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60th Edition

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# PRESS REVIEW

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## Security & Defence

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# ASSOCIATION PANTHÉON- SORBONNE SÉCURITÉ- DÉFENSE

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# Security & Defence

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## 1.1. The French military withdrawal from Ivory Coast: A turning point for its presence in Africa?

The withdrawal of French forces from Ivory Coast, announced for January 2025 by President Alassane Ouattara during the New Year transition, marks a disruptive shift in military relations between France and its African partners. The strategic base in Port-Bouët (Abidjan) will be handed back to Ivorian authorities after decades of French presence, signaling the end of a chapter in military cooperation.



This departure follows similar withdrawals from other countries in the region (Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, Chad) and is expected to be followed by a withdrawal from Senegal.

These decisions, often taken under popular and political pressure, reflect a growing desire among African states to regain control over their security sovereignty. This wave of withdrawals is occurring in a broader context of rising nationalist sentiment and rejection of the former colonial power, accused of « neocolonialism » and « interference ». In Senegal, recent comments by Emmanuel Macron about re-evaluating Franco-African relations sparked critical reactions, intensifying local demands for military disengagement. These dynamics have been further fueled by foreign influence campaigns, particularly from Russia and China.

For France, these successive withdrawals pose significant strategic challenges. Counterterrorism operations in the Sahel, previously centralized, are losing effectiveness without key operational bases. Moreover, Paris now faces increased competition from new actors such as Russia, which is solidifying its influence through security agreements, and China, which focuses on economic dominance. In response to this situation, France is compelled to rethink its African policy. It envisions bilateral partnerships based on explicit requests from host countries while strengthening support for regional security initiatives, such as those led by the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS). This transition signals the beginning of a new era in which Franco-African relations must be redefined.

By Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

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## 1.2. Strengthening military-industrial cooperation between Algeria and China

In the context of a rapidly advancing military modernisation agenda, Algeria has announced its plans to locally construct Type 056 (F-15A) corvettes with Chinese assistance, following the delivery of the first ship in 2023. This ambitious project, which includes the manufacture of several units at Algerian shipyards, reflects the country's efforts to improve its defence capabilities and reduce its dependence on foreign suppliers.



The Type 056 corvettes are equipped with a cutting-edge multifunction radar system, advanced sonar, YJ-83 anti-ship missiles, and 76mm guns for support operations. This modernisation will significantly bolster the Algerian navy's surveillance and combat abilities, particularly in safeguarding its maritime resources and exclusive economic zones. Additionally, these ships are equipped with advanced anti-submarine warfare technology, making them a strategic asset for Algeria, especially in the increasingly tense Mediterranean maritime environment.

This project is part of a broader Algerian-Chinese cooperation that also spans infrastructure, mining, energy development, and transportation. By enhancing its local industrial capabilities and relying on Chinese technology, Algeria aims not only to modernise its armed forces but also to stimulate its economy and naval sector.

Algeria views this collaboration as a strategic pillar for its military and industrial ascent, aligning its economic development with the geopolitical challenges of the region.

By Amzina DAOUSSA DEBY

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## 2.1. Trump's Military Ambitions Regarding Greenland

Donald Trump's proposal to acquire Greenland rests on a strategic vision aimed at strengthening American national security.

Due to its key geographical location between North America and Europe, the island presents a major military asset.



It provides direct access to transatlantic maritime routes, allowing the US to effectively monitor military activities in the Arctic, while also housing the American base at Thule, a crucial facility for ballistic missile surveillance. These factors reinforce the United States' position against potential threats, particularly from Russia and China.

Moreover, Trump has highlighted Greenland's natural resources, particularly rare minerals, which could support America's future economic dominance, especially in advanced technologies and battery production. However, this acquisition attempt has been rejected by both Denmark and Greenland, resulting in diplomatic tensions. Denmark has bolstered its defence capabilities in the region, while European political figures, including Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French Foreign Minister Jean-Noël Barrot, have voiced opposition, stressing the importance of respecting Greenland's sovereignty.

Beyond the immediate stakes, Trump's ambitions could redefine NATO dynamics and disrupt transatlantic relations. Greenland's strategic position, coupled with American territorial claims, threatens to turn the region into a major geopolitical flashpoint, exacerbating military tensions between global powers. In the long run, the US will need to weigh the consequences of its actions in this sensitive matter, particularly with regard to international security cooperation, while reinforcing its Arctic presence against adversaries.

By Amzina DAOUSSA DEBY

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- The Guardian : "France Warns Trump Against Threatening EU Sovereign Borders over Greenland", 2025.



## 2.2. Mark Zuckerberg ends fact-checking on Meta

On 7 January, Meta, under the leadership of Mark Zuckerberg, announced that it would replace fact-checking with "community notes," a system where users voluntarily write annotations which are then validated by other users. This shift, inspired by the X (formerly Twitter) model, removes the evaluations previously carried out by independent organisations.



