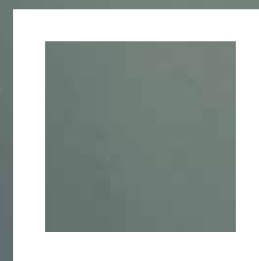
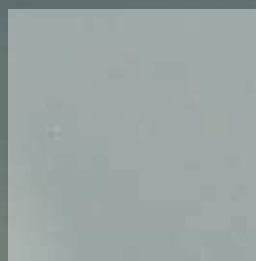
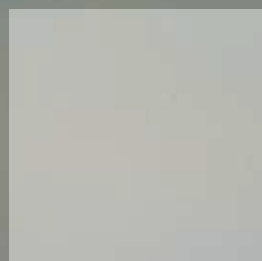


# INTELLIGENCE OUTLOOK 2022

An intelligence-based assessment of the external conditions  
for Danish national security and interests



DANISH DEFENCE  
INTELLIGENCE SERVICE

## THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENTS BY THE DANISH INTELLIGENCE SERVICES OF THE THREATS TO DENMARK

**INTELLIGENCE OUTLOOK** outlines the external conditions impacting Danish security and Danish interests.

INTELLIGENCE OUTLOOK is one of four annual assessments of the threats within and against Denmark. The other assessments are:

- **Assessment of the terrorist threat to Denmark**, in which the Centre for Terror Analysis sets the national terrorist threat level and describes the terrorist threat to Denmark and Danish interests abroad.
- **Assessment of the espionage threat to Denmark**, which is published by the Danish Security and Intelligence Service and describes the threat from foreign state intelligence activities targeting Denmark, in particular espionage, influence operations and attempts to illegally procure technology and knowledge.
- **The cyber threat against Denmark**, in which the Centre for Cyber Security describes and sets the national threat levels for cyber espionage, cyber crime, cyber activism, destructive cyber attacks and cyber terrorism.

# INTRODUCTION

■ More than any other crisis in recent decades, the war in Ukraine has moved security policy to the forefront of many people's minds. We are witness to a major war of conquest in Europe and to a Russia that is trying to influence us by making threats, cutting energy supplies, and disseminating false information.

The Western countries have responded with unity, and following years of neutrality, Sweden and Finland are set to join NATO.

Denmark and the West are faced with the prospect of a long-term conflict with Russia, which is ready to use an array of different means to sow fear and uncertainty in our countries. Though Russia, as a starting point, does not want a war with NATO, its conduct has changed the security situation in ways that will also have a strong impact on Denmark in the years to come.

At the same time, China is on its way to becoming the world's largest economy. This presents a challenge to the West and Denmark, as China's political and economic model is intrinsically different to that of the West.

Both China and Russia conduct cyber espionage against Denmark, and there is a potential threat from destructive cyber attacks by Russia. The consequences of these types of attacks and of cyber crime are growing more serious, as the physical and digital worlds increasingly merge.

The tensions between Russia and the West will also spill over into the Arctic, increasing the military presence in the region. Russia could also try to sow unrest or division among the Western Arctic states and between Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland.

Many countries in the Middle East and Africa are struggling with instability, which has only intensified due to the fallout from the war in Ukraine and the COVID-19 crisis. This development provides the setting for terrorist groups to grow in strength and for renewed migration pressure on Europe. Europe is still facing a significant terrorist threat, in particular from lone actors and small networks motivated by militant Islamism.

INTELLIGENCE OUTLOOK outlines these external threats to Denmark and conditions abroad that impact Danish security policy and the alliances of which Denmark is a member.

INTELLIGENCE OUTLOOK is the Danish Defence Intelligence Service's annual contribution to the public debate on Denmark's security policy. Therefore, it is written for interested citizens as well as politicians, journalists and researchers.

Enjoy your reading.



**Svend Larsen**

Acting Director of the Danish Defence Intelligence Service

# CONTENTS



3	INTRODUCTION
6	TERMS AND DEFINITIONS
7	MAIN CONCLUSIONS
8	■ DENMARK IN THE CURRENT SECURITY POLICY CONTEXT
16	THEME ENERGY POLICY HAS BECOME A SECURITY POLICY ISSUE
18	■ RUSSIA
32	THEME INFLUENCE OPERATIONS
34	THEME ESPIONAGE
36	THEME WEAPONS PROLIFERATION
38	■ THE CYBER THREAT
42	■ THE ARCTIC
50	■ CHINA
58	■ TERRORISM, INSTABILITY AND MIGRATION
62	THEME TERRORISM
66	THEME MIGRATION
74	THEME MARITIME SECURITY



## THE ARCTIC

42

Despite its heavy losses in Ukraine, Russia maintains its military position of strength in the Arctic. China could gain increased access to Arctic resources and sea routes.

## RUSSIA

18

Russia's relations with the West have deteriorated over the war in Ukraine, while China continues to challenge the established international rules-based order.

## SECURITY POLICY CONDITIONS

8

The war in Ukraine is turning into a protracted conflict between Russia and the US, the other NATO countries and the EU countries, increasing the level of tension in Denmark's vicinity.

## CHINA

50

China's global ambitions and increasing influence contribute to aggravating tensions with the West, including Denmark.

## TERRORISM, INSTABILITY AND MIGRATION

58

Growing instability feeds into the strengthening of terrorist groups, increased arms proliferation and renewed pressure from refugees and migration towards Europe.

## THE CYBER THREAT

38

The most serious cyber threats to Denmark emanate from Russian and Chinese cyber espionage and from cyber crime committed by organized foreign criminal networks.

## TERMS AND DEFINITIONS

To provide a common framework of reference, we have prepared a brief outline of the special terms and definitions used in **INTELLIGENCE OUTLOOK**.

### Degree of certainty in assessments

Intelligence assessments almost always contain elements of doubt. Consequently, our analysts attempt to clarify for readers the degree of certainty that they attribute to their assessments, using standardized expressions and consistent use of probability terms to express the same degrees of certainty.

We use five degrees of probability to express the level of certainty in our assessments. The probabilities are estimates, not calculated statistical probabilities. The estimation of probability depends on the strength of the available information and on the complexity of the subject.

We apply the probability scale shown below:



### TIME FRAMES

<b>Few months:</b>	Very short term
<b>0-2 years:</b>	Short term
<b>2-5 years:</b>	Medium term
<b>5-10 years:</b>	Long term
<b>Over 10 years:</b>	Very long term

# MAIN CONCLUSIONS

■ Increased great power competition will provide the setting for international politics for years to come. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has added new tensions to its already strained relations with the West, while China continues to challenge the established international rules-based order. Relations between Russia and China will grow stronger but will not expand into an alliance between the two countries. Issues such as supply chains and other economic conditions will become instruments of security policy used in the competition among states, testing the unity of the Western world, which has united over the invasion of Ukraine.

Russia's war against Ukraine has reshaped the security environment in Europe and has given it characteristics that are reminiscent of the Cold War. The war in Ukraine will highly likely drag on and will become the centre of a protracted conflict between Russia on the one side and the United States, the other NATO member states, and the EU countries on the other. This will also increase the level of tension in Denmark's vicinity. Russia will be willing to escalate the conflict with the West to just below the threshold of direct military conflict. Denmark will thus be facing a new threat environment in which former clear boundaries between peace, crisis and war are blurred and overlaps will occur.

Though different in nature and impact, cyber crime and cyber espionage both pose a serious threat to Danish society. The consequences of cyber attacks will likely grow more serious in the future. Cyber activists interfere in international conflicts, potentially contributing to the worsening of the conflicts.

The war in Ukraine will impact the development in the Arctic. Russia's political and economic dependence on China will grow to a point at which Russia could be forced to cede influence as well as access to Arctic resources and sea routes to China. Despite its heavy losses in Ukraine, Russia maintains its military position

of strength in the Arctic. Though Russia will continue to try to keep security policy tensions out of the Arctic, the intensified conflict between Russia and the West will likely make for a more volatile security policy climate. This will also affect the Kingdom of Denmark, which could become the target of Russian attempts to sow division internally in the Kingdom and in its relations with the United States.

China's global and regional ambitions are growing, and China wants to become the dominant military power in the region. Politically, China aims to increase its influence in international organizations and to create alternatives to the rules-based world order. China's ever-growing economic clout serves to bolster its global influence, and just as its economic model is a challenge to the West, so are its focused efforts to acquire Western technology and knowledge. At the same time, the Communist Party is tightening its grip on power. These developments harm China's relations with the West, including with Denmark. Tensions are further aggravated by China's close cooperation with Russia, the war in Ukraine and the increasingly tense issue of Taiwan.

Denmark and Europe will, in the years to come, increasingly have to tackle the continuing challenges posed by Europe's conflict-ridden neighbouring regions in the Middle East and Africa on our own. The serious terrorist threat to Europe will persist and a renewed pressure from refugees and migration is likely. The instability characterizing the most vulnerable countries in these regions will grow due to the impact of the war in Ukraine and COVID-19. Many areas suffer from poor living conditions caused by high population growth and climate change, feeding into the strengthening of terrorist groups, increased arms proliferation and increased migration. At the same time, Europe is once again turning to the Middle East and Africa for energy sources. China and Russia as well as the regional great powers of Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia will pursue their own interests, which often diverge from European ones.



On 9 August 2022, President Biden signed a document of US support for Sweden and Finland to join NATO in the presence of their ambassadors to the United States.  
Evelyn Hockstein/Reuters/Ritzau Scanpix

# DENMARK IN THE CURRENT SECURITY POLICY CONTEXT

EXISTING DIVIDES DEEPENED  
BY THE WAR IN UKRAINE







Increased great power competition will provide the setting for international politics for years to come. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has added new tensions to its already strained relations with the West, while China continues to challenge the established international rules-based order. Relations between Russia and China will grow stronger but will not expand into an alliance between the two countries. Issues such as supply chains and other economic conditions will become instruments of security policy used in the competition among states, testing the unity of the Western world, which has united over the invasion of Ukraine.

■ Russia's February 2022 invasion of Ukraine has unleashed dynamics that highlight and deepen dividing lines in global politics. In some instances, these dynamics have fuelled uncertainty and questions concerning developments in global politics.

The established international rules-based order is under pressure, and the war in Ukraine has accelerated the already strong competition among great powers. The change in the established world order will occur through competition as well as conflict or negotiation. Denmark will highly likely be forced to navigate this new security political reality in the years to come.

The world order is moving away from the singular dominance of the United States towards a world order with a number of competing powers.

Relations between the two leading military, economic and political powers, the United States and China, will determine the development of global politics.

Several political and economic issues that have for years been regarded as separate from security policy will now move into the realm of security policy due to the change in the established international rules-based order. States use a wide range of political and economic instruments to secure their own position and to influence competing states, for instance by engaging in subversive activities.

### **The war in Ukraine unleashes new dynamics and highlights existing tensions**

The war in Ukraine comes at a time when Western international dominance and the foundation of internationally accepted norms and rules have been under pressure for years. The primary challengers of the established norms and rules are Russia and China, which each – using a range of different approaches and resources – pushes against what they perceive to be Western dominance of the international system.

While Russia primarily uses security political pressure and undermining of international cooperation, China seeks to challenge Western influence on international politics through political and economic initiatives and influence on international organizations. Conflicts over norms and values have thus become a significant

factor in global relations.

With its invasion of Ukraine, Russia is trying to force through a new European security order by military force, adding large-scale conventional military operations to its years-long list of measures for challenging the established world order.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine has created dilemmas for China and India, in particular, which have to balance their close relations with Russia against their strong interest in maintaining good relations with the West.

It is likely that Russia's failure to achieve rapid gains in Ukraine will call Russia's influence into question, opening the doors for both regional and great power competition in, for example, Central Asia and Caucasus.

China continues to use an array of instruments to challenge Western interests, including cyber espionage, influence campaigns and military pressure against neighbours in connection with border disputes. China has also used economic sanctions against countries which, in China's view, undermine Chinese core interests.

Conversely, Russia's capability to challenge the international order is also under pressure. Russia has been hit by a barrage of sanctions designed to isolate it from its primary trading partners and has suffered major military setbacks in Ukraine. As a result, Russia's basis for challenging the international order will be worse than in years past.



With its invasion of Ukraine, Russia is trying to force through a new European security order by military force.

The invasion of Ukraine has demonstrated that, despite years of focusing on internal conflicting interests, the Western world is able to rally together and present a united front. This is reflected in the unity of Western countries, spearheaded by the United States, in providing weapons aid to Ukraine and imposing economic sanctions against Russia. However, Russia will try to break Western unity, in particular by weaponizing issues such as energy. At the same time, competing and, at times, conflicting interests have made it difficult to reach global consensus on how to respond to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The anticipated shift in the global economic focus towards Asia will increase the importance of the region, which will also be reflected in the United States' interests and investments in military capabilities in Asia. This shift of focus will force the European countries and the EU to assume greater strategic responsibility.

#### **Economic developments will significantly impact the balance of power**

Global economic developments will have a major impact on the balance of power and dynamics between different actors in international politics. Russia's reduction of gas supplies to the EU and Europe's move away from Russian energy have already had consequences for the global economy. Factors such as higher energy prices and energy supply uncertainty contribute to the European and global economic slowdown.

The overall economic trends will continue to reflect Asia's rising importance on the global economic stage. Conversely, though, the current rise in energy prices and the sluggish economic growth levels are also putting pressure on China, which is already struggling with coronavirus lockdowns and a property sector burdened by debts.

The global economic slowdown will impact the power balance among major actors. China's continued ability to pose a challenge to Western interests may be weakened if, for example, China is forced to adjust its engagements outside its neighbouring region. The United States and Europe on their part could find it increasingly difficult to pursue national interests and to counter challenges posed by other actors due to the global economic slowdown.

Sanctions have had a significant impact on Russia, and Russian energy export earnings will likely decline, potentially limiting Russia's ability to undertake large-scale power projection outside of its borders. However, Russia is constantly looking for ways to bypass the economic sanctions.

#### **Nation states will seek to secure supply chains**

Decisions that were previously regarded as falling entirely within civilian, technical or financial realms have now taken on a security policy dimension, as international politics are increasingly characterized by rivalry and opposition, including in fields such as supply chains, energy and technological developments.

The sanctions imposed by the West as well as Russia's changed gas supply policy have highlighted the problem of reliance on Russian energy and raw materials. At the same time, the Western sanctions have put Russia under pressure in relation to access to goods, services and technology.

Just as with the COVID-19 pandemic, the economic consequences of the war have demonstrated the crucial importance of international supply chains.

In critical areas of supply needs, states will turn to either national solutions or solutions provided by highly trusted partners. This shift will, however, be gradual due to the interwoven nature of the international market. In areas that are not considered vital to national security, there is less of a tendency towards decoupling from the global market.

In this context, the manufacture of semiconductors, which are essential components in modern electronics, has become an arena for competition between the United States and China, in particular. Advanced semiconductors are primarily produced in Taiwan. China's increasing pressure on Taiwan and the risk of conflict are a testament to the vulnerability of the semiconductor supply to the global market. The great powers now seek to reduce this kind of dependency through large-scale investment programmes.

As part of this development, there will be a tendency towards tightened controls on export and transfer of dual-use technology.



## HEIGHTENED GREAT POWER COMPETITION

Russia and China each use a range of different approaches and resources to push against what they perceive to be Western dominance of the international system.

The EU presents a united front on Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

EU

RUSSIA

Russia's readiness to challenge the established world order by means of a conventional military operation of the magnitude of its invasion of Ukraine heralds a new phase in Russia's relations with the West.

CENTRAL ASIA

THE MIDDLE EAST AND AFRICA

The progress of Russia's war in Ukraine will allow for increased great power competition in Russia's neighbouring regions, including in Central Asia.

CHINA

China continues to challenge Western interests through a wide range of instruments.

The Middle East and Africa have also become arenas for great powers such as Russia and China.





Asia and the great power competition with China will be a long-term strategic priority for the United States.

Relations between states and private enterprises will also come to play a key role in the development and protection of new technology. As a result of the rise of private enterprises, states no longer necessarily control technology development and cannot necessarily expect private actors to cooperate on development of new technology. The tendency towards greater autonomy for private actors has become apparent in fields such as space technology and has been highlighted by the importance of commercial satellites in the war in Ukraine.

As a result of the increasing reliance of states on private tech companies, including companies that produce technology relevant in the context of national security, clashes and discussions between state actors and private enterprises could become more frequent and serious in the future.

#### **States are hesitant to use destructive cyber attacks outside of conflict areas**

Several states also have the capabilities to launch destructive cyber attacks that could be used in military conflicts, for instance. Countries with destructive cyber attack capabilities include Russia, China, North Korea and Iran, which all in varying forms and to varying degrees have strained relations with the West.

Most destructive cyber attacks aim to destroy data and IT systems. Dependent on what type of data and IT systems are destroyed, the attacks could paralyze critical societal functions such as the supply of energy or public and private transportation. Consequently, though they very rarely result in physical destruction, the attacks could carry serious consequences for the targeted companies, authorities and societies.

So far, destructive cyber attacks have mainly been used in certain conflict areas, including Ukraine and the Middle East.

Since the onset of the conflict between Russia and Ukraine in 2014, Ukraine has been the target of several destructive cyber attacks. Even though Ukraine has been the target of the attacks, other countries, including Denmark, have also been affected by the resulting consequences.

The most serious destructive cyber attack against Ukraine since the beginning of 2022 was the one launched against satellite communication provider Viasat the day before the onset of the Russian invasion. The attack hampered Ukrainian military communication, as thousands of satellite modems in Europe had their configurations wiped.

Russia will in all likelihood continue to launch destructive cyber attacks against Ukraine but will also make efforts to prevent the attacks from spreading and causing great harm outside of Ukraine.

It is highly likely that Russia does not want to escalate the conflict with the NATO countries into a direct military confrontation. Consequently, Russia will likely refrain from launching destructive cyber attacks directly against NATO countries in the short term. However, there is a low, yet real, risk that Russia could still resort to destructive cyber attacks, first and foremost to test the NATO countries' reactions.

Russia's efforts to establish a national Internet capable of functioning independently of the global Internet highlight the Russian regime's perception of the Internet as a battlefield. Should Russia manage to disconnect its national Internet from the global Internet, it would make the country less vulnerable and thereby more willing to launch destructive cyber attacks against the West.

### **Military rearmament and competition**

Russia's attack on Ukraine has escalated security tensions in Europe and prompted several European countries to announce a significant increase in defence spending.

A potential arms race among great powers will to a large extent be characterized by Russia and China looking for technological solutions that could contribute to ending or at least diminishing the conventional military superiority that Western forces have enjoyed since the end of the Cold War.

Some modern advanced capabilities, such as long-range and armed drones, are no longer reserved for the great powers and other technologically advanced

military forces. This shift is the result of some regional powers now being capable of developing and producing modern weapons and of foreign states supplying proxy war parties with advanced weapons systems.

### **Great power competition in unstable regions**

The past decade has seen growing opportunities for China and Russia to increase their involvement in Africa and the Middle East.

In order to promote its security policy interests, Russia has since 2015 sought to consolidate its role in the Middle East through its military involvement in Syria, which has also been aimed at securing Russian bases in the region. Most recently, Russia has made efforts to expand its influence in Africa by using private security companies such as the Wagner Group.

China has contributed to infrastructure and economic growth in a number of developing countries through economic agreements. This involvement strengthens China's global network and is aimed at securing influence in and resources from both Africa and the Middle East.

Russia's involvement in Africa and the Middle East comes amid a number of trends that increase the risk of instability and conflict in the regions. These trends include high population growth as well as water and food scarcity, which is exacerbated by climate change and most recently the war in Ukraine. In addition, a number of states are fraught with oppression and poor governance.



Russia's attack on Ukraine has escalated security tensions in Europe and prompted several European countries to announce a significant increase in defence spending.

In these circumstances, European countries will increasingly be forced to tackle security interests in their own neighbouring regions as a result of a diminishing US involvement in the regions.

#### **The closer relationship between China and Russia has clear limitations**

With its invasion of Ukraine and ensuing isolation from Western markets, Russia has put itself in a position in which the country will be more dependent on China, adding to the fundamental imbalance in the close partnership that the two countries otherwise established with their joint declaration in February 2022.

Russia is dually dependent on China as a buyer of Russian energy and as a supplier of technology to Russia. China attaches great importance to its economic relations with the United States and Europe, a fact that will impact on its support for Russia. Russia on its part will still consider its cooperation with China as a way of bypassing Western sanctions.

Despite continued distrust and conflicting interests, Russia and China view each other as key strategic partners working to promote an international order aimed at countering the dominance of the West in global politics.

Russia is trying to challenge the rules-based world order to consolidate its position in its neighbouring region, while China is increasingly trying to reshape

the world order towards greater Chinese power and influence aligned with Chinese values. The relationship between Russia and China will thus grow stronger, though highly likely not to the point at which it will turn into a proper alliance.

The growing shift in the balance of power between Russia and China is also evident in Central Asia – a neighbouring region to both countries. China is strengthening its influence and has grown less wary of pursuing its interest in countries which have traditionally been part of Russia's sphere of influence. For instance, in 2022, China declared support for Kazakhstan's independence and territorial integrity, thereby indicating that it intends to play a greater role in Central Asia and that Russia would be well-advised not to threaten China's regional interests.

