

STRATEGIC ASSESSMENTS 2021 INSECURITY COORDINATES

Abstract ■ The world economy in the second year of the pandemic: economic dynamics of the USA, Europe, China and the Russian Federation ■ Europe's defence: divisions and cooperation in an increasingly unstable international environment ■ International migration in 2021: from instrumentalization and securitization to long-term humanitarian crisis ■ Infodemic in the context of COVID-19 pandemic ■ A year of transition in Eastern Asia ■ Middle East, between conflict and cooperation ■ African military conflicts in 2021 and regional security

Abstract: This monograph provides an overview, in the vision of the researchers of the Centre for Defence and Security Strategic Studies (CDSSS) within “Carol I” National Defence University, of the most important trends of the international security environment manifested during 2021, with an impact on Romania’s national security. The analyses were carried out on the basis of rigorous documentation, according to the competences and areas of interest of each of the authors, this volume representing a continuation of the Centre’s démarche since 2014.

The year 2021 was dominated by the pandemic crisis, but also by other crises and conflicts, before the outbreak, in the first quarter of 2022, of a new crisis – the invasion of Ukraine by the Russian Federation. This volume comprises seven chapters, structured on thematic and geographical criteria. Thus, security is approached in almost all its dimensions – political, military, economic, social¹ and at all levels – national, regional and international. A key element to be emphasised is that the security environment has been and continues to be heavily affected by the pandemic – one of the strongest strategic shocks of recent years. On this background, there are addressed in the papers of the volume the following aspects: the tense relations between the main powers of the

¹ N.B.: The climate dimension of security will be addressed by CSSAS in a dedicated scientific event in December 2022.

international scene – USA, China, and the Russian Federation, the increase of competitiveness and conflict at global level, the maintenance and even the manifestation of an amplification of regional crises, the close prospect of a global economic crisis, the aspect of migration and the various forms of hybrid aggression. All these required the adaptation of international actors in order to be able to cope with the security environment and the challenges that characterise it.

Chapter 1 addresses the economic dimension of security. Thus, Cristian Băhnăreanu, PhD Senior Researcher (SR), analyses *the world economy in the second year of the pandemic*, with reference to the *economic dynamics of the US, Europe, China and the Russian Federation*. The Researcher points out that, since the spring 2020, the global society and economy have been severely challenged by the COVID-19 pandemic and its associated effects. The author believes that the emergence of vaccines and the economic support programmes have halted the decline and gave momentum, but the recovery of the economy is still quite uncertain and uneven, especially in less developed countries. The chapter shows that, on the one hand, the US and Europe experienced a period of rapid recovery throughout 2021, as actions to prevent and control the pandemic were stopped, but that, on the other hand, those economies faced a number of challenges. And with regard to the Chinese economy and that of the Russian Federation, if, in the first half of the year, they recovered, based on the strong recovery of exports and government stimulus measures, the pace diminished noticeably in the second half of the year. For 2022, SR Băhnăreanu expected a temperate growth in the world economy, as a result of the gradual abandonment of economic stimulus measures and the possible emergence of new waves of infection and restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

Chapter 2 addresses the political-military dimension of security, Cristina Bogzeanu PhD Senior Researcher focusing her study on the *Europe's defence*, where there are both *divisions* and *cooperative* tendencies *in an increasingly unstable international environment*. The analysis shows that, for the European Union, the context also implies the need to identify a posture, depending on its *hard* and *soft* capabilities, as

well as the dynamics of relations with the main players of this competition. Under the existing conditions, in parallel with the effort to define and develop a European strategic autonomy, the fundamental role of the transatlantic partnership is maintained, but with multiple challenges from within. This is all the more so since, in the East of the European continent, security challenges remain, especially in relation to the Russian Federation, with which tensions are becoming increasingly acute, especially at the end of 2021, when Moscow begins to concentrate troops at the border with Ukraine, while organising military exercises with Belarus. SR Bogzeanu also produces a very pertinent synthesis of the general characteristics of the period under review, from a security perspective.

Chapter 3 addresses the social dimension of security. Thus, Alexandra Sarcinschi PhD Senior Researcher studied the phenomenon of *international migration in 2021* from the following perspective: *from instrumentalisation and securitisation to lasting humanitarian crisis*. The section analyses the challenge posed by the couple events-demographic phenomena immigration-migration for European countries, taking into account two dimensions: one concerns the need to include and protect all categories of people, such as the forcibly displaced, in the special conditions of the COVID-19 health crisis, and the other refers to the use of refugees as a tool of pressure to achieve political goals. In particular, the case of the Belarusian crisis at its borders with Latvia, Lithuania and Poland is highlighted, stressing that the state's instrumentalisation of migrants has become an internationally used formula, but above all a catalyst for the reform of the European asylum and migration management system. For the analysis of the general trends, the author used the multivariate model of migration developed by British sociologist Anthony H. Richmond and the model of coercive engineering migration of the American political scientist Kelly M. Greenhill.

