

NATO ANTAGONIST: NUCLEAR ALLIANCE IN 2024

АНТАГОНІСТ НАТО: ЯДЕРНИЙ АЛЬЯНС У 2024

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Abstract. *The purpose of this study is to analyze the military capabilities of the bloc of Russian-oriented countries and the level of their influence on Russia's support for the war against Ukraine in 2024. In order to effectively identify the links and signs of military cooperation between the countries of this bloc, such research methods as the structural-functional method, comparative analysis, and content analysis are used. The theoretical basis of this work is the theory of structural realism by Kenneth Waltz. Actors of the international geopolitical arena, who have fallen under the tendency of concentration around Russia as opposed to the NATO bloc, interact not only with the totalitarian flagship of this bloc, but also with each other, which is a very alarming sign of consolidation and poses a threat to the entire democratically oriented world. The dynamics of the development of this grouping, which includes both the nuclear countries Iran, North Korea and China, as well as non-nuclear, but quite important European countries that have an influence on the decisions regarding military assistance to Ukraine in the war against the occupation forces of Russia, such as Hungary, Serbia and Slovakia.*

Key words: *US nuclear policy, nuclear blackmail, non-proliferation, NPT, China, Iran, North Korea.*

Анотація. *Метою даного дослідження є аналіз мілітарних можливостей блоку російсько орієнтованих країн та рівень їх впливу на підтримку росії у війні проти України у 2024-му році. Задля ефективною ідентифікації зв'язків та ознак воєнного співробітництва між країнами даного блоку використовуються такі дослідницькі методи, як структурно-функціональний метод, порівняльний аналіз та контент аналіз. Теоретичним підґрунтям даної роботи є теорія структурного реалізму Кеннета Волтца та теорія «ідеологічних союзників» Марка Хааса. Актори міжнародної геополітичної арени, які потрапили під тенденцію концентрації навколо росії на противагу блоку НАТО, взаємодіють не лише із тоталітарним флагманом даного блоку, але й між собою, що є дуже тривожною ознакою консолідації та становить загрозу для всього демократично орієнтованого світу. Динаміка розвитку даного угруповання, яке включає, як ядерні країни Північна Корея, Китай та потенційно ядерний Іран, так і неядерні, але досить вагомні європейські країни, які мають вплив на рішення щодо військової допомоги Україні у війні проти окупаційних сил росії, як Угорщина, Словачія та Сербія.*

Ключові слова: *ядерна політика США, ядерний шантаж, нерозповсюдження, ДНЯЗ, Китай, Іран, Північна Корея.*

Introduction. This article is the second in a series of posts on the process of forming a bloc of nuclear totalitarian states under the auspices of russia. The current trend of close military-

conventional and nuclear cooperation between the main countries of this bloc: Russia, Iran, South Korea and China is considered. Considerable attention in this article is also paid to forecasting the continued development and possible spread of this association in 2024, since European countries that are potentially loyal to Russia, such as Hungary, Serbia, Slovakia (after the 2023 elections), also act in the geopolitical arena. This trend is a rather negative factor influencing the decision-making policy and the collective security system of the European Union. When new challenges and advantages on the part of a hostile totalitarian alliance emerge, it is first necessary to look for a counterbalance that will keep the balance of forces between NATO and the states of the Russian-oriented coalition at a level where nuclear and conventional deterrence can still be classified as effective. As soon as Russia enlists the more decisive support of other actors in the geopolitical arena, it pours new resources into the war with Ukraine and the propaganda work of its elements in other countries, which undermine the internal political stability of these countries and lead the path of a satellite state of the pro-Russian bloc. Overall, the Russian expansionist-totalitarian mechanism is becoming stronger. As a result, there is a continuous expansion and annexation of sovereign territories of neighboring countries. When Russia was looking for allies in Africa and Asia, it had only an external factor influencing the efficiency of the functioning and well-being of NATO countries, but when Russian-oriented politicians come to power in EU member states and radically change the course of the foreign policy of such countries, this is an internal threat to not only the EU, but also the entire NATO bloc.

The purpose of research is to analyze and predict the potential military possibilities and threats from Russian bloc of the states against NATO and Ukraine in 2024.

Recent literature review. This article covers the analysis of a wide range of security issues of the EU and NATO, therefore, in the context of this study, it is necessary to note not only the work on nuclear security, non-proliferation and deterrence, but also research on international stability and the security of the EU and NATO countries as a whole. Some of the most relevant works on NATO security and military threats and challenges from Russia belong to the following researchers: Alexandra Gheciu [*Gheciu: 2022*], who concentrates her research on topics such as multilateralism and international institutions: NATO, European Union, Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, United Nations Global Governance International Security. Benjamin Schreer [*Schreer and Alberque: 2022*] who is a head of European Security and Defense Program and expertise on defense policy and Indo-Pacific strategic affairs, NATO and German defense policy. On the theory of nuclear deterrence and non-proliferation, the works of foreign scientists are considered: Amy Wolf [*Wolf: 2023*], who is a researcher at the U.S. Congress on the U.S., Russia and China Nuclear Arsenal Programs, Strategic Arms Control and U.S.-Russia Arms Control Policy; Scott Sagan, whose work focuses on U.S. foreign policy and nuclear deterrence; Heather Williams researches international security and nuclear nonproliferation issues in Eastern Europe; Jonathan Eyll during recent years, he has been researching the possible consequences of Iran's nuclear program for Europe, as well as Russia's nuclear threats in the context of its invasion of Ukraine; Eric Heginbotham examines China's nuclear deterrence, as well as US-China relations in the geopolitical direction; Bruce Bennett is an expert on nuclear non-proliferation and deterrence in the Northeast Asian direction, namely North Korea, China, Japan, and South Korea.