China is trying to strike a balanced position on the war in Ukraine. On the one hand, China has refrained from condemning the invasion even though it is a violation of China's fundamental principles of sovereignty and non-interference. China has also voiced criticism of NATO's expansion, has repeated Russian disinformation about the war and is backing Russia in international organizations whenever it serves China's interests. On the other hand, China has not provided weapons support for Russia and is hesitant to help Russia evade Western sanctions.

## THEME ENERGY POLICY HAS BECOME A SECURITY POLICY ISSUE

The significance of Russia's invasion of Ukraine extends beyond severe geopolitical, security policy and energy policy consequences for Russia itself and for Europe, the Middle East, North Africa and China. The invasion also has implications for the mutual balance of power among these countries and regions as well as for their respective interests.

The EU is working to rid itself of its dependence on Russian energy, and Russia has already reduced its gas supplies to Europe. These factors will have far-reaching geopolitical consequences, for Russia as well. In addition to having resulted in higher gas and electricity prices, this development also changes the balance of power between the other great powers.

In the years to come, the European countries will be more vulnerable to energy political developments and surging energy prices as they pull away from Russian energy. This step has already had wide economic consequences, for example as it has contributed to higher food prices.

As Europe is by far the largest importer of Russian energy, its fast move towards energy independence from Russia will also have major economic consequences for Russia.

### DIFFICULT FOR RUSSIA TO SELL NATURAL GAS

During the spring and summer of 2022, Russia chose to significantly reduce its gas supplies to Europe. Natural gas is still scarce in Europe and will remain so until Europe finds alternative suppliers, reduces its consumption and establishes new energy sources. These are all steps in a very large transition process, but even during 2023, Russia will likely be incapable of selling much of the gas from its fields at Yamal and in Western Siberia.

As a result, it will become increasingly difficult for Russia to export its gas, in particular, but probably also its oil. Demand has dropped for Russian oil on the global energy markets due to the Western sanctions triggered by the invasion of Ukraine. Consequently, Russia has been forced to offer large discounts on its oil over the past year.

At the same time, the energy exporting countries in the Middle East and North Africa have solidified their bargaining position vis-à-vis Europe, a position that will remain solid at least in the next few years. Europe will be forced to buy more oil and gas from the region, especially from countries such as Qatar, Saudi Arabia and Algeria. However, this new demand will also add to the conflict potential in the region.

In the longer term, the impact of the war in Ukraine on the Middle East region is more uncertain, as the invasion of Ukraine has also fuelled more investments in non-fossil energy sources in Europe as well as the United States.

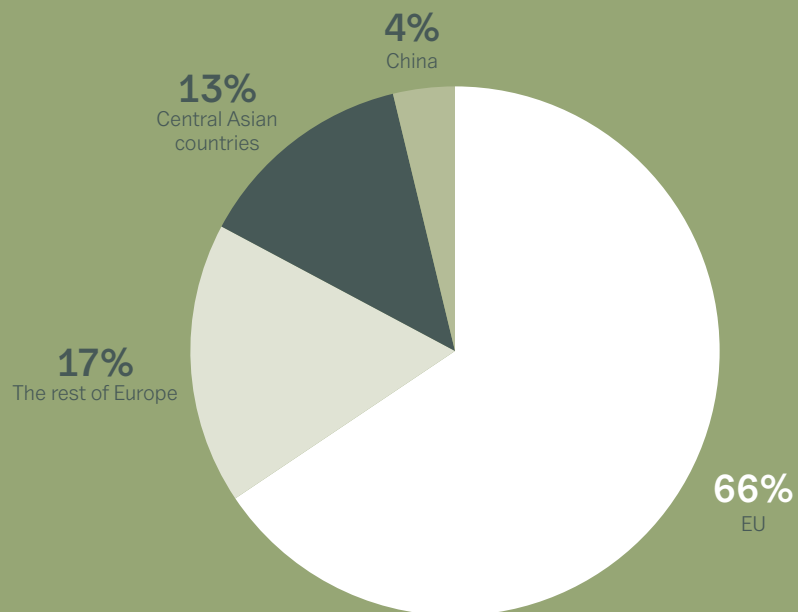
As the world's largest importer of energy, China has a strong interest in keeping energy prices at a low level. China's negotiation position vis-à-vis Russia has been significantly strengthened as a result of Russia's problems on the European market. A likely outcome is that China will be able to negotiate better deals with Russia when it comes to new agreements on gas supply and other energy cooperation initiatives.

China will not, however, allow itself to become dependent on Russian gas, as Russia would be able to use this dependence as leverage in the same way as it has used energy supply as a weapon in its foreign policy towards Europe.

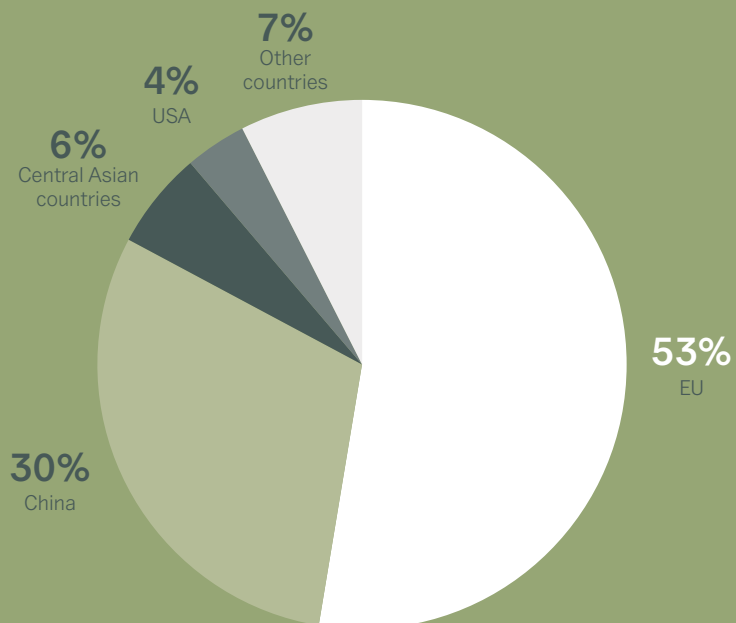
While the United States is the world's largest producer of natural gas, it also consumes approx. 90% of its natural gas production domestically. Europe has already purchased significantly more liquid natural gas from the United States than it did prior to the invasion.

## IN 2021, RUSSIA SOLD MOST OF ITS GAS AND OIL TO EUROPE

### RUSSIAN PIPELINE GAS EXPORTS IN 2021, as distributed by countries



### RUSSIAN OIL EXPORTS IN 2021, as distributed by countries



Source: BP Statistical Review of World Energy 2022.

# RUSSIA

## IN LONG-TERM CONFLICT WITH THE WEST

A blurred background image showing a Russian military vehicle, possibly an armored personnel carrier, with a prominent red star emblem on its side. Several soldiers in dark uniforms are visible on top of the vehicle. The image is out of focus, emphasizing the text in the foreground.

Russia's war against Ukraine has reshaped the security environment in Europe and has given it characteristics that are reminiscent of the Cold War. The war in Ukraine will highly likely drag on and will become the centre of a protracted conflict between Russia on the one side and the United States, the other NATO member states, and the EU countries on the other. This will also increase the level of tension in Denmark's vicinity. Russia will be willing to escalate the conflict with the West to just below the threshold of direct military conflict. Denmark will thus be facing a new threat environment in which former clear boundaries between peace, crisis and war are blurred and overlaps will occur.





A soldier from the Russian National Guard in front of an armoured vehicle.  
Oleg Elkov/Alamy Stock Photo

■ Russia's continued war against Ukraine and annexation of parts of the country demonstrate that President Putin is determined to continue the current course despite his failure to achieve his strategic objectives during the initial phase of the war. Though Russia's objectives in the war remain unchanged, its immediate objective, in all likelihood, is to maintain and consolidate control over the annexed regions and at a later point to continue the invasion and gain control over the rest of Ukraine.

Russia is conducting a war of attrition, using military mobilization, superior firepower and attacks on infrastructure and civilian targets in an attempt to wear down the Ukrainian forces and the will of the Ukrainian people.

In this way, Russia wants to force Ukraine into accepting peace on Russia's terms. According to Russia's terms, Ukraine must recognize the areas currently occupied and annexed by Russia as part of Russia's territory, and the rest of Ukraine must accept the status of a non-aligned state under Russia's dominance.

It is highly unlikely that either party will be able to force the other into ending the war over the course of the winter 2022-2023, raising the likelihood of a protracted war.

The combat morale of the Russian forces is lower than that of the Ukrainian forces, making the Russian forces more vulnerable in a protracted conflict. However, Russia can draw on its large personnel reserves and will likely, at some point, mobilize additional personnel reserves and convert parts of the society and production capacity to deal with wartime conditions.

However, it is uncertain whether further mobilization efforts will be sufficient to sustain a war of attrition for a long time.

It is highly likely that Russia has a long-term ambition to incorporate other parts of the post-Soviet space into its sphere of influence as well. Finally, it is part of Russia's long-term strategic ambition to have NATO military forces and infrastructure removed from areas close to Russia's borders. Russia will hold on to these ambitions, irrespective of the fact that NATO has reacted to the war by strengthening its military preparedness close to Russia, and that Sweden and Finland are about to join NATO.

### **Russia could escalate the war in response to a perceived threat to its strategic core interests in Ukraine**

Russia will continuously attempt to regain the initiative by escalating the conflict militarily, including by deploying more mobilized forces and intensifying its attacks on Ukrainian military and civilian infrastructure and densely populated areas.

It is possible that Russia would regard any Ukrainian success in taking back very large parts of the annexed territories as a threat to its strategic core interests and, ultimately, its existence. If this were to be the case, the risk increases that Russia would conclude that the use of tactical nuclear weapons is the only remaining option to avoid defeat. Russia would likely have a similar threat perception if NATO member states were to engage directly in military combat against Russia on Ukrainian territory. So far, though, Russia has chosen to withdraw from the parts of the annexed territories that it was unable to defend militarily rather than escalate to the use of nuclear weapons.



Russia regards Sweden's and Finland's expected NATO membership as a serious strategic challenge, as it will weaken Russia's military position in the Baltic Sea region.



It is highly unlikely that Russia's leadership has the intent to provoke a direct military conflict with NATO. This could change, however, if Russia's leadership were to conclude that NATO's military actions constitute a threat to Russia's strategic core interests.

Russia's annexation of the occupied areas in Ukraine has opened up the risk that Russia could reach the conclusion that the West's donation of weapons to Ukraine constitutes a de facto threat to Russia's territorial integrity. Should Russia decide to use military force against NATO member states, Russia would highly likely target logistic infrastructure in a country that borders Ukraine and whose infrastructure is used for transport of military supplies to Ukraine. In such a scenario, though, it is less likely that Russia's initial response would be to launch a decisive and direct military attack. Rather, Russia's first reaction would likely be to launch more limited operations, such as sabotage operations and cyber attacks.

In Russia's top-down decision-making process, it is Putin alone who decides when Russia's strategic core interests, and ultimately Russia's existence, are threatened. This increases the risk that Russia, in its confrontation with the West, might react more strongly than expected and might possibly also further escalate militarily. There is also a risk that lower levels in Russia's decision-making hierarchy could misinterpret and overreact to NATO member states' military activities and in this way unwittingly provoke an escalating crisis.

### **Sweden's and Finland's expected NATO membership changes the strategic environment in the Baltic Sea region**

Russia's war in Ukraine impacts the strategic environment in the Baltic Sea region where relations between Russia and its neighbours have deteriorated significantly. In the coming years, Russia will become increasingly threatening and aggressive both in its political behaviour and rhetoric and in its military posture.

Russia regards Sweden's and Finland's expected NATO membership as a serious strategic challenge, as it will weaken Russia's military position in the Baltic Sea region. In addition, Russia will also regard Finland's admission into NATO as a threat to Russia's position in the Arctic.

Russia will highly likely react to Sweden's and Finland's NATO membership by strengthening its permanent military presence in the north-western part of mainland Russia and in the Baltic Sea region. At the same time, Russia will likely strengthen its nuclear deterrent and increase its threat rhetoric to the point where it will threaten to direct nuclear weapons against targets in Sweden and Finland.

However, as long as large parts of Russia's armed forces are engaged in Ukraine, it will be difficult for Russia to launch a large coordinated military offensive against the Baltic countries. In addition, Sweden's and Finland's NATO membership will complicate Russia's ability to reinforce and defend the Kaliningrad Region in the event of a military conflict with NATO.

Russia's military capabilities in the Baltic Sea region remain significant, and Russia will likely continue to demonstrate its military strength to NATO as part of its confrontational posture against the alliance. It is likely that Russia's future military activities in the Baltic Sea region will become more unpredictable, and that the role of hybrid means will increase in Russia's policy in the region. However, Russia will still attempt to prevent its military and hybrid activities from creating an escalation that could be difficult to control.

## THE SUWALKI CORRIDOR

Belarus is Russia's gateway to the Suwalki Corridor, which Russia could attempt to use in its efforts to reinforce, defend and help the Kaliningrad Region in the event of a military conflict with NATO.

■ NATO member states



### **Belarus's strategic importance is on the rise for Russia in the Baltic Sea region**

Belarus would play a decisive role in Russia's ability to enforce and sustain its sovereignty in the Kaliningrad region in the event of an armed conflict between Russia and NATO. In addition, with its geographical location bordering large stretches of Ukraine's northern border, Belarus constitutes a buffer zone for Russia against Poland and Lithuania.

Russia will continue its pressure for the political and economic integration of Belarus into the Union State, established by the two countries in 1999. Belarus will remain cautious in complying with Russia's demand, though it will likely only be able to postpone, not prevent, closer integration with Russia, including military integration.

Russia will thus work for even closer integration of the Belarusian military forces into the Russian armed forces. Russia will also put sustained pressure on Belarus to accept the permanent deployment of Russian military forces in Belarus, including deployment of missile systems that can be armed with nuclear warheads. Such deployments would allow Russia to strengthen its military capabilities to the point at which it would be able to threaten targets in NATO member states, including the land corridor between Poland and Lithuania, the so-called Suwalki Corridor, separating the Kaliningrad region and Belarus.

The Suwalki Corridor would in all likelihood come to play a significant role in the initial phases of a direct military conflict between Russia and NATO. This is due to its geographical location between Belarus and the Kaliningrad region and the fact that Sweden's and Finland's expected NATO membership will increase the vulnerability of Russia's ability to supply the Kaliningrad region by air and sea via the Baltic Sea.

### **Russia will use hybrid means to weaken and divide the West**

Regardless of the outcome of the war, Ukraine will remain at the centre of a protracted strategic conflict between Russia on the one side and the United States, the other NATO member states and the EU member states on the other. In this situation, Russia will still have the strategic ambitions of securing spheres of

interest in the post-Soviet space, of weakening the global influence of the West, and of undermining a rules-based international world order.

Consequently, Russia will turn its back on cooperation with Western states. Russia will, however, strive to keep its political and diplomatic contacts and lines of communication to Western countries open.

Russia will use a range of offensive means against the Western countries in order to erode their perception of a clear distinction between peace, crisis and war. In this way, Russia will try to create fear and insecurity in the Western countries to undermine their will and ability to stand against Russia's policy and behaviour. A long-term goal for Russia will also be to create discord between the United States and its allies, and between the European NATO members and EU member states.

In the years to come, Russia will particularly try to weaken the unity among the European countries by reducing most of its gas export to Europe. This will contribute to growing inflation in Europe and increasing economic insecurity. Russia likely expects that this strategy will generate political pressure in several European countries to reconsider the EU's sanctions regime against Russia and the EU's support for Ukraine. In just a few years, however, the Russian gas weapon will likely have lost some of its impact, as European countries are finding alternatives to Russian gas.



Russia will use a range of offensive means against the Western countries in order to erode their perception of a clear distinction between peace, crisis and war.

## RUSSIA USES HYBRID WARFARE

The term hybrid warfare is commonly used to describe how a state actor can use a number of offensive means to achieve its foreign policy and strategic objectives without having to use direct military power. There is no clear and agreed Western definition of hybrid warfare, and the exact meaning of the term is often subject to discussion.

Russia calls hybrid warfare “non-linear war” as opposed to “linear war”, which is a direct military conflict between two states. Russia also has no fixed definition of “non-linear war”, for instance in the form of a written doctrine, but has, for years, confronted the West using a number of means that combine to give an impression of Russia’s hybrid warfare.

Russia’s intention in using hybrid means is to stress decision-makers and populations in the targeted countries by creating uncertainty and confusion. In most cases, Russia tries to disguise its involvement in the incidents in order to complicate a united Western response to Russia.

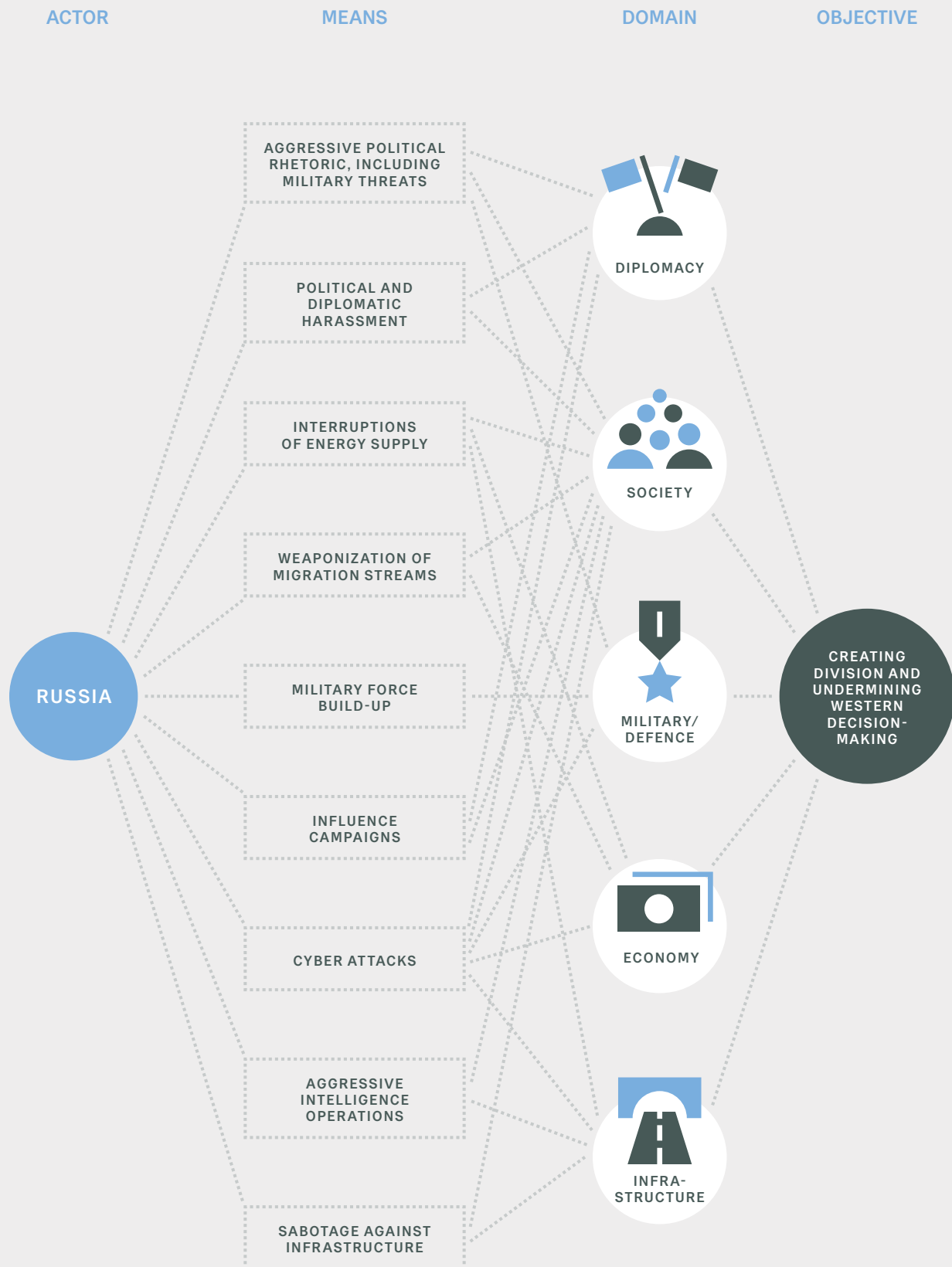
Finally, Russia reinforces its hybrid warfare with military threats and build-up of military forces, in particular in the post-Soviet space, with the purpose of amplifying the pressure on the target country. As an ultimate resort, military forces can be employed directly against the target country once the hybrid means have weakened the resolve and resilience of the target country’s decision-makers and population.

As a result of Russia’s need to disguise its role in the hybrid activities, Russia’s intelligence services often play a major role in their execution. The role of the intelligence services in this context is also due to their access to special capabilities that make them ideally suited for hybrid activities such as cyber attacks, sabotage operations and influence campaigns.

In recent years, Russia has directed several influence campaigns and cyber attacks against targets in the West. Russia tailors its influence campaigns to their exact purposes, which may range from influencing the outcome of an election to quelling international criticism of Russia. The Russian influence campaigns are coordinated by Russia’s leadership, and, besides the intelligence services, other Russian authorities, media platforms and private companies participate in the activities.

