

Will Donbass Live to See the UN Peacekeepers?

December 11, 2017

REUTERS/Oleksandr...

It all began three months ago to the day, in the Chinese town of Xiamen. During a news conference following the BRICS Summit, President of the Russian Federation Vladimir Putin proposed the use of international peacekeepers under auspices of the United Nations in the east of Ukraine. The idea was not totally new either: it had been discussed, in a variety of formats, ever since the very first months of the military confrontation in Donbass. However, it was the first time that Russia had officially proposed a peacekeeping initiative at the highest level. The President of the Russian Federation suggested a fairly narrow mandate for potential peacekeepers, yet his initiative took all the parties in the conflict by surprise.^[i]

This is no surprise. On the eve of Putin's statement, official Russian representatives had resolutely rejected the very idea of involving international peacekeepers in the Ukrainian conflict. Moscow's usual argument was to cite the Minsk agreements, which do not envisage such a possibility. Kiev's intermittent calls for involving the United Nations or the European Union in the settlement process effectively indicated the desire of the Ukrainian authorities to divest itself of any responsibility for the implementation of these agreements.



Andrey Kortunov:

[The Price of Peace: The Parameters of a Possible Compromise in Donbass](#)

The proposal of the President of the Russian Federation gave rise to numerous conjectures as to the Kremlin's possible motives and intentions.^[ii] Was Putin's statement merely a tactical ploy aimed at driving Kiev into a corner? Or had Russia's position on the Ukrainian changed dramatically? Should the parameters of a possible UN peacekeeping mission outlined by Putin be taken as Moscow's new red line? Or are they a bargaining chip for the future? Finally, who were Moscow's proposals primarily addressed to: the Ukrainian leadership? The participants in the Normandy format? Or the Donald Trump administration?

Even now, three months on, the possible answers are being heatedly debated. All the more so as the public discussion of possible ways to resolve the conflict remains extremely emotional and not necessarily constructive. External observers who are not privy to the various informal consultations still know very little about them. Nevertheless, the statements, comments and interviews with the main actors that are available to us give us an approximate idea of the disagreements that have up to now stood in the way of implementing the peacekeeping discussion in practice, as well as an idea of what needs to be done by all stakeholders in order to overcome these differences.

Does Russia (and Ukraine) Want War?

The following arguments are based on the assumption that both Kiev and Moscow want to find a political solution to the Donbass problem. Any political solution would imply that the parties are willing to compromise. If at least one of the parties lacks the desire and readiness required, and is looking at a violent resolution instead, one that would result in the opponent's unconditional surrender, then it would naturally be senseless to talk about the prospects for an international peacekeeping mission. At best, we might see certain tactical agreements designed to gain time, regroup, accumulate resources and resume political (if not military) pressure on the enemy at the appropriate moment. Another possibility is that the statements made by the parties to the effect that a political solution is the only viable solution are nothing more than propaganda. The presumption that the sides are prepared for a political compromise is certainly open to criticism, but if we do not allow for this possibility we are better off ending this discussion right here and now.

Other assumptions are that Kiev is not currently ready to let Donbass go, and that Moscow is not interested in absorbing the DPR and LPR or in securing the status of "unrecognized states" for them. As is known, many people in Russia doubt the validity of the former solution, and many people in Ukraine question the legitimacy of the latter. It is unlikely that anyone, with the possible exception of the leaders of the two countries, knows for sure what ideas the Russian and Ukrainian governments are currently considering. Nevertheless, official statements from both sides allow us to treat the aforementioned assumptions as being justified and lawful.

The third important assumption is that the four years of conflict have taught both Moscow and Kiev to assess the current situation, and its perception by the opposing side, in a realistic manner. Back in late 2014, some people in Russia thought that Ukraine could disintegrate at any moment, that the mounting economic difficulties would undermine the socio-political foundation of Ukrainian nationalism, and that the West would be either unable or unwilling to keep Kiev's sinking "comprador" regime afloat. Now, in late 2017, no intelligent person can conceivably entertain such ideas any longer. On the other hand, a widespread idea in Ukraine was that the Russian economy would quickly collapse under the weight of the Western sanctions, that political support for Putin would crumble, and that Russia would soon be facing a new 1991. Today, such a scenario appears to be something taken from a parallel universe, completely unrelated to the actual state of affairs in Russia.

Looking back, we must admit that both Kiev and Moscow (or, rather, the Ukrainian and Russian people) have demonstrated the steadfastness, resilience and flexibility. And this has come as a surprise to many external observers. You can call this staunchness as stubbornness, or you can blame the insidious government propaganda. However, this does not change the essence of the matter: the Ukrainian and Russian people, with the exception of a handful of dissidents, are prepared to continue to bear the costs associated with the Donbass conflict.

This means that the hopes formerly held in Kiev and Moscow that the situation would resolve itself in quick time, that time was on "their side" and that victory was guaranteed because their cause was just, stood no chance of persisting on either side of the conflict. Neither side is likely to achieve a decisive victory in the foreseeable future. And a protracted crisis will mean the accumulation of long-term problems for both Ukraine and Russia. In this conflict, time is working against both Kiev and Moscow, even though the people of both countries have somehow adapted to living in a situation that would have seemed totally inconceivable only four years ago.

