
68th Edition

PRESS REVIEW

Security & Defence



ASSOCIATION PANTHÉON- SORBONNE SÉCURITÉ- DÉFENSE

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1.1. RSF drone strikes expose Port Sudan

Long regarded as a bastion of stability amid Sudan's civil war, Port Sudan came under unprecedented drone attacks carried out by the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) between 4 and 8 May 2025. These strikes targeted critical infrastructure, including fuel depots, the international airport, military installations, and desalination plants.



The attacks triggered widespread water and power outages, paralysing essential services, disrupting the delivery of humanitarian aid, and forcing thousands of civilians to flee to more remote areas.

The Sudanese government blamed the RSF for the strikes and accused the United Arab Emirates of providing them with logistical, technical, and military support. In response, Khartoum officially severed diplomatic ties with Abu Dhabi, escalating regional tensions. Although the RSF did not formally claim responsibility, they justified their actions by denouncing the "aggression" of the regular army and its allies.

At the international level, the United Nations voiced deep concern over the targeting of civilian infrastructure protected under international humanitarian law. Egypt, alarmed by the potential impact on the Suez Canal, and Iran, keen to maintain its influence in the Horn of Africa, both condemned the attacks and called for an immediate ceasefire.

This aerial offensive marks a strategic turning point: it extends the theatre of conflict to Sudan's eastern maritime front and poses a direct threat to the security of Red Sea trade routes.

The attacks underscore the growing asymmetric capabilities of the RSF and highlight the increasing complexity of a conflict that is becoming ever more internationalised.

By Amzina DAOUSSA DEBY

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1.2. 12th edition of the Africa CEO Forum in Abidjan

The Africa CEO Forum 2025 — held on 12–13 May in Abidjan, Côte d'Ivoire — brought together over 2,000 business leaders, policymakers, and investors from 73 countries, further cementing its status as the leading gathering of Africa's private sector. This 12th edition, organised in partnership with the International Finance Corporation (IFC), highlighted the pivotal role of the private sector in the continent's economic development.



The central theme, “Can a new public–private deal reshape the future of the continent?”, was explored through high-level panels, notably one featuring six African heads of state, including Presidents Alassane Ouattara (Côte d'Ivoire), Bassirou Diomaye Faye (Senegal), Cyril Ramaphosa (South Africa), Paul Kagame (Rwanda), and William Ruto (Kenya). Discussions focused on the institutional reforms needed and on how governments and businesses can work together to build a sovereign and sustainable continental powerhouse.

Key topics included the accelerated implementation of the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA), innovative financing mechanisms, and strategies to boost industrialisation, digitalisation, and economic integration across Africa. Participants also addressed the challenges of the energy transition, emphasising the need for a balanced approach that takes into account Africa's specific realities.

The forum also served as a platform to showcase promising investment projects and foster public–private partnerships. Targeted networking sessions enabled attendees to forge strategic connections and share insights into best practices for economic development.

Through the scale and ambition of this year's forum, Africa continues to assert itself as a key player in shaping the dialogue between the public and private sectors, underscoring the vital importance of close collaboration to address the continent's economic and social challenges.

By Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

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2.1. Mexican President rejects US military intervention on her soil

In May 2025, the Trump administration revived a controversial proposal: launching targeted military operations against Mexican drug cartels. President Donald Trump publicly confirmed that he had offered to send American troops into Mexico to combat these criminal organisations, in a proposal made directly to Mexican President Claudia Sheinbaum. The Mexican government's response was unequivocal.



It firmly rejected any foreign intervention, invoking national sovereignty. "Mexico is a sovereign country, and we will never accept foreign troops on our territory," declared Claudia Sheinbaum at a press conference held in Mexico City on 3 May.

The proposal forms part of a broader strategy adopted by the Trump administration, which has officially designated several cartels as foreign terrorist organisations. This classification opens the door to extraterritorial military action, including drone strikes or targeted operations. However, according to a legal analysis by Duke University, a unilateral US intervention in Mexico would be difficult to justify under international law. Although the cartels are responsible for thousands of overdose-related deaths in the United States, they do not meet the threshold of an "armed attack" as defined under Article 51 of the United Nations Charter, which permits the invocation of self-defence.