Cyber attacks can form part of such influence campaigns, with methods such as hack-and-leak attacks used to influence targets. Cyber attacks are also used to spread uncertainty and confusion. To illustrate, in the weeks leading up to the invasion in February 2022, Ukrainian authorities were targeted in several cyber attacks, with anti-Ukrainian messages being posted on their websites in some of the attacks.

In addition, destructive cyber attacks can turn into something akin to sabotage when they destroy or disrupt the running of critical infrastructure, etc.



### **Russia's closed decision-making process increases risk of miscalculations**

The war in Ukraine has shown how decision-making in Russia's top leadership carries a great risk of miscalculations and erroneous decisions.

Putin is the sole decision-maker when it comes to Russia's foreign and security policy. Putin is surrounded by a narrow circle of decision-makers and advisers who echo and amplify his perception of reality, and the war in Ukraine has likely served to reinforce these tendencies.

Putin thus likely decided to invade Ukraine based on a misconstrued perception of the political situation in Ukraine, its resilience, and the West's willingness to rally in a quick and unified response. These miscalculations were among the reasons that prevented Russia's armed forces from planning and executing a well-prepared and coordinated military operation.

Putin's decision to annex several parts of Ukraine and to initiate a partial mobilization was likely an offensive reaction to Ukrainian successes on the battlefield. However, as a result of Putin's decision, Russia now finds itself in a situation in which it lacks the military means to retain control over parts of the annexed territories, let alone to gain control over all the territories it alleges to have annexed.

Russia's top-down political decision-making process likely also limits the ability of the military leadership to make timely military decisions.

At the same time, though, the decision-making process enables Russia to pursue its strategic objectives patiently over time without involving public opinion in its deliberations and decisions. This is also the case in relation to Ukraine and Russia's confrontational course towards the West.

### **Russia's foreign policy takes on stronger anti-Western ideological dimension**

Russia's confrontational policy towards the West is fuelled by a strong anti-Western world view that will continue to influence the way Russia pursues its foreign policy objectives. This world view will further reinforce the view among Russia's leadership that Russia is in a state of siege. It will also increase the risk that Russia's leadership will take political and military initiatives against the West on a partially distorted basis.

While Russia has long used its national and conservative values as hallmarks in its ideological distancing from the West, it has, during the war in Ukraine, increased its anti-Western rhetoric to the point where Russia now portrays the West's policy as motivated by a historic hatred of Russia.

This will make it increasingly difficult for Russia and the West to find common ground on the causes and content of key security issues. Though this is particularly the case in relation to the war in Ukraine, it will also significantly complicate a dialogue between Russia and the West on a number of other international issues.

Russia will also use its anti-Western world view in its efforts to present itself as an attractive cooperation partner to non-Western countries. This will be a way for Russia to try to prevent non-Western countries from uniting with Western policies and sanctions against Russia to any significant extent.

### **Russia is willing to use military power to achieve its strategic objectives**

Russia's war against Ukraine is yet another example of Russia's willingness to accept significant risks and its low threshold for use of military power in order to achieve its strategic objectives. Russia has previously attacked Georgia in 2008 and Ukraine in 2014, and Russia has intervened militarily in Syria since 2015.

Russia's armed forces will remain the backbone of the country's role as a great power and the key instrument in Russia's efforts to enforce national strategic interests. However, a protracted war in Ukraine could lock many of Russia's conventional forces along the front in Ukraine.

## RUSSIA'S GLOBAL MILITARY ACTIVITIES

The purposes of Russia's military activities reflect its perception of threat, with the United States and NATO posing the main threat to its great power ambitions.



### THE ARCTIC

- Limit NATO presence

### THE NORTH ATLANTIC OCEAN

- Control NATO movements into the Arctic

### THE BALTIC SEA REGION

- Restore Russia's conventional combat power
- Challenge NATO's freedom of manoeuvre and curb NATO's command and control capabilities

### THE ATLANTIC OCEAN

- Disrupt US and Canadian reinforcements to Europe

### THE BLACK SEA REGION

- Prevent NATO operations

### THE MEDITERRANEAN/AFRICA

- Challenge NATO capabilities and influence

Russia, however, still has significant military assets, including offensive military capabilities such as long-range missile systems, that can also be directed against targets outside Ukraine, including against targets deep into European territory.

Russia will highly likely give strong priority to restoring its military capabilities to their pre-invasion level of strength and quality. It will still be Russia's ambition that its conventional forces should be capable of fighting a war on equal terms with NATO forces in the western border areas of Russia. However, in the short and medium term – i.e. within the next five years – it will be very difficult for Russia to replace the loss of modern and technologically advanced equipment and replenish the units with sufficiently qualified and professional personnel.

To fill this gap, Russia has already transferred a large number of military units and their equipment from the eastern to the western part of the country. In addition, Russia will be able to draw on its strategic arms stockpiles and personnel reserves to replenish its conventional forces. Within a limited number of years, these forces will be able to constitute a threat to Russia's neighbouring countries, including NATO staging areas for reinforcements and NATO's freedom of manoeuvre in, among other places, the Baltic Sea region. However, the key component of these forces will be ageing but functioning equipment, and conscripts or mobilized troops.

### **Russia will give its nuclear deterrence a bigger role**

Russia will give its nuclear capabilities a more prominent role in its deterrence of the West. Putin has made thinly veiled threats about potential use of Russia's nuclear weapons. However, Putin has been ambiguous and vague as to what would constitute a crossing of Russia's red lines. Putin is likely deliberately trying to create confusion among Western decision-makers, opinion-formers and populations in order to weaken Western unity and consensus on reactions against Russia. In addition, Putin likely intends to signal that he is prepared to escalate the war to a nuclear level if all other options of escalation are exhausted.

Russia's official nuclear doctrine allows deployment of nuclear weapons against a conventional military threat if the existence of the Russian state is threatened. This option is highly likely intended to compensate for the fact that Russia would be inferior to NATO in a protracted conventional military conflict.

Russia's top-down decision-making process gives Putin freedom to interpret or completely disregard Russia's official nuclear doctrine. It is thus possible for Putin to escalate a conflict to the nuclear level in an attempt to force a negotiated solution to the conflict that would be acceptable to Russia. However, the international costs to Russia would be severe, and the international reactions unpredictable.



Russia's political course will highly likely not change in the long term.



### **Russia aims to destabilize the West through influence operations**

Russia will continue its efforts to influence democratic processes in Western countries and to propagate pro-Russian messages to Western populations.

However, Russia's ability to conduct influence operations against Western countries has likely been reduced due to Russia's isolation from the Western countries and the increased focus of Western intelligence services on pro-Russian activities in their home countries.

As a consequence, it is highly likely that Russia will increasingly use international companies and organizations as well as opinion-makers to propagate its messages. Similarly, Russia will step up the involvement of the Russian intelligence services and the use of clandestine methods in its influence activities.

Russia has also intensified its influence efforts against non-Western countries to keep them from joining Western countries in condemning the war in Ukraine. In addition, Russia has increased its influence activities over its own population and ethnic Russian populations outside of Russia's borders to secure their continued support for the war.

### **Putin will likely remain in power**

Russia's political course will highly likely not change in the long term, i.e. in a 10-year perspective, and President Putin will likely remain in power in the short to medium term.

It is likely that the continued war and the toll it will take on the Russian civilian population will lead to increasing scepticism and dissatisfaction with the country's political leadership among parts of the Russian population. However, it is highly unlikely in the short to medium term that a civilian opposition will emerge outside the power elite that is strong enough to threaten Putin and the power elite.

Russia's ruling elites still support Putin and also support the war in Ukraine. However, the strain of the war on Russia's armed forces and civilian society could trigger unrest among the ruling elites, and emerging cracks in their unity, although this development is less likely. Still, even if instability in Russia's leadership were to result in a change of president, it is highly unlikely that this would lead to a major shift in the country's political course. When the time comes, Putin's successor will thus in all likelihood come from his inner circle of "silokivi", a term which is used to describe representatives of the security and intelligence services and other power bodies.

### **RUSSIA'S DOCTRINES FOR THE USE OF NUCLEAR WEAPONS**

The Russian 2014 military doctrine and the 2020 doctrine on the use of nuclear weapons outline four circumstances under which Russia might use nuclear weapons:

- In case of credible information on a launch of ballistic missiles against the territory of the Russian Federation and/or its allies.
- Use of nuclear weapons or other types of weapons of mass destruction by an adversary against the Russian Federation and/or its allies.
- Actions by an adversary directed against critical government or military objects whose destruction would undermine Russia's nuclear forces' second strike capability.
- Aggression against the Russian Federation with the use of conventional weapons threatening the very existence of the state.

The “siloviki” and their power structure have become significantly more willing to exercise their power over the Russian society, and this has resulted in an increasingly autocratic and repressive regime. The authorities crack down relentlessly on political activities that go against the leadership’s official line.

Using the country’s state-controlled media as its mouthpiece, Russia’s leadership is waging a strongly anti-Western propaganda campaign aimed at justifying the war. The propaganda alleges that the war in Ukraine was started by the West, just as the West is supposed to have installed a neo-Nazi regime in Ukraine as a tool in its fight against Russia. This propaganda is accepted by broad segments of the Russian population that are already supportive of the war and the anti-Western world view.

The Western sanctions and the widespread self-sanctioning by Western companies have already proved very detrimental to the Russian economy. In addition, the measures imposed by the Russian authorities on foreign companies have greatly undermined the faith in Russia as an attractive climate for investments, which will cause decline in Russian economic output and activities in the years to come. Combined, these factors will push Russia towards a less market-based economy, more state control and greater isolation from the world economy.

Russia will in all likelihood continue to prioritize funding of its armed forces and other power structures over civilian welfare. Though the economic recession will thus negatively impact the economic conditions of the Russian population in the years to come, it is less likely that this will provoke political and social unrest on a scale that has the potential to threaten Putin and the ruling elites.

Revenues from export of oil, oil products and gas extensively help to cushion the blows to the Russian economy. However, conditions for Russian energy exports are becoming less favourable as European countries reduce their dependence on Russian energy.

The Western sanctions also have a detrimental effect on the Russian production system, including its ability to produce modern weapons systems. Russia is thus constantly looking for ways to bypass the sanctions on, for instance, technology. Russia’s leadership is also trying to prevent long-term damage to the economy by introducing national initiatives to cushion the impact of the sanctions. It is, however, less likely that such initiatives will be enough to broadly soften the impact of the sanctions on Russia.

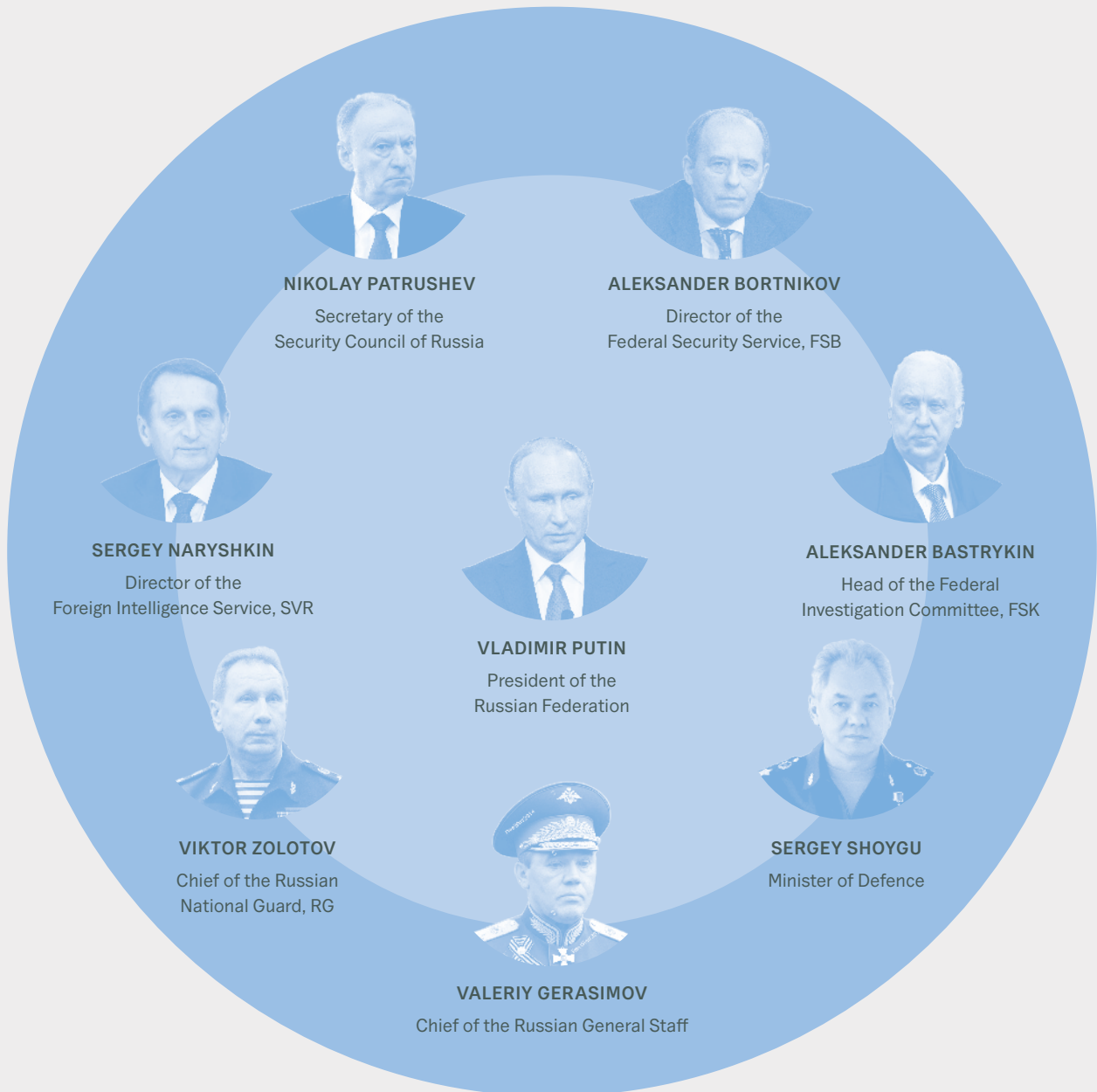


The Western sanctions and the widespread self-sanctioning by Western companies have already proved very detrimental to the Russian economy.

## WHO ARE THE “SILOVIKI”?

Even though the term “siloviki” can be used about all Russians with a background in the Russian power structure, it is mainly used to denote the heads of the Russian authorities that underpin the power of President Putin.

Key siloviki are:



All of the key “siloviki” are members of Russia’s Security Council. Together, the Security Council and the Russian Presidential Administration make up Putin’s key bodies of executive power.

## THEME INFLUENCE OPERATIONS

The term influence operations covers a diverse range of activities aimed at influencing populations and the decision processes of policy makers. Influence operations can be used by countries as instruments to create a climate favourable to their foreign policy strategies.

Russia constitutes the most serious challenge to the West in terms of influence operations. Russia, in particular, uses influence operations to increase discord among NATO member states and EU member states in order to undermine the West's ability to pursue a united policy towards Russia.

China's influence activities are mainly focused on projecting an image of China as a responsible great power and on influencing international opinions on high-priority issues such as Taiwan, Hong Kong, the Xinjiang province and Tibet. China also has the capabilities to launch influence campaigns on a scale equivalent to Russian operations involving deliberate use of disinformation and fake profiles.

Influence campaigns take on different forms depending on their specific purposes.

Some campaigns are long-term and have the aim of spreading messages to parts of the population in a specific country or more broadly to the international community. Messages can be disseminated through, for instance, networks of Western politicians or opinion makers, with some being aware of their role in the campaigns while others are not.

Russia, in particular, also conducts single-issue campaigns, typically in connection with elections in foreign countries. One of the most notorious examples is the hack-and-leak attack against the Democratic National Committee in connection with the 2016 US presidential election. US authorities accused Russia of the attack.

Finally, Russia and China also conduct ad hoc operations, acting on sudden opportunities to promote their own cause or avert international criticism. Russia, for example, used state-controlled media platforms to deliberately spread false information about the killing of civilians in Bucha, near Kyiv, in April 2022.

In connection with the COVID-19 pandemic, Chinese authorities tried to promote the false narrative that the virus had originated in US laboratories in former Soviet countries, echoing Russian disinformation.

Both Russia and China view their respective national diasporas as key targets of influence. Countries with large diasporas will thus be more prone to influence activities.

The Communist Party also supports, for instance, organizations for researchers and students of Chinese origin with the intent to control them and use them as tools of dissemination for the party's world view. For its part, Russia tries to use Russian-speaking minorities in, for instance, the Baltic countries to influence the countries' policies towards Russia.

Russian and possibly also Chinese intelligence services play a key part in planning and executing the influence campaigns. The services, and other actors engaged in influence activities, constantly refine their methods, sophisticating the use of fake accounts to disseminate false news stories, etc. However, they also still rely on traditional methods such as personal contacts with Western decision-makers and support for political parties in the promotion of their national interests.

## PURPOSE



## DOMAIN



### THE INTERNET



### THE PHYSICAL WORLD

## MEANS





## THEME ESPIONAGE

Many states use espionage as a means to garner sensitive information about other countries. States use traditional methods of espionage tradecraft such as recruiting of sources and bugging of communication, just as they extensively use cyber espionage to fulfil their objectives. Though the methods may vary, their purpose is most often the same, namely the advancement of national political, economic and strategic interests, for instance within security and foreign policy issues and development of national industries and sectors.

Denmark, too, is a target of espionage conducted by foreign states, with Russia and China being particularly active in such activities. The espionage targets a wide range of fields, including strategic areas such as political decision-making processes and development of technologies, and information that could become operationally or tactically valuable in a military conflict, such as Denmark's military capabilities and critical infrastructure.

Espionage can be a way for countries such as Russia and China to obtain information about Danish foreign and security policy decisions in relation to the war in Ukraine and the cooperation in the EU and NATO.

The competition between the great powers also increases the threat from espionage against the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Foreign states spy on targets such as authorities, research, transportation and shipping in the Arctic. Due to, among other things, their roles in the Arctic, Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland will remain targets of espionage in the future.

### **Russia uses espionage in preparation for a possible conflict with NATO**

One of the key motivations behind Russia's espionage activities against Denmark is to prepare for a potential military conflict with NATO. Under such a scenario, Denmark would be tasked with supporting NATO's deployment of reinforcements to the conflict.

At the same time, Russia spies on the Danish industrial complex in a bid to close the gap on NATO's technological superiority, thus strengthening its own global position of power.

### **THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF THE ESPIONAGE THREAT TO DENMARK**

The threat from foreign state intelligence activities targeting Denmark is outlined in the Assessment of the espionage threat to Denmark, which is published by the Danish Security and Intelligence Service (PET).

In the 2022 assessment, the PET writes that the threat from foreign state intelligence activities in Denmark is specific and persistent.

The assessment outlines the threat from foreign state intelligence activities targeting Denmark, i.e. espionage, influence operations, harassment, attempts to illegally procure products, technology and knowledge and, in exceptional cases, outright assassination attempts.

*The Assessment of the espionage threat to Denmark can be found at the PET website:*  
**[www.pet.dk](http://www.pet.dk)**

Western reactions to the invasion of Ukraine have served to keep espionage at the top of Russia's priorities. Russia intends to employ its intelligence services to bypass the Western sanctions aimed at curbing Russia's efforts to develop military technological capabilities.

In addition, espionage can provide Russia with access to critical infrastructure that it can attempt to destroy or disrupt, including in the event of a serious crisis or war.

On 5 April 2022, Denmark expelled 15 Russian intelligence officers stationed at the Russian Embassy in Copenhagen. Operating under diplomatic cover, the intelligence officers carried out espionage on Danish territory. However, the expulsion of the intelligence officers will hardly put an end to Russian espionage against Denmark, as the Russian intelligence services had likely prepared for a potential deterioration of diplomatic relations with the West and for the possible expulsion of their intelligence officers working under diplomatic cover. Russia has likely switched to other methods of espionage to compensate for the expulsions.

### **Russian and Chinese cyber espionage constitutes a serious threat**

One of the subcategories of espionage is cyber espionage. As cyber espionage does not typically require physical proximity between the hacker and the target, it is less visible and risky than, for instance, human sources. In addition, targeted and successful cyber espionage can provide hackers with access to large amounts of sensitive information in one go.

Russia and China both have very strong cyber espionage capabilities and are still trying to use cyber espionage actively against Danish authorities and companies. As a result, both countries constitute a serious cyber threat to Denmark.

As the competition intensifies between state actors, rival states will increasingly try to steal information through espionage, in particular cyber espionage. Russia and China will thus likely work to further expand their cyber capabilities and employ them to, for instance, spy on Denmark.

Several regional actors, including in Asia, the Middle East and Latin America, are also engaged in cyber espionage. Though these actors mainly use their capabilities against rival states in their neighbouring regions, some of them also monitor individuals and organizations that are critical of the regimes or in other ways perceived as a threat.

### **WESTERN COUNTRIES ACCUSE CHINA OF CYBER ESPIONAGE**

Several Western countries have publicly accused China of cyber espionage in the hope that the accusations will serve as political leverage on China to stop its espionage activities:

In July 2022, Belgian authorities accused several Chinese hacker groups of having orchestrated cyber attacks on the Belgian defence and interior ministries.

In July 2022, British security service MI5 and the US FBI issued a joint statement warning authorities and the public against China's increasing use of cyber espionage.

Since 2014, US authorities have publicized several indictments describing specific examples of Chinese cyber espionage and naming Chinese citizens as responsible for the attacks.

