



APRIL 2020

# DE RE MILITARI JOURNAL

CONFLICTS, MILITARY, ANALYSIS

ENGLISH VERSION

ISSUE 3

Sofia, Bulgaria



# De Re Militari

De Re Militari is a Bulgaria-based group of analysts, which follows the development of conflicts and political processes worldwide. Our purpose is to provide a broad audience in Bulgaria with an in-depth understanding of the processes that are shaping the conflict around the globe. All our work is freely available on the Internet and has been used by students of political science worldwide in the conduct of their academic research, as well as from specialists in the field, NGOs and government structures.

**Published in Sofia, Bulgaria**

Issue: 4.2020

**Blog of the journal:**

[www.remilitari.wordpress.com](http://www.remilitari.wordpress.com)

**Facebook & Twitter:**

<https://www.facebook.com/deremilitari>

<https://twitter.com/remilitari>

**Contacts:**

[deremilitarijournal@gmail.com](mailto:deremilitarijournal@gmail.com)

**Translation of some of the articles: Mia Babikyan**



ISSN 2367-9476

# editorial

## Ruslan Trad

---

Freelance journalist, analyst and author with over ten years' experience covering and analysis of MENA, Balkans and Turkey regional issues; co-founder of De Re Militari Journal; and author of the book "The Murder of a Revolution" (2017).

## Dr. Aleksandar Stoyanov

---

Dr. Aleksandar Stoyanov is a co-founder of the De Re Militari journal. He has graduated from Leiden University with a Ph.D. in History and is working in the field of Military History for the past twelve years. Dr. Stoyanov has five published books and dozens of articles in different scientific and popular journals.

## Ventsislav Bozhev

---

Political scientist and an expert in the field of international relations with extensive experience in the analysis of the European political processes as well as the dynamics of the relations in the Middle East and the former Soviet Union. Author of many publications and academic texts on the subject.

# Security vs. Liberty: Analysing the trade-off between security and liberty with reference to TEMPORA

Victoria Tomova

## Introduction

---

*'It is the Government's ultimate responsibility to find a fair and effective balance between security and liberty...'*<sup>1</sup>

---

The socio-political context after 9/11 reinforces the assumption that security increases at the expense of liberty. This understanding has been discussed by the academia as a debate on how the two concepts should be balanced and under what circumstances.<sup>2</sup> What is puzzling here is democratic states' readiness to undermine liberty, which they claim to be the highest goal in society, to achieve security. To address this puzzle the present research article will develop the following question with specific reference to the TEMPORA project: *'What can everyday intelligence practices tell us about the relation between Security and*



---

<sup>1</sup> David Blunkett's foreword in 'Counter-Terrorism Powers: Reconciling Security and Liberty', *Open Society: A Discussion Paper*, British Home Office (2004), Cm 6147.

<sup>2</sup> Andrew Ashworth, *The Criminal Process: An Evaluative Study*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998).; Jeremy Waldron, 'Security and Liberty: The Image of Balance', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, **11** (2), pp. 191-210.; Mark Neocleous. 'Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance: Towards a Critique of Security Politics.' *Contemporary Political Theory* **6**(2), 2007, 131-149.; British Home Office, Counter-Terrorism Powers: Reconciling Security and Liberty, in an *Open Society: A Discussion Paper*. 2004, Cm 6147.; UK Presidency [of the EU] (2005) Liberty and Security: Striking the Right Balance.; Vincenzo Pavone, Elvira Santiago Gomez, and David-Olivier Jaquet-Chiffelle. 'A Systemic Approach to Security: Beyond the Tradeoff between Security and Liberty.' *Democracy and Security* **12**(4) (2016), 225-46.; Tiberiu Dragu, 'Is There a Trade-off between Security and Liberty? Executive Bias, Privacy Protections, and Terrorism Prevention', *American Political Science Review*, **105**(1) 2011, 64-78.

*Liberty?*'.<sup>3</sup> It is essential to focus on intelligence as it is states' key tool to tackle security threats and as such will offer a more nuanced context, within which to develop an in-depth analysis.<sup>4</sup> Based on that analysis, the author will claim that security is perceived as more important than liberty. This is evident in the program's pre-emptive nature,<sup>5</sup> that self-generates a continuous state of exception, utilising security practices such as mass surveillance and data-gathering, which in turn legitimately undermine citizens' liberty. The article shows the implications of using the traditional idea of balance by illuminating how the UK applies it as a rhetorical device to legitimise authoritarian security practices like TEMPORA – a project doomed to create opportunities for new threats to emerge undermining the fundamental values of democracy, namely privacy, freedom and autonomy.<sup>6</sup>

## 4

<sup>3</sup> Intelligence is seen as data-gathering and data-collection because these are the key activities undertaken by governments in their everyday fight with terrorism. Data-surveillance consists of looking at information from social and online platforms, email and phone correspondence which requires tracing location, logging into private accounts, listening to private conversations, switching on personal devices' cameras. Data-collection is the process of acquiring and sorting that information which is now done by specialised software that works based on algorithms aiming to identify key words, types of user's behaviour and creates links between different sorts of information to form hypotheses if an individual is a potential threat. **See:** Gary Marx, 'Some Concepts that may be Useful in Understanding the Myriad Forms and Contexts of Surveillance', *Intelligence & National Security*, **19**(2) 2004, 226-248.; Michael Warner, 'Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence', *Studies in Intelligence*, **46**(3) 2002, p.15.; Sherman Kent, *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp.3-11.; Loch K. Johnson, 'Intelligence', in Bruce W. Jentleson ad Thomas G. Paterson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of US foreign Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.365-73, (p.365).

<sup>4</sup> Michael McCahill, 'Surveillance, Crime and the Media', in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*, ed. by Kevin Haggerty Kirstie Ball and David Lyon (London: Routledge, 2012), 244–251.; Johann Eriksson and Giampiero Giacomello, 'The Information Revolution, Security, and International Relations: (IR) Relevant Theory?' *International Political Science Review* **27**(3) 2006, 221–244.; Claudia Aradau and Rens van Munster, 'Governing Terrorism through Risk: Taking Precautions, (Un)Knowing the Future'. In: *European Journal of International Relations*, **13**(1) 2007, pp. 89–115.; Ian Brown and Korff Douwe, 'Terrorism and the Proportionality of Internet Surveillance', *European Journal of Criminology*, **6**(2) 2009, 119-134.; Jeffrey T. Richelson, *The U.S Intelligence Community*, (U.S: Westview Press 1999), 1-13.;

<sup>5</sup> Ian Manners, *European [Security] Union: From Existential Threat to Ontological Security* (Copenhagen: Roskilde University Publications, 2002).; Ulrich Beck and Christoph Lau, 'Second Modernity as a Research Agenda: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in the 'Meta-Change' of Modern Society,' *British Journal of Sociology* **56**(4) 2005, 525–557.; Yee-Kuang Heng, 'The 'Transformation of War' Debate: Through the Looking Glass of Ulrich Beck's World Risk Society,' *International Relations* **20**(1) 2006, 69–91.; Gabe Mythen and Sandra Walklate, 'Terrorism, Risk and International Security: The Perils of Asking 'What If?'' *Security Dialogue* **39**(2/3) 2008, 221–242.; Kevin D. Haggerty, Minas Samatas (ed.), *Surveillance and Democracy* (New York, Routledge: 2010).

<sup>6</sup> Pavone et al, 'A systemic approach to security', 2016, 225-46.; Daniel Solove, 'Understanding Privacy', *Harvard University Press*, May 2008; GWU Legal Studies Research Paper No. 420; GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 420. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1127888>; Laura K. Donohue, *The Cost of Counterterrorism: Power, Politics, and Liberty*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008), pp.29- 33.

The text begins by conceptualising liberty and security to avoid any misunderstandings and achieve clarity. Then it develops a conceptual analysis by engaging with the existing literature to create a context within which to place this research. Following that, it analyses TEMPORA by looking into its key principle of work and by using language discourse explores on what grounds political elite justify the program.

## Conceptualisation of liberty and security

---

Security and liberty are contested concepts that have undergone processes of 'deepening' and 'widening', as they contain ideological elements, which cannot be addressed with empirical evidence and thereby making them difficult to use as analytical tools.<sup>7</sup> While it is important to review the different ways of formulating those concepts in order to make a better understanding of their role in the political realm, doing so does not adhere to the narrow scope of the project nor is needed to satisfy the set objectives as outlined in the introduction.<sup>8</sup> The present article takes the meaning of liberty

5

---

<sup>7</sup> Ian Carter, 'Liberty', in *Political Concepts* ed. by Richard Bellamy and Andrew Mason, (Manchester: Manchester University Press 2003), pp.4-15., John Hoffman and Paul Graham, *Introduction to Political Theory*, ed. 3 (Abingdon, Oxon ; New York, NY: Routledge 2015), pp. 34-53., Steve Smith, (2005). 'The Contested Concept of Security'. In: K. Both. *Critical Security Studies and World Politics*. (Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers). pp. 27-62., Paul D. Williams, *Security Studies: An Introduction*, ed.2 (Abingdon: Routledge 2013), pp.1-13., David A. Baldwin, The Concept of Security, *Review of International Studies*, **23**(1) 1997, pp.5-26.

<sup>8</sup> **For liberty see: collective and individual freedom-** John Stuart Mill and Gertrude Himmelfarb, *On Liberty*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982), John Locke and Richard Howard Cox, *Second Treatise of Government*. (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Incorporated, 1982)., Kristján Kristjánsson, *Social Freedom: The Responsibility View* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996); **internal or external-** F.A. von Hayek, *The Constitution of Liberty* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960).; D. Miller, 'Constraints on Freedom', *Ethics*, **94** (1983), pp. 66–86.; **negative or positive-** Isaiah Berlin, *Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991).; Benjamin Constant , 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared With That of the Moderns,' in *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988).; Wilhelm Von Humboldt, and Burrow, J. W. *The Limits of State Action*. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993).; Jean-Jacques Rousseau, *The Social Contract*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968).

**For security see: security as human emancipation** see Ken Booth, 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, **17**(4) 1991, 313-26;**securitization** - Barry Buzan, Ole Waever, and Jaap de Wilde, *Security: a new framework for analysis*, (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Pub 1998); **everyday security practices-** Didier Bigo, 'Internal and External Aspects of Security', *Journal of European Security*, **15**(4) 2006, 385-404.; **the role of gender in security-** Ann Tickner, *Gender in International Relations*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner 1992).

as a personal right to privacy and capability to exercise self-autonomy. Without those, the individual cannot pursue their goals or plans that constitute the perception of a 'good-life'.<sup>9</sup> In comparison, security is seen as a 'state's process of managing sources of risks/insecurities', whose definition covers the area discussed here- intelligence practice.<sup>10</sup>

## Literature review

---

The debate on the relation between security and liberty revolves mainly around balancing between the two concepts.<sup>11</sup> Waldron usefully raises awareness about the language of balance and concludes that in this debate it refers to evaluating opposing values based on facts and reasons that have been considered in terms of quantity, quality and precision.<sup>12</sup> Claiming that security and liberty exist in a state of balance is problematic as it implies they constitute conflicting values where one increases at the expense of the other. This statement has not been adequately justified, rather academics prefer to rely upon their ontological reasoning. Therefore, scholars adopting the idea of balance fall into the trap of assumption, which makes their theories highly vulnerable to criticism, and thus, devalues their findings.