Among the Ukrainian researchers who consider the nuclear policy of the United States, including through the problem of non-proliferation, it is worth mentioning Sergei Galaka [*Galaka: 2011*], Polina Sinovets [*Synovets and Budjeryn: 2017*] and Tetyana Melnyk [*Melnyk: 2021*] among others.

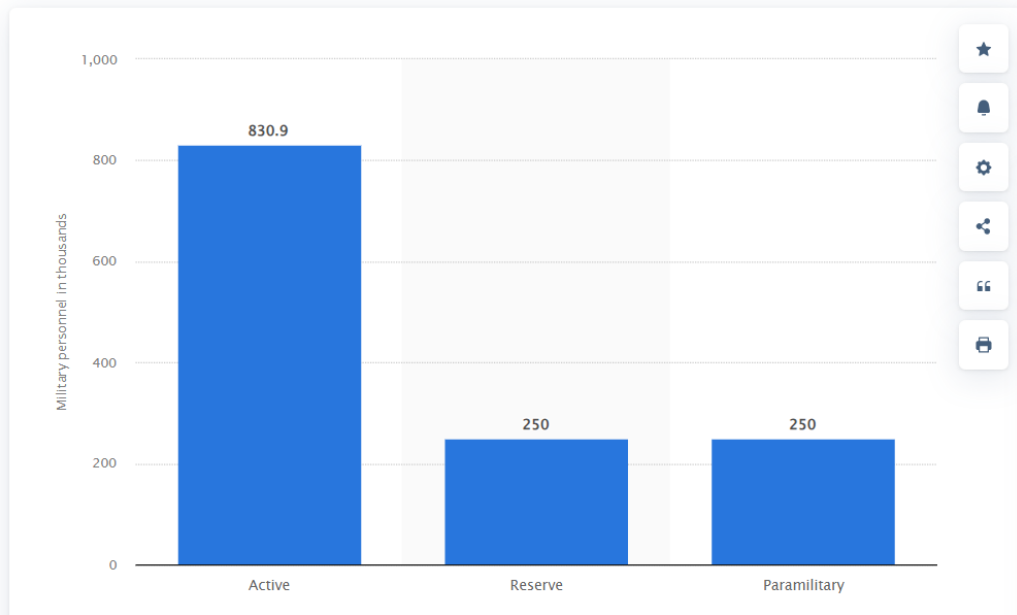
Main research results. The year 2023 was busy, among other things, with high-level visits by representatives of the nuclear states of Russia's allies to Moscow to discuss cooperation and exchange of military technologies not only of a conventional nature, but also of a nuclear nature. The apogee of these visits can be considered Russia's withdrawal of ratification of the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty [*Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (UN Treaty): 1996*] and simulation of a Russian nuclear strike from land, sea and air on the 25-th of October, 2023: «This

year's exercises included a massive nuclear strike by strategic offensive forces in response to an enemy nuclear strike,» Shoigu reported to president Putin [Wright: 2023]. There is a correlation between the intensification of visits for the purpose of military-nuclear cooperation between these countries and the act of demonstrating the readiness of Russia's nuclear arsenal for activation. Thus, Putin is trying to prove to his nuclear allies his determination and inevitability in terms of his aggressive military and nuclear policy against the bloc of democratic countries, the United States and Ukraine.

Coming back to a topic of visits themselves and what issues were considered. "That's why we came here. The leader of North Korea is showing a great interest in space, in rocket technology, and they are trying to develop space. We will show our new facilities." Putin told reporters about the purpose of the North Korean leader's visit to Moscow on the 14-th of September, 2023. In contrast to Putin's statement, the visit was mostly focused on military cooperation: «During Kim's visit, Shoigu and Lieutenant General Sergei Kobylash, commander of Russia's long-range bombing forces, confirmed for the first time that the Tu-160 had recently received new cruise missiles with a range of more than 4000 miles (6500 km). Shoigu, who met with Kim Jong Un during a visit to North Korea in July, also showed him another of Russia's latest missiles, the Kinzhal hypersonic missile, carried by a MiG-31 fighter jet that took part in the first fighting in Ukraine. Later, Kim and Shoigu went to Vladivostok on Saturday, where they inspected the frigate Admiral Shaposhnikov. The commander of the Russian Navy, Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov, briefed Kim on the ship's capabilities and weapons, which include long-range Kalibr cruise missiles, with which Russian warships regularly fire at targets in Ukraine. North Korea's state media reported that Kim was accompanied by his top military officials, including the defense minister and senior commanders of his air force and navy, during Saturday's visits. After lunch, Kim Jong Un and Shoigu spoke about the regional security situation and exchanged views on «practical issues arising in further strengthening strategic and tactical coordination, cooperation and mutual exchange between the armed forces of two countries,» according to a North Korean official. Central News Agency. During their July meeting, Kim Jong Un gave Shoigu a similar inspection of North Korea's weapons systems before inviting him to a parade in the capital, Pyongyang, where he fired his most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles designed to target the United States [McCurry: 2023].

