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WINTER IS COMING

Those following the Ukraine war closely will have noted how the weather has a marked effect on how both the Ukrainians and Russians fight. As the conflict heads toward its third winter, in [this detailed piece](#), CNN assesses the Ukrainian army's agility and adaptability to fight during the long cold winter months. The key? Fighting smaller – the Ukrainian army utilises groups of 10-15 operating in what are known as assault squads to cover ground more quickly, eschewing larger mechanised forces that move slowly through cold, wet muddy terrain and make an easy target for the Russians. This use of smaller forces combined with long range artillery and rocket barrages forms what Admiral Sir Tony Radakin, the Chief of the Defence Staff, has termed “starve, stretch and strike”. However, whether these tactics combined with new and improved range attack weapons can break through the Russian lines before political will begins to erode is unclear. For both Russia and Ukraine, another long hard winter is coming.

IS WESTERN SOLIDARITY ON UKRAINE BEGINNING TO CRACK?

As Ukraine's forces struggle to take back territory from a deeply entrenched Russian army, the first signs of fatigue among Ukraine's allies has begun to show. Previously stalwart ally Slovakia looks set to elect anti-Ukraine populist Robert Fico as Prime Minister, meanwhile Ukraine's rift with Poland appears to be growing, with several Law and Justice Party officials openly criticising Volodymyr Zelensky for being ungrateful. Unsurprisingly a number of articles have now appeared questioning support for Ukraine, with [this piece](#) for *The Atlantic* arguing that the days of Eastern European solidarity for Kyiv are numbered. While in *The Guardian* [Gaby Hinsliff argues](#) that domestic pressures in Western Europe and the US (particularly the cost of living, and the rise of far right pro-Putin politicians), may prove too great to sustain further support for the Ukrainians.

THE GROWING POWER OF RUSSIA'S ANSWER TO FACEBOOK

Russia's alternative to Facebook (and other Western social media apps) is called VKontakte – or VK for short. In a [new paper](#) for the German Council on Foreign Relations, Philipp Dietrich outlines how VK is increasingly becoming the dominant actor in Russia's cyberspace. Supported by the government, it is blending social media, propaganda dissemination, state surveillance and service delivery. He argues that Western policymakers must try to understand VK and its growing reach, not least in order to counter the app's potential to reach Western audiences too.

OPENING THE DEBATE ABOUT OFFENSIVE CYBER OPERATIONS

Discussions about offensive cyber operations have long been beset by taboos, secrecy and misconceptions. In a new [paper](#) published by Chatham House, Juliet Skingsley tries to kickstart a more constructive and sober debate about what responsible offensive cyber operations can look like. As its starting point, the paper reviews the national cyber strategies of nine NATO states, before delving into how countries tend to perceive the risks and opportunities of offensive cyber operations. The paper ultimately calls for more openness from governments and militaries as the cyber domain becomes an increasingly normalised part of war and peace.



DE-ESCALATION IN THE MIDDLE EAST

For the past two decades, the geopolitics of the Middle East were defined by instability, conflict and intense competition amongst regional powers. However, over the past two years or so a new normal has set in. Saudi Arabia and Iran have agreed to re-engage diplomatically; the Arab League has readmitted Syria; Qatar and its neighbours have overcome their long-running dispute; the Gulf monarchies and Turkey are getting closer; and normalisation between Israel and Arab states seems to be progressing too. Mohammed Baharoon, a senior Emirati analyst, has published a very readable [overview of this trend towards de-escalation](#), offering a regional perspective and explaining how dynamics in the region relate to the changing global strategic environment. One of the key drivers of the changing geopolitics of the Middle East is the behaviour of Saudi Arabia, arguably the region's centre of gravity. Anna Jacobs at the International Crisis Group has written one of the most comprehensive – and yet succinct – [summaries](#) of how the Kingdom's foreign policy has evolved.

EL SALVADOR BETWEEN GANG AND STATE VIOLENCE

Over the past decade, El Salvador has had one of the highest murder rates in the world as a crime epidemic and gang violence have ravished the country. In an attempt to restore a degree of security, President Nayib Bukele, in office since 2019, has adopted an uncompromising and often controversial approach that has brought him praise from some parts of the population and instilled fear of authoritarianism in others. Bukele also has an ambitious regional foreign policy that clashes with the views of others in Central America and beyond. A new [episode](#) of *The Red Line* podcast offers an informative overview of what is going on in El Salvador and how it fits into wider regional – and ultimately global – dynamics.

POLAND WANTS NUCLEAR SHARING

Poland has long made its ambitions to become a more active partner in NATO's nuclear-sharing mission clear. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 and subsequent decision to deploy nuclear weapons in Belarus have added urgency to this issue from Warsaw's perspective. In June, Prime Minister Mateusz Morawiecki announced that Poland is keen to host American nuclear weapons on its territory, and Poland wants the new F35s aircraft it is buying (due to be deployed in 2025) to be capable of carrying nuclear bombs. The International Institute for Strategic Studies offers a useful [overview](#) of the debate in Poland and how it fits into the wider question of NATO's changing defence posture.

