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HEZBOLLAH'S MILITARY CAPACITY

Worries about security on Israel's northern border have escalated in recent weeks. Although neither Hezbollah nor the Israelis appear to want to let things slide out of control, there are signs that both are prepared to use increasingly sophisticated tactics to disrupt each other and gain an advantage. This [piece](#) from the Israeli think tank INSS is a short insightful analysis of Hezbollah's use of unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) for offensive and reconnaissance missions. Mostly of Iranian or Chinese origin, Hezbollah has an arsenal of UAVs ranging from long-range attack platforms able to carry 150kg of munitions to shorter range suicide drones. Additionally for those interested in a deeper understanding of Hezbollah's missile and rocket capabilities, this [article](#) from CSIS in 2021 still holds up well, albeit with the caveat that Hezbollah improves its arsenal with every passing year.

ISRAEL'S USE OF AI IN TARGETING

Since 8th October, Israel has conducted an unprecedented number of airstrikes in the Gaza Strip, resulting in the well-publicised high civilian death toll that has dominated the headlines for months. The high frequency of strikes has also drawn attention to how Israel selects targets. In 2019, the Israel Defense Forces (IDF) established a targeting directorate meant to ensure that the Air Force would not run out of targets within days of the outbreak of a future conflict. Two years later, Israel announced that it had used an artificial intelligence system to support the identification and selection of targets in 2021's brief Gaza war. In an interesting [piece](#) for the Royal United Services Institute, Noah Sylvia outlines what is known about the so-called Habsora AI system, but also argues that it is unlikely that the IDF is really relying on an autonomous targeting system at this stage of the conflict.

TWO YEARS IN: A BATTLEFIELD UPDATE

As the weather begins to turn to spring and the frontlines thaw, it's important to understand what is at stake for Ukraine as the third year of conflict begins. Although Western allies have bucked recent trends to demonstrate a renewed commitment to Ukraine's exhausted military, there is little doubt that the upcoming warmer months are perhaps the most crucial of the entire war for Ukraine. The current state of play is important to understand, and for those who don't follow the machinations of day-to-day conflict [this conversation](#) held at the Center for Strategic and International Studies is an excellent overview of where the two sides currently stand on the battlefield. It is worth reading the full transcript and there is also a [50 minute video](#) for those wanting to listen in.

PAKISTAN'S COMPLEX ELECTION OUTCOME

In early February Pakistanis went to the polls. Tensions were enormously high after the military, Pakistan's real rulers, had effectively upended the previous government of Imran Khan, the cricketer-come-politician who is now in prison. The election was marred by violence and reported irregularities; and the result was inconclusive with a coalition government the only real way forward. By the time this *Digest* is published, a government may well have been formed. Nevertheless, it is well worth reading this [think piece](#) by Chietigj Bajpae, published by Chatham House. He succinctly summarises the complex election outcome and outlines the worrying path ahead, not just for the government formation, but also for what it might all mean for one of the world's most unstable nuclear powers.



THE MILITARY BALANCE 2024

The International Institute for Strategic Studies has published the latest version of its flagship *Military Balance*. As ever, the entire collection of data and analysis about militaries and military developments around the world is well worth exploring in depth. The report highlights the apparently ever-more complex international security environment, with Russia's ongoing war in Ukraine, the Israel-Hamas war, the Nagorno-Karabakh conflict, coups across the Sahel, and Chinese manoeuvres around Taiwan all occupying policymakers around the world. Amidst rising global defence spending, including in Europe (NATO just announced that the number of members who now spend more than two per cent on defence has risen from 11 to 18), a particular focus is on defence industrial capacity.

POLAND: EUROPE'S NEW POWERHOUSE?

