
61st Edition

PRESS REVIEW

Security & Defence



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1.1. Security crisis in the DRC with escalating clashes and Rwanda's involvement

On the outskirts of the city of Goma, capital of the province of North Kivu, in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), fighting has intensified since Sunday January 26, between the Congolese army and the anti-government group M23, supported militarily and strategically by Rwanda.

Located on the Rwandan border, the city has a million inhabitants and almost as many displaced people and has seen the advance of M23 troops and some 3,000 to 4,000 Rwandan soldiers in recent weeks.

The M23, or March 23 Movement, a predominantly Tutsi rebellion, accuses the Congolese government of not respecting the 2009 peace agreement and uses the increase in persecution against the Tutsi minority in Congo to legitimize its actions. After relaunching its insurgency in 2022, the group now controls certain strategic regions, notably the mining region of Rubaya, rich in coltan, a valuable resource which finances its military campaign. After a failed attempt at mediation between the DRC and Rwanda under the aegis of Angola in December 2024, relations between Kigali and Kinshasa are gradually straining. In recent days, thirteen foreign soldiers have died in the fighting, including three peacekeepers from MONUSCO, which has some 15,000 soldiers in the DRC; and ten soldiers engaged in the SAMIRDC, the regional force of the Southern African Development Community (SADC), established in eastern DRC since 2023 and composed mainly of South African soldiers.

Faced with this crisis, the international community is trying to reduce the escalation and the UN Security Council organized an emergency meeting this Sunday on the situation in the DRC. In the east of the country, rich in natural resources, conflicts have persisted for more than three decades. No less than half a dozen ceasefires and truces have been established, then broken, the most recent dating from July.



By Martha RAFFAELLI

Sources:

- Le Monde : "RDC : des soldats du M23 sont entrés dans Goma ; le Kenya annonce un sommet de la Communauté des Etats d'Afrique de l'Est", 26/01/2025 ;
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1.2. Israel's spyware diplomacy in Africa

The NSO Group's Pegasus spyware, known for its military-grade surveillance capabilities, has become a symbol of controversy in Africa. Once championed for its cutting-edge technology, NSO is now mired in allegations of enabling authoritarianism.

Ghana's purchase of Pegasus in 2015, revealed through investigative reports, highlights the shadowy dealings that have allowed surveillance tools to infiltrate even model democracies. Despite initial denials, Ghanaian authorities were found to have used Pegasus to monitor opposition figures, sparking legal action and convictions for corruption.



Israel's spyware diplomacy extends beyond Ghana. By offering spyware like Pegasus, Tel Aviv has sought to bolster its geopolitical influence across Africa. Notably, spyware played a pivotal role in securing Israel's observer status at the African Union in 2021, a controversial decision met with internal division among AU members. The spyware's use in countries such as Morocco, Togo, and Rwanda further underscores its role in strengthening repressive regimes.

These surveillance tools, developed through Israel's military occupation of Palestine, are now deployed by African leaders to suppress dissent, target journalists, and silence human rights activists. The lack of international regulation on cyber-surveillance exacerbates the problem, enabling authoritarianism to flourish.

This growing spyware market underscores the urgent need for global accountability. Without oversight, the unchecked proliferation of cyber-surveillance tools threatens democratic principles and stability in Africa, turning the continent into a testing ground for a new era of digital repression.

By Amzina DAOUSSA DEBY

Sources:

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- Al Jazeera : "Journalists, activists targeted in Jordan with Israeli-made Pegasus spyware", 01/02/2024 ;
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2.1. Mexico is preparing to receive migrants following Donald Trump's return to the American presidency

United States President Donald Trump implemented an anti-immigration policy immediately after taking office on 20 January 2025, reminiscent of the "Remain in Mexico" programme that was in place between 2019 and 2021.

In response, Mexico has begun preparing to address the initial measures introduced by the American president regarding immigration. On Friday, 24 January 2025, Mexico declared it was ready to welcome its expelled citizens and, to a lesser extent, other non-Mexican migrants or asylum seekers turned away by the United States, according to a statement from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



The new American president is aiming to enforce a plan for mass deportations, targeting the removal of one million migrants annually, impacting over 11 million undocumented individuals living in the United States. In response, Mexico has launched the "Mexico Embraces You" plan to provide assistance to migrants in its six border states. Nine reception centres are set to be constructed, and temporary shelters are being established. Meanwhile, the first anti-migrant raids by ICE have already taken place in Boston and Chicago—Democratic-led "sanctuary cities" that refuse to cooperate with federal authorities in migrant deportations.