Zuckerberg justifies this change, arguing that the fact-checking system, introduced after Donald Trump's 2016 election, had become ineffective and overly politicised.

This decision has provoked strong criticism, particularly in Brazil, where President Lula has demanded an explanation from Meta within 72 hours. Studies show that users most active in community notes tend to have politically charged views, raising concerns that they could inadvertently promote biased content and increase misinformation. In the United States, the issue of misinformation is highly complex, with conservatives arguing that such efforts constitute censorship.

International voices have raised alarms about the dangers of this move. Maria Ressa, Nobel Peace Prize laureate, and Ross Burley from the Centre for Information Resilience, argue that it weakens content moderation at a time when misinformation is proliferating. The Council of Europe and the UN have stressed that moderating harmful or false content is crucial for protecting human rights and does not equate to censorship. Without a credible alternative, experts warn that this shift could lead to a significant rise in misinformation.

By Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

Sources:

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## 3.1. EU diplomats engage with HTS-led regime amid uncertainty

In early January 2025, a European diplomatic delegation visited Syria to meet with authorities established following the takeover of Damascus by Hayat Tahrir al-Sham (HTS), led by Abu Mohammad al-Jolani. This visit marks a pivotal moment in Syria's international relations, following the collapse of Bashar al-Assad's regime and the consolidation of HTS's power, which had previously been limited to the northwest.



After months of internal conflict, HTS successfully seized control of the capital and eliminated the remaining pro-Assad resistance. While tensions with rival armed groups persist, particularly in northern and eastern regions, this development represents a significant shift for Syria.

However, the European visit does not imply tacit recognition of the new regime. The European Union has made it clear that any support for reconstruction or humanitarian aid is conditional on concrete commitments to human rights and the establishment of a democratic political process. European diplomats emphasised the need to safeguard the rights of ethnic and religious minorities, including Kurds, Christians, and Alawites, ensuring their security and representation in the new political framework. A key condition for cooperation is the organisation of free and transparent elections within a reasonable timeframe to enable a genuine democratic transition.

Discussions also centred on the country's reconstruction, a pressing issue after years of conflict. While European representatives expressed willingness to provide substantial financial support, they tied it to profound reforms. The role of HTS in Syria's future governance remains contentious, given its Islamist ideology and questions surrounding its adherence to democratic principles and human rights.

This visit signals a readiness to engage in dialogue with Syria's new authorities while reflecting European caution regarding the country's uncertain future. Governance and reconciliation challenges remain vast, and Syria continues to be a region of instability.

By Matéo GRANDGIRARD

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- *Euronews* : "Les ministres allemand et français des Affaires étrangères en visite en Syrie", 03/01/2025.





## 3.2. North Korea launches a ballistic missile toward the Sea of Japan and South Korean coasts

On Monday, 6 January 2025, North Korea launched a ballistic missile towards the Sea of Japan, following a missile salvo on 6 November 2024, just before the US presidential election. Earlier in January, North Korea had also tested its new solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the most advanced in its arsenal.



According to South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff, the missile fired on 6 January travelled approximately 1,100 kilometres before falling into the sea. Japan reported that the missile reached an altitude of 100 kilometres, classifying it as an intermediate-range ballistic missile (IRBM), with a range between 3,000 and 5,500 kilometres.

This missile launch occurred during the visit of US Secretary of State Antony Blinken to Japan and South Korea. Both the US and South Korea condemned the action, emphasising that it violated UN Security Council resolutions. The two nations also took the opportunity to reaffirm their cooperation, especially in light of upcoming governmental changes. Blinken further revealed that Russia was reportedly planning to share advanced satellite technologies with North Korea, following the deployment of North Korean soldiers in Russia.

This geopolitical situation unfolds amid political instability in South Korea, where President Yoon Suk-yeol has been impeached and faces potential arrest after declaring martial law. North Korea may seek to exploit this turbulence to heighten pressure, potentially viewing the South's internal crisis as an opportunity to advance its own strategic objectives.

By Elina RIBEIRO DA COSTA

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## 4.1. Poland: Rotating EU Council Presidency

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"Europe is fortunate that, at this difficult moment in our history, Poland is assuming the presidency," stated Donald Tusk, Poland's pro-European Prime Minister, during the inaugural ceremony of the country's presidency of the Council of the European Union (1 January – 30 June 2025). Succeeding Hungary in this role, Poland assumes a crucial position in shaping European legislative priorities, with its presidency slogan, "Defence, Europe!", encapsulating the continent's pressing security concerns.



However, Poland's domestic political scene presents significant hurdles. The ongoing rivalry between Tusk's centrist coalition and President Andrzej Duda of the conservative Law and Justice (PiS) party continues to strain governance. Recent disputes over judicial reforms and foreign policy, including differing approaches towards Israel, underscore the deep divisions. These tensions are likely to influence Poland's strategic decisions ahead of the presidential elections on 18 May.