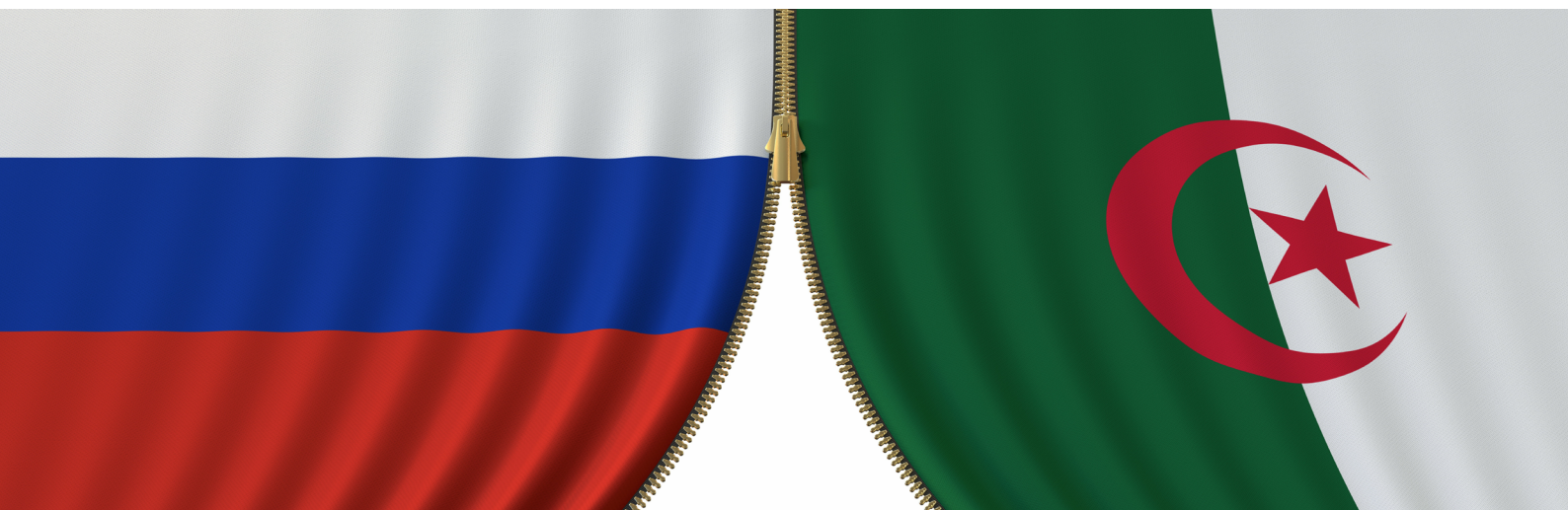
In recent years, Poland has made headlines for two reasons: on the one hand, its government, controlled by the right-wing populist PiS party, was steering the country into one clash with the European Union after another; on the other hand, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, Poland emerged as one of Europe's leading, most determined defenders. The upset victory of Donald Tusk, a pro-European politician at the elections in late 2023, removed some of the tension between these two facts. Nevertheless, as European and NATO allies think about the future of European security, it is clear that Poland must be central to all considerations. A new episode of [The Red Line](#) podcast examines Poland's emergence as Europe's frontline state and discusses how Warsaw might approach its role in the coming years, including in its engagement with fellow EU governments, the UK and the US.

WHAT COULD US STRATEGY TOWARDS RUSSIA LOOK LIKE – AFTER UKRAINE

A [paper published by the RAND Corporation](#) explores how the US might think about and approach its engagement with Russia and the challenges it poses for US national security – and for global security writ large – once Moscow's war in Ukraine concludes. Authors Miranda Priebe and Samuel Charap acknowledge that much depends on the outcome of the war, but they nevertheless attempt to look beyond the day-to-day events in Ukraine. The paper is structured on a basic scenario-building premise: four alternative futures are constructed from two variables – a favourable vs unfavourable outcome of the war; and a hard-line vs less hard-line US political approach towards Russia. As is common with scenario-building exercises, the paper does not necessarily produce clear conclusions for what must be done, but raises a number of important issues strategists in the West should think about now in order to be able to formulate coherent and proactive strategies going forward.

RUSSIAN TIES IN NORTH AFRICA: THE CASE OF ALGERIA

For years, analysts in Europe and beyond have warned that Russia is not just threatening the continent's security from the East, but that it is working to expand its ties and influence in North Africa. The activities of the Wagner Group in countries like Libya and Mali have produced headlines, as has Moscow's apparent support for a string of coups across the Sahel region. However, Russia's strongest relationship in North Africa may be with Algeria. The two countries have maintained defence ties for decades, dating back to Algeria's struggle for independence from France in the 1950s and 60s. Since 2022, Moscow and Algiers have further expanded and diversified their relationship. A [highly informative brief](#) by Yahia Zoubir, published by the Middle East Council on Global Affairs based in Doha, provides a succinct overview of Russian-Algerian relations, and highlights both some of their structural drivers and likely limitations Western policymakers should be aware of.