What are Kiev and the West Afraid of?

The three months that have passed since Putin made his proposal have been rich in commentaries, criticisms and counterproposals by the Ukrainian leadership, experts and analysts. The peacekeeping idea provoked an equally vivid reaction in the West. Parts of this reaction lacked a certain coherence and consistency, yet the response itself allows us

to draw several conclusions as to what it is about the Russian proposal that does not suit Kiev and its Western partners.

Donbass as a frozen conflict. To begin with, the deployment of peacekeepers exclusively along the demarcation line between the opposing sides could turn Donbass into another “frozen conflict.”^[iii] This kind of deployment would recognize the status quo, which, as is illustrated by many conflict situations, including in the former USSR, often plays into the hands of separatists. Kiev cites the examples of Transnistria and Abkhazia, where delimiting the sides did nothing to resolve the respective conflicts but rather consolidated and accelerated the centrifugal processes. This means that a “dividing line” is capable of putting an end to the prospects of Donbass subsequently being integrated into the political, economic and social life of Ukraine.

Legitimizing Russia’s military presence. Kiev believes that if Russian troops are included in the peacekeeping contingent (a matter on which the DPR and LPR authorities insist), Moscow will be able to secure a legitimate military presence in the east of Ukraine under the auspices of the United Nations. In addition, Russian peacekeepers cannot be a politically neutral force, given the current state of relations between Moscow and Kiev. In fact, the UN peacekeeping traditions preclude the participation of countries that border the areas where peacekeeping operations are being carried out.

Recognition of the DPR and LPR authorities. Throughout the conflict in the east of Ukraine, Kiev has demonstrated a continuing reluctance to have anything to do with the leadership of the unrecognized DPR and LPR as the second party to the peacekeeping talks, something that Russia has always insisted on in its proposals. Ukraine believes that any direct interaction with the current Donbass leadership on peacekeeping issues would effectively mean the recognition of that leadership as the legitimate representatives of the DPR and LPR population. This is politically unacceptable to Kiev. Kiev believes, therefore, that any peacekeeping talks should be conducted exclusively with Moscow, and that it is for Moscow to make sure that its “stooges” implement the agreements reached.

Easing of Western pressure on Russia. The decision to launch a peacekeeping operation in the east of Ukraine, in any format, could lead to the activation of forces in the West that have always promoted the restoration of cooperation with Moscow, including the lifting or mitigation of the sanctions against Russia. Such a scenario understandably worries the current Ukrainian leadership. In Kiev’s opinion, the very fact that Russia has made proposals on a peacekeeping mission indicates that the Western sanctions are having the desired effect. Therefore, in order to make progress in the resolution of the conflict, the pressure on Moscow needs to be maintained, or perhaps even intensified.

What are Moscow and the DPR/LPR Afraid of?

The past three months have demonstrated Russia’s unwillingness to make any fundamental concessions to Kiev and its Western partners. Moscow objects to Ukraine’s version of international peacekeeping involvement (extending the peacekeeping area to cover all of the DPR and LPR and the state border with Russia; the refusal of Kiev to negotiate with the Donbass leadership; and the rejection of the idea of Russia’s direct involvement in the peacekeeping operation, etc.).^[iv] The Kremlin’s objections grow even more resolute and uncompromising when transmitted via the leaders of the unrecognized Donetsk and Lugansk republics.

Donbass massacre scenario. At the heart of Russia’s objections lies the suspicion that an international peacekeeping contingent would not be able to provide sufficient security to the Donbass population, especially given the widespread radical nationalist and revanchist sentiments in Ukrainian society.^[v] Moscow points out that the Ukrainian leadership remains incapable of controlling the numerous autonomous armed groups and paramilitary radical

political movements that might terrorize the DPR/LPR territories, threaten their political opponents and contribute to the spread of crime in the region. It is possible that this could be followed by new waves of refugees and internally displaced persons from Donbass towards Russia.

Peacekeepers as a pretext for revising the Minsk agreements. The Ukrainian version of a possible peacekeeping operation raises numerous questions in Moscow linked to the future of the Minsk agreements. Russia suspects Kiev of attempting to use the new settlement plan as a pretext for overhauling the Minsk agreements, or even abandoning them outright, particularly those provisions that concern political reform.^[vi] In addition, should the Ukrainian version be implemented, Moscow would lose all its current influence on the situation, effectively becoming an outside witness to Ukrainian nationalists engaging in a “mopping-up” operation in Donbass. As far as Moscow is concerned, the commitment of Western countries to the Minsk agreements is by no means a sure-fire guarantee that the agreements will be observed by Kiev.^[vii]

Irvin Studin:

[How China and India Can Keep the Peace in Ukraine](#)

Moscow’s flexibility resulting in greater pressure on Russia. Whereas the Ukrainian government fears the erosion of the West’s anti-Russian consensus and the weakening of pressure on Moscow, the Russian government has reasons to believe that, should Moscow make any significant concessions with regard to the peacekeepers in Donbass, Kiev and the West (the United States at least) would perceive this as a sign of weakness on the part of Russia and might try to apply greater pressure on Moscow.^[viii] If Russia decides to give up Donbass, then Crimea might become the West’s next target.