On the geopolitical front, Poland is adopting an assertive stance regarding the war in Ukraine. Foreign Minister Radosław Sikorski has not ruled out deploying Polish forces as part of a peacekeeping mission. Simultaneously, Poland is backing the European Defence Industry Programme (EDIP), a key initiative aimed at bolstering the EU's defence capabilities. Nonetheless, the programme has faced criticism, with figures like French Defence Minister Sébastien Lecornu expressing concerns over its potential opening to non-European firms.

Poland's historically strong ties with the United States and its substantial defence spending, reaching 4.1% of GDP in 2024, bolster its credibility as a security partner. Warsaw hopes to leverage this Atlanticist foundation to navigate negotiations with the newly inaugurated Trump administration, though this adds a layer of complexity to its ambitions for European cohesion and defence.

By Bastien POULIQUEN

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- Le Monde : "La présidence polonaise de l'Union européenne s'annonce très politique", 01/01/2025.



## 4.2 Transnistria: Gas cut-off and humanitarian risk

The Republic of Transnistria, located in northern Moldova on the southern border with Ukraine, is currently facing a historic energy shortage.

Since the unilateral proclamation of independence and the fall of the USSR, which resulted in the permanent stationing of a thousand Russian soldiers, Transnistria has been largely dependent on the latter for its supplies.



However, the Ukrainian state decided not to renew the contract with the Russian company Gazprom regarding the transit of gas on its territory. This despite the outcry of Slovak President Robert Fico about the danger that such a stop would pose for Europe. However, the cessation of these flows does not explain all the distress of the Transnistrian region. Indeed, its leader Vadim Krasnoselsky refuses any energy supply from the European Union. In addition, Gazprom could still theoretically deliver its gas via the Turkstream pipeline or a network of pipelines through Bulgaria and Romania.

Nevertheless, the stop of exports to Moldova would be based on the accusation against Moldovagaz (main Moldovan company) and the Moldovan state for not respecting accumulated debts, amounting to 700 million dollars (theory in contradiction to the audits carried out by various Western companies). The Moldovan authorities suspect an attempt by Moscow to trigger a humanitarian crisis, in order to influence the results of the upcoming parliamentary elections (July 2025). Romania currently supplies almost 50% of Moldova's energy needs.

But as every crisis presents its share of opportunities, the possible supply of gas to its secessionist region could allow Chisinau to regain a foothold east of the river Dniester, and finally consider reaffirming its sovereignty there.

By Bastien POULIQUEN

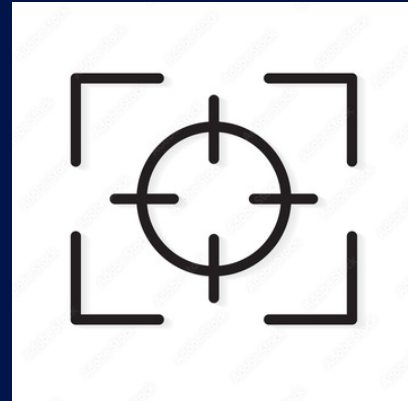
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## 5.1. China's expanding cyberespionage and psychological warfare tactics

China is significantly enhancing its cyber-espionage and psychological warfare efforts to assert global dominance. A Pentagon report reveals that Beijing is making substantial investments in "cognitive domain" operations designed to influence the perception and behaviour of both ordinary citizens and high-level officials. The aim is to control the informational spectrum from the outset of any conflict, utilising advanced technologies like artificial intelligence and deepfakes to create misleading content and manipulate public opinion.



A notable example of this strategy is the "Salt Typhoon" operation, a large-scale Chinese cyber-attack that compromised the networks of nine major US telecommunications companies. This intrusion granted Beijing access to sensitive communications, including those of senior government officials, highlighting the vulnerabilities of the ageing US telecom infrastructure.

Faced with this growing threat, the US administration is grappling with the challenge of balancing its economic and security priorities. The response is further complicated by internal tensions surrounding the powers of intelligence agencies.

China's digital espionage activities are not confined to the US. In Europe, hacker groups linked to the Chinese state have used ransomware to conceal espionage operations targeting several European countries. This expansion of cyber-attacks highlights the intensification of information warfare.

Meanwhile, Taiwan is actively preparing for a potential Chinese invasion. In addition to strengthening its military, the island is conducting crisis simulations involving government agencies to anticipate and manage risks. This multifaceted approach aims to enhance Taiwan's resilience against external threats, underscoring the strategic importance of cybersecurity in contemporary conflicts.

By Julien DEBIDOUR LAZZARINI

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- Reuters, 2025. Greenland Important for US, Says Trump's Pick for National Security Adviser.
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