

Focus 82 – *On the shadow of Russian's aggression* The Indo-Pacific scenario

By **Paulo Casaca**

09 June 2022 – DOI: [10.48251/SADF.ISSN.2406-5633.F82](https://doi.org/10.48251/SADF.ISSN.2406-5633.F82)



Paulo Casaca is the Founder and Executive Director of the 'South Asia Democratic Forum'; founder of the international co-operation association registered in Brussels ARCHumankind, 'Alliance to Renew Co-operation among Humankind'. Founder and senior partner of the consultancy company on sustainable development registered in Brussels, Lessmeansmore, Land and Energy Sustainable Systems (2010-2020).

Introduction

The recent summit of the Quad nations (Australia, India, Japan and the United States) in Japan was confronted by a Russian-Chinese flying fleet of nuclear bombers which was scrambled by the Japanese air force ([Financial Times, 2022](#)). Whereas Russian-Chinese armed exercises are not uncommon nowadays (see for instance, the latest Iran-China-Russia naval exercise in early 2022, [Radio Liberty, 2022](#)), this one established an unequivocal link between Russia's latest invasion and the clash between the Quad alliance and Chinese expansionism in the Indo-Pacific region.

Several interpretations have been offered on the specific meaning of this common demonstration of force. Some interpret it as a message sent to the US President ([Kubo, 2022](#)); others are more inclined to see Japan as the main target ([Panda, 2022](#)); still others emphasise a specific threat to Taiwan. All are reminded that similar exercises have been carried out annually since 2019 ([Financial Times, 2022](#), op. cit.).

The display of these bombers did not contribute to a de-escalation of the global confrontational atmosphere (and its nuclear dimension). It does warrant a specific European concern on the Indo-Pacific stage.

1. Atlantic alliance

The day I started delving on the issue analysed in the present lines, we were celebrating the 78th anniversary of the D-day, when allied forces led by the [United](#)

[States](#) Army disembarked on the shores of Normandy to save Europe from itself. It is probably the best-ever recollection we Europeans have of the importance of the United States to the protection of freedom and democracy, an importance that outlived, undiminished, the end of the cold war, as underlined by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation's (NATO) Secretary-General in the [Davos 2022 Economic Forum](#) (when mentioning Russian's aggression in Europe).

Yet there are as much less glorious memories, for instance the deal brokered by the head of US diplomacy for the [withdrawal](#) from Vietnam. My childhood recollections of that event created an impression of 'déjà vu' when seeing the images of the catastrophic NATO withdrawal from Kabul.

The aforementioned speech by NATO's Jens Stoltenberg failed to get the traction it deserved in the press. It did centre on the crux of the matter: the selfishness of Western powers obsessed with [profits rather than values](#). By contrast, Henry Kissinger's tele-presence in the same [Forum](#) made headlines everywhere, perhaps overestimating its importance.

Some fifteen years ago, a European delegation I was part of saw an apex of overexcitement when spotting Henry Kissinger and Condoleezza Rice dining at the Watergate Hotel in Washington DC. A less enthusiastic US official, however, addressed my comment at the time remarking (pointedly) that Mr Kissinger was born in Europe.

Kissinger's Davos speech most quoted remarks in the Western press regarded the wisdom of handling a part of Ukraine to Russia (see, for instance, the '[Washington Post](#)'). However, his most important statement was meant by Kissinger to present himself as the original author of Putin's proposal to 'neutralise' Ukraine:

'About eight years ago, when the idea of membership of Ukraine in NATO came up, I wrote an article in which I said that the ideal outcome would be if Ukraine could be constituted as a neutral kind of state, as a bridge between Russia and Europe.' ([Kissinger, 2022](#))

The eight years' timeline for the 'idea of membership' is consistent with the timing of the first Russian invasion of Ukraine, not with the discussion of Ukraine's presence in NATO (see, for instance, [Bukvoll, 1997](#)). Moreover, the mentioned

neutrality proposal coincides with the main [formal request](#) by the invading forces.¹ Still, the most important feature of Kissinger’s proposal is its inherent logic of ‘spheres of influence’, a logic that the European institutions explicitly and emphatically rejected during the [Informal Council of Foreign Affairs Ministers of January 2022](#), which preceded the invasion.