## EUROPE, THE USA AND OTHER COUNTRIES

## RUSSIAN MISSILES CONTAIN WESTERN TECHNOLOGY

Many of Russia's advanced weapons systems, including long-range missile systems, contain high-tech components of Western origin imported despite export control regimes.

IMPORT OF TECHNOLOGICAL COMPONENTS FOR MILITARY PURPOSES TAKES PLACE TO SOME EXTENT DESPITE ATTEMPTS AT EXPORT CONTROL AND SANCTIONS

RUSSIA

SUPPLY OF MILITARY-GRADE DRONES

KAZAKHSTAN

PROLIFERATION OF SMALL ARMS, EXPLOSIVES, ETC. TO CRIMINALS IN EUROPE

UKRAINE

AGREEMENTS ON PRODUCTION OF TURKISH DRONES AND EXCHANGE OF MOTOR TECHNOLOGY

TURKEY

AGREEMENTS ON PRODUCTION OF TURKISH DRONES

IRAN

## PROLIFERATION OF DRONES FOR MILITARY PURPOSES

Turkey has allowed Ukraine and Kazakhstan to license produce Turkish drones. The agreement with Ukraine gives Turkey access to Ukrainian motor technology. Turkey needs access to this type of technology, as Western sanctions and restrictions on export licenses for parts like motors have made it difficult for Turkey to sell several of their other weapons systems to third countries.

## PROLIFERATION OF WEAPONS SYSTEMS

Iran exports military-grade drones, missile technology and "know-how" to several different state and non-state actors in the Middle East, including Yemen, Iraq, Lebanon and Syria.

EXPORT OF MISSILE AND DRONE TECHNOLOGY

STATE AND NON-STATE REGIONAL ACTORS

## THEME WEAPONS PROLIFERATION

More actors will gain access to modern weapons technologies, as they are made available by wars and armed conflicts, and because required technologies are becoming more widely accessible.

Western countries are finding it difficult to enforce sanctions and export control regimes for high-tech components that can be used for both military and civilian purposes. Such components include micro-chips as well as sensor and drone technologies. Many of the missiles used by Russia in the war against Ukraine have shown to contain high-tech components of Western origin that have been included in the export ban to Russia's military industry. It is possible that countries such as Iran will assist Russia in obtaining components for or complete advanced weapons systems such as missiles or air-defence systems.

Not since the war in the Balkans in the 1990s have so many weapons, including modern and Western-produced types, been in circulation and use in a war in Europe as in the war in Ukraine. Russia's war against Ukraine thus also carries the risk of unintentional spreading of Western modern weapons systems originally donated to Ukraine.

Proliferation of small arms and other technologies from the war in Ukraine could pose security challenges in Europe in the long term. Such arms and technologies include handguns, explosives, man-portable anti-aircraft missiles, and anti-tank weapons. So far, though, there are only examples of such equipment being spread after falling into the hands of Russian forces.

Criminal networks in and near Europe will likely try to procure weapons from the war with the purpose of reselling them. This could increase the supply of weapons sold via the criminal markets in and near Europe, potentially giving terrorists access to more and newer types of weapons.

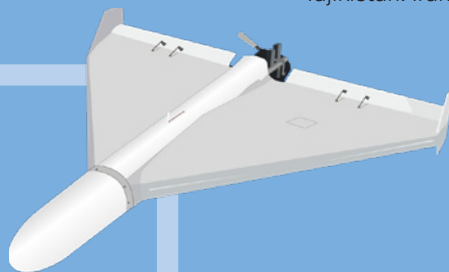
There is a strong global interest in armed drones. This is also the case in developing countries, as the drones are relatively cheap, which further contributes to the proliferation of weapons. Turkey, among others, has responded to the demand and is increasing its export of armed drones. Turkey is also trying to expand its sales of drones, in particular the Bayraktar TB2 drone, to countries in Central Asia, Europe, the Middle East and Africa. It is highly unlikely that such sales will be conditioned by guarantees of non-proliferation of the kind Western countries typically impose.

Iran is providing drones for Russia's war in Ukraine, and Iran will likely continue assisting regional state and non-state actors, in particular in the Middle East, in procuring or producing military drones. In recent years, Iran has played a decisive part in setting up drone factories in countries such as Yemen, Venezuela and Tajikistan. Iran and its partners will increasingly use

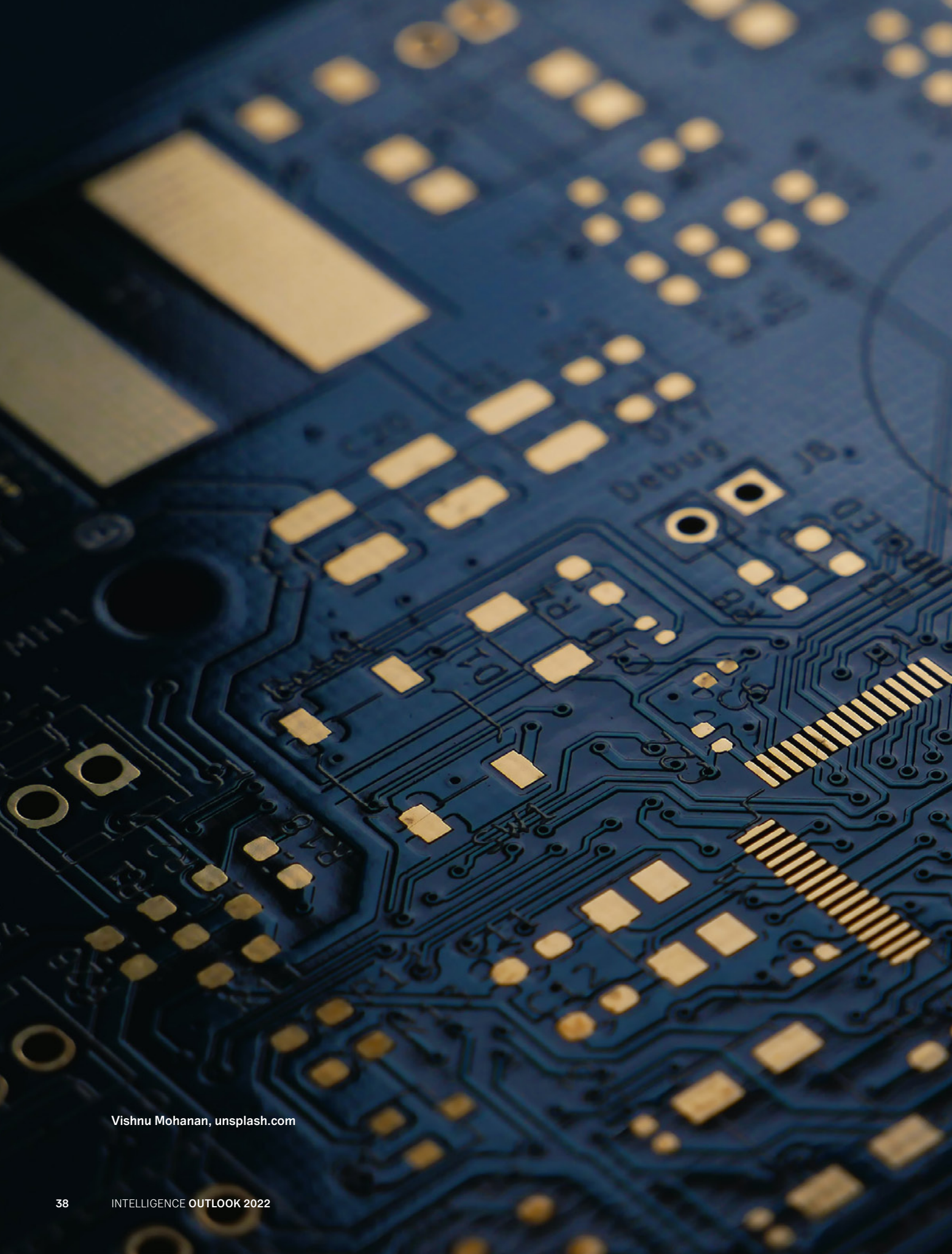
drones as attack weapons, as they are flexible, affordable and difficult to trace. This will increasingly threaten and degrade the ability of Western forces to operate in the region.

### IRAN'S SHAHED 136 DRONE

Iran's supplies to Russia include "kamikaze drones", which are cheap but effective one-way attack drones.







Vishnu Mohanan, unsplash.com



# THE CYBER THREAT

## THE CONSEQUENCES WILL WORSEN

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Though different in nature and impact, cyber crime and cyber espionage both pose a serious threat to Danish society. The consequences of cyber attacks will likely grow more serious in the future. Cyber activists interfere in international conflicts, potentially contributing to the worsening of the conflicts.



■ The most serious cyber threats to Denmark emanate from Russian and Chinese cyber espionage and from cyber crime committed by organized foreign criminal networks.

For the victims, the consequences of cyber crime are often visible and tangible. Some criminals even try to use the threat of public exposure to add pressure on the victims to pay ransom. While ransomware attacks for extortion were previously something that took place between victims and perpetrators out of the public eye, criminal networks now often publicly list their victims on leak sites. Also, threats to leak sensitive information stolen in connection with ransomware attacks are a common attack technique.

#### THE ANNUAL ASSESSMENT OF THE CYBER THREAT AGAINST DENMARK

The cyber threat to Denmark is described in more detail in the Centre for Cyber Security's (CFCS's) annual national threat assessment. This assessment outlines in more detail the threat from cyber attacks that serve a wide range of purposes and the different nuances of the threats.

In the 2022 assessment, the CFCS sets the threat from cyber espionage and the threat from cyber crime at the highest threat level: **VERY HIGH**. These two threats are the most active cyber threats against Denmark.

The threat from cyber activism is set at the threat level **MEDIUM**, the reason being that Russia's invasion of Ukraine, in particular, has increased activity in cyber activist communities. The threat from destructive cyber attacks is set at the threat level **LOW** and the threat from cyber terrorism is set at the lowest level possible: **NONE**.

The assessment titled "*The cyber threat against Denmark*" is available in Danish and English at the CFCS website: [www.cfcs.dk](http://www.cfcs.dk)

Hackers engaging in cyber espionage, however, want to remain undetectable throughout the duration of the attack. Cyber espionage is often conducted by states with significant resources and capabilities. These states use their resources to gain access to sensitive and valuable information that Danish public authorities and private companies want to keep protected.

By remaining undetected, state-sponsored hackers are able to exploit compromised access points to acquire information for long periods of time. Even though the impact of cyber espionage is typically less visible compared to that of cyber crime, cyber espionage may have serious economic, diplomatic and security policy consequences for Danish society.

States not only use cyber espionage to gain access to sensitive and valuable information. Cyber espionage is also used in preparation of destructive cyber attacks, which could be launched in connection with an escalating crisis or war, as has been the case in Ukraine.

Destructive cyber attacks can carry very serious consequences, but states have so far been hesitant to use destructive cyber attacks outside of conflict areas.

#### The consequences of cyber attacks will likely worsen in the future

Continuous technological development and increased digitalization highlight society's vulnerability to cyber attacks. The increasing fusion of the digital and physical worlds will likely worsen and expand the consequences of successful cyber attacks launched by states and criminals.

In addition to the growing digitalization, other technological developments such as the increasing complexity of IT networks, the rising number of Internet-connected units, and increasingly complex supply chains contribute to the continuous and ever faster emergence of new vulnerabilities.

Today, state-sponsored hackers and cyber criminals are resourceful actors who will continue to develop their capabilities in the future. Both types of hackers are quick to exploit new vulnerabilities and attack vectors and come up with new attack techniques. However, technological developments may also help

improve cyber security as evidenced by the stronger data and network protection facilitated by the increased use of encryption and better access protection standards seen in recent years.

### **Cyber criminals are, by nature, opportunistic, apolitical and financially motivated**

Criminal hackers continue to bolster their capabilities due to the continued development, sharing and selling of hacking tools. At the same time, cyber criminals will continue to organize in a way mirroring traditional production companies, using specialized suppliers and division of labour to increase efficiency. Today, cyber crime has grown into a multi-billion industry and will remain so in the long term.

Consequently, cyber criminals will remain able to direct serious cyber attacks against private citizens, companies and public authorities in Denmark. Even though the techniques used will vary over time, their overarching purpose will be enrichment through different types of cyber attacks involving theft, fraud or extortion.

Most cyber criminal groups are motivated by financial gain and only rarely by ideology. They continually weigh the risks against the potential rewards of a particular attack or collaboration. Ransomware types, hacker forums, victims or collaborations that are considered too risky will be substituted with other activities.

### **Russia's invasion has not prompted a shift in the focus of cyber attacks from profit to politics**

When Russia invaded Ukraine in 2022, there was widespread concern that Russian criminal hackers would launch politically motivated cyber attacks in support of Russia. The criminal network behind the Conti ransomware therefore caused quite the stir in the IT security community when it declared support for the Russian government shortly after the Russian invasion. At the time, Conti was one of the most commonly used types of ransomware in the world.

The Conti network's pledge of support for Russia fuelled counter reactions in the criminal community, with several groups issuing statements that they were apolitical and refusing to take sides in the war. In addition, the source code of the Conti ransomware

was leaked, likely in response to the group's support for the Russian government. During the spring of 2022, the number of new Conti victims dropped, one reason being that the criminal network behind the Conti group engaged in a major restructuring of operations, shutting down some of its infrastructure.

The incident shows that even though several organized criminal hacker networks have roots in Russia and other former Soviet countries, they also cooperate across geographical borders. Consequently, political statements carry a risk of internal conflicts in the criminal community, which may weaken the scope for criminal hacker groups to cooperate and profit on cyber criminal activity.

### **Cyber activists interfere in international conflicts**

While criminal hackers are typically apolitical and conduct cyber attacks to enrich themselves, many cyber activists are willing to interfere in conflicts, including the war in Ukraine.

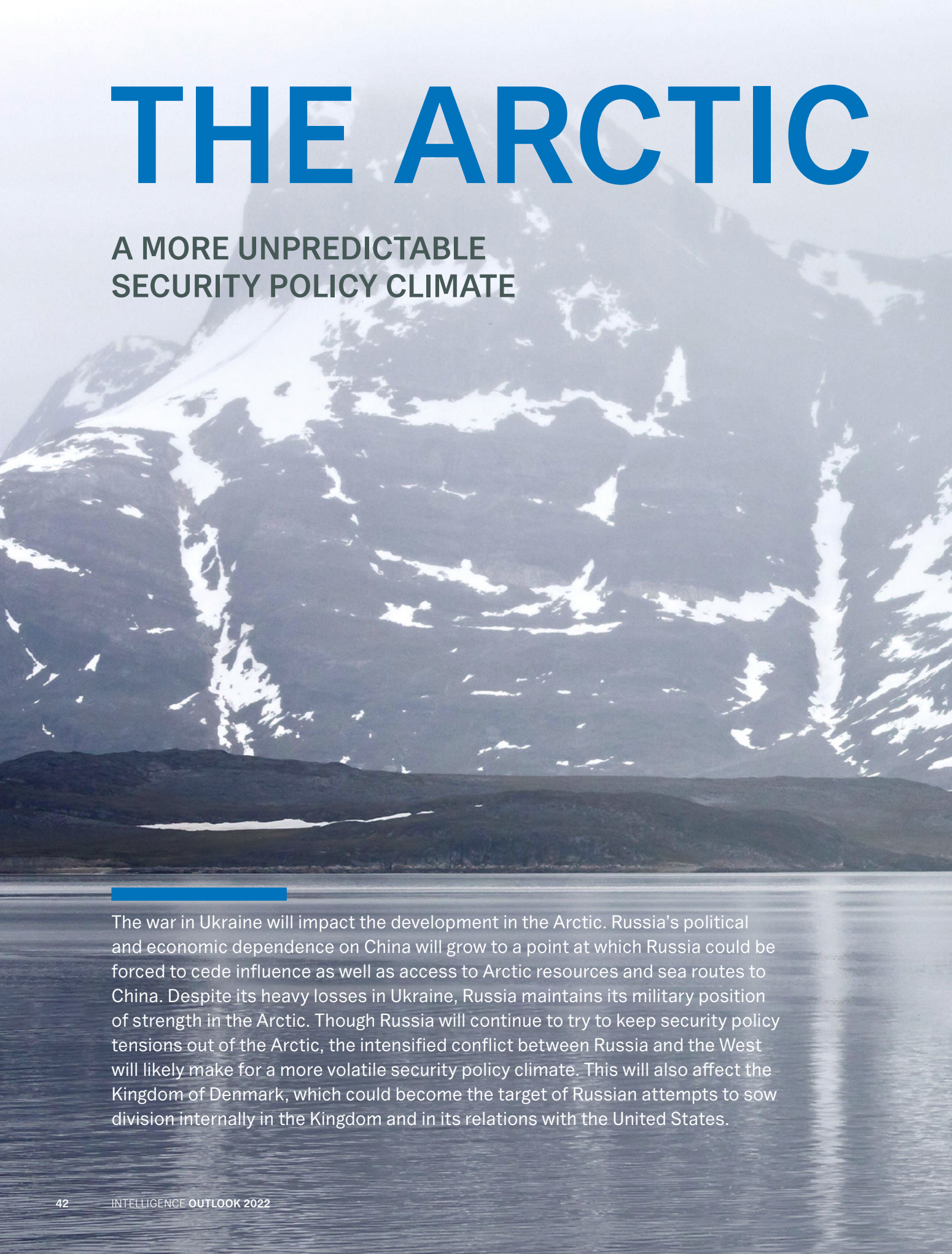
In the wake of the conflict, cyber activists on both sides have launched a large number of cyber attacks. Initially, most of the attacks were launched in direct response to the war, mainly targeting Russia, Ukraine and Belarus. Since then, cyber activist attacks have also targeted European NATO countries such as Norway, Lithuania, Romania, Estonia and the Czech Republic. Most of the attacks were short-term disruptive overload attacks.

Even though activists are considered non-state actors, there may be links between some activists and the authorities of different nations.

The potential affiliation between cyber activists and foreign states and the frequency of transnational cyber activist attacks create a grey zone that could contribute to the spreading and exacerbation of conflicts, for example if the attacks have a destructive effect or disrupt critical infrastructure.

# THE ARCTIC

## A MORE UNPREDICTABLE SECURITY POLICY CLIMATE



The war in Ukraine will impact the development in the Arctic. Russia's political and economic dependence on China will grow to a point at which Russia could be forced to cede influence as well as access to Arctic resources and sea routes to China. Despite its heavy losses in Ukraine, Russia maintains its military position of strength in the Arctic. Though Russia will continue to try to keep security policy tensions out of the Arctic, the intensified conflict between Russia and the West will likely make for a more volatile security policy climate. This will also affect the Kingdom of Denmark, which could become the target of Russian attempts to sow division internally in the Kingdom and in its relations with the United States.





Danish naval vessel off Greenland.  
NJphoto / Alamy Stock Photo

■ Tensions between Russia and the West will spill over into the Arctic and result in an increased military presence in the region. Russia will likely continue to try to keep the security policy tensions separate from Arctic issues, though doing so could become increasingly difficult. Russia's increasing economic and military isolation from the other Arctic states will deepen its dependence on China, making it harder for Russia to turn down increased cooperation with China. This will likely create a more volatile security policy climate in the Arctic, in turn further complicating the great power rivalry between Russia, China and the United States in the Arctic.

The war in Ukraine will not change Russia's strategic objectives in the Arctic, and the region will remain significant to Russia both economically and in terms of security policy, also in the long term. To Russia, the Arctic has largely been unaffected by the invasion of Ukraine, and the war has not fundamentally changed Russia's position as the leading military power in the region, nor has it changed the level of Russian military activities in the Arctic. The economic, political and military fallout from the war will, however, reduce Russia's chances of achieving its objectives in the region. In addition, the future NATO membership of Sweden and, in particular, Finland will impact Russia's perception of the threat in the Arctic.

#### **Russia's Arctic ambitions remain intact, but the game has changed**

Russia will continue its efforts to exploit the region's natural resources, to strengthen monitoring and control of its Arctic territory, to protect its position of military strength in the region and ensure its participation in decision-making processes and in the formation of rules in the Arctic. In addition, a significant number of Russia's ballistic missile submarines are based in the Arctic, and protecting them is a key priority for Russia, as the submarines are a core part of Russia's nuclear retaliatory capability.

The aggravated security policy tensions between Russia and the West could prompt increased Western focus on and military presence in the Arctic, which, in turn, could challenge Russia's role and position of military strength in the region. In addition, Swedish and, in particular, Finnish membership in NATO will serve to shift the military balance of power in the region.

The West has suspended Russia from international cooperation in the Arctic. Moreover, Russia is under a strict sanctions regime, restricting its access to loans and making it harder for Russia to attract foreign investments, expertise and technologies.

As a result, it is possible that Russia will start taking more offensive steps to secure its influence and interests in the region. Russia has the capabilities needed to carry out confrontational actions such as close flybys of Western naval vessels, mock attacks on Western ships and aircraft, strategic bomber flights near Western Arctic states or over the North Pole, and offensive intelligence operations.

Russia's chances of realizing its Arctic ambitions, for instance through attracting foreign investments and avoiding increased Western military presence, are better if the region is characterized by low tension. Consequently, Russia would highly likely seize on any opportunity to resume international cooperation in the Arctic. So far, Russia's reactions and rhetoric towards the diplomatic measures adopted by the West in the Arctic have been subdued. Russia still refers to the Arctic as an area of low tension and cooperation.