On the Mexican side, President Sheinbaum reaffirmed her willingness to engage in dialogue and bilateral cooperation—provided it respects national jurisdictions. She stated: "We can collaborate. We can work together. But you on your territory, and we on ours."

This diplomatic standoff marks a turning point in the relationship between the two countries, already strained since the election of Donald Trump.

By Lucie SCARNIERE

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1. Duke University – Lawfire (2025) Reasons for action? The legal grounds for potential U.S. force against drug cartels.
2. News.com.au (2025) Bad news: Trump's wild plan for Mexican drug cartels.
3. Reuters (2025) Sheinbaum says she rejected Trump's offer to send troops to Mexico.



2.2. Ecuador launches a manhunt to track down former FARC members

On Friday, 9 May 2025, during a counter-operation against illegal gold mining on the Colombian border, eleven Ecuadorian soldiers were killed. The main suspects are the so-called "Border Commandos", an alliance of drug traffickers and former FARC combatants who have refused to lay down arms despite the 2016 peace agreement signed with the Marxist guerrilla movement in Colombia.



These groups operate along the 582-kilometre frontier between the two countries. The Commandos have denied responsibility in an official statement, instead accusing rival Ecuadorian gangs such as Los Lobos, Los Choneros, and Los Tiguerones.

The likely motive behind the attack is the protection of an illegal gold mining site—a highly lucrative activity, sometimes rivaling drug trafficking in profitability, and a powerful vehicle for money laundering. The 2016 peace deal in Colombia forced traffickers to seek new routes for exporting cocaine (2,664 tonnes produced in 2023). Ecuador has since become a central hub in these routes, owing to its geography, including a long Pacific coastline ideal for shipping narcotics to the United States.

Ecuadorian President Daniel Noboa, re-elected in April, declared three days of national mourning from 10 to 12 May. His electoral campaign centred on a hardline security policy and on permitting foreign military cooperation—particularly with the United States—on Ecuadorian soil to combat systemic violence. Following the attack, 1,500 soldiers were deployed across the country.

However, the Border Commandos are currently engaged in peace talks with the government of Colombian President Gustavo Petro. This latest incident could jeopardise those negotiations and potentially lead to the group's consolidation in the region.

By Elina RIBEIRO DA COSTA

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3. RFI (2025) Équateur : 1 500 militaires déployés pour contrer une guérilla dissidente colombienne.



3.1. The Philippines continues their balancing strategy against China

In April 2025, the Philippines adopted an especially proactive stance on defence and security matters, most notably through the Balikatan military exercise, conducted jointly with the United States and involving nearly 17,000 troops. However, this exercise was not their only strategic initiative of the month.



The Philippines also intensified bilateral relations with two key political partners in the Indo-Pacific region: Japan and New Zealand. On 30 April 2025, Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. announced the signing of the Status of Visiting Forces Agreement (SOVFA) with New Zealand. This bilateral agreement outlines the terms governing the presence of foreign troops on each other's territory and frames military cooperation in areas such as training, joint exercises, and operational missions. It builds upon the Multilateral Maritime Cooperative Activity of September 2024, in which both countries had already participated together.

Simultaneously, the Philippines strengthened its partnership with Japan. On 29 April 2025, Japanese Prime Minister Shigeru Ishiba announced the forthcoming launch of negotiations for a cooperation agreement based on the Acquisition and Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA) model. Such an agreement provides for mutual logistical support — including the supply of food, fuel, and military equipment — between the armed forces of both nations. This future accord would complement the Reciprocal Access Agreement, signed on 8 July 2024, which grants reciprocal access to military facilities (bases, ports), but which remains pending ratification by the Japanese Diet.

Finally, these bilateral engagements take place within a broader regional context shaped by a normalised and shared apprehension regarding China's expansionist posture in the South China Sea. In response to this growing pressure, Japan, the Philippines, New Zealand, and other states are stepping up their strategic coordination.