For example, Hobbes argues that the state of nature, of absolute liberty, is a condition of insecurity, whereas in the social contract people find

---

<sup>9</sup> For a definition of 'good life' see: Ross Bellaby, 'What's the Harm? The Ethics of Intelligence Collection', *Intelligence and National Security*, 27(1) 2012, 93-117.

<sup>10</sup> That should not be seen as a way of disregarding other approaches to conceptualising security but as building upon them and adding one more piece to the puzzle of security.

<sup>11</sup> Solove, 'Understanding Privacy', 2008.; Waldron, 'Security and Liberty: The Image of Balance', 2003; Richard Posner, 'Security versus Civil Liberties', *The Atlantic Monthly*, 2001, pp. 46-47.; Bruce Ackerman, 'The emergency constitution', *Yale Law Journal* 113(5) 2004, 1029-1091.

<sup>12</sup> Waldron, 'Security and Liberty: The Image of Balance', 2003, p.192.

safety possible because their liberty is limited.<sup>13</sup> In this sense, for Hobbes security and liberty are mutually exclusive as security ‘outweighs’ liberty due to the assumption that in a state of ‘absolute liberty’ people become a threat for each other. They are unable to decide how to distribute the natural resources creating conditions for violence. Similarly, the liberal domain follows the principle of balancing but shift the focus towards liberty by arguing people need a society where liberty is secured.<sup>14</sup> In contrast to Hobbes’ approach, liberalism gives a positive value to liberty as it is perceived as fundamental and permanent.

However, as Pavone claims, giving value to security and liberty as either negative or positive creates an assumption that their relationship forms a zero-sum game.<sup>15</sup> He emphasizes on the fact that the literature does not provide any empirical evidence supporting the idea of a negative correlation between security and liberty where one grows at the expense of the other.<sup>16</sup> Therefore, arguing that liberty has to be decreased to favour more effective security policies does not have a legitimate base for justification. Dragu's research also underlines the lack of scholarship justification of the mechanism through which decreasing liberty leads to more security.<sup>17</sup> What is more, he contributes to the question of balance by empirically proving that reducing privacy protections does not necessarily increase security but in

---

<sup>13</sup> Thomas Hobbes, *Leviathan (1651)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991).

<sup>14</sup> John Locke, *Two Treatises of Government (1690)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988).; Jeremy Bentham, ‘Principles of the Civil Code’, in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, 1, (Edinburgh: William Tait 1943).; Montesquieu Baron de, *The Spirit of the Laws (1748)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989).; Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature (1740)*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1978).

<sup>15</sup> Pavone, 2016.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

<sup>17</sup> Dragu, *Is There a Trade-off between Security and Liberty?*, 2011, 64-78 (p.64)

fact decreases it.<sup>18</sup> That finding should not be seen as conflicting with Pavone's view because he does not argue for security and liberty to be value-free concepts, but shapes an understanding of the two as interlinked and mutually constitutive. Thus, the two scholars present the relation between security and liberty as a positive correlation, where the two change in the same manner. What this means for the idea of balance between the two concepts is that it is not to be achieved by limiting liberty to empower security practices. On these grounds, justifying states' policies that intervene in people's liberty as a way of successfully protecting them is inadequate. Hence, the idea of balance loses its legitimacy as liberty and security are not opposing values that have to be balanced out. Bigo also emphasizes the negative role of the idea of balance, which creates a social discourse of security as coercion, violence, exclusion, and control.<sup>19</sup> These findings raise the question: What is the purpose of balance and does it even exist? Ashworth puts forward the argument that it is a rhetorical device because when used by the political elite it adopts a positive value, which implies striking a balance between security and liberty is society's higher goal, and thus, allows the government to use it to gain legitimacy for its actions.<sup>20</sup> This is more thoroughly reviewed by Neocleous who argues that the idea of balance is a mechanism of the liberal domain to justify its authoritarian security measures.<sup>21</sup> Ross Bellaby offers a useful set of *Just Cyber-Intelligence Principles*, built on the just war theory, to show if and when such



---

<sup>18</sup> *ibid.*

<sup>19</sup> Dilgo Bigo, Carrera, S., Guild, E. and Walker, R. B. J., 'The Changing Landscape of European Liberty and Security: The Mid-Term Report of the CHALLENGE Project', *International Social Science Journal, UNESCO*, 2008, pp. 283-308

<sup>20</sup> Ashworth, 1998, p.30.

<sup>21</sup> Neocleous, *Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance*, 2007, 131-149.

measures are justified, however, his work remains within the debate of balance.<sup>22</sup> In other words, in his attempt to offer a better understanding of how to legitimise the intrusion into people's liberty for security reasons, he reinforces the liberal assumption that security is of greater importance and fails to recognise the equal validity of liberty.

The present research adopts a critical stand towards the idea of balance and will contribute to the work of Neocleous and Pavone by analysing how everyday intelligence practice portrays, uses and transforms the relation between security and liberty to normalise state's oppressive practices. It also lays the foundations for further research on the role of everyday intelligence practices on the socio-political context, an aspect that has been understudied by academia.<sup>23</sup>

### Case study: TEMPORA

---

*'TEMPORA represents a window on to everyday lives, sucking up every form of communication from the fibre-optic cables that ring the world'*.<sup>24</sup>

The metaphor of TEMPORA being a window used here implies that the software is a tool to gain sight. A description creating an image of TEMPORA as an all-seeing creature. On a sublevel, this image is underpinned by the idea that 'knowledge is power' as the state uses mass surveillance, conducted via TEMPORA, to acquire information which it can

---

<sup>22</sup> Ross Bellaby, 'Justifying Cyber-intelligence?', *Journal of Military Ethics* 15(4) 2016, 299-319.

<sup>23</sup> See Vincenzo Pavone and Esposti, S., 'Public assessment of new surveillance-oriented security technologies: Beyond the trade-off between privacy and security', *Public Understanding of Science*, 21(5), 556-72.

<sup>24</sup> Ewen MacAskill, Julian Borger, Nick Hopkins, Nick Davies and James Ball, GCHQ taps fibre-optic cables for secret access to world's communications, *The Guardian*, 21 June 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/21/gchq-cables-secret-world-communications-nsa> (Accessed 9 January 2020).

then use to make predictions and construct counter-actions. This increases state's chances of protecting national security by giving it time to react before a threat has emerged. Therefore, the key characteristic of this software is that it works upon pre-emptive logic. What the program does is store and analyse data that is extracted from users' online activity on platforms like Google, Facebook, Twitter, YouTube as well as email and phone correspondence regardless of individuals' nationality or location.<sup>25</sup> The collected data is analysed through algorithms to determine if a user's online behaviour implies a potential threat to the national security.

The quote above implies that this process is characterised as continuous and aggressive which is evident in the verb '*sucking up*' referring to intensive, constant and coercive action. Similar representation of the program is typical for the majority of press releases implying the society's negative attitude towards state practices that intrude into users' personal online space.<sup>26</sup> That is problematic because people's online accounts and Internet activity could be regarded as private information, which is upon individuals to decide how to be made use of.<sup>27</sup> Therefore, when the state uses TEMPORA to collect information,

<sup>25</sup> Edgar Whitley and Ian Hosein. 'Policy Discourse and Data Retention: The Technology Politics of Surveillance in the United Kingdom.' *Telecommunications Policy* 29(11) 2005, 857-74.; Arne Hintz and Lina Dencik. 'The Politics of Surveillance Policy: UK Regulatory Dynamics after Snowden.' *Internet Policy Review*, 5(3) 2016, 1-16.; David Lyon, *Surveillance after Snowden*. (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2015), pp.66-91.

<sup>26</sup> Alan Travis, Kate Connolly in Berlin and Nicholas Watt, 'GCHQ surveillance: Germany blasts UK over mass monitoring', *The Guardian*, 26 June 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/25/germany-uk-gchq-internet-surveillance> (Accessed 9 January 2020) ; Blair, T., 'Prime Minister's speech on criminal justice reform', *The Guardian*, 23 June 2006, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/jun/23/immigrationpolicy.ukcrime1> (Accessed 9 January 2020); Hopkins, N., 'MI5 chief: GCHQ surveillance plays vital role in fight against terrorism', *The Guardian*, 9 October 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/08/gchq-surveillance-new-mi5-chief> (Accessed 9 January 2020); James Bamford, 'Every Move You Make', *Foreign Policy*, 7 September 2016, Available from: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/07/every-move-you-make-obama-nsa-security-surveillance-spying-intelligence-snowden/> (Accessed 24 January 2020)

<sup>27</sup> Eda Shils, 'Privacy: Its Constitution and Vicissitudes', *Law and Contemporary Problems*, 31(2) 1966, 281–306, (p.290).; Charles Fried, 'Privacy: A Moral Analysis', *Yale Law Review*, 77(1) 1968, 475–93.; Bellaby, What's the Harm?, 93-117.; John Young, *Privacy*, (Chichester (etc.): Wiley, 1978); Duncan Campbell, and Steve Connor, *On the Record : Surveillance, Computers and Privacy : The Inside Story*. (London: Joseph, 1986); Parent, W. A., 'Privacy, Morality and the Law', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, 12(4) (1983), 269-288.

it does so without users' consent, which challenges one's ability to self-guide their choices. That undermines people's confidence and sense of self-worth as they are deprived of their autonomy, hence, their liberty is profoundly eroded. In this relation, TEMPORA infringes people's liberty by taking away their self-determination, making them feel powerless and hindering their ability to pursue a good life. This creates a state of insecurity among people and portrays the state as an enemy of the population, with fewer options to develop and implement security policies. What all this shows is that the sources of insecurities are rather enforced through TEMPORA than effectively dealt with. However, the nature of everyday intelligence practice is determined by the notion of *exception, which* legitimising such practices because they deal with threats such as terrorism which require broader and more intrusive state intelligence actions.<sup>28</sup>

Based on the traditional conceptualisation of security, a threat is physically visible and affects the national security immediately; therefore, in this case, the state declares a state of emergency to deal with the threat as soon as possible by using means, which on a normal basis do not comply with the rule of law.<sup>29</sup> In turn, deprivation of liberty for a short time is socially accepted as the context implies that the state does not have the technical time to form a different strategy. In other words, when the state declares something a security threat it creates a state of emergency, which legally permits the use of means that are otherwise forbidden by the rule of law. However, contemporary security threats, namely terrorism, are subjective in nature because they are broadly defined and specific measures to tackle

---

<sup>28</sup> Buzan, Waever, and Wilde, *Security: a new framework for analysis*, 1998; Mark Neocleous, *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008).; Dragu, 2011, 64-78.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

them cannot be found among the theoretical understandings and practices of traditional security studies.<sup>30</sup> This means that implementing traditional practices in a modern security context, characterised by profoundly different threats and technological tools, is prone to lead to inconsistencies such as the normalisation of emergency measures as they are applied to a threat that is multi-dimensional and continuous. Therefore, by saying that TEMPORA is used to fight terrorism, the political elite places the work of the program into a context of constant exception, meaning that its practices such as reducing privacy are justified on a repetitive basis. For example, Ed Miliband, former leader of the Labour party, says that ‘It’s vital, it keeps us safe...’ by which he portrays the implementation of TEMPORA as necessary.<sup>31</sup> That is also clear in the defensive speech of MI5 head, David Parker, who used the term ‘terrorism’ or ‘terrorist’ more than 40 times and defined it as ‘more diffuse, more complicated, more unpredictable’.<sup>32</sup> Such use of language creates a context of emergency.