Chapter 4 of the volume, *Infodemia in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic*, elaborated by Daniela Lică PhD Researcher, brings to the attention a phenomenon derived from the pandemic – a phenomenon that is worrying and with multiple effects upon the public – mainly

psychologic. The main hypothesis of the paper is that the influx of information – including false or misleading information – has affected the global population to a greater extent than the virus itself. The author argues that the multitude of negative information affected almost the entire population of the planet, while the virus itself caused a small number of serious illnesses and deaths, respectively, relative to the global population, according to official statistics.

The author identifies and analyses the main causes of the phenomenon, the enabling factors, the psychological effects of infodemia and some behavioral reactions, as well as indirect, economic and social effects, including a decrease in confidence in government and authorities, in the medical system and in the media. The section covers two dimensions of research: the first is related to the quantitative aspect of information, and the second relates to its qualitative aspect – here we invoke the difficulty of detecting, in some cases, to what extent a statement or a narrative is true or false. The secondary hypothesis, derived from the former, is that disinformation can also occur through official sources, even in the absence of intention. At the end of the paper, there are brought forward a number of approaches to raise awareness about infodemia and its disinformation component.

Chapter 5 addresses the region of *East Asia*, Mihai Zodian PhD Senior Researcher concluding that 2021 was *a transition year* for this part of the globe. His contribution highlights the characteristics of Sino-American relations in 2021, which have gradually formed, in recent decades, one of the most important elements of international politics and economy, with ramifications in many fields, of which the scientific one is not at all to be neglected. The COVID-19 pandemic has also been a factor influencing these characteristics, with consequences often difficult to predict, notes the author. In the analysis, he refers to political-military phenomena, to differences related to pandemics and conflicts, the working hypothesis being derived from the theory of power transition. The main question is whether Sino-American relations will evolve towards a more conflicting climate, including at the risk of resorting to force. SR Zodian shows that 2021 was marked by many contrasts: often deceived hopes of

overcoming the pandemic, interaction between science and prejudice, fears of war in Eastern Europe. Vaccines were produced quickly, the world economy resisted, and it seemed that in some regions, at least some stability has been preserved. However, investigations have indicated a number of limitations and uncertainties, such as the tendency to overestimate contemporary processes, risking some determinism.

Chapter 6 is dedicated to the *Middle East area*, which was analysed by Mirela Atanasiu PhD Senior Researcher, in the *conflict-cooperation* dichotomy. In 2021, the Middle East, with a security environment generally marked by conflict – expressed in various forms – and a high level of intervention by extra-regional actors, suffered a major imbalance in terms of wealth and economic stability, making the typology of the economies of regional states diverse (from those at the subsistence limit to those based on the oil and gas extraction industry). The author also points out that the long-term structural challenges in the region, such as the decline in gross domestic product and employment (especially among young people and women), the decline in the human capital index, low inflows of foreign direct investment and the weak investment climate, are correlated with rising levels of external debt of the analysed countries. These pre-existing conditions, reflecting the fragile state of the social contract in many countries in the region, have amplified the negative effects of COVID-19. However, during the review period, some more pronounced cooperation initiatives were also highlighted, concludes the author.

From *Chapter 7, The 2021 African Military Conflicts and Regional Security*, elaborated by CS III Dr. Crăişor-Constantin Ioniță, it appears that this area of the globe was characterised by the emergence of new virulent conflicts, amid the already existing ones. Following the analysis, the author points out that in some conflicts there was a decrease in the actions of the belligerents, but in most of the conflicts there was a tendency to escalate and amplify the negative effects, while also seeing an increase in the involvement of the international community. The security situation of the African continent in 2021 describes a context marked by the coronavirus pandemic and the effects of climate change,

with a strong potential to cause dramatic turmoil in various unstable areas of Africa, such as North Africa, the Sahel, the Horn of Africa and West Africa. The tense situation is also maintained by the diverging interests of regional powers and neighbouring states, which make it impossible to resolve existing crises and conflicts through negotiations or peacefully, in particular for the return to democracy. The researcher shows that, as a result of the aspects highlighted in the analysis, Africa entered in 2022 with a long list of problems to solve, some of which seem insurmountable, but which represent the postpandemic reality of recovering from the negative influences of SARS-CoV-2 infections, drastic climate change in the region and attempts to return to democracy.

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Therefore, the starting point of each analysis is represented by the main events of the analysed period, the characterisation of the current state of the space/base envisaged and the elaboration of possible trajectories of the security dynamics.

The purpose of this approach is to outline a clear and, as far as possible, succinct picture of the global security evolution, based on the delimitation of the strategic specificities of each region or area assumed in this volume, so that the result is relevant for the short and medium term security analysis.

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