So, according to the dynamics of this visit, it is possible to identify more specific areas of military cooperation between Russia and North Korea. Kim Jong-un's main and only lever of pressure on the world community is nuclear weapons. In other words, North Korea's nuclear arsenal is the only guarantee of stability and a guarantor of the existence of the current government of this state. To have such an ideological and military ally as Russia, very important for Kim Jong-un, but most of all he is attracted to this alliance by the fact that Russia is the second largest nuclear arsenal in the world after the United States. Cooperation in the field of nuclear weapons and the exchange of these technologies is exactly what the leader of North Korea is interested in, and Putin, in turn, aims to establish stable supplies of conventional weapons, primarily missiles, kamikaze drones and ammunition to continue intervention in the Ukraine, given that he does not experience a shortage of human resources, such military allies significantly increase the potential of the Russian army in the prospect of a long-term confrontation. According to statistics published by the Statista Research Department [Statista Research Department: 2023] at the beginning of 2023, the number of the Russian armed forces was 830 thousands personnel:

Number of military personnel in Russia as of 2023, by type (in 1,000s)



Source: Statista Research Department.

Two weeks after the above-mentioned visit, information appears in the media about the first deliveries from North Korea to Russia: «There is a sharp increase in rail traffic on the North Korean-Russian border, which likely indicates that Kim Jong-un is helping Russian President Vladimir Putin by supplying ammunition, the US think tank claims, citing recent satellite photos. Satellite imagery from the 5-th of October showed a «dramatic and unprecedented level of freight car traffic» at the Tumangang train station, according to Beyond Parallel, a website run by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies. Imagery taken last week showed approximately 73 wagons, while previous satellite imagery from the past five years showed a maximum of 20 wagons at the site. » [Rai: 2023] An intensification of deliveries by sea in both directions was also noted, October 13, 2023:

North Korean Munitions Transfer Routes Into Russia



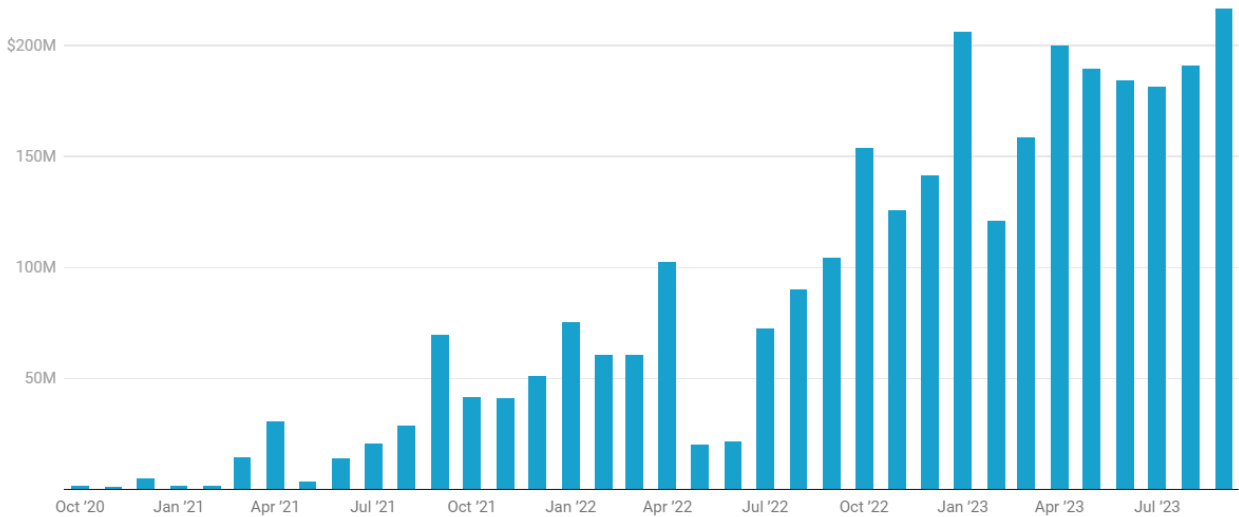
Source: *Beyond Parallel* by the Washington-based Center for Strategic and International Studies.

«National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said about 1,000 containers of «equipment and ammunition» had been provided «in recent weeks». The White House released images showing approximately 300 containers assembled in Najin, North Korea, and delivered by sea and rail to an ammunition depot in southwestern Russia near Tikhoretsk, about 280 miles from the Ukrainian border. Instead, Kirby said that «we've already seen Russian ships unload containers» that «could constitute the initial shipment of weapons from Russia» to North Korea. He did not specify the type of weapons believed to be being transported by one of the parties. The administration has previously said Russia is looking the world for more ammunition as both sides of the war in Ukraine have expended hundreds of thousands of artillery shells.» [DeYoung: 2023]

Such close ties between North Korea and Russia with the potential to supply nuclear weapons technology to the DPRK, in exchange for conventional weapons, should cause concern on the part of China. But as China continues to actively trade with Russia and import goods into North Korea, which reached \$1.63 billion in the first three quarters of 2023, which is three times more than in the same period of the previous year, may indicate that the issue of nuclear proliferation from Russia to North Korea does not really bother Xi Jinping:

Monthly value of China-North Korea trade between Oct. 2020 & Sept. 2023, in USD

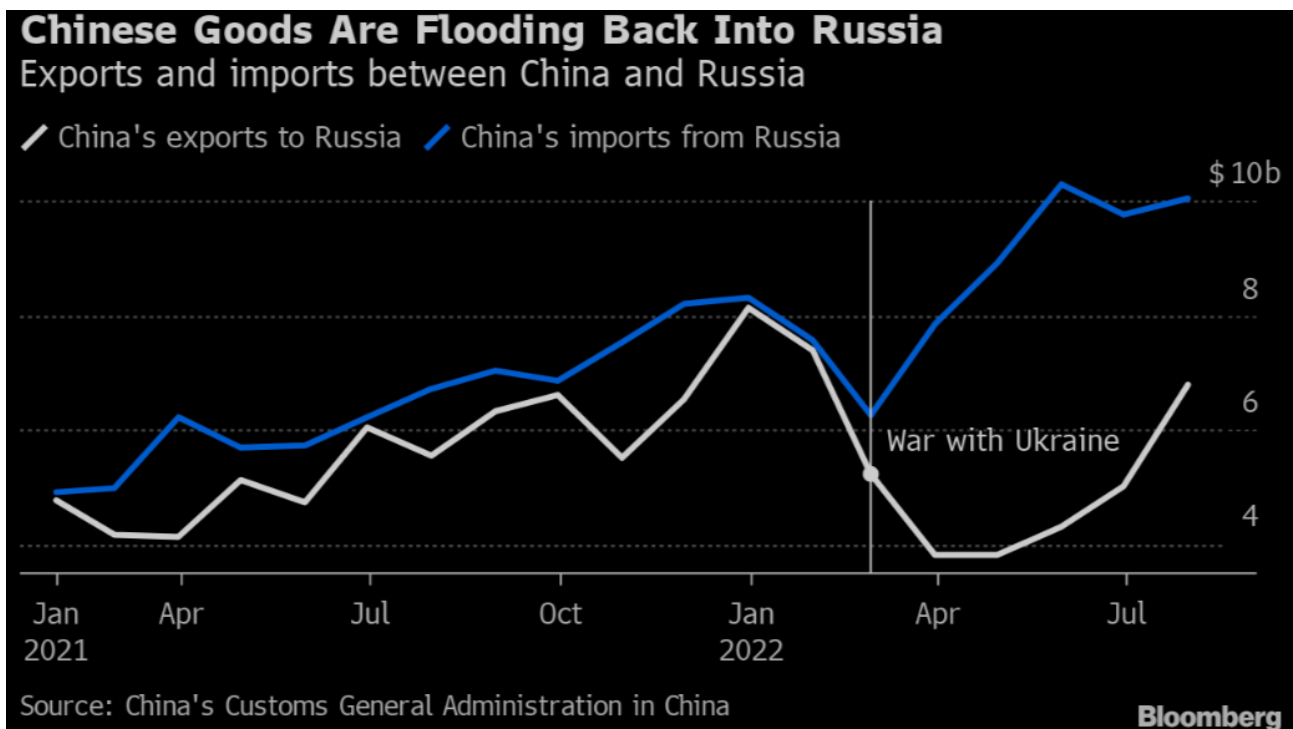
Source: China General Administration of Customs



Source: China General Administrative of Customs.

Chinese exports to Russia increased by 73.4% and reached \$62.54 billion compared to 2022

[Bloomberg News: 2022]:



Source: Bloomberg.

According to these economic statistics, there are signs that China is actively buying agricultural products and raw materials from Russia, including resources that were stolen and exported by the Russian military from the temporarily occupied territories of Ukraine. And what type of imports Russia is primarily interested in is components for missiles and kamikaze drones, radio-electronic equipment, as well as military ammunition of various types, ammunition and automatic weapons. Of course, the fact of China's possession of nuclear weapons is the basis of authority and the basis for China's most priority position among other countries participating in the pro-Russian bloc.

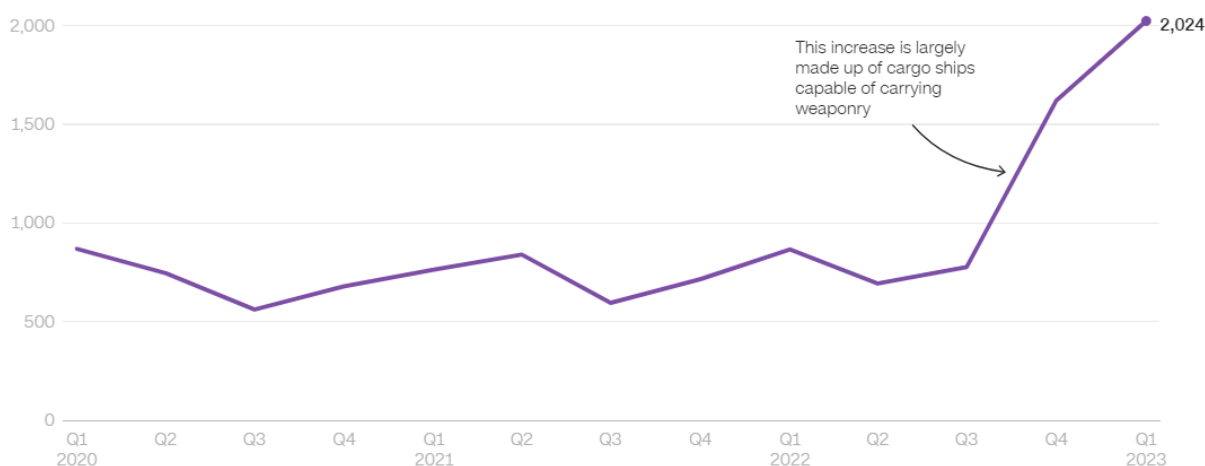
2023 was also a year of significant strengthening of Russia's relations with Iran, namely military collaboration in the context of the supply of various types of weapons to replenish stocks, which are periodically empty due to the war against Ukraine, mostly influenced by the expiration of UN Security Council Resolution 2231, [U.S. Department of State: 2023] which prohibited Iran from exporting, or procuring, ballistic missiles, among other weapons. According to a series of meetings between the Russian and Iranian sides, the 2023 exhibition of military weapons and technologies [Tasnimnews: 2023] in Moscow on the 14-th of August, the meeting of Shoigu and Mohammad Reza Ashtiani at the IRGC Aerospace Forces Headquarters in Tehran on September 20, as well as Shoigu's visit to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps of Iran [Cook E.: 2023]. Iran and Russia discussed the following models of Iranian missiles in the context of procurement: *Ababil* (86 km), *Zolfaghar* (700 km), Raad-500 (500 km), Fattah (1400 km), Paveh (1650), Fateh-110 (200-350 km).