The risk is that Mexico's border could quickly become overwhelmed in the event of mass deportations. This is compounded by the fact that migrants traveling between Mexico and the United States are frequently targeted by violence and forced disappearances. Human smugglers tied to organised crime play a significant role in managing migration routes, making the situation even harder to secure. This programme threatens to destabilise Mexico, a buffer state between North and South America, and may redefine regional dynamics.

By Elina RIBEIRO DA COSTA

Sources:

- RFI : "Le Mexique se prépare à accueillir les migrants expulsés des États-Unis", 25/01/2025 ;
- Courrier International : "Le Mexique s'organise face à la menace de l'"expulsion massive de migrants" annoncée par Donald Trump"
- RFI : "États-Unis: la police anti-immigration lance ses premiers raids pour expulser des sans-papiers", 24/01/2025.



2.2. Colombia grappling with guerrilla warfare and the chaos of Catatumbo

The Catatumbo region in northeastern Colombia is currently the scene of intensifying violence between the National Liberation Army (ELN) and dissidents from the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC).

These brutal clashes have led to a major humanitarian crisis, with a provisional death toll of over 80 and tens of thousands of people displaced in recent weeks.



The Catatumbo is a highly strategic area due to its vast coca crops, estimated at over 50,000 hectares, as well as its oil and coal resources. This abundance of natural resources makes it a coveted territory for various armed groups seeking to control drug trafficking routes and other lucrative illicit activities.

In response to the escalating violence, Colombian President Gustavo Petro suspended ongoing peace negotiations with the ELN, accusing the group of committing “war crimes.” He also declared a state of emergency in the region and ordered the deployment of over 5,000 additional troops to try to restore order.

The humanitarian consequences of this crisis are alarming and widespread. Thousands of families have been forced to flee their homes, seeking refuge in temporary shelters or crossing the border into Venezuela. Local authorities are struggling to provide adequate assistance to the displaced, while humanitarian organizations are urgently calling for unhindered access to provide emergency aid.

Colombia therefore continues to face persistent challenges in achieving lasting peace, despite the 2016 peace agreement with FARC. The Colombian government is now looking to ensure the security of its population while pursuing sustainable solutions to end more than six decades of violence definitively.

By Lucie SCARNIERE

Sources:

- *Courrier International* : “En Colombie, les affrontements impliquant l’ELN font plus de 80 morts et 11.000 déplacés”, 20/01/2025 ;
- *AP News* : “Colombians flee to Venezuela as clashes between rebel groups escalate in coca-rich border region”, 22/01/2025.



3.1. Prisoner exchange between the Taliban and the US with Qatar's mediation

The Taliban government of Afghanistan announced on Tuesday, 21 January 2025, the release of an Afghan detainee by the United States in exchange for American prisoners, following “lengthy discussions” mediated by Qatar.

These negotiations, conducted in secret, began under the Biden administration and later involved a team from the Trump administration. The Taliban expressed hope for “tangible progress in relations” with the United States.



The Afghan detainee is Khan Mohammed, a fighter arrested in 2006 for “narcoterrorism” in Nangarhar province, eastern Afghanistan. He had been sentenced to life imprisonment in a Californian prison. Khan Mohammed arrived in Jalalabad on Tuesday, 21 January 2025, where he told reporters, “Many innocent people are still in prison; I call for all of them to be freed and allowed to return home.” On the other side, the two American detainees released were civilians: Ryan Corbett and William McKenty. However, the situation of other prisoners remains unresolved. Two more Americans, George Glezman and Mahmood Habibi, are still held in Afghanistan, while at least one Afghan, Mohammed Rahim—a close associate of Osama bin Laden—remains imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay.

By organising the negotiations, Qatar positions itself as a mediator and an important regional actor. Afghanistan’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs even referred to Qatar as a “brother nation.” Since the Taliban’s return to power in Afghanistan, Qatar has been a key player, facilitating the signing of the 2020 Doha Agreement on the withdrawal of US troops from Afghanistan and overseeing the evacuation process for individuals threatened by the Taliban.