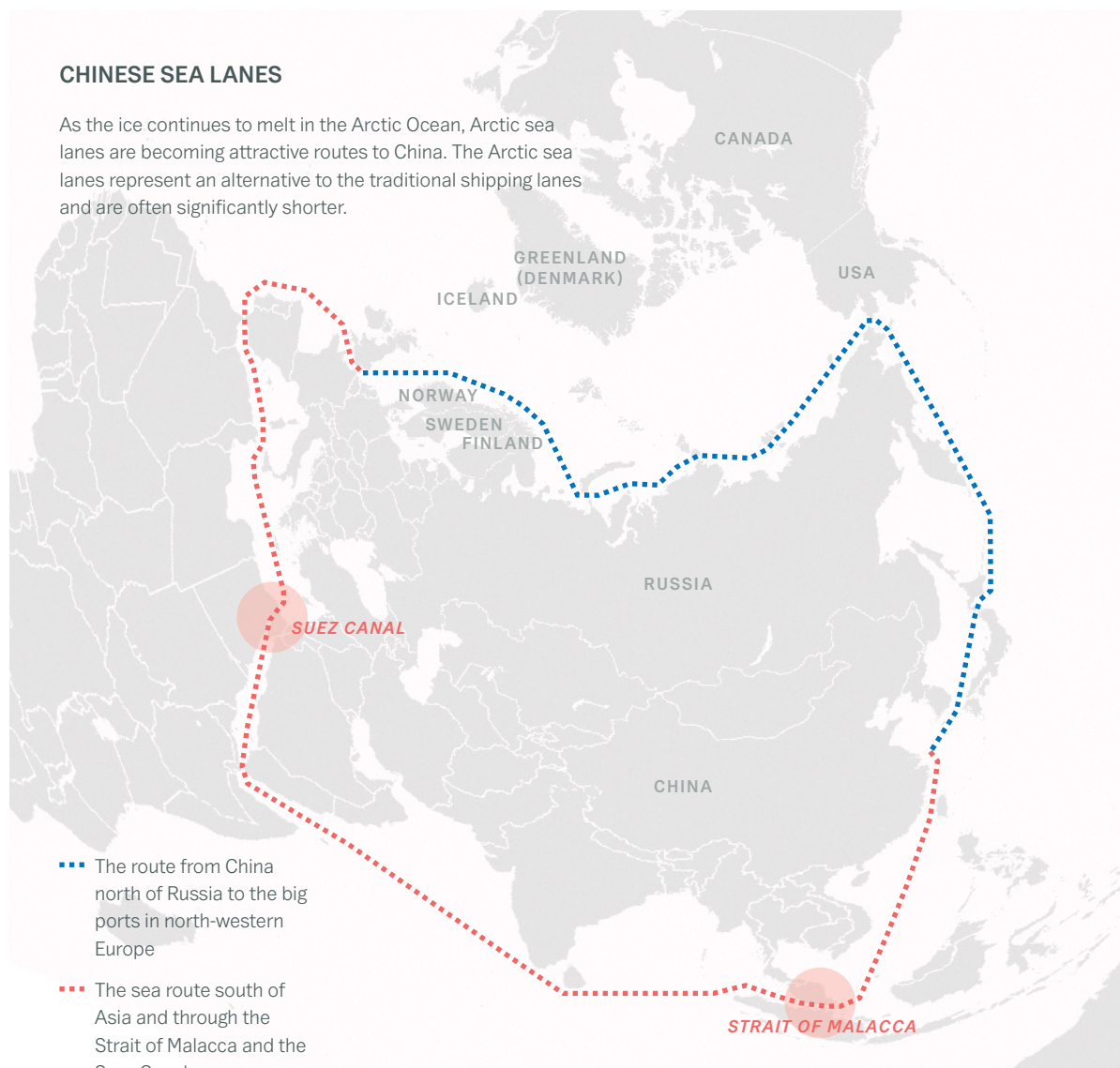
#### **China wants access to Arctic resources and sea routes**

China's interests in the Arctic are long-term and focused on gaining access to energy, raw materials and sea transport routes as well as on flagging China's status as a global great power. China's specific activities in the region remain limited, though, mainly because China does not have an Arctic coastline. This makes China dependent on cooperation with the Arctic coastal states in fields such as research or mere passage through ice-covered Arctic waters.



China is working to bolster its influence on Arctic matters to facilitate its interests, trying to increase its relevance by casting itself as a legitimate actor in the various Arctic cooperation forums. China is aware, however, that none of the Arctic states generally wants China to increase its influence on Arctic matters. China is thus trying to present itself as an attractive partner to the Arctic countries by offering technical expertise and financing of both commercial projects and research cooperation activities.

In addition to its commercial interests, China also has long-term military strategic interests in the Arctic, and China likely wants to establish a capability for military operations in the Arctic. As yet, though, China's military activities in the Arctic are limited to military participation in civilian-led research expeditions. These expeditions can serve purposes such as becoming more familiar with the Arctic region and supporting a future military presence.





### **The United States views the Arctic as a security challenge**

The United States still has the ambition to counter-balance Russia's military strength in the Arctic and to keep China's ambition for regional influence and economic traction in check. Russia's invasion of Ukraine has not changed the United States' stance on the Arctic as a security challenge, and the United States will continue its gradual build-up of capabilities in the Arctic and call on its allies to do the same. This will highly likely prompt the West to start expanding its military capabilities and presence in the Arctic, just as Russia will likely work to bolster its capabilities further.

### **Russian-Chinese relations in the Arctic will find a new balance**

Russia wants to preserve the special status enjoyed by the Arctic nations but must equally accept the influence that China gains through its role as investor as a necessary evil to promote economic development in the Russian Arctic. In addition, Russia has grown reliant on Chinese backing due to the Western economic and political pressure on Russia.

Even before the war in Ukraine, the tense relationship between Russia and the West had brought Russia and China closer together, including on Arctic matters. The cooperation between the two countries could become closer, and China's role as a buyer of Russian energy is growing.

Russia will strive to keep a tight rein on China's access to the Arctic and avoid growing economically dependent on China. However, a more isolated Russia could be forced to compromise and widen China's access to the Arctic. Potential compromises could be for Russia to allow Chinese investments in critical Arctic infrastructure or to give China more extensive right of passage along the Northern Sea Route in exchange for access to Chinese investments.

### **An isolated Russia aims to attract new economic partners to the Arctic**

Russia has made exploiting Arctic natural resources a key priority. Russia's economic problems will highly likely serve to amplify the region's economic importance to Russia.

Russia needs foreign investments and technologies to realize its long-term plan of exploiting the vast natural resources in the Russian Arctic.

Russia has publicly stated its aim to diversify foreign investments by attracting new economic partners to the Arctic. However, this strategy has been complicated by the sanctions introduced in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, with many companies now being wary of becoming collateral victims of sanctions if they invest in Russia, even if their nations of origin have not imposed sanctions against Russia. In the short term, China thus remains the most realistic partner country for Russia, with India being a prospective partner too.

### **Russia maintains its position of strength in the Arctic despite the war in Ukraine**

In recent years, Russia has built up military capabilities in the Arctic to the point where it has now consolidated its military position of strength in the region.

Russia's military activities in the Arctic have generally not been impacted by the extensive losses suffered in Ukraine, and Russia still conducts naval patrols with ballistic missile submarines.



Russia is capable of rapid deployment of aircraft from the Russian mainland to the forward air bases.

However, Russia's vast redeployments of personnel from the Arctic to the war in Ukraine have depleted its pool of sufficiently trained personnel. In addition, Russia continues to expand and improve its forward air bases north of the Russian mainland that enable Russia to maintain a permanent Arctic presence, allowing it to enforce its air supremacy far into the Arctic Ocean.

Though Russia's military build-up in the Arctic is defensively motivated, it also contains certain elements that can be used offensively in the Arctic Ocean and the North Atlantic Ocean. Russia is capable of rapid deployment of aircraft from the Russian mainland to the forward air bases. In an escalating crisis, Russia will be able to use its Arctic military capabilities to threaten Western warships, delay Western reinforcements, hit US aircraft carriers in the North Atlantic Ocean, and target critical military installations in the Arctic.

Russia will perceive Finland's expected NATO membership as a serious deterioration of its strategic position, not only in the Baltic Sea region but also in the Arctic. Russia is likely concerned about its capability to defend and protect the Murmansk region and its nuclear-armed missile submarines that are a key component of its nuclear retaliatory capabilities. Russia is already wary of the United States' capability to launch a potential surprise attack with precision weapons over the North Pole. Finland's prospective NATO membership will also force Russia to take NATO's ability to launch an attack from Finnish territory into account, as Russia would probably view Finnish NATO accession as an opening for the alliance to deploy more and larger ground troop units on the Finnish-Russian border than it currently can on the Norwegian-Russian border.

Russia will thus likely try to expand its military capabilities in the region. In the short term, though, Russia's war in Ukraine will reduce its capability for extensive military build-up near Finland. This will likely serve as a motivation for Russia to assign a more prominent role to its nuclear deterrence in the region.

## DELIMITATION OF THE ARCTIC CONTINENTAL SHELF

The five Arctic coastal states, Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Norway, Russia and the United States, agree that regional delimitations must be based on international maritime law. Four of the five Arctic nations have submitted their claims to the UN Commission on the Limits of the Continental Shelf.

In 2001, Russia became the first nation to submit its claim, amending it in 2015 and again in 2021. The current claim borders the Greenland Exclusive Economic Zone.

In early 2022, the sub-commission processing Russia's claim stated that it expects to deliver its general view and recommendations on Russia's claim soon. Following years of processing, Russia can now expect to receive its final recommendation within 12 months.

The Commission delivers recommendations based on the data submitted, and recommendations may overlap. It is subsequently left to the countries whose claims overlap to negotiate a solution.

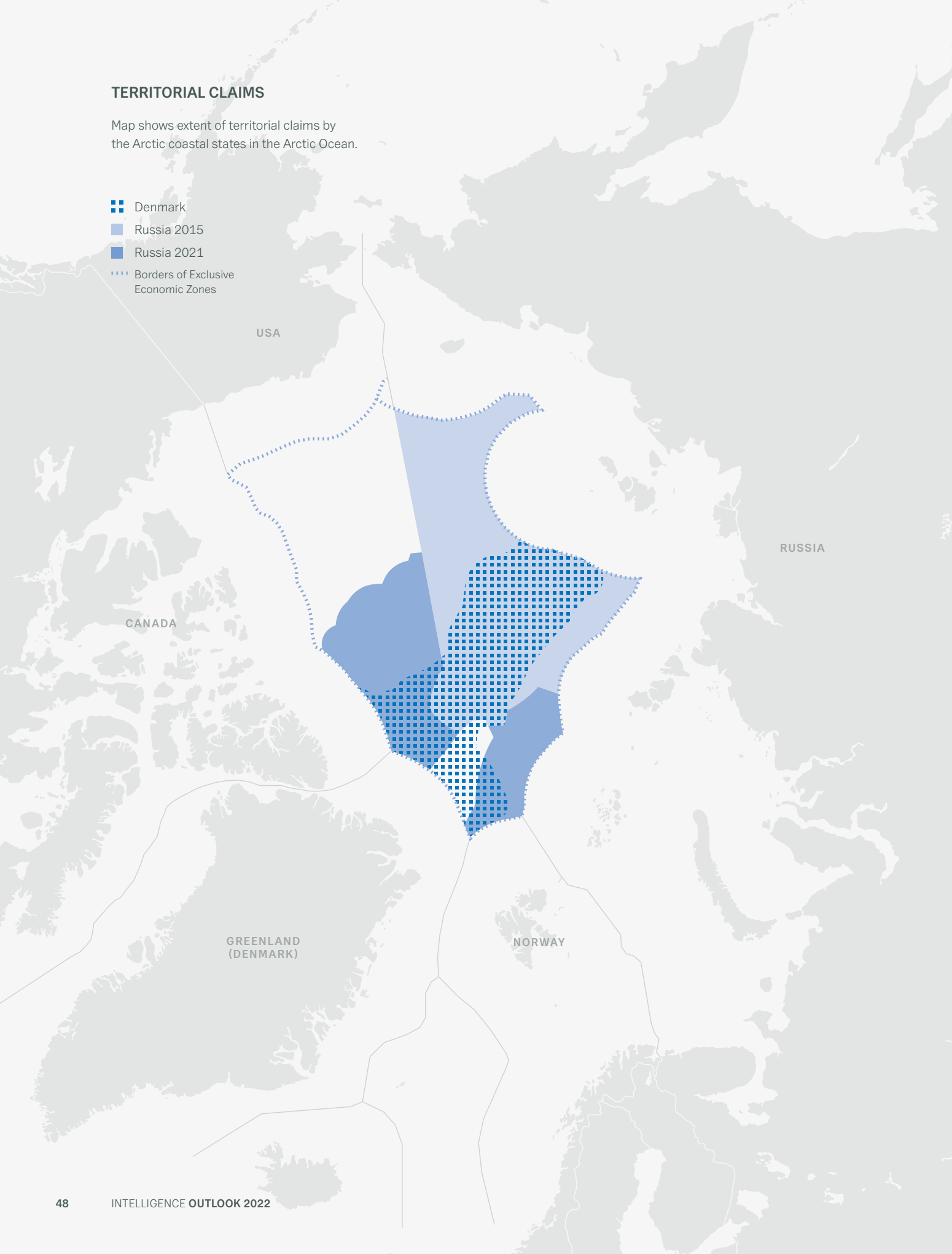
The Kingdom of Denmark submitted its claim in 2014, followed by Canada's partial submission in 2019. It is possible that the United States will also submit a claim.

It will likely be another 7 to 9 years before the Danish claim is processed, and an additional couple of years for the Canadian claim, and yet another couple of years for any claim by the United States.

## TERRITORIAL CLAIMS

Map shows extent of territorial claims by the Arctic coastal states in the Arctic Ocean.

- Denmark
- Russia 2015
- Russia 2021
- Borders of Exclusive Economic Zones



### **The Kingdom of Denmark must navigate a more unpredictable Arctic**

As a result of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, virtually all Arctic international cooperation has been stopped, suspended or resumed on a limited scale in relation to projects that do not involve the participation of Russia. This has left the Kingdom of Denmark to navigate a region in which the special security status of the Arctic as an area of low tension will either be redefined or cease altogether.

The seven Western Arctic nations must remain united in their approach to Russia in the Arctic. The interests of the seven Arctic states do not necessarily converge on all Arctic issues, possibly leaving them with different views on how to interact with Russia in the region.

Russia will try to play on these differences to sow doubt and division among and within the seven nations about their attitude to Russia in the Arctic. Russia will likely push the narrative that the West is harming the vulnerable Arctic environment and living conditions for the indigenous Arctic peoples by refusing to cooperate with Russia.

By the same strategy, Russia could try to strengthen its own position by sowing internal division within the Kingdom of Denmark and creating discord between the Kingdom and the United States. The intensified conflict between Russia and the West thus increases the risk of Russian influence operations against the Kingdom.

Russia will be attentive to areas in which the Arctic interests of Denmark, the Faroe Islands and Greenland possibly diverge. Differences could include diverging approaches to sanctions against Russia and to the resumption of certain types of cooperation with Russia, and different views on Western military build-up and presence in the Kingdom of Denmark.

Russia will keep a close eye on the implementation of Denmark's Arctic capability package and any activities on the part of the United States or NATO in the Faroe Islands and Greenland. Russia will perceive any new military capability in either of these areas as directed against Russia. It is possible that Russia will spread the narrative that Denmark is contributing to the militarization of the Arctic with severe consequences for the

region's environment and inhabitants.

China has for a number of years shown an interest in investments and projects in Greenland, in particular within raw material extraction and infrastructure. None of these enterprises has yet been realized, though, and the involvement of Chinese companies in Greenland is still limited. However, China's interests in the Arctic and, by extension, also in Greenland are long-term, and China will likely continue to look for investment possibilities in Greenland.

Because of the interconnection between Chinese companies and China's political system, large-scale Chinese investments in Greenland come with certain risks due to the effect that such investments would have on an economy the size of Greenland's. In addition, the risk of potential political interference and pressure increases if the investments are related to strategic resources or sensitive infrastructure.

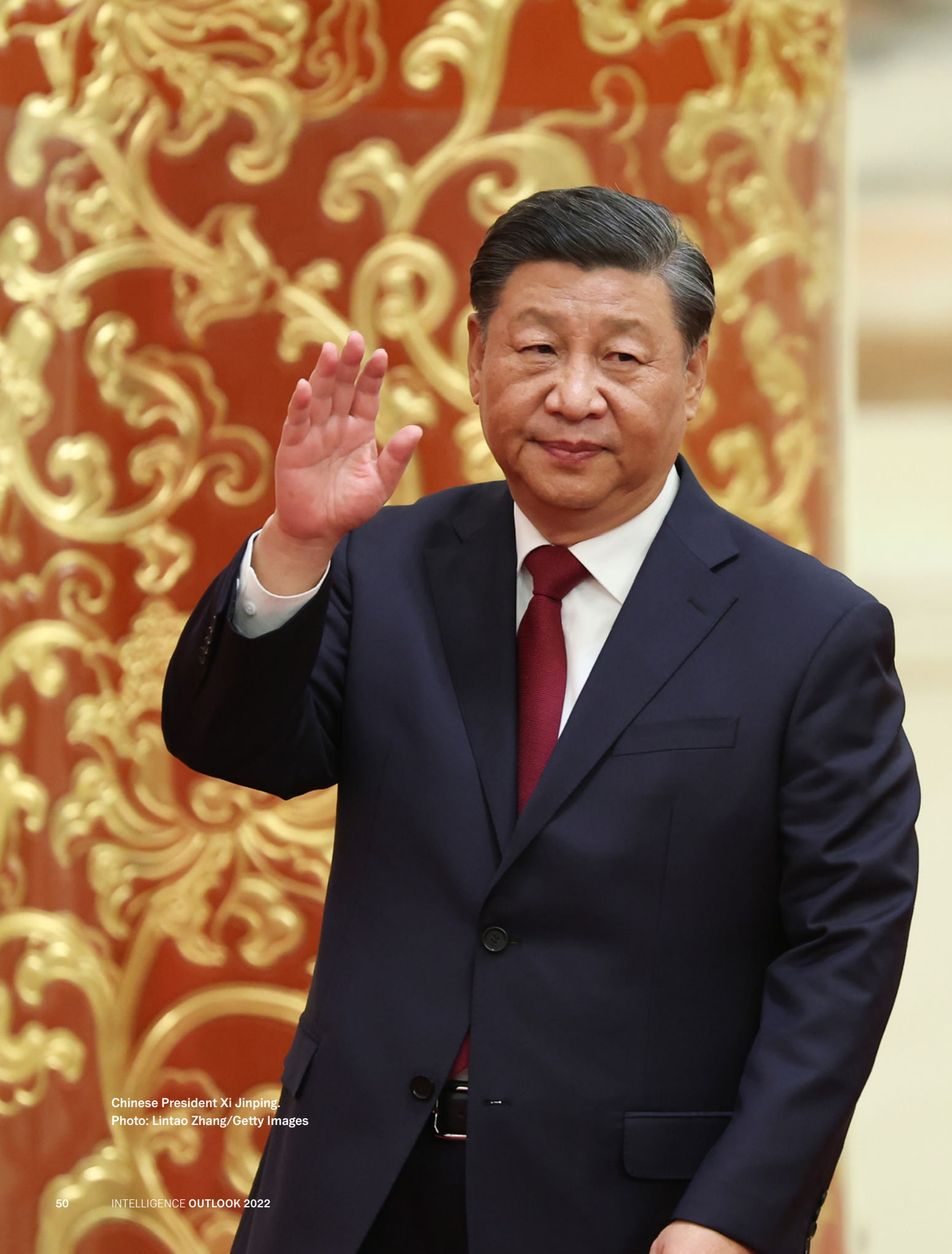
### **RUSSIA AND THE ARCTIC COUNCIL**

On 3 March 2022, the seven Western members of the Arctic Council – Canada, the Kingdom of Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway, Sweden and the United States – adopted a strategic suspension of activities in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. On 8 June, the seven countries issued a joint statement announcing a resumption of the Council activities that do not involve Russia.

Until the spring of 2023, Russia holds the rotating chairmanship of the Arctic Council. Russia has stated that it will continue its chairmanship but with a national focus.

Russia's reaction to, first, the strategic suspension and then to the limited resumption of Council activities has been relatively muted and characterized by a wait-and-see attitude.





Chinese President Xi Jinping.  
Photo: Lintao Zhang/Getty Images

# CHINA

## CHINESE-WESTERN RELATIONS ARE GROWING INCREASINGLY TENSE



China's global and regional ambitions are growing, and China wants to become the dominant military power in the region. Politically, China aims to increase its influence in international organizations and to create alternatives to the rules-based world order. China's ever-growing economic clout serves to bolster its global influence, and just as its economic model is a challenge to the West, so are its focused efforts to acquire Western technology and knowledge. At the same time, the Communist Party is tightening its grip on power. These developments harm China's relations with the West, including with Denmark. Tensions are further aggravated by China's close cooperation with Russia, the war in Ukraine and the increasingly tense issue of Taiwan.