To summarise, the pre-emptive nature of TEMPORA requires the use of exceptional methods on an everyday basis, which leads to the institutionalisation of its methods.<sup>33</sup> By doing that, a continuous state of exception is established that allows the political elite to claim that its security policies respond to the existing context. What this shows is that by creating

---

<sup>30</sup> Cindy C. Combs, *Terrorism in the twenty-first century*, (Upper Saddle River, N.J.: Prentice Hall 2000), ch 3 &4.

<sup>31</sup> Nicholas Watt, ‘David Cameron Makes Veiled Threat to Media over NSA and GCHQ Leaks’, *The Guardian*, 28 October 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/28/david-cameron-nsa-threat-newspapers-guardian-snowden> (Accessed 9 January 2020)

<sup>32</sup> Privacy International, *Reigniting the surveillance debate: Competing views emerge from the UK government*, 14 October 2013, Available from: <https://privacyinternational.org/blog/1440/reigniting-surveillance-debate-competing-views-emerge-uk-government> (Accessed 9 January 2020).; Nick Hopkins, ‘MI5 chief: GCHQ surveillance plays vital role in fight against terrorism’, *The Guardian*, 9 October 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/08/gchq-surveillance-new-mi5-chief> (Accessed 9 January 2020)

<sup>33</sup> Neocleous, *Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance*, 2007, 131-149.

a favourable context and relying on the assumption that it is the state's responsibility to balance security and liberty, political leaders successfully implement restrictive security measures. Therefore, practices like TEMPORA deem security as more important and confine the assumption of balancing security and liberty in the society.

The idea of balance is also embedded in the policy-making and ratified through amendments in the law regarding TEMPORA. For example, Blair says: "It is not about choosing hard-line policies over an individual's human rights... In making that decision, there is a *balance to be struck*."<sup>34</sup> Similarly, Clegg states that "...it is a very important task, it is a painstaking task, to *get the balance between liberty and security right*."<sup>35</sup> This rhetoric gives a positive value to the idea of balance and supports the belief that liberty should be infringed to gain security, which is further legitimised by the law. As William Hague argues '... intelligence work takes place within a strong legal framework. We operate under the rule of law...'.<sup>36</sup> Even though the law limits data collection and sharing, those limitations are vague and broad which makes it difficult to convict intelligence agencies in intruding civil liberties.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, the law has been amended multiple times to expand and empower the clauses that include an exemption for the preservation of

---

<sup>34</sup> Tony Blair, 'Prime Minister's speech on criminal justice reform', *The Guardian*, 23 June 2006, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/jun/23/immigrationpolicy.ukcrime1> (Accessed 9 January 2020).

<sup>35</sup> Nicholas Watt, 'Clegg vows to get balance right in review of control orders', *The Guardian*, 5 January 2011, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2011/jan/05/nick-clegg-control-orders-reform> (Accessed 9 January 2020).

<sup>36</sup> Associated Press in Los Angeles, 'William Hague defends US-UK spy links', *The Guardian*, 26 June 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jun/26/hague-defends-us-uk-spy> (Accessed 9 January 2020)

<sup>37</sup> Hintz and Dencik, 'The Politics of Surveillance Policy' 2016, 1-16

‘national’ security.<sup>38</sup> For instance, The Prevention of Terrorism Act was introduced in 2005 and allowed those bodies to monitor a suspected citizen without an official order. This power was further expanded with the Terrorism Act 2006 and made it possible for the police to imprison suspected terrorists for 28 days without any criminal charges.<sup>39</sup> The Government undertook institutional changes that placed the Home Office in charge of the development of the Communications Bill, which aimed at obliging internet and phone service providers to record their customers’ online activity. In other words, what the government did was to exclude ministers of digital communication and civil liberties from the discussions on the Bill giving more voice to intelligence and security agencies.<sup>40</sup> This way TEMPORA achieved its justification in the law due to its direct link to state security regardless of its impact on the complexities and dynamics forming individuals’ perception of ‘feeling safe’.

As it became clear in David Cameron’s speech, the former Prime Minister of the UK, the state calls for greater public understanding of intelligence because accessing private information and collecting data through the Internet is needed ‘to keep people safe’.<sup>41</sup> The political elite *de facto* uses the idea of trade-off to convince the population its security practices like TEMPORA are legitimate as they are used against sources of insecurities, and implies that security is the highest value in society.

---

<sup>38</sup> Haggerty, *Surveillance and Democracy*, 2010.; Hintz and Dencik, ‘The Politics of Surveillance Policy’ 2016, 1-16; Fuchs, and Trottier, ‘Internet Surveillance after Snowden.’ 2017, 412-44.

<sup>39</sup> Fuchs, and Trottier, ‘Internet Surveillance after Snowden.’ 2017, 412-44.

<sup>40</sup> Haggerty, *Surveillance and Democracy*, 2010.; Hintz and Dencik, ‘The Politics of Surveillance Policy’ 2016, 1-16; Fuchs, and Trottier, ‘Internet Surveillance after Snowden.’ 2017, 412-44.

<sup>41</sup> Geoff Meade, Gavin Cordon And David Hughes, ‘David Cameron defends intelligence agencies’, *The Scotsman*, 26 October 2013, Available from: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/uk-news/david-cameron-defends-intelligence-agencies-1-3158978> (Accessed 9 January 2020).

However, excluding ministries of civil liberties from the law-making and applying practices that make people feel insecure contradicts with the normative stand the UK political elite takes towards the use of TEMPORA, namely that it 'only exists to protect *people's* freedoms.'<sup>42</sup> UK's government solves this contradiction by explaining its intrusive practices, which undermine people's fundamental right to liberty with the idea that a balance has to be achieved and such measures are justified by the context of emergency. What this analysis of TEMPORA shows is that approaching state security policies through the prism of trade-off between security and liberty is problematic. It leads to the normalisation of practices that legitimately undermine people's liberty, which generates more insecurities, and thus, makes it harder to face contemporary security threats effectively and adequately.

## Conclusion

---

The present research article showed how a narrow focus on everyday intelligence practices could better illuminate the impact of using the idea of balance between security and liberty. It argued that the pre-emptive nature of intelligence establishes a state of constant exception within which the political elite continuously reinforces the understanding that in order to gain security, people need to give away their liberty. By showing the implication of such practices, the article outlined the importance of reconceptualising

---

<sup>42</sup> Alan Travis, Kate Connolly in Berlin and Nicholas Watt, 'GCHQ surveillance: Germany blasts UK over mass monitoring', *The Guardian*, 26 June 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/25/germany-uk-gchq-internet-surveillance> (Accessed 9 January 2020)

security by reviewing it as mutually constitutive with liberty. It is important to engage with the idea of trade-off as the dichotomy it creates shapes a negative view of security that is problematic. It constructs a conflictual context, where human rights organisations and security agencies work against each other rather than together in order to tackle the security threats of today.<sup>43</sup> The implications of such practices lead to ineffective and inadequate security policy-making such as the legislation of unregulated mass surveillance that directly affects citizens' well-being by undermining their sense of privacy and self-autonomy. The article aimed to draw attention to the importance of critically engaging with the concept of balance, but more specifically, to call for a (re)conceptualisation of security and its relation with liberty as rather mutually constitutive.

---

*Victoria Tomova is a third-year student in International Relations and Politics at the University of Sheffield and a Master's offer holder from the University of St Andrews to do a course in International Development Practice. Her interests are based in the realm of security, development, and postcolonial studies.*

---

---

<sup>43</sup> Christina, Pantazis and Simon Pemberton. 'Reconfiguring Security and Liberty.' *The British Journal of Criminology* 52(3) 2012, 651-67.; David Pozen, 'Privacy-Privacy Tradeoffs', *The University of Chicago Law Review*, 83(1) 2016, pp. 221-247; Robert McArthur, 'Reasonable Expectations of Privacy', *Ethics and Information Technology*, 3 2001, pp. 123-128.; Bellaby, R., 'Going dark: analysing technology in cyberspace', *Ethics and Information Technology*, 20 2018, 189-204.

## Bibliography

---

- Ackerman, B. 'The emergency constitution', *Yale Law Journal* **113**(5) 2004, 1029–1091
- Alan Travis, Kate Connolly in Berlin and Nicholas Watt, 'GCHQ surveillance: Germany blasts UK over mass monitoring', *The Guardian*, 26 June 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/25/germany-uk-gchq-internet-surveillance> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Aradau, Claudia and van Munster, Rens, 'Governing Terrorism through Risk: Taking Precautions, (Un)Knowing the Future'. In: *European Journal of International Relations*, **13**(1) 2007, pp. 89–115
- Ashworth, A., *The Criminal Process: An Evaluative Study*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1998)
- Associated Press in Los Angeles, 'William Hague defends US-UK spy links', *The Guardian*, 26 June 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2013/jun/26/hague-defends-us-uk-spy> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Bamford, James, 'Every Move You Make', *Foreign Policy*, 7 September 2016, Available from: <https://foreignpolicy.com/2016/09/07/every-move-you-make-obama-nsa-security-surveillance-spying-intelligence-snowden/> (Accessed 24 January 2020)
- Ball, K., and Webster, F., *The Intensification of Surveillance : Crime, Terrorism and Warfare in the Information Age*. (London, Sterling, VA, Pluto Press, 2003), p.6
- Beck, U. and Lau, C., 'Second Modernity as a Research Agenda: Theoretical and Empirical Explorations in the 'Meta-Change' of Modern Society,' *British Journal of Sociology* **56**(4) 2005, 525–557
- Bellaby, R., 'Going dark: analysing technology in cyberspace', *Ethics and Information Technology*, **20** 2018, 189-204
- Bellaby, Ross, 'What's the Harm? The Ethics of Intelligence Collection', *Intelligence and National Security*, **27**(1) 2012, 93-117
- Bellaby, Ross W. 'Justifying Cyber-intelligence?', *Journal of Military Ethics* **15**(4) 2016, 299-319
- Bentham, J. 'Principles of the Civil Code', in *The Works of Jeremy Bentham*, **1**, (Edinburgh: William Tait 1943)
- Berlin, I., *Liberty*, (Oxford: Oxford University Press 1991)
- Bigo, D., Carrera, S., Guild, E. and Walker, R. B. J., 'The Changing Landscape of European Liberty and Security: The Mid-Term Report of the CHALLENGE Project', *International Social Science Journal, UNESCO*, 2008, pp. 283-308