Wrong time for concessions. As far as we can tell, Moscow does not see Kiev’s latest proposals, which have been supported by the West, as a compromise. Should Russia adopt these proposals, it will be difficult to present this as another foreign political victory (even a formal victory) for the Kremlin to domestic and outside audiences. The presidential election campaign is under way in Russia, and the Kremlin is likely use the foreign policy victories it has earned in the past few years to bolster its chances of winning. This means that any “retreat” on the Ukrainian front would appear ill-timed, to say the least. It could even entail unnecessary political risks. On the other hand, the Kremlin points to the numerous uncertainties that remain in the West, including the domestic political crisis in the United States and German Chancellor Angela Merkel’s inability to form a coalition government. As far as Moscow is concerned, it would be better to postpone serious discussions on the Ukrainian issue until next summer or autumn.

Where is a Compromise to be Found?

As is characteristic of any complex and multifaceted international crisis, the situation in the east of Ukraine represents a tangle of subjective and objective factors, external and internal circumstances, personal ambitions and long-term social trends, specific interests of individual political groups, and banal mistakes caused by the incompetence or incomplete awareness of the parties. This is why solutions to this problem – in the plural, as there is no single solution – should be sought at different levels and on different planes. Listed below are just the most obvious ingredients required for a successful peacekeeping mission in the east of Ukraine.

Agreeing on the current priorities. Even though the diverse tasks facing the peacekeeping mission are absolutely important, the most urgent and important objective is to put an end to the violence, stop the loss of life and ensure the implementation of the first three conditions of the Minsk agreements (a bilateral ceasefire, the withdrawal of heavy weapons and the implementation of monitoring activities). This objective should inform priorities with regard to both the territory where the peacekeeping are forces initially

deployed (the demarcation line) and to the initial mandate of these forces (preventing possible violations of the ceasefire agreement, regardless of which side commits the transgression). For Russia, it would be worthwhile to think about expanding the mandate it originally proposed to include not only the protection of Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE) observers, but also the provision of a stable truce. This mandate needs to be consistent with the number of peacekeepers, the weapons in their possession, and their right to use such weapons against those who violate the truce. For its part, Ukraine should not insist on giving the blue helmets any additional functions at this stage. As things progress, the peacekeeping force might be provided with a new, broader mandate.

Overcoming phantom fears. Some of the concerns of the two parties seem to be far-fetched. And that is putting it mildly. It is, for example, fairly difficult to believe that, under the current circumstances, any NATO member – no matter how much Kiev pleads – would be prepared to commit significant military contingents for a peacekeeping operation in Donbass, certainly not before they have obtained sufficient security guarantees from the DNR and LNR. Furthermore, the existing UN procedures for setting up and managing peacekeeping forces exclude even the theoretical possibility of a single country (including Russia and the United States) or group of countries (including NATO) unilaterally controlling the progress of a peacekeeping operation. There appears to be nothing preventing the peacekeeping force from comprising representatives of countries trusted both by Kiev and Moscow; everything would depend on the political will of the two sides and their readiness to make balanced compromises.

Taking prior experience into account. Existing peacekeeping experience does not support the idea that negotiating with unrecognized entities within a given territory serves as the first step towards the international recognition of those entities. For example, the United Nations has been coordinating its peacekeeping activities in Cyprus with the government of Northern Cyprus for decades, ever since Turkey invaded the island in the summer of 1974, even though the territorial entity is not recognized by anyone except Turkey. A similar situation arose in the course of numerous attempts by the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe (CSCE), and then the OSCE, to mediate the Nagorno-Karabakh issue: the presence of Nagorno-Karabakh representatives at the negotiating table since 1992 has not, and will not, lead to the recognition of the territory as a legitimate subject of international law. There is no doubt that, should the sides agree on this and demonstrate a degree of flexibility and creativeness, a similar formula could be devised for Donbass.

Sharing the responsibility for the peacekeeping mission. Observing Ukraine's demands to the letter – that Russia take no part in the peacekeeping operation and that negotiations with the Donbass authorities do not take place – would raise the logical question of who is to act as the guarantor of uninterrupted peacekeeping work in Donbass. Is Kiev prepared to bear sole responsibility for inevitable incidents, outbreaks of violence and attacks on the peacekeepers? It appears that at this point in time, Ukraine's interests would best be served by the active involvement of both Moscow and the Donbass authorities in the settlement process. The particularities of such involvement, however, are quite a different matter. The existing experience of the Trilateral Contact Group on Ukraine should be carefully studied again, as should the experience of practical interaction between the OSCE monitoring mission and the Donbass authorities. As for Russia, its strategic role should be to define the mandate of the peacekeeping operation within the framework of the UN Security Council, as well as planning and monitoring that operation. Speaking of Russian peacekeepers in Donbass, some form of presence, however symbolic, would be an additional guarantee that all the parties to the conflict will fulfil the terms of the peacekeeping agreement.