By Elina RIBEIRO DA COSTA

Sources:

- *Le Monde* : “L’Afghanistan annonce un échange de prisonniers avec les Etats-Unis au terme de « longues discussions »”, 21/01/2025 ;
- *Le Monde* : “Afghanistan : comment le Qatar s’est replacé au centre du jeu diplomatique”, 14/09/2021 ;
- *RFI* : “Le gouvernement taliban annonce avoir procédé à un échange de prisonniers avec les États-Unis”, 21/05/2025.



3.2. Moscow and Tehran consolidate their alliance with a global partnership

On January 17, 2025, Presidents Vladimir Putin and Massoud Pezeshkian sealed a comprehensive strategic agreement in the Kremlin, marking a new stage in the rapprochement between Moscow and Tehran.

This partnership, which takes place in a geopolitical context marked by increased tensions, reaffirms their desire to strengthen their military, economic and diplomatic ties, while displaying direct opposition to what they describe as “Western diktat”.



The agreement, which covers 47 articles, notably highlights strengthened military cooperation and mutual support in the face of security threats. However, unlike the pact concluded between Moscow and Pyongyang, including immediate military assistance; no clause provides for automatic military assistance in the event of aggression. Furthermore, the agreement provides for joint projects in the nuclear field and in fact revives Western concerns linked to the Iranian nuclear program. But this lack of an immediate assistance clause highlights a notable difference in Moscow's relations with Iran compared to those established with North Korea. The Russo-North Korean pact has, in fact, allowed Pyongyang to increase its military capabilities through direct technological support, strengthening North Korea's ballistic capabilities and solidifying its role in this emerging trilateral alliance.

This strategic agreement, outlining the desire of the two leaders to reshape the global balance by promoting a multipolar vision, is part of a particular geopolitical context. Furthermore, the war in Ukraine has catalyzed an unprecedented convergence between Russia and Iran, both increasingly hit by economic sanctions imposed by the West, while the return of Donald Trump to the White House marks the rekindling of tensions between Washington and Tehran.

By Martha RAFFAELLI

Sources:

- L'Orient Le Jour : “La Russie et l'Iran signeront vendredi un “Accord de partenariat stratégique global””, 13/01/2025 ;
- Euronews : “La Russie et l'Iran renforcent leur alliance avec un nouveau pacte stratégique”, 17/01/2025 ;
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4.1. Slovakia: Robert Fico's parliamentary coalition in trouble

As a member of NATO since 2004, popular support for the alliance has been eroded in recent years in the context of the war in Ukraine. For example, the MP Tibor Gašpar, member of the so-called pro-Russian parliamentary coalition (Smer-SD) has considered during a speech the departure of Slovakia from NATO and the EU. This happened during parliamentary debates that were aiming at enshrining the Slovak membership of these countries in the constitution.



Proposal immediately rejected by his political party, but described by the leader of the first opposition party (Progressive Slovakia) Michal Šimečka as the desire to gradually open up debate on this issue. Ivan Mikloš, former Slovak finance minister and director of the think tank MESA 10, adds in an interview for Politico: “[that he] just tested the ground, because the EU is and will remain a hindrance to R. Fico’s attempts to take authoritarian control of the country”. Nevertheless, in response to the Prime Minister’s recent visit to Russia, major demonstrations are taking place in some 20 Slovak cities. President Peter Pellegrini (who supports the R. Fico coalition) warned of the “organized and intentional nature [of rising tensions] with the aim of increasing dissent, even beyond peaceful protests”. Agreeing with R. Fico to see outside influences.

The geographical position of the country on the border with Ukraine gives its domestic policy developments a special character. Having exceeded the 2% of GDP allocated to defence in 2021 (budget that continues a trend increase), and supporting Ukraine with 700 million military aid (now defensive) ; Slovakia remains a concrete NATO actor in the region for the time being. Nevertheless, the Prime Minister’s lack of hesitation in including assistance to Ukrainian refugees in negotiations on Russian gas imports demonstrates that a changing perception of the Russian threat could have short and medium-term consequences.

By Bastien POULIQUEN

Sources:

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- Politico : “Anti-Fico protests build as Slovak PM mutters about foreign ‘coup’”, 24/01/2025 ;
- ENR : “President and political parties rejected any discussion about Slovakia’s withdrawal from the EU and NATO”, 19/01/2025 ;
- CNN : “Slovakia threatens to reduce aid to Ukrainian refugees in spat over Russian gas”, 03/01/2025.