■ China continues to expand its political, military and economic power and influence both regionally and globally. China is set to become the world's largest economy and already ranks as the biggest trading partner to most countries in the world. The Chinese leadership wants the country to become the leading Asian nation and to rank on a par with the United States internationally. In China's view, the United States is working to curb China's power and development. The United States and China both aim to strengthen their respective foreign partnerships to be in as strong a position as possible for a protracted great power competition. China's global ambitions and rising influence contribute to deepening its tensions with the West, including with Denmark.

The situation regarding Taiwan is growing increasingly tense. China maintains that Taiwan is an indisputable part of China, and Chinese leader Xi Jinping has announced that reunification must be realized no later than 2049. The Taiwanese population and government are increasingly distancing themselves from the idea of reunification with China, and the United States is increasing its political and military support for the island.

#### **China is trying to change the global order to maximize its own interests**

It is a key focus for China to strengthen its influence in existing international institutions.

At the same time, China is setting up new multilateral organizations where China has a leading role. These include the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), whose members are Russia, India, Pakistan, a number of Central Asian countries, and soon Iran and Belarus; the BRICS organization comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa; and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), which has 105 member countries, including Denmark. China will highly likely try to enhance the role of these organizations by expanding into new fields of cooperation and by increasing their members with the aim of strengthening China's global power.

In addition, with the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Chinese investments have expanded into strategic infrastructure such as harbours, roads, energy, telecommunication and mines. In recent years, however,

investments under the BRI have declined, among other things as a result of an enhanced focus on economic viability.

In 2021 and 2022 respectively, China launched two new initiatives for development and security, the Global Development Initiative (GDI) and the Global Security Initiative (GSI). The GDI and GSI lay down a number of principles for security and development that China uses to project itself as a responsible great power in the domains of development and security and as an attractive alternative to the United States and the West.

China promotes the two projects as twin initiatives by arguing that security is a precondition for development, thereby promoting a view on development under which security takes precedence over individual rights.

China's assertive conduct and strategic objectives of greater global influence present a challenge to Western and Danish interests. China's strengthened position in international organizations, in particular the UN, makes it harder for Western countries to uphold their interests in these forums and limits the scope for consensus on key issues. As an example of this, China has on several occasions successfully rallied circles of UN member countries against criticism of China's abuses in the Xinjiang province. In such contexts, China is capitalizing on the fact that developing countries in Africa and elsewhere are reaping the benefits of Chinese investments, for instance through the Belt and Road Initiative.

#### **Relationship between China and Europe under pressure**

Cooperation between the EU and China is characterized by growing disagreement. For example, China has introduced economic and political sanctions against Lithuania for allowing Taiwan to establish a representation in the country under the name Taiwan Representative Office. In China's view, the word "Taiwan" violates the One China policy and constitutes a break with the established norm of using the word "Taipei" (the capital of Taiwan).

## CHINA'S APPROACH TO MULTILATERAL COOPERATION RESTS ON THREE PILLARS

The Global Development Initiative (GDI) and Global Security Initiative (GSI) outline China's international ambitions, and combined they form the framework for China's engagement in international organizations and initiatives. To promote its interests internationally, China mainly works through three types of organizations:



Existing international organizations such as UN organizations, the World Bank and the IMF. China works strategically to maximize its influence in these frameworks through strategies such as promoting Chinese representatives, Chinese or pro-Chinese leaderships, and Chinese policy and interests inside the organizations.

New international organizations initiated by China: the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), the BRICS organization, and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Inside these organizations, unlike in most existing international organizations, China plays the leading role, giving it a wide scope for influencing their directions and politics.

China's Belt and Road Initiative is an instrument designed to draw other countries closer through economic agreements and strategic investments. The initiative is designed to strengthen China's political influence and economic interests, including the specific economic interests of Chinese companies and their access to raw materials.

## CHINA'S SENSITIVE ISSUES

The Chinese authorities are actively trying to suppress any criticism or challenge to the Communist Party and its political line. Taiwan, Xinjiang, Hong Kong and Tibet are particularly sensitive issues.



XINJIANG

In Xinjiang, there is extensive control, monitoring and internment of Uyghurs, Kazakhs, and other ethnic and religious minorities.

TIBET

In Tibet, authorities have increased their control and monitoring. The authorities are systematically violating Tibetan citizens' freedom of religion, speech and assembly.

HONG KONG

In Hong Kong, a new national security law passed in 2020 has been used as an instrument to limit civil liberty and to suppress the pro-democratic opposition.

TAIWAN

China has increased the military pressure on Taiwan. China continues its attempts to prevent Taiwan from gaining a foothold in international organizations.

EU-China cooperation is also challenged by China's violations of basic human rights in Hong Kong and abuses in Xinjiang that have drawn reactions from Denmark and the EU. The relationship between the EU and China has deteriorated further due to China's strengthened partnership with Russia and its silence on Russia's war in Ukraine.

China has on certain occasions tried to sow division among European countries to prevent them from uniting against China, for example by offering economic and diplomatic favours to countries that support key Chinese viewpoints.

### **China is able to challenge the United States militarily in Asia and the Western Pacific**

China's main military objective is to establish itself as the dominant regional power in East Asia and the Western Pacific, mainly with the purpose of protecting itself against US intervention and influence.

Even at their current level, the Chinese armed forces are likely capable of matching those of the United States in China's neighbouring region, and the Chinese Navy has seen a strong expansion over the past decade, making it much younger than the navies of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and the United States.

China's military focus is on the capability to win potential wars in East Asia and the Western Pacific, especially around Taiwan. To this end, China is expanding its naval infantry, building capabilities such as aircraft carriers, large amphibious vessels and cruisers. These capabilities also serve to bolster China's ability to project military power with a global reach.

The South China Sea is also a top military strategic priority. China is deploying forces to the bases set up on the artificial islands in the South China Sea and is continuously strengthening its coast guard and tightening military control over contested areas. In the medium to long term, China's ambition is to be able to control and monitor the entire South China Sea. The United States and several European countries conduct routine patrols to demonstrate the right to freedom of navigation in the area and to assert that the Chinese territorial claims are not legitimate.

### **XI JINPING TIGHTENS HIS GRIP ON POWER EVEN FURTHER...**

While China's leader Xi Jinping has gradually strengthened his position in the Communist Party, the party has, on its part, tightened its grip over China. The party has strengthened its presence and influence inside government bodies, companies and other Chinese organizations.

As expected, the October 2022 Communist Party congress confirmed Xi Jinping as the leader of the party and thereby of China for a third five-year term. Many of those appointed to the party leadership at the congress have previously worked closely with Xi Jinping and proved their loyalty to him. At the same time, those in favour of economic reform have been removed from the party's senior leadership. Xi Jinping has thus managed to uniformize the political course and concentrate power around himself to a degree unseen for decades.

### **...BUT IS FACING MASSIVE DOMESTIC ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL CHALLENGES**

Until the end of 2022, China reiterated its zero-COVID-19 policy, enforcing strict lockdowns. This approach has triggered popular protests and weakened the Chinese economy.

In addition, the Chinese growth rates will slow down in the longer term. Demographically, the Chinese population is ageing fast. The property sector, which has been a strong driver of China's economic growth, will lose steam and could become a source of financial instability. Production growth rates are relatively low, in particular among state-owned companies. US sanctions and the increasing reluctance of Western companies to invest in China are also factors that weigh on the Chinese economy.

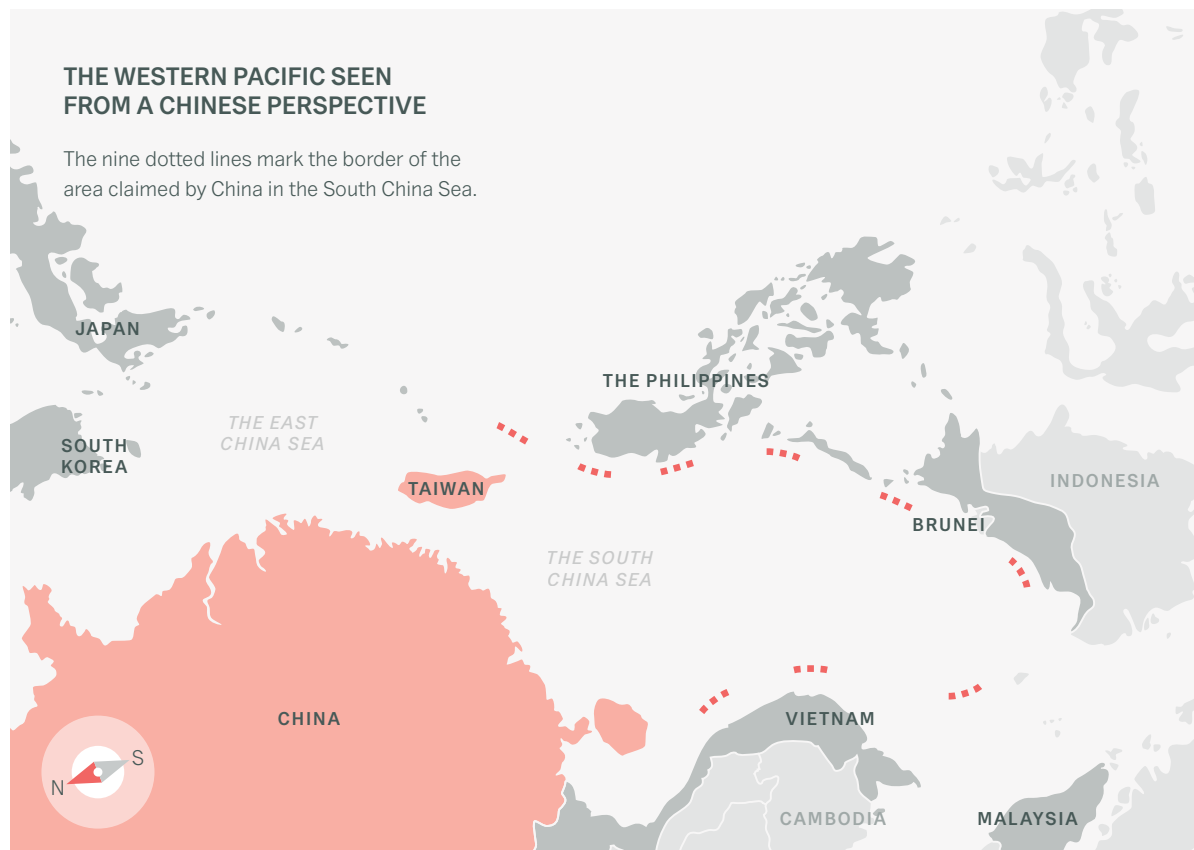
However, China's economy does boast a number of strengths. China has a pivotal role in global supply chains and a vast domestic market that is attractive to foreign companies. In addition, China's heavy investing in research and development is a catalyst for research at an international top level and successful tech companies.

### Tensions regarding the Taiwan issue are growing

The Communist Party regards Taiwan as an indisputable part of China and reunification with Taiwan as intrinsically linked to the party's legitimacy. Though China still aims for peaceful reunification with Taiwan, it does not rule out a military solution, and Xi Jinping has stated that reunification must take place before 2049 – the 100th anniversary of the People's Republic of China.

China is concerned about the increasing US support for the Taiwanese government, seeing it as a sign that the United States is retreating from its one China policy. At the same time, both the Taiwanese population and government are distancing themselves from the idea of reunification with China, and the relationship between China and Taiwan has deteriorated.

China saw the August 2022 visit to Taiwan by Speaker of the House of Representatives Nancy Pelosi as a violation of the US commitment to the One China policy, which is at the core of China's foreign diplomatic relations. Following the visit, China launched the largest-ever military exercises in the waters around Taiwan, and tensions in the region and between the United States and China have grown since the visit. In future, China will sustain an increased military presence around Taiwan, which in turn will increase the risk of misunderstandings or accidents that could lead to an escalation of tensions.



In recent years, the issue of Taiwan has moved to the centre stage in the tense US-Chinese relationship, and the years to come will likely see a higher number of crises between the US and China related to the Taiwan issue. The negative ripple effects of a regional security crisis could also affect Denmark, in particular due to the impact of a crisis on the global economy, on Danish companies in China, and on supply security in Denmark.

The elevated level of tension in the Taiwan Strait adds to China's sensitivity on the issue of Taiwan's status. This will likely intensify pressure – including on Danish decision-makers, institutions and companies – to take certain stands in relation to Taiwan.

### **China's economic conduct does not align with Western principles**

The Chinese economic model operates on principles that are different to those of Denmark and the West. The Chinese state intervenes heavily in the economy and plays a strong role in the allocation of investments to different sectors. The state controls the many state-owned companies and has the power to reach into private companies.

Internationally, the state supports Chinese companies, providing economic, political, technological and diplomatic assistance to facilitate advantages and contracts. A negative fallout of this approach is that Danish and European companies, among others, risk coming up against unfair competition from Chinese companies.

China has also proved that it will not hesitate to wield its economic clout in order to make foreign countries, institutions and companies support Chinese interests.

### **China aims to procure foreign technology**

China focuses on the acquisition of technology and knowledge and is rapidly closing the gap on the world's leading tech nations. This is not least the case in fields such as information and communication technology, artificial intelligence and quantum technology, which China has designated as strategically important. In certain areas, China has transformed into a global tech leader.

China wants to reduce its dependence on foreign technology within strategic key fields, an ambition which has been amplified following the Western sanctions against Russia. Consequently, China is also focusing on developing technologies that it currently has to import, including computer chips.

China employs an extensive array of instruments to map and transfer foreign technology. Some of these are legitimate, including research, talent programmes and investments in start-up and established tech companies, while others are illegal and include activities such as espionage, in particular cyber espionage. China highly likely also targets Danish companies and research institutions for information and technology.

### **China's development of civilian and military technology poses challenge to the West**

China has a strategy for civilian-military integration with the dual aim of ensuring that the Chinese military can benefit from scientific and technological progress in the civilian sector and that private companies, on their part, can benefit from military technology. Under this strategy, research cooperation and Chinese investments in foreign companies can be used to bolster China's military technological development. It follows that even though Danish companies may benefit from research cooperation with Chinese companies and institutions, there is risk involved in certain types of research partnerships, not least in the fields of natural science and technology.

The United States regards China's rapid civilian and military technological development and efforts to secure transfer of technology as a threat to its national strategic interests and security. The development of advanced technologies has thus become part of the strategic competition between China on the one side and the United States and Europe on the other.

China is also working determinedly to shape international standards, which could give China a strong competitive edge. International organizations engaged in setting standards and in wider scientific and technological issues are thus increasingly becoming an arena for great power competition.





Air strike in the rebel-controlled Idlib province in Syria.  
Omar Haj Kadour/AFP





# TERRORISM, INSTABILITY AND MIGRATION

## EUROPE'S CONFLICT-RIDDEN NEIGHBOURING REGIONS

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Denmark and Europe will, in the years to come, increasingly have to tackle the continuing challenges posed by Europe's conflict-ridden neighbouring regions in the Middle East and Africa on our own. The serious terrorist threat to Europe will persist and a renewed pressure from refugees and migration is likely. The instability characterizing the most vulnerable countries in these regions will grow due to the impact of the war in Ukraine and COVID-19. Many areas suffer from poor living conditions caused by high population growth and climate change. This development feeds into the strengthening of terrorist groups; increased arms proliferation and increased migration. At the same time, Europe is once again turning to the Middle East and Africa for energy sources. China and Russia as well as the regional great powers of Iran, Turkey and Saudi Arabia will pursue their own interests, which often diverge from European ones.

■ The Russian invasion of Ukraine has left Denmark and Europe facing new challenges in our already conflict-ridden neighbouring regions to the south.

The war in Ukraine and the fallout of COVID-19 have added new economic problems and food insecurity to the already long list of problems facing some countries in the two regions. This situation will raise the risk of new conflicts in the years to come.

Climate change, high population growth, and a combination of rampant corruption, poor governance and increasing oppression raise the risk of renewed civil unrest and collapse of the most fragile states in the regions, such as Iraq, Lebanon, Yemen and Mali.

Also, there is an increased risk that the existing and volatile status quo in countries such as Iraq, Syria and Libya will be disrupted and replaced by violent conflict.

New unrest and conflicts may threaten European energy security, just as new conflicts in all likelihood will set off an increase in migration and in the number of refugees following the drop in migration caused by COVID-19 lockdowns. Islamic State, al-Qaida and other terrorist groups will seek to exploit conflicts and instability in weak states to rebuild their networks and attack both civilian targets and authorities, in particular in the Middle East and Africa.

In addition, Europe has again become more reliant on oil- and gas-producing regimes such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. High oil and gas prices have served to significantly strengthen the position of these regimes, providing a better setting for them to pursue their own interests, which often conflict with those of Europe. Some of the countries in the region have also normalized their mutual relations over the past few years. Though this normalization has helped stabilize the region, it has not increased fundamental freedoms or improved conditions for the populations.

### **MOST OF THE COUNTRIES IN THE REGION HAVE BECOME INCREASINGLY AUTOCRATIC**

Several of the leading countries in the Middle East used the conflicts that arose in the wake of the Arab Spring in 2011 to engage in inter-state fighting, using different types of proxy groups and providing support for popular movements. This was the case in Syria and Libya. However, over the past two years, these regimes have made efforts to maintain their power and regional position by taking steps to normalize their mutual relations, including suspending support for popular movements in each other's countries. These steps have helped stabilize the situation in many places in the region, but at the expense of the regional populations that have become subject to increasing oppression.

## THE WAR IN UKRAINE RAISES THE RISK OF NEW CONFLICTS IN EUROPE'S MOST FRAGILE NEIGHBOURING STATES TO THE SOUTH

Several of the countries in Africa and the Middle East are among the most fragile countries in the world. At the same time, some of these countries are among the countries most dependent on Russian and Ukrainian exports of wheat, corn, sunflower oil and fertilizer. Despite the UN-brokered deal to allow grain exports from Ukraine, Russia's invasion of Ukraine will continue to worsen the already critical food situation in these countries.

More generally, most of the countries in the region are struggling with surging inflation, declining credit ratings and widespread investor flight. With the exception of the oil- and gas-producing countries, this development has the potential to challenge the stability of countries in Africa and the Middle East, especially the most fragile ones.

Mali was facing economic challenges and struggling with oppression when the war in Ukraine added to Mali's list of problems with increased food and fuel scarcity.

The war in Ukraine is further exacerbating the already fragile situation in Lebanon. Today, 80% of the Lebanese people live in poverty, and the ripple effects of the war are further compounding food insecurity.

Public frustration with corruption and poor governance could spark renewed unrest in Iraq. The absence of a power monopoly and the presence of ethnic-religious divides raise the risk of new armed conflict in the country.



Source: OECD

## THEME TERRORISM

### **The terrorist threat in Europe will primarily emanate from lone actors or small networks of militant Islamists**

Lone actors or small networks of sympathizers motivated by militant Islamism will continue to pose the biggest terrorist threat to Europe in the next few years. The attack during the Oslo Pride celebration in June 2022, in which a gunman killed two and wounded at least another 20 when he opened fire at two bars, is a testament to this threat. The threat remains serious even though the total number of attempted, successful and foiled attacks within the EU has dropped in recent years, among other things as a result of international counter-terrorism efforts.

The terrorist threat will in particular emanate from individuals at the periphery of or outside known networks. In the past few years, Europe has seen several attacks by lone actors who sympathize with militant Islamism but likely had no previous contact with other militant individuals or groups. This threat emanates from increasingly younger people who are often radicalized online and who do not necessarily subscribe to or follow calls from specific terrorist groups or networks.

The terrorist threat in Europe also emanates from networks of militant Islamists present in the European countries. Some of these European networks comprise ex-foreign fighters or individuals who have previously been involved in terrorist activities. Online communication tools will represent the biggest window for spreading propaganda, recruitment and financing.

### **Sudden events may quickly increase the terrorist threat**

The terrorist threat in the West is dynamic, and events taking place inside or outside of Europe may quickly create a large mobilization and threat potential for militant extremists.

The European “cartoon cases” from 2005 and onwards are an example of how the terrorist threat can quickly increase as a consequence of events that are perceived as intolerance of or insults to Islam. The resolve to retaliate against perceived insults to Islam transcends Sunni and Shiite extremist divides. The threat will persist for years and could also suddenly be reignited, as evidenced by the attacks on French teacher Samuel Paty in 2020 and author Salman Rushdie in 2022.

Another example is the large influx of Western foreign fighters to Islamic State in Syria and Iraq in the years after 2012. By encouraging attacks in the West with whatever means available, Islamic State has lowered the threshold for when and how lone actors can carry out terrorist attacks in the name of the group. Today, the thousands of Islamic State fighters, including several from the West, who are detained in the Kurdish-controlled camps and prisons in northern Syria pose a latent threat. If the circumstances of their detention and freedom of movement suddenly change, the terrorist threat may quickly increase inside and outside of Europe.

### **Islamic State and al-Qaida pose a significant terrorist threat to the West and Western interests**

Islamic State, al-Qaida and their affiliated subgroups still have a strategic ambition to launch attacks in the West. However, in the years to come, the terrorist groups will less likely have the capabilities to plan and execute large-scale coordinated terrorist attacks comparable in size to Islamic State’s November 2015 attacks in Paris. One of the reasons is the likely short-term weakening of parts of Islamic State’s networks in and around Europe as a result of counter-terrorism efforts and arrests in recent years.