- Bigo, D., 'Internal and External Aspects of Security', *Journal of European Security*, **15**(4) 2006, 385-404
- Blair, T., 'Prime Minister's speech on criminal justice reform', *The Guardian*, 23 June 2006, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/politics/2006/jun/23/immigrationpolicy.ukcrime1> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Booth, K., 'Security and Emancipation', *Review of International Studies*, **17**(4) 1991, 313-26
- British Home Office, Counter-Terrorism Powers: Reconciling Security and Liberty, in an *Open Society: A Discussion Paper*. 2004, Cm 6147
- Brown, I. and Douwe, K., 'Terrorism and the Proportionality of Internet Surveillance', *European Journal of Criminology*, **6**(2) 2009, 119-134
- Buzan, B., Waever, O., and Wilde, J., *Security: a new framework for analysis*, (Boulder, Colo: Lynne Rienner Pub 1998)
- Campbell, Duncan and Connor, Steve, *On the Record : Surveillance, Computers and Privacy : The Inside Story*. (London: Joseph, 1986)
- Constant, B., 'The Liberty of the Ancients Compared With That of the Moderns,' in *Political Writings*, ed. Biancamaria Fontana (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1988)
- Combs, Cindy, *Terrorism in the twenty-first century*, (Upper Saddle River, N.J: Prentice Hall 2000)
- David Blunkett's foreword in 'Counter-Terrorism Powers: Reconciling Security and Liberty', *Open Society: A Discussion Paper*, British Home Office (2004), Cm 6147
- Donohue, L. K., *The Cost of Counterterrorism: Power, Politics, and Liberty*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 2008), pp.29- 33
- Dragu, T., 'Is There a Trade-off between Security and Liberty? Executive Bias, Privacy Protections, and Terrorism Prevention', *American Political Science Review*, **105**(1) 2011, 64-78
- Eriksson, J., and Giampiero Giacomello, 'The Information Revolution, Security, and International Relations: (IR) Relevant Theory?' *International Political Science Review* **27**(3) 2006, 221–244
- Ferejohn, J. and Pasquin, P., 'The law of the exception: A typology of emergency powers', *International Journal of Constitutional Law*, **2**(2) 2004, pp. 210 - 239
- Fried, C., 'Privacy: A Moral Analysis', *Yale Law Review*, **77**(1) 1968, 475–93
- Fuchs, C., and Trottier, D. 'Internet Surveillance after Snowden.' *Journal of Information, Communication and Ethics in Society*, **15**(4) (2017), 412-44

- Haggerty, K., *Surveillance and Democracy*, Minas Samatas (ed.), (New York, Routledge: 2010)
- Heng, Y., 'The 'Transformation of War' Debate: Through the Looking Glass of Ulrich Beck's World Risk Society,' *International Relations* **20**(1) 2006, 69–91
- Herman, M., 'Ethics and Intelligence after September 2001', *Intelligence and National Security*, **19**(2), 342-58 (p. 180)
- Hintz, A. and Dencik, L., 'The Politics of Surveillance Policy: UK Regulatory Dynamics after Snowden.' *Internet Policy Review*, **5**(3) 2016, 1-16
- Hobbes, T., *Leviathan (1651)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1991)
- Hopkins, N., 'MI5 chief: GCHQ surveillance plays vital role in fight against terrorism', *The Guardian*, 9 October 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk-news/2013/oct/08/gchq-surveillance-new-mi5-chief> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Hume, D., *A Treatise of Human Nature (1740)*, (Oxford: Clarendon Press 1978)
- Johnson, L. K., 'Intelligence', in Bruce W. Jentleson and Thomas G. Paterson (eds.), *Encyclopedia of US foreign Relations* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1997), pp.365-73
- Kent, S., *Strategic Intelligence for American World Policy* (Princeton, N.J: Princeton University Press, 1953), pp.3-11
- Kristjánsson, K., *Social Freedom: The Responsibility View* (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 1996)
- Locke, J., and Cox, R., *Second Treatise of Government*. (Wheeling, Illinois: Harlan Davidson, Incorporated, 1982)
- Locke, J., *Two Treatises of Government (1690)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1988)
- Lyon, D., *Surveillance after Snowden*. (Cambridge, UK ; Malden, MA: Polity, 2015)
- MacAskill, E., Borger, J., Hopkins, N., Davies, N. and Ball, J., GCHQ taps fibre-optic cables for secret access to world's communications, *The Guardian*, 21 June 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/uk/2013/jun/21/gchq-cables-secret-world-communications-nsa> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Manners, I., *European [Security] Union: From Existential Threat to Ontological Security* (Copenhagen: Roskilde University Publications, 2002)
- Marx, G., 'Some Concepts that may be Useful in Understanding the Myriad Forms and Contexts of Surveillance', *Intelligence & National Security*, **19**(2) 2004, 226-248

- McArthur, R., 'Reasonable Expectations of Privacy', *Ethics and Information Technology*, **3** 2001, pp. 123–128
- McCahill, M., 'Surveillance, Crime and the Media', in *Routledge Handbook of Surveillance Studies*, ed. by Kevin Haggerty Kirstie Ball and David Lyon (London: Routledge, 2012), 244–251
- Meade, G., Cordon, G. and Hughes, D., 'David Cameron defends intelligence agencies', *The Scotsman*, 26 October 2013, Available from: <https://www.scotsman.com/news/uk-news/david-cameron-defends-intelligence-agencies-1-3158978> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Mill, J. S., and Himmelfarb, G., *On Liberty*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1982)
- Miller, D., 'Constraints on Freedom', *Ethics*, **94** (1983), pp. 66–86
- Montesquieu Baron de, *The Spirit of the Laws (1748)*, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press 1989)
- Mythen, G. and Walklate, S., 'Terrorism, Risk and International Security: The Perils of Asking 'What If?'' *Security Dialogue* **39**(2/3) 2008, 221–242
- Neocleous, M., *Critique of Security* (Edinburgh University Press, 2008)
- Neocleous, M., 'Security, Liberty and the Myth of Balance: Towards a Critique of Security Politics.' *Contemporary Political Theory* **6**(2), 2007, 131-149
- Pantazis, Christina, and Simon Pemberton. 'Reconfiguring Security and Liberty.' *The British Journal of Criminology* **52**(3) 2012, 651-67
- Parent, W. A., 'Privacy, Morality and the Law', *Philosophy and Public Affairs*, **12**(4) (1983), 269-288
- Pavone, Vincenzo, Elvira Santiago Gomez, and David-Olivier Jaquet-Chiffelle. 'A Systemic Approach to Security: Beyond the Tradeoff between Security and Liberty.' *Democracy and Security* **12**(4) (2016), 225-46
- Posner, R., 'Security versus Civil Liberties', *The Atlantic Monthly*, December 2001, pp. 46–47
- Pozen, D., 'Privacy-Privacy Tradeoffs', *The University of Chicago Law Review*, **83**(1) 2016, pp. 221–247
- Privacy International, *Reigniting the surveillance debate: Competing views emerge from the UK government*, 14 October 2013, Available from: <https://privacyinternational.org/blog/1440/reigniting-surveillance-debate-competing-views-emerge-uk-government> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Richelson, Jeffrey, *The U.S Intelligence Community*, (U.S: Westview Press 1999), 1-13.
- Rousseau, J. J., *The Social Contract*. (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1968)

- Solove, D., 'Understanding Privacy', *Harvard University Press*, May 2008; GWU Legal Studies Research Paper No. 420; GWU Law School Public Law Research Paper No. 420. Available at SSRN: <https://ssrn.com/abstract=1127888>
- Shils, E., 'Privacy: Its Constitution and Vicissitudes', *Law and Contemporary Problems*, **31**(2) 1966, 281–306
- Shulsky, A. N., and Schmitt, G. J., *Silent Warfare: Understanding the World of Intelligence* (Dulles, VA: Brassey's, 3rd edn 2002), p.1
- Tickner, J.A., *Gender in International Relations*, (Boulder: Lynne Rienner 1992)
- UK Presidency [of the EU] (2005) *Liberty and Security: Striking the Right Balance*
- von Hayek, F.A., *The Constitution of Liberty* (London, Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1960)
- Von Humboldt, W., and Burrow, J. W. *The Limits of State Action*. (Indianapolis: Liberty Fund, 1993)
- Waldron, J., 'Security and Liberty: The Image of Balance', *The Journal of Political Philosophy*, **11** (2) 2003, 191-210
- Warner, M., 'Wanted: A Definition of Intelligence', *Studies in Intelligence*, **46**(3) 2002, p.15
- Watt, N., 'Clegg vows to get the balance right in review of control orders', *The Guardian*, 5 January 2011, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/law/2011/jan/05/nick-clegg-control-orders-reform> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Watt, N., 'David Cameron Makes Veiled Threat to Media over NSA and GCHQ Leaks', *The Guardian*, 28 October 2013, Available from: <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/oct/28/david-cameron-nsa-threat-newspapers-guardian-snowden> (Accessed 9 January 2020)
- Whitley, E. A., and Hosein, I., 'Policy Discourse and Data Retention: The Technology Politics of Surveillance in the United Kingdom.' *Telecommunications Policy* **29**(11) 2005, 857-74
- Young, J. B., *Privacy*, (Chichester (etc.): Wiley, 1978)

# Authoritarianism in times of pandemics

Dr. Aleksandar Stoyanov

The COVID-19 coronavirus caught the world unprepared. No one expected a pandemic in 2020, and this is clear from the reactions of states and their leaders. Some, such as Brazil's leader Jair Bolsonaro and [British Prime Minister Boris Johnson](#), waved dismissively and called the disease a hoax. On the 27th of March, it became clear that Johnson was ill with COVID-19, and Bolsonaro's first test also came out positive, just 5 days after his meeting with Donald Trump. The second, according to the [Facebook profile of Bolsonaro](#), was already [negative](#). Time will tell if his illness was a momentary sensation, a Brazilian media speculation, or a fact. Other states such as Hong Kong, Japan, and Taiwan have taken action on time. This comes as no surprise as they have already survived coronavirus twice, albeit with another strain, in 2003 and in 2009. China has also experienced these two previous waves, but Beijing has nonetheless been taken by surprise this time.

“Count your chickens after they are hatched”

Reports of the damage scale caused by the coronavirus face several problems. First, there is no way to calculate exactly how many people are infected with the virus. This is due to the inability to test everyone, coupled with the high rate of spread of the disease. Secondly, an equally serious problem is information blackout. Here, authoritarian states, of course, occupy the forefront. Due to strict and sometimes absolute control over the media flow, it is extremely difficult to obtain adequate and credible information in the event of a crisis in these countries.

When the coronavirus began to spread to China in November-December 2019, local authorities initially tried to suppress and downplay the

extent of the problem. The first evidence of the infection indicated a small scale of the disease. Then came videos and comments, filmed and distributed [by locals](#), who painted a very different and ominous picture. Many experts and observers have expressed serious doubts about the accuracy of the data released by China. A chilling example was the [sudden](#) announcement of 15,000 new cases in February 2020.