This conflict is not fundamentally driven by resources, ethnic markers, or territory. It is driven by the esteem for freedom and democracy from one side and the fear of its contagious consequences on its own territory on the other side, as the Economist partially hinted: ‘Perhaps he [Mr Putin] wants Ukraine to fail because, if it were a prosperous democracy, it would be a rebuke to his claim that Western values are inapplicable in Orthodox, Slavic Russia. ([Economist, 2022](#)).

Coming back to Vietnam, it would certainly be demagogic to single-out Kissinger as the motor of the complex set of developments which finally resulted in the Saigon debacle of 1975. That disaster was the ultimate consequence of a mind-set that progressively took hold among the nation’s decision mechanisms. The democratic will of either of the US people or third parties was systematically downplayed and ultimately forgotten.

The engagement of the United States symbolised in the D-day was only possible because it received the approval of its people, not because it was ‘the right thing to do’ on an abstract level. It was even less the consequence of any diplomatic, chess-like calculation, of the kind Mr Kissinger manages so well. Conversely, the US lost the Vietnam war both within its borders and among the global public opinion, not in the Southeast Asia battlefield itself.

The US defeat in Southeast Asia resulted in tremendous human hardship, including a fully-fledged genocide in Cambodia, incomparable in horror to whatever may have happened during the war. On the other hand, it paved the way for the cracking of the apparently victorious, communist anti-American coalition – as Vietnam invaded Cambodia, and China attempted a failed incursion into Vietnam.

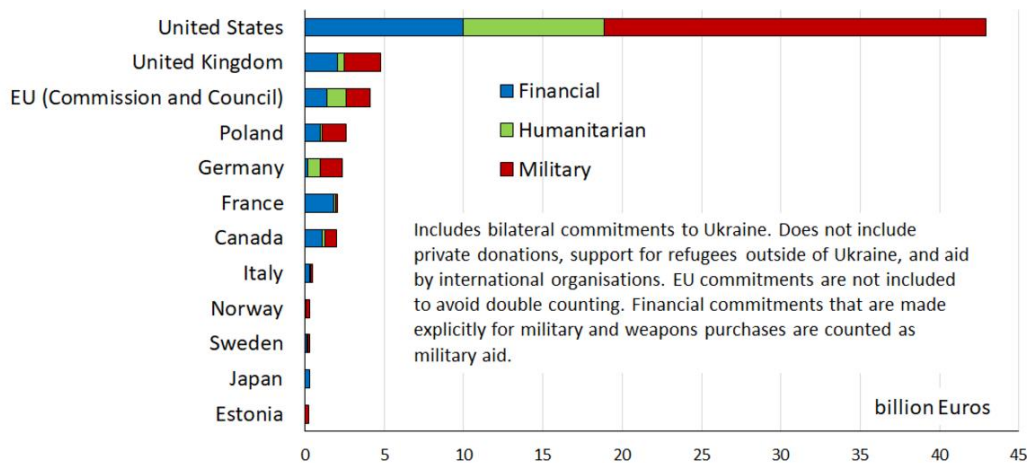
¹ The understanding of the second goal, ‘denazification’, is not straightforward. It might be interpreted either as a crude propaganda manoeuvre or as a political objective of full political control over the country. Among various other reasons, the widespread use of avowedly Nazi groups by invaders does not allow this rhetoric to be taken at its face value. See [Radio Free Europe, 2022](#).

Whereas many predicted the US-Indochina’s debacle announced the end of a United States-led international order, and in spite of important crises such as that related to dollar convertibility, oil shocks, stagflation and the Islamic revolution in Iran, two decades onwards the US statute was reinforced and categorised as ‘hyperpower’ ([The International Herald Tribune, 1999](#)).

Regardless of Kissinger’s words in Davos, any objective and balanced assessment will necessarily conclude that the United States is the main pillar for European independence and for the safeguarding of its values – today as much as seventy-eight years ago. The support given to the Ukrainian resistance is the most telling sign in this respect.

According to the most recent data on support to Ukraine provided by the Kiel Institute for the World Economy in Germany ([2022](#)), the United States humanitarian, financial and military support to Ukraine is far larger than the sum of the other 37 major donors.