An active increase in the volume of arms supplies from Iran to Russia has been noticed since the second half of 2022, and the upward trend in supplies continues in 2023. According to analytics provided by Lloyd's List Intelligence [Abdelaziz and Kent: 2023], the active increase in ship traffic between Iran and Russia through the Caspian Sea, as well as the zone of "temporary shutdown of ship tracking systems" is one of the components that give reason to believe that the trend of increasing the supply of weapons by Tehran to Moscow continues.

Data shows an increase in the number of gaps in tracking data for Russian and Iranian ships in the Caspian Sea

Experts say suspected weapons transfers from Tehran to Moscow are taking place using this route. By turning off AIS vessel tracking, these vessels are able to hide parts of their journeys, destinations or ship-to-ship transfers.

Number of tracking system gaps in the Caspian Sea for Iran- and Russia-flagged cargo ships



Note: Automatic Identification System is a mandatory automatic tracking system that uses transceivers on ships to aid safe travel and allow maritime authorities to track and monitor vessel movements.

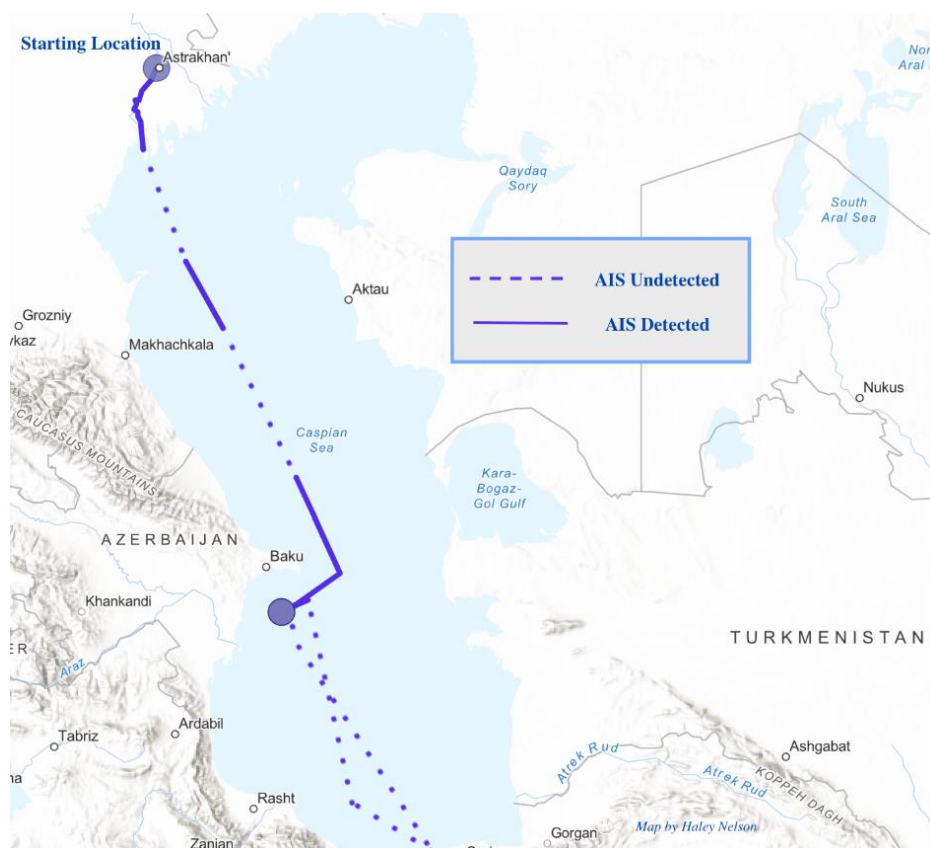
Source: Lloyd's List Intelligence
Graphic: Lou Robinson, CNN

Source: CNN.

According to data published by Sky News [Haynes: 2023] on the 8-th of March, 2023, Tehran provided Moscow with 100 million small arms rounds and 300 thousand shells. This delivery was carried out along the same route through the Caspian Sea, as covered according to the data provided by the previously indicated source. From the port of Amirabad in Iran to the Russian port in Astrakhan, as well as to the port of Makhachkala, there is the main traffic of Russian and Iranian ships with weapons for use in the war against Ukraine. Detailed analysis of sea routes of this traffic and patterns of disconnection of track equipment on these vessels was recorded by the Caspian Police Center, statistics provided for the period during May 2023:

«In May 2023, a total of 138 Russian-flagged vessels in the Caspian Sea had approximately 657 cases of no AIS signal, while 48 Iranian-flagged vessels had 199 such cases. Since June, Russian-flagged ships have shown 625 gaps in their AIS signals, while 48 Iranian-flagged vessels have shown

218 gaps. In July, this trend continued, with 630 AIS gaps, including 157 Russian-flagged vessels, and 47 Iranian-flagged vessels with 192 gaps.» [Nelson: 2023]



Source: Caspian Policy Center.