NEWS STORIES TO WATCH OUT FOR

As the wars in Ukraine and Israel/Gaza and their multi-dimensional repercussions continue to dominate headlines, here are some other topics to keep an eye on:

After being at loggerheads for much of the 2010s, Turkey and Egypt, two Middle Eastern heavyweights, are increasingly coming together; [Presidents Erdogan and Sisi met](#) for the first time in one of each other's capitals – in this case Cairo – on Valentine's Day.

Ahead of a looming national election, [Senegal's President Sall has adopted an ever-more authoritarian approach](#), raising concerns about yet more democratic backsliding on the African continent.

Away from the headlines, [the war in Sudan between the country's army and the paramilitary forces of renegade general Hemedti continues to escalate](#) and exacerbate an ever-worsening humanitarian crisis.

Months ago, the Haitian government called for an international intervention in its country's escalating gang war; in the meantime, [the criminal groups have only become stronger](#).

[Guatemala is struggling to withstand increasing Chinese economic pressure](#) and maintain its relations with Taiwan; a good case study of how China is using increasing economic influence in Latin America for its geopolitical aims.

[Indonesia's new President, former Defence Minister Subianto](#), has praised the country's former strongman leader Suharto, raising questions about the future of one of Asia's most populous democracies.

In Washington, renewed [health concerns surrounding Defence Secretary Austin](#) are fuelling debates about changes to come in the Pentagon.

[Farmer protests are keeping both Europe and India occupied](#), as governments struggle to satisfy a complex constituency and its demands.

UNDERSTANDING GLOBAL WATER (IN)SECURITY

There has long been a – often anguished and at times almost hysterical – debate about so-called 'water wars,' conflicts caused by competition over access to water. Some have argued that water wars are the future and highlighted how water or its absence – often in the form of droughts – has already contributed to conflicts in places like Darfur or Syria. Others steadfastly reject the notion. What may have gotten lost in this debate is the changing global water security picture. A new detailed and interactive [report](#) published by the Center for Strategic and International Studies addresses this gap. It argues that instead of discussing a coming crisis, the world must wake up to an already ongoing catastrophe that security establishments cannot afford to ignore regardless of whether direct cause-and-effect links between water and specific conflicts can or cannot be established.

SOUTH KOREA'S ROLE AS A LEADING ARMS PRODUCER AND EXPORTER

Besides shining a spotlight on the concerning state of Western armouries and defence industries, the Western effort to arm Ukraine and increase Europe's defence capabilities vis-à-vis Russia has highlighted something else: South Korea's emergence as one of the world's leading producers of highly sophisticated and competitive weapon systems. Poland, for example, perhaps Europe's most ambitious procurer of new arms, has heavily invested in South Korean equipment. Wooyeal Paik, [writing for the French Institute for Foreign Relations](#), traces the rise of South Korea's defence industry and provides highly informative detail on some of the systems the country has developed, how it has been able to expand its production capacity, and what it is doing politically and diplomatically to secure its spot amongst the world's leading arms exporters.



NEW MULTILATERAL ALIGNMENTS IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

A lot has been written recently about the ever-increasing levels of global competition and the emergence of a new, multi-polar order. At the same time, analysts have also argued that the way the international system works is becoming more complex and uncertain just as the challenges countries around the world are facing are becoming more difficult to address. Climate change, for example, can hardly be addressed by the West – or the Global North – alone. Instead, there is a need for new multilateral alignments, even if they are limited to specific issues. That, in turn, highlights the need to better understand how countries around the world are approaching threats and challenges – how they think about them and why. In an effort to support European policy-making, Carla Hobbs, Rafael Loss, Jana Puglierin and Pawel Zerka at the European Council on Foreign Relations have developed a [Multilateral Matchmaker](#). The interactive tool allows the reader to explore which countries around the world might be particularly suitable partners for European states in tackling some of the most important issues of the coming decades.

OUT NOW...

● "Some of the most remarkable stories are of those who were civilians on the 23rd February 2022 and who volunteered to fight on the morning of the 24th. Mobilisation was chaotic but essential – these initial volunteers went on to make up a significant portion of the forces that defended Kyiv." – [As Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine enters its third year, this timely special edition of The British Army Review provides a hugely valuable insight into the opening chapter of Ukraine's ongoing fight against a numerically-superior enemy. Click the cover right to flick through its digital pages.](#)