perfected while intervening in the U.S. presidential elections of 2016 – a propaganda, media and social media campaign designed to bolster Lukashenko and undermine the more vocal but less adroit opposition. This disinformation apparatus was in no way deterred by the pandemic.

Throughout the darkest months of the pandemic, the Russian military also continued to flex its muscles and demonstrate its preparedness. Velikiy accompanied by the missile cruiser Marshal Ustinov, engaged in live-fire exercises that included cruise missile launches over 250,000 square kilometers in the Barents and Norwegian Seas. Norway's Defense Chief Haakon Bruun-Hansen said that the objective of the maneuvers was to test Russia's ability to block NATO's access to the Baltic, North, and Norwegian Seas. "This is an exercise where Russia seeks to protect its territory and its interests by deploying highly capable ships, submarines and aircraft with the purpose of preventing NATO from operating in the area," Bruun-Hansen said.<sup>5</sup> A month later, the Russian navy embarked on the largest series of live-fire exercises off the coast of Alaska since the end of the Cold War – some 50 warships and 40 aircraft took part in the Bering Sea maneuvers, which also involved multiple missile launches.<sup>6</sup>

Putin saw the Covid-19 crisis in the Middle East as an opportunity to expand his reach

” Throughout the darkest months of the pandemic, the Russian military also continued to flex its muscles and demonstrate its preparedness.

and operations. In mid-March, Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu traveled to Damascus "on President Putin's instructions" to meet with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad. Help with the burgeoning coronavirus crisis in Syria was high on the agenda.<sup>7</sup> Syria's official request included test kits, personal protection equipment, and medical devices including ventilators. Two days later, countries already under various sanctions – Russia, as well as China, Iran, Syria, Venezuela, North Korea, and Nicaragua – appealed to UN Secretary General António Guterres to ease these measures, in an effort to halt the spread of the pandemic in their nations. There was no response to the plea. Still, Putin continued on the offensive, discussing how Russia might come to the aid of Turkish president Recep Tayyip Erdogan, Iranian prime minister Hassan Rouhani, even Israeli prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu. Deputy Foreign Minister Mikhail Bogdanov talked by phone with Ismail Haniyeh, head of Hamas's political bureau with the same aim

<sup>2</sup> Is Russia running a coronavirus disinformation campaign?, DW, March, 2020

<sup>3</sup> Pelosi upbraids counterintel chief in private briefing over Russian meddling. Politico, July, 2020

<sup>4</sup> Hanna Liubakova, Russia may not need to invade Belarus. It's already there. Washington Post, August, 2020

<sup>5</sup> More than 30 Russian naval vessels open fire in large-scale Barents Sea war games. The Barents Observer, July, 2020

<sup>6</sup> Russian navy conducts major maneuvers near Alaska. Military Times, August, 2020.

<sup>7</sup> Intel: Why Russia is getting involved in Mideast COVID-19 fight. AI Monitor, April, 2020.



**IMAGE:** View to the Ramstein Air Base, Germany, serves as headquarters for U.S. Air Forces in Europe and is also a North Atlantic Treaty Organization installation. (© Beowulf Tomek)

of offering help with containing the spread of the coronavirus.

Meanwhile, in early April, Russia began reaching into territories of potential NATO expansion, deploying chemical, biological, radiological, and nuclear defense military units to Serbia to help in decontamination and disinfection efforts against the spread of Covid-19.<sup>8</sup> Serbia has been toying with NATO membership. And Russia has been cementing relations with such near-beyond states as Armenia and Kazakhstan, offering similar help.

At the same time, the United States was playing right into Putin's hands. Over the past year, Trump and his defense secretary Mark Esper announced withdrawals of American armed forces from Germany, the Middle East, and Africa, canceling critical arms treaties. In June, the United States announced plans to withdraw 9,500 of the 34,500 troops deployed to Germany. Some would be deployed elsewhere in Europe, but as many as 6,000 would be returning to the United States.<sup>9</sup> A substantial withdrawal

from West Africa, announced before the pandemic struck, was expected to be accompanied by a shutdown of a \$110 million drone base in Niger, as well as the halt of assistance to French forces fighting militants in Mali, Niger, and Burkina Faso.<sup>10</sup> Also taking the pressure off Putin's missile forces, Trump had already announced he was pulling out of the Intermediate Nuclear Force (INF) treaty with Russia<sup>11</sup> and the Open Skies Treaty,<sup>12</sup> and was contemplating an end to the 2010 New Strategic Arms Reduc-

<sup>8</sup> Russia sends medical aid to Serbia to fight coronavirus. Reuters, April, 2020.

<sup>9</sup> Trump approves Pentagon plan to pull 9,500 US troops from Germany. Military Times, June, 2020.

tion Treaty (New START) that is due to expire in February 2021. All this clearly left Putin in a much stronger position to deal with the coronavirus and a host of other challenges.

Of course, there are two ways of looking at all such efforts. As I suggest in the concluding Coda of my latest book, *A Red Line in the Sand: Diplomacy, Strategy, and the History of Wars That Could Still Happen*, rulers like Putin are using the opportunity offered by

a global pandemic to enlarge or embed even more firmly red lines that are in their own basest interests. In less fraught times, the western powers in particular had established red lines that Putin had not dared to cross, though he certainly challenged them at every opportunity. Now, a defense of any such lines is too often problematic, allowing the Putins of the world to establish their own boundaries – geographic, diplomatic, political or military – expanding their territories

and their scope of operations. We might call this the glass-is-half-empty scenario.

The glass-is-half-full perspective is that the pandemic will at some point – and we have certainly not reached the end game by any stretch of the imagination – force dictators like Putin to restrain their appetites and adjust their goals while they deal with a virus in their own territories that respects no edict or fist, no matter how firmly clenched. ■



IMAGE: Russian oil platform (@ Pixabay)

<sup>10</sup> Pentagon Eyes Africa Drawdown as First Step in Global Troop Shift. New York Times, December, 2019.

<sup>11</sup> U.S. Completes INF Treaty Withdrawal. Arms Control Association, September, 2019.

<sup>12</sup> David A. Andelman, Trump is about to give Putin another gift. CNN, October, 2019.

## BIDEN'S EUROPEAN POLICY DILEMMAS

DR. CHRIS MILLER

DR. CHRIS MILLER

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### IN SHORT

- On NATO, Trump pushed a longstanding US complaint that Germany and other NATO allies do little to provide for their own defense and added unnecessary personal vitriol against Angela Merkel. This is set to change.
- The most destructive division within NATO is not between Trump and Merkel but between French President Emmanuel Macron and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey has created a host of foreign policy problems via its hyper-militarized foreign policy. Its clashes with Russia in Syria, the Caucasus, and Libya could bolster its position in NATO – but Ankara is also at odds with France in Libya and in the Mediterranean more generally.
- Though Biden has promised to be tougher on Russia, there are few new ideas in Washington about what to do. Sanctions remain popular, and could be tightened, but there is little optimism that they will induce change in Russian behavior soon.
- Western Europe is celebrating Trump's defeat, but for Central and Eastern Europe, the results of the election will be less conclusive. The volatility that Trump injected into US foreign policy is gone. But the dilemmas posed by Russia and the divisions within NATO remain.

When Joe Biden made his first speech as president-elect on November 7, he did not mention foreign policy once. Given that the United States faces a raging pandemic, a painful recession, and a deeply divided political system, the desire to focus on events at home was understandable. Among his priorities, Biden promised “to control the virus,” “to build prosperity,” “to secure...health care,” “to achieve racial justice,” and “to save the climate.” International issues were not even on the agenda.

Over the past four years, Democrats have condemned President Donald Trump's foreign policy for betraying America's allies and weakening the US on the world stage. It is normal for presidents to be criticized by their rivals, and common for incoming presidents to promise to reverse almost everything their predecessors have done. When it comes to Russia and Europe, President Trump had a highly unusual infatuation with Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin. However, his top foreign policy officials pursued a relatively conventional set of policies toward the Kremlin, articulating a strategy of great power competition. Biden is likely to ramp up criticism of Russia and increase support for Ukraine, at least rhetorically. But



When it comes to Russia and Europe, President Trump had a highly unusual infatuation with Russia and its leader Vladimir Putin. However, his top foreign policy officials pursued a relatively conventional set of policies toward the Kremlin, articulating a strategy of great power competition.

beyond the rhetoric, the broad architecture of US security policy in the regions – sanctions on Russia, NATO-led deterrence, and support for Kyiv in its struggle with Russia – looks unlikely to change.

On NATO, Trump pushed a longstanding US complaint that Germany and other NATO allies do little to provide for their own defense and added unnecessary personal vitriol against Angela Merkel. This is set to change. Western Europe always gets along



IMAGE: Defence spending has risen steadily throughout the Trump presidency (© Gage Skidmore)

better with Democratic presidents, and Biden's pledges to work with Europe on trade and climate will win friends in Brussels and many European capitals.

However, not every dilemma in US foreign policy or NATO was caused by Trump, and not every problem can be resolved by Biden. Four issues stand out that create enduring divides within NATO and pose challenges for American engagement in European security even after the election.

Start with the divisions within NATO. Although Americans focus on Trump's tweets, the most destructive division within NATO is not between Trump and Merkel but between French President Emmanuel Macron and Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan. Turkey has created a host of foreign policy problems via its hyper-militarized foreign policy. Its clashes with Russia in Syria, the Caucasus, and Libya could bolster

its position in NATO – but Ankara is also at odds with France in Libya and in the Mediterranean more generally. Many in Paris now see Turkey as a more pressing problem than Russia. Macron has not helped matters by calling NATO “brain dead.” President-elect Biden will be wary of doing anything that pushes Turkey further out of the NATO mainstream. But it will be hard to manage the alliance when two of the most militarily powerful member states – Turkey and France – are at odds.

Second, though Biden has promised to be tougher on Russia, there are few new ideas in Washington about what to do. Sanctions remain popular, and could be tightened, but there is little optimism that they will induce change in Russian behavior soon. There is broad-based support for NATO deterrence efforts, but less consensus about how to deter Russian political meddling,

” Biden has promised to be tougher on Russia, there are few new ideas in Washington about what to do. Sanctions remain popular, and could be tightened, but there is little optimism that they will induce change in Russian behavior soon.

assassinations, and adventurism in other regions. Nor do American foreign policy experts have many new ideas about how Russia might be persuaded to cut a deal on the Donbas. So, the stalemate with Russia looks most likely to continue.



Like Trump and like Obama before him, Biden's foreign policy will be focused on the dilemma of China. Biden and his advisers have criticized Trump for being too unilateral in confronting China and not working with allies.

Western Europe will welcome Biden's change of tone on many issues, while Central and Eastern Europe will appreciate the rhetorical clarity on NATO and Russia. However, other issues may create tension in specific bilateral relations with some countries. Many Biden foreign policy advisers have vigorously criticized autocratic tendencies in countries such as Hungary as well as rightwing populism across Central and Eastern Europe. Some Biden advisers have also backed trying to pressure such countries to adopt different policies, potentially in coordination with the EU or major European countries. This is almost certain to intensify tension with Hungary and could easily create problems in relations with Poland, Slovenia, and other countries in the region. It is plausible to imagine a scenario in which Trump's tension-filled relations with Western Europe are resolved but replaced by tense relations with several key countries in Central and Eastern Europe.