Government support to Ukraine: Type of assistance, € billion
Commitments Jan 24 to May 10, 2022. Top 12 out of 38 donors



Source: Antezza et al. (2022) Kiel Working Paper ifw-kiel.de/ukrainetracker

2. The global confrontation framework

The sturdiness of support to Russia by its closest allies was called into question when both China and Iran abstained on the United Nations’ vote condemning this year’s invasion. The press has echoed numerous Chinese dissenting voices regarding the wisdom of supporting an international outlawed power with a faulty military machine that reflects a dysfunctional political system (for instance, in New

York Times, [2022](#)). The press has also fuelled an impression of intensive rivalry between Russia and Iran for the conquest of the Chinese oil market ([Sharafedin et al., 2022](#))

It is a question of elementary wisdom not to favour any consolidation of alliances among your opponents. Still, it is just as important not to allow this precaution to be overshadowed by wishful thinking or, worse still, to be manipulated by your foes into erroneous appeasing logics.

Appeasement is an expression which gained a pejorative meaning as it was unequivocally associated with the betrayal of democratic Czechoslovakia for the sake of a satisfaction of Hitler's expansionism. A neglected side-effect of the appeasement act, fundamental in this famous case, was exactly the favouring of an alliance among those opposed to appeasing powers (France and the United Kingdom).

The betrayal of Czechoslovakia by Western powers, other than destroying any respect for democratic values and creating an incentive to Hitler's further aggression, also encouraged the Soviet Union to engage with Germany, an engagement that resulted in the Soviet-Germany alliance which made the war inevitable ([Roberts, 1995, pp49-61](#)).

To appease is not always the worst attitude; however, a step-back by the United States regarding defence guarantees to Taiwan would be wrong, as it would embolden Chinese aggressive intentions and scare US allies in the Indo-Pacific region. It would also fail to prevent the consolidation of the Russian-Chinese alliance. Still, opinions to the contrary seem to be dominant in US diplomacy and press circles. According to Voice of America ([2022](#)) 'US State Department Walks Back Biden's Unusually Strong Comments on Taiwan' and the New York Times editorial ([Kanno-Youngs, 2022](#)) headlines read: 'Biden's Words on Taiwan Leave Allies in an Awkward Spot'.

It is hard to find a contemporary appeasement policy as consistently disastrous as that by the West regarding Iran – an appeasement policy which knew only episodic interruptions since the Islamic Revolution.²

² I have repeatedly addressed the issue. My book, 'The hidden invasion of Iraq' ([2008](#)) is perhaps the most noteworthy.

The appeasement of the Iranian dictatorship proved time and again to be counterproductive since it repeatedly emboldened, and never moderated, Iran's rulers' ambitions. Equally important, it undermined the Iranian people's democratic movement, as well as the Arab world's neighbouring countries' suffering by Iran's expansionist agenda.

A case in point is the Iranian war against both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates undertaken through continued missile attacks by its Islamic Revolutionary Guards proxies in Yemen. The West did nothing to prevent these attacks; in fact, the US actually delisted the Yemeni Islamic Revolutionary Guards proxy Ansar-Allah from its global terrorist list ([US State Department, 2021](#)). It is hardly surprising that these and other Arab countries showed little enthusiasm to help Western countries making energy-related sanctions against Russia effective ([Wall Street Journal, 2022](#)).

More importantly, Western democracies should resist infiltration by their enemies through sophisticated influence and disinformation campaigns, an issue SADF has dedicated repeated attention to, namely [here](#) and [here](#).

3. Strengthening the Quad

As SADF stressed in its [plan of activities for 2022](#), we see no advantage in multiplying security-related regional initiatives in the Indo-Pacific region such as the new AUKUS. Instead, the priority should be to strengthen the Quad – reinforcing its democratic, environmental, economic, and general linkage issues with the crucial security dimension.

The Indo-Pacific region needs to bring political support from elsewhere – instead of importing European Brexit rivalries; commercial, narrow, vested disputes on the sales of submarines (Stoltenberg's call for giving priority to values over profits certainly applies here). The Indo-Pacific does not need narrow ethno-linguistic logics, or new concerns with nuclear proliferation rules (on this last point, see [Bana, 2021](#)).

The inclusion in the Quad of the largest democracy in the World (according to some recent demographic estimates, also the largest country in the world, see [Tang, 2022](#)) is by far the most important achievement of this organisation. India's strengthening of the Quad is also likely to concern the countries that paraded their nuclear

bombers in the Japanese air space. It certainly will not please those countries that have promoted intense anti-India influence campaigns in both the United States and Europe.

