
62nd Edition

PRESS REVIEW

Security & Defence



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1.1. AFRICOM and the US Embassy in Libya strengthen security cooperation

On 4th February 2025, a delegation from the U.S. Africa Command (AFRICOM), led by Lieutenant General John W. Brennan and Brigadier General Rose Keravuori, commenced a series of high-level meetings in Libya, marking a decisive step in strengthening security ties between the United States and Libyan authorities.

Upon their arrival in Tripoli, the American representatives engaged with officials from the Government of National Unity (GNU), including Prime Minister Abdul Hamid Dbeibeh and the Acting Minister of Defence, to discuss measures aimed at promoting the unification of Libya's fragmented military forces.

Following these discussions, the delegation continued their engagements in Benghazi, where they met with Field Marshal Khalifa Haftar of the Libyan National Army and with Chief of Staff, Lieutenant General Saddam Haftar. These meetings provided an opportunity to address the challenges related to national stabilisation, coordination of forces, and the implementation of comprehensive training programmes and technical exchanges designed to enhance the resilience of Libyan military institutions.

The visit concluded in Sirte, where the delegation explored the opportunities offered by the joint military commission "5+5", intended to optimise cooperation among tactical units. This operational focus, combined with efforts to reinforce institutional capacities, comes at a time when Libya is striving to consolidate its sovereignty and establish lasting peace. These initiatives underscore the shared commitment of American and Libyan partners to create a secure environment that fosters stability and development in North Africa.



By Amzina DAOUSSA DEBY

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- U.S. Africa Command : "AFRICOM, U.S. Embassy Libya Discuss Security Cooperation with Libyan Leaders", 2025 ;
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1.2. After the fall of the Syrian regime, Russia redefined its military strategy in Libya

On November 8, the fall of the Syrian regime of Bashar al-Assad revived Russian military ambitions in Libya.

The relocation of Russian military equipment from Tartous to Cyrenaica not only demonstrates a desire to compensate for the loss of Syrian bases for Russia, but also reiterates its desire to consolidate its influence in North Africa and the Sahel.



Therefore, after the termination by the new Syrian authorities of the 49-year lease granted to Moscow for the operation of the port of Tartous, Russia had to carry out an urgent transfer of its military equipment. The Russian ships Spartan and Spartan II, under American sanctions, then began their withdrawal towards Libya, at the same time consolidating the position of Commander Khalifa Haftar.

One of the main challenges of this establishment remains the renovation of the Maaten es-Sarra air base, located in the south of Libya, close to Chad and Sudan. This particular geographical position then allows Moscow to extend its influence to the Sahel, where the paramilitary group Africa Corps, Wagner's successor, is already demonstrating its activity. A strategic support point, the Maaten es-Sarra base, would allow Russia to operate in Niger, Mali or the Central African Republic, regions where it has already replaced French forces.

For Italy and France, who perceive this presence as a threat in the Mediterranean, the Russian redeployment in Libya is particularly worrying and raises the question of a possible transformation of Benghazi or Tobruk, under the control of the Libyan National Army (LNA) into a substitute Mediterranean anchor point for Russia.

By Martha RAFFAELLI

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- *Le Figaro* : "La Russie se tourne vers la Libye pour garder un pied en Méditerranée", 26/12/2024 ;
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2.1. Canada joins U.S. in North American missile shield project

On February 6, 2025, Canadian Defense Minister Bill Blair announced that Canada is ready to join the United States in developing a missile defense shield inspired by Israel's "Iron Dome".

This project, initially proposed by President Donald Trump, aims to strengthen North America's air defense against potential threats from ballistic, hypersonic and cruise missiles.



The "Iron Dome" is an air defense system originally developed by Israel, designed to intercept and destroy rockets, drones and artillery shells at short range, i.e. up to 70 km. Its effectiveness has been amply demonstrated, with an interception rate of around 90%, making it a benchmark for this type of technology.

Bill Blair emphasized that Canada is already an "essential partner" in the joint defense of North America, notably through its participation in NATO and NORAD (North American Aerospace Defense Command), the joint military command responsible for air security in both countries. He declared that "an integrated missile defence system for all of North America is the thing that makes sense to everybody".

This announcement comes amid growing tensions between Canada and the United States, particularly given President Trump's threats to impose 25% tariffs on Canadian products. In addition, the American president Donald Trump recently suggested that Canada become the "51^e state" of the United States. The anticipated high cost of this missile shield project has also drawn criticism. Nevertheless, the Canadian and American governments seem determined to go ahead with this initiative, considering that it will strengthen the security of the North American continent.

By Lucie SCARNIERE

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- *Le Parisien* : "Le Canada prêt à rejoindre le bouclier antimissile américain « Dôme de fer »", 07/02/2025 ;
- *BBC News* : "What are Israel's Iron Dome, David's Sling, Arrow and Thaad missile defences?", 16/10/2024.





2.2. Trump's ambitions for Panama brings uncertainty in the region

Trump's ambitions for Panama unsettle the region. The new American president has been highly critical of Panama, criticizing the local authorities for entrusting management of the Panama Canal to a Hong Kong company with links to China.