Considering the dynamic side to the agreement. Many of the disagreements between Moscow and Kiev would appear less fundamental if the mandate, area of deployment and the timeframe of the possible peacekeeping mission were viewed as dynamic, rather than

static, values. In other words, the mission should be perceived as a set of successive stages, with the objectives of each subsequent stage defined by the preceding stage's achievements. For example, it would be correct to expect the peacekeeping mission's deployment area to expand gradually (all the way to the border between Russia and Ukraine), its potential to grow over time and its functions to gradually transition from the initial objectives (ensuring the cessation of hostilities) to more complex matters (including, for example, technical assistance with the organization of local elections). Both Kiev and the West fear that Moscow will retain the right to block the transition to the next stage if it is not satisfied with the current results of the peacekeeping mission. However, Russia would reserve such a right irrespective of how the UN peacekeepers are used. Also, peacekeeping missions eventually acquire their own dynamics and inertia; politically, it is always more difficult to block the continuation of a successful mission than prevent the launch of a new one.

Synchronizing the peacekeeping mission with the implementation of the Minsk agreements. There exists the opinion that, since the Normandy format has reached an impasse and the focus of the current Donbass settlement consultations has shifted to the "shuttle diplomacy" exercised by Kurt Volker's successor as the U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine, the future UN peacekeeping mission should eventually replace the "outdated" mechanisms and procedures envisaged by the Minsk agreements. It appears that, rather than becoming an alternative to the Minsk agreements, the mission should represent an additional instrument for their implementation. Such an instrument is not provided for in the text of the Minsk agreements, but it does not contradict the spirit of the document in any way. Having assisted the parties to the conflict in the implementation of the first three clauses of the agreements, the peacekeeping mission could move on to deal with the other clauses, including the distribution of humanitarian assistance, the disarmament of illegal groups, the enforcement of law and order, etc. The timeline of the Minsk agreements would certainly need to be revised accordingly to reflect the progress of the peacekeeping mission.

Keeping the pan-European perspective in mind. There is undoubtedly a bilateral causal link between the current crisis involving Ukraine and the more general problems related to European (or Euro-Atlantic) security. For as long as the Ukrainian crisis remains unresolved, the European security system cannot become indivisible; nor will it be possible to overcome the new east division of the continent. At the same time, the Ukrainian crisis cannot be resolved completely all efforts are focused on it alone, outside the context of solving broader European problems. Restoring peace in Donbass, normalizing Russia-Ukraine relations and finding new approaches to European security in general need to be viewed as parallel objectives, not consecutive ones. It will take many years, if not decades, to solve these problems. However, the launch of a UN peacekeeping operation in Donbass could become a pivotal event in European politics, one that would result in a negative trend being replaced by a positive one. We are left to hope that this shift will take place in 2018. The longer the current crisis lasts, the harder it will be to emerge from it.

[1] "First, I believe the presence of UN peacekeepers or, should I say, of those people who would ensure the security of the OSCE mission, to be fairly appropriate. I see nothing wrong in this; on the contrary, I believe this would help resolve the situation in the southeast of Ukraine. Of course, we are talking exclusively about ensuring the security of the OSCE officers. Second, these forces need to be stationed exclusively along the demarcation line and nowhere else. Third, the decision is to be made only after the sides have disengaged and withdrawn heavy equipment. No decision can be made without direct contact with the leaders of the self-proclaimed Donetsk and Luhansk people's republics."
(<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55535>).

[ii] Ukraine's first official detailed response to Putin was Petro Poroshenko's address to the UN Security Council on September 20, 2017, which proposed a comprehensive UN peacekeeping operation across the entire territory of the DPR/LPR, including the stretch of the Ukraine–Russia border that is currently not controlled by Kiev (<https://www.unian.net/politics/2145861-poroshenko-obratilsya-k-sovbezu-oon-o-razvertyivanii-mirotvortsev-na-donbasse-video.html>).

[iii] We can cite, for instance, the following statement by Minister of Foreign Affairs of Ukraine Pavlo Klimkin: “We have absolutely no use of a frozen conflict here, simply because this is something that Russia needs by definition. The entire logic of Russia's actions boils down to attempting to influence us and destabilize us via the occupied Donbass, via this Russian colony in Donbass. This is why even this schizophrenic Russian proposal to protect the OSCE by means of peacekeepers (read: protect from Russia itself, because nobody else can influence them there) also contributes to nothing more than the freezing of the conflict. The same can be said of placing peacekeepers exclusively along the contact line, which is nothing more than the creation of a new frontier.” (<https://www.ukrinform.ru/rubric-polytics/2312434-klimkin-nazvav-rosijsku-rezoluciu-po-mirotvorcam-sizofrenicnou.html>).

[iv] Following his meeting with U.S. Special Representative for Ukraine Kurt Volker in Belgrade on November 13, 2017, Russian Presidential Aide Vladislav Surkov stated that, out of the 29 proposals made by the United States, Russia had only been able to concede to three, those which generally reiterated the inviolability of the Minsk agreements (https://www.gazeta.ru/politics/2017/11/14_a_10985108.shtml).