By Sami Sudici BELHADJ-SALAH

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2. AP News (2025b) New Zealand, Philippines sign visiting forces deal, boosting military cooperation.
3. CPF – U.S. Pacific Fleet (2025) Australia, Japan, New Zealand, Philippines, and United States conduct multilateral maritime cooperative activity.
5. RFI (2025) Le Japon et les Philippines renforcent leur coopération militaire.



3.2. Four days of deadly clashes between India and Pakistan over the Kashmir

On 7 May 2025, India launched airstrikes against Pakistan following rising tensions triggered by the 22 April 2025 terrorist attack. This marked the most significant military confrontation between the two countries in over two decades. The strikes resulted in at least 26 deaths, followed by a border exchange of fire that caused a further 12 fatalities on the Indian side.



The escalation had been anticipated for several days, prompting the authorities to prepare the territory for potential aerial bombardments. Makeshift underground shelters were constructed, and the regional food agency stockpiled two months' worth of emergency supplies. The strikes targeted not only Muzaffarabad, the capital of Pakistan-administered Kashmir, but also mosques and surrounding villages. However, India claimed that Operation Sindoor was solely aimed at destroying sites "from which terrorist attacks against India were planned and ordered," as stated in an official communiqué from New Delhi.

By 8 May, both countries were accusing each other of drone and missile attacks. The Pakistani daily Dawn reported on the Indian drones used, identifying them as Israeli-manufactured Harop drones. The newspaper noted that the drone "combines the characteristics of both a drone and a missile."

This surge in hostilities raised fears of nuclear escalation, given that both nations possess nuclear arsenals. However, deterrence proved effective, and the conflict concluded without the use of such weapons. The United States acted as a mediator, facilitating the cessation of hostilities on 10 May.

Nevertheless, due to the speed of escalation and the fragile nature of the resolution, the risk of renewed conflict remains. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi further fuelled tensions with a speech delivered on 12 May 2025, which was widely regarded as belligerent.

By Elina RIBEIRO DA COSTA

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4. Le Monde (2025) Inde-Pakistan : Narendra Modi jette de l'huile sur le feu.



4.1. Diverging prospects for negotiations on Ukraine

On 19 April 2025, Vladimir Putin announced a ceasefire for Easter. Although partially upheld, the truce was marred by mutual accusations of violations from both sides.

Today, the prospect of a renewed ceasefire has re-emerged on the Ukrainian side, aiming to create space for peace negotiations



On 10 May 2025, Emmanuel Macron, Donald Tusk, Friedrich Merz — the newly appointed Chancellor of Germany — and Keir Starmer travelled to Ukraine to express their support for President Volodymyr Zelensky in establishing a 30-day ceasefire, due to begin on Monday, 12 May 2025. The truce is intended to pave the way for future negotiations. A sanctions package, backed by the United States, has also been prepared against Russia in the event of a refusal.

On 12 May 2025, Moscow officially rejected the ceasefire proposal by launching around a hundred drones towards Ukraine. This show of force appears to signal the Kremlin's intention to retain leverage in the negotiation process.

Meanwhile, on 11 May 2025, Turkey volunteered to host peace talks between Ukraine and Russia. This offer is far from coincidental: Turkey has so far positioned itself as an active supporter of Ukraine, notably by supplying Bayraktar-TB2 drones and through the forthcoming opening of a drone assembly plant in the Kyiv region. At the same time, Turkey maintains a close economic partnership with Russia.

In this context, President Vladimir Putin proposed to the Ukrainian side a date and venue to initiate peace negotiations: 15 May in Istanbul.

Given the shifting dynamics, the United States has urged Ukraine to accept the talks — likely as a way to mask the repeated failures of earlier diplomatic efforts initiated under Donald Trump's leadership.

By Sami Sudici BELHADJ-SALAH

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3. Euronews (2025) Vladimir Poutine propose des négociations directes avec Kyiv à Istanbul le 15 mai.
4. Les Échos (2025) Guerre en Ukraine : la Turquie se pose en alliée incontournable d'une Europe de la défense.