Beyond these Europe-focused dilemmas, one other factor will

shape Biden's foreign policy choices with regard to Europe: China. Like Trump and like Obama before him, Biden's foreign policy will be focused on the dilemma of China. Biden and his advisers have criticized Trump for being too unilateral in confronting China and not working with allies. Europeans criticized this, too. But now Europeans must develop an answer when Biden demands transatlantic coordination on China.

NATO has begun to think more seriously about how it should address China, and the Biden Administration will continue to push it to take China seriously. Countries across Europe can expect continued US skepticism if they allow major Chinese investments in infrastructure, telecoms, or tech. The Trump Administration took unilateral steps to condemn China over Hong Kong and Xinjiang, including very limited sanctions, but the Biden Administration is likely to demand that allies join it in standing up to China. For Western Euro-

peans who have already signed on to critical statements, coordination with the US will be welcome. For Central and Eastern European countries, this may require them to take more controversial stances than they would like.

Western Europe is celebrating Trump's defeat, but for Central and Eastern Europe, the results of the election will be less conclusive. The volatility that Trump injected into US foreign policy is gone. But the dilemmas posed by Russia and the divisions within NATO remain. The US and Europe have effectively deterred Russia from further military operations in Europe after the war in Ukraine and have imposed substantial costs on Russia via sanctions and export controls. But Russia remains a serious challenge. Under the Biden presidency, like under Obama and Trump, the West will need continued focus on developing a coordinated policy to deter Russian cyber-attacks, assassinations, and political meddling. ■

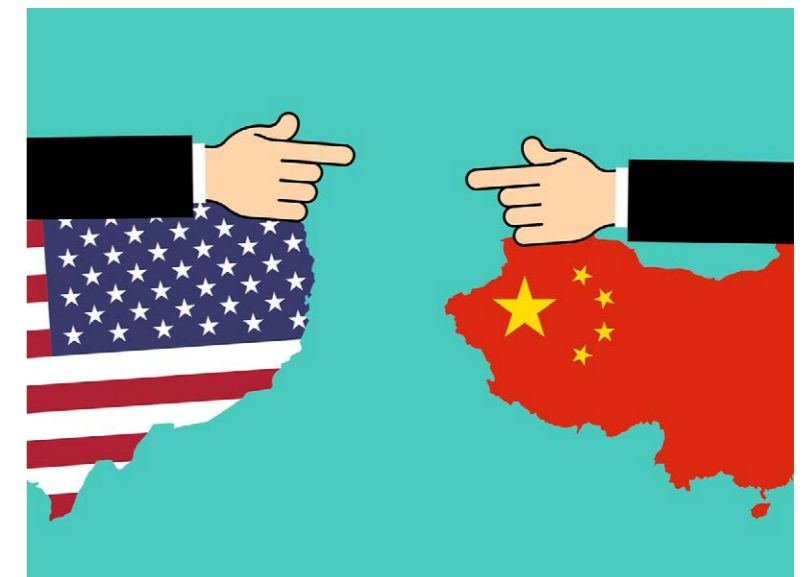


IMAGE: US-China relations will be the focus of Biden's presidency (@ Pixabay)

# US LEADERSHIP POST-CORONAVIRUS

DANIEL FRIED

The ongoing coronavirus pandemic is less a game changer and more an accelerant of international (and US) trends, both bad and good.

First, the bad news: President Trump has bungled the US response through poor leadership at home. That includes deliberately minimizing its danger early on (as we now know through Trump's own words<sup>1</sup>); failing to mobilize the US around measures known to be effective in limiting the coronavirus's spread (social distancing and mask wearing); and applying political pressure to tout quick fixes, pushing either relatively useless or only moderately effective treatments (and publicly suggesting ingesting detergent, which could be lethal).<sup>2</sup> Trump may also be preparing to push his administration to rush a vaccine for public use before it is fully tested for safety and effectiveness. This is consistent with Trump's performative rather than substantive style of governing.

Trump also deployed his unilateralist (and blame-seeking-first) approach to the international aspect of the pandemic. The Chinese

government's role in covering up the coronavirus in its earlier stages has rightly earned it opprobrium. But Trump and many in his administration tout China's failings as a rhetorical device to excuse their own. The US administration's decision to withdraw from the World Health Organization as punishment for its alleged failings in the early stages of the coronavirus pandemic is another example of Trump's unproductive attacks on international organizations and multilateralism, a US approach that did not begin with Trump but one he has intensified. Another US President might have chosen to lead an international effort to manage the pandemic.

Meanwhile, US citizens cannot travel to much of the world, including Canada and most of Europe and Asia, creating a major obstacle to the sort of soft-power leadership to which the US is accustomed.

To be sure, the coronavirus is a tough problem. Europe itself is not out of the woods. France and Spain in particular are experiencing a major second wave of new infections. So is Israel. Indeed, Europe,

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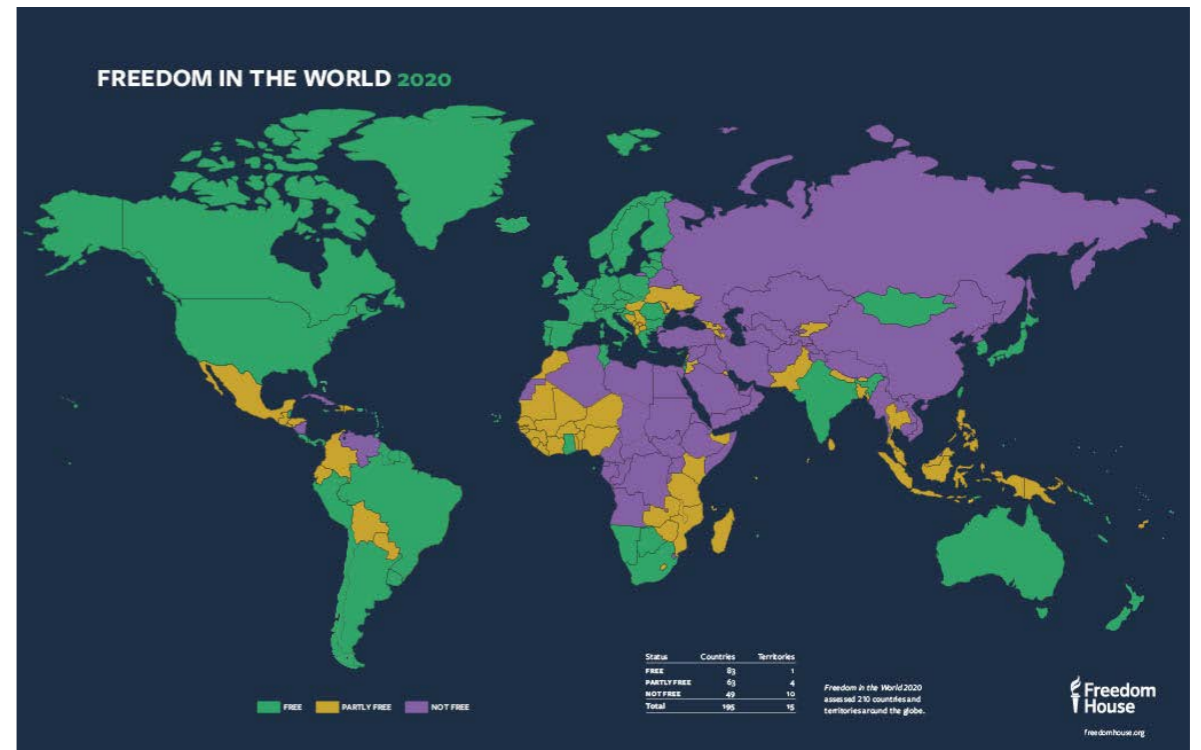


is an American diplomat, who served as Assistant Secretary of State for European and Eurasian Affairs from 2005 to 2009, and as United States Ambassador to Poland from 1997 to 2000. He also served as a Special Envoy to facilitate the closing of the Guantanamo Bay detention camp, Cuba, and as a coordinator for United States embargoes. Fried retired from the State Department in February 2017, after 40 years of service.

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## IN SHORT

- US public opinion has long been torn between support for US alliances and a leading US role in the world on the one hand, and a skepticism about the costs and responsibilities of leadership.
- Democracies have a habit of messing up, particularly in early stages of new challenges. But they have in the past demonstrated a resilience that can astonish both themselves and their adversaries, and are showing some of this now.
- Of particular interest to Lithuania, a Biden administration would also focus with greater consistency on combating the Kremlin and other forms of disinformation and on ways to combat corrupt money flows (one of the vectors of Kremlin influence).



**IMAGE:** Global Freedom Status 2020 by the Freedom House. It notes that 2019 was the 14th consecutive year of decline in global freedom (@freedomhouse.org)

the United States, and the world will be vulnerable to setbacks and new waves of infection until a reliable vaccine and/or treatment are developed and widely available. Western economies that had just recovered from the Great Recession of 2007-09 are back in recession territory or worse and may not have seen rock bottom.

With the US isolated and distracted (at least until the US Presidential elections are held and decided), and European and other G7 economies hit, President Putin's Russia and President Xi's China may feel that the time of authoritarians has come again. China has established a Gulag for Uyghurs in Xijiang and seems to have grown more menacing toward its neighbors and Taiwan.<sup>3</sup>

The Kremlin continues its brazen efforts at assassination and is threatening yet another neighbor, Belarus, whose people seem to be seeking nothing more than for their votes to count.

The strategic consequences could get ugly. The last time the industrial democracies were in depression, the United States inward looking, and autocrats on the march, we got World War followed by the Cold War.

But there is another side. Democracies have a habit of messing up, particularly in early stages of new challenges. But they have in the past demonstrated a resilience that can astonish both themselves and their adversaries, and are showing some of this now. The

“ Democracies have a habit of messing up, particularly in early stages of new challenges. But they have in the past demonstrated a resilience that can astonish both themselves and their adversaries, and are showing some of this now.

<sup>1</sup> Bob Woodward's interviews with President Trump.

<sup>2</sup> Pushing Hydroxychloroquine, which is minimally effective at best, or convalescent plasma therapy, which may be moderately effective but not as much as the administration touted, thus creating more public confusion and doubt.

<sup>3</sup> Link to China Global Times editorial, 9/11/2020 by Hu Xijin, "GT" editor-in-chief.

“ US public opinion has long been torn between support for US alliances and a leading US role in the world on the one hand, and a skepticism about the costs and responsibilities of leadership.

EU this past summer overcame earlier differences and agreed on a major fiscal stimulus package to help governments deal with the pandemic's economic hit. The US Federal Reserve also acted with speed to do much the same and the US Congress (and some parts of the administration) overcame habitual paralysis and passed huge stimulus bills early on that prevented economic collapse. Rather than race to protectionism, both the US and EU have been thinking about ways to reduce dependence on supply chain vulnerabilities for critical products for which China is a sole or critical supplier. Trump's rhetoric notwithstanding, there are many on both sides of the Atlantic who are eager to develop common approaches to economic vulnerabilities made apparent by the coronavirus. That could provide the basis for common economic policies rather than Trump's off-and-on trade wars with the US's major trading partners.