Islamic State and al-Qaida will continue to call on sympathizers, including those in the West, to carry out attacks on their own. One example of this is the April 2022 call by Islamic State's spokesman for supporters in the West to launch terrorist attacks by using simple means.

### Right-wing extremists still pose a terrorist threat

Increasingly younger people are becoming ensnared in right-wing extremist views and choosing former right-wing extremist terrorists as their role models, including in Europe. The main right-wing extremist terrorist threat will likely emanate from lone actors or small

groups with little or no contact to established groups. Right-wing extremists drawing on ideas about so-called accelerationism combined with neo-Nazi ideology pose a particular threat. Accelerationists want to provoke civil war in order to fight "corrupt democracies" and "multi-culturalism" in an effort to secure the survival of "the white race". In the years to come, transnational online communities will be a main platform for right-wing extremists who share the same far-right views without being under a specific leadership.

The war in Ukraine attracts a small number of Western foreign fighters with different backgrounds and motives. The majority of these foreign fighters have crossed into Ukraine to fight for the country and its population. Even though the Ukrainian armed forces generally have no interest in attracting people with right-wing extremist backgrounds, the war has attracted, and will likely continue to attract, a small number of right-wing extremists to the conflict. It is possible that some right-wing extremist foreign fighters in Ukraine will gain access to transnational networks of like-minded peers, receive training in a number of different weapons systems and become more prone to violence. They may thus over time come to pose a threat when returning back home. It is less likely that militant Islamists will travel to Ukraine to participate in the fighting.

### Islamic State's and al-Qaida's leaderships focus on local conflicts

Both Islamic State and al-Qaida will continue to strengthen their subgroups and expand their scope for action in a number of countries outside of the West. Today, the presence of Islamist terrorist groups in Africa, the Middle East and Asia is more widespread than it was a decade ago. Focus on local conflicts through subgroups will remain the main priority for both groups in the years to come. This will particularly be the case in parts of western, central and eastern Africa, where Islamic State's and al-Qaida's subgroups have been able to expand their presence in recent years, launching attacks in a number of new countries. The subgroups will pose a terrorist threat to Western interests in these areas.

#### ASSESSMENT OF THE TERRORIST THREAT TO DENMARK

The publication *Assessment of the terrorist threat to Denmark* from the Centre for Terror Analysis (CTA) describes the terrorist threat to Denmark and Danish interests abroad.

In its 2022 assessment, CTA classifies the terrorist threat at the level **significant**, meaning there are individuals and small groups in Denmark with intent and capability to commit acts of terrorism. According to CTA, the biggest terrorist threat to Denmark and Danish interests abroad emanates from the militant Islamist groups Islamic State and al-Qaida, which inspire individuals and networks to launch attacks inside and outside of the West.

In addition, CTA assesses that the terrorist threat to Denmark from right-wing extremists is at the level **general**.

*Assessment of the terrorist threat to Denmark* is available at [www.pet.dk](http://www.pet.dk)

The Islamic State leadership is present in Syria and Iraq, where it will focus on returning to its previous strength and fighting local security forces and authorities. Islamic State is likely less focused on launching terrorist attacks against the few remaining Western targets in Syria and Iraq. In the years to come, Islamic State will likely continue its efforts to free its many thousands of members, including foreign fighters, who are detained in camps and prisons in north-eastern Syria. The January 2022 attack on a large prison in northern Syria demonstrated that Islamic State has the flexibility, skills and capabilities required to launch large-scale operations in that part of Syria.

In Afghanistan, Islamic State subgroup Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP) will primarily use its resources to attack the Taliban and Shiite targets. However, ISKP has ambitions to attack targets outside of Afghanistan, including Western ones. Consequently, the group increasingly presents both a regional and global terrorist threat. Though the number of Western foreign fighters travelling to Afghanistan since the Taliban's seizure of power in August 2021 is likely very small, ISKP counts several foreign fighters from Pakistan and Central Asian countries among its ranks.

Since the 2021 Taliban takeover, al-Qaida has had increased freedom of action and a safe haven in Afghanistan. Despite the killing of al-Qaida leader Ayman al-Zawahiri, high-ranking and long-term members of al-Qaida are still present in Iran and Afghanistan. Al-Qaida is dependent on the goodwill of the Taliban in Afghanistan, and the Taliban has no interest in seeing the country and its government linked to international terrorism. Consequently, al-Qaida is less likely to launch attacks against Western targets in the short term that could be traced back to its networks in Afghanistan.

Islamic State and al-Qaida will exploit weak state structures and local conflicts in Africa, in particular, to expand their presence. In the beginning of 2022, approx. 50 percent of Islamic State terrorist attacks were carried out in Africa, especially in Nigeria. At the same time, terrorist groups in Africa south of the Sahara were likely responsible for approx. half of the total number of global terrorism fatalities in 2021.

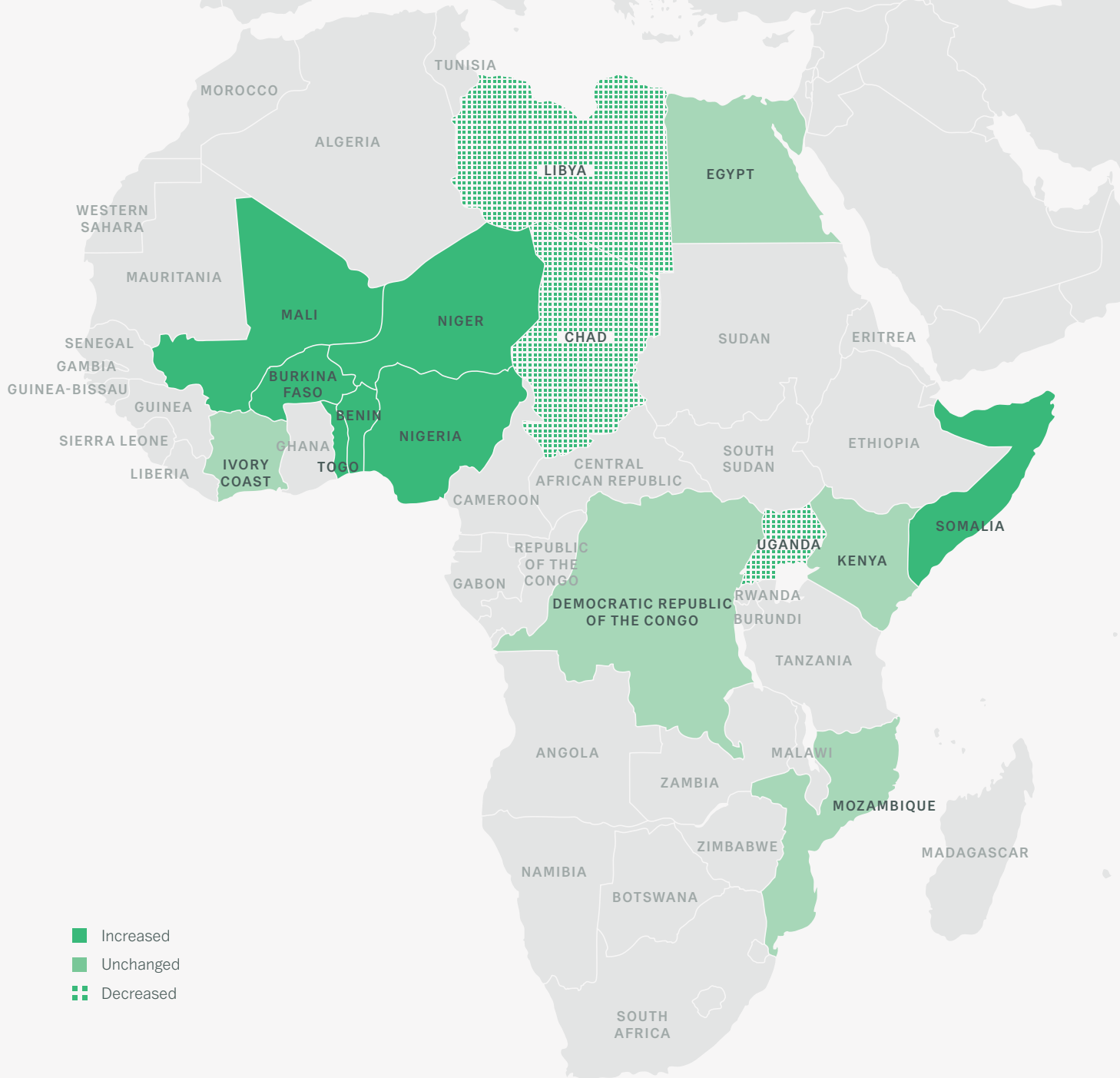
Al-Qaida's regional subgroup will pose a growing security and terrorist threat to a number of countries in the Sahel region. The precarious regional security situation will likely enable al-Qaida's subgroup to further expand its presence and increasingly threaten local and Western interests in a number of West African coastal states. Islamic State has also gained a foothold in the region, where subgroups in Nigeria and Mali will challenge local authorities and security forces and launch attacks on primarily civilian and local opponents.

In central, eastern and southern Africa, Islamist terrorist groups will pose a threat primarily to local authorities and secondarily to Western interests. From its areas of operation in Somalia, al-Qaida affiliate al-Shabaab will continue to fight local and regional security forces and authorities. Al-Shabaab will also continue to pose a threat to Western interests in the region, in particular in Kenya where the group has previously attacked targets affiliated with the West. Over the last couple of years, the group has bolstered its capabilities to use increasingly advanced weapons systems.

In recent years, Islamic State has been able to connect militant networks in a number of countries in the region, including Somalia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique and Uganda. Islamic State will seek to launch attacks in countries and areas that are new to terrorist attacks. In 2021, networks affiliated with Islamic State attacked targets in Uganda for the first time, while a planned attack in Rwanda was foiled. Even though Islamic State networks have the intention to attack Western interests, they are not the primary targets in the region.

## ISLAMIC STATE AND AL-QAIDA WILL GROW IN AFRICA AND THREATEN WESTERN INTERESTS LOCALLY

The countries highlighted below all have a presence of at least one militant Islamist terrorist group that conducts regular attacks on local authorities or civilians. The colour of the country name indicates our assessment of whether the terrorist threat posed by these groups has increased, remained unchanged or dropped compared to last year.



## THEME MIGRATION

### Increasing migration towards Europe

Following a temporary drop in migration towards Europe due to COVID-19 restrictions, migration flows from Africa, the Middle East and a number of countries in Asia such as Afghanistan and Pakistan will once again increase. Many countries in the regions are facing new economic problems as well as food and energy insecurity in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine, giving rise to increasing migration flows towards Europe. In several of the countries along the EU's external borders where European border control has reduced migration, the governments will likely seek to exploit the issue of rising migration to add new diplomatic and political pressure on Europe.

Problems of a more structural nature will also increase migration pressure towards Europe, including, in particular, high population growth, climate change causing extreme weather conditions and water scarcity, widespread oppression in several countries and the absence of prospects for young people.

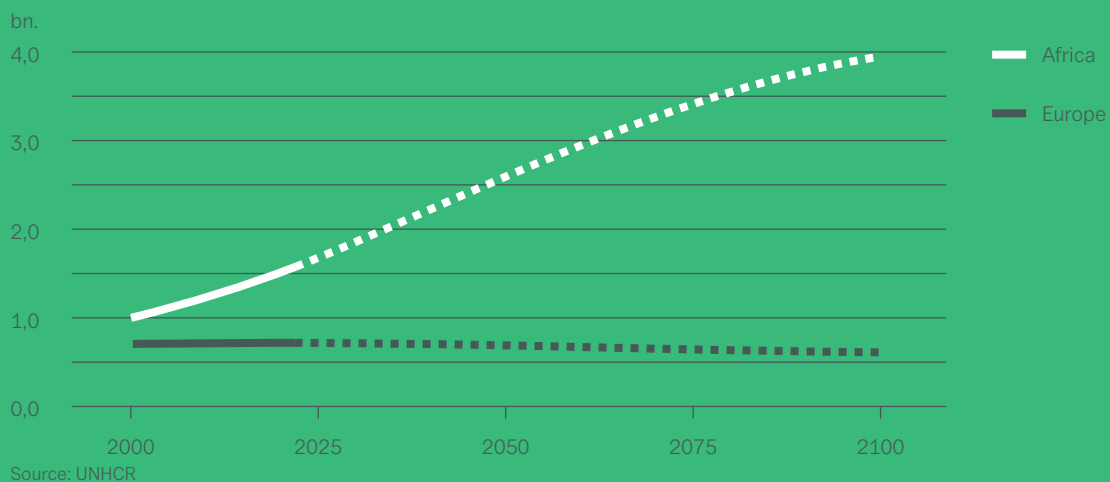
### AFRICA IS FACING NUMEROUS CHALLENGES

While the African continent will grow increasingly important to the rest of the world, it is facing massive challenges. The governments on the continent grow increasingly oppressive. Climate change will trigger mounting food insecurity, poverty and displacement in Africa. The Sahel is one of the world's most severely affected regions by climate change, and Burkina Faso, for instance, faces one of the fastest growing humanitarian crises in the world.

It is likely that the population growth in Africa will increase migration flows both internally on the continent and towards Europe. Moving towards 2100, the African continent will have the world's highest population growth. By 2100, Africa will overtake Asia as the world's most populous continent. The Sahel region's population size is expected to almost double by 2040.

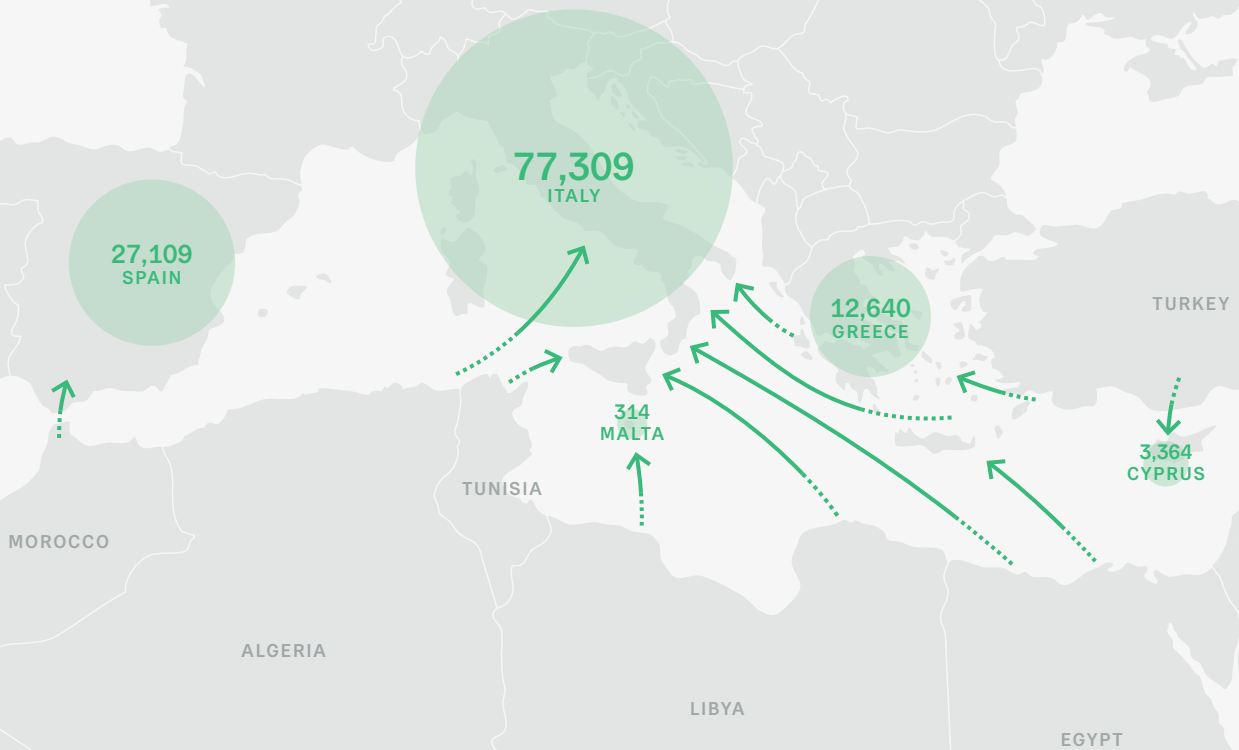
### POPULATION GROWTH IN AFRICA AND EUROPE

UN assessment of the demographic development in Africa and Europe until 2100.



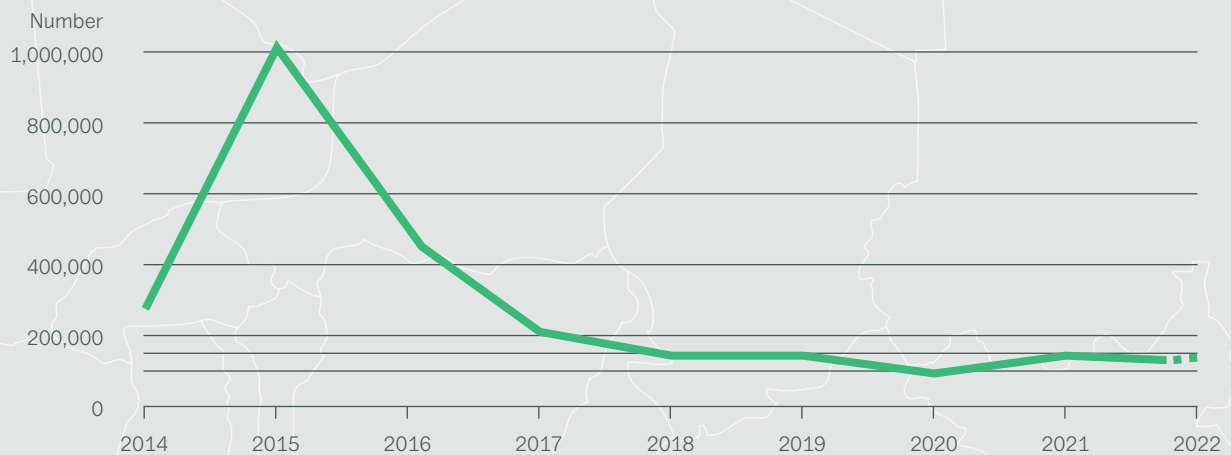
## MIGRANT TRAFFIC ACROSS THE MEDITERRANEAN IN 2022

The number of migrants and refugees crossing the Mediterranean from 1 January to 23 October 2022. In total, 114,051 migrants or refugees crossed the Mediterranean to Europe, and 6,685 reached Europe by land between January and October 2022.



## MIGRANTS SINCE 2014

The annual totals of migrants and refugees who have arrived in Europe.



Source: UNHCR



### **Europe will be increasingly alone in tackling China, Russia and key regional powers in Africa and the Middle East**

The reduced US involvement in the Middle East and Africa along with the heightened great power competition will likely allow China, in particular, but also Russia and key regional powers to increasingly pursue their own interests in the two regions – often at the expense of European interests.

Officially, Russia and China do not interfere in foreign countries' internal affairs, just as they do not call for democracy and observance of human rights – an approach that contributes to consolidating authoritarian and repressive regimes and leaders that challenge European interests and security. There are, however, major differences with regard to the challenges that China and Russia each pose in Africa and the Middle East.

China's primary interest is to secure the widest possible access to the region's oil, gas and natural resources. China is also trying to garner support from the countries in the Middle East and Africa for its views in the UN and other international organizations, making China a direct competitor to Europe. In the event of a heightened conflict with China, it is possible that the Chinese naval presence in the Indian Ocean could put pressure on European energy and supply security in the long term. However, so far, China only has a single overseas military base – the naval base in Djibouti at the entrance to the Red Sea. China has also invested heavily in civilian ports, some of which could serve as bases for the Chinese Navy.

There are, however, some overlaps between Chinese and Western interests in both Africa and the Middle East. China has a fundamental interest in stability, not least as a means to protect its investments, and has contributed significantly to peacekeeping operations, in particular in Africa. Chinese investments that contribute to economic development in the countries may thus also help bring stability and reduce migrant flows towards Europe.

Russia's involvement in the Middle East and North Africa is driven by its ambition to forge close cooperation with countries that may help promote an anti-Western narrative. In addition, Russian disinformation campaigns blaming Western sanctions for the economic slowdown seem to resonate with these countries. Such campaigns have, for instance, served to fuel distrust of the West in Mali.

It is less likely, though, that Russia will be able to significantly expand its cooperation in the region beyond the countries in which it has already established a presence. Russia will likely seek to maintain its military presence in the region, in particular in Syria, and use this presence as leverage against Western interests. As a result of the Western sanctions, Russian arms sales to the region have dropped – a trend that will likely continue in the next few years due to additional sanctions and Russia's need to produce weapons and spare parts for domestic use. Russia's shrinking arms exports will create a void that arms exporters such as China, Turkey and Iran may seek to fill.



Iran continues to increase its regional clout – politically, economically and militarily.

### **Iran poised to become a nuclear threshold state**

The United States and Iran are still negotiating a new nuclear deal. Irrespective of whether or not a new deal is forged, Iran will likely continue its efforts to become a de facto nuclear threshold state. The Iranian regime will thus strive to gain access to all the resources and facilities and technical expertise required to develop a nuclear weapon, should the country decide to build one.

In recent years, Iran has attained irreversible knowledge, including knowledge of how to produce and operate advanced centrifuges and how to produce highly enriched uranium and metallic uranium.