This canal, crucial to global maritime trade, is of strategic importance to the United States. In the event of conflict with China, the latter could attempt to block it. Trump, using history to his advantage, considers that the retrocession of the canal to Panama in 1999, in accordance with an agreement signed in 1977 with President Jimmy Carter, was a mistake.



He also believes that Panama has failed to honor its commitments to the United States, thus justifying a US takeover of the canal. In a sign of the importance of the issue to Trump, the new head of US diplomacy, Marco Rubio, made his first visit to Panama to deal with the matter. To ease the situation, Panama agreed to cancel the contract with Hong Kong-based CK Hutchison holdings, which managed the ports at the canal's entrances. However, tensions persist due to false information circulated by the Americans, claiming that American ships would be exempted from passage through the Panama Canal. These allegations were immediately denied by the Panamanian authorities.

In addition, on Wednesday, the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs filed a complaint with the United States, denouncing "irresponsible" remarks concerning the Panama Canal and "attacks" on Sino-Panamanian cooperation. The ministry spokesman stressed that cooperation between China and Panama under the Belt and Road Initiative was proceeding normally.

By Alexandre GLABASNIA

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- RFI : "Nouvelles routes de la soie: Panama confirme son retrait du projet chinois, la Chine le «déploire»", 07/02/2025 ;
- France 24 : "Improglio entre les États-Unis et le Panama autour du péage du canal par les navires américains", 06/02/2025.





3.1. Israel : the dilemma of military service for ultra-Orthodox

Since the 7th of October 2023, Israel has been engaged in direct conflict with Hamas and Hezbollah, resulting in 900 deaths among the Israeli ranks.

A recent ceasefire with Hamas revealed growing fatigue within the Israeli population due to the prolonged war. After the October 7th attacks, a strong sense of unity emerged, with the reservist rate exceeding 100% due to volunteers and financial support from foreign countries.



One year later, however, reservists are exhausted, some disagreeing on military objectives, while their families suffer from the economic and psychological consequences of their absence. To counteract unofficial desertion, the government extended the duration of military service for men from 32 to 36 months in July 2024.

In parallel, in June 2024, the Israeli Supreme Court abolished the military exemption granted to a few thousand ultra-Orthodox students, a community that constitutes 13% of the Israeli population. This decision sparked large demonstrations in July 2024. At the same time, lay citizens, especially family members of mobilized soldiers, view this exemption as an unfair disparity. The government, formed by ultra-Orthodox parties, is weakened by these tensions. Consequently, some political factions, such as Degel HaTorah, have threatened to leave the coalition, whereas the population criticizes the prolonged conflict. Under pressure, particularly from former Minister of Defense Yoav Galant, Prime Minister Netanyahu attempted to extend conscription to the ultra-Orthodox community, including 7,000 new recruits.

Ultimately, the most effective strategy to delay this high-risk political dilemma seems to have been the ceasefire, first with Lebanon in November 2024, then with Hamas in January 2025. A prolonged war, without clear objectives, coupled with pressure from the international community and growing tensions between ultra-Orthodox and lay citizens, could lead to the collapse of the coalition.

By Sami Sudici BELHADJ-SALAH

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- *France 24* : "Pourquoi les ultra-orthodoxes Israéliens sont-ils exemptés de service militaire ?", 23/12/2024 ;
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3.2. China responds to the increase in trade barriers by the United States

In early February 2025, the Trump administration announced new U.S. trade sanctions against China, the only targeted country. The United States justified this 10% increase in tariffs on Chinese products by citing the trafficking of fentanyl, an opioid devastating the U.S.

The implementation of this tax has led to the temporary suspension of parcel deliveries from China and Hong Kong to ensure that tariffs apply to all goods, including small parcels worth less than \$800.

Hu Xijin, former editor of Huanqiu Shibao and close to the Chinese government, stated that these tariffs would be ineffective against China, arguing that Beijing is familiar with such "tactics" and has already adapted. He highlighted the increase in Chinese exports to the U.S., which reached \$524 billion in 2024, as proof of China's economic resilience.

However, Beijing announced that, starting February 10, it would impose tariffs on \$14 billion worth of American goods, representing less than 10% of its imports from the U.S. This measured response aims to prevent escalation. Indeed, Chinese exports remain highly dependent on the U.S. Consequently, China has filed a complaint with the WTO, but since the appellate body has been blocked by the U.S. since 2019, the outcome remains uncertain.

Meanwhile, Japan faced similar threats of sanctions but managed to avoid them by strengthening its trade agreements with the U.S. and, in turn, reinforcing military defense agreements, securing an ally against China. This emerging trade war further isolates China from the United States, highlighting the crucial role of the economy and financial systems in global power dynamics.



By Elina RIBEIRO DA COSTA

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- *RFI* : "La guerre commerciale de Trump va-t-elle sonner la fin de l'Organisation mondiale du commerce?", 05/02/2025.