Australia is an historical ally of the United States. Japan has consolidated its role of forerunner in ‘Easternising’ the concept of West. India, a fully-fledged democracy, is still in a different development league from its three partners; New Delhi has pioneered the Non-Aligned Movement and is a newcomer to this sort of structures.

It is therefore common-sense to carefully consider India’s crucial contribution to the Quad’s potential and venues. To start with, it is certainly quite unhelpful to lecture India on its specific choices and policies regarding the European confrontation scenario. The more so when both the EU and NATO – the Western institutions directly involved – seem quite unable to reign the differences within their own organisations.

France has taken the lead in joining Quad defence exercises in the Bay of Bengal (the [Times of India](#), 2021 expressively titled: ‘Eye on China, Quad-plus-France exercise kicks off in Bay of Bengal’). It is up to France to take Europe’s lead in this delicate exercise of making the Atlantic and Indo-Pacific alliances complement and reinforce each other.

This exercise must necessarily avoid falling victim to disputes such as last year’s regrettable submarine saga (see the Submarine Dispute file in [France24, 2022](#)). More to the point, we must avoid being torpedoed by the more dangerous influence-submarines that continue to attack both the European Union and the United States from within.

References

- Bana, S. (2021, September 28). Using AUKUS to Brazen it out. Vivekananda International Foundation.
<https://www.vifindia.org/article/2021/september/28/using-aukus-to-brazen-it-out>
- Bella, T. (2022, May 24). Kissinger says Ukraine should cede territory to Russia to end war. The Washington Post.
[Henry Kissinger says Ukraine should concede territory to Russia to end the war - The Washington Post](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/energy-environment/wp/2022/05/24/kissinger-says-ukraine-should-cede-territory-to-russia-to-end-war/)
- Bester, L. (2022, May 23). Kissinger: These are the main geopolitical challenges facing the world right now. World Economic Forum.
<https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/05/Kissinger-these-are-the-main-geopolitical-challenges-facing-the-world-right-now/>
- Buckley, C. (2022, March 18). Defying China's Censors to Urge Beijing to Denounce Russia's War. The New York Times.
<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/03/18/world/asia/china-ukraine-russia-dissent.html>
- Bukkvol, T. (1997). Ukraine and NATO: The Politics of Soft Cooperation. Security Dialogue. Vol. 28, No. 3 (SEPTEMBER 1997), pp. 363-374.
<https://www.jstor.org/stable/26296597>
- Casaca, P. (2021, December 8). Comment 223 – On the UN Genocide Remembrance Day. South Asia Democratic Forum.
DOI: 10.48251/SADF.ISSN.2406-5617.C223
- Casaca, P. (2022, June 6). Marx, Eça, e o imperialismo russo [Marx, Eça, and Russian Imperialism]. Jornal Tornado.
<https://www.jornaltornado.pt/marx-eca-e-o-imperialismo-russo-4/>
- The Economist. (2022, January 8). Mr. Putin will see you now.
<https://www.economist.com/weeklyedition/2022-01-08>
- European Union External Action. (2022, January 14). Réunion informelle des ministres des affaires étrangères (Gymnich): Remarques du haut représentant/vice-président Josep Borrell à la conférence de presse. [Informal meeting among foreign Affairs Ministers (Gymnich): Notes to the press conference by the high representative/ vice-president Josep Borrell].
<https://www.eeas.europa.eu/eeas/r%C3%A9union-informelle-des->

[ministres-des-affaires-%C3%A9trang%C3%A8res-gymnich-remarques-du-haut-0_en](#)

France 24. (n.d.) Archives 2021-2022: Submarine dispute.

<https://www.france24.com/en/tag/submarine-dispute-1/>

The International Herald Tribune. (1999, February 5). To Paris, the U.S. looks like a ‘Hyperpower’. New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/1999/02/05/news/to-paris-us-looks-like-a-hyperpower.html>

Jennings, R. (2022, May 24). US State Department Walks Back Biden's Unusually Strong Comments on Taiwan. Voice of America.

<https://www.voanews.com/a/us-state-department-walks-back-biden-s-unusually-strong-comments-on-taiwan-/6588234.html>

Kanno-Youngs. (2022, May 24). Biden’s Words on Taiwan Leave Allies in an Awkward Spot. The New York Times.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/24/world/asia/biden-taiwan-china-australia.html>

Kiel Institute for the World Economy. (2022, May 18). Ukraine Support Tracker.