US public opinion has long been torn between support for US al-

liances and a leading US role in the world on the one hand, and a skepticism about the costs and responsibilities of leadership. Long years of inconclusive wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, and perceptions about the costs of economic integration with the world, have fueled neo-isolationist thinking in the US. The stresses of the coronavirus probably increase such trends. But US support for NATO remains high<sup>4</sup>, even as President Trump has argued against US alliances. European support for NATO also remains strong.

All this suggests potential dangers but also the raw material for a democratic comeback. Trump's neo-unilateralist rhetoric and weak response to the pandemic are giving both Americans and their democratic allies a look at what the world might look like without US leadership. It isn't pretty. That sobering look could drive democracies to fix problems and, above all, not to take the Western alliance for granted. To repurpose a famous line from an old Polish-Lithuanian epic poem, the West "is like good health, we miss you only when you are gone."<sup>5</sup>

Happily, former Vice President Biden's foreign policy team seems more committed to US alliances, especially with Europe, is properly wary of another "reset" with Putin and skeptical of China's intentions, having learned that China's economic integration with the world has not led to political convergence.

Team Biden speaks of harnessing the latent power of the great democracies to address the anxieties that the coronavirus

and years of economic stresses have generated, but in ways more consistent than those of the Trump Administration.<sup>6</sup> If Biden wins, it is not hard to discern the direction of their early foreign policy moves: a Biden administration is likely to re-join the Paris Climate Agreement and the WHO, reach out to the EU and other democracies with offers to combine forces to resist Putin's aggression and Chinese exploitation of the international economic system, halt threats to pull US forces out of South Korea and Japan and stop picking second-order fights with Canada and Europe. In doing so, it would generate enormous political capital it could then put to use.

Of particular interest to Lithuania, a Biden administration would also focus with greater consistency on combating the Kremlin and other forms of disinformation and, as Biden has himself indicated,<sup>7</sup> on ways to combat corrupt money flows (one of the vectors of Kremlin influence).

Europe would have to reach back and work with the US. A first Biden summit with Europe might be easy due to general relief in Europe from Trump's ouster. But a second summit would have to show results. That's not inevitable but it is well within the realm of the possible.

The coronavirus, Trump's neo-isolationism, Xi, and Putin have combined to put a good scare into the transatlantic community. We now need to think about fixing it if the opportunity arises. To tweak an old phrase, we should never let a good near-death experience go to waste. ■

## ROCK SOLID: GERMANY'S ROLE IN DETERRENCE AND DEFENSE IN NATO'S NORTH-EAST

DR. PATRICK KELLER

Just as the largest trees catch the most wind, Germany's role in European security policy is prone to much criticism and skepticism. Given its size – in population, territory, wealth – its enviable political stability (Chancellor Angela Merkel is on her third U.S. president and her seventh Italian prime minister), and its geographic location at the heart of the European continent, allies and partners in Europe expect Germany to contribute accordingly to the common defense effort. And they expect this contribution to not be limited to financial and military means, but rather to include political leadership as well. Some call it the Spider-Man Doctrine: With great power comes great responsibility.

Frequently, the German government is taken to task for not living up to this responsibility – not the least by domestic critics. The failure to spend even close to 2% of GDP on defense (spending hovers at around 1.3%), the lamentable state of its armed forces' readiness, and the timidity with which Germans participate in – let alone initiate – strategic debates within NATO and/or the EU all serve as valid points.

And yet: To tell a very different story, it is necessary only to

“ In addition, Germany is the only continental European nation leading one of the four battalions that make up NATO's rotating enhanced forward presence in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.

glance at what has been happening in NATO's North-East. In response to Russia's aggression against Ukraine and its illegal annexation of Crimea in 2014, NATO immediately re-emphasized its key task of territorial defense. Allies in the East received not just rhetorical reassurance of solidarity but concrete military measures that send a clear signal, warning Moscow against any infringement. Germany has been at the forefront of this response, both conceptually and, even more importantly, on the ground.

Take one of the innovations of the 2014 Wales summit, the Very High Readiness Joint Task Force, or VJTF, a quick response-spear-

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### IN SHORT

- The failure to spend even close to 2% of GDP on defense (spending hovers at around 1.3%), the lamentable state of its armed forces' readiness, and the timidity with which Germans participate in – let alone initiate – strategic debates within NATO and/or the EU all serve as valid points
- Yet Germany is the only continental European nation leading one of the four battalions that make up NATO's rotating enhanced forward presence in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania.
- It is up to Germany to not just remain steadfast but to explain more clearly and openly its strategic rationale.

<sup>4</sup> 77% of Americans agree that the NATO alliance should be maintained, according to a Gallup poll from March 2019, reflecting a steady trend since the mid-1990s.

<sup>5</sup> With the greatest reverence for Mickiewicz's, "Pan Tadeusz".

<sup>6</sup> Atlantic Council 8/21/20 blog from a discussion with Jake Sullivan.

<sup>7</sup> Biden "Foreign Affairs" article from March/April 2020 edition.



**IMAGE:** German troops on arrival to Lithuania (© Ministry of Defence of Lithuania)

head of 5,000 soldiers. Germany was crucial in its implementation and last served as its lead nation in 2019 – and will again in 2023. Likewise, Germany served as lead nation in the creation of the Multinational Command Center Northeast in Szczecin, Poland, which is of key relevance in regional defense planning.

In addition, Germany is the only continental European nation leading one of the four battalions that make up NATO's rotating enhanced forward presence in Poland, Estonia, Latvia, and Lithuania. (German troops are stationed in Lithuania; other EFP lead nations are the U.S., the United Kingdom, and Canada. The German-led battle group was the first to be ready.) And last but not least, Germany has contributed to NATO air policing over the Baltics since 2004. This task has only grown in relevance, and Germany has assumed (again) a leadership role in September 2020, contributing 180 soldiers and six Eurofighter aircraft.

None of these efforts are subject to change. In fact, successive Ger-

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As the threat from Russia is not likely to diminish any time soon and since German troops enjoy a cordial reception in their host countries, there is no reason to expect German withdrawal from this common cause.

man defense ministers have stated that the Bundeswehr will remain as long as it is welcome. As the threat from Russia is not likely to diminish any time soon and since German troops enjoy a cordial reception in their host countries, there is no reason to expect German withdrawal from this common cause.

Moreover, this German commitment is not to be confused with a somewhat paternalistic attitude of reassurance of antsy Eastern allies whose threat perception vis-à-vis

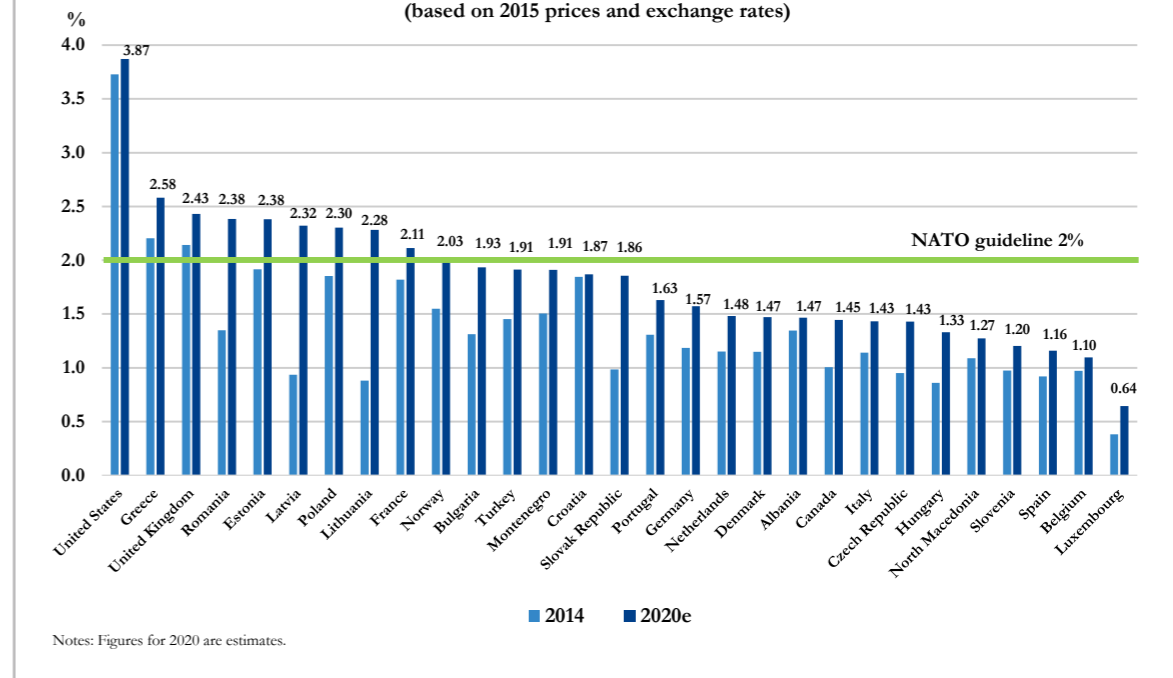
Russia is regarded as overblown. To the contrary, the tangible German commitment to Baltic security is part of a larger reassessment of the German and Euro-Atlantic security situation. It is widely accepted in German security circles that the focus of the last two decades on stabilization missions out-of-area came at the expense of territorial defense – and that this imbalance has to be repaired. As a consequence, German military planning and the Bundeswehr's force structure have shifted fundamentally.

This is evident in the revised German policy toward the Baltic Sea as well. Germany, accepting its responsibility as the largest maritime power of all NATO states bordering the Baltic Sea, has established the Maritime Forces Staff in Rostock which can plan and command NATO operations in the region. It will soon grow into a larger Baltic Maritime Component Command, complementing the land and air efforts already in place and signifying a thorough understanding of the broader security situation in the region.

Finally, Germany is addressing the most trenchant criticism of the initiatives of 2014: The worry that NATO forces are simply too few and far-between to stem a Russian attack by conventional means. True, the EFP and VJTF are sitting ducks, trip-wires at best. Unless, that is, capable reinforcements can be brought into action swiftly. Hence, the establishment of NATO's new Joint Support and Enabling Command in Ulm, Germany is of utter significance. As are NATO's bi-annual reinforcement exercises like DEFENDER (which, unfortunately, had to be minimized this year due to the Coronavirus pandemic). In this context, the European Union's PESCO project of military mobility is crucial in creating the infrastruc-

**Graph 3 : Defence expenditure as a share of GDP (%)**

(based on 2015 prices and exchange rates)



**TABLE:** Defence expenditure as a share of GDP (%) in 2014 and 2020 (© NATO)

ture – both in terms of bureaucratic process and actual traffic grid – that allows for smooth movement of forces across Europe. In all of these measures, Germany is in the driver's seat.

So, all's well on the Eastern front? Of course, there is room for improvement. NATO troops in the region could and should do more joint exercises, and the contingency planning needs to be more specific and realistic.

But these are rather obvious and likely next steps. On a more fundamental level, there remains the perennial question about German reliability. Allies ask themselves: When push comes to shove, will the Germans really be there for us? The occasional discouraging polling result among the German people fans this worry, as does the unwillingness among German elites to recognize Nordstream II for the geopolitical ploy it is. Experience has made Central and Eastern Eu-

ropeans wary of too much closeness between Berlin and Moscow.

It is a testament to the power of history that decades of German rhetoric as well as economic sanctions against Russia since 2014 and the tangible efforts at military solidarity with allies are not enough to overcome this sensitivity. Therefore, it is up to Germany to not just remain steadfast but to explain more clearly and openly its strategic rationale.