[v] As Putin told the Valdai Club conference in October, “Closing the border between Russia and the unrecognized republics would result in a situation akin to Srebrenica. A massacre will follow there. We cannot, and never will, allow that.” (<http://kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>).

[vi] There are grounds for such concerns. Consider, for example, the recent statement made by the Minister of Internal Affairs, Arsen Avakov (<https://rian.com.ua/politics/20171128/1029853624.html>).

[vii] Moscow refers in particular to the events that took place in Kiev on February 21, 2014, when a number of European officials facilitated an agreement between President Viktor Yanukovich and the Ukrainian political opposition on a transition period that was subsequently breached by the opposition at the West's “connivance” (<http://www.kremlin.ru/events/president/news/55882>).

[viii] When Jon Huntsman Jr., the new Ambassador of the United States to Russia, conditioned the lifting of the U.S. sanctions on progress in Donbass (<https://topspb.tv/programs/stories/466132/>), the general reaction from Russian politicians and experts was extremely sceptical. The overwhelming majority of commentators believed that the sanctions were there to stay and that, no matter what Moscow did, the decision of the United State Congress was irreversible, regardless of the Trump administration's desires.

The Middle East and a New Round of Escalation of the War in Yemen

December 8, 2017

REUTERS/Mohamed

Clashes erupted in Yemen's capital Sana'a on November 29, 2017 between former tactical allies, the armed Houthi militias and supporters of former president Ali Abdullah Saleh (who

led the country from 1978 to 2012). On December 2, following severe fighting within the city limits and in its suburbs that involved the use of grenade launchers and artillery, Ali Abdullah Saleh announced the split with the Houthi forces, the Ansar Allah movement led by Abd al-Malik al-Houthi. Two days later, reports emerged of a Houthi attack on Saleh's motorcade that killed him and several of his senior aides.

With such an experienced player as Ali Abdullah Saleh on their side, the Houthis ought to have been prepared for him to continue his game — at the worst possible moment for them.

That Strange Alliance That Was

Ali Abdullah Saleh, a Zaydi Muslim, had been fighting the Houthi rebels since 2004 from his base in the mountainous northern province of Saada. Following an attempt on his life in June 2011, Ali Abdullah Saleh retreated to Saudi Arabia to recuperate, returning to Yemen in September of that year. He then signed a [Gulf Cooperation Council-sponsored power-transfer plan](#) on November 23 in Riyadh in exchange for guarantees of his personal safety. But what followed caused confusion and gave rise to suspicions that the ex-president had embarked upon a multi-dimensional game in a bid to not let power slip from his hands for good. When the Houthi entered Yemen's capital on September 21, 2014, encountering almost no resistance, [many started to talk](#) about the loyalty of key Yemeni warlords to Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had for some reason become interested in a Houthi victory march across the entire country.

Indeed, it soon became clear that a strange alliance of the former adversaries had taken shape. But Ali Abdullah Saleh's tactical allies, the Houthis, continued to suspect him. They remembered all too well the border treaty he signed with Saudi Arabia on June 12, 2000 (66 years after the previous border treaty had been signed), which secured Ali Abdullah Saleh a huge political and financial advantage in the struggle for Saudi favour, in particular against the Islamist al-Islah party, and directly affected the Houthis' territorial claims.

With such an experienced player as Ali Abdullah Saleh on their side, the Houthis ought to have been prepared for him to continue his game — at the worst possible moment for them. On the other hand, it is not inconceivable that the time had come for the ex-president to repay the Saudis what he may have owed them. This could explain why he rose against the Houthis in the Yemeni capital with all the firepower of his supporters.

Saudi Leadership Ambitions — Again

The last time the House of Al-Saud was this incensed was when a missile was launched on November 4 in the direction of Riyadh from an area controlled by the Ansar Allah movement. The attack alarmed the Saudis very much and generated [many opinions](#). An article from [Resolution 2216 of the UN Security Council](#) adopted on April, 14 2015 comes to mind here: it demands that “the Houthis immediately and unconditionally <...> withdraw their forces from all areas they have seized, including the capital Sana'a, and <...> refrain from any provocation or threats to neighbouring States, including through acquiring surface-surface missiles, and stockpiling weapons in any bordering territory of a neighbouring State.” The fact that Saudi Arabia had already been bombing Yemen for three weeks by the time the resolution was adopted (since March 25) was conveniently omitted from the document.

One month after the killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Saudis might intensify the “southern dimension” of their deterrence of Iran.

Clearly, the Houthi missile launched towards the Saudi capital in November 2017 gave the Saudis yet another reason to demand compliance with the Security Council resolution. At the time, the incident led, among other things, to the Saudis intensifying their rhetoric with

regard to Iran's "proxy" Hezbollah in Lebanon and to increase pressure on it via the Prime Minister of Lebanon Saad al-Hariri, himself a Saudi citizen.

One month after the killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh, the Saudis might intensify the "southern dimension" of their deterrence of Iran, this time by putting more military pressure on what they view as another Iranian proxy –Ansar Allah.