<https://www.ifw-kiel.de/topics/war-against-ukraine/Ukraine-support-tracker/>

Kozhurin, D. (2022, May 27). Who Are The Neo-Nazis Fighting For Russia In Ukraine? Radio Free Europe.

<https://www.rferl.org/a/russian-neo-nazis-fighting-ukraine/31871760.html>

Kubo, N. Shin, H. & Martina, M. (2022, May 24). Russian and Chinese jets deliver pointed send-off on last day of Biden Asia trip. Reuters.

<https://www.reuters.com/world/asia-pacific/russian-chinese-jets-conducted-joint-patrol-moscow-says-2022-05-24/>

Nissenbaum, D., Kalin, S., & S. Cloud, D. (2022, March 8). Saudi, Emirati Leaders Decline Calls With Biden During Ukraine Crisis. The Wall Street Journal.

<https://www.wsj.com/articles/Saudi-emirati-leaders-decline-calls-with-biden-during-ukraine-crisis-11646779430>

North Atlantic Treaty Organisation. (2022, May 24). Special address by NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg at the World Economic Forum Annual Meeting.

https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_195755.htm

- Panda, R. (2022, May 30). Should India worry about Russia-China partnership post-Ukraine crisis? Vivekananda International Foundation.
<https://www.vifindia.org/article/2022/may/30/should-india-worry-about-russia-china-partnership-post-ukraine-crisis>
- Pandit, R. (2021, April 5). Eye on China, Quad-plus-France exercise kicks off in Bay of Bengal. The Times of India.
<https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/eye-on-china-quad-plus-france-exercise-kicks-off-in-bay-of-bengal/articleshow/81917310.cms>
- Radio Free Europe (2022, January 21). Iran, Russia, China Hold Joint Naval Drill Amid Growing Ties.
<https://www.rferl.org/a/iran-russia-china-exercises/31663080.html>
- Roberts, G. (1995). The Soviet Union and the Origins of the Second World War. Springer.
<https://doi.org/10.1007/978-1-349-24124-8>
- Rotondi, J. P. (2022, May 9). Henry Kissinger’s Controversial Role in the Vietnam War. History Channel.
<https://www.history.com/news/henry-kissinger-vietnam-war-legacy>
- Sevastopulo, D., Hille, K., & Inagaki, K. (2022, May 24). Chinese and Russian nuclear bombers fly over Sea of Japan as Biden visits Tokyo. Financial Times.
<https://www.ft.com/content/2b77473c-44d8-4b27-98f8-07c096f5302c>
- Sharafedin, B., Tan, F., & Aizu, C. (2022, May 20). More Russian oil going east squeezes Iranian crude sales to China. Reuters.
<https://www.reuters.com/business/energy/more-russian-oil-going-east-squeezes-iranian-crude-sales-china-2022-05-19/>
- South Asia Democratic Forum. (2021, March 9). POLICY BRIEF 11 – Disinformation in the name of the ‘fight against disinformation’.
DOI: 10.48251/SADF.ISSN.2406-5625.PB.11
- South Asia Democratic Forum. (2022, February 2). SADF Activities Programme 2022.
<https://www.sadf.eu/sadf-activities-programme-2022/>

Tang, F. (2022, March 26). China-India population debate comes down to quantity vs quality after social media sparks storm. China Macro Economy. <https://www.scmp.com/economy/economic-indicators/article/3171867/china-india-population-debate-comes-down-quantity-vs>

TASS Russian News Agency. (2022, May 23). Ukraine’s neutral status should be main goal in current situation — Kissinger. https://tass.com/world/1454753?utm_source=google.com&utm_medium=organic&utm_campaign=google.com&utm_referrer=google.com

U.S. Department of State. (2021, February 12). Revocation of the Terrorist Designations of Ansarallah – Press statement by A. J. Blinken, Secretary of State. <https://www.state.gov/revocation-of-the-terrorist-designations-of-ansarallah/>

U.S. Mission Italy. (2022, June 4). D-Day anniversary prompts reflection. U.S. Embassy & Consulates Italy. <https://it.usembassy.gov/d-day-anniversary-prompts-reflection/>

19 Avenue des Arts 2nd floor, 1210 Brussels, Belgium
E 0833.606.320 RPM Bruxelles
Email: info@sadf.eu Web: www.sadf.eu