For instance, the German refusal to let NATO station troops in Eastern member states in a permanent rather than rotating fashion might be exasperating to some. But to stick to NATO's commitments under the NATO-Russia Founding Act, even though Russia has violated it many times over, is of immense value. It allows the Alliance to maintain the high ground – and use it as leverage. As long as Germans make it clear on which side of the table they are sitting,

sitting down at all to talk and to seek agreement is the most promising strategy.

In truth, the debate about German reliability vis-à-vis Russia points to even deeper challenges for Germany – and perhaps Europeans in general. Do we accept that there are threats to our freedom and way of life, both in the European theater and on a global level? That we are dependent on an international order we have contributed relatively little to uphold?

With the changing role of the U.S. and the challenge from autocratic powers, we Europeans must recalibrate our attitude toward defense and, more broadly, systemic competition. This translates into all fields of domestic and foreign policy – from technological innovation to the state of our armed forces and the (under-) performance of EU neighborhood programs. Plenty of room for true leadership, indeed. ■

# 30 YEARS GERMAN UNITY – 30 YEARS NATO ENLARGEMENT TO THE EAST

DR. ANDREAS VON GEHLEN, MBA (BERLIN)

Since the fall of the Iron Curtain, developments in Germany repeatedly provided blueprints for Europe as a whole. While the Eastern German Democratic Republic (GDR) was one of Moscow's closest allies, the Western German Federal Republic (FRG) stood firmly on the side of the United States. The latter maintained a "special relationship," personified by then US President George H.W. Bush and Chancellor Helmut Kohl, which not only enabled the reunification of Germany, but also paved the way for NATO to expand to the East.

The fact that the question of German Unity could not be answered separately from questions concerning future military alliances in Europe became apparent in early 1990. Hans-Dietrich Genscher, the foreign minister for the FRG, declared that a unified Germany should be a member of NATO; however, no foreign NATO troops should be deployed on the territory of the former GDR. In addition, "an enlargement of NATO territory to the East, i.e. closer to the border of the Soviet Union, [...] will not take place." In this apparently clear assurance given by Bonn's Foreign Minister to Moscow lies the contradiction that NATO membership for all of Germany would inevitably



The fact that the question of German Unity could not be answered separately from questions concerning future military alliances in Europe became apparent in early 1990.

bring NATO closer to the USSR (at least *de jure*, regardless of deployments).

Thereby, Genscher invented the contradiction of the frequently quoted "assurance" of the West that there would be no eastward expansion of NATO: A week later, the United States Secretary of State, James Baker, assured the General Secretary of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union (CPSU) and *de facto* head of state, Mikhail Gorbachev, with regard to negotiations on German Unity that "not an inch of NATO's present military jurisdiction will spread in an eastern direction." The next day, additionally Kohl assured Gorbachev that NATO "would not shift

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## IN SHORT

- Germany's unity was built upon trust between partners in the East and West that not long before had considered each other enemies.
- In 1990 no commitments in written form were made as to whether former Warsaw Pact member states other than the GDR would be allowed to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. An eastward enlargement of NATO has simply not been discussed within the organization itself or in the Warsaw Pact.
- NATO nevertheless did not permanently deploy troops to member states bordering Russia even after it strongly condemned the "aggressive actions against Ukraine" and the "illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea."

the international context into account." On the following day, Kohl interpreted the second sentence in response to a journalist's question: "Could the Soviet Union imagine a united Germany in NATO?" – "Yes, of course." There was no denial from Moscow, which also did not comment on the Camp David declaration by Bush and Kohl of February 25, 1990: "We share a common belief that a unified Germany should remain a full member of the North Atlantic Treaty Organization, including participation in its military structure." Merely a "special military status" was foreseen for the territory of the former GDR.

Washington and Bonn stuck to this position. In Moscow, on the other hand, demands arose for a unified Germany to be neutral. Gorbachev described NATO membership in *Pravda*, the CPSU's official newspaper, on March 7, 1990, as being "completely unacceptable." However, on May 31, 1990, he was received in Washington by President Bush, who confronted him with reference to the Helsinki



Ultimately, the Soviet head of state agreed at the founding site of NATO to its initial expansion to the East.

Accords, that a "united Germany should decide for itself about its political status concerning a military alliance." Ultimately, the Soviet head of state agreed at the founding site of NATO to its initial expansion to the East.

In this way, Gorbachev enabled or at least facilitated the approval of the two Western European powers of 1945 to German unity. The United Kingdom and France were just as skeptical of German Unity as other European states, which, however, did not have "Four Power" status. They shared the intention to continue Germany's military incorporation. At the meeting of the foreign ministers of both NATO

and the Warsaw Pact in February 1990, only Shevardnadze, the Soviet Union's Minister of Foreign Affairs, and his long-time East Berlin colleague Oskar Fischer (who was voted out one month later) spoke out in favor of a neutral Germany. On the sidelines of the same meeting in Ottawa, the foreign ministers of the two German states and their colleagues from the "Four Powers," the United States, the United Kingdom, France and the Soviet Union, agreed on the "2+4" format for negotiations on German unity.

The agreement was ultimately concluded because Moscow yielded to the security policy interests of the Western Allies at the price of economic support from Germany. Bush had set this course with his saying, the "Chancellor has deep pockets." On July 16, 1990, Kohl and Gorbachev came to an agreement which led to payments from Bonn to Moscow amounting to 15 billion D-Marks, which were intended to cover the costs of the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces from unified Germany. In



IMAGE: Berlin 1989; picture taken soon after the fall of the Berlin Wall on November 9 (© Raphaël Thiémond)





IMAGE: Graffiti Portrait of Gorbachev on the Berlin Wall in Germany (@ Pixy)

“The geostrategic intention of the Soviet leadership was not to reduce the distance between NATO troops and Moscow.

return, the “Treaty on the Final Settlement with Respect to Germany” (more commonly known as the “Two Plus Four Agreement”), signed on September 12, 1990, stipulates: “Following the completion of the withdrawal of the Soviet armed forces from the territory of the present German Democratic Republic and of Berlin, units of German armed forces assigned to military alliance structures in the same way as those in the rest of German territory may also be stationed in that part of Germany, but without nuclear weapon carriers. [...] Foreign armed forces and nuclear weapons or their carriers will not be stationed in that part of Germany or deployed there.” (Article 5, Paragraph 3) Thus, the former GDR’s territory “special

military status” that Bush and Kohl agreed upon in Camp David, made its way into the contract. At the end of a controversial debate in the Supreme Soviet, the USSR’s highest legislative body, on March 4, 1991, the Soviet Union was the last state to adopt the “Two Plus Four Agreement.”

30 years after Germany regained full sovereignty in unity, debates concerning its impacts are ongoing. With regard to Western assurances to Moscow not to enlarge NATO eastwards, four points can be determined:

1. In 1990 no commitments in written form were made as to whether former Warsaw Pact member states other than the GDR would be allowed to join the North Atlantic Treaty Organization. An eastward enlargement of NATO has simply not been discussed within the organization itself or in the Warsaw Pact.
2. In the absence of agreements on the Eastern demarcation of NATO, the cited paragraph of the “Two Plus Four Agreement” is of ongoing political

importance. The geostrategic intention of the Soviet leadership was not to reduce the distance between NATO troops and Moscow.

3. This is reflected in the “Founding Act” between the Russian Federation and NATO, dating from 1997. However, also on the eve of the accession to the Alliance of the Czech Republic, Hungary and Poland, it did not completely rule out a “permanent stationing of substantial combat forces” in Eastern Europe.
4. NATO nevertheless did not permanently deploy troops to member states bordering Russia even after it strongly condemned the “aggressive actions against Ukraine” and the “illegal and illegitimate annexation of Crimea.” According to the Warsaw Summit Communiqué 2016, NATO’s enhanced Forward Presence (eFP) troops are deployed on a “rotational basis.”

Today’s geopolitical situation in Europe emerged 30 years ago from the fall of the Iron Curtain. Germany’s unity was built upon trust between partners in the East and West that not long before had considered each other enemies. Meanwhile, trust vanished, however tensions did not yet escalate to Cold War levels. The Helsinki provision “to be or not to be a party to treaties of alliance” continues to safeguard every country’s right. On this foundation, the “Two Plus Four” paragraph on the stationing of foreign armed forces on the territory of the former GDR could provide a blueprint: A re-increased distance between both sides’ troops remains a challenging disarmament mission in order to preserve peace on our continent. ■

## THE PARADOX OF RUSSIA’S DECLINE

JAMES SHERR

The paradox of Russia’s decline is that it makes no difference to the threat that it poses. On every front where the state is challenged, retreat has been combined with attack and a determination to show that, regardless of consequences, it will not back down. Now as in the past, the business school metric of profit maximization and rational choice runs aground on Russia’s culture of power, its methodology of conflict management and its purposeful extraction of maximum utility from the finite means at its disposal. The expectation that the ebbing away of Russia’s economic and innovative capacity, along with the “punishment” of its transgressions, will foster a reconsideration of its approach and objectives remains a hope unsupported by evidence.

For all this, the Putin regime is encumbered by dogma and is partially sighted. Years of “negative selection” in all branches of power, the shrinkage of permissible space for constructive discord, the diversion of creativity from policy and statecraft into clan rivalry and private enrichment are all finally diminishing the country’s analytical capability where it matters most: in the anticipation of danger.

One would have to discard one’s own memory to be oblivious of the contrasts between the dynamic Russia of the early Putin years, the righteously vengeful Russia of 2008 and 2014 and today’s frozen policies. After the first post-Soviet decade in which history was made largely without Russia and to its perceived detriment, Yeltsin’s successor gradually seized the advantage and did so on the basis of growing national confidence and collective self-respect. Not only did the new leadership reverse much of Russia’s geopolitical decline (and even, in much of the West, a perception of its irrelevance), it combined this achievement with prosperity for the first time in more than a century. In 2008, Russia took its titular Western partners by surprise; in 2014, it forced them to revise the grammar of conflict and war.

But in 2020, it is Russia that finds itself beset with surprises in every domain of importance to it. Today, Russia’s leadership has little respect for others, but the country over which it presides has far less confidence in itself and faith in those who govern it. Imbued with the conviction that the West has lost (pace Lavrov) its “monopoly of the globaliza-

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For over 25 years, he has been regularly consulted by Western governments on the foreign, defence and security policies of the Russian Federation and since 1995 has had an active advisory role in Ukraine, working closely with the defence and security establishment. Since 1991, James has been a frequent visitor to Estonia and its Baltic neighbours before taking up residence in January 2019.

### IN SHORT

- After the first post-Soviet decade in which history was made largely without Russia and to its perceived detriment, Yeltsin’s successor gradually seized the advantage and did so on the basis of growing national confidence and collective self-respect.
- The protests in Khabarovsk are a warning that Putin’s template of pre- and post-election management might finally be running its course. Yet his response to those who challenge this template is unchanged: manipulation, vilification and pressure.
- A catalogue of unexpected foreign policy challenges, some artfully managed and some poorly managed, has not dented the Kremlin’s efforts to use the means available to diminish further the supposedly inexorable erosion of Western “hegemony” and the sway, not to say attractiveness, of the liberal-democratic order. [...] Whatever the rewards of such conduct at home, its most conspicuous results abroad have been the estrangement of Germany and a program to increase Sweden’s defense budget by 40 percent.