But among the other types of weapons provided by Iran, as during the previous year, Russian troops most often use Shahed 131/136, Mohajer-6 and Shahed 131/136 kamikaze drones. One of the first deliveries of which was recorded at the beginning of the year, in February 2023:

«Most of the drones sent to Russia were secretly picked up by an Iranian vessel from a base on the Caspian Sea coast and then transferred by sea to a Russian Navy boat, the sources said. Others were sent by Iran's state-owned airline, they added.» [Chulov, Mando and Sabbagh: 2023].

In addition to the traffic of a large assortment of weapons from Iran to Russia, another threat to democratic Europe and the world as a whole is Iran's military collaboration with Russia in the context of the development of military infrastructure on the Russian coast of the Caspian Sea, as well as the cooperative construction of a plant for the production of Geran 2 kamikaze drones according to the Iranian model, which announced the production of 6000 units of this type of drone in two and a half years starting from January 2023. A detailed analysis of the development of this cooperation between Iran and Russia was conducted by the Institute for Science and International Security:

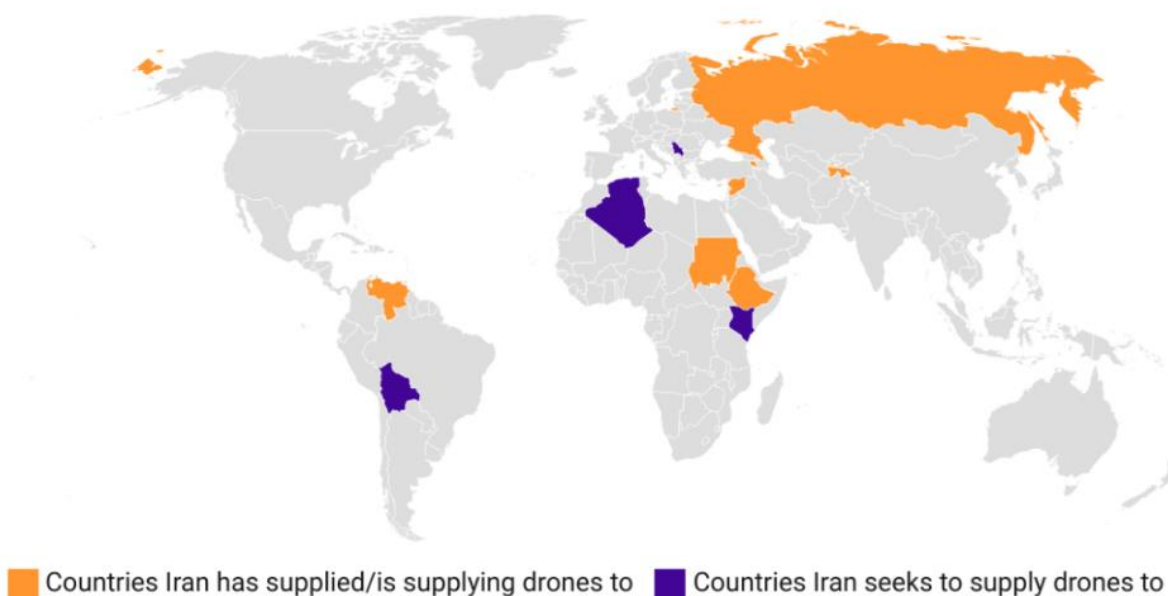
«At the request of the Washington Post, the Institute analyzed a set of internal documents of the Russian OJSC SEZ PPT "Alabuga"1 on its production of Geran-2 military drones with the assistance of Iran. On the 17-th of August, 2023, the Washington Post published its story "Inside Russian Attempts to Build 6000 Attack Drones with Iran's Help.»

The Geran 2 is actually a replica of the Shahed 136 drone, a kamikaze-type munition that Iran supplies by the hundreds to Russia for use against fixed Ukrainian targets, where its targets and routes are pre-programmed before launch. Geranium 2 is the most important combat drone of the Russian army mentioned in the documents. The Russian Ministry of Defense has signed a contract with Alabuga to produce 6,000 Geran 2 drones, sometimes referred to in documents as Geranium 2, as part of a two-and-a-half-year project that will begin on the 2-ns of January 2 2023 on the basis of significant assistance from Iran and the transfer of technology to Russia.» [Albright, Burkhard and Faragasso: 2023]

Iran has a fairly powerful potential as a supplier for the military bloc of Russian-oriented countries. Already today, in addition to Russia, Tehran also supplies its military drones to countries such as Sudan and Ethiopia. The latter recently suppressed the war for the independence of the Tigray region in 2023. Ethiopia also took measures to involve locals to the Russian armed forces into the war against Ukraine. On July 26, 2023, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmet Ali met with Putin in St. Petersburg, and a month later, Chinese leader Xi Jinping met with Ethiopian Prime Minister in Johannesburg on the eve of the BRICS summit, the latter stressed the importance of promoting «stability in the region», Addis Ababa's transport ties with the most important port in the region, Djibouti, as well as the prospect of Ethiopia's accession to BRICS: «China is ready to work with Ethiopia to promote the implementation of the Peace and Development Projections in the Horn of Africa and contribute to regional peace and stability.» [The Herald :2023]

Ethiopia, due to its unique geographical location, size, and population, is one of the most strategically attractive countries on the African continent. But, considering the foreign policy sentiments of Abiy Ahmet Ali and the ruling elite of this country, they joined the bloc of totalitarian Russian-oriented countries. Returning to the export of kamikaze drones by Iran, Ethiopia is the second largest supply of this type of weapon:

Iran Drone Exports



Map: AEI's Critical Threats Project • Source: Author's Research • Created with Datawrapper

Source: *The New York Times*.