The recalculation of 15,000 infected is clearly visible in the middle of the chart, dated from the 12th of February. The sudden stabilization of patient growth at the end of February was called into question, as was current information on the death toll. According to official statistics, a total of 3,174 people have died in Hubei Province. At the same time, [an inspection](#) at the funeral home showed more than 7,000 urns used in crematoriums around and in Wuhan, which was considered the outbreak of the virus. Additional weight in measurement is placed on the scale of mobile network usage in China. For the last quarter, the number of mobile network users [decreased by 21,000,000](#) and that of landline users – by 840,000. Of course, much of this decline is due to the collapse of businesses, the closure of stores and the decrease in the number of seasonal workers who generally use two mobile networks when traveling to other provinces. However, if even 1% of those 840,000 subscribers who cut their mobile networks fell victim to COVID-19, then again it is 8,400 people – 2.5 times the official statistics and relatively closer to the stated number of 7,000 urns set aside for crematoriums in Wuhan province.

The way in which the coronavirus is spread in Europe and the US is also being raised. In territories similar in size to China, several major outbreaks of the disease are observed. At the same time, the disease in China is mostly concentrated in Hubei Province. The official point is that the Chinese authorities have been able to quickly introduce quarantine measures to block the spread of the infection. However, this is not true. The infection was announced by Chinese doctors in December 2019, and the first significant measures taken by the authorities came in 2020, with Wuhan being put under quarantine on the [23rd of January](#) 2020. Prior to the quarantine announcement, over [5,000,000 people left](#) Wuhan. There is also a discrepancy at the statistical level. According to the basic charts, China is starting to move away from the dangerous line of doubling cases around the 6th of February. In reality, however, the peak of 15,000 new patients

announced in a single day comes a week later. Even if we assume that this is a simple correction of the data, it is more than clear that statistics submitted before the 13th of February are incorrect. This raises serious doubts about the stabilization of the number of newly infected at the end of the month and the reduction of real cases in March. It is important to note here – the remarks made so far do not mean that the People’s Republic of China has no longer been able to cope with the main phase of the disease. The question, however, is what the real cost to this victory is.

Of course, China is not the only authoritarian country hiding real data on the spread of the infection. On the 28th of February 2020, according to [official statistics](#) in Iran, 34 people were killed by COVID-19. A [BBC investigation](#) has revealed that the real number is at least 210 people. The major difference in numbers, approximately 6 times bigger than the announced, casts serious doubts on the current official figure (as of the end of March) – 2,378 deaths. This is [evidenced](#) by the fact that massive burial pits appeared in Qom province, the initial spreading point, visible from satellite images. The crisis with the coronavirus has spread to such an extent that the otherwise outspoken and always arrogant Foreign Minister, Javad Zarif, asked for urgent international assistance on the 12th of March when official deaths in the country were 429.

In North Korea, authorities said there were no patients, as all borders were quickly closed. Informally, however, Pyongyang has sought help to cope with the spread of the disease, although it continues to deny publicly the spread of COVID-19 in the country. According to sources in the DPRK, South Korean media reported that there were at least 180 coronavirus deaths in North Korea and 3,700 were quarantined. The data only applies to the North Korean army.

In Syria, it was not until the 23rd of March that the Damascus government announced the first case of a coronavirus. However, the first reports of dead soldiers from pro-Iranian militias with COVID-19 had emerged at least a week earlier. Even before Damascus announced its first official case, Syrian Democratic Forces controlling the territories northeast of the Euphrates river had declared that they were closing the roads across the river with territories controlled by the regime’s forces.

The situation played out in a similar way in Russia. Authorities began reporting on the very limited spread of the disease and a minimal number of casualties. Again, the intervention of doctors who chose to speak up despite the censorship cast serious doubts on the real situation in the country. Doctors have announced that patients who died as a result of symptoms inherent for the coronavirus are being declared as victims of pneumonia in order to mask the real extent of the crisis. This could be further explained by the drastic measures taken by Moscow over the last few days in closing the borders and completely canceling flights to and from Russia. These urgent measures, in fact, open a window to one of the biggest problems of authoritarian states – information security.

## Ignorance is bliss

---

Authoritarian states live based on a simple principle – society needs to know the bare minimum. With little knowledge comes little anxiety and public anxiety is the main enemy of authoritarianism. The reason is that worried people ask too many questions and can act unpredictably. Authoritarian systems do not like questions and unforeseen situations because their very nature is closely tied to total control. This creates the need to over-centralized everything – power, news and, in general, information.

Information control, in turn, poses two major problems. The first one is the need to prevent any possible data leakage, which consumes massive resources. The second problem is purely structural – lower-level employees are afraid to share on information about unforeseen, unpleasant things upwards in the hierarchy to prevent falling a scapegoat in turn. This creates a kind of internal eclipse of information. It turns out that not only the population but also the upper echelons of power are not aware of absolutely everything that is happening in the state. As Russian domestic policy expert Mark Galeotti [rightly admits](#), it is very possible that until recently, no one has told Putin exactly how many ill patients there are in his state, and only after learning of it, that all these extraordinary measures have been taken from last week – the cancellation of flights, annual leave for everyone, postponing the plebiscite for a constitutional amendment, etc.

A similar scenario may have developed in China. The Wuhan local administration has been slow to convey bad news to the governors of Hubei Province, who in turn did not want to immediately bother Xi Jinping, a man popular with many things but not with a good temper or tolerance for failure. Fear, which is the main weapon of authoritarian regimes, is one of their greatest weaknesses. The reason is that what separates the anointed nomenclature from the ordinary citizen, who may suddenly disappear, is a single inappropriate mistake. The lack of real security – not only job security but also that of individual life acts as a paralyzing factor for the system in times of crisis. Similar to the 1986 Chernobyl situation, each level tries, usually inadequately, to suppress the crisis before finally surrendering and sharing with those up the chain. The problem is that each subsequent step requires more time, as more power means more effort to cover up the crisis. In a pandemic situation, any delay is fatal, not in a matter of weeks, but days. As aforementioned, China has been delaying the crisis for more than a month.

## Do not waste the crisis

---

In a 1976 article at the Medical Economics Journal, M.H. Weiner writes, „Do not waste a crisis – neither your patients’ one nor your own.“ Gradually, the phrase „Do not waste a crisis“ becomes a principle of economy and diplomacy. It has obviously already become part of politics, too. In addition to the tremendous stress on states, crises also create many opportunities. Opportunities for reform, but also opportunities for concentrating even more power in the hands of the ruling elites. In the last 10 years, Europe has seen many authoritarian wannabes. We have some at home, many around us, both within and outside the European Union. The current crisis, with its state of emergency and extended powers, creates a fertile ground for the authoritarianism of democratic systems. Hungary becomes a textbook example, but based on the emergency measures adopted, Bulgaria is following the same model. This situation requires an extremely high level of public sensitivity. In our country, it is unfortunately dulled by the low educational level, lack of cultural qualifications and lack of clear political trends that would channel civic ideas on how a state should be

governed. Adding to the massive groundless nostalgia for a fictitious past imagined in people's minds, but non-existent in reality, the recipe for disaster is clear.

While some state leaders try walking in the shoes of authoritarian statesmen, the latter do not stand with hands in their pockets. In an attempt to divert attention from the enormous domestic problems, Russia and China rushed to send humanitarian aid to First World countries, most notably Italy, where the coronavirus disaster gained apocalyptic proportions. It is extremely convenient for China to be the humanitarian winner in a country whose indicators of COVID-19 development are perhaps most clearly indicative of the real dimensions of the crisis that Beijing faced. Russia rushed to follow in the footsteps of its eastern neighbor. However, it turned out that, like [other moves by Putin](#), humanitarian aid to Italy was limited investment in the pursuit of unlimited dividends. About 80% of the assistance sent by the Kremlin proved to be [useless](#). The same level of inefficiency was reported by China's quick coronavirus tests – in [Spain](#) and [the Czech Republic](#) – authorities said the tests were massively ineffective due to their lack of sensitivity to the disease.

However, online propaganda has been rampant, portraying Russia and China as Italy's saviors, as well as ridiculous rumors of Italy leaving the „ungrateful“ EU. Leaving aside the usual nonsense for Nostradamus and Vanga (who is much more popular in Russia than in Bulgaria – for example, the verb „*vanguvam*“ [вангувам ]), Prigozhin's troll factory is working at full force, and we also add the informal support network for the Chinese image, which is [far less discussed](#).

## What did the author mean

---

Long story short, the global pandemic crisis creates both enormous challenges and significant niches to grow in terms of authoritarian regimes and those pseudo-democrats who want to play in the high league with the Big Brothers (an Orwell reference). The situation in the world right now requires all societies to be vigilant. We need to be careful about the statistics

that flood us. We must beware of the news we read – between 40% and 60% of them are fake or distorted. We need to be extremely vigilant about the laws that governments are passing while we are sitting at home focused on the newer and newer restrictive measures issued by the National Crisis Group. The media flow and political efforts are creating an eclipse. The eclipse builds up and turns into darkness. And in the darkness, as [Bob Woodward](#) put it, democracy is dying.

# COVID19 – is it the new Plague? Most likely not.

**Dr. Aleksandar Stoyanov**

In 1346 an invisible enemy started crawling across Asia to Europe. Scientists are still arguing about the exact way of how it spread. Rats were previously thought to be the carriers, but later on, fleas were proved to most likely be the origin. In any case, the Mongol troops who besieged the city of Azov brought it with them and with the catapults thrown into the city, corpses passed it to the Genoese defenders.

From Azov, the plague spread into the Mediterranean, and then into Europe and North Africa. Meanwhile, the plague, with its other tentacles reached Asia. Somewhere between 30% and 60% of the population of Europe and approximately a third of the world's population have died as a result.

Today, six centuries and a half later, the world has a new pandemic – the coronavirus COVID19. The media rushed to announce the virus for the new plague. From a historic and medical point of view, this is an absurdity. The only similarity between the two is the high level of contagiousness. COVID19 is not as deadly or dangerous during the sickness period. Much of the gloomy aura of the disease comes from panic and hysteria triggered not by the disease itself but the mass inadequacy in reaction from governments and media.

The reasons for this inadequacy can be traced back to the international context of the last ten years where its progenitor of hysteria will undoubtedly be the World Trade Crisis from 2009. It has unleashed a wave of apocalyptic predictions and accelerated the process of transforming social networks into an alternative source of information. This easy-to-manipulate information environment has been used with increasing intensity by various governments and corporations. The aggressive use of the Internet was so widespread that the military forces around the world had to formally add a fifth dimension to military affairs – cyberspace.

The so-called asymmetric war surfaced after Russia's entry into Ukraine in 2014 and Syria in 2015. What followed was the battle for the European opinion around the migrant wave of 2015-2017 and then the US presidential campaign. What was created was an extremely tense media environment with too little critical thinking and at the same time too much sensitivity to any information flow.

As the media hive was shaken, the political leaders were being tested too, and they failed catastrophically. The financial crisis and the ensuing recession were accompanied by all kinds of mistakes. Many of them, such as the fictitious maintenance of poorly managed banks, have been implemented through pure lobbying and preservation of personal relationships at the expense of the public good. In order to maintain their position in crisis situations, many governments have allowed restrictions on the personal freedoms of citizens, and especially the freedom of speech.