**IMAGE:** Protests in Khabarovsk Krai, Russia, began in Summer 2020 in support of the then governor, Sergei Furgal, after his arrest (© Incredible Terence)

tion process,” Russia’s governing establishment lacks the stimuli that in the mid-1980s persuaded its Soviet predecessor to reassess its fundamental premises and interests. Lose-lose outcomes and the containment of challenges, rather than their resolution, now substitute for more positive and enduring definitions of victory. A reactive approach as well as overconfidence in tested but increasingly outdated stratagems can now be observed both at home and abroad. A president who once embodied and shaped the public mood is now increasingly isolated from society and deaf to ordinary voices.

The protests in Khabarovsk are a warning that Putin’s template of pre- and post-election management might finally be running its course. Yet his response to those who challenge this template is unchanged: manipulation, vilifica-

tion and pressure. Not only did the Kremlin fail to anticipate the public response to its effective abduction of the “people’s governor,” Sergey Furgal, and his incarceration in Moscow’s Lefortovo prison, it continues to display a marked contempt for the region’s sensibilities and interests. Like Alexander III’s *eminence grise*, Konstantin Pobedonostev (who described the Tsar’s subjects as “soft wax”), the curators of today’s election technology and administrative resources appear to believe that ordinary people are infinitely malleable. Within these flawed terms of reference, the Kremlin is pursuing a calculating strategy of maneuver and attrition, menacing its opponents rather than crushing them, and demonstrating that its tenacity is inexhaustible. The affair continues to “stink like a sod in the oven,” but a fire has been averted.<sup>1</sup> The question is, for how long?

In Belarus, the Kremlin is managing not only to confound its opponents but alienate its potential allies. What it possesses is a clear understanding of its own self-defeating objectives. The first, of absolute importance, is that there be no more “colored” revolutions in “former Soviet space,” irrespective of how well disposed the revolutionaries might be to Russia itself. The second is that Russia and Russia alone is the arbiter of the terms of Alyaksandr Lukashenka’s survival and his departure. The principal means for securing the latter objective is a rescue package for Lukashenka that is designed to enfeeble him and, by a process of constitutional reform – diametrically opposite to the one so recently launched in Russia – provide it with the means to dilute and ultimately end his power. Yet not only has this stratagem failed to curb Lukashenka’s



Turkey’s emergence as the enabler of Azerbaijan’s offensive (and its military revival) has now torn up the playbook. Here and elsewhere, Turkey has become a determinant actor in its own right, with its own distinctive scheme of geopolitical interests

determination to rule without constraint, it has diminished the possibility of a post-Lukashenka regime that would secure Russia’s more fundamental interests: deeper integration into Russia’s economy (which Lukashenka has doggedly resisted) and its adherence to its geopolitical policy (which, with regard to Ukraine, Lukashenka has also opposed). By these means, Putin has transformed Svitlana Tikhanovskaya from a constructive opponent into a revolutionary leader and has pushed her more heavily-Russophile allies, Valery Tsepikalo and Viktor Babarika, into the margins of significance. The longer Russian money finances the instruments of Lukashenka’s repression, the less favorably disposed towards Russia Belarus is likely to become.

Yet it is in Nagorno-Karabakh that the survival of established paradigms is most dramatically threatened. Since the ceasefire accord of 1994, Russian interests have defined the art of the possible, whether it connived in conflicts, acquiesced in them or

prevented them. Russia’s partners in the OSCE Minsk Group – perhaps the sole format of post-Cold War cooperation to preserve its relevance – never challenged Russia’s standing as first amongst equals. Neither Armenia nor Azerbaijan had the capacity to do so. For good or ill, this was a closed game. Turkey’s emergence as the enabler of Azerbaijan’s offensive (and its military revival) has now torn up the playbook. Here and elsewhere, Turkey has become a determinant actor in its own right, with its own distinctive scheme of geopolitical interests.

An argument can be made – as indeed it has been – that Turkey’s entry onto the scene has afforded Russia a convenient means of embarrassing, if not crippling, Armenia’s Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan, whose Europhile proclivities have engendered mounting Russian displeasure. Yet Pashinyan made a swift retreat from his “deviation” after the first defeats of Armenian arms. Nevertheless, one Russian and one US-brokered ceasefire have failed to curb either Azerbaijan’s ardor or halt its territorial advance. Turkey’s deployment of hundreds of *jihadis* in support of Azerbaijan serves no conceivable Russian interest. Even less conceivable is the possibility that Russia would abandon its primary interest: excluding external competitors from the South Caucasus. In 2008 Russia fought a war with Georgia in order to make this point. That it would surrender this achievement for momentary gain defies both logic and experience. Needless to say, Russia’s image and standing in both Armenia and Azerbaijan have been diminished, indeed damaged.

This catalogue of unexpected challenges, some artfully managed and some poorly managed, has not dented the Kremlin’s efforts to use the means available to diminish further the supposedly inexorable erosion of Western “hegemony” and the sway, not to say attractiveness, of the liberal-democratic order. “Exercise Ocean Shield” in August 2020 exposed the Baltic region to a scale of Russian military activity and provocativeness not witnessed in several years. Economic and social burdens have only whet Russia’s appetite for cyber assaults, which have the merit of being cost-effective as well as deniable. The latest targets of hacking not only include the Norwegian parliament, but the OPCW and US laboratories developing vaccines against the COVID-19 virus, thereby exposing the cynicism of Russia’s campaign to trumpet the pandemic as a new theatre of international cooperation. The development of a new strain of Novichok and its employment against Alexei Navalny, a figure whose significance is so ridiculed by the Kremlin that it refuses to speak his name, has had the sole merit of distracting attention from a spate of assaults and murders targeting scientists, academic researchers and medical professionals who cross the shifting and ever more invisible lines of permissible disclosure, criticism and dissent.

Whatever the rewards of such conduct at home, its most conspicuous results abroad have been the estrangement of Germany and a program to increase Sweden’s defense budget by 40 percent. Habit has gained the upper hand over intellect in the citadel of power, and it is anyone’s guess when Russia’s leadership will face this fact and conduct an audit of its own performance. ■

<sup>1</sup> “Two months have passed since Furgal’s arrest. What has changed in Khabarovsk?” [S aresta Furgala proshlo dva mesyatsa. Chto izminilos’ v Khabarovske?], BBC Russian Service, 11 September 2020: <https://www.bbc.com/russian/features-54106363>.

## WHAT WILL HISTORY BOOKS SAY ABOUT THE EU AND LUKASHENKO IN LIGHT OF THE CRISIS IN BELARUS?

DR. LAURYNAS JONAVIČIUS

*Where will this end? The forces of repression might carry the day, but the wounds in society will not heal, and a siege regime will clearly not survive forever.*

If one had to guess what year the above quote on the situation in Belarus dates back to, even a well-informed reader would likely be unable to decide between 2006, 2010, and 2020. One could definitely set 2015 to one side, as the presidential election in Belarus at the time was relatively quiet and largely protest-free. And although the quote is actually an excerpt from a 2010 open letter by four EU foreign ministers<sup>1</sup>, the situation it describes is an accurate representation of today's Belarus, too. Both then and now, the presidential election lacked transparency, its results were fraudulent, and protesters were beaten, detained, and violently dispersed. The expectation that 'a siege regime will clearly not survive forever' also remains a hope for the future, not the reality. Given the fact that there were

hardly any protests following the 2015 election, that the Belarusian regime had released political prisoners, that the EU had suspended sanctions against it, that the regime's tensions with Russia have been growing, and that the US had nominated its first ambassador to Belarus in 12 years – why, given all of that, is one left with a feeling of déjà vu following the 9 August 2020 election and all that happened afterwards?

Despite its similarities with previous elections, this election season was different in several important

” Russian adventures in Ukraine sent a signal that Russia is going to pursue its interests by any means necessary, no matter if it's its Slavic sister or a country like Syria.

DR. LAURYNAS JONAVIČIUS

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### IN SHORT

- Lithuania was the first to declare it doesn't recognise Lukashenko as a legitimate president and also the first to impose sanctions on a list of individuals from the Belarusian regime, including Lukashenko himself.
- Lukashenko's room for manoeuvre in his negotiations with Putin is gradually narrowing down to zero.
- Support from the West – diplomatic, economic, organizational, and moral – is now a matter of life and death for the nation of Belarus. Even more important is the opportunity to show that its actions can have a decisive impact in Belarus, thus demonstrating that Europe is not just the world's largest economy but also a significant player in the international arena with the ability to defend its values and interests

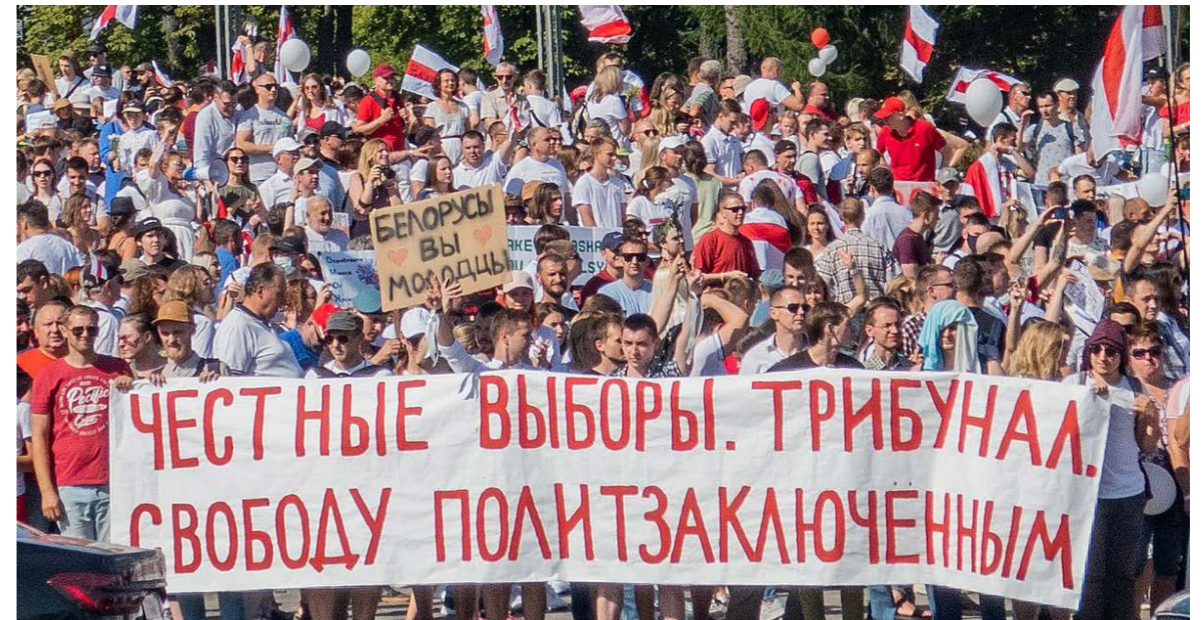


IMAGE: Protest rally against Lukashenko on August 16th, 2020 in Minsk. The banner reads "Fair elections. Tribunal. Freedom to the political prisoners". (© Homoatrox)

ways. In short, the behaviour of Russia and the way it is seen in Minsk have both changed. Russian adventures in Ukraine sent a signal that Russia is going to pursue its interests by any means necessary, no matter if it's its Slavic sister or a country like Syria. And it just so happened that the Kremlin's behaviour towards Minsk shifted at around the same time, too. Vladimir Putin's order of 2015 to seek to establish a military air base in Belarus, the decreasing economic support, his demands to redirect Belarusian trade routes away from the Baltics and to Russian ports, nomination of Mikhail Babich as ambassador to Belarus, and Dmitry Medvedev's ultimatum on forming a union state – all of this indicated a growing tension between two of the most closely integrated post-Soviet countries. In light of this unprecedented threat, the reaction from Alexander Lukashenko was also nothing like what we had seen in his previous skirmishes with the Kremlin. The

decision not to recognise Crimea officially as part of Russia, the refusal to host the military base, the order to diversify the country's economy and energy supplies, the (yet another) attempt to improve relations with the West, the change in the official narratives on Belarusian statehood (or soft Belarusization) – all of this provided grounds for observers to claim that Belarus is truly seeking to increase its autonomy and independence from Russia.