That said, it could well turn out that the simplified theory of a regional axis of the supposed Shia–Sunni confrontation does not explain what is really going on. We believe that competition for the status of the most financially potent Arab Gulf state is an important (even central, though not so obvious) factor.



Sergey Serebrov:

[Yemen Crisis: Causes, Threats and Resolution Scenarios](#)

Rivalry in the Gulf

There was a time when countries such as Iraq, Egypt, Jordan and Yemen tried to establish a club similar to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC). Under an [agreement](#) signed in Baghdad on February 16, 1989, the Arab Cooperation Council, headquartered in Amman, was created. The rules of that club (which in any case failed after just two years as a result of an anti-Iraq campaign during the Gulf War) were supposed to be quite different. The Gulf

Cooperation Council, a club that is effectively closed to outsiders (it includes Bahrain, Qatar, Kuwait, the United Arab Emirates, Oman and Saudi Arabia), exists to this day and apparently feels no discomfort from a total lack of ideology. On the contrary, this club of monarchies usually demonstrates, in the words of a classical American philosopher, “loyalty to loyalty.”

While the internal cohesion of the GCC project can be called into question for a whole number of reasons, its viability is beyond doubt because it stems from the export and financial potential of its members. The severity of internal competition surfaces only in such demonstrative actions as the recent “Qatar crisis,” but the real struggle seems to be between the two richest members, the ruling houses of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (which, incidentally, trace their origins to different local tribes, a big deal on the Arabian Peninsula).

The Saudis have been bombing their neighbours for more than two and a half years now, having effectively isolating the country economically. Meanwhile, according to data announced by UN experts at the Security Council meeting on December 5, 2017, there are nearly 8 million people starving in Yemen, and up to 970,000 suspected cases of cholera had been reported. What is more, seven freight vessels carrying a month’s supply of food were moored at the ports of Hodeida and as-Salif at the time but were not allowed to dock.

But there is ample evidence that both the war in Yemen and the social and political upheaval it has unleashed are not limited to geopolitical or military-strategic — let alone religious or confessional — factors.

The severity of the humanitarian situation casts a favourable light on the United Arab Emirates’ efforts to expand its influence in Yemen’s southern muhafazat (provinces) — Mahra, Hadhramaut, Shabwah and the Socotra archipelago. The United Arab Emirates is paying for telecommunications, food supplies, roads and other infrastructure there. Naturally, supporters of an independent South Yemen now look favourably upon that country.

So it is possible that Iran may be playing the “Yemen card” to try and replicate Hezbollah’s “resistance” tactics among the Ansar Allah, yet competition along a totally different axis (inter-Sunni at that) seems to be a more likely explanation. The killing of Ali Abdullah Saleh, who was once an incredibly important figure for the Arabian Peninsula (as well as a number of his relatives and associates) may serve as a trigger for the escalation of Saudi Arabia’s campaign in Yemen. And in terms of confronting the United Arab Emirates, it offers a pretext not only for putting even more pressure on the Houthis, but also, most importantly, for blocking the United Arab Emirates’ creeping expansion in southern Yemeni areas.

It remains to be seen whether Yemen’s discovered oil reserves are running out. Nor is it clear whether the claims that the country sits on extremely abundant oil deposits have any basis in reality. Apparently, these deposits can only be developed if at least two conditions are met: a formal guarantee of the stable legal status of the areas in question and the security of investments. But there is ample evidence that both the war in Yemen and the social and political upheaval it has unleashed are not limited to geopolitical or military-strategic — let alone religious or confessional — factors. It would seem to make sense here to look for “cui prodest,” and quite literally so.

African Union-European Union Summit: The Security – Development Nexus in a New Way

December 7, 2017

REUTERS/Luc Gnago...

The fifth African Union-European Union (AU-EU) summit was held on 29-30 November 2017 in Abidjan, Cote d'Ivoire. The leaders of African and EU countries once again

gathered to develop strategic decisions on the future of their cooperation. Interestingly, this is the first time that the [summit](#) was held in sub-Saharan Africa. It was also the first time that the meeting was designated as the AU and the EU summit, and not as the EU – Africa summit. In this regard, Federica Mogherini [noted](#) that for "probably the first time ever, both sides meet as equals, like true partners, like brothers and sisters, as neighbors."

The [theme](#) of the summit was "Investing in youth for a sustainable future." Investing in the future of youth is a key priority for Africa and the EU, since 60% of the African population is under 25 years old, and their contribution to the economic development of the African continent can be enormous if they are provided with the opportunity to receive education, training, get jobs. If this is not done – and now the unemployment rate among African youth as a whole has [exceeded](#) 31% – then the great part of these desperate young people might join the ranks of migrants to the more prosperous EU countries, which presents a colossal challenge for the European Union. Moreover, if the unemployment rate among young people in North Africa is lower, about 25%, then in sub-Saharan Africa – 31% and above. According to the [Agenda-2063](#), the global continental development plan, adopted by the AU, in the first ten years of its implementation, the unemployment rate should be reduced by at least a quarter.