4.2. Trump's second term threatens European sovereignty

The inauguration of Donald Trump already stands out as a major disruption to Europe's global standing, affecting its strategic, economic, energy, and political capacities. Strategically, Trump reiterates his demanding requests to NATO's European members, urging a substantial increase in financial contributions and the direct purchase of American weaponry. The target of allocating 5% of GDP to defense spending is particularly ambitious, especially since some countries, like Italy, struggle to meet the current 2% threshold.



This approach worsens transatlantic tensions and fuels debates on European strategic autonomy. While France and Germany advocate for strengthening European defense capabilities, others, such as Poland and the Baltic states, remain closely aligned with Washington, showing reluctance to diverge. Economically, Trump adopts a strategy of commercial pressure, threatening sanctions and destabilizing transatlantic trade relations. The Greenland controversy highlights this aggressive narrative war, alongside the announcement of the ambitious « Stargate » project on AI systems. Europe's response remains fragmented: while Brussels struggles to present a unified front, individual states such as France, the United Kingdom, and Germany might pursue closer bilateral partnerships to counter this era of American unpredictability. Politically, Trump's reelection amplifies divisions within the European Union. His actions polarize member states, splitting them between those favoring a traditional transatlantic partnership and others advocating for a more sovereign Europe in light of Trump's direct accusations. These internal divisions weaken European cohesion but simultaneously revive trans-European initiatives in areas such as common defense and energy resilience.

Trump's blunt rhetoric presents European nations with a significant challenge : managing American pressures while strengthening unity and sovereignty. This tense situation has the potential to either unite or further fragment Europe as it navigates a geopolitical landscape dominated by the United States, China, and Russia.

Par Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

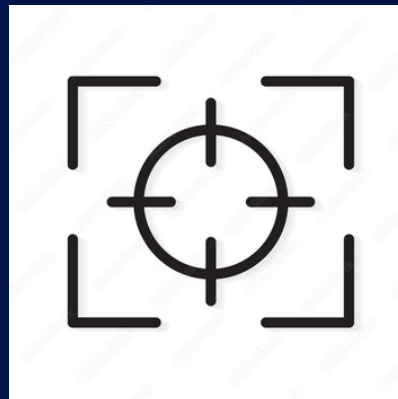
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5.1. Russia intensifies hybrid warfare in the Baltic Sea

Hybrid warfare, defined as the combined use of kinetic military actions and unconventional strategies such as information manipulation, cyberattacks, sabotage, or political foreign interference, reflects the dynamics of contemporary conflicts. Known as a specialist in hybrid operations, Russia is often accused of exploiting these tactics to undermine European morale.



The Baltic Sea, a region hosting critical economic and energy infrastructures like pipelines, undersea cables, and trade routes, has become a hotspot for intensifying tensions between Russia and Europe. Recently, several incidents have raised concerns among bordering nations. In October 2024, telecommunications cables linking Europe to the rest of the world were damaged in the Baltic Sea. Sweden, with German support, launched an investigation to determine if these incidents were acts of sabotage. Furthermore, the repeated detection of a Russian « spy ship » named « Yantar » off the English Channel, previously intercepted by a British submarine in November 2024, has heightened fears about a « Russian ghost fleet » allegedly targeting Western infrastructures - claims denied by Moscow.

In response to these hybrid threats, European nations are adapting their defense strategies. Germany announced the creation of a fourth division within its military, specifically dedicated to protecting critical infrastructures and ensuring internal security. Across the Atlantic, the United States is leveraging artificial intelligence tools to predict the behavior of global leaders, notably through « digital twins » developed by the CIA. Although still in its early stages, this innovation could revolutionize essential prediction and anticipation capabilities. The Baltic Sea, serving as a laboratory for this new form of conflict, is shaping the contours of future « next-generation warfare ».

To address these challenges, technological innovation, strategic continuity, and strengthened international cooperation emerge as key pillars of an effective global resilience strategy.

Par Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

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- Libération : "La mer Baltique, laboratoire de la guerre hybride entre la Russie et l'Europe", 22/01/2025 ;
- Sud-Ouest : "Guerre hybride : Londres met en garde Poutine après la détection d'un « navire espion russe » dans la Manche", 22/01/2025 ;
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