«Western diplomats confirmed to The New York Times that Ethiopia received Iranian drones, and this was later publicly acknowledged by the U.S. Treasury Department last October when they imposed new sanctions on Iran's drone program.» [Fassihi and Ward: 2022]

So, referring to current events in the geopolitical arena of Northeast Africa, which include visits at the highest level, the conclusion of cooperation agreements and, most importantly, the traffic of military equipment and weapons to support the leadership of the allied countries of the bloc of totalitarian states in continuous confrontation with the forces of NATO countries, the sphere of influence of the United States, as well as local national movements. The activities of such movements, as in the case of Tigray in Ethiopia, are aimed at eliminating de facto dictators, representatives of the totalitarian or authoritarian ruling elite, which is closely connected and even obliged to fulfill the tasks of such totalitarian superpowers like Russia and China, absolutely not taking into account real national interest of their citizens and ensuring the well-being and freedom of their existence. In 2023, Ethiopia suppressed activity of the Tigray People's Liberation Front, which advocated lifting of the food and energy blockade of Tigray, which was imposed by Abiy Ahmet Ali, and the change of the

country's leadership to a democratically oriented elite, which should act regulated by such bases of domestic state policy as human rights, the rule of law and other principles of a democratic society, where the people independently choose their future. which is most likely in no way related to the reality into which the current leadership plunged Ethiopia, turning the country into a resource and transit base for an alliance of totalitarian states under the auspices of Russia. The case of Ethiopia is one of many, but in general, more or less typical examples of involving allies in a large totalitarian alliance of Russia.

2023 was also the year of Slovakia's ideological accession to the group of European countries, such as Hungary and Serbia, in the context of supporting Russia. This happened immediately after Robert Fico's victory in the parliamentary race in Slovakia 2023. Fico was also an active participant in negotiations between the EU and Russia on the Nord Stream 2 project and, which is a fairly significant sign of Robert Fico's "special" contacts with Putin, it is that at a meeting in Moscow on August 26, he supported this project, despite the fact that it would be a significant blow to the Slovak economy, because it would also significantly reduce the demand for transit through the joint Ukrainian-Slovak pipeline. [*Spectator*: 2016] Loyalty to the totalitarian occupier from the north within the EU is a rather disappointing indicator for the EU and NATO itself, as it could potentially change Russia's status in the eyes of other figures in the international arena, giving Russia the status of a party that can theoretically be joined, since in addition to nuclear totalitarian states of the East, including European democracies, support this country despite repeated violations of fundamental international treaties, human rights violations, genocide of civilians and the status of Russia's leader as a criminal according to the decision of the International Criminal Court in The Hague on the 17-th of March, 2023. [*International Criminal Court*: 2023]

«We leave all lines of communication open for the Russians. Otherwise, there would be no chance for peace,» Orban said. It's a strategy. Such statements were made by the Hungarian Prime Minister at the EU summit on the 26-th of October in Brussels, a week after his marginal act against the EU's official position in the form of a meeting with Putin in Beijing on the 17-th of October, which included a provocative handshake photo with a totalitarian leader. [*Washington Post*: 2023] In turn, Fico made the following statement regarding assistance to Ukraine in the fight against the Russian occupation forces: «We all see that there is no military solution.» So, as can be seen from the official position of Hungary and Slovakia, these two countries carry an active narrative of support for Putin in the European Union, and what privileges they will receive from the dictator for such a contribution to the advancement of a totalitarian bloc into democratic Europe is currently unknown.

«I think that the Russian Federation, which fought hard for its security and tried to provide these guarantees earlier, was simply forced when it comes to this military operation,» said President of Republika Srpska in Bosnia and Herzegovina Dodik during a meeting with Putin on the 24-th of May in Moscow, also summed up cooperation in the economic sphere: «economic cooperation between Russia and the RS will be continued.» [*European Western Balkans*: 2023] Just like Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic, who had, as he himself summed up, journalists, «as always, a friendly meeting» with Putin in Beijing during the visit of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative. [*Taylor*: 2023] But during these meetings, attention was not focused on military collaboration against Ukraine, namely the recruitment of military personnel into the ranks of the Russian army from Serbian citizens. «Most of the foreign volunteers in the Russian army are from Serbia,» said a Serbian man who gave an interview to The Guardian about the Serb's journey from the moment he was recruited into the ranks of the Russian army until he was transported to the Ukrainian front line. [*Sauer*: 2023] As he also notes in his report, reducing the contract service to 1 year from 5 for foreigners has significantly increased the interest of Serbs in the prospect of fighting for Russia in the war against Ukraine.