In parallel with international affairs, domestic trends were undergoing a change, too. Quarrels with Russia directly affected the country's economy. The era of subsidies, loans, and cheap energy supplies was drawing to a close. With the worsening economic situation and the government no longer able adequately to abide by the social contract, discontent in the society was growing, so much so that the regime was facing mass protests on a scale it had hardly ever experienced before. (One might here

” The COVID-19 pandemic and Lukashenko's reaction to it (or lack thereof) only led to an increased disaffection among Belarusians with Lukashenko's actions, statements, and promises. With the election fast approaching, the dictator was faced with the reality of simply having nothing to offer to the increasingly disaffected nation.

recall the 2017 protests against the so-called 'social parasite tax'.) The COVID-19 pandemic and Lukashenko's reaction to it (or lack

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.nytimes.com/2010/12/24/opinion/24iht-edbildt24.html>

“ Seen as illegitimate in the eyes of his own people and most countries across the globe – and the majority of western countries have by now declared they do not recognise Lukashenko’s re-election – Lukashenko has no choice but to rely on the support from Russia and other authoritarian regimes.

thereof) only led to an increased disaffection among Belarusians with Lukashenko’s actions, statements, and promises. With the election fast approaching, the dictator was faced with the reality of simply having nothing to offer to the increasingly disaffected nation.

There was now an expectation that the changes in Russian politics, the worsening economic situation, and the growing discontent in the society will perhaps force Europe’s ‘last dictator’ to make some changes on the domestic scene, too. Notably, some practical – albeit limited – steps were taken in this direction. Decrees No. 3 and No. 8 of 2017 eased restrictions on businesses and made it possible for the IT sector to grow. Minsk released political prisoners, the EU eased visa rules, and the country was visited by US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo (a

first-in-decades bilateral meeting of such a high rank). The expectation that the presidential election would be at least as quiet and uneventful as that of 2015 was certainly palpable. That was largely wishful thinking, of course, but Belarus did admittedly show signs that could stoke optimism of this kind, too.

Yet the 9 August 2020 election and the events that surrounded it dashed all such expectations. The scrupulous removal of all competition before to the start of the candidate registration process; the crackdown on NGOs, opposition activities, and the freedom of press, deemed draconian even by Belarusian standards; the replacement of a relatively liberal government with people from the security forces – all of these actions months prior to the election were in sharp dissonance with the previous rhetoric. Then came the election day with an 80.1% victory from a blatantly rigged presidential vote. Last but not least, there were thousands of detained, beaten, and violated Belarusian citizens for daring to voice their protest against the government’s reckless abuse of power. There was now a president who re-elects himself, holds an AK-47 rifle in his hands, takes the oath of office at a secret inauguration, and calls people ‘rats’.

It appears that the urge to stay in power and decide himself as to how and when to leave office was the key argument in Lukashenko’s strategic calculations. Reliance on the country’s security forces and the methods they brought to the table was likely a limiting factor

on the Belarusian dictator’s field of vision, severely restricting his ability to manoeuvre as he sees fit. With respect to both Russia and the Belarusian people. His track record of victories by force after similar post-election protests in the past had led Lukashenko to expect that brute force would carry the day this time around, too. The threat of Western sanctions against Belarus, imposed and then lifted numerous times since 2004, certainly carried little weight in Lukashenko’s calculations. Finally, the knowledge that the strongest pillar of the regime, i.e. Moscow, will do everything in its power to prevent another ‘colour revolution’ allowed the leader calmly to rig yet another election and use force against any voices of protest among the country’s citizens. On the one hand, the dictator’s calculations worked as expected. Lukashenko still remains the de facto leader of the country. With the monopoly of violence still in his hands, Lukashenko needs little else to be able to ignore the hundred-thousand-strong protests and negotiate with Moscow the terms of cooperation as a means of clinging to power.

On the other hand, this was a miscalculation on Lukashenko’s part, in several respects. The first one concerns the Belarusian people. Hundreds of thousands of them have been taking to the streets and demanding a new election for over a month now. And this isn’t just the usual opposition. People of all age groups and demographics join in. These hundreds of thousands of Belarusians no longer see Lukashenko as their legitimate leader. Companies are on strike



IMAGE: Belarus leader of the opposition Svetlana Tikhanovskaya has fled Belarus into neighbouring Lithuania (© DELFI / Domantas Pipas)

and officials are resigning. The self-declared president may well be able to hold on to power for the time being, shut in his ivory tower as he is. But governing the country whose majority of population refuses to listen to him any longer is no longer possible in principle.

Seen as illegitimate in the eyes of his own people and most countries across the globe – and the majority of western countries have by now declared they do not recognise Lukashenko’s re-election – Lukashenko has no choice but to rely on the support from Russia and other authoritarian regimes.<sup>2</sup> Legitimacy issues aside, however, a situation like this also brings forth the issue of the country’s sovereignty. Yes, Russia has so far declared its support for Lukashenko. But just as Lukashenko was doing his strategic calculations for stay-

ing in power by means of force, the self-same prism of force is presently being used in Moscow’s calculations of the price of its interests in Belarus. And because those interests amount to keeping Belarus strictly within Russia’s sphere of geostrategic influence and doing so at a minimum cost, Lukashenko himself becomes a dead weight in Kremlin’s equation. A leader unable to control his people and demanding subsidies and financial aid isn’t exactly the best fit for Moscow’s optimal strategy. With only his own actions to blame for all channels for dialogue with the West being closed, Lukashenko’s room for manoeuvre in his negotiations with Putin is gradually narrowing down to zero.

These miscalculations on Lukashenko’s part may add up to a very sad outcome for the dictator him-

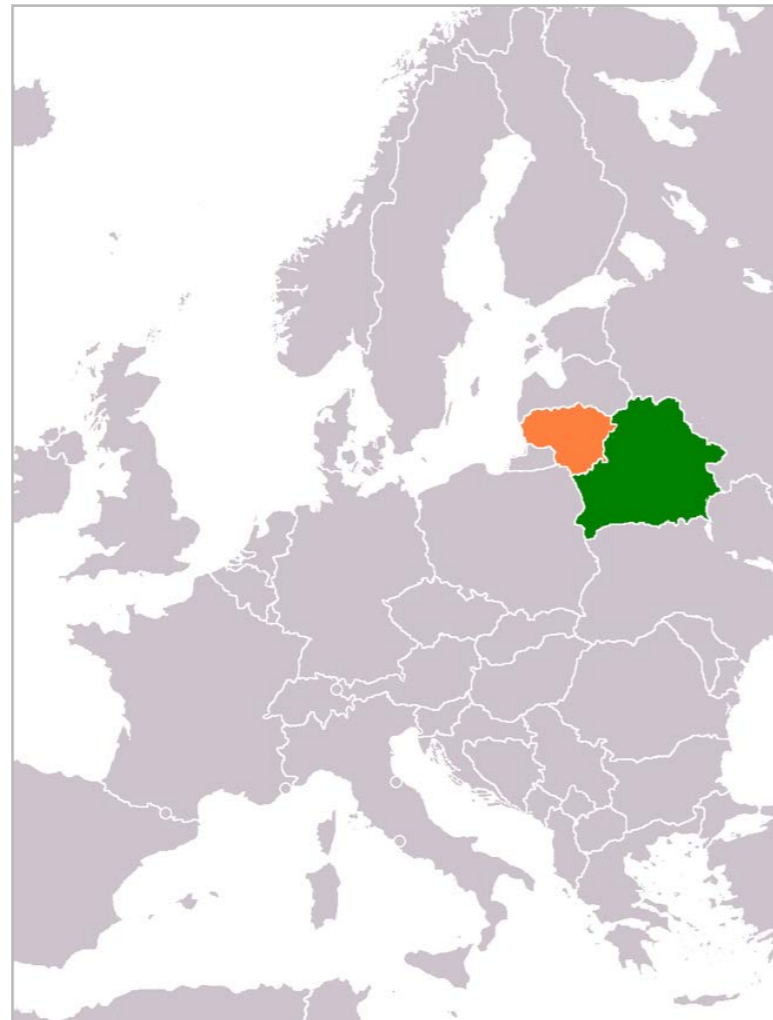
“ This degree of Vilnius’s involvement is easily attributable to its historical ties with the Belarusian people, geographical proximity, and the wish to prioritise the democratisation of Belarus on the European agenda.

self and for Belarus as a country. As far as Lukashenko’s person is concerned, his entry in history books as ‘the man who built Belarus’ today seems far more likely to be replaced with ‘the man

<sup>2</sup> Overview of International Reactions to Belarus Presidential elections 2020 – [https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International\\_reactions\\_to\\_the\\_2020\\_Belarusian\\_presidential\\_election\\_and\\_protests#Negative\\_reaction\\_to\\_the\\_election](https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/International_reactions_to_the_2020_Belarusian_presidential_election_and_protests#Negative_reaction_to_the_election)

who destroyed Belarus'. With respect to Belarus as a country, the beacon of stability in the middle of Europe appears to be facing a real threat of becoming – whether officially or not – a governorate of Russia. And almost the only hope that these events change course lies with those same Belarusian people. The people who want to live their lives in their own country and according to rules they accept. Lukashenko and Moscow couldn't care less about them.