4.2. Signature of the Nancy Treaty for a Franco-Polish cooperation

On 5 May 2025, a reinforced cooperation agreement was signed in Nancy between France and Poland, in the presence of the President of the French Republic, Emmanuel Macron, and the President of the Polish Council of Ministers, Donald Tusk. Similar agreements have already been concluded with Germany (the 2019 Aachen Treaty, strengthening the Élysée Treaties of 1963), Italy (the 2021 Quirinal Treaty), and Spain (the 2023 Barcelona Treaty).



The “Treaty for Enhanced Cooperation and Friendship between the Republic of Poland and the French Republic” is composed of 19 articles, 13 of which detail specific areas of collaboration, ranging from culture and education to economic and industrial cooperation.

The defence component—particularly structuring within this new partnership—is addressed in Article 4 of the treaty. It provides for a substantial increase in interoperability between the French and Polish armed forces through joint exercises, officer exchanges, and coordination between general staffs. Both states commit to developing a shared strategic culture, intensifying intelligence sharing, and aligning their positions within multilateral forums, notably within NATO and the European Union.

The treaty also foresees enhanced cooperation in the field of armaments, encompassing research, technological development, and the strengthening of European production chains. Furthermore, it establishes a mutual assistance clause in the event of armed aggression and facilitates the transit of troops across their respective territories.

This dynamic is reinforced by other sectoral provisions: Article 2 refers to contributions towards enhanced European strategic autonomy; Article 5 commits to combating hybrid threats within the framework of internal security; Article 6 opens the door to dual-use industrial cooperation; and Article 8 provides for the development of civil and military infrastructure for dual purposes.

This pragmatic approach—based on the complementarity of national and European instruments—reflects a shared determination to build an operational bilateral foundation in support of stability on Europe’s eastern flank.

By Bastien POULIQUEN

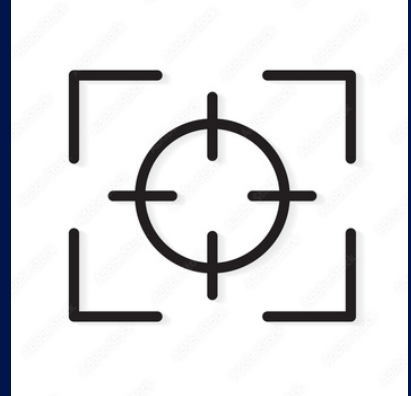
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3. Le Monde (2025) Emmanuel Macron et Donald Tusk signent un traité à Nancy pour renforcer les liens entre la France et la Pologne.



5.1. The battle for narrative control in the Indo-Pakistani conflict

A key feature of this confrontation lies in the instrumentalization of an aerial engagement— notably the downing of a Rafale—as a lever of influence. Press conferences, viral visual content, and multilingual narratives were deployed to generate a reflexive effect on the perceptions of the adversary, third-party observers, and global public opinion. Islamabad’s discourse—centered on the idea of an effective defensive posture and an immediate response—reflects a maneuver of reflexive control.



By projecting an image of full preparedness and information dominance, this narrative aims to induce an underestimation of Pakistani capabilities by the Indian side.

The first psychological lever is the destabilization of trust in Indian military institutions: portraying losses—real or exaggerated—as tools of humiliation. By emphasizing the operational ineffectiveness of the Rafale jets—not due to technical failure, but to doctrinal or human shortcomings—Pakistan shifts the blame onto Indian tactical organization.

This strategy also relies on the shock effect: within hours of the engagement, Islamabad circulated striking images, such as the Rafale engulfed in flames, framed by a narrative highlighting Pakistani “technological superiority.” This is part of a cognitive “shock and awe” strategy, designed to break India’s perceived confidence in its own capabilities and to signal to third-party countries— notably France and the United States— the effectiveness of alternative systems, particularly those of Chinese origin.

A final dimension of this psychological operation lies in the manipulation of informational ambiguity. The number of aircraft shot down, the actual involvement of F-16s or J-10s— all of this is deliberately maintained in a grey zone, a fog of uncertainty that is actively exploited.

This is a case where the tactical battlefield is overtaken by a narrative theater of confrontation, in which the control of emotions, storytelling, and collective perception becomes as critical as the control of airspace.

By Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

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