Alexey Boguslavskiy:
[Turkey's Venture into Africa](#)

It is encouraging to note that the problems of youth at the summit were solved with the active participation of young people – representatives of both continents. One hundred and twenty youth leaders provided an important input for the preparation for the event, taking part on October 9-11 in the 4th African-European Youth Summit in Abidjan. They agreed upon the declaration with the recommendations for the November's "adult" summit. In addition, 36 young people from both continents continued this work based on the adopted declaration within the framework of the initiative of the AU-EU youth plug-in initiative. It is interesting that young people from the African Diaspora also took part in the young people forum. The forum participants agreed that young representatives of the Diaspora have a unique potential to inspire and stimulate positive changes in relations between the two continents. From October 12 to November 29, young leaders developed a youth agenda, which was presented to the leaders of the two continents at the summit. The youth agenda included specific proposals on six priority areas: education and skills; business, job creation and entrepreneurship; governance and political integration; peace and security; culture, sport and arts; the environment and climate change.

Youth leaders, in particular, called on the leaders of the EU and the AU to create a framework for recognizing and validating the competencies received through non-formal education, including within the framework of youth organizations, as well as to Euro-African cooperation in harmonizing quality assessment and accreditation of African higher education. They also [support](#) the mutual recognition of evaluation systems and diplomas on formal education between the countries of Africa and the EU to increase mobility of students and young professionals. Young people are also interested in having access to

initial capital for starting a business, as well as reducing the age for being elected to political posts.

Proposals developed by youth leaders were taken into account in the joint declaration adopted at the end of the AU-EU summit. In addition, the participants also discussed the implementation of the joint Action plan for 2014-2017 adopted at the previous summit in Brussels three years ago, and discussed the steps that need to be taken to specify the joint AU-EU strategy on the problems that both continents face. Although Africa is expanding its economic relations with other continents, the EU remains the main trading partner and donor of development assistance for the continent.

The joint declaration adopted at the end of the summit reflected initiatives in four strategic areas: economic opportunities for young people; ensuring peace and security; mobility and migration; cooperation in the field of good governance.

It is important that the summit saw presentation of a new EU [External Investment Plan](#) (EIP). According to this initiative, the EU established the European Fund for Sustainable Development with a capital of 4,1 billion euro in order to attract private investment from European companies and organizations that would like to work on the African continent and in the EU Neighbourhood and provide them with safety guarantees. The EIP is important, because in general the inflow of FDI and other private capital to developing countries declined after the financial crisis of 2008, and as of 2012, only 6% of their volume [flowed](#) into unstable, "fragile" countries, and even then mostly into those that are rich in natural resources. The [cost](#) of creating a business in a "fragile" African country is three times higher than in a stable one.

Although the EU is the largest donor of development assistance to Africa, European experts, as well as Africans themselves, are aware that in order for all projects in Africa to be implemented and achieve the UN Sustainable Development Goals until 2030, the funds of European ODA are catastrophically insufficient. It is necessary to attract private capital, should it come from European or other partners.

The EU is currently the largest aggregate investor for Africa accounting for 33% of the total FDI attracted by the continent in 2015, which [amounted](#) to 32 billion euros. The European Investment Bank alone has already [invested](#) over 20 billion euros in more than 330 projects in the public and private sectors in Africa.

In addition, the EIP framework presupposes providing technical assistance to local authorities in the partner countries to improve the regulatory framework and the investment climate. Partners in the field will be supported in the development of banking projects that will be of interest to investors. The EU leadership expects that, thanks to this project by 2020, an investment of additional 44 billion euros will be attracted. This should also help create new jobs for African youth. The implementation of the plan should also be accompanied by a structured dialogue between the European and African private sectors within the framework of the Sustainable Business for Africa (SB4A) platform. In addition, participants of the platform will look for possible ways of linking this initiative with the national projects of the EU member countries that are similar in direction, as well as with multilateral efforts, in particular, with the "[Compact with Africa](#)" proposed by the G20 thanks to Germany's active role in 2017. This Compact is also aimed at expanding private investment and stimulating private enterprise.

The EU is working with the African Union and its member countries to develop guidelines for creating a more predictable and favorable investment climate on the continent for responsible investors. It is known that the main risk for business is the unpredictability of the business environment, which is largely related to political instability, which, unfortunately, is typical for many countries of the continent. To ensure economic transformation and industrialization in Africa, a sound investment structure is needed. The EU will promote best

practices to improve the business environment in Africa in order to attract investment and contribute to the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.



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In addition, the EU seeks to support the so-called the digital agenda in Africa, focusing on the deployment of e-government services, the development of agribusiness through increased access to and use of market, climate and environmental data, and on the development of an open digital research environment to improve skills and knowledge.

Digital innovations have proven their ability to offer solutions to local problems and can contribute to improving life even in the poorest countries, in particular by empowering women and girls, strengthening democratic governance and transparency and increased productivity and job creation. Technological trends such as mobile and social solutions, cloud computing and data analysis offer a wide range of opportunities for new business services, including in the agricultural sector, and can facilitate the entry of innovative small and medium-sized businesses and start-ups to the market. The EU's External Investment Plan will help maximize the "digitalization" of African economies, as this is a powerful factor in economic growth, as well as the reduction in the "digital gap" between Africa and the rest of the world, providing access for all.