Even in the event that a new deal on limitations on Iran's nuclear programme is reached, it would only take Iran just over six months to produce enough fissile material for a nuclear weapon, the so-called "break-out time". In the original deal from 2015, the break-out time was calculated to about a year.

Iran's strategic goal of regional dominance will remain a major driver for potential conflict in the Middle East. As a threshold state, and ultimately as a nuclear power, Iran will be able to adopt a more assertive and confrontational stance.

Iran continues to increase its regional clout – politically, economically and militarily. Iran is directly involved in numerous conflicts in the region, most often in adversary to European and US interests. At the same time, Iran is strengthening its political and economic cooperation with Russia and China, including its existing military cooperation with Russia which involves areas such as sale of drones to Russia and a potential future sale of ballistic missiles.

Iran continues to strengthen its regional allies, not least by providing military support to its proxy groups such as Hezbollah in Lebanon, the Houthi Movement in Yemen, Palestinian Islamic Jihad in Gaza, and a myriad of Shiite militias in Iraq. Iran supports these groups with increasingly modern weapons, including advanced drones, which pose a threat to Western military forces and Western interests.

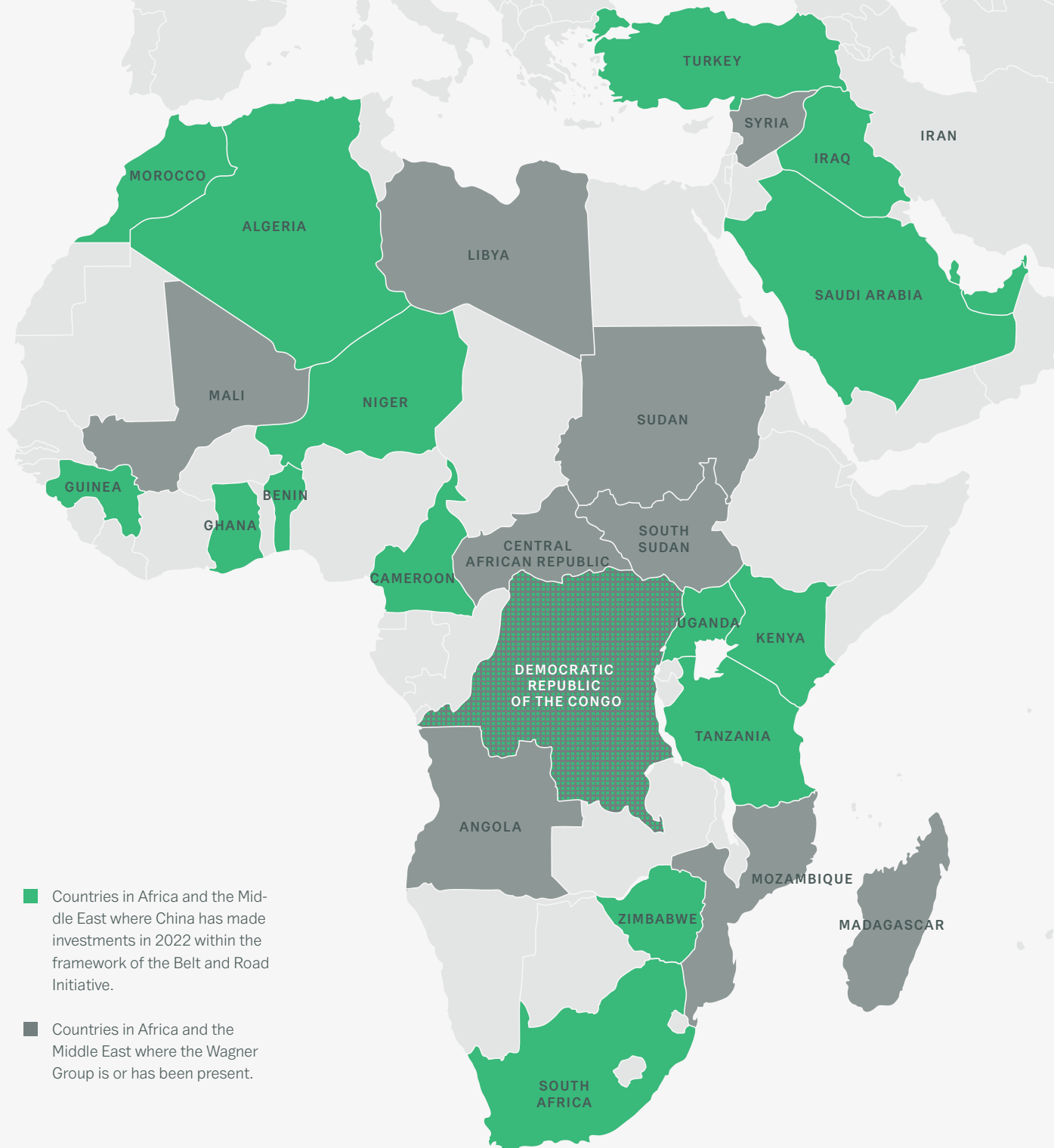
Iran is expanding its military presence in the waters and straits surrounding the Arabian Peninsula – a presence that Iran has previously used to threaten European energy and supply security. Iran is also continuing the development of its ballistic missile programme and strengthening its cyber attack capability against regional and international targets.

Even if a new nuclear deal is reached, Israel will likely continue its efforts to weaken Iran's regional influence and contain Iran's already advanced nuclear programme by carrying out attacks and sabotage, which will raise the risk of military escalation. Similarly, several Gulf States will continue to reassert their hostile position to Iran's increasing influence in the region, potentially bringing them closer to Israel.

The widespread and months-long protests in Iran have served to demonstrate the growing gap between the Iranian regime and the Iranian people. However, the protests pose no immediate threat to the regime's existence. Rather, the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps and Iran's hardliners will probably use the protests to consolidate their power even further.

## CHINA AND RUSSIA IN AFRICA AND THE MIDDLE EAST

Russia and China are involved in Africa and the Middle East in very different ways. Russia's involvement primarily has a military focus which includes the use of private military companies, while China is investing in areas such as infrastructure.





## RUSSIA

- Russia exports weapons to and forges official military agreements with countries in the Middle East and Africa.
- The Russian private military company called the Wagner Group has established a presence in several countries in Africa. The Wagner Group highly likely operates in understanding with and on behalf of Russia whenever Russia wants to distance itself from engagements in places such as Africa.

## CHINA

- In Iraq in 2021, China invested heavily in a campaign for COVID-19 protection equipment and helped to build at least one hospital.
- In 2021, China forged a comprehensive strategic agreement with Iran, and Iran already exports large quantities of oil to China.
- Saudi Arabia is one of the few countries to receive large investments related to China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2022.

### A more independent Turkey holds challenges for the West

In recent years, Turkey has pursued a more independent foreign and security policy course. Consequently, Turkish interests and threat perceptions often differ from those of Europe, for example on the issue of Western support for the Kurdish YPG group in Syria which, in Turkey's view, is closely linked to the terrorist group PKK. These diverging views have also been reflected in Turkey's reluctance to approve Sweden's and Finland's NATO membership applications. In addition, tensions continue to rise between Turkey and Greece over maritime disputes in the Aegean Sea.

Also, Turkey will continue its policy of balancing between Russia and the West in a bid to gain increasing independence on the international scene. On the one hand, Turkey is seeking to bolster its legitimacy in the West by supplying Ukraine with drones and positioning itself as a mediator, just as Turkey is an important NATO ally. On the other hand, Turkey has significantly strengthened its economic ties with Russia in the wake of the war in Ukraine.

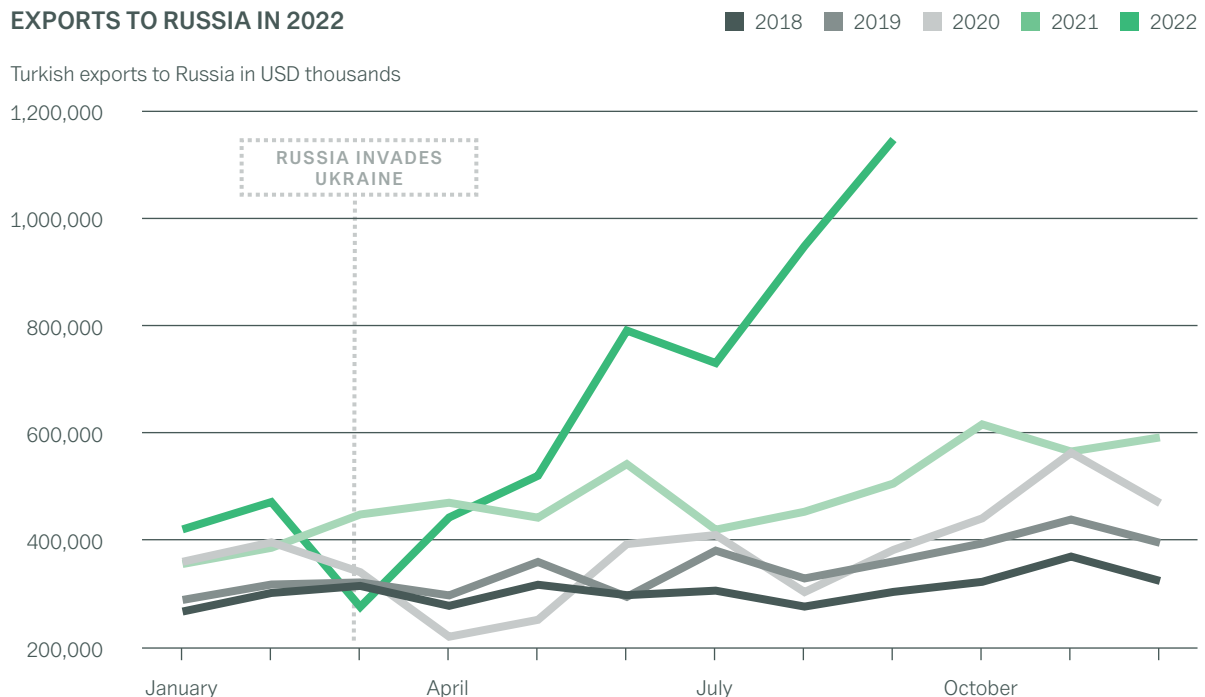
Turkey will in all likelihood also pursue its own security interests in northern Syria in 2023. In response to the November 2022 terrorist attack in Istanbul, Turkey carried out new air strikes against Kurdish targets in northern Syria and Iraq. Turkey also threatened to launch a new ground military operation in northern Syria – a development which stakeholders such as Russia and the Assad regime are trying to prevent through negotiations. However, several factors could still push Turkey into a new military offensive against the parts of the Kurdish-controlled areas in northern Syria that have no US military presence. The Turkish government also has a strong interest in initiating the repatriation of the close to four million Syrian refugees who are present in Turkey ahead of the Turkish general elections scheduled for June 2023.

### Europe will grow increasingly dependent on the oil- and gas-producing countries

The Russian invasion of Ukraine has made Europe turn once again to the Middle East and Africa for fossil fuels. Consequently, the EU and several European countries are looking into the possibilities of promoting energy cooperation with states in the two regions.

### SIGNIFICANTLY INCREASED TURKISH EXPORTS TO RUSSIA IN 2022

Turkish exports to Russia in USD thousands



Source: TURKSTAT



Following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the main producers of oil and gas in the region have pursued narrow self-interests and have refrained from taking a clear position in the conflict. Countries such as Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have proven unwilling to increase oil and gas production and thereby accommodate Western needs to reduce reliance on Russian oil and gas and keep energy prices stable and low. In October 2022, the two countries agreed with Russia to significantly cut oil production within the OPEC+ framework, which is a cartel consisting of the oil-producing OPEC countries and primarily Russia.

If the OPEC+ maintains this course, energy prices will rise even further with rising inflation as a by-product. In addition, the countries rich in oil and gas supplies will have stronger bargaining power vis-à-vis Europe, potentially weakening Europe's possibilities of criticizing the democracy and human rights setbacks that characterize the region these years.

Russia will in all likelihood seek to prevent European access to oil and gas from the Middle East, bilaterally by influencing specific countries as well as through its participation in OPEC+. China is a competitor to Europe as a buyer of energy resources from the region, another factor that helps push up prices.

The impacts of the war in Ukraine on global energy markets, not least the growing European demand for energy, have the potential to deepen conflicts over extraction rights in disputed areas and maritime law disagreements in several places in the Middle East and the eastern Mediterranean. Such conflicts could potentially further destabilize the region and complicate Europe's access to the desired oil and gas.

2022 has thus already seen conflicts of varying intensity over access to or transport of gas and oil in northern Iraq and in the waters between Israel and Lebanon. Also, it is possible that a conflict from 2020 between Greece and Turkey will re-erupt. The conflict revolves around access to and transport of oil and gas out of the areas in the Mediterranean to which both countries claim sovereignty.

### **Arms race makes it more dangerous for Denmark to participate in peacekeeping operations in the Middle East and Africa**

Several of the large, powerful countries in the region will likely engage in arms races to protect against regional enemies. Such races will take place in parallel with several of them having engaged in mutual dialogue in recent years. As a result of this rearmament, the medium-term and long-term military confrontations in the region will likely become more violent.

In addition, it is likely that potential new wars in the regions will be more technologically advanced, making it more dangerous for European countries to participate in peacekeeping operations in these regions. As an example, countries such as Iran and Turkey produce advanced drones at affordable prices. Turkey is already selling drones to states all over the Middle East and Africa, while Iran is ready to sell its drones to non-state actors such as militias. It is possible that some of these weapons will eventually fall into the hands of regional terrorist groups and significantly bolster their capabilities.

#### **ARMS RACE**

Some parts of the region are witnessing an actual arms race, including new challenges connected to locally produced weapons such as drones.

##### **Iran – Saudi Arabia**

Iran perceives the softening of relations seen in recent years between Israel and Saudi Arabia and Iran's other regional rivals as a threat. This has prompted Iran to expand its production of increasingly sophisticated drones and missiles for domestic use as well as for export and weapons aid to its allies. However, Iran's regional rivals, whose military budgets far exceed that of Iran, on their part are investing heavily in high-tech weapons systems to be able to defend against attacks from Iranian-produced drones and missiles.

##### **Turkey – Greece**

Since 2015, Turkey has expanded its domestic arms production and has purchased the S-400 missile defence system from Russia. In recent years, Greece and Cyprus have forged extensive arms purchase agreements with France and the United States. Cyprus, for instance, has most recently approved the purchase of the Iron Dome missile defence system from Israel.

## THEME MARITIME SECURITY - EXPOSED STRAITS AND PIRACY

### Piracy in the Gulf of Guinea

In 2022, piracy in the Gulf of Guinea has dropped to a record low, mainly because regional criminals have turned from piracy to illegal oil trade.

Another possible reason for the drop is that the increased military efforts have weakened the pirates' resolve to operate in international waters. Local and regional maritime efforts, however, have not had the desired quelling effect on piracy. Nigeria's main priority is protecting the critical oil infrastructure close to the country's territorial waters rather than fighting piracy in international waters.

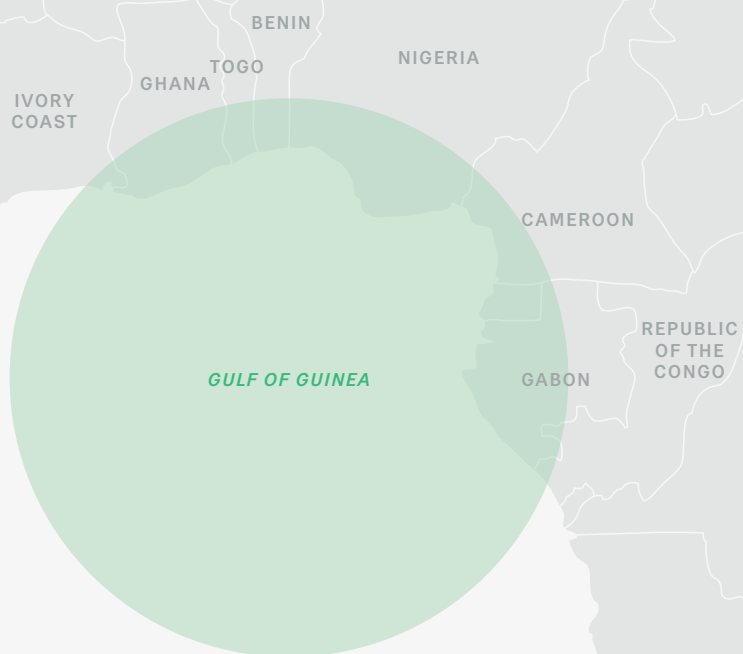
Pirates will likely continue to be active in the Gulf of Guinea in the short term but not to the same extent as seen in recent seasons. They still have the capability and intent to launch kidnapping-for-ransom attacks, including kidnapping of crews and vessels.

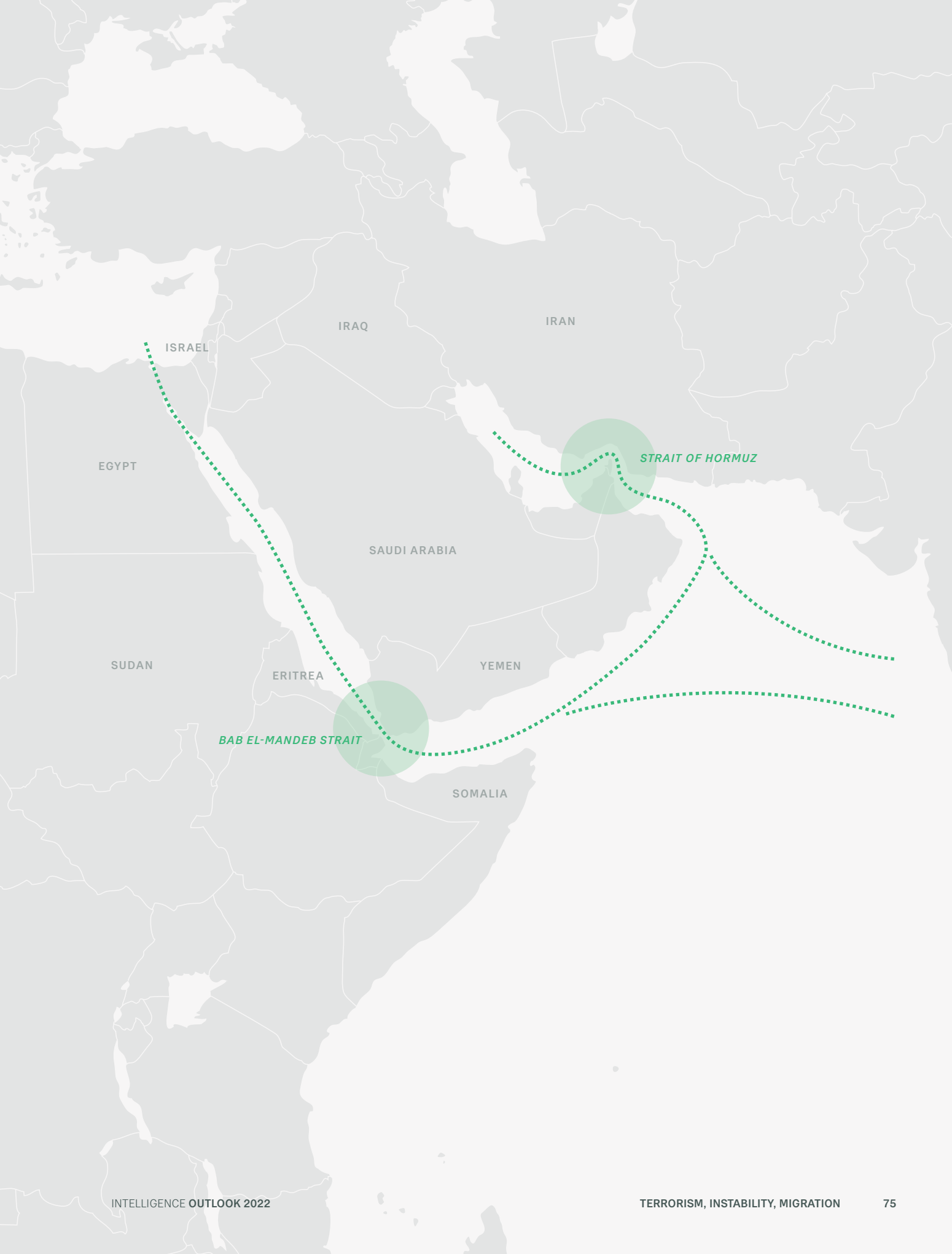
### Threats to shipping in the waters surrounding the Arabian Peninsula

Europe's trade with Asia and growing dependence on oil and gas from the Gulf region increase the strategic importance of maritime security around the Arabian Peninsula. Regional conflicts may threaten security for international shipping, including Danish merchant ships.

In recent years, Iranian military forces have detained foreign merchant ships in the Strait of Hormuz to deter nations with maritime interests in the region from implementing the sanctions imposed on Iran.

In connection with regional conflicts such as the civil war in Yemen and the conflict between Iran and Israel, both Israeli and Iranian merchant ships have been exposed to attacks. Third party vessels, including Danish merchant ships, may become collateral victims of such attacks, especially in congested waters or in waters where the capability of the parties to identify or strike their targets is limited.





Smoke rising from the Kerch bridge over the Kerch Strait between Russia and the Crimean Peninsula.  
Maxar Technologies/Reuters/Ritzau Scanpix



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