The elephant in the room at this point is the issue of what the West is going to do about it. Neighbouring Lithuania, Latvia, Estonia, and Poland have all tried to lead their far more inert western allies by example. Lithuania was the first to declare it doesn't recognise Lukashenko as a legitimate president and also the first to impose sanctions on a list of individuals from the Belarusian regime, including Lukashenko himself. Lithuanian diplomats are bending over backwards to persuade other EU member states to act swiftly and decisively. This degree of Vilnius's involvement is easily attributable to its historical ties with the Belarusian people, geographical proximity, and the wish to prioritise the democratisation of Belarus on the European agenda. However, you look at it, a democratic and sovereign Belarus not only is in the moral interest of Lithuania but also reflects its national security concerns. Vilnius had long become a place of refuge for all Belarusians striving for freedom and democracy in their own country. It is no coincidence that Sviatlana Tsikhanouskaya now resides in Vilnius, too. However, the weight of Vilnius alone is not



**IMAGE:** Lithuania's (orange) border with Belarus (green) is the country's longest border, almost 679 km in length (@ Wikimedia)

enough if Europe were to have a real impact on the processes in Belarus instead of expressing its endless concern. Support from the West – diplomatic, economic, organizational, and moral – is now a matter of life and death for the nation of Belarus. Even more important is the opportunity to show that its actions can have a decisive impact in Belarus, thus demonstrating that Europe is not just the

world's largest economy but also a significant player in the international arena with the ability to defend its values and interests. If the West fails to find the will and the capacity for real action, then any talk of the EU's credibility with respect to its external relations will soon become a matter of ridicule not only among Belarusians but also in the eyes of the international community at large. Does Europe understand this? Is this what it wants? ■

## COUNTERING HYBRID THREATS: IN SEARCH OF A MORE STRATEGIC APPROACH

VYTAUTAS KERŠANSKAS<sup>1</sup>

### INTRODUCTION

In recent years, the term 'Hybrid threats' has become commonly used to explain the contemporary security environment and sub-threshold hostility Euro-Atlantic nations face. However, as any newly emergent concept, it triggered a huge dispute between proponents and opponents. While the academic or analytic value of this concept is still contested, there are real world implications which show that the conversation on Hybrid threats did serve its purpose by raising awareness of pressing security challenges and pushing countries to invest more into their resiliency.

### A PUZZLING CONCEPT...

The concept firstly emerged in the literature in the mid-2000s and originates from Dr. Frank Hoffman's research at the US National Defense University. He defined Hybrid warfare as the ability of the adversary to employ, in the battlefield, conventional weapons, asymmetric actions, terrorism, and other means to achieve political aims.

However, the illegal annexation of Crimea and aggression in East-

ern Ukraine by Russia was the flashpoint which mainstreamed the terms 'Hybrid warfare' and 'Hybrid threats'. London-based researcher Dr. Mark Galeotti, with his infamous article published in 2014 on the so-called 'Gerasimov doctrine', received a lot of attention and propelled the conversation even further. However, seeing how it was misinterpreted, Galeotti explained a few years later that he was not referring to an official doctrine of the Russian Federation but used the word 'doctrine' for a catchy headline. Hoffman, in a similar spirit, argues that his concept is widely misinterpreted in European academic circles. So, the whole conversation surrounding Hybrid threats has shaky foundations because of a common (mis)interpretation of the concept.

The sceptic camp also argues that the concepts 'Hybrid warfare' and 'Hybrid threats' are too broad or vague, or just new buzz words for an old phenomena with an existing conceptualisation ('grey zone', sub-threshold activities, 4<sup>th</sup> generation warfare). And they do have a point. Many of the ideas that fall under the 'Hybrid' concept are found in the writings

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### IN SHORT

- The sceptic camp argues that the concepts 'Hybrid warfare' and 'Hybrid threats' are too broad or vague, or just new buzz words for an old phenomena with an existing conceptualisation ('grey zone', sub-threshold activities, 4<sup>th</sup> generation warfare).
- While most of the scepticism addresses the shaky foundations of the concept, Hybrid methods have played an important role in the policy world.
- It is also important to move beyond reactive/responsive strategies for countering Hybrid threats that are mainly based on resilience-building. A growing body of research provides valuable insights on how to develop a more strategic approach to deal with Hybrid activities.

<sup>1</sup> The ideas presented in this article are exclusively his own and should not be considered an official position of the Ministry of National Defence of the Republic of Lithuania or its departments.



**IMAGE:** A Russia-backed rebel armoured fighting vehicles convoy near Donetsk, Eastern Ukraine, May, 2015. Russia's aggression in Ukraine encouraged discussions about various hybrid threats (© Mstyslav Chernov)

of Sun Tzu, Clausewitz and other military thinkers. Many case studies of such non-linear competition from ancient to contemporary history are widely discussed in the literature.

As the Covid-19 pandemic broke out, both proponents and sceptics used certain hostile activities (be it the Russian disinformation campaign or Chinese 'Wolf-Warrior' diplomacy in Europe) to prove that Hybrid threats do (not) explain the actions of these actors. Proponents suggested that these were 'classic Hybrid' campaigns, while opponents argued this was 'classic statecraft' – an opportunistic attempt to gain an advantage against a rival during a crisis. This debate between the two factions will likely continue.

Leaving the conceptual debate aside, it is worth describing what – in general – Hybrid threats are. The term refers to the coordinated use of overt and covert tools and activities across different domains to achieve a specific objective (from tactical to political) of

the actor which employs them. Some campaigns might involve force, but may also be employed purely in civilian domains. By using Hybrid methods, a hostile actor tries to disrupt the target's ability to respond effectively by eliciting a traditional response, remaining unattributed and unpunished.

#### ...YET, HELPFUL IN MANY WAYS

While most of the scepticism addresses the shaky foundations of the concept, Hybrid methods have played an important role in the policy world. I would stress three key benefits the conversation on Hybrid threats has brought and continues to offer.

Firstly, it helps to promote understanding of the materialisation of contemporary security challenges from traditional security to non-security players across government structures. Sectoral agencies that do not deal with security matters on a daily basis learn how their sectors are being weaponised by malign actors, as well as the Hybrid use of such means.



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Recognising the Hybridity of hostile influence across different sectors helps to connect the dots, to grasp how these malign activities link to form a single campaign employed by a single actor, and respond more efficiently.

Understanding this broader picture helps to develop a more coherent strategic culture across a wide range of actors in governmental systems and even beyond, if such a conversation is established with private partners, too.

Secondly, having a conversation on Hybrid threats is a very practical way to develop a whole-



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**IMAGE:** One aspect of hybrid warfare is disinformation campaigns (@ Pixy)

of-government response to security threats. In recent years, some countries have developed and institutionalised whole-of-government coordination bodies, which are not only dedicated to information sharing, but also policy response. In some cases, the conversation which led to the creation of these bodies started informally and without a clear end-goal, but the process itself brought a collective understanding of the benefits of having such a coordination body.

Thirdly, the Hybrid threats concept helps to bring multilateral partners together to discuss contemporary security threats, share information, develop policies to mitigate such threats and, in particular cases, coordinate responses more effectively. In most cases, Hybrid campaigns are designed to support broader policy goals of the malign actor and target multiple countries at once. Therefore, it becomes a multilateral issue that requires coordination and Hybrid threats language at least partly helps to frame this conversation in a more structured way.

#### TOWARDS A MORE STRATEGIC APPROACH

Geopolitical competition is not fading away anytime soon and Hybrid campaigns will remain a challenge. The hostile activities that surrounded the Covid-19 pandemic only confirm this conclusion. This is well recognised by the Euro-Atlantic community in multiple ways. Countries are reviewing their national security strategies to include Hybrid threats or even adopting specific strategies to counter them, reviewing their existing structures and procedures and putting a lot of effort into increasing their resiliency in various domains.

Countries should consider how they build a system that addresses security matters in a comprehensive manner. A starting point to do this should be the establishment of proper coordination to boost information sharing, increase situational awareness, enable long-term planning and assessment, and, ideally, serve as a platform to coordinate both short-term responses and long-term policies.



Countries should consider how they build a system that addresses security matters in a comprehensive manner. A starting point to do this should be the establishment of proper coordination.

It is also important to move beyond reactive/responsive strategies for countering Hybrid threats that are mainly based on resilience-building. A growing body of research provides valuable insights on how to develop a more strategic approach to deal with Hybrid activities.

An ongoing Hybrid CoE Deterrence project discusses the application of deterrence strategy to counter Hybrid threats. It suggests that deterrence in this context is not binary (total success or failure), so deterrence strategy "should aim



**IMAGE:** European Centre of Excellence for Countering Hybrid Threats was established in 2017 by the first nine Participating States, NATO and the EU in a joint meeting in Helsinki (© Hybrid CoE)

at fully dissuading hostile actors from high-level Hybrid activities, while simultaneously aiming to mitigate low-level hostile activities by denying their negative effects". A blend of resilience-building efforts and proactive policies that deny the benefits or (threat to) impose costs on hostile actors should be developed by countries.

Tim Sweijs and Samo Zilincik from the Hague Centre for Strategic Studies (HCSS) recently published a thorough analysis of cross-domain deterrence and its application with respect to Hybrid threats. They suggest the need to build a pre-set menu of possible response options, stress the importance of communication synchronisation, and the need to develop standards of proportionality. The authors recognise that most of the literature on cross-

domain deterrence focuses on the military domain – when it comes to Hybrid, more analysis should be conducted into how this logic translates into other domains.

Lauren Speranza from the Atlantic Council also recently provided a valuable contribution to this conversation by emphasising the need to boost cooperation with the private sector and develop methodologies to measure the negative impact of Hybrid campaigns (including less obvious 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> order effects).

The importance of attribution is emphasised by all of these works and is understood as one of the cornerstones of the strategies to counter Hybrid threats. Hybrid campaigns are usually built on 'plausible deniability', which constrains responses by the Euro-Atlantic community. There is a huge



Even though the theoretical debate continues, conversations on Hybrid threats among experts are providing a growing body of research on the ways and means of mitigating, deterring and eliminating these threats.

need to leverage new technology (which enables less political and more technical attribution) and build partnerships with the private sector (which is willing to engage because the Hybrid activities that take place in the domains in which companies operate harm them too). Attribution is also important to increase decision transparency, show resolve and reassure one's own population in crisis situations.

### CONCLUSION

Even though the theoretical debate continues, conversations on Hybrid threats among experts are providing a growing body of research on the ways and means of mitigating, deterring and eliminating these threats. In the policy world, the concept deserves recognition as a tool for bringing security policy officials closer together internationally, and raising awareness of those actors outside of traditional security policy at the national level. As argued, the phenomena is not going away, so consolidating the response to Hybrid threats in a more strategic manner – an ongoing process today – is important and needed to deal with these threats more effectively. 🇺🇦

## OVERVIEW OF THE INTERNATIONAL CONFERENCE: DEALING WITH THE TRAUMAS OF UNDIGESTED PAST

VILNIUS, LITHUANIA, MARCH 5-6 2020



**IMAGE:** Ambassador Laimonas Talat-Kelpša (© Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania)

### OPENING REMARKS BY LAIMONAS TALAT-KELPŠA, THE INITIATOR AND ORGANIZER OF THE CONFERENCE. AT THE TIME OF THE EVENT, HE WAS THE STATE SECRETARY OF THE LITHUANIAN MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS. HE IS CURRENTLY LITHUANIA'S AMBASSADOR TO THE CZECH REPUBLIC

The twentieth century was extremely brutal for Lithuania. In addition to the traditional horrors of war, which by itself involves a wide array of traumatic experiences, the population of Lithuania was exposed to a routine of brutal violence, which lasted for a prolonged period. Thus, in just one decade from 1940 to 1950:

- Roughly 200,000 Jews were killed by the Nazis and their local collaborators;
- 156,000 other citizens thrown into prison and tortured by the Soviets;

Historical trauma experienced by individuals and societies and its impact on international relations was the main topic of a Conference "Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past", held in the Palace of the Grand Dukes of Lithuania in March 2020.

The Conference brought together politicians, historians, artists, and mental health professionals from America, Asia and Europe and was the first event of the kind in Lithuania. Much attention was paid to the impact of trauma on international relations and means of dealing with it. The Declaration adopted by Conference participants emphasised that historical traumas influence how societies view themselves and what their domestic and international policies are.