The environment was somewhat of a paradise for both authoritarian regimes and those democracies that wanted to move towards self-authoritarianism. Under the pretext of fighting fake news, inconvenient critical media was chased. The tabloids themselves remained untouched and, on the contrary, their owners became an instrument in the hands of the status quo, which raised government stability in a political axiom. In order to survive, many major media companies have gone down the tabloid road to enjoy government benevolence. Governments themselves have put in place a system of pressure tools to control media they did not directly own.

And so, here it came – the spring of 2020. Governments are in shock – clearly, there is a threat, but how to deal with it? Europe is accustomed to fixing problems with financial tranches. We will pour money into PIGS (\*Portugal, Italy, Greece, Spain) until they stabilize. We will pay for Turkey and Libya to withhold migrants. We will sanction Putin in exchange for his obedience. None of these measures seemed to have worked in practice. Where progress has been made, it has happened due to alternative ways. Now once again – rescue financial transactions for billions and trillions. But how? What for? By what plan? There is no answer, only readiness for cashflow based on the old saying that if something does not work out with a lot of money, it will surely work out with a lot more money. This turns out to be false.

So here comes the comparison with the plague. The big difference between the plague and COVID19 is that the plague has killed people and the crisis around COVID19 will kill the economy.

Following the Black Death, Europe experienced decades of catharsis. But the economic recovery lies in higher demand for specialists and the restructure of the feudal economy into a capital one by opening access to business to wider parts of society. The lack of people leads to higher wages, legal norms reforms and better guarantees for workers.

Back to the coronavirus, people remain, thank God, alive as the mortality rate is relatively low for a pandemic and affects mostly the people beyond working age. However, panic measures and lack of adequate planning are killing the business. In Europe, following the plague, there was a lot of work to be done and little people. In Europe, after COVID19 there will be many people and little work to be done. Overconsumption of goods along stockpiling, coupled with bankruptcies and the shutting down of business initiatives will leave job hunger with no means to feed it. If the situation deepens, hunger will not be just for jobs.

More reasonable governments have already taken steps to create rescue packages for businesses. Whether they will be sufficient is not yet clear, but at least they are implemented. In Bulgaria, newer and newer restrictions are being introduced without any guarantees for the survival of the business, especially the small and medium ones. Civil rights and freedoms are being harmed in a careless manner on the basis of a hasty and ill-considered emergency state. The National Crisis Group is talking about saving the business, but words and deeds seem to diverge dramatically.

In our current state, it is important for people to realize that a pandemic is a serious problem, but not a long-term one. In the next 3-4 months, the situation will have developed and will start phasing out. The question is what will be the state in which we wake up after the nightmare and whether the economic impact of the crisis will plunge us into an even deeper and darker nightmare. At the same time, it is a good idea to think about the state of our civil rights currently and consider how long we can stay at that level. It is worth quoting Benjamin Franklin, who astutely points out that, „those who would give up essential Liberty, to purchase a little temporary Safety, deserve neither Liberty nor Safety“.

# Russia takes advantage of the COVID-19 chaos

Ruslan Trad, Ventsislav Bozhev

**W**ithin a few months, the Covid-19 epidemic swept virtually the entire world, putting not only health systems but also the socio-political balance of many societies at test. At present, Europe may be considered as suffering the major blow of the epidemic, with the situation in Italy and Spain seeming more than critical.

It is in this context that more and more evidence emerges that Russia is using the current crisis to intervene in other countries' internal affairs. The main approach is to disseminate disinformation and fake news about the coronavirus, which will further wreak havoc and sow distrust among European societies. The epidemic and the crisis it produced are an ideal topic for exploiting existing cleavages, both between European countries and different social groups in each state. First of all, it is of particular importance to build a strong sense of distrust of the democratic processes and the idea of a united Europe in general. Along the same line, the US-Europe chilling relations are being exploited. This opens a new opportunity for Russian intervention as Moscow tries to increasingly, more aggressively and visibly sow confusion and division between the NATO allies.

A few days ago, the Russian president spoke with Chinese leader Xi Jinping, praising Beijing's campaign to deal with Covid-19. Meanwhile, the pressure on the flow of information and the denial of free access at the beginning of the epidemic allowed the virus to spread without a public announcement in a timely manner. Since December, when the virus was spreading freely, Covid-19 has also become an "infodemia", defined by the World Health Organization as "an excessive amount of information - some accurate, some not, but complicating the finding of reliable sources and guidelines."

The Russian disinformation about the coronavirus is similar to the one used during operations in Crimea and Syria and later in Libya. The same practices have been used to flood fake news in Western societies. In the

case of Covid-19, it is relatively easy because of the inherent fear of epidemics and viruses, as well as the lack of trust in institutions - a problem that has been observed in many countries, not only in Africa and Asia, but also in Europe. During pandemics, fake news are even more spicy and shocking as the aim is to create chaos and distrust. The divide in European societies currently runs along two main lines: young against old, poor against rich. At a geopolitical level, misinformation seeks to divide the core of NATO with a focus on a lack of solidarity and adequate action among allies.

Citizens are angry with their governments and therefore susceptible to influence. There is a reason to be angry - a number of European countries have shown a lack of preparation for tackling such a challenge, and have also responded slowly, not on time and with a lack of willingness to give money for health care. The dire consequences expected from pandemic mitigation measures also create mistrust and negativity towards government institutions. Russian misinformation seeks to bring to the fore precisely these problems, with topics being flooded with exaggerated facts - with the help of short news with sensational and emotional headlines, vague video footage, so-called memes, that always get wide visibility. Distorted comments have emerged, presenting Covid-19 as the "new plague". Analysts expect that this campaign will intensify on the eve of the US presidential election.

In our March 29 newsletter, we included news from a new EU report that lists data on the presence of a Russian misinformation campaign led in English, Spanish, Italian, German, French and Arabic. Fake news originating in Iran are being circulated on social networks - such as the claim that the coronavirus is made by the US, that Jews and migrants are carrying it, etc. According to the EUvsDISINFO project of the European External Action Service, the misinformation campaign basically goes into several narratives. The first one is that the coronavirus was deliberately created in a laboratory as a NATO biological weapon against China and Iran, with a view of imposing US global hegemony or a shadow ruling global political elite. The other two stories are mutually contradictory. One of them denies at all the existence and significance of the coronavirus, while the other heralds an apocalyptic future and the collapse of NATO and the EU. Other narratives are linked to the global conspiracy of pharmaceutical corporations or the establishment of 5G communication networks that facilitate the spread of coronavirus. Few social media posts have attempted to link NATO's virtually

abolished large-scale military exercise, Defender Europe 20, with America's attempt to occupy Europe in times of an emergency.

This whole misinformation campaign has had grave consequences not only for the targeted state institutions, but also for everyday life - for example, in the US, there has been an increase in attempts by far-right and racist groups to attack medical infrastructure. The FBI made recommendations to police departments after a member of a racist group in Missouri tried to blow up a car bomb at a hospital that housed patients with Covid-19.

As of March 30, Russia had reported 1,836 cases of coronavirus. Confidence in Moscow institutions is also low, with even doctors criticising the data at risk of being censored or losing their jobs. The Kremlin has carried out similar campaigns in the past, with the most famous one being the AIDS claim that the United States is behind the disease.

There is no clear data on the spread of coronavirus in Russia. Like Iran, the government does not give free access to information, and doctors have no right to speak with journalists. Tehran has blocked access to Doctors Without Borders in recent days, and restrictions in Russia may be expected.

During a pandemic, there is a real danger of authoritarian inclinations and society must be even more vigilant.

# The Idlib Knot – A Test For The Putin-Erdogan Relations

Ventsislav Bozhev

Just within a week, the Turkish army lost 13 soldiers in clashes with troops loyal to President Bashar Assad in Idlib governorate. [Five](#) of them died after their base near Taftanaz was targeted, and a week earlier another [eight](#) were killed after shelling by Syrian government forces in the area of the strategically located city of Saraqib. Ankara's response was quick, as Turkish artillery hit over 100 targets of the Syrian army and its allies. This is the result from Turkey's decision to start pouring large amounts of military hardware and soldiers in a bid to deter the government offensive against the various insurgent groups in Idlib.

And while Russia is trying to play the role of a mediator, there are still no indications that the situation is going to deescalate. Ankara and Damascus blame each other, with both sides showing readiness to continue hostilities after the end of February, when expires the Turkish ultimatum, warning for further military action if the Syrian government does not withdraw.

## FAILURE OF THE SOCHI AGREEMENT

---

In the fall of 2018, Presidents Erdogan and Putin both reached an [agreement](#), which at that moment satisfied their [needs](#) and ensured at least temporary stability in the Idlib, Aleppo and Hama provinces. The main points were as follows:

- establishing a 15-20 km. demilitarized zone to separate the government troops from the different rebel and Islamist groups;
- withdrawal of all radical terrorist militias such as Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS) along with all types of heavy equipment;

- conducting joint Russian-Turkish patrols to monitor the compliance of the agreement;
- restoration of traffic on the key highways M4 (Aleppo-Latakia) and M5 (Aleppo-Hama).

However, none of these arrangements was fully implemented. Government forces and insurgents constantly violated the ceasefire, HTS refused to accept the agreement and withdraw from the buffer zone, carrying out provocations, and Russian and Syrian jets conducted hundreds of bombardments, targeting numerous civilian facilities. Turkey, on the other hand, failed in its efforts to establish control over the major factions in the area (especially HTS) using its proxies from the Syrian National Army (former Free Syrian Army) and the National Front for Liberation, which is composed from groups with diverse ideologies, including jihadist radicals such as Ahrar al-Sham. All this became the necessary pretext for the government to launch a large-scale offensive at the end of April 2019, which continues (interrupted in September and October) until now with the support from Russia and Iran.

As [predicted](#) by De Re Militari team in 2018, such offensive leads to severe humanitarian crisis. According to the UN, since December alone, nearly [700 000](#) people have been forced to flee the combat zones and seek asylum in the already overcrowded refugee camps along the border with Turkey, where access to clean water, warm shelter and food becomes harder every day. At least [53](#) medical facilities have suspended services as a result of insecurity, shelling and complete depopulation of entire regions. In this way, some 2.9 million people remain with limited or no access to basic healthcare and the risk of spreading diseases is steadily increasing.



A map of Northwest Syria, February 16, 2020.

## A TEST FOR THE RUSSIAN-TURKISH RELATIONS

---

The ongoing escalation in any case represents a serious challenge to the good relations that Russia and Turkey have been developing for the last few years. Relations that are actually nothing more than a product of political realism, economic and political pragmatism and mutually shared discontent with the West. All these factors have always played a crucial role in determining the relationship between Turkey and Russia over the last 500 years, when periods of conflict and war alternate with periods of cooperation. This is why their current partnership cannot be qualified as “strategic”, although this term is largely used by high-ranking officials such as the Russian Foreign Minister [Sergey Lavrov](#). It is very difficult to build long-term strategic cooperation, if it is based solely on pragmatism and balance of power without sharing common values and ideals. In this way, reaching a conflict point becomes inevitable.