And here again the question arises of the effectiveness of the collective security of the European Union and the level of consolidation of its members, or, as in the case of Serbia, candidates for EU membership. Since 2012, Serbia has had the status of an official candidate for EU membership and all these years has been continuing the process of preparation for accession in accordance with the requests and criteria of the EU, which, in turn, actively finances the development of various spheres and the economy of Serbia as a whole, which can be seen from the report published and updated on the official website of the European Commission. [*European Commission*: 2023]



Source: European Commission.

The principle of the formation of the EU should consolidate countries and have a positive impact on both collective development and collective security. The example of Serbia shows that while EU members supply Ukraine with military equipment and weapons, a country with the status of a candidate for membership declares economic cooperation with Russia and supplies it with its citizens as recruits, who die there from the same EU weapons.

Conclusions. The theory of structural realism, or neorealism according to Kenneth Waltz, [Waltz: 1979] can explain and partially predict the trend of the development of an alliance of totalitarian states and their satellite states: "With many sovereign states, among which there is no system of law, in which each state evaluates its grievances and ambitions according to its own reason or desire, a conflict that sometimes leads to war is bound to arise." [Waltz: 2010] In parallel with the desire of these states to meet their needs in the geopolitical arena at the expense of other states, there is also an ideological affinity in the ruling elites of these countries and in the means and direction of their domestic policy. Analyzing the vector of movement of the pro-Russian alliance of states and the principles of their collaboration, one can also find an obvious coincidence with the theory of «ideological alliances» of Mark Haas [Haas: 2012], which is also relevant to neorealism, since in this case we have an alliance of countries of totalitarian or authoritarian internal order, which have been concentrated and are rallying around Russia, at the same time, through mutually beneficial exchange, these countries, or their leaders, will receive certain tools and opportunities to satisfy personal interests in the geopolitical arena at the expense of the countries of the democratic vector of internal governance. «Ideological distance and polarity are analogous to the two main variables that systematically shape the results in theories of structural realism: the relative distribution of power and the number of large forces in the system (power polarity),» [Haas: 2012] Mark Haas noted in the paradigm of understanding trends in the formation of ideological alliances. Today, the world is considered multipolar, but in fact, since Russia's full-scale offensive on the Ukraine in 2022, two completely opposite ideological blocs have been formed. This trend will lead to the continued consolidation of ideologically related countries of the totalitarian-authoritarian vector of domestic policy around Russia and China, as well as in the case positive for NATO, the concentration of

ideological democratically oriented allies and NATO expansion in 2024 and beyond, until the totalitarian antagonist ceases its systematic activities.

So, according to the trend of increasing interaction between Russia and its allies in the Eastern (Iran, North Korea, China, Ethiopia) and Western (Hungary, Slovakia, Serbia) blocs of states that share the ideology of Putin and the Russian elite, we can conclude that 2023 was the most successful year for Russia in the context of consolidating its allies around the war against Ukraine, and strengthening the alliance of totalitarian states as opposed to the democratic world. An unprecedented amount of weapons transported from Iran and North Korea through the Caspian Sea and rail to Russia. Establishment of uninterrupted production of kamikaze drones in Russia with the support of Iran, as well as an active exchange of nuclear technologies, and the possible supply of nuclear weapons elements to North Korea and Iran from Russia in exchange for conventional weapons and strategic military support in the international geopolitical arena. The sale of grain stolen and exported from Ukraine by the Russian military to China, the import from China, in turn, of electronics and various types of equipment necessary for Russia's military needs. Active action of Russian foreign ministries to attract new satellite states and allies to satisfy the strategic and geopolitical interests of the flagship of the totalitarian alliance. The example of Ethiopia clearly reflects the model of Russia's interaction with a local corrupt leader, whose government is supported by Russia, while the latter receives a wide range of opportunities to manipulate and dispose of local resources and geostrategic position with indirect proximity to the most important ports of the Horn of Africa. And as can be seen from the trend in the development of Russia's relations with its supporters from the Western bloc about totalitarian states, thanks to his direct influence on the leaders of Hungary and Slovakia, Putin has influence on the decision-making of the European Union, namely the ability to block military aid from the EU to Ukraine, as happened repeatedly during 2023, when Hungary blocked the package of military aid to Ukraine. At the same time, there are no similar obstacles to the flow of weapons from Iran and North Korea to Russia.

«This relentless pursuit of power means that great powers tend to look for opportunities to change the distribution of world power in their favor. They will take advantage of it if they have the necessary opportunities. In this way, a great power will protect the balance of power when threatening change favors another state, and will seek to undermine the balance when the direction of change is in its own favor.» [Mearsheimer: 2001] - as John Mearsheimer noted in his work «The Tragedy of Superpower Politics», and this is exactly the global task that Putin set for Russia in the 21st century. The aggressor state continues to increase momentum in this vector of its foreign policy and will continue to do so in 2024 according to the analysis of the current dynamics of the development of this process.

We are witnessing the birth of the Grand Alliance of totalitarian states and their satellite states, which is rapidly and increasingly effectively consolidating around Russia and its war against Ukraine and the democratic world, thanks to which they are practically and already today working out military collaboration in all possible directions, including cooperation in nuclear weapons, and attracting, directly or indirectly, more states to their bloc. The most obvious factor that can stop the process of further consolidation of this formation against NATO and the majority of the democratic world is Ukraine's victory in the war with Russia with the support of NATO forces and other actors in the international arena who are not interested in the domination of Russia and other states of the totalitarian alliance in the global geopolitical space.

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