The Conference was initiated by Ambassador Laimonas Talat-Kelpša and organised by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania, in collaboration with the Andrei Sakharov

<sup>1</sup> Dealing with the Trauma of an Undigested Past. International Conference Overview. ISSUU, Vilnius, March 5-6, 2020 <[https://issuu.com/tmfadocs/dealing\\_with\\_the\\_trauma\\_of\\_undigested\\_past\\_confere](https://issuu.com/tmfadocs/dealing_with_the_trauma_of_undigested_past_confere)>

- No less than 130,000, mostly women and children, deported to Siberia;
- 20,000 perished as freedom fighters in the anti-Soviet resistance which lasted until 1953;
- Roughly 150,000 Polish-speaking population 'transferred' from the Vilnius region to Poland after the war;
- 64,000 people fled from the formerly Nazi-occupied Klaipėda region, leaving the city of Klaipėda with only 28 civilians when the Soviet army entered the city in 1945;
- 56,000 or more fled the country in 1944-45, expecting the return of Soviets and repressions.

This rounds off to approximately 800,000 people, who have vanished from the surface of Lithuania in just one decade. The estimate total number of the Lithuanian population in 1940 was 2.8 million.

800,000 is a staggering number. A substantial volume of research has been produced, especially in the last 30 years, registering and analyzing the sufferings of these victims, most of whom have been lost forever. It is right that we seek truth about what happened to these people, because it helps to comprehend the full scope of our shared tragedy.

<...>

This conference is an attempt to examine the issue from a broader professional perspective. It has brought together experts from fields as different as diplomacy, psychotherapy, literature, cinema, and many others. The aim is four-fold:

First, we need your help to understand and acknowledge our trauma. This does not always come easy. However, one who wants to heal must diagnose and acknowledge his or her problem for starters.

Second, we must realize how trauma works on a collective psyche. The effects are not only im-

mediate but also with long-lasting repercussions. Untreated trauma is passed on to the subsequent generations. Therefore, dealing with trauma requires a delicate and committed effort.

Third, we have to put our collective traumas in a larger international context. It is important to understand that our pain is unique but hardly singular. There are other countries and nations, from Sri Lanka to Ireland, who have suffered in recent history and who still struggle to come to terms with their traumatic past. Can we learn from their experience?

Finally and most importantly, what are the methods and means of overcoming collective traumas? Can we lean on the academic accomplishments of psychotherapy? Or maybe art? Or literature? Can we develop a universal toolbox, a certain blueprint, for those nations and societies who are still in the denial stage of their multiple trauma? Our big neighbor comes as an immediate example, but probably there are many more.

<...>

I think that for many years after the World War II, the trauma of the Holocaust and the history, which was around the World War II and the Stalinist crimes, created some kind of vaccinations for the next generations. This vaccination was responsible and led to the creation of the European Union. The answer to those traumas, those fears and those disappointments of humanity with itself. This vaccination has worked for many years, unfortunately, now it is evaporating, it is not working anymore.

Therefore, the question is, if we are still able to work our memory, to work it in an honest and courageous way. Are we able to make the history our 'cure'? And this 'cure' is possible if we find courageous, objective and intellectually brave 'doctors', the 'real surgeons' of the memory.

Research Centre for Democratic Development of Vytautas Magnus University, the Institute of Psychology of Vilnius University, and other partners.

The full volume of the Conference proceedings is available online<sup>1</sup>, while LFPR presents a brief summary of the main issues discussed during the event.

### HISTORIC TRAUMA AND PTSD AROUND THE WORLD

There is growing evidence of transgenerational trauma – the unconscious transference of emotional, physical or social pain from one person to their descendants. This can be transferred via the creation of a so-called "post memory"; second-hand memories

recounted by parents or guardians, but also through unexplained silences and expressions of grief, rage and despair. Empirical studies have shown that such trauma is more likely to be passed onto offspring if one or both of the parents are dead or imprisoned, or if children grow up with a parent(s) who has PTSD, live in the shadow



IMAGE: Participants of the Conference (© Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania)

” There is growing evidence of transgenerational trauma – the unconscious transference of emotional, physical or social pain from one person to their descendants. This can be transferred via the creation of a so-called “post memory”; second-hand memories recounted by parents or guardians, but also through unexplained silences and expressions of grief, rage and despair.

of a brother or sister killed during more troubled periods, suffer from domestic violence and various forms of physical and sexual abuse, or are forced to relocate

as a result of political intimidation. The notion of “transgenerational haunting” becomes very important here: how the “ghosts” of past traumas – “that which appears to be not here” – are in fact a “seething presence.” When it comes to trauma, this cannot be healed but only treated, because there is no way to erase trauma completely.

In terms of conflict, most conflicts, regardless of their nature, are predominantly psychological. Given this, there is a high prevalence of conflict-related mental health problems. For instance, in Northern Ireland, 40% of the population has experienced a conflict-related traumatic event (for example, bombings, shootings and mutilations), and 17% have witnessed a death or serious injury. Northern Ireland in general has one of the highest rates of PTSD anywhere in the world. Prescription rates here for anti-depressants are amongst the highest in the world and male suicide also has one of the highest rates in Western Europe.

PTSD itself is an interesting topic of discussion. It is widely accepted as the most com-

mon consequence of trauma in general. But not all experiences people have been negative. They can also be mixed. PTSD as a psychiatric phenomenon emerged in particular after the Vietnam War, but was not a well-known concept at all following World War I. Although war has always left people scarred with negative memories, there was no acknowledgment of a phenomenon called PTSD or the painful experiences of those affected. According to US statistics, over 40 percent of war veterans have been diagnosed with PTSD.

Overcoming collective trauma is extremely hard, and stopping the war is not enough to end the suffering. For example, when the Sri Lankan Civil War ended in 2009, suicide rates and alcohol abuse skyrocketed as a direct consequence of the trauma inflicted on Sri Lankan society. And this is not only true of Sri Lanka. It happens around the world. The sad truth is that people in general are not bothered by the suffering of others. As long as the problem does not touch them personally, people are rather reluctant to help.

When it comes to overcoming collective and historical trauma, acts of remembrance, apology and respect are not enough. Politicians have to prepare respective public opinions to overcome the past, something that is difficult to achieve outright. The different narratives and memories of the past that are maintained by a country's diverse communities need to be consolidated, studied and internalized when seeking to move forward beyond the scars of the past. Such scars perhaps can never be fully remedied, but at least their impact can be lessened through this process. Making





Statues and monuments play a substantial role in coping with historical trauma. They are the most visible embodiments of those memories and help society to overcome its traumas through symbolic confrontation.

progress on this is a strong means of reinforcing the unity of a country that engages in this way.

Furthermore, commemoration should no longer be tied only to the past, but should also look to have an educational focus and an emphasis not only on remembering what has occurred but one which also focuses on what the memory in question means and implies about the future. It is important to ensure that commemoration efforts look to engage with youths and can keep the events of the past relevant to them.

While vast challenges remain, India has been a showcase of certain positive shifts following a traumatic colonial past. Indians have a tremendous and long-lasting trauma that can be traced directly to colonialism and these colonial traumas continue to bleed in one way or another. The case of the United Kingdom's exploitation of India is illustrative, given how the Indian economy was ruined in terms of its global share of manufacturing. In the 1750s, India had around a 24 per cent share and Britain only two per cent. By 1947, this situation had reversed.



**IMAGE:** The January Events took place in Lithuania between 11 and 13 January 1991 in the aftermath of the Act of the Re-Establishment of the State of Lithuania. As a result of Soviet military actions, 14 civilians were killed and more than 700 injured (@ Ministry of Defence of Lithuania)

Mahatma Gandhi's challenge to colonialism and perhaps his greatest achievement in terms of that challenge was in liberating Indians from fear. Fear is a powerful tool which can be used as a political weapon (for example in creating hatred between Hindus and Muslims), but how can these different ethnic groups live together in an atmosphere of artificially-created fear? This requires a dual commitment to the country's constitution and a united concept of India as a country. Liberation from fear led directly to political independence from the United Kingdom in 1947. This political emancipation was only possible once the country had been freed of fear. Deep challenges remain to be overcome or at least limited in their impact, but the initial steps have been taken.

#### LINGERING SYMBOLS OF A TROUBLED PAST

Statues and monuments play a substantial role in coping with

historical trauma. They are the most visible embodiments of those memories and help society to overcome its traumas through symbolic confrontation. Nonetheless, those symbols are the subject of fierce debates and protests, including various protests in the United States against Confederate monuments.

In exactly the same vein, there is a fierce debate taking place in France on renaming streets named after individuals who actively contributed to colonialism and the slave trade. It would be worthwhile to compare France's approach to these issues to that of the United States. Various memorial laws have been passed in France in order to condemn brutal events in the past. These include the 2001 memorial law condemning the Armenian Genocide, the 2001 memorial law condemning the slave trade, and the 2005 memorial law condemning French colonial his-



The process of adjusting to a totalitarian system is more harmful than facing its repressions firsthand, as the victims of the first case often fail to perceive the damage. In a way, Lithuanians are still exiting its historical traumas through a mourning process which manifests itself through various public rituals and symbolic acts, such as repatriating the remains of its deported citizens, installing monuments to its freedom fighters, or since recently, through the organization of the Holocaust Memorial March like the one in Molėtai.

tory and the related crimes against humanity that were committed against the African people.

#### TRAUMA AND MEMORY POLITICS: LITHUANIA AND RUSSIA

Coping with cultural trauma can be constructive and successful, or it can be just the opposite. In order to cope with trauma, two conditions must be met: the event that caused it must be over and the trauma itself needs to be acknowledged. Lithuanians have



**IMAGE:** Nikolai Svanidze, Historian and Journalist from Russia, and Yves Doutriaux, Member of the Conseil d'État, Former Ambassador of France to the OSCE (© Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lithuania)

faced two major cultural traumas. The first of these started in 1940 with the first Soviet occupation and was followed by the Nazi occupation and the horrors of the Holocaust, to be further reinforced by the return of the Soviets and Stalinist repressions. The second trauma happened in the early 1990s, when the socialist system collapsed. Those traumas are directly correlated with the high suicide rate in Lithuania, which immediately skyrocketed in the 1940s and then again at the beginning of the 1990s. With respect to the transgenerational transmission of cultural traumas, paradoxically, the offspring of the families that experienced political repressions have proven in the long run less affected and psychologically sturdier than the descendants of the families who were not repressed. One might guess that the trauma of repressions was more openly discussed in those families which had already lost everything than those which still had what to lose.

In general, the process of adjusting to a totalitarian system is more harmful than facing its repressions firsthand, as the victims of the first case often fail to perceive the damage. In a way, Lithuanians are still exiting its historical traumas through a mourning process which manifests itself through various public rituals and symbolic acts, such as repatriating the remains of its deported citizens, installing monuments to its freedom fighters, or since recently, through the organization of the Holocaust Memorial March like the one in Molėtai.

Importantly, memory politics has become part of international relations. Thus, Russia often accuses its neighbors of being 'fascist states.' And even if coming to terms with their role during the Holocaust is still painful in many nations of Central and Eastern Europe, such use of history serves a different purpose than true reconciliation.

The Russian leadership's real goal is to create an ideology which



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