In the Syrian context, such conflict was just a matter of time and motive to come, although it is unlikely to be a reason for a lasting rift. The two countries have different goals and views regarding Syria (and Libya), but in the broader context, the interests uniting them are more than those dividing them. At least for now.

In any case, the current situation will require reformulating the partnership regarding Syria. In this sense, President Erdogan does not appear to have the upper hand. The more territory the government forces take with Russian support, the more Turkey’s ability to influence the processes in Syria will diminish. Military presence through its army and loyal proxies can guarantee Ankara enough leverage in the negotiations for the future of Syria. Even more – military presence and *de facto* territorial control are the main options for limiting Kurdish influence and above all – cutting off possibilities the Kurdish authority to obtain any political concessions from Damascus. For Erdogan, a military defeat in Idlib would mean a long-term political loss in Syria.

This is the reason why Turkey sends troops and military equipment. A risky move, given that the airspace of Idlib is entirely controlled by the Syrian and Russian air forces. However, it is a risk Erdogan is willing to take. He

sends a clear-cut message through the Turkish army and loyal proxies, that the cost of a military victory would be very high for Damascus. There is also a possibility to open a new front near the city of Al Bab. Such escalation would mean bringing new dynamics to the whole conflict with consequences hard to predict or control.

There is a more likely option for Idlib, which would mean a diplomatic solution and renegotiating. This solution would most probably involve creating new demilitarized zone, serving as an asylum for the refugees. Turkey is already sheltering over [3.5 million](#) people, so it is a matter of security that there is no new uncontrollable refugee waves. Idlib is more specific, because of the presence of many radical jihadist groups and the danger that their members might use the refugee masses as cover to sneak into Turkey.

It is unknown what would be the reaction to such agreement of radicals like HTS, Jaysh al-Ahrar or Huras al-Din (the Al Qaeda branch in Syria). Also, how can they be kept away from this buffer zone, so that there is no pretext for another devastating government offensive.

The whole situation in Idlib is a serious test of the sustainability of the relations between Russia and Turkey. Especially in context of Russia's foreign intelligence chief visit in UAE, where the main topic was Syria. The UAE-Saudi Arabia-Egypt axis has been having claims for political influence in Syria for years and a possible Russian rapprochement with it, would put Erdogan in a very vulnerable situation, displaced as a major factor. In this regard, the only question here is how far is willing to go Erdogan in order to preserve his position in Syria?

# Four Takeaways From „The Deal of the Century“

Ventsislav Bozhev

**A**fter more than two years of work, the team of Jared Kushner has finally revealed its final [version](#) of the American initiative for the Middle East peace process, known as the “Deal of the Century”. A contradictory proposal that was firmly [rejected](#) both by the government of Mahmoud Abbas in Ramallah and by the leading political factors in the Gaza Strip.

The plan itself is divided into two parts. The first is an economic one, presented by Jared Kushner back in June 2019. The second is a political one, that should provide solutions to all major problems complicating the Israeli-Palestinian conflict, such as the status of Jerusalem, borders, Israeli settlements in the West Bank, security as well as the right of return or compensation for the Palestinian refugees from the 1948 and 1967 wars. This plan must not be considered as a final proposal, but as a framework that should give a basis for further bilateral negotiations between Israelis and Palestinians.

The economic component envisages raising and investing more than \$50 billion in 179 different projects. Some \$23 billion are to be invested directly in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, with the rest to be spent in neighboring Egypt, Jordan and Lebanon. The three areas of investment are related to building economic prosperity, improving the education and health systems as well as reforming the public sector. The goals include doubling GDP within 10 years, reducing poverty rates by 50%, creating 1 million jobs and cutting unemployment below 10%. Ambitious aims and ideas that present ways of spending and managing money, but do not specify who is willing to invest it.

Unlike the economic part of the plan, the political is not related to the specifics of numbers and rates. It addresses the extremely complex and delicate issues, which have been an unresolvable puzzle for the international community for seven decades. Although the plan framework provides room

for negotiations, there are still major points favoring the Israeli cause that are unlikely to be changed:

- Jerusalem will be “undivided” capital of the state of Israel – something that was already recognized by president Trump’s administration at the end of 2017 causing the Palestinians to brake off their contacts with Washington;
- There won’t be a Palestinian capital in East Jerusalem. It will be located in the suburb of Abu Dis;
- The US will recognize the Israeli settlements in the West Bank as well as the Israeli sovereignty over the Jordan Valley, which is expected to be annexed soon;
- The possible future Palestinian state should be demilitarized and without any control of its borders. This means that the border control will be exercised by Israel and, to a lesser extent by Egypt and Jordan.

In the end, what does all this mean? Now, we can draw some sober conclusions more than a week after all details from Trump’s plan were made clear and all stakeholders voiced their opinions.

## The Quartet has been dead and gone long ago

Since it was established in 2002, the Quartet of Russia, the USA, the UN and the EU has to some extend been considered as the only possible body with potential to act as a mediator between Israelis and Palestinians. Although this format had apromising start, in the end it proved to be completely ineffective and without any capacity to urge the opposing sides to make progress in the peace process. The Quartet has lost so much of its legitimacy and authority that its members have not met for years, and its special representative Kito de Boer is not only absolutely unfamiliar among the international community, but he is probably unknown even to the people he has to work with in Israel and the Palestinian Authority. And this is precisely where Trump’s “Deal of the Century” comes into play. In a typical

business style, he decides to sidestep all forms of multilateral cooperation (whether effective or not) and move on to bilateral negotiations and deals.

## Russia is displacing the European Union as a leading factor in the peace process

---

Moscow was the first place Benjamin Netanyahu visited after the joint announcement of the plan standing next to Donald Trump in Washington. In Russia, he met President Vladimir Putin and apart from issues regarding the bilateral Israeli-Russian relations, the main topic they discussed was the “Deal of the Century”. The initial [reaction](#) in Moscow expressed by Dmitry Peskov was restrained, but it is hard to imagine that Putin would prefer supporting the Palestinian position over that of Israel, especially given the good and pragmatic relations he keeps with Netanyahu. In this sense, for the Israeli Prime Minister, Russia seems to be a much more reasonable partner than the European Union, whose position was everything but supportive. The EU firmly [rejected](#) the plan, as Josef Borell said that it departs from “*internationally agreed parameters*” and each step toward annexation “*if implemented, could not pass unchallenged*”.

Regardless of whether the American initiative proves to be successful or not, for Putin it represents a chance to keep the momentum for Russia and continue the trend of reaffirming Moscow as a major power broker and to some extent a preferred mediator at the expense of Europe.

## Israel will deepen its relations with more Arabic countries

---

Yes, “The Deal of the Century” was rejected by regional powers such as [Iran](#), [Turkey](#) and [Jordan](#) as well as by the [Arab League](#) and the [Organization of Islamic Cooperation](#), which in theory should represent the interests of 57 countries. However, the reaction of Egypt and the Gulf monarchies was generally pragmatic and rather positive. And this should

come as no surprise. For Saudi Arabia, Egypt and OAE, the Palestinian cause has not been a top priority for years, with regional confrontation with Iran as well as Turkey regarding the conflicts in Syria, Libya and the Eastern Mediterranean, being at the forefront for them. Therefore, it is logical for these countries to neglect the Palestinian interests for the sake of theirs. In this regard, it is not unnatural for Saudi Arabia, Egypt and OAE to be put together along Israel in one team, based on the principle that *“the enemy of my enemy is my friend”*.

## Most likely “The Deal of the Century” will be one of the last chances for a Palestinian state

---

These are the words of Jared Kushner from an extensive [interview](#), given for an Egyptian TV. A statement that is not far from the truth, at least in the near future. Ever since the first plan for a state from 1948, the Palestinians have always rejected any proposal. The only exception is the Oslo accords, which failed because of the Israeli tenacity to build settlements in the occupied territories, as well as the inability and the unwillingness of the Palestinian Authority to provide security guarantees.

This, in the end, leads to a situation where any subsequent peace initiative proposes less land and opportunities for the Palestinians. In any case, the current plan is not favorable for them, far from the classical two-state principle and reversing to 1967 borders. It offers a weak illusion of a state with fragmented territory and limited sovereignty. A plan that contradicts a number of UN Security Council resolutions with a clear message to the Palestinians: “You have lost and now it is time to accept it”.

But this deal is also a reflection of the reality, in which Israel has the upper hand and is ready, able and willing to impose terms and conditions from the position of power. Apparently, the Palestinians no longer have an ally in the White House (at least until the November elections), most likely they have also lost the support of key Arab states and the possibilities to talk with a moderate Israeli government are minimal. Even if Benny Gantz takes the Prime Minister seat in March, his view of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict

is the same as that of Netanyahu. The plan itself may actually be the necessary unitive factor for the two leaders that will help them form a coalition government after two failed attempts and a yearlong political crisis in Israel.

“Unitive”. A word long forgotten in Palestine.

# Why should we blame it on Russia?

**Dr. Aleksandar Stoyanov**

**E**very great story needs its villain. Human history makes no exception – generation after generation, people look for the villains of their time to use them as a scapegoat for their own actions.

In the past ten years European history has had its unquestionable villain -Russia. The Kremlin has sent its agents abroad to poison people in the United Kingdom and Bulgaria, organize a coup d'état in Montenegro, to conspire in Serbia and work for the split off of Catalonia. It is Moscow again that backs and finances controversial political parties, usually adhering to conservative and right-wing nationalist ideas. Moscow annexed Crimea. Moscow started the Donbas war and blocked the Ukrainian EU and NATO integration. Moscow split off Abkhazia and Ossetia from Georgia and froze the state's integration.

Putin backed Assad, his forces killed thousands of civilians in Syria and destroyed its chance for democratization. It is Putin again who backs the authoritarian marshal Khalifa Haftar and his mercenary army in Libya. Putin negotiated with the Taliban behind the US back and attempts to be a middleman in this conflict. Russian mercenaries guard gold and diamond mines across Africa, support dictators and train their armies, flooding the Dark continent with Russian arms.

Russia interfered in Venezuela, supporting the destructive regime of Nicolás Maduro. Once more, Moscow backs the North Korean regime. Moscow supports Iran, Moscow attempts to diverge Turkey from the North Atlantic Alliance and to pull the Saudi rug from under Washington's feet. Russia corrupts the Bulgarian political system, buys off politicians; uses its mafia to influence the local mafia; Arms, finances and trains paramilitary and pseudo nationalistic formations. Interchangeably, Kosovo, Serbia and Slovakia face the same situation. All clear-cut facts and so what?

In case you have failed to understand, Russia is a global political power with direct interests in two continents and implicit ones all over the world. As any other political and military power in our history, Russia does what deems right in pursuit of these interests. In the place of Russia, countries like France, the United Kingdom and the US have acted no less definitive, rude or bold.

The problem stems not from Russia's actions but from the collective surprise coming from the West. Their first main point of argument is: "We must not adhere to XIX century doctrines when it comes to foreign policy today". But why not? For the last 6000 years of human history people have used the exact same interchangeable golden rules. Change is only observed in the volume and scope of the political processes. Or put simply, the New Kingdom of Egypt, the Persian Empire, the Roman Empire, the Mongol Empire and the British Empire have all built their foreign policy on the same basic principles. These principles, on the other hand, are based on human nature. Thoroughly researched by anthropologists, the most successful finding is defined by Einstein's laconic claim that "two things are infinite: the Universe and human stupidity and I am not sure about the former."