Brussels views the implementation of this investment plan as part of its efforts to reduce "migration pressure", although NGOs are concerned that it is [intended](#) more to meet the needs of European companies than developing countries.

According to [Devex](#), based on the internal briefing of the European Commission, Brussels initially hoped to agree on a number of final documents of the summit, for example, investment guidelines. However, the expectations were not met, and the summit was completed by the adoption of a joint declaration and priority development projects (by far, not all projects proposed by the AU on behalf of its member countries were included in it).

Despite the fact that the official summit was devoted to the problems of youth, much of its agenda was focused on issues of migration and security.

First, the leaders of the EU and Africa adopted a joint statement condemning the inhuman treatment of migrants and refugees in Libya by criminal groups.

They committed themselves to working together to put an end to the brutal treatment of migrants and refugees in that country. The summit ended with the adoption of a plan for the immediate evacuation of some 3,800 African migrants caught up in Libya. According to the African Union, Libya [may have](#) up to 700,000 Africans, many of whom suffered from violence and even were sold into slavery.

In addition, issues of promoting mobility were discussed. Thus, the EU and African countries' leaders agreed to support the mobility of students, staff and academics on the African continent. They also agreed to intensify exchange programs between Africa and Europe, such as ERASMUS +.

The summit participants' discussed the issues of countering migrant smuggling and the ways of joint eliminating the root causes of illegal migration. The EU agreed to set up a joint working group on migration issues with the African Union and the United Nations, which will seek: to save and protect the lives of migrants and refugees, in particular in Libya; to accelerate the voluntary assisted return of migrants to their countries of origin; to accelerate the resettlement of those who need international protection.

The issue of regulating migration is one of the most controversial, painful in the relations between the EU and Africa. Currently, 70-80% of African migrants move within the continent, but migration flows outside the continent are beginning to increase. According to Chatham House (London) specialists, this is exactly the "headache" for European countries struggling with high unemployment rates among youth, with inequality and populist parties that attract voters with their anti-migration sentiments. They [indicate](#): "The EU is not prepared to accept all informal economic migrants. But for African governments, agreeing to cooperate in migrants' return home has become a matter of huge sensitivity. When Dutch foreign minister Bert Koenders claimed to have struck such a deal with Mali in December 2016 he was furiously rebutted by Bamako, forcing an embarrassed retreat."

The intensification of migratory flows from Africa and the spread of Islamist armed groups such as Boko Haram and Al-Qaeda in the Islamic Maghreb on the African continent in recent years have forced the European strategists to exert increasing efforts to cope with instability in the Sahel and the Horn of Africa. Germany, the Netherlands, and the Nordic countries sent peacekeepers to Mali. The French military is fighting the Islamists in the Sahel. British peacekeepers are part of the UN mission in Southern Sudan. Within the framework of the EU missions, training is conducted for the armed forces of Mali and Somalia and the police of Nigeria. EU ships patrol the Mediterranean and the coast around the Horn of Africa, countering pirates and traffickers.



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[European Experts on European Experience of Integrating Migrants](#)

The EU invested much in the work of UN agencies seeking to enter into agreements with African governments to stop migration flows. Nevertheless, Africa remains home to hotbeds of violence that fuel the humanitarian crisis in a number of countries – in the north of Nigeria, Southern Sudan, and Somalia, about 25 million people are on the verge of famine. A similar situation exists in Yemen. About [4.4 billion dollars](#) are required to support all of these people in need. The scale of the intra-African forced displacement of refugees is enormous. If the humanitarian situation in one or more of these countries worsens in the short or medium term, new waves of refugees and migrants are likely to flee to Europe.

That is why the EU is looking for the new ways to help Africa overcome security problems. Since 2011, the EU is implementing its Strategy for Security and Development ("Sahel Strategy"). In recent years, the EU has stepped up its cooperation with the countries that are part of the so-called Group G5, including Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Burkina Faso, and Chad. In July 2017, the EU [created](#) the Alliance for the Sahel, a joint initiative of the EU, France and Germany to improve development cooperation with this region and strengthen its stability. The EU provided training, expert assistance and financial support of 50 million

euros to the newly established G5 Sahel Joint Force, which will fight terrorism and organized crime in the Sahel.

The AU-EU Summit provided another opportunity for African and European leaders to discuss the prospects for partnership in overcoming such complex challenges as instability, unemployment, conflict and terrorism, and the illegal migration.

Instability in Africa inevitably affects the security and well-being of Europe. Africa needs assistance in ensuring security and development. European aid and investment are important for the progressive development and stimulation of economic growth on the African continent.

At the same time, Africa is a growing new market, and many actors are interested in getting access to it. The demographic potential of the continent is huge and can bring economic dividends if African youth find areas to invest their energy in.

The problems of ensuring security and promoting sustainable development, and with them – tackling the challenges of regulating migration from Africa to the EU, are inextricably linked, they cannot be resolved separately. Relations between the two continents remain difficult. At the same time, their leaders realize that most problems can be solved only through comprehensive cooperation.

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