4.1. Russia: Intensifying civil and military cooperation with North Korea

Russia is reportedly willing to transfer drone technology to North Korea in exchange for the latter's support in Ukraine, where approximately 3,000 North Korean soldiers have been deployed since November 2024.

This marks the culmination of a partnership between the two countries, which had previously seen Russia receiving arms, missiles, and ammunition from North Korea. Speculation had arisen about the potential rewards Russia might offer in return, and these rewards seem to have materialized, particularly in the form of sensitive military technology transfers, such as air defense missiles.



The West's primary concern is the possibility of nuclear technology being transferred to North Korea, but the focus now seems to be shifting toward drones. Russia has had to quickly adapt and improve its combat drones to meet the demands of the ongoing war. North Korea is likely to benefit from these rapid advancements in drone technology.

These actions by Russia violate UN Security Council Resolution 2397, which imposed sanctions on North Korea after its nuclear tests. In addition to military support, Russia has been importing North Korean labor to alleviate its severe labor shortages, particularly in construction.

Official statistics show that 13,221 North Koreans entered Russia in 2024. This influx is likely aimed at addressing the labor deficit caused by the partial mobilization and the ensuing outflow of workers due to the war. This cooperation between Russia and North Korea raises concerns internationally, given the potential implications for both countries' military capabilities and the broader geopolitical stability.

By Melwan ELAKAD

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4.2 Negotiations for the war in Ukraine: where do the Europeans stand?

Announced as resolvable in “24 hours” during the US presidential campaign, the Trump administration now says it aims to resolve the conflict in Ukraine within its first 100 days in office.

The US diplomatic trio in charge is composed of JD Vance (Vice-President), Marco Rubio (Secretary of State), and Pete Hegseth (Secretary of Defense).



The main issue is the role of the European states and the European Union in the negotiation process. Kaja Kallas (EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy), who was questioned on the sidelines of a meeting in Rome of the 'Western Balkan' states, confirmed that an agreement without the presence of the EU would be excluded. She also mentioned the project of Eurobonds (a common defense bond) without personally committing to the issue. However, the European Commission seems determined to move forward with financing European military spending (for example, by excluding it from the calculation of the excessive government deficit). Nevertheless, the announcement of new US tariffs on steel and aluminum (at 25%) illustrates the complexity of the transatlantic relationship, as Donald Trump no longer seems to differentiate between his allies and his strategic competitors. In addition, while the EU wants to separate various ongoing negotiations, including trade and diplomacy, the Trump administration, on the other hand, envisions permeability between these areas and a focus on bilateral agreements (de facto excluding the EU, but this is impossible in customs matters because of the Commission's exclusive competence).

Finally, it will be relevant to observe the effectiveness of the US compromise approach to intergovernmental relations in Ukraine. But it should be noted that the government of Volodymyr Zelensky seems to comply with the promise of increased access to national rare earths.

By Bastien POULIQUEN

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- Politico : “Trump et Poutine surprennent l'Europe avec leur plan de paix pour l'Ukraine”, 13/02/2025 ;
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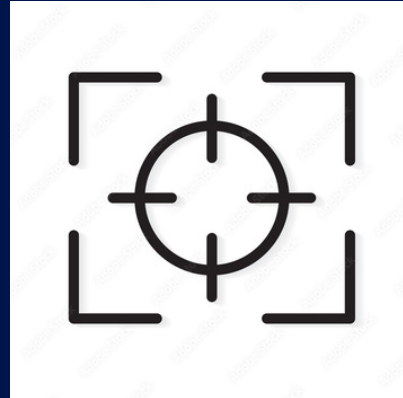




5.1. World Summit for Action on AI : what about defence matters ?

On February 10-11, 2025, Paris hosted the AI Action Summit, bringing together nearly 100 nations—including the United States and China—to discuss the safe development and use of AI systems.

Co-organized by France and India, the event focused on open-source systems and clean energy, aiming to reduce labor market disruptions and strengthen sovereignty in the global AI market. Leaders from major companies such as Alphabet, Microsoft, and OpenAI were present.



One of the summit's main goals was to negotiate a non-binding communiqué on AI principles. However, the United States and the United Kingdom refused to sign the final document, which promoted ethical and secure AI usage and was supported by France, Germany, Spain, Canada, and Japan. U.S. Vice President J.D. Vance stated that the Trump administration favored minimal regulation, prioritizing economic benefits and criticizing « large-scale regulations that suppress content deemed misinformation ».

Meanwhile, European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen announced a €200 billion investment in AI, with €50 billion from EU public funds and €150 billion from the private sector. This initiative aims to strengthen Europe's position in the global AI race against increasing international competition.

In the defense sector, AI is playing a growing role. A strategic alliance was formed between Helsing, a European company specializing in AI-based defense technologies, and Mistral AI, a French unicorn. This partnership seeks to develop Vision-Language-Action (VLA) models to enhance human-AI collaboration on the battlefield, accelerating military decision-making and optimizing operational efficiency.

By Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

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