The second main issue of modern society is that it tries to assess politics based on moral principles. Politics, similar to marketing, is built on the lack of moral grounds and rather, on the unconditional aspiration for success. Put this way, politics is neither "good", nor "bad", but merely "successful" or "unsuccessful", just like business. When discussing public debates, talking to friends over a drink or venting on social media, it is bearable to classify politics as "good" or "bad". The bad thing is, however, that these categories crawl back and become part of the vernacular of politicians and analysts – the people who ought to raise above such malfunctioning definitions. Beyond political demagoguery which sees us as the good guys and the others are the bad guys. Relying on moral categories alters and compromises the political analysis and hinders its causal relationship. Put simply, if one analyzes Putin's politics on the presumption that he is the "bad guy", one could not comprehend at least half of the real reasons behind his actions.

The simple truth which many politicians and analysts fail to apprehend is that Russia is not “bad” or not, in any case, worse than any other Great power. Russia acts in all the abovementioned conflicts simply because it can. For the same reason in 2003 the US invaded Iraq. This is also the reason behind the United Kingdom’s annexation spree around the whole world during the XIX century. For the same reason Spain exploited the Americas during the Renaissance. For the same reason thousands of slaves have died in the Roman empire’s arenas. In other words, if one claims one great power is “bad”, this means all great powers are “bad” and according to philosophy, if everyone is bad, then actually no one is.

The problem with Putin’s foreign policy is that it is an *ad hoc*-acrcy, i.e. Putin has no set long-term future plans. Putin has overall targets which he adheres to on the water principle – pressuring where the resistance is least strong. In Ukraine, Putin took Crimea and sparked the Donbas war simply because no one did anything to stop him. Examples precede from Georgia and Chechnya in 2000. In Syria, President Obama drew a red line in 2013 and at the same time called President Assad ‘our man’ in Damascus. After the chemical attacks, came oil smuggling, broken embargoes and still no reaction. In the mean time, British weapon concerns also broke the embargo and French construction companies were [indicted](#) on doing business with the Assad regime. Again, France and the United Kingdom were the ones who put efforts in lifting the arms embargo in Syria in 2013 so they can trade there. At the same time, Bulgaria acted as a hub for Syrian state assets laundry, transferred in the country via private companies owned by Assad loyalists. This is also the case in Libya where an active UN embargo is in place only to see Bulgaria’s continuous arms export.

Russia has been accused of aiding Khalifa Haftar in Libya. And this is a grounded judgment observed in mercenary deployment, currency printing, intelligence gathering missions, military and logistical support. Then what do we make of France, which also supported Khalifa Haftar by sending military and finance support? Two actors out of which only one is seen as “bad”. The Russian expansion into Libya is happening under the watch of the US and the United Kingdom who would not lift their finger about it – and France seemingly has no problem with Russian politics in this case. In Afghanistan, Russia is trying to mediate between the government and the Taliban and has even hosted a Taliban delegation received by Foreign Affairs Minister

Sergey Lavrov. On the other side, the US is also in negotiations with the Taliban and has taken no diplomatic steps to counteract the Russian intervention. Saudi Arabia remains a US ally, but it also looks flirtatiously to Moscow. Recep Erdogan made a U-turn towards Asia since the US allied the Marxist PKK militias in Syria, which for years have been listed as a terrorist organization by Turkey. To Ankara, the Kurdish leftist radicals pose a major strategic threat and it is only logical that their neutralization could come even at the cost of cooperation with Russia and Iran. The S-400 air defense system purchase and talks for SU-57 jet fighters to follow, play more of a political rather than a military role. Turkey was declined both EU accession and US understanding and accordingly sought new regional friends. Who is to blame for this turn of events? Clearly, the West which could not find the right way with Ankara. Did Russia take advantage? Of course, and it would do it again, even if it was headed by Alexey Navalny.

By the way, here comes another great myth about Russian foreign policy, namely, that it is entirely dependent on Putin and that it would be completely different in other circumstances. If you consider Putin seeing war as an endgame to his politics, you have clearly slept through your History classes. All of Kremlin's foreign policy moves in the last 19 years have a clear historical analogue both to the USSR and Tsarist Russia. Putin has not invented any new foreign policy interests that heretofore did not exist. Rather, the methods he uses are taken out of the dusty old almanacs of the Russian diplomatic school and refreshed with a bit of modern technology and neo-nationalist rhetoric. To look for any watershed in Russian foreign policy evolution is wrong. Moscow has been having many and long lasting interests in Eurasia for at least 300 years now. All of them pursued by Peter the Great and Alexander II to Lenin, Stalin and Putin. The same interests will be protected by Putin's heirs. The reason is that they are not specific to a particular political clique, but are part of the organic geopolitical construction on which Russian foreign policy is based.

Countering Russia's role is a common topic in Bulgaria, Europe and NATO. But this is precisely the problem - talking with little to almost nothing being done, alongside the polarisation of *good* and *bad* obscure an adequate realpolitik assessment of the situation. Russia cannot be regarded as Europe's eternal enemy. There are no historical, economic

or even cultural grounds for this. The fact that this country is currently governed by an aggressive, authoritarian regime unselective of the means to achieve its goals, does not mean that Europe and NATO should put themselves in a position where they appear to be an eternal and permanent enemy to Russia itself. It is important to show the Russian people that the West is not hostile to them, but to the particular authoritarian clique that currently rules in Moscow. It is also important to show Putin himself that his actions will not be heard of anymore, alongside firm, measured and unambiguous resistance at every point. In 2018 alone, [NATO has spent 14 times the size of Russian defense budget](#), yet Russia is a country that seems strong and NATO – weak, divisive and indecisive to the extent that the French president speaks of [a brain death](#).

The GDP of Russia does not differ much from countries like Spain and Italy. The economy is largely oriented towards the export of raw materials and weapons. Lack of flexibility and nationalization of key industries promise deep stagnation in the future. The only reason this country looks strong in foreign policy is, above all, the complete lack of adequate policies from its peers. The same applies to the cumbersome policies of countries like Bulgaria and the sullen kid approach demonstrated by Erdogan. Russia will be a strong player as long as it is allowed to be, free to push forward its interests into the weakest links as long as those links are left vulnerable. The simplicity of the multipolar world in which we have lived and live is that a great power is as powerful as the rest enable it to be by inaction.

Our assessment of Russia should not be focused on its “good” or “bad” nature. Instead, it should and could be measuring it as an effective or an ineffective state. From a foreign policy standpoint, Russia is more of an effective state and from a domestic political standpoint, Russia is rather an ineffective state. In order to counteract, the effects must be monitored and isolated and the inefficiencies must be pressed and used appropriately. The big game continues on and the ones who play it from a moral standpoint will fail, but those who play to win will eventually succeed.

# The Costs of the Syrian War (July 2019 data)

Dr. Aleksandar Stoyanov

To paraphrase Voltaire, the Syrian civil war is no longer Syrian or civil anymore, but it is a war. Soldiers and mercenaries from all around the world are fighting in Syria, and several countries are heavily involved in the ongoing conflict to this date. Leaving France and the United Kingdom aside, which take part with limited scale contingents, there are several major global and regional powers spending millions every day to keep their troops on the ground.

Iran has the largest military contingent consisting of both wide range militias and military units

---

In addition to the Revolutionary Guard units, Iran has vast numbers of subordinate and directly funded militias made up of volunteers from across the Middle East, estimated at between 60,000 and 120,000 people, according to various sources, with the latter figure being far more feasible. In addition, over 100,000 fighters from the so-called *Hashd al-Shaabi* must also be considered as part of the equation. *Hashd al-Shaabi* are operating in Iraq as part of the campaign against the Islamic State.

No different than the US involvement, Iran's presence in Syria and Iraq should not be seen as two separate operations, but rather as one major campaign.

## Following Iran, the United States is the second largest player operating on the ground in Syria and Iraq

---

The total number of US troops in Syria and Iraq is about 7,500-10,000 people, of which approximately 2500 are based in Syria. Additionally, there are potentially as many mercenary units principally based in Iraq. The United States also helps financially the Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF), whose weapons and ammunition are entirely dependent on Washington's goodwill.

## Russia is the next major investor in military assets after the United States

---

Russia spends considerable amounts on the maintenance of its aircraft engaged in daily bombing, as well as in providing the Syrian army and air force with equipment and ammunition. Russia also needs to finance its own on the ground contingent – approximately 7,000 soldiers, military police, as well as at least 5,000 mercenaries, mainly from the Wagner Group, but also from smaller mercenary companies such as E.N.O.T. Corp.

## Finally, in the war in Syria, Turkey is also engaged with a large contingent

---

Although Ankara prefers to operate through its proxy rebel units as evident from „Euphrates Shield” and “Olive Branch” operations, it still has a large number of garrisons in northwestern Syria, most noticeably in the Idlib and northern Aleppo provinces. The total Turkish forces involved are estimated at between 4,000 and 8,000.

### **The USA**

So far, the United States has spent nearly \$890 billion on the wars in Iraq (from 2003 onwards) and Syria (from 2014 to date). According to the 2019 budget voted in August 2018, the US will spend \$14.5 billion on operations in Syria and Iraq – nearly \$40 million a day. In comparison to 2016, the spending is four times in size, when the US was spending approximately \$10 million a day.

### **Russia**

According to Radio Free Europe, in 2018 Russia spent around 240 billion rubles (or \$3.9 billion) in Syria. This is a daily expenditure of around \$10.5 million – significantly higher than the one in 2015, when Russia's spending was estimated at about \$4 million per day; considering that Russia has not increased the ground contingent significantly. Based on the steady increase in spending each year, in 2019 the Kremlin is investing at least \$11 million a day.

### **Iran**

In 2018, Tehran spent around \$16 billion in aid to the Assad regime – in bank transfers using Austrian and Italian banks, loans, purchase of products at preferential prices, etc. About \$2 billion (1/8) were allocated for military spending in Syria – approximately \$5.5 million a day. During the fiscal year of 2019 (March 2019 – March 2020), Tehran has been forced to cut its defense spending by about 28% compared to the previous year. Nevertheless, the Iranian military still has various alternative financing sources related to the control of certain parts of the civilian economy. However, sanctions imposed by the US will undoubtedly have a great impact on Iran's financial capabilities in Syria and Iraq.

## Turkey

Turkey faced an unprecedented increase in its defense budget by more than 24% from 2018 to 2019. In total, state expenditure accounts for over \$19 billion, and current annual costs are at about \$22 billion. Like Iran, Turkey not only spends money on its army, but constantly invests in civilian projects, road construction, other infrastructure projects, and the maintenance of its allied local militias. In addition, approximately \$37 billion have been spent to support over 3,500,000 Syrian refugees living in its territory. According to estimates by Turkish media sources, the cost of the operation in Syria accounts for a significant expenditure, at several billion dollars a year. It is likely the amount spent is not very different from that spent by Iran, especially when taking into consideration the refugee support.