THE BRICS+ AND IMPLICATIONS FOR SPACE

The recent announcement that BRICS nations would take in new and diverse members such as Egypt, Argentina and Ethiopia has left many analysts wondering about the resulting impact on geoeconomics and geopolitics. Less observed has been the fact this new club of 11 states all have space programmes and strategies. As argued by [the Centre for Strategic and International Studies](#), this could have very serious implications for the management of the space domain and space governance. The vast differences between the space programmes of its members make it unlikely that BRICS+ will materialise into significant multilateral projects, however, the framework could enhance “minilateral” initiatives that primarily advance China's space strategy. There could be an upside though – countries like Saudi Arabia and the UAE joining the club could well prove to constrain Chinese military aims and lessen the chance of a conflict in space with the US.





NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the war in Ukraine and its multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

In Brazil, [investigations into how former President Jair Bolsonaro tried to stay in power](#), possibly even through a coup, continue to unearth new worrying evidence over the political leanings of parts of the security services.

[Relations between Canada and India continue to deteriorate](#) after Prime Minister Justin Trudeau accuses India of being behind the murder of a Sikh leader in British Columbia.

In an effort to curb [irregular migration from Tunisia to Europe](#), the EU is sending money to an increasingly authoritarian government in Tunis.

In Libya, a natural disaster that killed more than 10,000 people in the city of Derna is threatening to [undermine the strongman image of renegade General Khalifa Haftar](#).

The [Moroccan government plans to spend \\$11.7 billion](#) to rebuild southern areas of the country affected by last month's earthquake.

The [Philippines are considering international legal action against China](#) over the destruction of coral reefs.

[China's Minister of Defence](#) is the latest senior official who seems to have disappeared from public view.

Nationalist [protests in Bulgaria](#) call for the government's resignation – and for the closure of NATO bases.

The [UAE is considering imposing export controls](#) on items sanctioned by the US and EU, which could reduce Emirati-Russian trade.

A NEW INDIA-MIDDLE EAST-EUROPE CORRIDOR TO COUNTER CHINA?

At the G20 meeting in mid-September, this year's host India, the US, European states and Middle Eastern participants (Saudi Arabia and the UAE, specifically) announced their intention to create a new trade corridor stretching from India through the Middle East to Europe. At least from the perspective of Western states, this initiative appears to be designed to counter China's Belt and Road Initiative. Its feasibility, especially in commercial terms, remains questionable. Eleonora Ardemagni at the Italian Institute for International Political Studies [highlights](#) how Gulf states involved are likely to see the corridor more as an addition to their engagement with China, rather than as an alternative to it. Cinzia Bianco and Julien Barnes-Dacey at the European Council on Foreign Relations, meanwhile, [argue](#) that the corridor could be an avenue for greater geopolitical influence for Europe, while also tempering expectations that it can meaningfully counter China's sway.

JAPAN COOL ON SAUDI ARABIA JOINING COMBAT AIR PROGRAMME

Over the past year, Saudi Arabia has made it very clear that it wants to join the Global Combat Air Programme – the UK-Italy-Japan joint project to develop and build a next-generation combat aircraft. The UK and Italy have signalled their openness to admit the Kingdom into the project; Japan has thus far demurred. In an [article](#) published by the Middle East Council on Global Affairs, Shigetō Kondo argues that Tokyo should change its position. In his view, beyond strengthening bilateral ties with the Kingdom, such a move could also help counter growing relations between Riyadh, Beijing and Moscow.

SHOULD THE US MOVE ON FROM DETERRENCE BY DENIAL POLICIES?

Deterrence by denial has been at the core of US defence policy for much of the past three to four decades. Dan Patt and Bryan Clark, [writing](#) for the Hudson Institute, argue that Washington should change course, recognising that the policy is simply no longer fit for purpose. Their argument is that adversaries like Russia, China and Iran have demonstrated over and over again that they will not be deterred by risks of denial or punishment – not in Ukraine, not in the South China Sea, not in the waters of the Gulf.

WHAT IS GOING ON IN NAGORNO-KARABAKH?

It appears that the existence of the largely Armenian populated exclave of Nagorno-Karabakh may soon be at an end. After three decades of conflict between ethnic Armenians and Azerbaijan, the Azeris have begun to dominate the battlefield. In advance of a potential assault on Stepanakert, the 'capital' of the region, tens of thousands of Armenians are fleeing the area leaving a once thriving city almost completely deserted. In this [podcast](#) by the Centre for New American Security, a former US Ambassador for Eurasia and Carnegie Scholar Thomas De Waal debate the prospects for Armenia and Azerbaijan, as well as widening the lens to discuss Russian and Turkish interests in the conflict.

OUT NOW...

● "[We] will continue to make sure, as we evolve the British Army, at pace, to keep up with an ever-changing threat kaleidoscope alongside an increasingly rapidly-evolving world of technology, that it retains those foundational aspects that make sure that the men and women who serve in it are enabled to remain world beaters." – **Lieutenant General Sharon Nesmith, Deputy Chief of the General Staff, writes in the latest edition of The British Army Review (click below).**

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A flexible friend
or process in
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retail therapy?

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**FORCE PROJECTION:
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stuck in the mud
or deep rooted
by design?

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